



Wooster City Schools: Achievement Profile

Wooster, Ohio

Three years ago, the Wooster City School District (WCSD) took a leap of faith, signing on with the state education agency as a partner district to help design and test the development of a statewide improvement process that could be used by any district, regardless of size and demographics, to improve student learning.



partnerships needed to focus and align core work across the district. “As a superintendent, you have to be willing to check your ego at the door because you’re not going to be the keeper of the initiatives. It’s synergistic, it’s an entire team process that’s a makeup of your cabinet, your management, teachers, even parents and students,” explained Tefs.

Today, after three years of OIP implementation, the district has redefined the role of central office; forged a strong district-union partnership; instituted an aligned leadership team structure across the district, school, and teacher team levels; and become very intentional in reducing initiatives to increase the district’s focus on student learning. Wooster’s nine schools (one preschool, six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school) are working in more coherent ways to consistently define and implement high quality instructional strategies, and also continually evaluate the effects of their efforts on the progress each child is making. “Having a very focused, intentional strategic

Wooster City School District Student Demographics

Total Enrollment: 3,748
% Students Identified as Students with Disabilities: 17.6
% Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged: 53.3
% Students Identified as Minority: 13.5
% Students Identified as Limited English Proficient: 0.5

Dubbed the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), it was the state’s vehicle for establishing a state system of support focused on instructional leadership and improvement – a system that was truly statewide in scope and systemic in nature. Built around the use of an embedded set of connected, web-based data tools, the OIP is being used by well over half of the 612 traditional public school districts and 100+ charter schools in the state to enact essential leadership practices as identified by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC), a broad-based stakeholder group jointly sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators.¹ It is also a key component of the state’s Race to the Top (RttT) strategy.

New to the district in 2008, but not to the superintendency, Michael Tefs initially used the district’s involvement in OIP to get the lay of the land, conducting an environmental scan to identify the district’s most pressing issues and develop the kind of collaborative



OHIO LEADERSHIP ADVISORY COUNCIL & THE OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS: CORE MESSAGES/NON-NEGOTIABLES

- ▶ Leadership is a shared responsibility...
- ▶ Leadership is a process distributed across an entire school system...
- ▶ Accountability for school improvement requires leadership structures that foster internal accountability...
- ▶ A collective focus on full and sustained implementation is necessary for school improvement...
- ▶ The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) provides a vehicle for initiating Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework...
- ▶ All learning, including teachers’ learning of instructional practices, depends on changes in behavior that respond to precise and relevant feedback...

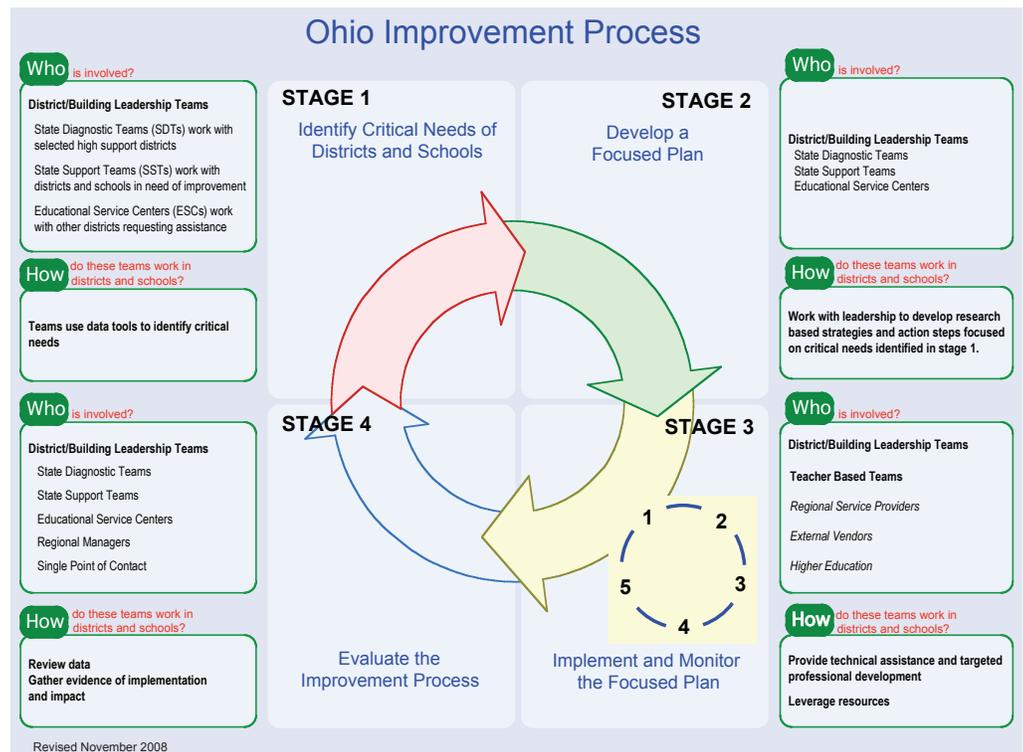
For more information, go to www.ohioleadership.org

¹ While developed for use by all districts, under Ohio’s federally approved differentiated accountability model, all districts in school improvement (SI) status or that have one or more schools in SI, are required to implement the OIP as their intervention.

priority helps us gain and grow. It's the foundation for our school improvement system here," said Tefs.

COLLECTIVE FOCUS REDUCES FRAGMENTATION

Building the foundation for growth starts with narrowing the focus so that a limited number of strategies and actions can be implemented well. Categorized by the state as an urban district with low median income and high poverty, Wooster's progress has been slow but steady. At the end of the 2009-10 school year, the district made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all student groups for the first time since the inception of the state's accountability system under NCLB. More important, the performance of all groups of students has increased over the last year, moving the district from the effective category to excellent.



Use Data Well. Part of using data well involves who's using it and whether its use leads to meaningful action. The OIP, as a process designed to assist all districts in implementing essential leadership practices, had as a core belief the notion, borrowed from Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Richard Elmore, that "the purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role."²

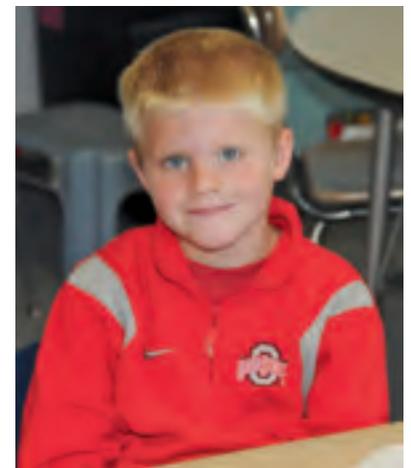
To that end, the OIP required the development of a district leadership team (DLT), aligned building leadership teams (BLTs), and teacher-based teams (TBTs) – as defined by OLAC – for the purpose of redesigning everyone's role to be primarily about improving the capacity of someone else. The *leadership framework* recommended by OLAC serves to distribute key leadership functions, align and focus the work across the system, and hold adults at all levels accountable for improving instructional practice and student achievement.

