

BUILDING INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP CAPACITY: SST 10 Coaches and District Leaders Join Forces to Improve Results for All Learners

“In the past the SST provided training; now we coach key people in the district who can then train their staff. Instead of training, we’re building internal capacity through coaching,” explained Betsy Apolito, Director of State Support Team (SST) Region 10. SST 10 – which serves districts, schools, and families in Clark, Darke, Greene, Miami, Montgomery and Preble counties – works with districts to use the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) resources, and other initiatives to make and sustain improvements in instructional capacity and student learning. What makes the biggest difference? According to Apolito, it’s “the superintendent being on board 110%!”

SST 10’s work with two of its districts in Montgomery County – *Trotwood-Madison City Schools* and the *Mad River Local Schools* – illustrates the ways in which regional consultants have supported districts in making connections across opportunities presented through statewide initiatives and/or requirements, gaining the degree of focus needed for meaningful implementation, and building shared leadership capacity across the district.



PURPOSEFUL FLEXIBILITY: IT’S ABOUT FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS

“If you want people to buy in to a framework, you have to give them options and flexibility. Sometimes, you have to take a step back and then let them get it right,” observed Apolito. Stepping back to go forward, or ‘going slow to go fast,’ has been evident in the way SST 10 consultants have supported districts like Trotwood-Madison City and Mad River Local.

For example, SST 10 Consultant Vicki Hudepohl worked with Mad River Local Superintendent Chad Wyen to position the district to use the OIP by making connections to the district’s ongoing Baldrige effort¹. Wyen explains: “Vicki worked with us to create a template that embedded the *Ohio 5-Step Process* within the Baldrige work we were already doing. If I had said to staff, ‘now we have to do the 5-step process,’ they would have said, ‘here we go again.’ Instead, the flexibility of my SST support person was amazing; she helped us align the two processes to make it one. The fact that she didn’t come in with a rigid agenda, but instead listened to us...well, that flexibility was a big component.”

Knowing the inner workings of the district is a prerequisite for helping district leadership use effectively tools like the OIP. “Our work with OIP helped us get familiar with the districts we support. As opposed to walking

¹ The Baldrige in Education Initiative (BiE IN) is a quality management approach based on a systems perspective using data collection and analysis, strategic planning, and human resource development. BiE IN was adapted from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program and the associated Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which were established in 1987 and named for businessman, Malcolm Baldrige, who served as Secretary of Commerce during the Reagan administration.

in cold, the relationships we've built with them have allowed us to connect new initiatives with district and building improvement plans and help the building leadership teams and teacher-based teams make the right connections," said Marilyn Brigati, SST 10 Consultant assigned to Trotwood-Madison City Schools.

From random to structured improvement efforts. "For the first time, we have a plan that makes sense and that we can implement with fidelity and monitor," explained Wyen. Prior to 2015-16, Mad River had an improvement plan; however, according to Wyen, it wasn't used for its intended purpose. "We're in year 1 implementation of our plan to increase graduation, use positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) in connection to graduation, and improve instruction," added Wyen. Mad River is using OIP structures (e.g., the Ohio 5-Step Process) to foster a district-wide growth mindset and use project-based learning as a primary strategy.

"I'm the guy who follows the process, but the old plan felt like a cookie cutter approach. We needed to narrow our focus and develop a plan that aligned with our mission to provide educational experiences and opportunities that improve learning for all students. Betsy said, 'Chad, make it fit you.' The SST supported us in getting it right," Wyen added.



In nearby Trotwood-Madison City Schools, Superintendent Kevin Bell reflects on the district's use of OIP-OLAC to support improvement efforts. "We've been working with OIP for several years now and we've gotten better at it. Earlier on, about five years ago, we thought of it as compliance, as jumping through external hoops. There's been whole transformation; now, groups find value in cross-conversation, in using common assessment, in talking to each other about how they provided instruction to get different results," described Bell.

BLT 5-Step Process Implementation Rubric

STEPS	Beginning (1)	Developing (2)	Skilled (3)	Accomplished (4)	Evidence	Score
Step 3: Review and/or refine the building-focused adult/student indicators relative to the data and TBT needs	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT does not look at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult implementation indicator(s) Student performance indicator/assessment(s) used 	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT reviews the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult implementation indicator(s) Student performance indicator(s) (assessment(s) used but does not consider the role of the BLT in making recommendations for change. 	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT discusses revising the steps/details for achieving the following if needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult implementation indicator(s) Student performance indicator(s) (assessment(s) used and shares that information with the TBTs. 	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT develops or refines the steps/details for implementing/achieving the following if needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult implementation indicator(s) Student performance indicator(s) (assessment(s) used and assists the TBT in implementing the steps as recommended. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BLT minutes Refined list of "look fors" or implementation steps/details Revised assessments 	BLT Collective Score
	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT suggests that individual teachers be allowed to determine how they will improve/change.	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT discusses the need for building-wide improvement/change.	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT identifies general expectations for improvement/change.	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT determines specific expectations for improvement/change.		External Score
	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT makes decisions randomly rather than based on data.	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT begins to look at data in a summative way.	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT looks at a variety of data and makes general recommendations based on that data.	<input type="checkbox"/> BLT uses adult implementation and student performance data to drive the decisions necessary for building/district improvement.		
Justification for Scoring <i>(Anecdotal comments related to the items selected)</i>					Evidence	

