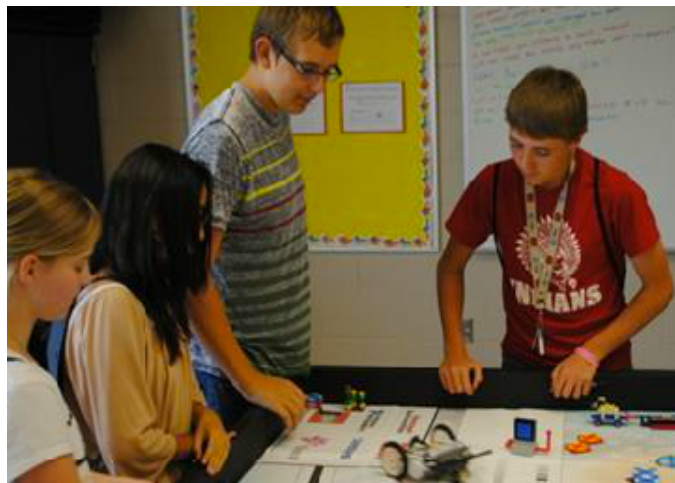


MAD RIVER LOCAL SCHOOLS: *Providing Diverse Learning Opportunities to Meet the Needs of All Students (Part II)*

Part I of this two-part feature on the Mad River Local Schools described the district's work to gain focus and put structures in place that facilitate meaningful implementation of strategies and actions to meet identified goals. The district's 4,000 PreK-12th-grade students are served in seven schools – all located in



economically and socially diverse Riverside, Ohio. The schools that comprise Mad River Local are described by the district as small learning communities with proximity to the resources of the city of Dayton and the Wright Patterson Air Force Base. The area's emphasis on high-level research in avionics, composite materials, and aircraft design supports a district-wide focus on STEM education and its problem-based integrated learning approach. Both Stebbins High School and Mad River Middle School are designated by the state as STEM (*Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*) schools.

In Part II, we'll explore how the district, led by Superintendent Chad Wyen, uses structures and tools to build the capacity of the faculty and staff to improve instruction and student learning.

Supporting Implementation, Inquiry, and Learning

The phrase 'go slow to go fast'¹ describes Mad River's approach over the past two years in re-examining its priorities and developing a unified focused plan for meeting its goals. Wyen believed that stepping back to reconsider what he described as "cookie cutter goals that just didn't work for us," was a necessary part of bringing the school and larger community together around what internal and external stakeholders believed mattered most: improving core instruction for every student and ensuring that each student graduates.

Using Structure to Facilitate Instructional Discourse. The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) – Ohio's framework for supporting districts and their schools in implementing focused strategies and actions to meet school system goals – calls for the use of aligned leadership team structures to foster collaborative conversation and discourse around strong core instruction for all learners.



Superintendent of Schools
Chad Wyen

¹ As an example, see <http://www.strategy-business.com/blog/Why-It-Makes-Sense-for-Managers-to-Go-Slow-to-Go-Fast?qko=4a225>

According to the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), there are four inter-related stages of implementation (i.e., exploration, installation, initial implementation, and full implementation), as well as three categories of drivers that affect teams' work to implement specific strategies with fidelity. These drivers, which are categorized as (1) competency (e.g., coaching, training, recruitment), (2) organization (e.g., facilitative administration, data systems), and (3) leadership (e.g., technical and adaptive), are described more fully in the foundational component accessible through the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) module titled, *The Collaborative Process* (see Support for the Work of Teams) at: http://www.ohioleadership.org/mod_view.php?nav_id=816&back=817.

Reframing 'achievement gaps' as 'implementation gaps,' Wyen and his team have used the OIP and the embedded *Ohio 5-Step Process* to support the district leadership team (DLT), each school's building leadership team (BLT), and teacher-based teams (TBTs) in operation across the district to work toward full implementation of agreed-on instructional strategies and actions.

