The purpose of the MTSS (Increased Engagement) Toolkits is to present a select group of high-yield practices that not only foster relationships between adults and students, but also improve outcomes for ALL youth. The toolkits will have a laser-like focus on six, research-based, pedagogical practices resulting in increased engagement, more effective tier-one instruction, and ultimately, increased student achievement. The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Academic Resource Department will provide instructional support to enhance pedagogical-efficacy for all teachers.
Teacher Clarity

Explicit Delivery of Content

(High-Yield Instructional Practices)

Concept Mapping

Goal Setting

Explicit Teaching Strategies

Scaffolding

Mnemonics
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EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA
The school collects, analyzes, and uses key data points to inform academic and non-academic decision making.

INSTRUCTIONAL FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
The District and school have identified common frameworks (leadership, content, pedagogy, systems) and use structured walkthroughs, feedback and coaching, and professional learning to improve leadership and instructional practices.

PROGRESS MONITORING AND ANALYSIS OF STUDENT WORK
Teams of teachers and school leadership collect/review/analyze data and student work samples to determine student progress towards meeting mastery and application of standards and performance benchmarks.

ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT
Teachers use academic and behavioral data to prescribe short- and long-term supports for students to meet and exceed standards and strengthen their sense of belonging.

STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION
The school identifies essential, grade-level standards that a student must reach to demonstrate high levels of learning and commits to ensure mastery and application for all students. This serves as the foundation for instructional transformation and informs every other system in this process.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Teacher Clarity

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING AND PRACTICE FOR DEEPER LEARNING
Teams of teachers and administrators collaboratively plan units, lessons, and assessments to reinforce high levels of learning and ensure mastery for all students.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Modes of Instruction & Modes of Student Practice

STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION
The school identifies essential, grade-level standards that a student must reach to demonstrate high levels of learning and commits to ensure mastery and application for all students. This serves as the foundation for instructional transformation and informs every other system in this process.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Teacher Clarity
EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA
The school collects, analyzes, and uses key data points to inform academic and non-academic decision making.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Self-Reflection and Assessment

INSTRUCTIONAL FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
The District and school have identified common frameworks (leadership, content, pedagogy, systems) and use structured walkthroughs, feedback and coaching, and professional learning to improve leadership and instructional practices.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Feedback Via Engagement

ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT
Teachers use academic and behavioral data to prescribe short- and long-term supports for students to meet and exceed standards and strengthen their sense of belonging.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Classroom Systems That Support Student Behavior

PROGRESS MONITORING AND ANALYSIS OF STUDENT WORK
Teams of teachers and school leadership collect/review/analyze data and student work samples to determine student progress towards meeting mastery and application of standards and performance benchmarks.

MTSS TOOLKIT: Formative Assessment

MTSS TOOLKIT 1 // TEACHER CLARITY
INTRODUCTION

Blueprint: System 1 - Standards Implementation

Definition
The school identifies essential, grade-level standards that a student must reach to demonstrate high levels of learning and commits to ensure mastery and application for all students. This serves as the foundation for instructional transformation and informs every other system in this process.

Description
PLCs review standards and curriculum resources and teachers and leaders commit to:

1. Developing an understanding of the complexity of grade-level standards in order to avoid surface-level standard implementation
2. Spending collaborative time planning lessons, creating formative assessments, and reviewing student work
3. Teaching the standard at deep levels of learning and to competency
4. Providing high-quality corrective instruction for students not meeting the standard
5. Monitoring individual, class, and grade-level progress toward mastery and application of the standard(s)

The District has created curriculum and instructional frameworks that identify essential standards for each grade level/course in addition to articulating a culturally proficient.

Administrators are actively involved in the collaborative process and assist with providing time to unpack standards, develop protocols to identify standards, make essential standards public, and track individual student/class/grade level progress.
### Success Criteria

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### RESOURCES:
Principal Performance Standards  
JCPS Curriculum Frameworks  
MTSS Toolkit: Teacher Clarity
Teacher clarity is a multidimensional component of teacher effectiveness that involves the ability of teachers to facilitate the communication of content to maximize student understanding.

According to Hattie, teacher clarity is the ability to name all of one’s planning steps about goals, content, methods and media and using examples to explain them to students. Before instruction can begin, the teacher must articulate success criteria for achievement to students (Hattie, 2018, p. 62).

