CHAPTER 1

DIFFERENTIATED SUPERVISION 101

"Successful gardeners know when to use a rake versus a hoe. School leaders must approach supervision in this same manner, understanding which tool will yield the best results."

What Keeps Us Up at Night: *Have you ever worked really hard as a leader to improve your school only to find at the end of the year that student results weren't what you hoped for? You were frequently in classrooms, designed powerful learning activities for your staff, and followed the district evaluation protocols. Why are the results not what you desired?*

Having great schools requires having great teachers. Helping teachers grow is job number one for school leaders who want to make a direct impact on student learning. This sounds simple enough, but schools are complex systems. Cultivating seeds of improvement in a school requires patient attention, requiring leaders to not only know effective supervision practices, but also know when they should be used so they have the greatest impact. School leaders must be well versed in the effective processes of school supervision if they want to help teachers grow.

WHAT SUPERVISION IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Understanding the nuances in supervision begins with recognizing the multiplicative role that it plays in schools. According to Marshall (2013) there are five core functions of supervision: appraisal, affirmation,

improvement, housecleaning, and quality assurance. Supervision, unlike evaluation, is a process that is designed to help teachers improve outcomes for students. It isn't about checklists or forms or providing lengthy feedback to teachers. At its essence, supervision is about supporting students because when done right it helps teachers do the complex work of advancing student learning. Evaluation is an event that determines whether or not the supervision process has been successful. The differentiated model connects supervision and evaluation practices while also allowing the core functions of supervision to happen in a focused and purposeful way.

THE CHALLENGE

Two common issues derail the use of critical supervision routines. The first is the sheer number of staff that leaders are required to supervise. According to the National Council of Education Statistics 2016 data, the average public school enrollment is 528 students. If there is an average of 25 students per class, this equates to approximately 21 teachers per school. Even if a school has assistants, supervision numbers can be in the double digits. The second challenge is the diversity of expertise found in the typical school staff. Skill levels can vary dramatically based not only on years of experience, but also on the individual's willingness to learn and try new techniques.

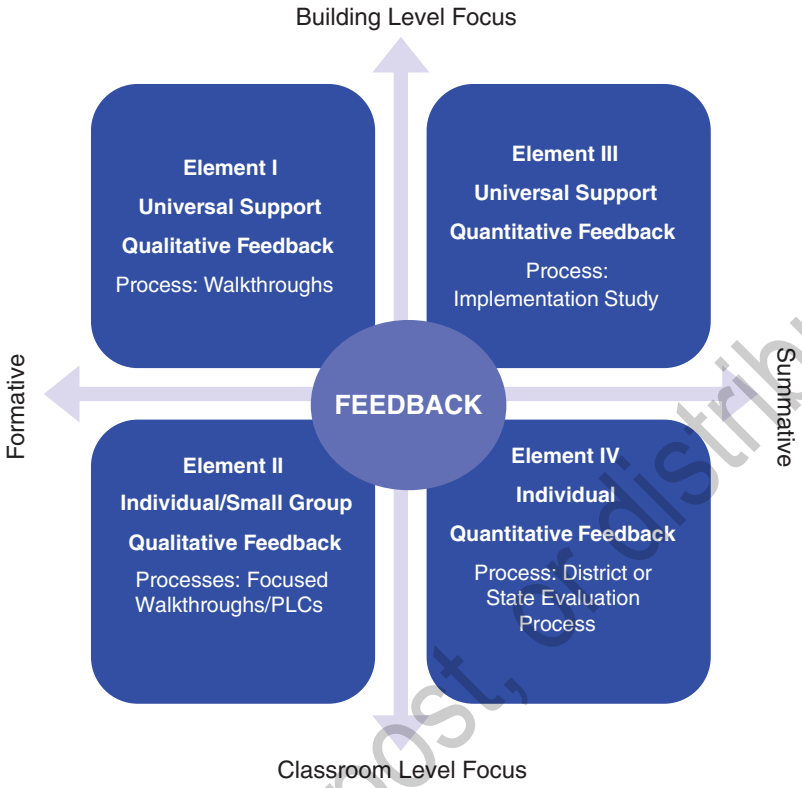
Addressing these complexities requires a new approach to supervision. This approach must account for the variability found in school staff while helping leaders provide feedback that impacts student growth. This requires a framework that allows leaders to differentiate supervision practices, just like classroom teachers do to accommodate the varied needs of their students.

Note This: Differentiated supervision of personnel means that school leaders do things differently based on what teachers need and students deserve (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008).

Differentiated supervision embraces a philosophy that is designed to match the level of supervision with the needs of both the individuals and teams while moving the entire school forward. Ongoing meaningful feedback serves as the centerpiece for this approach so teachers and leaders can work together to develop a mutual understanding about what students need to succeed.

The remainder of this chapter will serve as the first step in answering this challenge by introducing the fundamental elements of differentiated instruction. Then it will move into illustrating a model for differentiated supervision followed by the research on why this model is effective, and finally how to begin putting it into practice.

