

# Foundation Setting through OLAC-OIP:

## *Building the Framework for Transformation in District-wide Practice and Culture*

**C**lose to 300 districts in various stages of improvement are currently using the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) to establish the building blocks for sustainable change and improvement in instructional practice and student achievement. In addition to these districts – which represent rural, suburban, and urban districts, high- and low-wealth districts, and large, small, and everything in-between districts, as well as community schools – approximately 65 high-performing districts have chosen to use some or part of Ohio’s improvement process to gain greater focus and clarity around their core work related to instruction and achievement.

The OIP is a structured process that can be used and adapted by districts to enact research-based essential leadership practices as outlined by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) in *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework*. The OIP is also Ohio’s strategy for establishing a common and consistent vocabulary and set of protocols for use by Ohio’s 450+ regional providers from educational service centers (ESCs) and state support teams (SSTs) in facilitating and supporting the improvement efforts of districts, schools, and community schools around the state.

The combination of OLAC’s work in delineating essential practices (“*the what*”) and the use of the OIP (“*the how*”) to support implementation of such practices has given many districts across Ohio increased capacity to lay a strong foundation for continued and sustainable improvement by (1) engaging teachers, administrators, board members, parents, and others in a much more collective and strategic examination and use of relevant data to make better informed decisions about instructional practice; (2) identifying a limited and focused set of goals and strategies to improve instructional practice across the district; (3) developing shared instructional practice among adults in the system; (4) fully implementing those shared instructional practices across the district; and (5) monitoring – on an ongoing basis - the degree of implementation of those practices, and providing feedback and support in relation to what is/is not working well, and what is likely to work better.

### **How Smart Do You Think You Are?**

In rural Georgetown Exempted Village School District, one of the 65 or so districts voluntarily engaged in the OIP, superintendent Tony Dunn believes that the use of the OIP has been instrumental in helping staff from the elementary school and the junior/senior high school come together as a district-level team in identifying a limited number of focused goals that all levels of the school system “own.” Gaining a more collective view based on a comprehensive review of student performance data allowed the district team to engage in more strategic and focused dialogue about how each part of the district could and should contribute to ensuring that all students



graduate. At the entrance to each wing of the elementary school, staff, students, and visitors are greeted with the reminder of the district’s goal of 100% graduation and that graduation is not only a high school issue. Rather, the quality of instruction provided to children at the preschool, elementary, middle/junior, and high school level *ALL* contribute to preparing each student for graduation and success in meaningful post-secondary experiences.

The use of collaborative leadership structures, such as district, building, and teacher-based teams, promote internal accountability and provide a vehicle for adults in the system to learn from each other and hold each other accountable for shared work. Structures like this are especially important where significant change in culture and practice are needed to

support and sustain improvements in instructional practice and student achievement.

In a May 2010 presentation to 48 districts participating as OIP “test” districts, Dunn challenged his fellow superintendents who may be reluctant to engage in a shared or distributed leadership model like the one supported through OLAC-OIP by asking “how smart do you think you are?” He asked them to rethink their definition of leadership away from a focus on “the leader” to a focus on *leadership practices* that allow for the kind of shared responsibility needed to sustain improvements when a key staff member leaves the district.

In Ashland City Schools, a mid-size district in north central Ohio, director of secondary curriculum Dr. Neil Gupta worked with external facilitators from State Support Team (SST) 7 to lead the development of collaborative teams using the OIP. Among the district’s lessons learned, Gupta reported that using the state’s improvement process and tools allowed the district leadership team (DLT) to “uncover disconnects in communication and priorities. We operated more as a district of separate schools, rather than a school system,” Gupta said.

After two years of involvement as one of the test district working with and giving feedback to SST 7 and the Ohio Department of Education, Ashland has established a strong DLT and building leadership teams in each school, identified critical work based on a comprehensive needs analysis, and is now developing a more systemic and systematic approach to implementing and monitoring improvement efforts and whether they’re having the desired effect on changing adult practice and raising student performance.

“We’re changing the culture of the district by changing practice so that we can not only make needed improvements, but also be able to sustain them over time,” Gupta explained.

Adults are coming together around shared instructional practice in Ashland’s schools due to the increased coherence and focus resulting from the work of the DLT. In Montgomery Elementary School, for example, the building leadership team (BLT) analyzes student assessment results, and created a flexible schedule that allowed for more instructional remediation, intervention, and extension for students based on their needs. Principal Patricia Dawson, teacher and building leadership team (BLT) facilitator Diana McMillen, and teacher Doug Hess are among the staff leading the development of teacher-based teams to provide opportunities for teachers to share instructional strategies and learn from each other. Data reviewed by teacher-

## Tenets of OLAC and OIP

*Based on research about the effective practices that must be in place for districts to make and sustain improvement in instructional practice and student performance, these tenets are reflected in the work of OLAC and are used to guide continuing development of products and services associated with OLAC and OIP.*

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.
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.
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.
4. **A collective focus on full and sustained implementation**—and monitoring of the degree of implementation—of a few potent yet flexible strategies provides the conditions necessary for school improvement.
5. **The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)**—a structured process based on the use of a connected set of tools for reviewing, analyzing, and basing decisions on relevant data—provides a vehicle for initiating *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework* in ways that are responsive to stakeholders’ insights about local commitments, needs, and assets.
6. **All learning, including teachers’ learning of instructional practices, depends on changes in behavior** that respond to precise and relevant feedback. Procedures (e.g., routine classroom monitoring) that provide teachers with feedback and support constitute the most powerful way to enable teachers to improve their instructional performance. For professional learning to occur teachers must be deeply engaged in understanding and responding to such feedback and support—not simply trying to comply with external requirements.

based teams will be reported to the BLT for further examination of what strategies are working well and what additional changes might be needed to improve the achievement of every child.