To successfully provide clarity during instruction, teachers must have a deep understanding of what they are teaching and why, how to provide effective instruction through explicit delivery of content, and what successful learning looks like for different learners. It is important to note that these elements begin with explicit and thoughtful planning.
Definitions
High-Yield Pedagogical Practices

Teacher Clarity
Clarity describes a set of teacher behaviors that are vital to engaging and empowering all students in their learning process by helping them clearly understand what they are learning, why they are learning it, and what they are expected to know or be able to do to demonstrate what they have learned (Hattie, 2009).

Concept Mapping
Concept mapping refers to the provision of a context for lesson content – where it fits into a larger picture. When teachers call students back to prior learning, discuss learning targets, and ask for real examples, they are helping to build a context that effectively creates concept maps (Hattie, 2009).

Goal Setting
When teachers help students strive toward goals, there is an enhanced effect on student learning. In fact, difficult goals have been shown to be more effective than easy goals. However, the idea is to create goals that effectively challenge students while still being realistic. Feedback provided in relation to performance toward a goal is also an important component (Hattie, 2009).

Scaffolding
Scaffolding is providing students with an appropriate linguistic and/or conceptual tool to bridge the gap between present and intended understanding (Hattie, 2009).
Mnemonics

Mnemonics are memory devices that assist learners to recall substantial amounts of information, such as mathematical concepts like orders of operation and the quadratic formula. It is a memory enhancing instructional strategy which involves teaching students to link new information that is taught to information they already know. These could be a short song, an acronym, or a visual image that is easily remembered (Hattie, 2017).

Every teacher must reflect on their instruction and consider in which areas their clarity of instruction may be improved to accommodate all learners. For example, teachers must consider:

1. The logic of the organization and sequencing of content delivery
2. The cohesiveness of the explanation of topics and content
3. The relevance of examples, non-examples, and opportunities for practice
4. The connectedness of the methods of assessment

Explicit Teaching Strategies

Clear teaching behaviors include many different dimensions of instruction such as verbal and physical communication, predictability of teacher behavior, and adaptation of instruction to accommodate learner differences. Some examples of specific teacher behaviors that support students in actively receiving and accurately interpreting instruction include:

1. Delivering content in small, digestible chunks
2. Differentiating instruction in response to learner differences
3. Providing relevant and explicit modeling and examples of expectations
4. Adapting speech and pace of instruction to student needs
Teacher clarity and explicit delivery of content may look different across different content areas, but clarity of instruction is important not only for those classrooms with high-stakes academic outcomes, but also for those classrooms geared toward related content areas (e.g., art, physical education, music, vocational courses) or classrooms with challenging students. The strategies and examples presented within this toolkit are for consideration in all classrooms or learning environments in which students demonstrate signs of potential lack of teacher clarity such as class-wide or student-specific misunderstanding of assignment expectations, student disengagement during instruction (e.g., withdrawal, overt acting out), or lack of ownership over learning.

Teachers need to know the learning intentions and success criteria of their lesson, how well the students are progressing toward the criteria, and where to go next in light of the gap between current students’ knowledge and the success criteria (Hattie, 2009, p. 36-37). Teachers who exhibit clarity in instruction demonstrate a higher degree of transparency in regard to their goals for and approaches to student learning. This transparency helps students understand the intentions behind teaching methods and expectations as well as identify with the teacher. Teachers increase their students’ perceived and authentic understanding by clearly communicating learning and behavioral expectations, being consistent with their enforcement, and connecting them to relevant student experiences. This makes classroom expectations and content more meaningful to students.
To achieve student success, teachers need clarity which is a deep understanding about what to teach and why, how to teach it and how to determine success. This goes way beyond simply knowing the day’s activity. Teacher clarity encompasses teachers communicating those same aspects to their students in simple and plain language. Teacher clarity is a powerful tool for narrowing focus to essential understandings and skills and cutting away aspects of instruction that do not support learning. Along the way, teacher clarity reinforces the gradual release of responsibility of learning from the teacher to the students so that students feel ownership of their work, ultimately leading to deeper learning.

