Core Function → **Personalized Learning: Cognitive Competency**

Effective Practice → **Intentionally addressing students' accessible background knowledge to facilitate new learning**

Indicator: The school promotes cognitive competency in school rituals and routines, such as morning announcements, awards assemblies, hallway and classroom wall displays, and student competitions.   (C6)

Explanation: The evidence suggests that the Cognitive Competency helps students, families, and teachers know what students need to learn, including standards and curricula, as well as how they will learn it, including principles of child development and progress in school. Schools should embed these principles into their daily rituals and routines to emphasize the importance of the Cognitive Competency to its school community. This can be done through physical displays in the school, morning meetings in classrooms, and morning announcements throughout the school.

Questions: What rituals and routines already exist in the school? Which existing rituals could easily incorporate principles of the Cognitive Competency? Are there new rituals that need to be created? How will the administration lead and support this effort to embed the Cognitive Competency into schoolwide practices?

What is the Cognitive Competency?

The Cognitive Competency refers to what teachers and families "need to know" to best help their students learn; this can include the standards, curricula, and the basics of both child and brain development that will help them encourage student mastery of the content that they are learning (Educator Competencies, 2015). This competency aims to connect what students are learning to their prior knowledge and previously mastered material to foster and assist in new learning. Vocabulary and writing tasks play a key role in the cognitive competency, as tools for connecting pieces of knowledge across content areas and domains (Redding, 2016).

In the era of the Common Core State Standards and comparable sets of state-level standards, expectations for what and how students will learn have risen. Focusing more on conceptual understanding than on rote learning and memorization, these sets of standards represent a different way of learning than many parents were exposed to during their own school experiences. This era of learning standards emphasizes interdisciplinary learning and demonstrating proficiency in context, across multiple content areas, such as teaching and assessing writing in a social studies course (Ryerse, Schneider, & Vander Ark, 2014). This shift in standards nicely fits into the cognitive competency, which emphasizes making connections between content, skills, and knowledge (Redding, 2016).

Why Should Schools Promote the Cognitive Competency in Rituals and Routines?

In order for the principles, values, and skills associated with the Cognitive Competency to become ingrained in students, its implementation must extend beyond the classroom. In addition to helping families promote the Cognitive Competency at home, school staff and leadership need to think about how they can encourage these practices throughout the school day. Incorporating the Cognitive Competency into school routines and rituals, such as morning announcements, student showcases, and morning meetings helps to embed the competency into the overall culture and value system of the school (Redding, 2014; Educator Competencies, 2015).

Redding (2014) defines school culture as residing "resides in the school's collective values, beliefs, and norms, and evidenced in its mission statement, rituals, routines, and relationships among its personnel and students" (p. 13). Horsch, Chen, and Nelson (1999) discuss the importance of these shared rituals as a way of uniting the entire school community around its responsibilities and principles, stating that:

> This shared ritual provides a level of continuity that allows for a dialogue among staff members about the purposes and practices of the school community as a whole... each classroom has become part of the larger school community, and each student has become the responsibility of all the teachers. (p. 7)

Put another way, Mullis and Finch (1996) emphasize the welcoming, inclusive, and communal nature of school rituals, writing that:

> A supportive interpersonal environment, an academic climate that encourages student achievement, a sense of comfort, and a cooperative spirit among the students are additional positive elements. Rituals are a vital means of creating, expressing, preserving, and transmitting these interpersonal qualities of the school's organizational culture. (p. 246)

A notable example of a ritual that promotes the Cognitive Competency is the morning meeting, which is part of the Responsive Classroom framework. In schools that use this framework, the school day begins with each class sitting in a circle, talking and sharing with each other. The teacher can use this time to make announcements and review previously learned material in a fun and social way (Horsch, Chen, & Nelson, 1999; Horsch, Chen, & Wagner, 2002). As the entire school participates in this practice on a daily basis, it becomes a more comfortable part of the culture, encouraging students to interact positively with their peers and teachers, take academic risks, and start their day in a productive and structured way (Mullis & Finch, 1996; Horsch, Chen, & Nelson, 1999; Horsch, Chen, & Wagner, 2002).

Routine practices that incorporate the Cognitive Competency can be as involved as the daily morning meeting or as simple as highlighting student work on bulletin boards and displays (Educator Competencies, 2015). Regardless of the level of involvement, this incorporation of the Cognitive Competency into the everyday, non-academic

aspects of the school will help students and families see the importance of its components.

References and other resources

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