USING OIP-OLAC AS THE BEDROCK FOR IMPROVEMENT: SST 2 AND ELYRIA CITY SCHOOLS WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE RESULTS FOR ALL LEARNERS

SST Region 2 serves districts, agencies, and families in Erie, Huron, and Lorain counties. One of Ohio's smaller SSTs in terms of geographical area and population, the SST's nine full-time staff members make up in "heart" what they might lack in resources. "Sure, we wish we had more staff and more money, but we're very
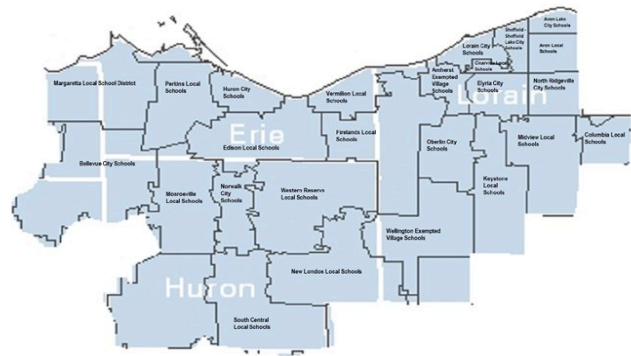

lucky to have the districts we have to work with – they're so supportive and welcoming," said SST 2 director Tracy Lichtenfels. "It's all about relationships; it sounds cliché, but the relationship that one SST consultant builds with a district makes it easier for other SST consultants to build a relationship with that district and other districts," she added.

SST 2 serves eight public school districts in Erie County, seven public school districts in Huron County, 17 public school districts in Lorain County, two educational service centers, two joint vocational schools/career centers, three boards of developmental disabilities, and numerous community schools, and public and private preschool and child care agencies.

SST 2 uses a tiered delivery model in working with districts and agencies across the region, providing Tier 1 (universal) services to all entities, Tier II (targeted) supports to those who need additional support, and Tier III (intensive) supports to those who need the greatest level of assistance. However, districts served by SST 2 might be at different tiers for different categories of support. For example, based on state performance plan (SPP) data, a district might be categorized as Tier III for preschool support, but at Tier II for compliance monitoring issues.

School Districts In State Support Team Region 2

"We use a variety of information and data sources to gauge district level of need, including, of course, the differentiated accountability list provided by the state, compliance monitoring designations, OIPIR designations[1], SPP indicator data, the number of schools within the district that are in various improvement designations, and literacy and preschool data," explained Lichtenfels. "We also use another non-scientific data point, which we call our 'gut check,' in assigning tier designations to districts. For example, a district may not be identified within our data sources but may be at risk for loosing ground due to various changes, such as changing administration," she explained.

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[1] OIPIR is the *Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) Implementation Criteria & Rubric* used by the Ohio Department of Education to assess level of use of the OIP by district leadership teams, building leadership teams, and teacher-based teams to support district-wide improvement.

Building on a Strong Foundation

SST 2 personnel arrive at tier designations as a team, working across multiple days to assess district level of need and match staff resources to best address those needs. "We constantly go back to re-assess as we work with districts and based on what we know about how they're progressing," said Lichtenfels. SST 2 consultants meet together twice per month to review district progress, update and inform each other's work, and problem-solve together to identify the most effective way of working with particular districts and schools.

In addition to drawing upon each other's areas of expertise, SST 2 personnel are working with Dr. David Silverberg, Director of the Ashland University-based Telego Center for Educational Improvement to facilitate team building and extend collective learning. Having developed a vision and mission statement that serves to build shared understanding of their work, consultants are working to finalize non-negotiables that will be used to guide the ways in which they do their work as an SST.

Consultants are assigned to work with districts based on their expertise (e.g., positive behavioral interventions and supports, preschool, literacy,

> **SST REGION 2 VISION STATEMENT**
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> By continuously building the capacity of educators and families within our region, all students will be taught in an equitable environment, which fosters learning at high levels, innovative thinking, and problem-solving skills. Therefore, students will graduate college and career ready, will be competitively employed, and become positively engaged in their community.

transition, etc.). Three consultants have as their primary role assisting districts in using the OIP framework to implement school improvement work.

Lichtenfels notes, "all SST consultants are knowledgeable in the use of OIP, regardless of their specific assignment, and all use the Ohio 5-step process in supporting districts through their particular area of service." "In keeping with our vision statement, this work is intended to foster the highest level of learning for all students," she said.

"We collaborate with each other and hold sacred our staff meetings because of the nature of our work and because so many of us might touch the district," said SST consultant Jennifer Jackson-Ausperk. Consultants use a shared database to communicate with each other about their individual interactions with districts.

