CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS: *FOSTERING SST RENEWAL & COLLECTIVE LEARNING*

State Support Team (SST) personnel form the foundation of Ohio's statewide system of support. As the group charged with supporting continuous district-wide improvement using Ohio's improvement framework [i.e., Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)], SSTs must find ways to support the individual and collective renewal of regional staff, helping them to improve their own understanding of the increasing array of tools

and resources available to support higher levels of learning on the part of Ohio's district leadership teams (DLTs), building leadership teams (BLTs), teacher-based teams (TBTs), superintendents, central office personnel, principals, teachers, and related services personnel.

Like all other organizations, Ohio's SSTs experience staff turnover. As new SST personnel are employed and introduced to the OIP, and as "new" districts are identified as being in need of improvement for the first time (including districts that may have been designated *excellent* or *effective* in the past), it is incumbent upon SST Directors to orient new staff and regularly re-orient veteran staff so that high-quality support can be provided in a consistent, coherent way to all districts and their schools to close achievement gaps and improve results for all students.

This story – the first in the *OIP CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS[1]* series that features the work of Ohio SST personnel – offers suggestions for how SST Directors can support the development of shared learning on the part of SST personnel. Such shared learning and understanding of the intended outcomes of OIP use, and the relationship between OLAC essential practices (i.e., the *what*) and OIP structures and tools (i.e., the *how*), is essential for ensuring that early learning and school readiness, special education, and other key SST functions work together in a unified way to foster improved instructional practice and student performance.

> ## Did you know?
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> **The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to provide assistance to districts in improving the schools within their purview, and to provide such help under the statewide systems of support (SSOS) provision of the Act.**
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> Herbert J. Walbert, Co-editor, *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*, Center on Innovation & Improvement, 2007

Keeping SST staff fresh, current, & relevant.
Regularly and frequently scheduled SST staff meetings that use a common protocol for structuring dialogue and decision-making – not unlike protocols used by DLTs, BLTs, and TBTs – are essential for bringing all SST personnel together around common goals and shared work. Irrespective of any individual staff member's assigned priorities and/or areas of expertise (e.g., low incidence, administration), such meetings serve the vital purpose of focusing the collective work of the SST around district-wide improvement at the student, educator, and organizational level.

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[1] OLAC's *OIP Cornerstone Connections* is intended to provide a forum for SST sharing of strategies for improving the quality and consistency of the support provided by SSTs to improve district-wide continuous learning and improvement.

In SST region 5, for example, an annual meeting schedule is established with changes made as needs arise throughout the year. All SST personnel meet three to four times per month with meetings used to focus on (1) district team planning, (2) professional development (PD) team planning, and/or (3) internal SST personnel capacity building. One meeting per month is used for SST capacity building around areas of needed PD identified by staff for staff, such as standards aligned to the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers* assessment (see PARCC at http://parcconline.org/), formative instructional practice (FIP), and other areas often incorporated as part of district focused plans. At times, SST or ESC personnel provide the PD identified by staff during monthly meetings devoted to internal capacity building.

Regardless of the focus of the staff meeting, draft agendas are disseminated to all SST staff prior to each meeting, and each meeting concludes by asking, "*have we established next meeting's agenda items?*" and an evaluation of the meeting. Staff members are assigned various roles – such as facilitator(s) (F1, F2), developer of the meeting minutes (M), timekeeper (TK), process observer (PO), and norms enforcer (NE) – on a rotating basis. Meeting outcomes are clearly identified and kept to a minimum number so they are achievable, and meetings routinely engage SST personnel in small-group work and large-group updates, as well as general discussion, data review [(e.g., review of the *Performance Agreement Deliverables (PAD)* report], and action planning.

DISTRICT TEAM PLANNING: *MONTHLY LEA NOTES TEMPLATE*

Key Considerations	Superintendent Core Team	DLT	BLT	TBT
Focus Plan				
Adult Indicators				
Student Formative Data				
Students with Disabilities Outcome Supports				
Early Learning Supports				
Strengths				
Challenges				
Changes in SST Support/Next Steps				
Other Info ☐ Dashboard ☐ OIP-IR ☐ Improvement Schools ☐ Focus Schools				

District Name:_____ Date:_____

Source: State Support Team Region 5, Mahoning County ESC

SST region 5 personnel are assigned to district teams, meeting in-between scheduled staff meetings, and using the all-staff meeting time to formally report and update on district progress. Similarly, SST personnel also participate as members of one or more PD planning teams. For example, three staff members might form the secondary transition team, while four other staff members participate as part of the positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS) PD planning team. These and others might comprise the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) team.

Assigning staff to planning teams helps them develop expertise in particular areas and intentional overlap (i.e., having some staff members participate on more than one team) provides an opportunity to make connections between and among strategic areas of support. Regardless of team assignment, all SST personnel view their work with specific strategies (e.g., PBIS) in relation to helping districts close performance gaps and improve results by intentionally and strategically addressing their identified needs.

A second strategy for helping regional personnel stay current and build their capacity to support districts involves the collective review of relevant information. In SST region 5, staff have come together in reading and thinking about UDL, coaching models, and other resources, such as Elise Frattura and Colleen Capper's work on developing inclusive district and school cultures for meeting the instructional needs of every child.

A third strategy for supporting SST staff members in continuously improving their skills is related to

coaching and feedback. Each SST region 5 staff member has a personal goal related to providing coaching to districts and schools. Time is build into each staff meeting – regardless of the particular focus (e.g., district planning, PD team planning, internal PD capacity building) of the meeting – for staff to practice and receive feedback on particular aspects of coaching (e.g., "pause, paraphrase, and probe").

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- *For more context around results-driven accountability (RDA), readers are encouraged to go to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education's website at: http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html.*

- *For more information about the OIP and how it can be used to support RDA, go the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council website at: www.OhioLeadership.org and click on **OIP Modules and Resources**.*

- *For more information about the strategies highlighted in this article, contact Michele DiMuzio, Director, SST Region 5, at michele.dimuzio@sstr5.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.