

## CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS:

### THE ROLE OF SSTs IN SUPPORTING IMPROVEMENTS IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Ohio's improvement strategy – the *Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)* – provides a framework for continuous district-wide improvement that helps district and school leaders make effective instruction for all learners their greatest priority.

The combination of OLAC's work in delineating essential leadership practices (*"the what"*) and the use of the OIP (*"the how"*) to support real implementation of such practices provides a vehicle for sustainable improvement by engaging teachers, principals, and others at the district and school level in effectively using relevant data to make better informed decisions about instructional practice; identifying a limited and focused set of goals and strategies to improve instructional practice across the district; developing shared instructional practice among adults in the system; fully implementing those shared instructional practices across the district; and monitoring the degree of implementation of those practices, and providing feedback and support in relation to what is/is not working well.



Ohio's state support teams (SSTs) play a pivotal role in supporting the use of OIP-OLAC to support system-wide improvements in instructional practice and student, adult, and organizational learning. SST personnel, functioning as external facilitators and coaches, work with district and school personnel in a variety of ways to build instructional leadership capacity.

**Aspiring Principal  
Network:  
The Art of Building  
Leadership**  
January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Appreciation Strategy Humility  
Commitment Responsibility Listening  
**Leadership**  
Integrity Honest Communication  
Values Purpose Determination  
Passion Principles

In SST region 9 – responsible for supporting improvement efforts in approximately 40 districts in Stark, Wayne, and Holmes counties – SST personnel work closely with Stark County Educational Service Center (ESC) personnel to co-plan and co-deliver professional development (PD) to practicing and aspiring principals. The **Principal Network** engages between 80 and 100 practicing principals through four full-day sessions per school year. Each session involves principals from all building types (e.g., elementary, middle, high) in training on timely topics relevant to improving results for all students. Following whole-group training and discussion, principals meet in smaller groups by school level to discuss problems of practice. For example, principals discussed issues related to Ohio Teacher Education System (OTES) implementation and how school-level efforts to improve instructional practice could be supported by/aligned with OTES requirements.

The **Aspiring Principal Network** is provided through SST 9 and the Stark County ESC for about 40 individuals who are on the path to becoming credentialed as principals. These aspiring school leaders must be recommended by their district superintendent as a condition of participating in the network. The initial session for aspiring principals provides an orientation to the network as well as PD in "the art of building leadership, and engages them in role-play scenarios during which they have to respond to real-life situations faced by principals during a typical day. Spotlight presenters work with the participants to extend their

learning around important topics (e.g., community and family engagement) using a variety of resources (e.g., OLAC on-line modules), and participants are assigned a visitation schedule whereby they have an opportunity to see districts and schools of different typologies from their own.



Veteran educator Peg Deibel started the network for both practicing and aspiring principals more than 20 years ago when serving as a coordinator of administrative programming for the Stark County ESC. “The PD that we deliver to principals, as well as to other district and school personnel, needs to be more job-embedded,” said Deibel who has served as a teacher, secondary building administrator, ESC

consultant, district curriculum supervisor, higher education instructor, and, most recently, as one of four SST consultants responsible for training all SST personnel in a quadrant of the state in the use of OIP-OLAC. “A coordinated approach to supporting district-wide improvement is possible when both the ESC and SST consultants/facilitators use a common framework, which is the OIP,” she added.

Deibel is the first to note that the network activities are one way to support principal development and learning. “The ongoing, continuing challenge is in helping the district leadership team and building leadership team to understand that the work is not about filling in forms, but rather about building a system,” said Deibel.

Helping to build instructional leadership capacity in principals is most often facilitated by SST personnel working in the role of a coach or, as Deibel describes them, ‘a guide on the side.’ “Supporting principals is a little different than working with the entire DLT, which is a more formalized process involving facilitation,” explained Deibel. “It’s critical that principals, in particular, have an opportunity to debrief about what they’re seeing and hearing as they participate in DLT meetings and/or facilitate BLT meetings,” she said.

**OLAC-OIP: DEFINING ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT**

Essential leadership practices – defined by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) and articulated in *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework* (BASA, 2013) – are grounded in several foundational beliefs:

1. Leadership is a shared responsibility and needs to be viewed, not as a role, but as a set of essential practices directed toward the improvement of instruction with the ultimate aim of increasing students’ learning (see, e.g., Elmore, 2006);
2. Leadership is a process distributed across an entire school system – its central office and all of its buildings – involving shared responsibility for and concerted action on behalf of improved instructional practice and school performance (see, e.g., Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Fullan, 2011, 2010); and
3. Accountability for school improvement requires leadership structures (that is, district leadership teams, building leadership teams, and teacher-based teams) through which personnel take responsibility and hold one another accountable for organizing, implementing, monitoring, and learning from improvement processes (see, e.g., McNulty & Besser, 2011).

Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, & Hargreaves (2015) argue for development of a professional culture that fosters the participation of principals as learners in the professional learning of teachers, and that build principal knowledge and skill in facilitating effective teacher collaboration among other key areas of expertise (p. 10). The *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation, & Instructional Improvement (OLi<sup>4</sup>): Improving Results for Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties* – a statewide effort coordinated through the Dublin-based University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center – is structured to do just that. In addition to supporting the development of instructional leadership capacity in partnership with participating districts and principals, OLi<sup>4</sup> also serves as a testing ground for the principal development component of the OIP.

The project is directly aligned with and builds on the foundational beliefs underlying Ohio's use of OLAC-OIP. The focus of the PD being provided is on the principal's role in supporting teacher learning and the implementation of effective instructional and inclusive practices. Currently, more than 60 principals from 23 districts across Ohio are participating as members of the project's first cohort and will participate in project-related PD – including centralized PD, regional cadre discussion group meetings, and in-school coaching provided by an SST coach – through the 2015-16 project year. A second cohort of principals will begin their engagement with the project in summer of 2015 and participate for a two-year period.



## REFERENCES

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- McNulty, B.A., & Besser, L. (2011). *Leaders make it happen! An administrator's guide to data teams*. Englewood CO: Lead + Learn Press.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information about SST region 9-Stark County ESC **Principal Network** and **Aspiring Principal Network**, contact Peg Deibel, Peg Deibel, Consultant, Ohio Improvement Process and State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)/OIP Lead at [Peg.Deibel@email.sparcc.org](mailto:Peg.Deibel@email.sparcc.org), or via phone at 330-493-6082 Ext. 1411, or visit [http://www.sst9.org/SI\\_Principal\\_Network.html](http://www.sst9.org/SI_Principal_Network.html).
- For more information about the *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation, & Instructional Improvement (OLi<sup>4</sup>)* Project, contact Pamela VanHorn, Coordinator, at [pvanhorn1@udayton.edu](mailto:pvanhorn1@udayton.edu), or via phone at 614-785-1163 (ext. 116), or visit the OLi<sup>4</sup> website at <http://www.oli-4.org/>.
- For more information about distributive leadership, see the new on-line module on Leadership available through the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council website at: [www.OhioLeadership.org](http://www.OhioLeadership.org).

### SHARE YOUR STORIES

A unified system involves collaboration among all components so that as issues are identified, the system is able to respond in an effective, coherent, and timely manner. The strategies highlighted in this story are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they are intended to spark idea sharing across SSTs. All SSTs are encouraged to submit examples that can be highlighted in future articles. To submit ideas for future articles, contact Dr. Jim Gay, Director, OLAC, at [jimgay@basa-ohio.org](mailto:jimgay@basa-ohio.org).