"As a superintendent you have to be willing to check your ego at the door because you're not going to be the keeper of the initiatives. It's synergistic, it's an entire team process that's a makeup of your cabinet, your management, your teachers, even parents and students."

**Michael Tefs,
Superintendent**

As an OIP partner district, Wooster's first step, then, was to establish its district leadership team (DLT), and that team had to be comprised of more than the cabinet-level membership common in many districts. "You get one chance to make a first impression with OIP, and the development of that DLT is absolutely crucial. If this would've been a DLT of central office staff and principals, we would not be where we are today. Having the union president and the union grievance chairperson on our DLT was strategic and incredibly beneficial," stated Tefs.

Among Wooster's DLT members were selected teachers and the principal from each school, teacher association president and first-grade teacher Peter Larrousse, central office staff such as the director of pupil services, and other personnel from across the district.



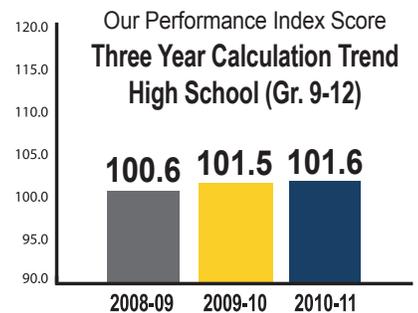
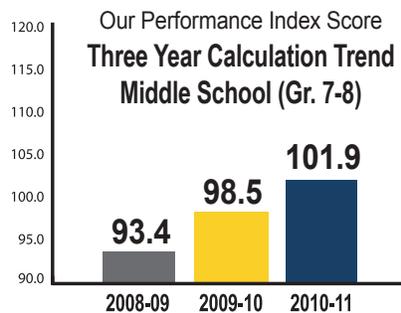
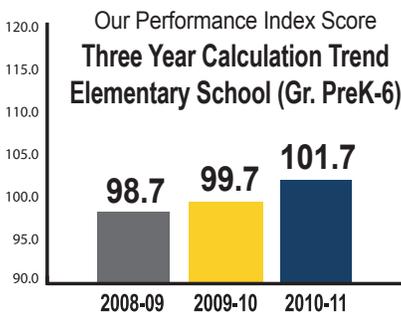
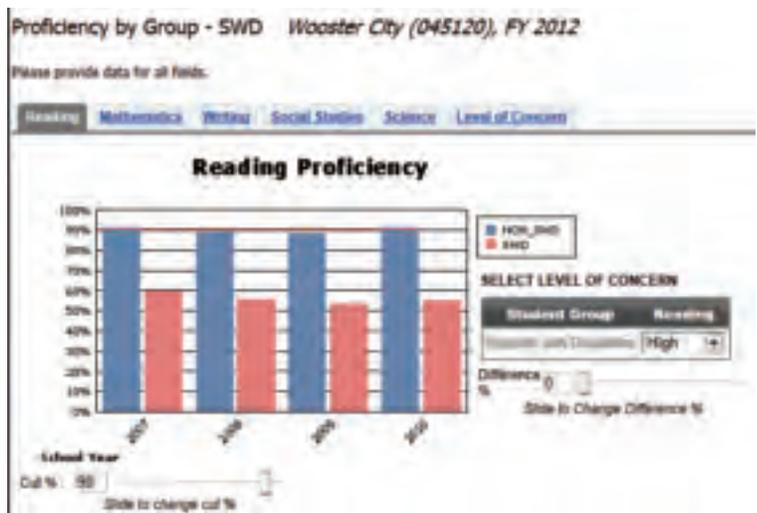
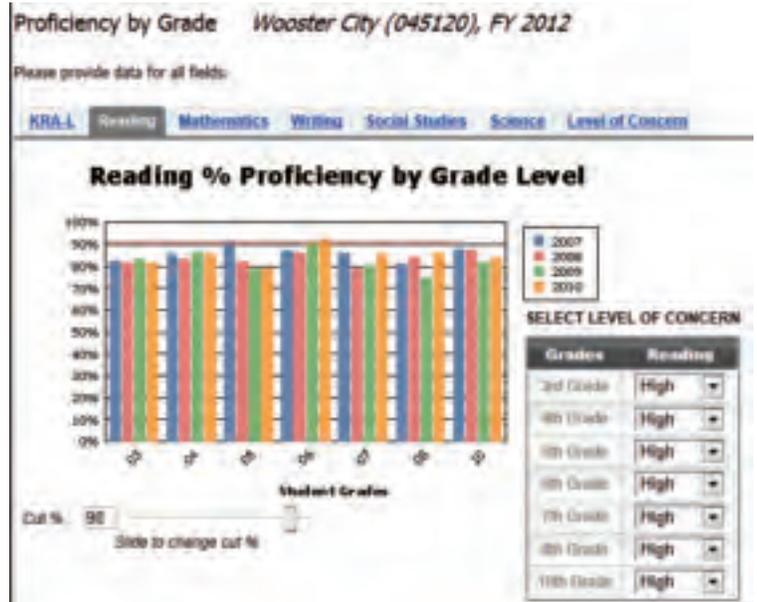
² Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice and performance*. Boston, MA: Harvard Education Press.

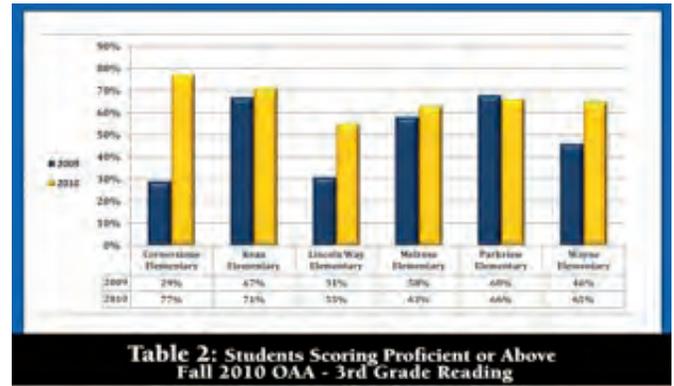
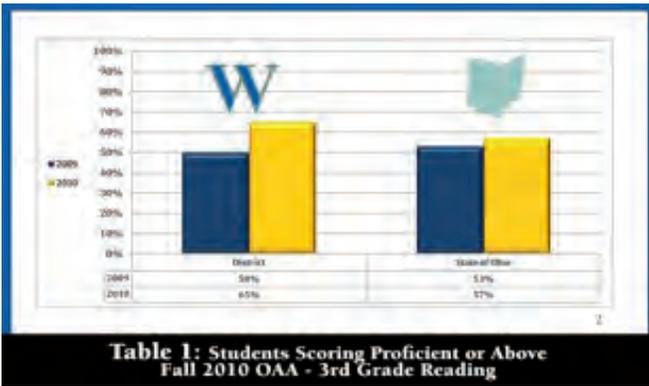
This cross-sectional team – a requirement of the OIP – was meant to ensure that data were being viewed from multiple perspectives and that resulting decisions made about the district’s areas of greatest need were based on an honest account of how well and to what degree the district had engaged in essential practices on a district-wide basis.

