



Illinois State Board of Education

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Abstract

Target Audience

Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI) is a 23-year old nonprofit with proven results in accelerating adult and student learning. Our overall goal in the Transformation Process is to accelerate improved student and adult performance by leveraging systemic change focused on improving school culture, principal and teacher effectiveness, and family/community engagement, the primary drivers of student success. Using over forty years of systemic research from high performance schools and businesses, SLI works with low-performing schools to develop a dynamic system of data-driven decision-making, professional development, peer support, building of a strong, positive school culture and family/community involvement.

Over more than two decades, SLI has worked with more than 70 prekindergarten to grade12 schools in Chicago, Springfield, Decatur, East St. Louis, and DePue, IL Baton Rouge, LA, Tucson, AZ, and Los Angeles, CA. In these 70 schools SLI has served more than 70 principals/administrators, 1,400 teachers, and 28,000 students.

Evidence of Effectiveness

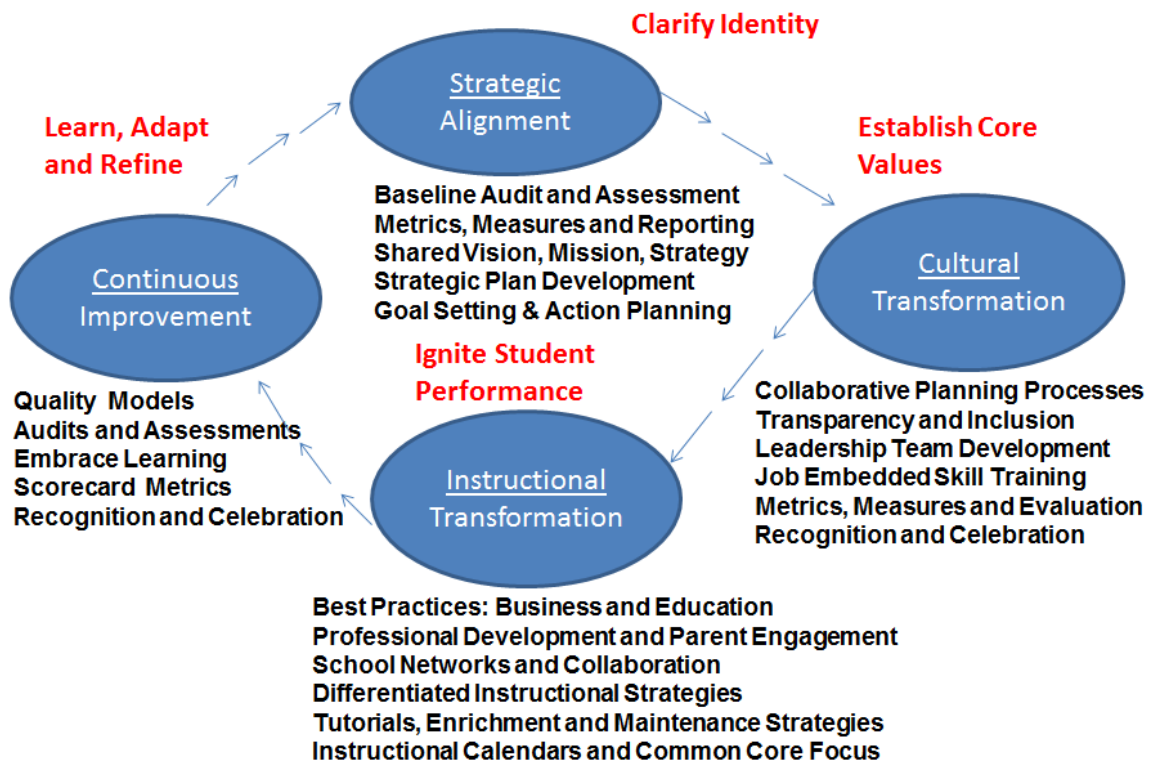
SLI, working with a network of eight failing Chicago k-8 schools, the CPS district leadership, and the school leadership teams, partnered to deliver dramatic results using the Focused Instruction Process (FIP). Those results over a two-and four-year period clearly demonstrated that students at the eight schools increased their ISAT scores in reading over two years by 6.5% beyond their baseline rate of improvement per year 1.1% for the average school.

At the end of the fourth year, the ISAT average reading score for the eight schools was increasing reading performance 5 times faster than the average of schools citywide. The eight schools average reading gain was 3.4% compared to the citywide average of .07%.

The American Institutes of Research issued validation reports on this project and made the following statement, “The results that SLI has achieved and that AIR has validated, are very impressive and suggest that well before decisions are made to reconstitute schools under mandates of NCLB, school districts would be wise to consider far less drastic, but clearly powerful, interventions”.

Strategic Learning Initiatives is a SIG supporting partner, facilitating the FIP instructional model, at Lanphier High School in Springfield, Illinois. Lanphier ACT College Readiness Benchmarks for Grade 11 (Spring, 2011) improved dramatically, after one year of instructional intervention, from on an average of 33.3% meeting benchmarks to 41.7% meeting benchmarks, an 8.4% increase. Lanphier had the highest gain in the ACT composite measure of any of the sixteen federally supported School Improvement Grant Schools.