Jackson-Ausperk explains: "Any time one of us is in a district, we update the team spreadsheet. I can click on a tab and see what my colleagues have done in the district. That helps paint a picture so I don't have to walk in cold. It's a very supportive atmosphere here, which is key to the work we do."

SST consultants and Lichtenfels spend the majority of their time in districts and in building communities of practice around the shared work of improving student learning. "We're focusing a lot on the concept of teaching 'tip to tip' as compared to teaching to the middle in order to encourage all districts to more effectively reach every child," explained Lichtenfels.

Lichtenfels attends all ESC-hosted superintendent meetings and holds two-hour monthly "breakfast with directors" meetings for area directors of special education to ensure that district personnel have repeated exposure to the same messages about improving student learning.

She explains: "We rely on OIP and are constantly referring districts to OLAC resources. "OIP is the bedrock, the lens through which we look at everything. We work with districts to help them understand

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Cultivating Trust through Constancy

Another core value that SST 2 consultants hold sacred is the commitment to building strong working relationships with district personnel. Jackson-Ausperk serves as lead consultant in supporting five districts in the region, including Elyria City Schools. "Being steadfast and stable is really important," reflected Jackson-Ausperk. "Districts like stability and were frustrated in the past when things constantly changed. I jokingly tell

districts that they're stuck with me. That reputation for being stable and consistent spreads and now we're getting calls from independent districts that want us to work with them," she said.

Elyria, one of the largest districts in the region, is participating in the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) as well as the *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion, Implementation, & Instructional Improvement* (OLi[4]) project coordinated through the University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center.

Ann Schloss, Director of Academic Services for Elyria, credits having stable and continuous support from the SST with helping Elyria make the shift from a focus on compliance to a focus on instructional improvement. "Even though we do a lot internally to support improvement, it's helpful to have someone like Jenn who can

look at what we do from different eyes. The feedback she provides is critical and she's seen as part of the district, a true Pioneer!" said Schloss. Schloss has been with Elyria City Schools for 25 years and attended the district as a child.

Elyria, home of the Pioneers, participated as one of the initial test districts during the development of the OIP. Schloss relayed that in the early years many Elyria teachers and administrators viewed using the OIP as a compliance mandate from the state. Now, with Jenn's support, "they don't look at it as compliance or as the 'get-er-done' forms anymore, but rather as support that meets our needs. The SST works with us to customize the process and that's resulted in greater trust. Teachers now look at the SST as a support," explained Schloss.

Jackson-Ausperk's work in Elyria includes working with the District Leadership Team (DLT), working with and participating in building leadership team (BLT) meetings, and helping to support teacher-based team (TBT) development. "When I walk in they're excited to see me, I'm one of them. When they see you're invested in partnership, you can begin to move mountains," remarked Jackson-Ausperk.

Under Schloss' leadership, Elyria is working to ensure both a bottom-up and a top-down approach to supporting continuous district-wide improvement. "It's about 50-50; the DLT has ideas and priorities, but the BLTs and TBTs have an equal part in deciding how those priorities are acted on," she said.

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> **Consultant, SST Region 2**

Elyria's 35-member DLT includes multiple perspectives. Along with BLTs and TBTs in place across the district's 12 schools, Elyria has three internal facilitators who plan team meetings and support communication across the district. Two schools participate as SPDG buildings, and the principals from two

different schools, along with Schloss, participate in OLi⁴. "OLi⁴ has been an added support and the participating principals were chosen because they're able to come back and share what they're learning with others in the district. It definitely has helped principals gain focus," shared Schloss.

So, what's next for SST 2? "We're looking to refine our processes and gearing up for planning for next year. We continue to identify ways to use our time and resources smarter so we can reach a wider audience. Instead of replicating trainings, for example, how might we use technology to reach more people and make the information more readily available when districts need it," explained Lichtenfels.

"We believe in this work!" she added.

For More Information

For more information about how State Support Team (SST) Region 2 is working with districts to improve opportunities to learn for all students, contact Tracy Lichtenfels, Director, SST Region 2, 1885 Lake Ave., Elyria, OH 44035; 440.324.5777 (x 1136); or via email at lichtenfels@sstr2.org

For more information about improvement efforts under way in the Elyria City Schools, contact Ann Schloss, Director of Academic Services, Elyria City Schools, 42101 Griswold Rd., Elyria, OH 44035; 440.284.8280; or via email at schlossann@elyriaschools.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 the **OLAC and OIP** resources, contact Dr. Jim Gay, OLAC Co-director, at jimgay@basa-ohio.org.