Once established, the DLT used the Ohio Decision Framework (DF), a web-based tool used at stage 1 of the OIP. As a decision-making aid, the DF is designed to assist districts in making informed decisions about where to spend their time, energy, and resources to make significant and substantial improvements in student performance. Each district, school, and community (i.e., charter) school in the state has a DF populated with its own data, which are organized in such a way as to allow leadership teams to answer essential questions and make decisions about their greatest needs. The DF is organized around four levels and is structured to help teams sort through and categorize data, prioritize areas of need, identify root causes of prioritized needs, and develop a more focused plan for impacting student learning.

“The biggest change for us as a district was in working with the data and using it to make decisions,” said Rich Leone, formerly the principal of Edgewood Middle School and newly appointed as the district’s Director of Secondary Education. “Using the Decision Framework helped us look at data in a very different way, versus just having a theory or an opinion of what was happening with students,” he added.

The DF tool presents state assessment trend data for all tested children (not only those counted for accountability purposes) for each content area in three ways: by grade level, by building level, and by disaggregated student group. Teams review the data, discuss what an acceptable level of proficiency should be, and make decisions about which areas are areas of high concern. Tefs concurs with Leone, explaining “if I heard it once I heard it many times – it was powerful for the team to look at district-wide data, rather than only having buildings look at their own building-level data.” “That district-wide view was essential in moving toward collective ownership for the work of the district and for helping us identify the priority areas that we needed to tackle together,” he added.





The focus on effective data use doesn't stop with the identification of needs. That's only one necessary part of the process. According to Karen Arbogast, principal of Wayne Elementary School and Title I coordinator for the district, structures have been put in place to support the common use of multiple types of data. "We've established some consistent protocols and the beginning, middle, and end-year assessment must-have data collection pieces for reading and math and, for the first time, we're looking at data that are consistent across the district," she explained. "This allows the DLT, BLTs, and TBTs to talk about the same data and use these data to make better instructional decisions," said Arbogast.

Better instructional decisions are paying off. For example, Wooster's performance index (PI) score – a measure of growth based on a weighted average that includes grades 3-8 and 10 for all tested subjects, and untested children – shows improvement across

Wooster City Schools Ohio Graduation Tests in Reading & Math: High School Level							
Test Grade	Test Subject	2010-2011 % Proficient		2009-2010 % Proficient		2008-2009 % Proficient	
		Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP
10th	Reading	94.1	58.7	92.9	45.7	94.5	34.0
	Math	95.7	49.2	93.7	45.7	>95.0	42.0
11th	Reading	98.7	80.5	>95.0	59.6	>95.0	65.2
	Math	98.7	65.9	>95.0	63.8	>95.0	65.2

% proficient denotes scores at the proficient level or above

Wooster City Schools Ohio Achievement Assessments in Reading & Math: Middle School Level							
Test Grade	Test Subject	2010-2011 % Proficient		2009-2010 % Proficient		2008-2009 % Proficient	
		Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP
7th	Reading	92.2	44.4	94.0	50.0	90.7	31.0
	Math	90.5	50.0	92.2	52.3	87.6	31.0
8th	Reading	96.2	64.3	94.7	51.4	85.3	35.1
	Math	94.1	45.2	84.1	35.1	88.7	29.8

% proficient denotes scores at the proficient level or above

Wooster City Schools Ohio Achievement Assessments in Reading & Math: Elementary School Level							
Test Grade	Test Subject	2010-2011 % Proficient		2009-2010 % Proficient		2008-2009 % Proficient	
		Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP
3rd	Reading	92.3	71.7	89.9	52.2	87.7	74.4
	Math	94.4	75.5	89.4	65.2	92.3	59.0
4th	Reading	94.1	66.7	89.5	73.3	90.2	71.7
	Math	91.4	66.7	86.4	46.7	87.3	60.9
5th	Reading	86.7	51.2	85.2	58.7	82.2	56.8
	Math	85.6	46.3	86.3	58.7	73.7	43.2
6th	Reading	95.8	75.6	>95.0	75.6	93.5	85.7
	Math	95.9	68.9	94.0	61.0	93.5	59.2

% proficient denotes scores at the proficient level or above

elementary, middle school, and high school, with the greatest gains at the middle school level. A review of 2008-09 and 2009-10 state assessment data for the district and each elementary building shows significant gains in the majority of buildings and an overall improvement across the district as compared to the state average.

Further, an examination of Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) and Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) results in reading and math for students with and without disabilities show significant improvement across many tested grades. While gaps still exist, the district has made substantial gains in the percent of students who scored proficient or above in areas such as 8th-grade reading (from 35.1% in 2008-09 to 64.3% in 2010-11) and 10th grade reading (from 34% in 2008-09 to almost 60% in 2010-11).

Finally, data provided by the state that rank districts in terms of performance indicates that WCSD had the highest poverty level of any Ohio district rated as Excellent with Distinction. "We have never allowed poverty to be an excuse in the WCSD," said Tefs.

Focus Your Goals. While none of Wooster's schools is in school improvement status, the district has chosen to stay the course in using the OIP as its school improvement mechanism. "Being focused is a

KEY PRACTICE 1: USE DATA WELL

While districts, schools, and individual teachers use data and have been for some time now, there has been too much emphasis placed only on the performance of students on state assessments. While these data are important for strategic planning, they provide little ongoing guidance to teachers or administrators. Districts that have “moved their numbers” for all children have or are engaged in developing district-wide processes that allow for more collective use of relevant data to make smarter decisions, including the ongoing assessment of teaching and learning at the classroom, school, and district levels. These processes include the development, implementation, and ongoing use of teacher-developed formative assessments, and the use of grade-level/departmental/course, and vertical teams to collaboratively score these shared assessments and plan for shared instruction. They also include the use of building and district benchmark assessments. Fullan (2008) states that principals working directly with teachers in the use of data is more than twice as powerful as any other leadership dimension, and Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that the reliability for assessing student learning and district decision making was one critical characteristic of effective districts.

ROLE	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Increasing the Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement</i></p>
<p>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use data to identify and respond to common needs related to student learning across areas (e.g., regions, zones, intermediate/cooperative service areas, districts) of the state? ▪ Establish clear expectations for effective data use across SEA offices and departments, facilitating coherence and reducing fragmentation in the services and/or supports provided to districts? ▪ Refine, redefine, or create new state systems of support focused on building the capacity of all districts in the state to improve instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Establish mechanisms for providing high-quality and consistent support - including facilitation and professional development - to all districts in the state in the effective use of data to improve the learning of all students and groups of students, such as students with disabilities? ▪ Provide tools/products/services that facilitate the effective use of data by all districts, schools, and teachers in improving instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Ensure that state initiatives are targeted to providing support to underperforming districts and, at the same time, are applicable to and used by all districts in the state to continually support higher levels of learning for all students?
<p>DISTRICTS & THEIR SCHOOLS</p>	<p>To what degree do districts and their schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish clear expectations for effective data use at all levels of the system? ▪ Use data to identify district, building, and classroom needs, and establish goals and performance targets at the district and school level? ▪ Use data to measure the degree of implementation of strategies/actions, including professional development, to reach district/school-identified goals? ▪ Use data to evaluate the effect of strategies/actions on student learning? ▪ Require teachers and teacher teams to use data to establish instructional priorities and inform instructional practice on an ongoing basis? ▪ Model and monitor the use of data to inform instructional decisions? ▪ Provide support at all levels in the effective use of data to facilitate higher levels of learning for all students and groups of students, such as students with disabilities?
<p>PARENTS & FAMILIES</p>	<p>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide relevant information and feedback to district/school personnel on multiple dimensions (e.g., academic, physical, social-emotional) of their child’s progress and challenges? ▪ Participate as members of the district or school leadership/data team? ▪ Understand the importance of grade-level expectations in core content areas (e.g., reading, math)? ▪ Understand the implications of how their child’s district/school/teacher(s) assesses what their child is learning and the level of learning? ▪ Work with the district/school/teacher(s) to collect data on their child’s performance in designated areas?