One misconception regarding Project Based Learning (PBL) is that it does not focus on standards. However, in actuality, the model of PBL is standards-based. Driving questions are aligned with or even derived from content standards. The major products students create require a demonstration of knowledge and understanding of important concepts, and should be assessed in terms of standards. PBL combines the teaching of critical thinking skills with rich content, because students need something to think critically about- it cannot be taught independent of content.
Considerations

Culturally Responsive

Culturally responsive teachers value students’ cultural, racial, and linguistic assets and view this knowledge as capital (an asset) rather than a barrier to learning. Teachers may use this capital (i.e. personal experiences, primary language, identities, and personal interests) as the foundation for instructional connections to facilitate learning. Teacher clarity can be provided through responsive feedback, high expectations, appropriate wait time, paraphrasing, frequent checks for understanding, written and verbal instructions, and visuals. Teachers should communicate clear and specific expectations to students about what they are expected to know and be able to do. They should also utilize collaborative-based learning approaches to assist in understanding concepts, deriving main ideas, asking/answering questions, and relating what students are learning to their cultural backgrounds.

Modeling is another approach that teachers can use to address student cultural needs. This strategy involves explicit discussion of instructional expectations while providing examples based on students cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences. Culturally responsive modeling techniques include strategy use, content learning, metacognitive and critical thinking, and having interest and respect for diversity. Learning through observation can be a part of a groups’ cultural practice, i.e. students observing the modeling of math problem-solving skills.

Early Childhood

In early childhood, instruction is often embedded in ongoing activities and play. Informing students of lesson objectives in advance and pointing out what is important for students to learn can be disruptive to the play or ongoing activity. It may also require metacognitive abilities that are not realistic to expect from young children. Therefore, these recommendations for increasing clarity may not be appropriate for young children.

One way of providing clarity to young children is to use visuals during instruction. For example, when discussing classroom rules, the teacher should refer to a posted visual that illustrates each rule. Or, when discussing the characters in a book after a read aloud, the teacher could use visuals to support children’s understanding (e.g., by drawing pictures of the different characters).
Exceptional Child Education

All students struggle when a teacher lacks clarity, however, the struggle is more pronounced with students who have a learning disability. To maximize student understanding, teachers may consider the use of Explicit Instruction (EI). This is an instructional approach that involves continuous monitoring by the teacher, through formative assessment, to determine the students' progress toward mastering the learning objective and then adjusting instruction. EI begins with providing an advance organizer. An advance organizer provides the relationship between what will be taught in the lesson and what has already been learned. It highlights the important information in the upcoming lesson.

Examples of advance organizers include graphic organizers, skimming the material, providing a narrative (e.g., story) as a hook for the lesson, or just explaining the new content in understandable terms before you begin the lesson. Following the advance organizer, the teacher should give a clear explanation of what the student should do in the lesson. This could include reminding students of the classroom rules and the teacher expectations for a lesson (e.g., I expect you to be watching as I demonstrate this process). Once students have been given an explanation of what they will be doing, the teacher should model the skill or process (e.g., model a math problem on the smartboard).

During this modeling, the teacher will use think aloud strategies so students are able to understand the teacher's thought process during the example. When the results of formative assessment (e.g., questioning) indicate the students are ready to move on, the teacher will provide guided practice (e.g., complete problems together step by step with students), check for understanding, and provide corrective feedback. Finally, the teacher will provide opportunities for independent practice after he or she is confident the students can complete the skill accurately. Assessing progress is the final step in EI.

Another consideration teachers of exceptional students may find helpful in enhancing clarity is the use of visual schedules, because they provide a support for students to anticipate the order of events throughout the day. The schedule should be in a format that best suits the student's strengths and areas of weakness. Visual schedules include icons, such as objects, photographs, pictures, or words that are listed sequentially to represent a given day's activities. These schedules provide a level of predictability that allows the student to anticipate changes throughout the day as well as monitor their progress toward a goal (Cihak, 2011).
Project-Based Learning (PBL):

Within PBL, it is vital that the teacher consider the following:

- Ensure clarity of learning intentions and success criteria by ensuring students have a clear understanding of the core learning intentions of the project and what success looks like in showing their understanding of the learning intention. Learning intentions are not tasks or project products; rather they are expectations of learning that are presented through tasks and/or products.
- The project should be designed to teach students academic content-area knowledge and skills, drawn from standards.
- The project should also be designed around a goal for students to think critically, solve problems, collaborate, and communicate. These goals should be articulated clearly to students.
- Align major products with essential standards and use them as assessment tools. Ensure that the success criteria for these assessment tools are communicated to students.
- Assess products and presentations and with a set of clearly articulated, specific criteria.
- Begin the PBL cycle with an entry event that will activate prior knowledge and provide a scaffold in students beginning the project.
- Provide explicit instruction as needed of the content and background knowledge needed for the project.
- To help student be effective critical thinkers and problem solvers during a project, give them tools such as: graphic organizers, sentence starters, protocols, mnemonics tools, texts.
APPLICATION

Vignettes From:
Elementary School
Middle School
High School

Literacy
Mathematics
Social Studies
Science
Related Arts / Electives
The following vignette is an example of a teacher using explicit instruction to teach suffixes (word endings) through the use of connected text (poem).

Ms. Vincent is a literacy teacher who planned a word work lesson on the use of spelling patterns and generalizations in words. At the beginning of the lesson, she introduces the learning target to her students by writing “I can find and use -ed and -ing endings when I read and write” on the whiteboard. Together they discuss the sequence of the lesson and how they will demonstrate their learning throughout the lesson.

She begins by reading a poem that she has displayed on the board. When she reads it, she focuses on the words ending in -ing. Then she reads the poem again replacing the words that end with -ing with words that end with –ed. They talk about what happens to the meaning of the poem when the ending switches from -ing to -ed.

Next, she pulls out individual white boards for her students to practice writing words and trying out different word endings. They start this activity by using the words in the poem – they write the word, read it together, add an ending, read it together, erase the ending, add a new ending, read it together, and then start over with a new word.

After they follow this pattern with several words, Ms. Vincent assigns a guided reading text that features -ed or -ing endings to small groups. Students then read together, stopping at the end of each page to point out when they find words with an -ing or -ed ending. During this time, Ms. Vincent continues to reference the learning target written on the whiteboard at the front of the classroom.

The group ends with the students getting their writing notebooks and looking at some of their previous writing. Ms. Vincent asks them if they find any places that they used -ing or -ed. They use highlighters to show where they find the endings.

At the end of the lesson, Ms. Vincent references the “I can” statement on the whiteboard that was discussed at the beginning of the lesson (I can find and use -ed and -ing endings when I read and write). For the closing activity, she writes a word on the board and instructs students to turn and share the –ing and –ed endings and how it changes the meaning of the word.
The following vignette is an example of a teacher using a concept mapping strategy to deliver content in small, digestible chunks while providing relevant and explicit modeling, as well as, examples of expectations.

Mr. Ellis has planned a lesson activity that requires students to identify major ideas from a variety of self-selected informational sources focusing on the current controversy related to school safety and the “right to bear arms.” He begins the whole group lesson by writing the learning goals for his students, “I can synthesize main ideas and supporting details from a variety of sources in order to formulate my own position on school safety and second amendment rights.”

Mr. Ellis also verbally introduces students to the learning goal and elicits feedback on how students define the word “synthesize” as a means of informally assessing prior knowledge. As a part of their daily learning expectation, students then write the learning goal on their weekly self-assessment organizer or class journal.

Next, Mr. Ellis projects and talks through three different concept mapping examples. Using one of the samples, Mr. Ellis models how to use one concept map as a framework to allow them to organize their thoughts and convert the diagram into an outline that synthesizes main ideas and key details identified from their sources to support their position.

After Mr. Ellis completes his worked example, students are assigned a partner and then begin working through their own concept maps by self-selecting a mapping style. As groups are working, Mr. Ellis is monitoring the learning process by providing feedback to each partner group to reach an understanding of the students thinking process as they move towards mastery. The goal is that each partner group is actively engaged in dialogue to formulate a position, identify relevant key details from their sources, and eventually write an argumentative essay synthesizing main ideas to support their position.

In conclusion, Mr. Ellis uses concept mapping as a foundation to illustrate the taxonomy of learning within scaffolded lesson activities to define success criteria and how it should be made visible to students as they synthesize ideas.
Mathematics

Elementary

The following vignette is an example of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) deciding to adopt a common word-problem mnemonic strategy to use across grade levels. It also demonstrates how a teacher from that committee explicitly taught the strategy to her classroom to promote clarity.

