Measuring Quality of Year 3 CFS Implementation
Elements of High Quality Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is one of the key strategies that Connecting for Success (CFS) schools have chosen as a way to improve the academic performance of struggling students. Differentiated instruction is both a pedagogical philosophy and a practice of teaching that respects the varied learning needs and backgrounds of <u>all</u> students. The goal of a differentiated classroom is to maximize student growth and success by providing multiple paths for students to access content, process ideas and information, and produce artifacts of their learning.[1] Through this process, teachers adapt instructional lessons or approaches by integrating students' diverse learning needs, readiness levels, learning preferences, and interests. There are five dimensions that reflect promising practices of differentiated instruction:

> **Differentiated Instruction and Response to Intervention (RTI)**
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> Most of the CFS schools are implementing RTI (one of HIDOE's *Six Priority Strategies* for promoting student success). RTI itself falls under the rubric of differentiated instruction, so schools often use RTI as a jumping-off point for this aspect of their work with CFS students. In fact, two of the components of differentiated instruction discussed here (progress monitoring and data-based decision-making) are also two components of RTI.

- **Academic Progress Monitoring:** A set of practices used to assess students' academic progress, with the goal of using the results of monitoring to inform instruction.
- **Data-Based Decision-Making:** The regular and formal use of student data (including the data collected as part of academic progress monitoring) to guide teachers' instruction and their one-on-one interactions with students.
- **Student Learner Profiles:** A profile document capturing students' strengths, learning needs, preferences, and interests. Teachers use the information in the profile to help them tailor their work with a particular student.
- **Applications of Differentiated Instruction:** There are several ways that teachers can *apply* differentiated instruction at the point of service. Teachers can vary their teaching *content* (topics/concepts), *process* (the way students interact with the material), and *product* (how students demonstrate learning, e.g. project or test).[2] Teachers can also tailor teaching to each individual student's instructional level.
- **Support Systems:** Support systems refer to a school culture and administration that support teachers to engage in, and improve their skills in, differentiated instruction.

The following summary provides more detail on each of these dimensions, including definitions of the individual elements that make up each dimension.

Academic Progress Monitoring

- **Benchmark assessment systems:** Benchmark assessments (e.g. STAR) are used to determine whether students are meeting grade-level standards. Benchmarks are set early in the first term and then updated at regular intervals. Assessments take place at least three times a year to measure progress toward the goal of working at grade level by the end of the year.
- **Intensive benchmarking:** At schools implementing RTI, benchmark assessment systems are used for *all* students – but more frequent assessments are used with students receiving supplemental

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[1] Tomlinson, C. A., & Allan, S. (2000). Leadership for differentiating schools and classrooms. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
[2] Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). How to differentiate in mixed-ability classrooms. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

academic instruction (because they have been identified as being at risk for especially poor learning outcomes). Within the RTI framework, these supplemental interventions are referred to as Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. For these students, teachers formally monitor progress at least monthly for Tier 2 students, and at least weekly for Tier 3 students. For interventions delivered through an online platform (e.g. Accelerated Reader), electronic assessments are often available to further support teachers' ability to monitor skill development frequently.

- **Data-informed instruction:** Intensive benchmark results deliver data that are relevant and actionable; teachers use results to (1) identify gaps in instruction and (2) provide targeted support to help students achieve their academic goals. If students are progressing more slowly than expected, multiple data sources are consulted to determine how to modify interventions to meet the student's needs.

Data-Based Decision-Making

- **Scheduled time and protocols for collaboratively reviewing data:** The school schedule includes time for teachers to participate in frequent meetings (every week or every two weeks) to review student data, using structured data review protocols to support decision-making. As they review the data, teachers work together to consider the interventions they are currently using with students, identify instructional gaps, collaborate on instructional practices, and problem-solve to shift a specific student outcome.
- **Plans to inform instructional adjustments:** Collaborative data review results in action plans to adjust instruction. At subsequent data review meetings, teachers may revisit plans to determine whether goals were achieved, and identify any additional action steps needed.

Student Learner Profiles

- **Systems, data, and organization:** The learner profile includes information about students' strengths, areas of need, and interests; and the strategies, or specific interventions that teachers are using to work with the student (to support learning, social emotional skill development, or both). The profile may also provide details on student health. Ideally, a variety of school-based stakeholders (teachers, student, administrators, and counselors) and parents or family members are consulted in its creation. In addition, there is a process for updating the profile at regular intervals.
- **Teacher use:** Teachers and other school staff who interact with the student on a regular basis are the primary audience for the student learner profile. All teachers should use this document to help inform their understanding of students' needs. This understanding will support their ability to appropriately tailor instruction, and will help guide their interpersonal interactions with students.
- **Student-led tracking:** Student-led tracking documents or portfolios can further support teachers' understanding of students' needs. In these documents, students are responsible for tracking their progress towards identified goals.

Applications of Differentiated Instruction

- **Variation of content, process, and product:** Teachers can differentiate instruction in three aspects of teaching: content, process, and student products. [2,3]
  - ○ **Content** refers to *what* is taught, including the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students are expected to learn (e.g., how to complete a long division problem, or how to approach a non-fiction text). Content can also be differentiated by using various delivery formats, such as readings, lectures, or videos.

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[3] http://www.edutopia.org/blog/differentiated-instruction-ways-to-plan-john-mccarthy

- ○ **Process** refers to how students *engage* with the content in order to master material (e.g., using manipulatives, multi-media activities, or partner talks). Processes can be customized to reflect personal learning preferences or styles.
  - ○ **Products** are the results of learning: what students produce to demonstrate their understanding (e.g., passing a written test, building a model, or teaching another student). Differentiation by product can include student choice– in other words, students may choose from a menu of options the format they prefer in order to demonstrate their learning. Choosing an alternative product typically happens with guidance from the teacher.[4]

- **Targeted instruction:** Students should receive targeted direct instruction at or slightly above their current instructional level. Teaching a student at his or her instructional level supports academic growth without being too challenging or causing frustration.

Support Systems

- A school's culture and administration can support teachers to build their capacity to deliver differentiated instruction by prioritizing ongoing professional development, resources, and coaching opportunities. Schools may provide these resources internally, or the school can seek outside professional development to support and strengthen educator capacity. Internal school resources may include an instructional coach or curriculum coordinator who facilitates differentiation focused initiatives, and a virtual or actual library of additional resources. Ideally, school-wide professional development is institutionalized in such a way that all teachers continuously examine, reflect on, and improve instructional practice.

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The elements outlined above form the basis of the *Connecting for Success Differentiation Quality Measurement Tool*. The quality measurement tool assesses the extent to which a school's implementation of differentiation-focused strategies incorporates these dimensions, and also addresses differentiation strategies. This tool can help schools and the Hawai'i Community Foundation monitor implementation of best practices, and identify areas to strengthen quality and further maximize impact for students.

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[4] http://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-differentiated-instruction