KEY PRACTICE 2: FOCUS YOUR GOALS

When asked to describe the new initiatives undertaken in the last year or two, most teachers and administrators would list a litany of initiatives, often disconnected. If asked, "What are the district or school improvement initiatives?" most teachers and administrators often cannot articulate them. Reeves (2006) referred to this problem as "initiative fatigue," while Fullan (2008) calls this "repetitive change syndrome." If teachers, schools, and districts are to make improvement then they must be allowed and encouraged to focus on a few critical things well. As Patterson, et al. (2008) notes, "a few behaviors can drive a lot of change... Enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviors." Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) recommend focusing the goals on student learning through the use of specific forms of instruction. They also recommend that the strategies be targeted on specific areas of low performance and phased in over time. Robinson (2008) identifies goal setting as one of the most critical school leadership responsibilities.

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<p>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus and align their collective work to effectively support <i>all</i> districts, schools, and teachers in improving instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Establish common goals that require offices and departments across the SEA to work together to build the capacity of all districts, schools, and teachers in the state? ▪ Provide tools, products, and/or services that facilitate focused goal setting by all districts, schools, and teacher teams in improving instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Provide tools, products, and/or services that facilitate the development of coherent district and school plans that are useful in helping all districts, schools, and teacher teams to improve instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Establish mechanisms for providing high-quality and consistent support - including facilitation and professional development - to all districts in the state in developing a limited number of focused goals directly related to district-identified needs in the area of instruction and student learning?
<p>DISTRICTS & THEIR SCHOOLS</p>	<p>To what degree do districts and their schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use a data-driven needs assessment to develop a limited number of focused goals, and measurable strategies and actions, directly related to addressing the district's greatest needs related to instruction and achievement? ▪ Reflect in district goals that the core work and priority of the district is to improve teaching and learning? ▪ Ensure that all schools in the district align their work with district-established goals and strategies? ▪ Identify goal setting as an important leadership responsibility? ▪ Develop a single coherent district plan to reach district goals and require that each school develops a building plan aligned to district goals? ▪ Make intentional decisions to align resources (fiscal, material, personnel) across the district to meet district-wide goals? ▪ Screen, interview, select, and provide ongoing support to staff based on district-wide goals? ▪ Engage the larger community, including board members, in establishing and sustaining a focus on district-wide goals for improving instruction and student learning?
<p>PARENTS & FAMILIES</p>	<p>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribute to the identification of focused district goals for improving instruction and achievement? ▪ Support the district in reaching district-wide goals? ▪ Participate in activities related to school-level strategies designed to reach district goals? ▪ Understand the relationship between their child's classroom instruction and school-level strategies designed to reach district goals? ▪ Offer feedback to school and district officials on the relevance of district goals and school-level strategies in meeting their child's instructional needs?

KEY PRACTICE 3: SELECT AND IMPLEMENT SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Over the last several decades the research on effective instructional practices has demonstrated that “not all instructional strategies are equal” (See Marzano et. al., 2001). A recent synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses provides clear guidance in this area (Hattie, 2009). While most educators understand these findings, school districts have had limited success at implementing them. Both Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), and Fullan (2008) recommend focusing on specific effective instructional practices as a part of the district’s improvement process. Fullan (2008) says we need “relentless consistency” in the use of effective “non-negotiable” practices.

ROLE	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Increasing the Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement</i></p>
<p>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p><i>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make their primary role be about helping all school districts in their state improve the quality of instruction provided to all students? ▪ Take steps to continually reduce fragmentation across SEA offices and departments by requiring shared, cross-agency work intentionally designed to increase the capacity of all districts to improve instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Establish a statewide system of support intentionally designed to provide consistent, high-quality technical assistance to all districts in the state to improve instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Evaluate the degree to which SEA actions are affecting district performance? ▪ Recognize districts for system-wide improvement efforts that have a positive affect on all students and student groups?
<p>DISTRICTS & THEIR SCHOOLS</p>	<p><i>To what degree do districts and their schools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish and require the use of a district-wide standards-based curriculum aligned with district goals and priorities for instruction and student learning? ▪ Take steps to build a common language among all staff for what constitutes high-quality instructional practice? ▪ Ensure full access to challenging content aligned with rigorous standards for all students and student groups? ▪ Ensure that the use of prevention/intervention strategies is implemented consistently as part of, rather than separate from, the district’s instructional program? ▪ Require the use of ongoing assessment and progress monitoring to inform instruction at the district, school, and teacher-team level? ▪ Provide for the system-wide use of collaboratively developed common classroom formative assessment as part of the instructional process? ▪ Provide structured opportunities for schools to learn from each other, for principals to learn from each other, and for teachers to learn from each other?
<p>PARENTS & FAMILIES</p>	<p><i>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support the delivery of instruction to their children in targeted areas? ▪ Assist in the implementation of prevention/intervention strategies to support the instructional process? ▪ Work with their child’s teacher(s) in using common classroom formative assessment to gather and provide feedback on their child’s level of understanding and application of content learned?

Other examples include curriculum implementation at the middle and high school in the area of algebra. “Although teachers were all teaching Algebra 1, we had to get them to the point where they were more alike than different in how they were delivering the instruction, and that’s where formative assessment came in,” explained Tefs. “Our TBTs helped a great deal with improving the consistency of the instruction by having common discussions and they’re definitely getting better at being more alike than different,” said Leone.

STAYING THE COURSE

WCSD is gearing up for its fourth year of OIP implementation and its second full year of using teacher-based teams to promote continuous learning about what impacts student learning. As the DLT prepares for the start of a new school year, the district is committed to using the improvement process to realize district goals. “We need to continue to sustain the process of using walk-through data, become a little more critical of the data, identifying the key look-fors, and developing structured processes for supporting peer coaching, observation, and reflection,” said Arbogast.

While WCSD has made progress, the DLT quickly points to challenges they’re working to overcome. Wider community involvement and understanding of the work, how to fully meet the needs of children with the greatest educational needs, and how to continue to move forward in using formative assessment across the district are among the issues WCSD will tackle in the coming year. “I’ve seen districts try to take the model they used before and tweak it. For us, it wasn’t about tweaking; it was about hitting the reset button and starting over,” stated Tefs.