A group of teachers in a PLC were sitting around a table trying to calibrate the rules that they teach, the terminology that they use, and even the notation incorporated in their mathematics lessons. Ms. Levine, a lead teacher, suggested that they also talk about problem solving strategies used across the school. She noticed that every classroom had a different problem solving mnemonic poster. For example, one room had CUBES and another SWEEP. She said, “Did you notice that the letters of the mnemonics mean different things on different posters? That means every grade must learn a new approach. That doesn’t make sense for students who struggle. What can we try instead?”

The group shared their different mnemonic strategies and decided that everyone would use the CUBES word-problem mnemonic strategy, so all students would have a clear approach that was reinforced from one year to the next. The CUBES strategy was chosen because it could be applied to word problems that require the student to solve addition, subtraction, multiplication, and/or division problems as well as problems involving whole numbers and/or fractions. Again, they wanted all students to have an approach that was used consistently from year to year.

After the PLC, Ms. Levine knew that she would have to explicitly teach this new word-problem mnemonic strategy to her students prior to them using it independently. She began the lesson by introducing the mnemonic:

- **C**ircle the numbers
- **U**nderline the important words
- **B**ox the question
- **E**liminate unnecessary information
- **S**olve and Check

The introduction included discussing the relevance of using the strategy by identifying why they are learning the strategy as well as where and when students should use the strategy. Next, she modeled the strategy by demonstrating how to solve a word problem using the mnemonic while verbally describing what she was doing (i.e., think aloud). During the modeling phase, she made sure to provide multiple examples with different types of word problems. As students finish, they raise their hand so that Ms. Levine can come scan their work and provide them with a solution card. After the lesson, Ms. Levine determined that even with the need for more guided and independent practice, her explicit teaching of this mnemonic word-problem strategy greatly benefited her students.
The following vignette is an example of a teacher making it clear what learning success involves and how it should be made visible. Effective strategies in this example include: stating the goal/purpose of a specific learning target at the beginning of the lesson, creating and communicating appropriate success criteria for the objectives, and implementing a card sort activity.

Ms. Abdulkader determined that her class was struggling with making connections between different representation of functions. She decided to do a small group activity to help clarify misconceptions with her class. She created groups of four cards, each one containing a different representation (table, graph, equation, and verbal description) for the same function. In the classroom, the desks were arranged in groups of four with the function cards in the center. As the students took their seats, Ms. Abdulkader asked them to pick up a card from the center of their table and then posed the questions, “What information can you gather from your function representation? Is there anything about your function that you cannot determine?” Students began writing their thoughts in their warm-up notebooks and having discussions with their peers.

As the class began to “buzz” about the similarities and differences on their cards, Ms. Abdulkader solicited responses from individual students regarding her original questions. Jaylen responded, “I can see the y-intercept of the function.” Ja’Miyah followed with, “I noticed the x-intercept, but not the y-intercept in my table.” A frustrated Juan Carlos said, “I just have a story on my card.” Ms. Abdulkader then asked the class, “Why do some cards show more key characteristics than others?”

She next prompted students to share their thoughts with another student near them. As she circulated the room, she heard responses such as “My card just has a story, but you have a graph;” “My equation is not in slope-intercept form;” and “What does a table tell me?” Ms. Abdulkader brought the class back together and asked Celeste to share what she discussed with her partner. Celeste shared, “We decided that the information you get depends on how your function is represented on your card.”

Ms. Abdulkader drew the class’s attention to the learning target of the day “I can describe a function using multiple representations.” She randomly asked a student to read the learning target again to ensure clarity about the daily objective. She next asked students to hold up their cards to show each other around the room. “What different types of function representations do you see?” Students responded with, “Table, graph, story, and equation.” Ms. Abdulkader asked her class, “What do we need to have to get the most information possible for a function?” Cindy replied, “If you have the table you know the points for the graph.” Ja’Miyah responded, “The equation gives me information about the graph, as well.” KeShawn told the class, “Well, it would be nice if we had all the different representations.”

Ms. Abdulkader said, “Yes. Today we can meet our learning target by finding the table, graph, equation, and verbal representation for each function. Your task today is to find a function family by sorting the cards so that you have a card with each representation.” Students began the task of sorting the cards into function families.

