

REAL-TIME FEEDBACK ON WORK THAT MATTERS: SST 13 SUPPORTS PRINCIPALS AND TEAMS TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL CAPACITY AND LEARNING

Winton Woods City Schools principals Danielle Wallace and Kevin Jones – both participating in the *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation, & Instructional Improvement (OLi⁴)* project – credit State Support Team (SST) region 13 coach Karen Lehmkuhl with helping them reflect on their own practice and learn how to more effectively support teacher learning. “We have the opportunity to be challenged to think outside the

box and are supported in always asking the right questions and being reflective,” said Wallace. Jones added, “We get real-time feedback on work that matters.”




OLi⁴ is a grant-funded project developed and implemented by the Dublin-based University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center. OLi⁴ was conceptualized as an effort to build principal and regional provider

coaching capacity¹ in using the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) and the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) resources to support district-wide continuous improvement in learning and results for all groups of children.

In nearby Clermont Northeastern Local Schools – known as CNE – principals and assistant principals of each of the district’s four schools (i.e., preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school), along with central office representatives, are also participating in OLi⁴ and receiving coaching support from Lehmkuhl. CNE Superintendent Mike Brandt views participation in OLi⁴ as one part of the district’s strategic effort to improve instructional capacity and continuous learning on the part of students and staff by using the OIP.

“The conversation is shifting to a focus on instruction,” observed Brandt who joined the district last year after having served as superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools and other districts in Ohio and Kentucky.



The *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation, & Instructional Improvement (OLi⁴)* project – now in its fourth year of operation – supports the development of principal capacity to lead teacher learning and improve the quality of instruction provided on a school- and district-wide basis.

OLi⁴ is aligned with the context state’s improvement framework (i.e., the Ohio Improvement Process) and the essential leadership practices delineated in *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework* (BASA, 2013) to support sustainability and scalability of targeted areas of practice, which include visioning, using data well, using research and evidence to guide instruction, sharing leadership, coaching teaching, and reflecting on practice.

Professional development (PD), which is informed by partner district feedback, includes centralized PD, regional cadre discussion group training, and in-school monthly coaching for principal participants; as well as regular PD for SST consultants who are serving as coaches for participating principals and their districts.

“As a new superintendent to the district a year ago, I received greetings from the state in the form of a letter telling me the district was ‘going into OIP’ as a result of low scores on the state report card. SST 13 walked

¹ OLi⁴ uses Leadership Performance Coaching, a model developed by Elle Allison.

us through the process and provided an orientation to OIP, which was very helpful. Rather than seeing OIP as a penalty, we embraced it,” added Brandt.

Compliance or Instructional and Professional Capacity Building?

The OIP is Ohio’s framework for supporting districts and their schools in implementing focused strategies and actions to meet school system goals. Unlike other continuous improvement (CI) models, it couples the use of a structured four-stage process (e.g., identify essential needs, develop focused goals, etc.) with the use of collaborative learning teams at the district, school, and classroom level. These teams [i.e., the district leadership team (DLT), building leadership teams (BLTs), and teacher-based teams (TBTs)] provide the forum for shared and collective learning among central office personnel, teachers, principals, and others across the district.



Tracy Atchison, Director of SST region 13, serves as what Brandt calls a moderator for CNE’s DLT. In this role, she co-develops the agenda for DLT meetings, helps to structure the meetings, and ensures that the team stays on track and that OIP tenets are acted on with fidelity. “Tracy’s facilitation has been terribly helpful given that no one else in the district had any experience is using the OIP,” explained Brandt.

“We use OIP as a framework; systems change to us is built around the idea of true collaboration at all levels and helping districts and buildings have a focus for what they’re going to do, and stay focused on implementing their improvement plan so when we move out of a district, that system stays in place,” said Atchison. “We help them focus on achievement, climate-culture, and student and adult behaviors; and make sure they collect data and information that help them stay focused, rather than collect data just to collect them. OLi⁴ has been a huge help; we see it as the perfect alignment with what we’re doing in districts like Winton Woods and CNE,” she added.

Lehmkuhl, pictured above, participates in OLi⁴ coaches training conducted periodically throughout each project year by the OLi⁴ project team and lead trainer Dr. Brian McNulty. She attends CNE’s DLT, BLT, and many TBT meetings, reinforcing what Brandt believes is the key

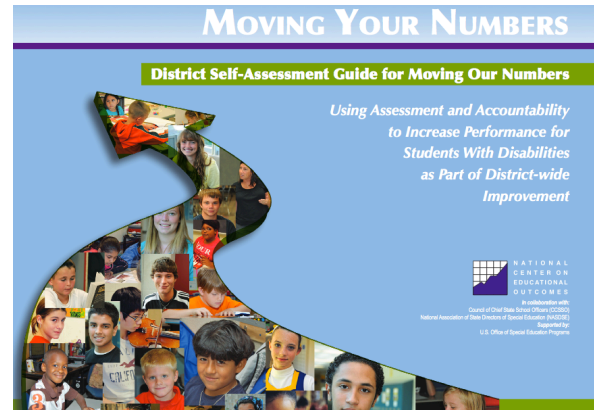
message for teachers and principals across the district: “This work is not a requirement; it’s an empowerment for you. OIP is the perfect distributed leadership model and we need to make sure it stays in use as our primary improvement framework even if the district is no longer in improvement status. You (teachers) are relevant recommenders and therefore don’t have things done to you; instead, you take control of structures, policies, procedures.”