Advice from Wooster City School District

1. Make sure the district leadership team (DLT) includes staff from across the district, not only cabinet level personnel or administrators.
2. Include the principal and a teacher from each school’s building leadership team (BLT) on the DLT to foster continuity and alignment of core work across all schools.
3. Use relevant data to focus critical conversations about need and progress, and make sure that team members from across the district are working with district-wide data, not just the data from the schools they represent.
4. Reduce the number of initiatives and ensure that all work directly aligns with a small number of goals and strategies.
5. Measure both adult implementation and student achievement to focus on the impact of district actions on student performance.
6. Focus on sustainability by ensuring that the teacher association/union is a partner in making improvements from the beginning of the process.
7. Align decisions about resource management with district goals.
8. Rely on strong external facilitation to implement a sustainable process, allowing the superintendent to participate as a team member, rather than a facilitator.

For additional information about the Wooster journey, contact Michael Tefs, Superintendent/CEO, Wooster City Schools, 144 North Market Street, Wooster, OH 44691 at 330.988.1111 (ext. 1223) or via email at wstr_mtefs@woostercityschools.org.

What Matters Most: Key Practices Guide

KEY PRACTICE 4: IMPLEMENT DEEPLY

Most of us can identify a whole host of initiatives that were undertaken with great fanfare but then implemented poorly. So the first step of any change initiative must begin with the realization that without consistent, rigorous follow through, there will be limited progress. As Bossidy and Charan (2002) have stated “leadership without the discipline of execution is incomplete and ineffective” (p. 34). All too often we achieve limited success and blame this on the intervention, while the real problem is the lack of full implementation. Reeves (2006) documents the fact that we should not expect to achieve the outcomes identified in the research until we reach a 90% implementation level.

ROLE	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Increasing the Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement</i></p>
<p>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limit the number of requirements to which districts must respond? ▪ Support school districts to identify a limited number of goals for focusing all work, rather than multiple goals that are specific to initiatives, programs, or funding sources? ▪ Ensure that all SEA initiatives soliciting district involvement require responding districts to align proposed work with district-identified goals, rather than identify new or different goals? ▪ Provide tools, products, and/or services that support districts in fully implementing identified instructional strategies?
<p>DISTRICTS & THEIR SCHOOLS</p>	<p>To what degree do districts and their schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require that identified instructional strategies chosen for improvement are implemented in every building and in every classroom across the district? ▪ Define what full implementation of identified instructional strategies chosen for improvement looks like? ▪ Require the use of aligned structures (i.e., teacher-based teams, school-level teams, district-level teams) that support shared implementation of focused instructional strategies? ▪ Hold staff at all levels accountable for following through on focused instructional strategies, while providing them with multiple opportunities for practice and support? ▪ Set expectations for the direct involvement of administrators (superintendents, principals) in ensuring that focused instructional practices are being implemented at a high level? ▪ Ensure that professional development is directly related to the identified instructional practices chosen for improvement? ▪ Actively maintain a focus on improving instructional practice and student learning?
<p>PARENTS & FAMILIES</p>	<p>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participate in the implementation of focused instructional practices? ▪ Understand the need for full implementation of focused instructional practices? ▪ Understand what full implementation of focused instructional practices looks like? ▪ Gauge their child’s performance in response to teachers’ implementation of focused instructional practices?

What Matters Most: Key Practices Guide

KEY PRACTICE 5: MONITOR AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

Even if we are successful in our implementation there must be a system in place to provide feedback. To develop the system we must first be clear about defining what the practices look like when they are being implemented well. This description can take the form of a rubric, checklist, or protocol, but it must clearly describe what the behavior looks like when it's being done well. Once these indicators are defined, there needs to be a monitoring and reporting schedule that informs everyone in the system as to the progress being made. The collection and reporting of these data serve to provide a feedback loop to the staff on the overall implementation level of the strategies and is described by Reeves (2006) as an inquiry process that is the most critical component of district and school continuous improvement. The second component includes the implementation of student progress indicators that have been collaboratively developed and scored by the staff.

ROLE	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Increasing the Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement</i></p>
<p>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p><i>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support and help districts to understand the importance of and relationship between monitoring for improvement and monitoring for compliance? ▪ Support school districts in designing and using formative indicators and protocols/procedures for measuring district-wide implementation of focused improvement strategies and the effect of such implementation on student learning? ▪ Provide tools, products, and/or services that support districts in monitoring the degree of implementation and its effects on student learning? ▪ Provide tools, products, and/or services that support districts in providing feedback and differentiated support to schools and school-level teams and to teachers and teacher teams?
<p>DISTRICTS & THEIR SCHOOLS</p>	<p><i>To what degree do districts and their schools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use a set of district-identified formative indicators for measuring district-wide implementation of focused improvement strategies and the effect of such implementation on student learning? ▪ Use a consistent set of protocols/procedures for measuring district-wide implementation of focused improvement strategies and the effect of such implementation on student learning? ▪ Monitor the degree of implementation of focused improvement strategies across the system? ▪ Monitor the progress of students, and examine where and why students may be struggling? ▪ Require central office personnel to actively monitor and provide feedback to principals and school-level teams on the implementation of focused instructional practices? ▪ Require principals to actively monitor and provide feedback to teachers and teacher teams on the implementation of focused instructional practices? ▪ Provide differentiated support, as needed, to schools and teachers in the implementation of focused instructional strategies? ▪ Measure the effectiveness of feedback and/or differentiated support provided to schools and teachers?
<p>PARENTS & FAMILIES</p>	<p><i>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide feedback to the school or teacher(s) on their child's progress in relation to focused instructional strategies? ▪ Work with the school or teacher(s) to monitor the implementation of focused instructional strategies and the effect of that implementation on their child's progress and learning?

What Matters Most: Key Practices Guide

KEY PRACTICE 6: INQUIRE AND LEARN

While data help us prioritize and gauge progress, data-driven decision-making begins by asking fundamental questions (Reeves, 2002). At the grade-level, department, course, building, and district level, we need to be able to reflect on our collective and individual practice, answer important questions, and learn from the work we're doing. Important questions for teams to ask to support systems learning include the following:

- Where are the practices being implemented well?
- Why are they being successful?
- Where are the practices not being implemented well?
- Why are they being unsuccessful?