Ms. French, was preparing for a unit on colonization. She wanted to ensure that she provided explicit teaching regarding the vocabulary to build the foundation of the unit. She knew she would need to provide clarity by front-loading this vocabulary. She initially planned out the unit by listing the critical vocabulary she would need to introduce to students such as colony, ethnic groups, and migration. She planned out the vocabulary by creating student friendly definitions, determining picture cues, context clues, and possible examples and non-examples. Over the course of the next several days, Ms. French implemented the following plan to introduce the needed vocabulary to students:

1.) Ms. French began by presenting the words to the entire class. She said the word, had students repeat the word, then had them clap out the syllables. Ms. French had a cloze paragraph, written on chart paper at the front of the room. A cloze paragraph has blanks where the vocabulary words belong and can be used to provide context clues to students. She intentionally used this format to provide students with context. She then had students pair up with partners to make predictions about where the words belonged in the cloze paragraph. Ms. French asked students to justify their predictions. Then she presented them with student-friendly definitions and picture cues.

2.) When students returned to their desks, they worked in their vocabulary notebooks using the Frayer Model graphic organizer. The Frayer Model allows students to write the word, write the definition, draw an illustration, find antonyms and synonyms (or examples and non-examples), and write the word in a sentence. On the first day, students wrote the definition, drew a picture, and wrote a sentence. Example on left page.

3.) The next day, Ms. French reviewed the words in the cloze activity and allowed students time to finish the Frayer models in their notebooks. She then introduced students to synonyms and antonyms or, depending on the words, examples and non-examples. Students worked together to identify the synonyms and antonyms or in the alternative, examples and non-examples. Students added those to the Frayer Models in their notebooks. Ms. French also made sure to post the class charts with picture cues and the cloze activity on the social studies content wall.

4.) Over the next several days, Ms. French engaged students in practicing the words in a variety of ways. First, some students wore their words on a lanyard around their neck while other students wore the synonyms and antonyms. Every so often, she would stop the class and have them pair up matching their word with either their synonyms or antonyms, periodically switching roles and cards. Students also practiced by making chains where they would connect their words with other vocabulary words. They played Pictionary and Name that Category (like the $100,000 Pyramid) in small groups. They also highlighted prefixes and suffixes that would help them in understanding the words.
The following vignette is an example of a teacher modifying their lesson to provide clarity with understanding basic economic terms. Specific effective strategies in this example include: identifying critical attributes of terms; using examples and non-examples; modeling; and providing guided practice.

A social studies teacher, Mr. Malkmus, was preparing for a unit on basic economics. When previously teaching this unit, he noticed that students struggled with the vocabulary associated with economics and this greatly affected their understanding. He knew he would need to provide more clarity when introducing these terms, therefore, his first learning target for this unit would be "I can define the economic terms: scarcity, production, market, and cost."

The first step in planning was to look at the definitions of each term and identify their critical attributes to make them more student-friendly. For example, the definition of production is making goods and services. To further clarify: 1) goods are the items that we value or desire, they must be tangible (can be touched, tasted or held) and 2) services are the intangible actions that are performed for which people are willing to pay. Mr. Malkmus went through the rest of the terms (i.e., scarcity, market, cost) and determined each term’s critical attributes.

Mr. Malkmus knew that presenting students with the definition, even if student-friendly, may not be enough for students to understand the terms, so he developed examples and non-examples. For instance, he came up with the following example and non-example for scarcity:

- Each year a limited amount of the flu vaccine is available to the population, meaning there is not enough for each individual to be vaccinated. This is an example of scarcity because there was not a sufficient amount of the resource for the whole population.
- I planted tomatoes in my garden and I now have more than I can possibly eat. This is not an example of scarcity because there was more than a sufficient amount of the resource.

During the lesson, Mr. Malkmus introduced each term to the students, identified the critical attributes of each, and provided examples and non-examples. He then checked the students’ understanding of the terms by actively involving them in generating their own examples and non-examples for each term. He had the students participate in a think-pair-share activity to generate multiple examples and non-examples. This was followed by a whole class activity that consisted of: 1) writing the term; 2) listing the critical attribute(s); and 3) providing examples and non-examples on chart paper to be displayed on the classroom wall for the duration of the unit.
This vignette illustrates establishing clarity by preplanning questions when developing lessons independently. Ideally, preplanning questions that check for understanding should take place in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) prior to lesson delivery.