FIGURE 1.1 DIFFERENTIATED SUPERVISION MODEL



A MODEL FOR IMPROVED SUPERVISION

This model is not a recipe for how to approach supervision. We don't believe such a thing exists, and even if it did, we know that wouldn't work. Supervision requires a more nuanced approach. Nuanced leaders, according to Fullan (2019), have to comprehend the inner workings and see the patterns in order to understand how something works. Effective supervision requires moving beyond the simplistic notion that walkthroughs coupled with a comprehensive summative evaluation is enough. Both practices are needed and have their place; what matters most, however, is how these practices work together in the service of student learning.

Two Scopes: Focus and Assessment

The differentiated supervision model is built around two axes as illustrated in Figure 1.1. The model was designed around these axes in order to

address the inherent challenge of improving an entire system while simultaneously addressing the individual needs of a diverse teaching staff. The two axes define the dimensions of differentiated supervision by intended focus (building or classroom) and the type of assessment (formative or summative).

The elements on the left-hand side of the matrix are where leaders should spend the majority of their day throughout the school year in terms of supervision. The descriptive nature of qualitative feedback used in these two elements generates ongoing information that helps teachers continually refine their practice. This formative data is vital to helping support teachers and will be the most significant factor in their growth and development.

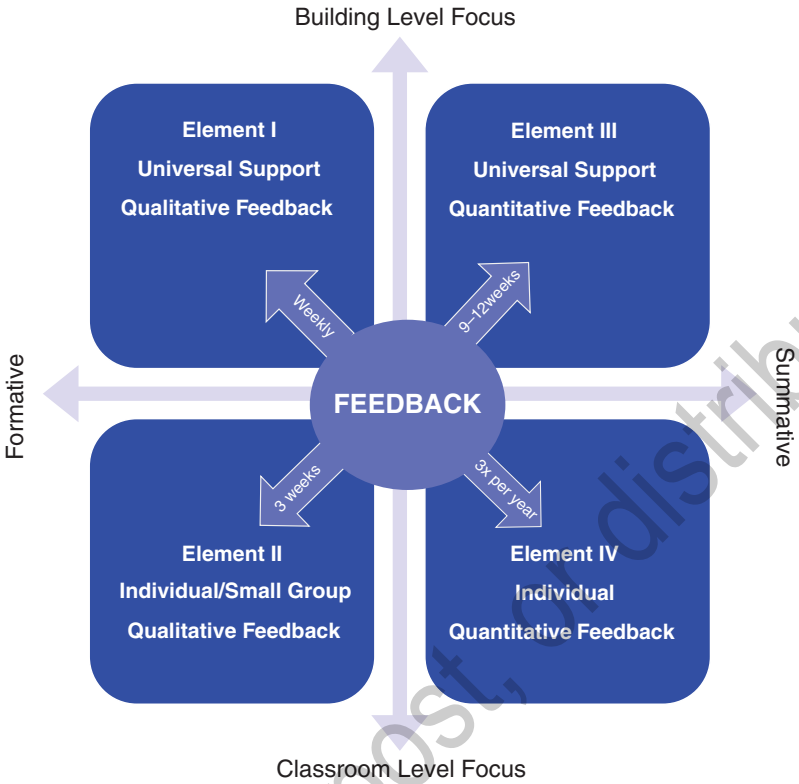
Driven by Feedback

At the core of the differentiated supervision model is feedback. Feedback occupies this spot because it is central to how we learn and grow. Essentially, feedback is the information that we receive that helps to shape our next response (Nottingham & Nottingham, 2017). We agree wholeheartedly with Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) that "the primary purpose of observing teachers isn't to judge the teacher, but to find the most effective ways to coach them to improve student learning" (p. 63). This requires an approach to feedback that has teachers actively engaged so *they* can identify what is working and what they could do better next time.

Figure 1.2 depicts the frequency and tools for generating feedback in the differentiated supervision model. The school improvement and professional development plan serves as the lens for feedback as it provides the school with focus. Look fors act as the magnifying glass, allowing the teacher and leader to focus on specific well-defined practices. The intent of this model is to utilize feedback that promotes self-awareness, serving as that voice in a person's head that has them constantly thinking and reflecting on how to advance or change their performance. This is impossible if the feedback used is too generic or all encompassing. Science and experience have taught us that it is impossible to try to improve too many things at once. This is why the model relies heavily on collaboratively defined looks (see Chapter 2) because they lead to actionable feedback.

Feedback aligned to look fors helps identify areas for growth and provides specificity on how to move forward. The feedback techniques described throughout the book showcase how to promote reflection and dialogue, essential practices if we want supervision to be something teachers engage in rather than being done to them. Because state and district teaching standards tend to be broad and generic, they are typically used at the conclusion of observation cycles. Frequent feedback based on look fors generated from the school improvement and professional

FIGURE 1.2 FEEDBACK TIMING



development plan, given in small relevant chunks over time, is at the heart of this model.

The Elements

The essence of this model is found in each of the four elements. While each element is distinct in both the supervision processes employed and the feedback content focus, it is the synergy of these elements, working in tandem with each other, that results in strong outcomes for students. An overview of each element can be found here, but each element will be the subject of a separate chapter.