IMPLEMENTATION WITH FIDELITY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

NIRN describes fidelity assessment as "measuring the degree to which teachers or staff are able to use the intervention or instructional practices as intended" (<http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/>).

"Until you have a good functional team, you can't even have the conversation about what strong core instruction should look like," said Wyen. "Everyone is part of a TBT but the teams are at various levels of learning and understanding; the conversations around instructional practice have been deeper than ever before in the sense that they're really looking at depth of knowledge and understanding, not just doing more of the same – such as more fractions – and hoping that doing more will lead to greater understanding," explained Wyen.

Rather than viewing less-than-adequate progress as deficits that reside within individual children, Mad River used the OIP and its associated tools (e.g., *Decision Framework*), coupled with training in the development of growth mindset (Dweck, 2012, 2006) to build the capacity of all personnel to teach all students. Building the collective instructional capacity of the district required teams to get better at implementing instructional strategies that responded more effectively to each student and increased opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of disability, race, economic circumstance, or other factors.

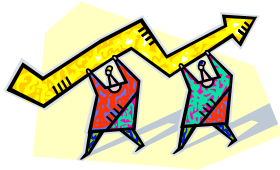
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OIP TEAM STRUCTURES

"Until you have a good functional team, you can't even have the conversation about what strong core instruction should look like."

Chad Wyen
Superintendent
Mad River Local Schools

Focusing on a limited number of goals was a prerequisite to supporting teams in moving toward authentic implementation. And, implementing a limited number of strategies and actions to reach those goals meant that the district had to jettison activities or initiatives that were no longer aligned with district priorities. At the same time, district leadership had to rethink the use of professional development (PD) and how to use it in more intentional ways to support all personnel in understanding and acting on core work. Mad River supported the then-teacher association president in using a National Education Association (NEA) grant to first learn about and then train school personnel in understanding the depth of the common core and its implications for instruction.

“We quit doing PD the old way because staff wasn’t growing,” recalled Wyen. “We deployed a very focused PD plan that involved more of a grass-roots effort of supporting staff in using data, reflecting on instructional practices, teaming, and using the Ohio 5-Step Process as a plan-do-study-act model,” he added. Mad River also employed two instructional coaches to support teams in implementing instructional strategies that were related to the district’s focused plan.



From Pockets of Change to District-wide Sustainable Improvement. “We’ve moved from just focusing on the skill to thinking as teams about why we need to focus on particular skill areas, where the gaps are, and what we need to do instructionally in the classroom to address them,” said Wyen. “Capacity building is more about learning how to be a team because our staff really didn’t know; in the past, we had more of a checklist mentality versus a focus on true instructional practices,” stated Wyen.

Moving from what Wyen describes as “pockets” of change to district-wide implementation of meaningful instructional strategies required the district to assume the role of lead learner in the process. The role of central office personnel has evolved to a more supportive role, working with principals and school personnel to support implementation efforts. “A lot of it is modeling, constant modeling from the district level and modeling at the DLT level, trickling to the BLTs, and from the BLTs to the TBTs and classroom level,” explained Wyen.



Wyen leads the attendance “goal team” – one of two teams established to work on reaching the district’s graduation goal – with membership that includes central office representatives, the high school and middle school principals, and four teachers. “I talk about data and how to facilitate the agenda for the day; then each principal reviews building progress using the plan-do-study-act model, followed by teachers talking about what progress looks like in the classroom and on the TBTs,” explained Wyen.