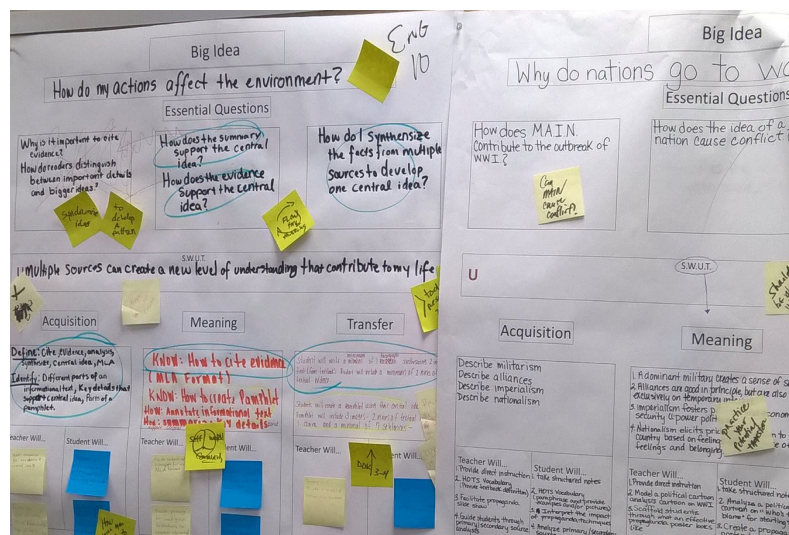
Using the Ohio 5-Step Process is one of the requirements Trotwood-Madison leadership put in place to support the expectation that all staff focus on the use of effective instructional strategies and monitor their implementation. SST 10 developed the 5-step implementation process rubric (see excerpt to the left) for the district leadership teams (DLTs), for building leadership teams (BLTs), and for teacher-based teams (TBTs) to aid districts in understanding and using each of the five steps, and in working toward shared understanding of what effective use – from *beginning* to *accomplished* – entails. SST consultants complete the rubric based

on their observations of how the DLT, BLTs, and TBTs function across the district and compare their assessment to that of district and school personnel.

Brigati notes, “we can give districts feedback, but if they don’t understand the why – why they’re really doing it – it goes in one ear and out the other; building in the why is critical.” Apolito and Brigati agree that using the 5-step implementation process rubrics helped SST staff as much as it has helped the districts they serve. Consultants rate teams using their own evidence and give each other feedback, resulting in greater inter-rater reliability and understanding of effective team functioning. “If you haven’t been well-trained and aren’t well-versed in OIP, you’d have a hard time helping districts make the necessary connections and move from a compliance mindset to one that is focused on instructional improvement and student learning,” said Brigati.

Where’s your evidence? Both Trotwood-Madison and Mad River superintendents are dedicated to the district-wide use of data to improve practice and learning. Bell, who began his career in the district 25 years ago as a custodian and paraprofessional, is in buildings every day making rounds with principals and talking about basing decisions on data. “OIP has helped us become so much more data focused and our conversation is wrapped around what the data tell us and how it informs our decision-making process,” said Bell. “Sometimes, high school folks say they can’t learn anything from other levels because high school is so different. My team really thinks they can learn from one another; decisions are sound decisions rooted in data, not feelings, and we look at data all along the way,” he added.

According to Wyen, the consistent use of relevant data by all personnel has helped the district “shift the culture from compliance to actual application of the plan and what it looks like in each school.” Wyen explored the new *Decision Framework* tool – the OIP tool used at stage 1 of the process to identify critical district needs – and is gearing up to ensure that all central office personnel are positioned to support the work of BLTs and TBTs. “We reorganized how our central office would function to make sure we have connections to buildings and are offering support to buildings,” he commented.



“Both Trotwood-Madison and Mad River use data binders. Kevin and Chad are data guys who are actively involved in improving instruction; they are not passive leaders,” said Apolito. For example, data from Trotwood-Madison’s BLTs indicated a need for targeted professional development (PD) on deconstructing standards at the high school level. Brigati provided the PD, but then coached the principal in how to use what he learned to improve teacher competence and team functioning.

Building Leadership Capacity

SST 10 consultants acknowledge that while there are pockets of exemplary practice, BLTs and TBTs are still developing. One initiative that has helped cement understanding and use of OIP-OLAC on the part of districts and, at the same time, expand SST coaching capacity, is the *Ohio Leadership for Inclusion*,

Implementation, and Instruction Improvement project, commonly referred to as OLi⁴. Coordinated through the University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center with support from the Ohio

Department of Education, OLi⁴ is a PD effort grounded in OIP-OLAC and designed to support principals in leading teacher learning through effective coaching of teachers and facilitation of BLTs and TBTs. OLi⁴ operates under several non-negotiables or core beliefs, namely that high expectations, shared accountability, and focused work are necessary to make and sustain improvements in adult and student learning.