Mr. Juarez is reviewing his lesson plans for science, along with team PLC notes, to prepare for his science investigation, “What’s inside a seed?” In this lesson, students soak a lima bean seed and observe the changes in the seed structures over time. He knows to establish clarity for his lesson, he must intentionally preplan questions to guide student inquiry while focusing on the objective.

He plans to begin his lesson by telling students that an important part of being a scientist is asking questions and finding their answers through investigations. He writes the following questions on a notecard to reference throughout the investigation:

1. Is the seed alive? How can you tell?
2. What is inside a seed?
3. What could be causing the seeds to appear swollen?
4. If the seeds are soaking up water, how can we find out how much water the seeds are holding?
5. What are some ways we could measure the seeds?
6. What should we compare the soaked seeds to?

He does this during pre-planning to ensure he can support students on the essential question and learning target. He then shares the questions with his PLC to create a final list for his lesson.
The following vignette is an example of a teacher making the instructional schedule more explicit for students to improve clarity of explanation. Specific strategies include: deliver information in both verbal and written formats, ensure clarity and organization of scheduling information, and assess students’ learning.

On a Thursday afternoon, during a unit test on identifying the functions of plant cells, Ms. James overheard several of her science students complaining to their friends that they thought the test was tomorrow. After hearing the comments, Mrs. James realized that it was this confusion regarding the test date that caused several of her students to not turn in their unit study guides, which are always due on test day.

To identify the source of this confusion, Mrs. James requested feedback from the students by asking questions, “Did you feel prepared for the unit test, today?” and “Were you confused about the testing schedule? Why or why not?” on the exit ticket. Students provided responses such as, “I was confused, because last week you told us the test was going to be on Friday and that we were going to have a lab on Thursday,” and “I was unprepared, because I was planning on studying more and finishing my study guide tonight to hand it in tomorrow”. However, other students answered with, “I knew the test was today, because you told us at the end of class on Monday that our lab was canceled, and we would have the test on Thursday instead.”

Mrs. James considered the students’ responses on the exit tickets and reflected on her delivery of the testing information. She recalled announcing the lab cancellation and change of the test date at the end of class the previous Monday. She considered the likelihood that students were not attentive to receiving verbal information during that time and decided this likely explains the confusion surrounding the dates. To avoid potential confusion during the new unit—and in the future—Mrs. James decided she would both verbally and visibly provide the students with each unit’s homework, lab, and testing schedule and assess whether each student is aware of the schedule.

The following day, the first day of the new unit, Mrs. James verbally explained not only the learning standards (objectives) of the new unit, but she also explained and posted the unit’s working schedule including homework, lab, and testing dates in a highly visible area. To assess student learning of the scheduling information, Mrs. James asked students to report the unit’s test date on the day’s exit tickets. She also asked again three days later to review and reiterate the information.
Related Arts / Electives

Elementary

This vignette describes the use of explicit and engaging instructional strategies through the use of gradual release in an elementary music class.

Mr. Holland was planning a lesson on simple rhythmic patterns. After reviewing the content, he created the following learning target: “I can clap and count simple rhythmic patterns, using whole, half, quarter notes, and rests.”

At the beginning of the lesson, Mr. Holland shares the learning target and success criteria with the students. Students read the learning target together, which is posted on the board to reference throughout the lesson. He tells students that they will demonstrate mastery of the learning target when they can clap and count a given rhythm with the rhythm clock.

Mr. Holland is aware that he needs to use explicit and engaging instructional strategies. He decides to use a model of gradual release. Mr. Holland has a rhythm clock displayed on the interactive board that has a rhythm clap set for each hour. He spins the clock and claps and counts the assigned rhythm to model for the class. Next, he spins the clock and has the whole class clap and count the rhythm. Finally, he breaks students into partners and gives them cards with rhythm patterns like those he modeled on the rhythm clock.