DLT 5 Step Process Meeting Minutes	
DLT/Subgroup Meeting	Attendees: Chad Wyen, Mike Combs, Brad Holt, Karen Huddle, Cindy Sommers, Christina Olson, Jessica Provost
9/10/2015 4-5 PM 12/3/2015 4-5 PM 12/15/2015 4-5 PM 2/8/2016 3:30-4 PM 4/28/2016 4-5 PM 9/19/2016 4-5 PM	Roles: - Chad – CO Facilitator and note taker - Mike and Brad – Building Level Facilitator and Data Collector - Cindy, Karen, Christina and Jessica – Classroom Level Facilitator and Data Collector
Study (Step 1 and 2) Collect, Chart, Analyze Adult Implementation and Student Performance Data	What needs to be improved and what specific outcome needs to occur? (SMART Goal) Attendance: To achieve a 93 percent annual attendance rate or better, all students, staff and building principals will track daily attendance as part of their data folders/binders/graphic displays quarterly.
ATTACH DATA COLLECTION SHEET	What is the current condition and data that support the need for improvement? Strengths/Areas of Concern for Adult Implementation Indicators and Student Performance 2010-2011 District Attendance data:94.5 2011-2012 District Attendance data:94.5 2012-2013 District Attendance data:93.2

“In the past, the DLT process involved a data walk; now we look at the application of the process from the district to schools to classrooms. Our goal is to share out and give authentic examples of how it looks at every level so no matter what level you’re at in the district, you have the opportunity to learn something about application,” he added.

Putting the Pieces Together

Mad River's work to get focused, implement the right strategies, and build the capacity of the district to support higher levels of learning for adults and students is a work in progress.

Wyen believes that to sustain focus on meeting district priorities, he, as the superintendent, must be actively involved in leading the work without micromanaging the process. Being actively involved in leading the work includes asking the right questions. "I spend a lot more time asking questions about 'why,'" said Wyen. "Getting away from giving the pat on the back and saying 'good job' to using true reflective questions that focus the conversation on what's happening in the classroom is critically important," Wyen explained.



Leading adult learning also means getting all adults across the district 'on the same page' with regard to the priorities for their collective work. "A lot of times you exist in your bubble and you try to break out through a book study or a PD session, for example, but then you go back and exist in your bubble," Wyen reflected. He credits the district's participation in the *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation, and Instructional Improvement* project – commonly referred to as OLi⁴ – as a tool that has helped reduce competition between schools, and increase collective ownership for the district's work.



"OLi⁴ has made a difference and has helped us build capacity. The regional meetings allow us time to talk with other schools and districts, and the monthly coaching that is provided by our SST coaches for each principal has been tremendous in building collective understanding of the big pieces of our work and how they fit together," explained Wyen.

"My only regret is that I didn't have all principals participate in OLi⁴ last year because it would have helped build a common vocabulary for change," he added. Several of Mad River's principals participated in the OLi⁴ project last year and the other principals are participating this year. The project, which includes centralized PD, regional cadre training closer to home, and monthly in-school coaching for each participating principal, focuses on supporting principals to lead teacher learning through a focus on strong core instructional practice and effective facilitation of high-functioning BLTs and TBTs.

One extension of the project training that was offered to principals in the OLi⁴ project was the opportunity to attend a one-day training with up to five teachers serving on the school's BLT. Eight sessions were offered during the 2015-16 school year and another eight will be offered during the 2016-17 school year. "We will have all of our principals and their BLT members attending the sessions this year to help shift team perspective from a compliance-oriented focus to a focus on being a reflective school," said Wyen.

"Our biggest challenge is still the mindset that because a student has a disability or is economically disadvantaged, that the standards are too hard for them and that they can't do it," said Wyen. What are the

next steps for Mad River Local? According to Wyen, the next step is “having fully functioning BLTs in every single school and fully functioning TBTs in every building with members that are truly engaged in making informed instructional decisions to meet the needs of all students.” “We must continue to support a whole shift in mindset so all personnel understand that every child can learn and that all learners have the ability to grow,” said Wyen.

References

Dweck, C. S. (2012). *Mindset: How you can fulfill your potential*. Constable & Robinson Limited.

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

For More Information

For more information about resources to support implementation, visit the NIRN Active Implementation Hub at <http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/>.

For more information about the Mad River School District and its work to improve learning for all children, contact Chad Wyen, Superintendent, at 937.478.3349 or 937.259.6606, or via email at chad.wyen@madriverschools.org.

For more information about the **OLAC and OIP** resources, contact Dr. Jim Gay, OLAC Co-director at jimgay@basa-ohio.org.