OLi⁴ NON-NEGOTIABLES:

- **High expectations:** Students associated with any group (such as students identified as having disabilities and receiving special education services) are as different from each other as the members of any other group and, as such, assumptions about potential achievement based on disability/socio-economic/other status limit students' opportunities to learn and diminish the collective responsibility of adults to provide high quality instruction aligned with grade-level content to all students.
- **Shared accountability.** All educators are jointly responsible for the education of every child, regardless of categorical labels, program designations, or funding streams.
- **Focused work:** Significant improvement of educational systems and services requires state, district, school, and classroom commitment to inclusive practice as a central concept for addressing a focused set of goals using a few high-leverage strategies.



Principals from districts in all 16 SST regions are participating in OLi⁴ PD, which includes centralized training, regional cadre discussion group meetings (face-to-face and virtual), and in-school coaching. Principals participate in the project as part of a two-year cohort experience.

Trotwood-Madison and Mad River principals are participating in cohort 2 of the OLi⁴ project, having completed their first year of a two-year commitment. "OLi⁴ aligns with our plan and has helped us build capacity through developing common language, ensuring consistency in our processes. I had half my team - five principals and assistant principals - in cohort 2; I just wish I would have had all of them participate together," said Wyen who is finishing his 16th year in the district and his second year as superintendent. Mad River principals that did not participate in cohort 2 will participate as members of cohort 3, scheduled to begin in August 2016.

Trotwood-Madison principals have also benefitted from participation in cohort 2 of the project. "OLi⁴ has built something within our five building leaders. There's a different dynamic; they talk to each other and depend on each other," said Bell. He adds, "the largest benefit of OLi⁴ has been as a coalescing concept for all of my building leaders. They came together and I'll attribute it completely to OLi⁴. Each time they come back (from centralized training) they have felt more enriched professionally by hearing what others in other school systems are doing, and understanding it's not just your struggle; other folks have the same struggles."

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Trotwood-Madison City Schools

One of the biggest transformations in Trotwood-Madison has been at the high school level. The high school principal, with the support of SST 10, began to make connections and evolved from viewing the work as a compliance activity to being about real improvement. Bell described the principal's evolution, saying, "It truly was a shift for him; the light bulb went off and he's become one of our strongest leaders."

Both Bell and Wyen agree that the element of time presents the greatest challenge. "Time is so short, precious, and critical. Everyone wants to engage at a high level, but the other side is how to juggle and get

everything in,” explained Bell. Mad River has found creative ways to provide for team time by building early release days into the schedule, using waiver days to focus on core work, and finding time for teams to meet during the school day. “One of the big takeaways from the work we’ve been doing is that you have to find time and make time – sacred uninterrupted time dedicated to teaming,” said Wyen.

SSTs as value added. Monthly coaching for each OLi⁴ principal is provided by SST personnel using a *Leadership Performance Coaching*² model. Brigati explains: “We’ve done coaching for a long time and most of us have been through cognitive coaching. We find that sometimes you coach and sometimes you consult, but at all times you help the principal make the right connections.” “Vicki does such a good job supporting us in the right way, not by saying ‘we have to fix this.’ But by listening and helping. People feel more connected because of the authentic support and true coaching they’re receiving,” explained Wyen.

Bell offered a similar perspective on the role of the SST, describing Apolito as a “critical friend who can give honest feedback.” “The SST has been with us for a while and their focus over the years has been on how to support us so they work themselves out of a job. It’s about individualized support and developing capacity in each person and in the system. Some places have more advantages built in because the life experiences kids have when walking in the door help them succeed no matter who works with them. However, when looking at improvement efforts even in high-performing districts, it doesn’t mean those districts are meeting the needs of *all* kids,” said Bell.

In offering advice to other districts, Bell urges districts to be “open, accept feedback, be honest about where you are and think about where you want to be, and get as much help as you can in getting there. We did a mind shift when we realized the work isn’t about filling out the form the right way; it is about the conversation and you capture the conversation with the form. We moved from ‘it’s good stuff, but...to it’s just good stuff,’” he concluded.

For More Information

For more information about SST 10 and its work to support district-wide improvement, contact Betsy Apolito, Director, SST Region 10 at 937.236.9965 or via email at betsy.apolito@mcesc.org.

For information about how the leadership of the Trotwood Madison City Schools and the Mad River Local Schools have used OIP-OLAC and OLi⁴ to improve their districts’ collective capacity for inclusive instructional leadership, contact: Kevin Bell, Superintendent, Trotwood Madison City Schools at 937.854.3050 (ext. 11100) or via email at kevinbell@trotwood.k12.oh.us; and Chad Wyen, Superintendent, Mad River Local Schools at 937.478.3349 or via email at chad.wyen@madriverschools.org.

For information about OLAC and OIP resources, contact Dr. Jim Gay, Co-director, at jimgay@basa-ohio.org. For information about OLi⁴, contact Pamela VanHorn, Coordinator, University of Dayton School of Education and Health Sciences Grant Center, at pvanhorn1@udayton.edu or via phone at 614.785.1163.

² Allison, E. (2013). *Leadership performance coaching*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.