ROLE	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Increasing the Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement</i></p>
<p>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p><i>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluate SEA progress in supporting all districts to make improvements in adult professional practice and student learning? ▪ Provide opportunities for collective reflection and learning among SEA staff? ▪ Provide tools, products, and/or services that support districts in evaluating the degree of implementation of focused instructional strategies and its effects on changes in adult professional practice and student learning? ▪ Recognize districts for continuous improvement in the learning of all students and student groups?
<p>DISTRICTS & THEIR SCHOOLS</p>	<p><i>To what degree do districts and their schools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster and communicate a sense of urgency for continuous improvement and positive change in student learning? ▪ Engage everyone in continually evaluating the effect of the district's focused instructional practices on district and school performance, and student learning? ▪ Establish a decision-making process that supports shared learning across and among central office personnel, school personnel, and teacher team members? ▪ Support principals in actively participating in collegial discussions around instruction and its effects on student learning? ▪ Require principals to provide active oversight and coordination of the instructional program? ▪ Provide resources to support district-wide professional learning focused on improving instructional practice and student learning? ▪ Have established parameters for making decisions about needed changes to the district's improvement strategies?
<p>PARENTS & FAMILIES</p>	<p><i>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide information to the district, school, or teacher(s) about what is/is not working to improve their child's learning? ▪ Contribute to evaluating the degree to which focused instructional strategies have been implemented and district-identified goals have been met? ▪ Participate in district or school professional learning opportunities?

key part of Wooster’s improvement strategy,” explained Tefs. “The OIP, with its connection to the work of OLAC, is so much more comprehensive and far less fragmented than other improvement models we’ve explored,” he added. Once teams complete the first stage of the OIP using the DF tool, a very focused and usable needs assessment is produced and teams then use it to identify a limited number of district goals, strategies and actions.

Moving from multiple goals and initiatives to three goals that are used to structure the work across the district is what Tefs calls “weeding the garden.” Leone explains that in addition to narrowing the number of things they do, they also look at how they do their work in a different way. “We look at what we do daily in terms of the value add it will have in impacting student achievement,” he said. Each of the district’s three goals has no more than three strategies and a limited (no more than five) number of associated action steps. These steps – along with sources of evidence for gauging progress, the groups or individuals responsible, and a three-year time line – are detailed in the district’s single plan, the *OIP Implementation Plan*. Each school in the district has a plan that provides for flexibility at the action step level, but that is written to meet district goals and strategies.

WCSD’s three goals state that, by 2012, the district will:

- ▶ Implement a sustainable instructional process that will positively impact student achievement
- ▶ Increase performance on state standardized reading assessment by 3% annually
- ▶ Increase performance on state standardized math assessment by 5% annually



Wooster City School District (WCSD) OIP Implementation Plan – GOAL 2		
Goal #2: By 2012, all PreK-12 students will increase performance on state standardized reading assessments by 3% annually.		
Strategies & Action Steps	Indicators	
	Adult Implementation	Student Achievement
<p>2A. Implement a district-wide approach to balanced literacy</p> <p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a district-wide common understanding of balanced literacy • Establish expectations of roles and responsibilities of staff in delivering a balanced literacy framework • Provide initial and ongoing embedded PD for district literacy framework • Ensure the use of the board-adopted literacy-based framework 	100% of teachers will incorporate the district balanced literacy framework within instruction	100% of students will demonstrate improved achievement in reading and writing on common formative assessments
<p>2B. Develop and implement a district-wide approach to pre- and post-common assessments for reading to guide instruction and intervention</p> <p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a district-wide common understanding of the use of reading assessments in instruction • Ensure that all teachers use identified common reading assessments and scoring rubrics, and interpret results of assessments to guide instruction • Develop a schedule and time line for test administration and reporting • Design and implement record-keeping systems to monitor student progress by substrand 	100% of teachers will analyze and interpret the results of the assessment, and formulate and implement an instructional plan	Each student will demonstrate improvement on achievement as measured by reading post assessments
<p>2C. Use data-driven decisions to target appropriate reading instruction and intervention for students with disabilities, minority students, LEP students, and students who are economically disadvantaged</p> <p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and implement district-wide scientifically research-based instructional practices • Develop a systematic approach to ongoing data analysis, interpretation and utilization over time • Outline and implement an intervention plan • Expand the use of technology as an efficient means to make data-driven decisions 	100% of teachers will use scientifically-based research instructional strategies and interventions to meet identified needs	100% of students in identified subgroups will demonstrate improved achievement in reading

UNIFIED FOCUS, DECENTRALIZED ROLES



3rd Quarter Rubric Grade 6

Language Arts Rubric - Third Quarter			
Reading Standard	1	2	3
Determine the meaning of unknown words by using context clues and concepts	Uses a variety of strategies (e.g. pictures, context clues, word origins, word analysis) to determine the meaning of unknown words less than 7 out of 10 times	Uses a variety of strategies (e.g. pictures, context clues, word origins, word analysis) to determine the meaning of unknown words 7-8 out of 10 times	Uses a variety of strategies (e.g., pictures, context clues, word origins, word analysis) to determine the meaning of unknown words 9 out of 10 times

“I think the biggest culture shift has been the changing role of the Central Office, from one that controlled the work to a decentralized approach that works with and supports the implementation of shared practices in every school,” said Tefs. A common practice for many districts involved central office analyzing data by department and presenting those data to school principals. Now, through the use of the OIP and embedded tools, such as the DF, teachers are engaged from the bottom up in analyzing data for instructional improvement. But that engagement would not have happened without intentional action on the part of the district.³

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices. The greatest benefit of the change in culture has been “the ability to form the BLTs and really empower teachers to make and then hold each other accountable for building priorities,” said Arbogast. Wooster’s DLT meets every other month, while each school’s BLT meets monthly and TBTs meet weekly. And, while district leadership is quick to point out that they’re still not there yet, they have taken concrete steps – through the establishment of aligned team structures – to define and implement shared instructional practices.



In fact, the Wooster Board of Education felt so strongly about the need to focus district work on instruction and achievement that it restructured the key functions of the superintendent within the Superintendent/CEO Job Description to emphasize such elements as:

- ▶ Placing a primary focus on improving instruction and enhancing student learning;
- ▶ Leading the creation of instructional systems designed for high student achievement;
- ▶ Expecting, modeling, and supporting the effective use of data;
- ▶ Setting expectations for effective data-based decision making at all levels of the system;
- ▶ Requiring the use of an established curriculum;
- ▶ Creating and executing a coherent plan with a limited, achievable number of goals and objectives; and
- ▶ Implementing and monitoring the district plan.

Other foundational changes that have contributed to the district’s capacity for shared work include the development of a *K-12 Literacy Framework*, which “addresses the reading needs of all students through quality instruction in the classroom” and embeds short- and long-term intervention strategies; and the development of a standards-based report card at the elementary and middle school levels. The new report card, developed to better communicate the progress each child was making toward meeting performance-based standards, was implemented in 39 classrooms across six elementary schools during the 2009-10 school year. All elementary-aged children will receive the report card during the 2011-12 school year.

The district literacy framework is a key part of the district’s plan to implement a district-wide approach to balanced literacy (Goal 2, Strategy 2A). Teachers use specific quarterly



³ See Mac Iver, M.A., & Farley, E. (2003). *Bringing the district back in: The role of the central office in improving instruction and student achievement*. Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University.

learning targets – aligned with academic content standards and the district framework (in the case of reading and writing) – that are measured with a rubric-based system to check for proficiency. In reading, the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment is administered three times a year through 6th grade, while the middle school uses the Star assessment, which provides grade- and lexile-level indicators on progress. In math, a mid-year and end-of-year assessment that is part of the Everyday Math program is used to assess student progress.