Systemic School Transformation



Pre-intervention / Needs Assessment

SLI facilitators will conduct a comprehensive school audit, at the beginning of the process, which focuses on the need(s) of the school. The audit will include:

- Overall structure of the school/school district
- Curricula
- School climate
- Quality of instruction
- School finances
- Human capital
- Governance of the school/district
- Student achievement
- Family/community participation in the school
- Language needs of the students
- Special education programming
- Attendance
- Mobility

The audit will include interviews with the principal, the school leadership team, and where appropriate district personnel, as well as a human capital management survey, teacher, parent/community and student focus groups, and classroom observations.

The results of the comprehensive audit will determine the interventions needed for school improvement. An action plan will be developed and implemented that targets the priority school improvement needs.

General Description of Supports Provided

Instructional reform, including assessment, curriculum and instruction

The SLI Focused Instruction Process does not require the use of a specific curriculum or specific materials. All lessons including tutorial support and enrichment will be collaboratively designed by school staff, with the support of SLI staff and partners, using resources available at the school site and guided by the Common Core and College Readiness Standards. Through collaborative review and planning, teachers will enhance the materials available to meet the needs of all students. Through SLI's experience, we know that low-performing schools frequently lack the curricular supports needed to be successful. Based on the school suit/needs assessment SLI will assist in locating and securing the additional supports needed.

As a formative assessment process that emphasizes teacher/school use of data and collaborative reflection, FIP does require well-developed formative assessments tools in alignment with the standards. Rather than mandating specific formative assessment tools, those resources already in place in the school will be reviewed. In the event that staff is in need of more structured formative assessment supports SLI has experience in several assessment systems and will advise the school in a selection process.

Focused Instruction Process Model for Closing the Achievement Gap



Instructional and Leadership Coaching

Sustained and intensive professional development, coaching and modeling for school leaders and teachers plays an instrumental role in the SLI school reform process. SLI's comprehensive approach to instructional and leadership coaching substitutes one-time workshops for deeper, job embedded and sustained learning opportunities for all school staff. These learning opportunities may include seminars/workshops supported by follow-up coaching, demonstrations, and reflection sessions facilitated by SLI staff.

Program Management / Progress Monitoring and Data Driven Decision Making

The Focused Instruction (8-step process) is centered on data-driven decision-making and progress monitoring. The School Leadership Team and their constituents review student formative and summative assessment data, set up an instructional timeline to target identified skill deficits, teach the instructional focus, administer formative assessments to monitor student mastery of the identified skill(s), re-teach or enrich skills taught based on the formative assessment, and schedule periodic refreshers of the previous skills taught. The school administrators and school leadership team monitor the process through classroom snapshot visits and quarterly process checks.

Community and Family Engagement

SLI's Family Engagement Program focuses on maintaining high academic expectations for students, building school, family, and community partnerships, and strengthening the connection between families through interactive workshops and coaching. SLI will focus on teaching and coaching families and community members on how they can become more involved in and supportive of student learning.

Partnerships with community agencies will enable the school to provide student/family referrals for socio-emotional supports and other wrap-around services. Such services will address the needs that have been identified and prioritized by the school's leadership team(s).

School Climate and Culture

A whole school approach to the building of a positive school culture is a key facet of the SLI School Transformation Process. School climate and culture have a profound impact on student achievement, behavior, and reflects the school's culture. The initial school audit will identify areas of school culture and climate that need improvement. Do students, staff and families feel safe and supported? Are students engaged and challenged? Are students socially capable?

Areas of deficit will be identified, an action plan developed with input from all stakeholders, and implemented based on the identified plan. Continued monitoring and re-evaluation of the plan will allow for adjustments to be made in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Strategies for Post-grant Sustainability

Sustaining the project after SIG funding ends will be successfully undertaken because funds received from ISBE to launch programming will be conceived of as seed monies. Staff hired with SIG funds will no longer be needed, as new organizational structures will have been established to continue the process, e.g. teacher-leadership teams as well as school-wide planning, instructional leadership, grade-level, cross-grade level, lead teacher and department teams. After funding ends, school staff, along with project leaders and partners will continue their participation as part of their regular professional assignments. In addition, a wide range of systems will have been built at each participating school to ensure that the schools have the capacity to continue the school reform activities developed under the School Improvement Grant funding.

Other Organizational Hallmarks

The research-based transformation strategy that SLI has developed for turning around low-performing schools includes:

- 1) an inclusive governance and management process,
- 2) an integrated approach to curricula and instructional design addressing diverse student needs at all educational levels
- 3) a comprehensive process for evaluating, hiring, and retaining staff
- 4) sustained and intensive professional development for all school staff that includes onsite training, modeling and coaching
- 5) scheduling to maximize student learning time
- 6) on-going assessments to inform teaching and learning
- 7) in-depth involvement and engagement of families and community agencies.

Additional Resources

Visit our website @ www.strategiclearning.org or call (312) 738-0022