Element I: Universal Support, Qualitative Feedback. Practices and processes in this element are designed to help move the school forward by providing focused feedback around the school improvement plan. In this first stage, principals, teachers, and other key leaders in the building work together to collaboratively define the focus for observation used during daily walk-throughs. We refer to these as "look fors," and they provide the basis for feedback.

Element II: Individual/Small Group Support, Qualitative Feedback. Practices in this element are targeted at individual teachers and small groups. While all elements are needed, this element packs a big punch in terms of affecting student achievement because it uses frequent observations in both classrooms and PLCs to provide targeted ongoing feedback.

Element III: Universal Support, Quantitative Feedback. Practices in this element are designed to help determine levels of implementation of school improvement plan efforts. This summative check is necessary in order to help identify what additional supports are needed so that all students benefit from improvement efforts.

Element IV: Individual Support, Quantitative Feedback. Practices in this element provide individuals with summative feedback on their overall teaching efforts. Methods in this element are dictated by state or district mandates. Feedback is based on teaching standards.

Supervision Practices

The differentiated supervision model hinges on using a range of supervision methods to provide support to teachers. While we are strong advocates for principals engaging in walkthroughs with feedback, that process alone won't help provide a leader with the big picture needed to help all staff and students grow. Figure 1.3 provides an outline of the differentiated practices that leaders need to use. Each practice will be explored in-depth in the corresponding element chapters. What is central to remember here is that all of these practices are necessary. What the differentiated supervision model does is help leaders determine when to use a specific practice so results can be leveraged. Successful gardeners know when to use a rake versus a hoe. School leaders must approach supervision in this same manner, understanding which tool will yield the best results.

WHY IT WORKS

Connecting Supervision to the System

The work of improving a school or district requires a system approach.

Note This: Systems that build a common language and knowledge base along with implementing proven effective practices outperform schools that do not have this focus (Robinson, 2011).

The differentiated model works because it connects supervision to the rest of the system. Rather than treating supervision as an isolated activity that happens 3 times a year (or less) and is prescribed by forms, differentiated supervision is dictated by teacher needs and improvement strategies. Supervision becomes a supporting process in helping translate

FIGURE 1.3 DIFFERENTIATED SUPERVISION PRACTICES

PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY/ DURATION	FEEDBACK METHOD	FEEDBACK COLLECTION TOOL
Element I General Walkthrough	Organized visit through a school's learning areas, using specific look fors to focus on teaching and learning	Identify building-wide trends and patterns regarding implementation of SIP in order to help determine "next steps" for professional development (PD)	Weekly, 3–5 minutes in each classroom	Face-to-face Schoolwide via blog, email, etc.	Feedback Log and Walkthrough Summary
Element II Focused Walkthrough	Observe teaching and learning in a specific grade level or content area	Learn instructional strengths and needs of individual teachers Follow up on learning from PLC	Depends on work in small group PD, but on average each teacher every 2–3 weeks, 10–20 minutes per class	Face-to-face email/note	Feedback Log and Walkthrough Summary
Element II Participation in PLCs	Weekly attendance at PLC meetings in order to serve as an active team member	Play an active role in helping support teachers as they analyze student work and plan to meet the needs of all students	Attendance once a week per team for 30 minutes	Small group during meetings	Feedback Log
Element III Implementation Study	Scheduled visits to measure quantitative data on SIP implementation	Determine how near or far the school is from reaching 100% implementation of strategies in SIP	Approximately 2–3x per year, may take 3 weeks to complete depending on building size	Schoolwide face-to-face	Feedback Log and Teacher Map
Element VI Formal Evaluation	Process outlined by the school or district used to judge whether or not the teacher can continue to work at the school	Determine teacher competency	Annually or more frequently based on the needs of the teacher	Individualized	Feedback Log, Teacher Map, and Walkthrough Summary

the vision of the organization into a reality by setting a direction that results in whole school consistency and high expectations, one of the core functions of system leadership (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

Figure 1.4 illustrates the role supervision plays in the blueprint processes for school improvement (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008). The five core processes include the following:

1. Establishing a mission, vision, and values that guide the general direction of the school and its future actions;
2. Using data analysis, which includes both collecting and interpreting data for decision-making;
3. Using a school improvement plan to guide goals, strategies, action steps, and decisions in order to create a working plan for the school;
4. Implementing professional development that serves as the engine for the school improvement plan; and
5. Differentiating supervision of teaching and learning to monitor how processes are working in classrooms.

When supervision is aligned to the other school improvement processes (mission and vision, data, the plan, and professional development), it helps to gauge progress and serves as the GPS of school improvement.

