3.4 MORAL COURAGE

STEP 1 >> READ THE PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTIONS

1 INITIATING

The school culture is largely characterized by complacency and a “don’t rock the boat” mentality, and many important decisions are made in the effort to sidestep potential resistance or pushback from staff and parents. There are no formal structures or processes in place to examine student data, achievement gaps, or equity issues at the classroom, team, or school level, largely due to a desire to avoid singing out a specific teacher, student group, or department. The principal and other school leaders routinely avoid confrontation or discussions about persistent issues, and poor student-performance results are not openly or honestly discussed with individual teachers. Poor scores on state assessments and other unflattering data may be hidden, excused, or minimized. Inappropriate and unprofessional behavior is often tolerated, which has eroded trust and collegiality among the staff. The school culture remains largely resistant to self-reflection, and the belief that “we’re doing good enough” persists despite evidence that too many students are failing to succeed or graduate.

3 DEVELOPING

The superintendent, principal, and leadership team have developed a strategic plan for confronting challenges that may arise in response to school-improvement efforts. Decisions are increasingly guided by identified student needs, research on school effectiveness, and sound principles—not by a fear of confrontation, resistance, or possible failure. The school community is no longer making excuses for poor student scores or other unfavorable data, but is taking steps to identify the root causes and undertake strategic actions to address the issues. Administrators, teachers, and other staff have collaboratively developed standards and norms for professional behavior and interactions, although unprofessional behavior by some individuals continues to go unaddressed by administrators and colleagues. The school’s action plan is bold and ambitious, but the principal and leadership team have been unwilling to advocate for key elements with important constituents—including the superintendent and school board—even though the strategies are in the best interest of their students.

5 PERFORMING

The principal, administrators, and teacher-leaders skilfully handle contentious issues and defend equitable ideals and practices—even in the face of actual or potential attacks—that promote positive learning outcomes for all students and decrease achievement gaps. Good intentions and well-laid plans are not undone by careless words or actions, but they are achieved through collaboration, professionalism, and goal-driven moral courage. Each faculty member assumes personal responsibility for addressing interpersonal issues before they turn into problems. School leaders are self-reflective, process concerns and conflicts openly, and move the collective dialogue beyond personal issues and interests. School faculty and staff advocate for the school’s improvement work within the community, and the principal and leadership team work closely with the superintendent and school board to advance critical policies that support a student-centered academic program. When difficult situations arise, the principal proactively communicates with staff, students, parents, and the larger community to minimize the spread of misinformation, including reaching out to school board and local media. In general, challenges are not avoided or postponed, but embraced by administrators, faculty, and staff.

STEP 4 >> SCORE YOUR SCHOOL

Place an X on the scale below to indicate your school’s performance in this dimension.

1 2 3 4 5

NOT ADDRESSED INITIATING DEVELOPING PERFORMING
### SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- Review the school mission statement with staff, parents, and the community, and compare existing practices and organizational structures with the mission statement to ensure that programs are in alignment with its expressed principles.
- Adopt an “open door” policy so that any staff member, student, or parent with a significant concern about the school can meet with the principal and leadership team.
- Announce the school’s commitment to equitable practices and outcomes for all students, and have the principal publicly outline a clear plan for achieving these goals.
- Establish a set of school-wide norms that encourage open conversation within and outside of the school regarding student performance results and other data.
- Adopt a set of shared expectations and norms—aligned with the school’s vision and mission—for staff meetings, professional conduct, and adult-student relationships.
- Allow time in faculty meetings for staff members to raise concerns and question decisions in a constructive, respectful, and supportive manner.

### OUR STRATEGIES IN THIS DIMENSION

### SAMPLE EVIDENCE

- Criticism and differing opinions are expressed constructively and respectfully among staff and within the school community generally.
- Student interactions reflect the positive behaviors, attitudes, and social skills modeled by teachers and other staff members.
- Administrators and teachers regularly ask students and colleagues for feedback on their leadership and pedagogy.
- School leaders regularly discuss the school’s efforts with the district leadership and, when necessary, advocate for changes to district or state policies to create an environment that is more supportive of the school action plan.

### OUR EVIDENCE IN THIS DIMENSION