In all content areas, the development of common assessments to be used by groups of teachers is continuing as the district gets better at implementing high functioning TBTs. “Having the formative assessments and then the conversations that take place at grade level meetings about what’s being taught and how it’s being taught is priceless,” said Tefs.

Intervention as Part of Instruction. Another critical element of the district’s work to improve reading and writing across all student groups involves the integration of selected interventions as part of overall instruction. Intervention specialists (Ohio’s term for special education teachers) are regular members of all leadership teams – at the district, building, and teacher team level – and the district promotes the use of co-teaching models that allow struggling students to receive in-class support and additional instruction as needed. At Edgewood Middle School, an intervention specialist chairs the BLT.

In Wooster’s model, intervention is something that is provided to students above and beyond the core instructional program, not in lieu of it. Rather than view its response to intervention (RtI) work as a separate initiative, the DLT has used it as another leverage point to ensure that the individual needs of all children are being met as part of OIP implementation. “We’re not trying to build a silo; we are making sure that students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and other high-need children are getting what they need,” explained Elaine Karp, Director of Pupil Services. Prior to Karp’s arrival, WCSD had six different directors of pupil services in six years. “We had absolutely no continuity. Now we have consistency and the whole system is working so much more fluidly and coherently,” explained Tefs.



That continuity in effective data use at all levels and for all groups of children is key. “Our teacher teams look at subgroup data as part of the process, not only for IEP kids, but for other kids such as those who are economically disadvantaged. Our teachers have a good awareness of those data and are looking at how kids performed and what needs to be done instructionally to help each child achieve,” explained Leone. “I think all children benefit from the way the data are used,” he said.

Arbogast agrees, explaining that the TBT review of data across subgroups ensures that all children are part of the conversation. “We’re pulling those data apart to see who’s at, below, or above grade level, and continuously revamping instruction and that has

Universal Education: Ohio Study on Students with Disabilities Common Themes

Focus on Instructional Practice and Student Learning

*Access to general curriculum/grade-level content
Using research-based practices*

Leadership

*Starts at the district level and uses data to address issues
Principals and teachers are knowledgeable about data and take ownership for learning of their students*

Intentional Culture Shift

*From “old” SE model to shared responsibility (they’re all our kids)
Eliminating a culture of isolation – no one works in isolation*

Collaboration

Structures in place for adults to talk about data and inform instruction

Assessment & Curriculum

*Use of common formative assessment
Focus on aligned curriculum, use of power standards, pacing guides,
curriculum calendars and relationship to formative assessment*

Source: Silverman, S.K., Hazelwood, C., & Cronin, P. (2009). *Universal Education: Principles and Practices for Advancing Achievement of Students with Disabilities*



led to a much more center-based approach in math and a more leveled grouping approach in reading,” she said. “We used to think our role was to make sure regular ed teachers knew who was in their rooms so they could make the right modifications. Now, we know our role is to provide time for all teachers to work together to improve instruction for all students and, as a part of that process, to understand what interventions have been successful or unsuccessful and what needs to change instructionally to support student learning,” said Tefs.

which staff across the district talked about their role in educating all children, away from a focus on regular or special education to a focus on universal education for all children. This philosophical shift is evident in WCSD. “There is not one spot like an Office of Accountability or a Curriculum Department that is responsible for student success. Because of our leadership team structure, I could say today it’s the BLT, DLT and in another year all TBTs that are collectively accountable for the success of every student,” stated Tefs.

Two years ago, the Ohio Department of Education interviewed about 30 districts that showed good progress for the subgroup of children with disabilities to learn what factors most contributed to their success. In every case, the factors cited by districts included leadership for changing the way in

FACILITATION INTEGRAL TO IMPLEMENTATION

The WCSD team credits the improvements they’ve made, in part, to the structures and protocols (e.g., TBT Rubric, step 3) that have fostered shared expectations and helped to change conversations among teachers. And, they credit the external facilitators assigned from the State Support Team (SST) 9 – operated by the Stark County Educational Service Center (ESC) – as being essential in helping the district put these pieces in place. Beginning in 2008, regional technical assistance providers from across Ohio were



Ohio TBT 5-Step Implementation Rubric

STEPS	ADVANCED	PROFICIENT	BASIC
GOALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can explain their own individual goals, what they know and can do, and what strategies they are using to reach their goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classrooms have goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific • Measurable • Achievable • Relevant • Timely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established goals are academic or behavioral but may not be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, or timely Goals are made public to students
STEP 3: Establish shared expectations for implementing specific effective changes in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members establish shared expectations for implementing specific instructional changes in classroom and develop plans collaboratively Strategies are research-based and impact multiple content areas Strategies are prioritized for impact on student achievement Differentiating to meet individual student needs is evident Team members agree on instructional time for strategy implementation and post-assessment standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members discuss shared instructional changes but do not always agree on consistent implementation Discussed strategies are research based Strategies are prioritized for impact on student achievement Strategy instruction is observed Teachers usually model strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies are identified but are not identified as significantly impacting student achievement Teachers introduce strategies but do not model instructional strategies with consistency

Source: Ohio State Support Team 9



assigned to serve as external facilitators to partner districts, and to other districts in improvement status. The role of the facilitator was to work with/alongside the district, helping it to establish or refine leadership teams at the district, building, and teacher team levels; look at and use their data in more meaningful ways; identify a limited number of goals, strategies, and actions; put monitoring and evaluation systems in place for gauging the degree of implementation and its effects on student learning; and ultimately building the capacity of the district to make and sustain improvements in student learning.

Facilitators served the critical role of being part of but separate from the district team and, as such, were in a unique position to ask the tough questions, probe and redirect, and push back as needed. Their role in building district capacity involved the development of internal facilitators, usually central office personnel who could foster inquiry and learning across the district. “You can’t run this process without an external facilitator. The role they played allowed me as superintendent to engage in the process,” stated Tefs. “When the problem became the focus of our conversations, our facilitator could move us forward. She was integral to our capacity to improve,” he added.

WCSD initially received support from ESC consultant Dr. Sue Long who had previously worked as Akron City Schools’ deputy superintendent. According to Long, “even though teaching and learning is the business of school districts, I don’t think we’ve done a good job talking about how we get people from different levels and different perspectives talking about the work and having a few focused goals that we **implement deeply** and across the district to make a difference and leverage a change.”

When Long retired, WCSD received support from SST 9 consultant and former principal Peg Deibel, who also serves as one of the state’s four regional quadrant leads, providing support to other ESC, district, and school personnel in northeast Ohio. The district was also supported by SST consultant Laurie Langenfeld, who worked in tandem with Deibel on the integration of RtI strategies into the work of TBTs. Langenfeld then used the feedback she received from WCSD to develop an RtI Core Team Training Series for districts in the Stark County ESC region.