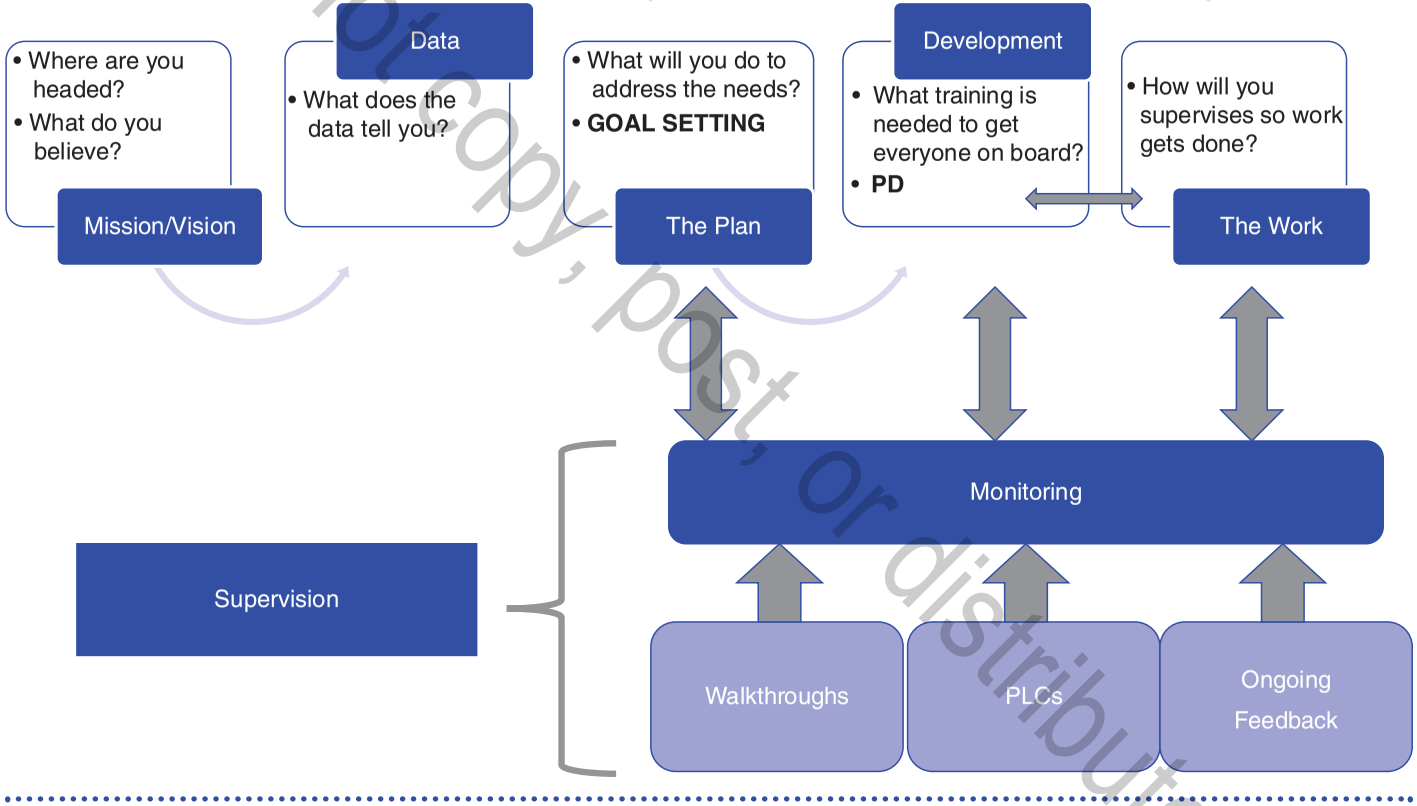
Supervision helps keep the plan safely on the road, preventing detours and helping determine when pit stops are needed. For example, if a strategy in the school improvement plan is implementing project-based learning, then the professional development should focus on helping teachers use project-based learning. Individual professional growth plans would then include teachers identifying aspects of project-based learning that they are going to focus on throughout the year to improve their practice. Supervision is where the real work of implementing the school improvement plan happens. Without supervision the plan becomes another misguided initiative.

Note This: The school improvement plan is the road map and professional development is the engine, but it is supervision that provides guidance on how near or far a school is from the targets.

Capacity Building Through Formative and Summative Practices

The research is clear that developing capacity is of central importance to school leaders (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Collective capacity building works because it involves deepening staff know-how through knowledge

FIGURE 1.4 BLUEPRINT PROCESSES FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT



Source: Adapted From *School Leadership Through the Seasons* (Mausbach & Morrison, 2016).

building, collective action, and consistent focus. The goal of collective capacity building is for everyone in the system to have the necessary knowledge and skills. This requires attention to both individual and collective growth. Like the gardener who has one eye on individual plant growth and the other on the overall harvest, leaders must use both formative and summative practices to determine how deep the roots of learning have been planted.

The differentiated supervision model hinges on the use of both formative and summative measures. Formative measures use frequent monitoring so leaders can address learning differences in order to lessen the knowing–doing gap. Summative measures help leaders in assessing what has been accomplished and aid in helping to make decisions on where to go next. Both are critical to creating communities of learners.