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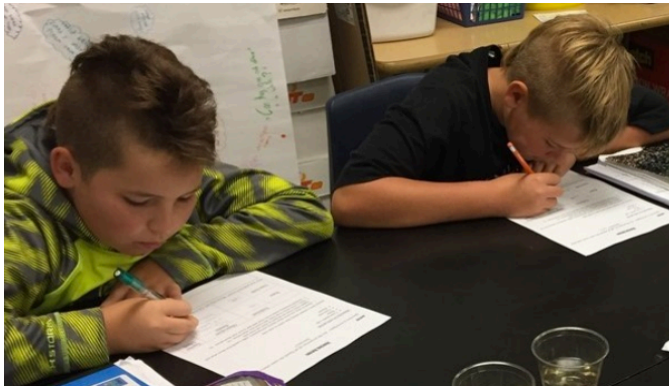
“We encourage distributed or shared leadership and actively work to build the capacity of BLT and TBT members so if the principal is out, the process still stays in place,” explained Lehmkuhl.

And SST 13’s support is making a difference in CNE. A year and a half after Brandt’s moving to CNE, the district has a focused improvement plan; building plans are aligned with district priorities; leadership team structures at the district, building, and classroom level are in place; and teams meet regularly. “We meet monthly as a DLT after deciding that quarterly meetings were not sufficient given the work we knew we needed to do,” explained Brandt. CNE’s DLT includes 27 members and represents multiple perspectives (e.g., principal, teacher, school nurse, teacher union, central office, and parent representation).



Brandt uses services provided by *Curriculum Engineers* in concert with OLAC and other resources to support a unified focus on improving adult and student learning. He has also relied on various levels of assessment data to inform decision-making. In addition to using the *Measures of Academic Progress* to provide teachers with important information on individual student progress, Brandt used the *Moving Your Numbers District Self-assessment Guide* to identify the district’s level of implementation of essential practices needed for improvement in terms of their degree of use (how deeply practices were used) and scale (how broadly practices were used) across the district.

“Across the board, we were at the second lowest category, which was emerging, on all practices. Using the MYN assessment helped us make decisions about team structures and composition and how to move forward in gaining the kind of focus we needed to make real improvement, and in using OLi⁴ and the OLAC resources as a foundation for ongoing PD,” explained Brandt.



Organizing to Support Effective Implementation

In addition to supporting CNE, Lehmkuhl is also part of an SST team that supports Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). “We determined that we needed to have SST consultants embedded in intensive districts so in addition to Karen and Paul (Smith) working at the district level in CPS, we also have consultants that serve focus schools within the district,” explained Atchison. “Our most intense districts get the most support; even though districts have to attend to compliance requirements, a good number have stopped viewing the OIP as something they’re being told to do, to viewing it as something that helps them get focused, rather than scattered,” said Atchison.

SST 13 consultants meet monthly for a full day as a team to build shared understanding of all components of the work and provide ongoing opportunities for staff to learn from each other about how various aspects

of their work [e.g., positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS), universal design for learning (UDL), implementation science] can be used in concert with the OIP as the overarching improvement framework.

“Meeting monthly is too far apart, but we try to balance the need to support our own learning with the need to be in districts and schools. We would love to offer a team wrap-around approach for some districts, but we simply don’t have the capacity,” Atchison added.

Advice from a veteran superintendent. Brandt believes that SSTs play a critical role in helping districts make and sustain needed improvements and he sees their work as falling into four stages: “Initially the SST has to direct districts in this work. As the district capacity evolves, SSTs should assume more of a teaching role. For example, they should help TBTs understand their role, their value, and the power they have through a distributed leadership model. The third mode of SST involvement is coaching – rotating meeting moderators, helping teams develop agendas, and helping them run a meeting. Finally, SSTs can move into a consultant role, periodically monitoring, checking in, helping during key meetings, etc., while we build the capacity to implement the model on our own.”



“We also need people like Brian McNulty² who have the national reputation to talk with principals and the acknowledgment from people like Brian to validate the importance of a distributed leadership model,” offered Brandt.

Brandt’s advice to state education agency leaders: “meet with SST leaders to redefine their roles so this work becomes the priority. SSTs need training, professional development, and access to tools and materials to get them ready for the kinds of roles they need to play to effectively support all districts. Put resources toward getting the right people trained to do this work.”

“My people love the coaching they receive from the SST. The last thing you’d want to do is put a novice rookie in an SST role; when that happens, we’ll be back to a focus on compliance only,” said Brandt.

References

Allison, E. (2013). *Leadership performance coaching*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Telfer, D. M., & Glasgow, A. (2013). *District self-assessment guide for moving our numbers: Using assessment and accountability to increase performance for students with disabilities as part of district-wide improvement*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

² Brian A. McNulty, Ph.D., serves as lead trainer/facilitator for the OLi⁴ project and has worked with Ohio state, district leaders, and professional association leaders since the inception of OIP and OLAC in 2007.

For More Information

For more information about how State Support Team (SST) Region 13 is using initiatives such as OLi⁴ to support district implementation of effective instructional strategies, contact Tracy Atchison, Director, SST Region 13, 2275 Collingwood Blvd., Toledo, OH 43620; 513.674.4227; or via email at tracy.atchison@hcesc.org.

For more information about Clermont Northeastern Local Schools and its efforts to focus and prioritize core work to improve results for all children, contact Mike Brandt, Superintendent, Clermont Northeastern Local Schools, 2792 U.S. 50, Batavia, OH 45103; 513.625.1211; or via email at brandt_m@cneschools.org.

For more information about **OLi⁴**, contact Pam VanHorn, Coordinator, University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center, at 614.785.1163, or via email at pvanhorn1@udayton.edu; or visit the OLi⁴ website at <https://www.oli-4.org/>.

For more information about **Moving Your Numbers (MYN)**, contact Deborah Telfer, Ph.D., Director, University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center, at 614.785.1163 x112, or via email at dtelfer1@udayton.edu, or visit the **MYN** website at <http://www.movingyournumbers.org/>.

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