Teacher-based teams (TBTs) are teams comprised of teachers working together to improve instructional practice and student learning through shared work. Often referred to as data teams, inquiry teams, or professional learning communities, TBTs break the traditional cycle of isolation by involving educators within schools in critical conversations focused on student learning results and effective instructional practices.



One of the major benefits of teacher-based teams is in the rich collaboration that occurs. Through this collaborative process, teachers build strong professional communities in schools. TBTs typically use common classroom formative assessment to collaboratively plan and score student work, track student progress toward reaching learning goals, and provide feedback to students and teachers on what's working and what needs to change. As part of the OIP, TBTs follow a common set of data team guidelines, but extend beyond these guidelines to focus on the goals, strategies and actions described in the district and school improvement plans.

Data team guidelines include generating standards-based common formative assessments; creating a pre-assessment to be administered prior to the unit of study and again as a post-assessment following instruction; analyzing student results concentrating on specific students who are proficient, approaching proficiency, and falling far below proficiency on the identified standards-based concepts and skills; determining, implementing, and monitoring the use of effective differentiated and engaging research-based instructional strategies; and post-assessing student learning to determine mastery of identified skills and concepts and identify any needed interventions for ensuring student success.

### ***Support for Collaborative Team Structures***

- In schools where teachers examined the evidence of the impact of teaching effectiveness on student achievement and regarded their professional practices as the primary cause of achievement, the gains in student achievement were three times higher than in schools where the faculty and leaders attributed the causes to factors beyond their control. (Reeves, 2007)
- Students make larger academic gains in math, science, history and reading than their peers in traditional schools without collaboration. Students in schools with collaborative teams have lower dropout, truancy and absence rates. (Hord, 1997)
- Studies conducted by Bolam, et. al. (2005) and Louis and Marks (1998) found that student achievement was significantly higher in schools with the strongest professional learning communities at both the elementary and secondary levels. In the Louis and Marks study, the strength of the professional learning community accounted for 85% of the variance in achievement.
- Vescio, et. al. (2006) examined 11 studies that reported empirical data that shows that establishing professional learning communities contributed to change in the professional culture of a school and in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their classroom work. A characteristic of the 11 studies was that collaboration encourages risk-taking, reflecting, and sharing.

## ***Aligning and Focusing the Work***

Breaking down silos is difficult but necessary work -- work that can't happen without districts providing the structure and support needed to allow adults to challenge each other's thinking about effective teaching practices, and/or learn new approaches to teaching and learning from one another.

In Dayton Public Schools (DPS), one of Ohio's major urban districts, Chief Academic Officer Jane McGee-Rafal attributed the district's progress in aligning work to the District Design Team's use of the OIP. "It was the first time that every building in the district had focused plans aligned to the district's goals and strategies," Rafal reported to at an April 2010 Board of Education meeting. This kind of alignment will be even more critical as DPS gears up to

implement the federally defined *transformation model* to significantly change teaching and learning in three of its lowest performing high schools using competitive school improvement grant (SIG) funds received for 2010-2011. Dayton Superintendent Kurt T. Stanic and DPS Board of Education President Jeffrey Mims, Jr., both stress the importance of staying focused to sustain the reforms DPS has begun to put in place. “This process has helped people understand that success in one building is still your success even if you’re not in that building,” said Mims.



DPS Board of Education President Jeffrey Mims, Jr.

A greater collective sense of shared responsibility for district success has resulted from the intentional work of the District Design Team (Dayton’s term for a district leadership team) to build the trust of all constituents and to foster open and honest communication. “It’s about helping all adults understand how they contribute to the success of our kids, and that includes understanding our primary responsibility as a Board in aligning the work at all levels of the district,” explained Mims.

Dayton’s use of the OIP and, in particular, the use of Ohio’s *Decision Framework* tool to support deeper examination of relevant data and conduct root

cause analysis of the factors contributing to the district’s greatest needs helped the district get focused on the right work. The District Design Team (DDT) -- which includes central office personnel, board and community members, teachers, related services personnel, and others -- identified a few specific needs, including the need to (1) realign pacing guides to and ensure full implementation of the district’s curriculum, (2) review the effectiveness of instructional practices and provide targeted professional development (PD) and support to teachers in content and pedagogy based on the district-identified needs, and (3) create district-designed assessments aligned to the pacing guides to monitor change in student performance on a regular basis.



State Support Team 10 Single Point of Contact Betsy Apolito and DPS Chief Academic Officer Jane McGee-Rafal chat while DDT members review district data using the OIP Decision Framework tool.

“In the past, we allowed ourselves to become fragmented. The structure and focus on use of relevant data through the OIP has helped us become much more purposeful and intentional in our actions. That, combined with shared responsibility for providing a high quality education to each child in the district is making the difference,” said McGee-Rafal.

As DPS transitions to new leadership under incoming superintendent Lori Ward, the district’s commitment to continue aligning, focusing, and monitoring the degree of implementation of core work remains strong. “The new DPS is an innovative district of champions where all students are academically and culturally prepared by a team committed to developing productive citizens ready to serve the world community,” said Ward. “And we’ve created the foundation for continued improvement and progress through the building blocks put in place over the last two years using the Ohio Improvement Process.”

Additional information about OIP or OLAC can be accessed from the “Improvement” section of the Ohio Department of Education website at [www.ode.state.oh.us](http://www.ode.state.oh.us), and from the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council site at [www.ohioLeadership.org](http://www.ohioLeadership.org). For additional information about SIG intervention models and funding, contact ODE’s Office of Federal Programs at 614.752.1473.