We have the power to transform our schools (and district) to be great if we embrace, and embody, the following big ideas:

1. **A commitment to high levels of learning for all students**

   The fundamental purpose of our schools is to ensure all students learn at high levels, and the future success of students depends on how effective we are in achieving that fundamental purpose. There must be no ambiguity or hedging regarding our commitment to learning, and we align all practices, procedures, and policies in light of that fundamental purpose. We recognize that a commitment to the learning of each student means we must work together to clarify exactly what each student must learn, monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions that ensure a student receives additional time and support for learning when he or she struggles, and extend and enrich learning when a student has already mastered the intended outcomes. We also recognize that if all students are to learn at high levels, we must also be continually learning. Therefore, we must create structures to ensure all staff members engage in job-embedded learning as part of our routine work practices.

2. **A commitment to a collaborative culture**

   We cannot achieve our fundamental purpose of learning for all if we work in isolation. Therefore, we must build a collaborative culture in which we work together interdependently and assume collective responsibility for the learning of all students. An important thought about teams: *You are not a team unless you have goals that require you to work together, collectively and interdependently, to achieve them. You must need each other to be a team.*

3. **A commitment to using results to foster continuous improvement**

   We will not know whether or not all students are learning unless we are hungry for evidence that students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions most essential to their success. We must systematically monitor each student’s learning on an ongoing basis and use evidence of that learning to respond immediately to students who experience difficulty, to inform our individual and collective professional practice, and to fuel continuous improvement.

   (Adapted from *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever it Takes* by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010)

Our Collaboration for Student Learning Teams use the following four questions to guide their work and improve student learning as well as instructional practices:

1. What is it we expect students to learn?
2. How will we know if students have learned?
3. How will we respond when students do not learn?
4. How will we respond when students already know it?
We have developed a framework of expectations for the CSL process that are simultaneously “loose” and “tight”. Those items that are “tight” are the non-negotiables of the CSL process and relate directly to the big ideas. Those items that are “loose” are the negotiables that allow teams, and schools, to differentiate to best fit their needs. In addition to the Loose/Tight Framework, we have developed a CSL Flow Chart to guide the work of CSL Teams and their focus on student learning.

In order to answer questions #1 and #2 we must have a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum in place at each level, and/or in each course of study. We also need a coherent assessment system in place with both common formative and summative assessments to guide student and adult learning.

Curriculum is the documents that contain statements of what, when, and how students will learn. A **guaranteed curriculum** ensures specific content is taught in specific courses, and at specific grade levels, regardless of the teacher to whom a student is assigned. A **viable curriculum** indicates that there is enough instructional time available to actually teach the content identified as important. A **Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum** only happens when teachers, who are called upon to deliver the curriculum, work collaboratively to:

- Study the intended curriculum and agree on priorities within the curriculum.
- Clarify how the curriculum translates into specific student knowledge and skills.
- Establish pacing guidelines for delivering the curriculum.
- Commit to one another that they will actually teach the curriculum.

(Adapted from *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement* by DuFour and Marzano, 2011).

A coherent assessment system consists of both summative and formative assessments designed specifically from the collaboratively identified Priority Standards and corresponding Learning Targets. Summative assessments are traditional assessments that give students a chance at the end of a unit to prove what they have learned. Formative assessments are a chance to see how well students are learning along the way. Common formative assessments are a powerful and important tool for teachers to monitor the learning of students who are expected to acquire the same knowledge and skills, and use the same instrument (or a common process) that applies the same criteria to assess the quality of student work. To determine if an assessment is formative, ask the following questions:

- Is it used to identify students who experience difficulty in their learning?
- Do students receive additional time and support for learning when they experience difficulty?
- Do students get an additional opportunity to demonstrate their learning?
- Do teachers use the results to inform and improve their individual and collective practice?

Some important thoughts on formative assessment:

*Studies have demonstrated assessment for learning rivals one-on-one tutoring in its effectiveness and that the use of assessment particularly benefits low-achieving students.*  (Stiggins, R. New Assessment Beliefs for a New School Mission, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86 (1), 22-27, 2004.)

*Reviews of accountability data from hundreds of schools reveal the schools with the greatest gains in achievement consistently employ common assessments, nonfiction writing, and collaborative scoring by faculty.*  (Reeves, D.B. *The Learning Leader: How to focus school improvement for better results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. 2006)
In order to answer questions #3 and #4 we have to develop a system of interventions and opportunities for enrichment.

*One of the most authentic ways to assess the degree to which a school is characterized by “high expectations” is to examine how the organization responds when some students do not learn.* (Lezotte, L. Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation. 1991)

Interventions are steps taken to help students learn when they did not get it the first time. The research in this area is clear: in order to help all students learn at high levels, schools must provide students who are experiencing difficulty in learning with additional time and support for learning. It is disingenuous for any school to claim its purpose is to help all students learn at high levels and then fail to create a system of intervention to give struggling learners additional time and support for learning. Providing that additional time and support for learning requires a systematic process of intervention that has the following three elements:

1. The process should ensure students receive the intervention in a timely fashion – at the first indication they are experiencing difficulty.
2. The process should direct rather than invite students to devote the extra time and take advantage of the additional support until they are experiencing success.
3. Most importantly, students should be guaranteed they will receive this time and support regardless of who their teacher might be.

What we know from working with students on a daily basis: some students will require a greater opportunity to learn – they will need more time and support than others. The most successful schools in this country have some type of system to ensure that students receive that extra time and support.

Schools traditionally make time and support for learning constant (that is, fixed); therefore, the variable will always be student learning. Most students will learn the intended skill or concept in the given time and with the given support. Some students will not. What happens to them is traditionally left to the discretion of the individual teachers to whom they are assigned. Effective schools that function as Professional Learning Communities make a conscious and sustained effort to reverse this equation: they advise students that learning is the constant – “All of you will learn this essential skill”—and then recognize that if they are to keep that commitment, they must create processes to ensure that students who need additional time and support for learning will receive it. Effective schools also understand that some students need opportunities for enrichment and make sure that those students receive opportunities within the system to stretch their learning.

A system of intervention/enrichment means that providing support for students is a collective, school-wide responsibility rather than the sole responsibility of the individual teacher. Effective intervention, and enrichment, is characterized by differentiation and precision. A student who failed to grasp a concept that was taught in a large-group setting by a teacher using a particular strategy is not likely to learn the concept if the intervention takes place in another large-group setting and replicates the same instructional strategy. **More of the same is not effective intervention.**