Human and Social Capital Are Interconnected

The notion that a singular heroic leader is needed to improve a system has been replaced by the understanding that it takes a team (think Avengers rather than Superman). The team is more powerful than the individual. This doesn't discount that individuals matter—the quality of the teacher and leader in a school has been well established as a major influence on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006; Marzano, 2003). However, if leaders want to improve teacher quality (human capital), leveraging the quality of groups (social capital) accelerates this process (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Individuals develop capacity when they are learning and getting feedback from the powerful interactions and relationships around them. The work of developing human capital flows from the skills and knowledge developed through collaborative learning experiences. Human and social capital are intertwined much like a plant is to soil. Plants can grow without soil, but place them in the ground and surround them with the right conditions (water, fertilizer, other healthy plants) and they thrive. Social capital is the soil for improvement. It is more powerful than human capital, but the two feed off of each other (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Individuals flourish when we root them in rich and meaningful experiences with their colleagues.

The differentiated supervision model is predicated on the symbiotic relationship between human, social, and decisional (discussed in Chapter 4) capital. In this model, the learning that occurs during collaborative work serves as a lens for helping determine how to support individual teachers. Individual skill and knowledge development are complemented by group learning. Group work, when done right, serves as the platform for deep learning, allowing individuals to collaboratively wrestle with the complexities of helping all students learn and in turn improving individual performance. Emphasis is placed on the practices on the right side of the matrix so we can as Fullan (2019) says, "use the group to change the group" (p. 79). Rather than

spending inordinate amounts of time trying to improve one teacher at a time and seeing slow or incremental gains, this model requires leaders to shift more attention to group dynamics. Strategizing about who should work together and how they should work is a central focus of the leader in the differentiated supervision model.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The coherent use of school improvement processes provides the foundation for the differentiated supervision model. Developing a rich understanding of how to connect supervision to school improvement efforts is job number one for principals. Armed with this understanding, the principal can then work to make sure that improvement efforts are focused and result in deep levels of implementation that positively impact student outcomes. The leadership practices outlined in the next section provide practical guidance on how to make this happen.

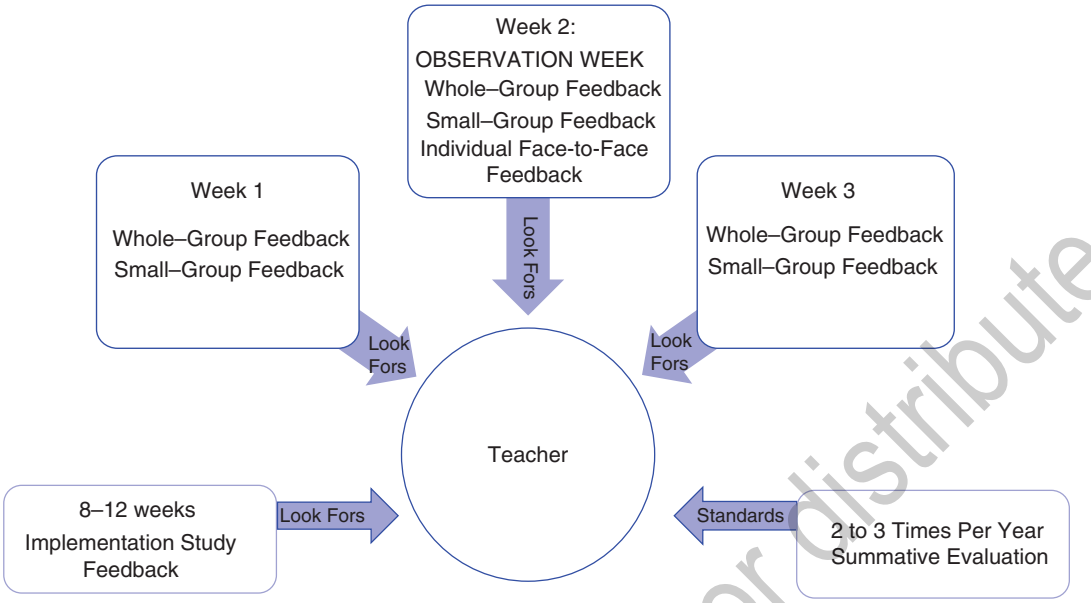
Build the Infrastructure: Create Feedback Cycles

In the wise words of Miles Davis, "Time isn't the main thing, it is the only thing." Simply put, if you don't build time into your calendar, this work will never get done. Supervising teaching and learning can't be an afterthought. The only way we have found to make this happen is by committing to the time in the leader's schedule every week of the school year. Four important tasks must be designated in the principal's weekly calendar: providing weekly feedback to the entire staff via a weekly message, participating in PLCs, observing in teachers' classrooms, and providing face-to-face feedback. This can seem overwhelming without a strategic approach to attacking the work. Strategies for making this happen will be addressed in the latter part of the chapter.

Developing a rotating schedule that divides staff into three feedback cycle groups is one such technique. Using three groups provides the principal with a manageable way to see all staff on a consistent basis while still providing time to attend to the other unplanned events that pop up regularly in a school day. Cycles also ensure that every teacher will have face-to-face feedback once in a 3-week time period. Building sizes vary, but we have found that a 3-week cycle is manageable for mid- to large-size schools. Two feedback cycles could be used with a smaller staff, or if there are multiple administrators, this would increase frequency of observations and feedback. The minimum expectation is face-to-face feedback every 3 weeks. The only caveat to this is first-year teachers who, at least for the first semester, are observed every week.

