



## OLAC and the Ohio Improvement Process: *Two Sides of a “Gold Coin”*

In 2007, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) joined forces to redefine leadership for Ohio districts and schools. In partnership with all major professional associations in the state, including OESCA, as well as practitioners, higher education representatives, and others, the 50+ member Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) was formed. OLAC’s foundational principle – that the purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role<sup>i</sup> – led to the development of *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework*, a delineation of essential leadership practices for superintendents, district leadership teams (DLTs), and building leadership teams (BLTs).

Redefining leadership as a set of shared practices that can be learned allowed Ohio to move from a conversation about *leadership* as the personal attributes or character traits of the individual “leader,” to a different conversation about what adults at every level of the system (e.g., board, central office, school, classroom) can do together to continually improve instructional practice and hold each other accountable for improved student learning on a district-wide basis (i.e., in every classroom in every building across the district). It also led to the development of a structured process that uses a connected set of tools to assist districts in enacting *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework*.

*“OLAC’s work, particularly the online modules, should be part of the coursework for all those interested in upper level leadership or administrative positions. ESC superintendents should be working together to identify ways to incentivize the use of OLAC’s work and how it can be implemented through the Ohio Improvement Process.”*

Dave Distel, Superintendent,  
Hamilton County ESC and  
OLAC Member

This process – called the *Ohio Improvement Process* – is also Ohio’s strategy for establishing a statewide system of support that can provide high quality services to all districts – not only those in improvement status – based on a commonly understood and implemented approach that uses a consistent set of protocols and tools directly aligned with the tenets of OLAC.

The essential practices outlined in *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework*, and their enactment through OIP, are supported by recent research<sup>ii</sup> on the effects of leadership on student learning that point to five key practices that must be consistently used across the system for improvement to be made and sustained.

These key practices include the (1) collective use of relevant data to make better informed decisions about instructional practice; (2) use of a limited and focused set of goals and strategies to improve instructional practice; (3) development of shared instructional practices; (4) full implementation of shared instructional practices across the district; and the (5) ongoing monitoring of the degree of implementation of these practices, as well as the provision of feedback and support in relation to what is and is not working well.

<sup>i</sup> Elmore, R. (2004). *School Reform from the Inside Out: Policy, Practice, and Performance*.

<sup>ii</sup> Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). *Linking Leadership to Student Learning: The Contributions of Leader Efficacy*.

## ***The Evolution of Ohio's Statewide System of Support***

In summer 2008, the Ohio Department of Education, Center for School Improvement, partnered with OESCA leadership to engage ESC superintendents in thinking about the role ESCs could and should play in the development of a viable and healthy statewide system of support (SSOS) for Ohio – a system that could assure the provision of high quality, consistent assistance and facilitation to all districts and schools. The active involvement of educational service center (ESC) personnel, including ESC personnel working as part of the 16 state support teams, has been instrumental to Ohio's progress in establishing an SSOS that was both statewide in nature, as well as focused on improving instructional practice and student achievement at all levels of the system.

From September 2008 through August 2009, over 300 ESC staff members from 55 ESCs completed three rounds of training in the use of the OIP to support district-wide implementation of the essential practices outlined in *Ohio's Leadership Development Framework*. Supported by OESCA, the training focused on the role of the facilitator as a *critical friend* in supporting and coaching district leadership team (DLT) members through the initial stages of the process, which included establishing/re-establishing a district leadership team (stage 0), conducting a comprehensive needs analysis using the *Ohio Decision Framework* tool (stage 1), and developing a focused plan to address a limited number of critical needs identified by the DLT (stage 2). **Figure 1** delineates the kinds of activities facilitators engage in when supporting districts at each stage of the OIP.