Monitor and Provide Feedback

and Support. After three years of OIP implementation, the district is well on its way to not only having high functioning teams at every level, but to using the work of the teams to increase the consistency in and quality of what gets taught at each level. Deibel and Superintendent Tefs are now spending much of their time helping to systematize the work of TBTs. At the same time, they’re ensuring that relevant instructional data generated by the teams are being used by the BLT and the DLT on an ongoing basis to evaluate whether district-wide strategies and actions are (1) being fully implemented as designed, and (2) having the desired effect on student learning.



A five-step rubric – the *Ohio TBT 5-Step Process Implementation Rubric* – is being used to support this work, which involves:

1. Collecting and charting data and results;
2. Analyzing student work specific to the data;
3. Establishing shared expectations for implementing specific effective changes in the classroom;
4. Implementing changes consistently across all classrooms; and
5. Collecting, charting, and analyzing post data, and evaluating impact on student learning.

In addition to evaluating the impact that strategies and actions are having on student learning, the effectiveness of the DLT and BLTs are evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that improvements are made on a continuing basis. All teams have responded to the *DLT Effectiveness Survey* and *BLT Effectiveness Survey* providing feedback about the degree to which they

“We’re getting better at focusing all of our conversations, including typical staff meetings, on reviewing the data and making decisions. We’ve found more efficient ways to take care of operational business so we can spend our time on instruction.”

**Karen Arbogast, Principal,
Wayne Elementary School**

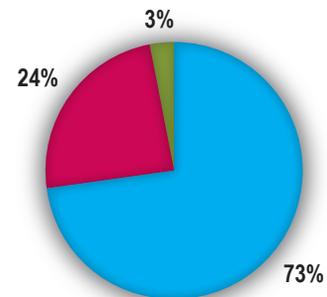
believe indicators of effective leadership teams are being met. “One of our biggest successes has involved taking six elementary schools and making them more alike than different in terms of the quality and consistency of instruction being provided to all kids,” said Tefs. “The survey data from our teams is phenomenal,” he added.

Intentional Resource Use and PD. “In real estate, they say location, location, location,” quipped Tefs. “In school

improvement, it’s called time, time, time!” “There’s not a better place to be than to watch our teams work, but I wish I could give them more time,” he said. But, time means money. WCSD, along with many other districts in the state, is experiencing an unparalleled budget shortfall. Ohio’s newly released

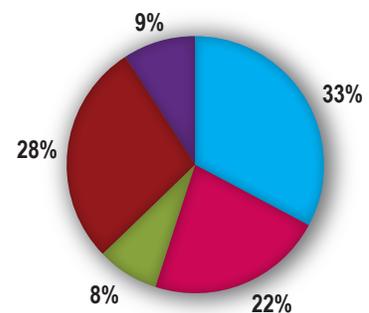
Item Name	SEL	%
1. Student understood learning objective and relevance of lesson	90	73%
2. Student somewhat understood learning objective and relevance of lesson	29	24%
3. Student could not state learning objective or relevance	4	3%
Total	123	100%

Learning Objectives are stated by the student



Item Name	SEL	%
1. Observed: Teacher Modeling	41	33%
2. Observed: Students working together	27	22%
3. Observed: Differentiated lessons for different groups	10	8%
4. Observed: Independent Practice	35	28%
5. Not Observed	11	9%
Total	124	100%

Gradual Release Model





state budget revealed that operating funds for Ohio school districts were cut by nearly \$780 million. “There are only 22 districts in the state of Ohio that are going to receive a larger reduction than Wooster due to the budget bill and that’s because of our incredibly high reliance on tangible personal property tax. We’re going to lose 19% of our budget over the next eight years,” lamented Tefs. “And that reality brings us back to the discussion on the importance of focusing our work.” In discussing professional development and related resource needs, Tefs explains “if it isn’t immensely focused on our goals, we’re just not going to do it.”

Tefs attributes the district’s ability to stay focused, in part, to the Board’s support for the work, and to the partnership with the teacher association. “The Board wants to know what the return on investment is, and our use of the OIP has made it easier for board members to codify expenditures with very focused work,” he said. At the same time the district reduced the number of central office personnel by 4.5 positions, it built time for grade-level meetings into its most recent collective bargaining agreement. “Because of the work we’ve done through the DLT, everyone saw the need for time for teachers to meet,” said Tefs.

Redirecting dollars to focus on the district’s goals is occurring at the building level too. For example, two positions were eliminated at the middle school level and dollars shifted to better support work to reach district goals. Leone

FOCUS ON IMPACT:

A Conversation with Dr. John Hattie, Professor, University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education

John Hattie, author of *Visible Learning*, a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to educational effectiveness, offers the following advice on what to pay attention to in improving learning for all students.

- There are several attributes that the system has to have/hold that revolve around “know thy impact.” To get the changes that lead to high effect size and change mindsets, we must help people to understand that they are fundamentally evaluators – seekers of feedback about their impact.
- It’s a myth that a teaching program or method is what makes the difference and focusing on this allows everyone to have a safe conversation, rather than look at how what we do impacts student learning.
- Feedback isn’t only something that’s given. It’s also something that’s received.
- Most teachers have their theories about why kids don’t learn. There are few things that differ across different groups of kids – this is an empirical question, not a belief statement.
- Schools are awash in data, but they don’t use it well. Data are valuable when they’re used as something that helps us know *what to do next*, NOT something that’s used to look at what we’ve already done.
- Focus is important, but the focus needs to be on impact.
- We need to change the conversation from talking about teaching to talking about learning.
- We won’t leave it up to individual teachers to decide what to do; it’s a system responsibility and we’ll judge the school, not teachers, by the quality of their evidence.
- Principals are key, particularly when they function as instructional leaders, not transformational leaders. In schools with large impact, principals can exert indirect influence; in schools with low impact, they need to use very direct influence.

J. Hattie (Personal Communication, June 28, 2011)

explains “by looking at our walk-through data of our adult indicators, we’ve come back, identified weak spots, and developed PD to address them.” Walk-throughs are conducted by Leone and two middle school teachers who are members of both the DLT and Edgewood’s BLT.

IT’S ABOUT COLLECTIVE LEARNING

“As we get better at the process of gathering and acting on walk-through data, we’d like to get the process in the hands of more of our BLT members in the future,” said Leone. The district has customized the use of a commercial walk-through product that allows team members to use electronic devices to gather data on district-developed rubrics.

Inquire and Learn. “We’re getting better at focusing all of our conversations, including typical staff meetings, on reviewing the data and making decisions,” said Arbogast. “We’ve found more efficient ways to take care of operational business so we can spend our time on instruction,” she added.

Arbogast moved to the principalship from the role of curriculum director for another district. “As a BLT, we’re using the data submitted from TBTs and prioritizing instructional strategies. We realized, for example, that a lot of kids weren’t making inferences, so teachers met vertically, beginning with grades four through six, and eventually all grades were on board. They came up with a whole school strategy to find specific pictures and place them in the hallway and incorporate inference activities in the classroom. As you walk down the hallway, the walls are covered with examples of making inferences and it’s really neat to see what first grades are doing with the picture, and then third grade, and then sixth grade. They’re just more willing to tackle things as vertical teams and now understand that this isn’t just a fourth grade problem,” described Arbogast.