In off-cycle weeks, teachers still receive feedback via the weekly message and in PLCs. Using collaboratively defined look fors makes this feedback

FIGURE 1.5 TEACHER FEEDBACK



relevant and useful, promoting consistency across the school. Figure 1.5 depicts how much feedback a teacher receives in the differentiated supervision model. Weeks 1–3 are from the formative side of the matrix, while the lower boxes are from the summative side.

We are ardent believers of creating a schedule for this work, however, who gets observed may need to change due to what has been observed and the work of PLCs. For example, you may observe in a PLC that one teacher's student data is much lower than the other teacher's student data in the grade level or subject area so the frequency of observation is increased to every week or every 2 weeks. This is much easier to do when time slots are blocked out each week for this work. In other words, create the schedule, but *differentiate* based on teacher needs.

Align School Improvement Processes

Alignment of school improvement is when all the processes (mission and vision, data, the plan, professional development, and supervision) work in concert (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008). It is the interconnectedness of these processes that determine the success of the school (see Figure 1.4). Gardens grow when all facets are interacting and working together. The same holds true for schools: If one of the core processes is missing, improvement is hindered. The key for leaders is to align the processes and help connect the dots for teachers.

Alignment happens when the leader has the mindset that everything in the organization is instrumental to the achievement of collective goals. Rather than spending time looking for the latest quick fix to use as the improvement lever, leaders look within to align the processes and resources in a systematic and focused way (Elmore, 2008). Using the mission to guide what data to collect, identifying professional development practices based on the strategies in the school improvement plan, and using look fors to determine what to observe in classrooms are examples of how these processes help leaders look from within. Each process requires the leader to collaborate with staff to make decisions about the direction of the school. Decisions made throughout the cycle of school improvement lay the groundwork for developing collective commitments that directly impact how staff works together.

Many times, schools and districts believe they have alignment because they have several of these processes in place. For example, a mission statement may exist, and schools may have improvement plans and engage in data analysis. However, these processes are done in isolation of each other and are treated as separate activities rather than as actions that must interosculate in order to get maximum results. Misalignment is so detrimental because it perpetuates the "silo" mentality that is far too rampant in many schools. Silos get created because there isn't a shared sense of purpose on what and how to do the work. Breaking these silos down requires leaders to take alignment issues head-on so staff can find their footing in the improvement journey. Figure 1.6 outlines some common problems with alignment and actions leaders can take to address these problems.

FIGURE 1.6 COMMON ALIGNMENT PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

PROBLEM	PRINCIPAL ACTIONS TO ADDRESS
Addressing mission and vision only at the beginning of each school year	• Frequently refer to the mission and vision when engaging in school improvement work • Highlight examples of the mission in action throughout the year • Use the mission as a touchstone when making decisions
Using annual data analysis vs. continuous data analysis for decision-making	• Distribute data as it becomes available followed by analysis and collective interpretation • Clearly identify data points in the school improvement plan that help measure impact on student learning and then collect this data on an ongoing basis and share progress with staff • Establish collaboration, such as PLCs, that use student data as the cornerstone for the work

(*Continued*)

FIGURE 1.6 (Continued)

Treating development of a school improvement plan as a one-time event driven by compliance with an outside source (i.e., district office, accreditation agency)	• Use school data to determine areas for improvement • Identify both implementation and impact data points, collect on an ongoing basis and revise plan as needed throughout the year
Developing professional development plans based on outside influences Creating professional development plans that are loosely related to the school improvement plan	• Develop professional development around identified needs of the school from the school improvement plan • Actively participate in PD and PLCs • Create an infrastructure for learning in the school that promotes both large and small group learning • Resist trainings, programs, or initiatives that are not a part of the strategies in the school improvement plan
Supervising teachers using daily monitoring methods that are not connected to the school improvement or professional development plan	• Set clear expectations regarding frequent classroom visitation for the purpose of monitoring teaching and learning in addition to evaluation of teachers • Collaboratively develop clear look fors around the school's initiatives so everyone understands what implementation looks like and sounds like

Source: Adapted from *Align the Design* (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008).

Alignment is a key factor in maximizing supervision efforts because it helps to create a shared ethos. It promotes the "we are all in this together" mentality since everyone is working toward the same desired state. An aligned system actualizes a growth mindset since it is built upon the notion of continuous improvement. When alignment is present, getting better at what we do becomes a part of the daily routine of the school. Learning from each other to meet collective goals is a common practice. Feedback is sought after and used. Supervision is no longer an unwanted, unsolicited intrusion from higher-ups but a helpful process that promotes growth.

Be Relentless About Focus and Clarity

Large-scale improvement doesn't happen without a tight instructional focus sustained over time (Elmore, 2008). Focus happens when what is of essential importance in the context of the organization is identified and efforts are concentrated on these essentials. However, the complex nature of schools often finds leaders caught in a frustrating game of whack a mole, trying to lead multiple initiatives all at once. While this game keeps a leader busy, it leaves them (and those they lead) tired and curious when results haven't improved. A lack of focus has the same catastrophic results as the garden

that isn't weeded. Competing initiatives vie for teachers' time and attention and result in frantic activity that leads nowhere.

Achieving a laser-like focus requires leaders to boil down change into the smallest number of key high-yield strategies that have an impact on learning, also known as Fullan's notion of "skinny" (2009). This is difficult to do in a complex system like a school. Getting skinny requires schools to take a ruthless look at reality and then make hard decisions about what should and shouldn't be pursued. The school improvement and professional development plan serves as the tool for this work because it promotes decision-making and links goals with action. This plan can provide clarity and coherence, but only when the following key practices are utilized.

Use Clear and Deliberate Language

Schools and school systems are highly compartmentalized both by physical and organizational design. Teachers in the science wing may rarely interact with the fine arts wing, not only because they are physically separated, but because the school schedule does not allow for common planning or lunch times. This isolation hampers reform efforts and adds to confusion or disengagement, complicating supervision efforts. Because this isolation exists, it is important to use common language so that everyone is on the same page. Figure 1.7 outlines questions and language that create shared meaning and clarity across a school staff. Using common language assists with staff knowing what is being built and how near or far the collective team is from reaching targets.

FIGURE 1.7 QUESTIONS AND LANGUAGE FOR DEVELOPING A SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Limit the Number of Goals and Strategies

Setting clear goals and then coordinating the work of the adults around that is how focus happens. Goal setting forces leaders to determine what is most important given all the important things that need to get done (Robinson, 2018). If the purpose of having goals is to determine direction, then having five or more goals means five or more destinations, putting the school on divergent paths. One useful way to help limit goals is to keep them centered on student outcomes. Then strategies are about the work of the adults to help meet the goal. For example, one goal area may be to improve achievement. Under this goal, there may be two strategies such as to implement formative assessments and improve feedback practices to students. On the surface, these goals and strategies seem simple; it is in the execution that complexity enters the picture. This is why it is essential to limit it to a manageable number.

Remember Programs Aren't Strategies

Strategies operationalize the goal, and in order for the goal to be met by all students, all staff need to clearly understand what needs to be accomplished. A clearly articulated strategy aids in staff's understanding of the work that lies ahead. Identifying a program as a strategy undermines supervision and continuous improvement efforts because it communicates that meeting the goal is outside of the teacher's influence and all that is necessary is to purchase and implement. While there are many good resources and programs available to teachers, what matters most is the quality of the teacher (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Commercially developed programs are effective when they are placed in the hands of a competent teacher who knows not only how to use the tool, but why and for which students. Rather than focusing a strategy on a program, a school leader is better served by focusing on people and process, which is the essence of the differentiated supervision model. The practices in the model account for the differences in staff competency and provide a process for supporting teachers in their practice.

Use Professional Development Needs as the Barometer

The best indicator as to whether or not the goals, strategies, and action steps in the school improvement plan are doable is to take a close look at the professional learning needs that stem from the plan. Listing all of the things teachers would need to know and be able to do if the strategies were implemented by the entire staff provides a realistic picture of the likelihood of the success of the plan. If the plan requires teachers to learn a long list of new practices, then the plan is too big. Can every single teacher in the school take on everything that is listed? Too often that answer is no, so scale back. Many times, we confuse staff lack of implementation of new strategies as a reluctance to change when in reality it may just be that we

have asked staff to do too much changing and they don't know where to start. Just as the barometric meter alerts us about changes in weather conditions so we can react appropriately, the amount of professional learning required in plans serves as an indicator of the reasonableness of improvement efforts. It alerts us to whether there will be stormy times ahead (asking teachers to learn too many new things at once) or sunny days (giving teachers the time and space to learn a limited number of high leverage practices).

EQUITY CHECK

Differentiation at its essence is the act of recognizing the distinctions in and between things. Without a noticing of differences, uniqueness can't be valued and enhanced in a way that is responsive and affirming. The differentiated supervision model recognizes, values, and supports teachers in a way that accounts for diversity in their learning so they can address differences they find in student learning. Inherent to the model is providing all teachers with *what they need* so they can effectively support their students.

A focus on high expectations and high support for everyone dismantles the lottery approach to supervision where only a few students are lucky enough to land in an effective teacher's classroom. This approach upends an inequitable system by designing processes that meet people where they are and provides footholds to get to the next level. Using the practices in this model helps shape the leaders' thinking and actions on equity so the mission of teaching *all* students can finally be realized.

FROM THE FIELD

At Issue: Gail was a principal. She had a large staff and knew that in order to move the achievement needle she would have to have all staff working with the same focus. Although she worked hard during the first year at the school, the student results weren't what she desired. Determined to change things, Gail took a different approach to her supervision. Using the differentiated model as her guide, she connected her work to the school improvement plan.

Gail started her journey at the school by making sure she made time for the things that mattered most: teacher collaboration and spending time in classrooms. She developed a schedule that had teams collaborating on a weekly basis and administrators attending PLCs and conducting daily classroom observations. In addition to carving out time for teacher teams, Gail also designated time each week to coordinate feedback efforts with her leadership team which consisted of two assistant principals. Developing a schedule that devoted time to observing and collaborating

with teachers before the year started ensured this work was a priority for Gail and her leadership team.

Once the collaboration schedule was in place, Gail and her staff worked to develop a focused school improvement plan. After reviewing data, they identified goals around student achievement. The strategy of writing and implementing learning intentions and success criteria was identified as the means to help them meet their targeted goals. Professional development around learning intentions and success criteria helped staff understand expectations. A collaborative process was used to develop look fors that helped staff understand what the strategy would look like and sound like when implemented in classrooms.

Element I. Once look fors were firmly in place, Principal Gail monitored the effectiveness of the school improvement plan. Gail made sure to visit classrooms every week and provided feedback based on the look fors via her weekly message. She used a weekly blog to highlight practices she observed that matched the look fors. Whole group professional development sessions provided teachers with rich learning on how to develop and use learning intentions and success criteria. Insights from general walkthroughs conducted each week informed this professional development.

Element II. Through her general walkthrough, Gail noticed that a team of teachers needed additional support. The teachers had strong instructional skills and were conscientious in their planning and collaborative practice. However, achievement was low, and students were not reaching growth targets. She knew she needed to spend more time with this team and became the lead learner with the teachers in studying the grade-level standards and planning authentic experiences for students. She worked with this team to unpack standards and to write quality learning intentions with specific success criteria. Together they would "do the student work" so they could put themselves in the shoes of the students. This work, coupled with focused walkthroughs and feedback, resulted in teachers using more explicit language that helped them differentiate based on student needs.

Element III. Implementation studies were conducted every 8 weeks to measure the percentage of teachers effectively utilizing success criteria and learning intentions, the strategy from the school improvement plan. The implementation study involved Gail and the assistants observing in every classroom and indicating whether the look fors were present or not. This qualitative data provided the leadership team with the percentage of teachers implementing the strategy. Teachers knew that the goal of 100% implementation with 80% fidelity was the bar to reach.

Element IV. Throughout the year, Gail collected the feedback given to the teachers from all of the elements. Conducting summative evaluations was simplified because

she had a multitude of data at her fingertips. Conferences with teachers connected to the state's teaching standards and used authentic evidence to support areas of strength and areas for growth. Teachers found value in these conversations because they provided a summary of the work the teacher had done all year and didn't rely on irrelevant measures.

The process was focused and driven by feedback. The differentiated supervision approach worked for Gail and her team as student results and teacher job satisfaction soared.

Key Takeaways

Leadership is complicated work that requires consistent attention to what drives growth. Creating conditions for growth necessitates a focus on what teachers know and can do both individually and collectively. It requires a framework that helps the leader simultaneously tend to the needs of the building, the team, and the individual teacher. The differentiated supervision model does this by helping the leader organize practices in a purposeful way so growth is realized throughout the school. The processes and tools used in each element of the differentiated supervision model help ensure coherence across the system.

Schools, like gardens, can be chaotic and wild—the soil, untilled and dormant. The differentiated model alleviates the distractions and noise around school improvement and supervision, cultivating a focused culture of collective action based on teacher and student needs. Leaders tame the chaos by targeting a small number of school improvement strategies, providing consistent feedback, and differentiating how they support teams and individuals—the fundamental constructs of the differentiated supervision model. The results are a bountiful harvest of improved achievement for all.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Successfully implementing the differentiated supervision model requires a leader to commit to capacity building. Capacity, according to Fullan and Quinn (2016), "refers to the capability of the individual or organization to make the changes required and involves the development of knowledge, skills, and commitments" (pp. 56–57). This is of critical importance because every action a leader takes, either intentional or unintentional, reverberates throughout the school. Without a leader's commitment to learning and action, it is difficult if not impossible to create a culture of growth, which is a hinge point of the differentiated supervision model.

Building capacity calls for serious and intentional focus on helping others develop their talents through the process of developing your own. A garden can't thrive without a skilled gardener orchestrating the work. The same holds true for schools. This doesn't mean that the principal has to be -all-knowing, we know that doesn't work. What it does mean is that the principal has to be the "lead learner" organizing the work so that collaboratively, teams can improve student learning. And this necessitates attention to specific knowledge, skills, and follow through on the part of the leader. As we work through the differentiated supervision model, we have provided an inventory of what this entails. Chapters 1–5 will include a self-assessment designed to help you think and reflect so you can identify areas of strength and pinpoint areas where capacity building needs more attention.

Use the following continuum to rate yourself on each of the statements. Ask yourself what you need to change or do to move down the continuum toward blooming.

Knowledge	I understand the importance of connecting the processes of school improvement (mission and vision, data, the plan, professional development, and supervision) and continually work toward alignment.
	I am clear about the difference between supervision and evaluation.
	I understand how actionable feedback is necessary to drive my school improvement plan.
	I realize that formative and summative measures are needed to provide a complete picture of a teacher's performance.
Skills	A clear and focused school improvement plan (limited goals and clear language) has been developed collaboratively with staff.
	All staff are able to articulate the goals and strategies in the school improvement plan.
Follow Through	I have developed and am using a clear system in place for how I organize my days and weeks that allows me to observe teachers and attend PLC meetings.
	Cycles for observations and feedback have been developed.