On September 1-3, 2009, all facilitators participated in annual training on stage 3 of the OIP, which focuses on assisting districts to fully implement their focused strategies and actions, and monitoring the degree of implementation to identify what is/is not working. Over the course of the 2008-09 school year, facilitators from SSTs and ESCs worked directly with 283 districts and 14 community school sponsors – encompassing over 1,000 buildings in school improvement – during the 2008-09 school year.

## ***Going Forward***

Paul Reville, director of the Education Policy and Management Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, describes the challenges encountered by state education agencies (SEAs) as they build their own capacity to more meaningfully provide support and assistance to districts and schools. In the *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (2007), Reville asserts that “states will need to curtail certain existing roles, locate and build new school improvement capacity, consolidate current strengths, integrate services, and rely on a variety of outside providers to get this job done (p. 16).” The transformed SEA, according to Reville, will need to guide its work with a clear focus on “the systematic improvement of instruction, and by extension, the state's role in improving instruction by asking the question “how can states assist districts to help schools to help teachers improve instruction?”

Ohio has a solid foundation and a clear focus on improving instructional practice on a statewide basis through the work of OLAC. It also has a mechanism – through the continued engagement of ESCs in facilitating the Ohio Improvement Process – for supporting districts and schools in the effective implementation of *Ohio's Leadership Development Framework*.

During the 2009-10 school year, ongoing training will be provided in the area of district-wide implementation of focused strategies and actions, monitoring of the degree of such implementation, and evaluation of the impact such implementation is having on desired changes in adult practice and student achievement on a school, district,

regional, and statewide basis. The expanding work of OLAC, including effective use of the on-line professional development modules, will be incorporated into OIP facilitator training. In turn, lessons learned from facilitators as they work with districts, as well as exemplars identified in districts and schools around the state, will be used to improve the products and services offered through OLAC.

For additional information about the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council, please go to [www.ohioleadership.org](http://www.ohioleadership.org).

**Figure 1: Using the OIP Structure and Tools to Support District-wide Implementation of Ohio's Leadership Development Framework: Facilitator Activities by Stage**

<b>Stage 0:</b>	<p>Preparing district personnel to implement the OIP by supporting district, building, and/or community school staff members to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish/re-establish a DLT and BLTs, or CSLT (when working with a community school) in accordance with the Ohio Leadership Development Framework;</li> <li>• Develop a common understanding of the role of the DLT and BLTs, or CSLT, in implementing the OIP; and</li> <li>• Measure their team's level of practice against the OLAC standards of effective practice outlined in the Ohio Leadership Development Framework.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 1:</b>	<p>Working with leadership teams to complete a comprehensive needs assessment that identifies the most critical needs and probable causes based on data by supporting team members to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively summarize and analyze data sets;</li> <li>• Understand and apply the decision framework;</li> <li>• Interpret key findings/information from the needs assessment; and</li> <li>• Prioritize list of data-based critical problems from the decision framework.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2:</b>	<p>Working with leadership teams to develop a limited number of focused district (or community school) goals, strategies, and action steps based on data; and a limited number of focused building actions aligned with district goals by supporting team members to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop focused SMART goals;</li> <li>• Determine prioritized cause-and-effect relationships;</li> <li>• Compose strategies for each goal; and</li> <li>• Create actions that have the greatest likelihood of increasing student performance and improving instructional practices.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3:</b>	<p>Working with leadership teams to implement, and monitor the degree of implementation, of the focused plan by supporting team members to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and implement collaborative structures, processes, and practices that support a culture of inquiry and distributive leadership;</li> <li>• Implement the plan systemically and systematically; and</li> <li>• Monitor and analyze changes in student performance and adult implementation and make and report course corrections to the plan.</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: service providers include SST and ESC personnel</i></p>
<b>Stage 4:</b>	<p>Working with leadership teams to evaluate the improvement process and make necessary changes to continually improve instructional practice and student performance by supporting team members to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate plan implementation, impact, and changes needed;</li> <li>• Report summative plan progress; and</li> <li>• Modify instructional practice and revise plan.</li> </ul>