Mr. Holland chooses to use a cooperative learning strategy “Stand Up-Hand Up-Pair Up”. Students stand up and keep one hand high in the air until they find the closest partner pair. Pairs give each other a “high-five” and share their rhythm card patterns. Mr. Holland is observing student groups and using a checklist to monitor performances. At the end of the lesson, Mr. Holland revisits the learning target posted on the interactive board.
Related Arts / Electives

Middle / High

The following vignette is an example of a teacher setting individual goals and providing feedback to students in order to achieve their goals in a physical education classroom.

Physical education classes around the country compete in a year-long President’s Fitness Challenge. This challenge includes several physical fitness activities that will be tracked three times a year (fall, early spring, and end of school year). Students are expected to demonstrate growth in all fitness areas over the course of the year. One of these physical activities is the timed mile.

Mr. Hopkins decided to have his class participate in the President’s Fitness Challenge. He researched average times and typical improvement rates for school aged students. In the fall, all of his students recorded their mile times on a large chart in the gym. Mr. Hopkins conferenced with each student to assist them in setting their own goal for the mile at the end of the school year. In order to help each student reach their end of year goal, Mr. Hopkins used his research to set short term targets for each week of the winter.

Throughout the winter, the students completed daily circuit training and sprints. Mr. Hopkins scheduled longer runs on alternate days and students tracked their times on those runs in individual notebooks. Every three weeks, students ran a timed mile and recorded those times also in their notebook. At the end of each week, students completed a self-assessment on their progress towards their end of year goal. Mr. Hopkins provided feedback to students on their self-assessments and helped students make adjustments to their training plans, as needed.

At the end of the year, Mr. Hopkins timed his students in the mile. Of his class, 85% reached their individual goals. Students reflected on training techniques that assisted them to achieve their goal, while those who did not reach their target determined how they would alter their plan in the future. Mr. Hopkins created a celebration board in the gymnasium to showcase student’s efforts and personal bests throughout the challenge.

Strategies for Implementation
The following are strategies that teachers can begin implementing in their classroom tomorrow:

1. Post and communicate the agenda/schedule with time frames. *

2. State the goal/purpose and expectations for a specific learning target at the beginning of the lesson (if appropriate, have students write down the daily target).

3. Provide clear, explicit directions to students about what is expected. State in positive terms (what children should do rather than what they should not do). *

4. Create and communicate appropriate success criteria for the objectives of the lesson (if appropriate involve students in determining success criteria).

5. Ensure that the students understand the success criteria (e.g. using frequent checks for understanding, conferencing, creating class rubric together, using examples and non-examples).

6. Preplan specific examples and non-examples that are diverse and authentic. Share with students for critiquing the reasoning of others.

7. Preplan questions that check for understanding throughout the lesson. Avoid generic questions (e.g., do you have any questions?). *

8. Create a pocket card with emphasized statements regarding lesson topic/concepts and write on the board when appropriate.

9. Use visuals for common/content vocabulary such as word walls with definitions, foldables (Interactive Notebook), Frayer model, and concept maps. *

10. Show similarities and differences between concepts and key ideas in order to make authentic and real-world connections to prior knowledge and schema.

11. To determine if students understood success criteria, assign students time to reflect and summarize learning at the end of the lesson individually or in small groups to compare results (e.g. write or document a new concept learned, 3-2-1: 3 new facts, 2 things found interesting and want to learn more about, 1 question).

12. Revisit the learning objective to highlight key concepts, learning goals, and success criteria. Also, note areas where learning objective needs to be revised throughout the learning process.

*Can also be used in early childhood.
Teacher Self-Assessment (Success Criteria)
The following reflection questions are designed for teachers to self-assess and/or reflect on Teacher Clarity practices.

1. Do I design and communicate clear learning goals and success criteria (e.g., written, posted, or verbal, etc.) that are reflective of what I want my students to know and do?

2. In planning, do I align the learning and student practice tasks to the lesson objectives/goals?

3. Do I revisit learning goals throughout the lesson and make connections for students to the learning goal?

4. Do I scaffold learning goals to measure progression of learning amongst achievement levels of students?

5. Do I use explicit instruction to clearly introduce new content to students? (refer to the introduction section for definition of explicit instruction.)

6. Do I clearly demonstrate relevant skills and processes that I expect students to do?

7. Do I anchor student’s prior knowledge to new learning goals?

8. Do I check that students have a clear understanding of new content?
Resources
ARTICLES:


BOOKS:


WEBSITES:


VIDEOS:

