

Southern Regional Education Board – High Schools That Work:

SREB’s Tools to Support Illinois High School Transformation

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Planning and Pre-Implementation

The plan of support uses research from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), National Research Center for Career Technical Education, and Father Flanagan’s Boys Town to build a school’s capacity to improve itself. SREB’s plan is based on the belief that when students put forth greater effort, they are more likely to graduate high school, college- and career-ready. Further, it is the adults within a building whose practices determine the amount of effort the students will make. Thus, the Planning and Pre-implementation is built on having teachers and leaders take ownership of both the problems and solutions by developing plans to implement school and classroom practices that cause students to put forth greater effort.

Two key aspects of school improvement are to create a culture of learning and to move beyond just the “tested areas.” SREB has partnered with Boys Town to support the development of a culture of learning and much of this support becomes part of the planning year. The HSTW framework gives teachers and leaders strategies to improve both academic classrooms and career technical programs of study. SREB believes that all students, especially those in struggling schools, need to see a purpose in high school. Quality career programs not only develop purpose-driven students, but have a value-added for academic programs.

The HSTW Priorities for Improvement provide a framework for schools to develop their transformation plan. SREB places an emphasis on supporting schools to address these priorities and they are the focus of the planning year support. Beginning with a thorough assessment of school and classroom practices, an in-depth workshop to organize the faculty for improvement and ongoing job-embedded leadership coaching to plan career pathways, the planning and pre-implementation year make the priorities the foundation for transformation. The HSTW Priorities are:

1. Provide challenging career pathways that prepare students for multiple options after high school—both postsecondary study and work.
2. Support academic and career technical teachers to design quality assignments that engage students in learning required knowledge and skills.
3. Train all teachers to support students’ overall literacy development, especially in grades nine and ten.
4. Use a balanced approach to instruction in mathematics.
5. Implement a counseling for careers program.
6. Implement a range of extra help strategies and initiatives.
7. Implement senior transition courses in literacy and mathematics.
8. Implement organizational structures that allow for teachers to collaborate across disciplines.
9. Provide every school with leadership for continuous improvement and that supports on-going teacher development.

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Governance

The HSTW design is based upon a distributed leadership model that engages teachers and leaders in taking ownership of both the problems and solutions at the school. Through a set of school improvement focus teams, all faculty members become a part of a team who, with support from school leadership and SREB, develops a plan for improvement in specific focus areas. This structure allows teachers to move from being victims of change to architects of change. Focus teams are formed based upon school priorities for improvement and have expectations to present their plans to other faculty members and a school leadership team. This distributed leadership model aligns with school-based governance models in place in the state.

For large high schools, HSTW assists the school to redesign into career academies. Each academy is led by a “leadership triad” that includes an Assistant Principal, Lead Teacher and Guidance Counselor. This triad works to create a semi-autonomous academy that falls within the larger school framework. SREB provides ongoing support to develop skills for each role in the triad.

Schools are assigned a leadership coach based on its unique characteristics, principal and leadership team. The leadership coach assists school leaders in developing the distributed leadership structure and works with leaders to develop their skills with this model.

District support is essential for the success and sustainability of whole school improvement efforts. Thus, SREB expects a high level of collaboration with the Local Education Agency and can provide leadership professional development around district best practices for supporting schools. . Each LEA is expected to identify a liaison for SREB to work closely with throughout the SIG timeline. The SREB Leadership Coach works closely with the district’s key point of contact for the school to ensure collaboration of efforts.

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Teacher/Principal Evaluation with Student Growth Component

The SREB framework for support is designed to provide research-based tools and strategies for continuous improvement based on the expertise and data from best practices in the HSTW network. Because SREB works in so many districts and states, we work with districts and states to implement the local or state model for teacher and principal evaluation. SREB Leadership Coaches work with schools to support the use of multiple models. The focus of the SREB work is improving instruction and student achievement.

If a school's evaluation model is not already developed, SREB is prepared to work with the LEA to develop valid and reliable principal and teacher evaluation systems in compliance with Illinois' Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 (Public Act 096-0861). The systems would incorporate multiple measures of data, including student growth. The teacher evaluation system includes measures of student learning, based on a variety of types of summative assessments, aligned to standards, and a growth model based on student progress. SREB works collaboratively with the LEA to incorporate into the evaluation system measures of teachers' instructional practices, professional responsibilities and contributions to building a positive culture of high expectations. Multiple measures of data to determine the extent to which students have mastered standards and made progress include standardized achievement measures, including state assessments and ACT and school-based data, such as SREB-facilitated ongoing reviews of student work using rubrics.

SREB has been involved in the development and advancement of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's efforts to Measure Effective Teaching (MET) and is viewed as a national leader through our Educator Effectiveness Program. SREB supports this multi-pronged approach to teacher evaluation that includes observations, student performance and student perceptions. Hence, we believe any teacher evaluation system should include multiple measures of student learning, based on a variety of summative assessments, aligned to standards, and including other aspects such as perceptions and observations. SREB works collaboratively with the LEA to incorporate into the evaluation system measures of teachers' instructional practices, professional responsibilities and contributions to building a positive culture of high expectations. Multiple measures of data to determine the extent to which students have mastered standards and made progress include standardized achievement measures, including state assessments and ACT and school-based data, such as SREB-facilitated ongoing reviews of student work using rubrics.

SREB also facilitates the district's development of a principal evaluation system which has as its foundation the Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders and their related Indicators and rubrics. SREB works with the LEA to implement the Illinois Principal Performance Review, based on the particular district and school needs and following statutory requirements. SREB consultants, working collaboratively with the principal, develop a systematic, ongoing and job-embedded professional development plan, to build the principal's capacity to achieve school improvement goals and the principal/s specific evaluation plan goals.

Recruitment, Hiring and Retention Incentives and Strategies

SREB's Improvement Plan is focused on development of staff, not removal and replacement. Although a key aspect of the leadership support is the effective evaluation of staff and the use of strategies to improve teaching, SREB has found that too great an emphasis on removal creates a culture of fear, not improvement. SREB works with school and district leaders to create protocols and processes to develop teacher skills through collaboration, effective use of professional development, effective follow-up and job-embedded coaching.

A focus of the SREB school improvement plan is the development of teacher leaders. The distributive leadership model of focus teams gives staff members a sense of efficacy and involvement in the mission of the school. When faculty takes ownership of the school's challenges and initiatives, the school culture improves, and recruitment and retention improves, as well. This along with the development of effective teacher orientation plans and support and a schedule that provides teachers time to collaborate effectively are keys to retention. SREB works with leaders in a unique way to develop guidelines for working with new teachers in ways to that helps keep them in teaching.

As schools take ownership of the improvement effort, The SREB Leadership Coach works closely with school and district leadership to develop systems for recruitment and hiring of new teachers including using the vast HSTW network to recruit teachers. SREB's other initiatives including the Electronic Campus, Educator Effectiveness, and Leadership Program provide resources for connecting schools and districts with colleges throughout the southern region of the country as an avenue for recruitment.

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Rewards Associated with Achievement or Graduation Rate

SREB develops a Memorandum of Agreement with each partner school outlining the outcomes to be expected by the end of the SIG support based on the schools' standing at the beginning of the partnership. This aspect is also about teachers and leaders taking ownership. The table below displays the minimum outcomes and measurable indicator of progress for each.

Indicator	Measure of Progress
Student participation rate on PSAE in reading/language arts and mathematics by subgroup	School participation rate for each subgroup will equal or exceed the average for the subgroup in the state
Dropout rate	The dropout rate for the school will equal or better the average dropout rate for the state or region (whichever is lower)
Student Attendance Rate	The student attendance rate for the school will equal or better the average attendance rate for the state, region or district (for multiple high schools) high schools (whichever is higher)
Number and percentage of students completing advanced coursework	The number and percentage of students completing advanced coursework will increase by 100 percent
Distribution of teachers by performance level on the LEA's teacher evaluation system	Teachers' performance on the LEA teacher evaluation system will improve by 25 percent in the two highest levels on the system's evaluation system
Teacher Attendance Rate	Teacher attendance rate will improve by 5 percent
School Climate and Culture	Teacher, student and parent perception surveys will show a 25 percent improvement in positive perceptions of school and classroom practices
Teacher and principal effectiveness	Student achievement on PSAE will increase to exceed the state or region (whichever is higher) average for each content area.

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Extended Time

Schools in need of improvement often benefit from a flexible daily and yearly schedule that ensures extended learning times for students. SREB has consultants who are experts on multiple formats of scheduling who can assist a school in determining the schedule that best supports attainment of the mission. Transformation schools will need a schedule that accommodates students who need extra support to meet or approach college- and career-readiness standards. SREB works with leadership to develop specific plans that not only provide extended time, but also ensure that those needing extended support participate. SREB uses its vast network of schools to provide best practices for extended time and SREB leadership coaches are trained to lead schools in analyzing their master schedule to find time to address priorities.

Extended time may serve the purpose of providing extra help for struggling students, credit recovery, academic enrichment, or in-school meeting times for staff professional development. It may also take the form of creating common plan periods for teams of teachers who meet to individualize instruction for students.

Another way of extending time is to extend semesters to provide makeup, catch-up, or transition opportunities to improve student achievement in the summer. SREB works with schools to develop and implement summer bridge programs and develop a standards-based learning format for students not meeting expectations.

SREB has shifted the focus in the last year from not just finding extended time, but to a focus on quality use of extended time. This includes the development of Senior Readiness Courses in literacy and math as well as the new High School Readiness Courses in literacy and math. These courses embed two of the key instructional changes – Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative – to get students to accelerate their learning.

The SREB School Improvement Consultant assists in designing the most beneficial extended time opportunities to meet the school's specific needs.

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Comprehensive Instructional Reform

SREB's design for comprehensive instructional reform focuses on the following:

Create career-focused pathways (or academies) that join rigorous academics with intellectually demanding career/technical studies linked to postsecondary opportunities. There are several ways to configure career-focused pathway programs of study. These can be set up as career-focused theme-based pathways or career academies. Create opportunities that allow students to use their core academic knowledge and skills in completing authentic projects. The career-focused courses will be organized around authentic projects — the kind of work that students would do in the real world. These courses would engage students both intellectually and emotionally in learning. Expand opportunities for students to participate in true work-based learning experiences as a part of the program of study.

Raise the quality of what is taught (Rigorous College and Career Readiness Standards) and how students are taught through ongoing, job-embedded professional development. Teachers need to use what they are learning immediately in their classroom instruction. Teams of teachers should observe each other's classes and discuss the effects of professional development and planning activities on instructional practices and student learning. The intent is to focus professional development around what teachers will be teaching, to help them better plan their instruction and to use proven instructional strategies for getting students to master the content. Three phases of professional development would span all three years.

- **Use the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC)** to assist English, social studies, science, related arts and career/technical teachers to embed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in classrooms by preparing reading and writing tasks and units of study that give students the skills needed to meet raised expectations (see Attachment B for templates of the tasks). Teachers embed reading and writing mini-task assignments in the ladder of learning activities to help students produce a paper that demonstrates mastery of the materials.
- **Use the Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) to embed the CCSS and improve math instruction.** In most low-performing schools, students are given a steady diet of drill sheets and procedural mathematics. MDC helps teachers increase the percentage of instructional time spent on developing students' understanding of why they do certain procedures and developing their reasoning and problem-solving skills to use mathematics tools to solve a range of problems.
- **Prepare all CTE teachers to use project- and problem-based learning to engage students.** Begin work with career/technical teachers to design their courses around authentic projects. Students would take a career-focused course each year in high school, built around projects that will function as a lab where they will use what they are learning in their academic classes to do authentic work. Part of the training will involve the core academic teachers so they can see how they can relate their instruction to what students will be doing in career-focused classes around these projects.
- **Use protocols for teachers to analyze the quality and rigor of assignments and assessments.** Assignments Matter is an integral part of the SREB instructional design. Through common planning, teachers use protocols to improve the quality of all assignments and assessments in classrooms.

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Use of Data to Drive Instruction

SREB offers several avenues of support to assist schools in using data to improve instruction. The first of these is through leadership development using SREB's nationally recognized leadership modules. The leadership module, *Using Root Cause Analysis to Foster a Culture of Change* shows principals and school leaders how to engage individuals and teams to ask tough questions about which current school practices are limiting student learning and to mine a variety of data sources to articulate clearly the scope, cause and potential resolution of the problem. Using predictive student-level data is one of the innovative components for improving student learning. This requires the creation of a culture open to change and innovation. High-performing school leadership expands this culture of higher expectations for all students to build a shared belief among school and community stakeholders. The shared beliefs about effort, relevance and relationship stimulate students' desire for achievement, efficacy and effort. Participants in this 40-hour course learn to work as a team to uncover underlying causes of underperformance and build a high-performance learning culture to tackle needed change at the building level. The course is provided to school and focus team leaders and district support staff in year one of the partnership.

The module SREB uses is our *Rigor in the Curriculum* module — which introduces principals and school leaders to alignment tools to determine whether levels of rigor and core habits of mind in their schools are at the level that produces high achievement from all groups of students. They use these tools to evaluate the alignment of teaching, assessment and expected student learning to determine whether intellectually demanding works exists in lessons and assignments and whether rigor exists systemically in all of the school's courses.

In addition to the modules outlined above, SREB offers data-driven training for administrators and school leadership teams to develop their leadership skills to take an active role in:

- Aligning all curriculum and instructional strategies with teachers.
- Using an instructional rubric to determine the level of assignments, assessments and student work.
- Monitoring and assessing the implemented curriculum, instructional effectiveness and student engagement with walkthrough training followed by side-by-side mentoring by an SREB coach.

SREB also works with teachers to use protocols in common planning time to analyze classroom data, student work and teacher assignments as a way to modify instruction.

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Program Monitoring

An essential component of the SREB support is program monitoring. This monitoring begins at the district level by ensuring the district is a partner in the process. Just as it is difficult for teachers to succeed in the absence of effective school principals, it is unlikely that principals and assistant principals will succeed if their district leadership lacks a vision of effective school and classroom practices and an understanding of the district's role in supporting principals. Using lessons learned from our Florida Turnaround Leaders Program, SREB offers high-quality training and follow-up coaching for members of district leadership teams to support school leaders in leading and turning around persistently low-achieving schools. Each team engages a larger strategic planning team comprised of district, school and community representatives. With the assistance of an SREB consultant, this team creates a strategic plan with specific frameworks of best practices, policies and strategies that enable school principals and assistant principals to take ownership of problems and implement proven solutions.

A vital piece of data that is critical for transformation/turnaround is the consistent collection of data on school and classroom practices. By monitoring these changes, schools better judge the impact of professional development and all other aspects of transformation. SREB leadership coaches work with school leaders to develop protocols and procedures to collect and analyze school and classroom practices data. This includes consistent use of walkthrough observations, student and teacher surveys, focus group discussions and other tools to ensure practices are changing.

SREB provides a Project Lead who will hold monthly conference calls with school and district leadership to monitor progress, make adjustments as needed and recognize successes. In addition, the project lead will conduct quarterly on-site visits to meet with teachers, leaders and students to gauge progress.

SREB also conducts a follow-up school and classroom practices needs assessment in the final year of the grant focused on determining the progress made in changing adult practices.

SREB also works with school leaders and teachers to analyze changes in student achievement and make adjustments in plans as needed.

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Family and Community Engagement

Continuous school improvement is a social process drawing from the perspectives of and interactions between people inside the school and outside the school. A substantial number of practices driving continuous improvement come from sources outside the school. Such outside-in perspectives come from school reform providers and professional development trainers, parents, and community and policy-making groups. Parents, business and industry representatives, community members and postsecondary educators can help schools better understand whether graduates are leaving high school adequately prepared for postsecondary study and careers and what is needed to improve graduates' readiness for their next step.

Improvement efforts are most effective in a culture in which such endeavors are planned, intentionally supported, thoughtfully nurtured and carefully measured. By studying perspectives from parents and the community, schools and districts can draw upon the capabilities and engagement of all major stakeholders in developing a robust, collaborative methodology to lead continuous improvement, bringing constancy of purpose and the development of a school culture embedded with permanent improvement practices.

An integral part of the HSTW framework is to engage parents in planning and monitoring their children's educational progress through annual advisement meetings. SREB believes the key role for parents is to participate actively in planning for postsecondary success. HSTW coaches assist schools to develop a Career Guidance and Advisement Program that matches students with the same adviser throughout high school. The adviser meets regularly with students and annually with parents to plan the program of study and to report progress toward graduation. The Advisement Program also establishes connections to community-based organizations to support students and families, allowing for quicker notification of community support agencies when needed.

Another SREB focus involves the broader community through the involvement of business and community members on Career Advisory committees for all Career Technology Education Programs. These committees use the expertise of the business community to plan for improvements in programs. With the focus on improving the quality of Career Technical Programs, community involvement is essential through participation of Business and Industry representatives, who help to redesign career technical programs by participating in workshops and providing educators with expectations for graduates, real world scenarios and industry roles for project-based learning.

SREB also engages community members in the needs assessment process and encourages schools to include community members on focus teams. Postsecondary partners also create new articulation agreements and expanded opportunities for collaboration between the school and area postsecondary institutions.

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Sustainability

Sustainability is an absolute strength of SREB and the High Schools That Work framework. HSTW is the only improvement design with a state network within Illinois. Schools that complete their grant support from SREB automatically become a member of the Illinois State High Schools That Work network. Through this network, they can receive continued support from the state, participate in state workshops and continue to be active in the national network of schools. Schools may also continue to receive direct support from SREB (almost all SIG schools do) at a reduced level based upon the needs of the school and funding opportunities.

In addition, SREB attempts to tailor support in a way that builds sustainability. SREB carefully frames services over the three years to build leadership capacity of school and district leaders and teachers. Leadership development over the three-year period will focus on the essential skills leaders need to lead schools to improve continuously. All training includes projects that current and aspiring leaders must complete that use the skills and processes included in the courses. Debrief and follow-up support participants in applying the training to fit various situations.

Teacher buy-in and commitment to the school and to continuous improvement are developed through participation in active Focus Groups, SREB's approach to distributed leadership. The HSTW School Improvement Specialist gradually moves from leading and directing initial Focus Group meetings to facilitating ongoing school improvement planning and implementation by these groups. Teachers are encouraged to take leadership roles in various school-wide improvement initiatives.

By the end of the grant period, the school and district has enough expertise to continue using the design for improving teaching and learning through on-going participation in the Illinois State Network, HSTW Annual Staff Development Conference, National Workshops, Biennial HSTW Surveys, Annual Site Report, and other services provided in the Illinois State Network. Leadership coaching support shifts from an on-site focus in the first two implementation years (up to 150 days) to increased virtual support (as few as 60 days on-site) in the third year, depending on the school's progress.

Professional development is planned in such a way as to develop Lead Teacher Facilitators as the experts on campus for new teacher training and to continue support of other teachers. Lead Teacher Facilitators may continue to hone their skills after the grant ends by participating in HSTW National and State workshops.

The overall HSTW framework of School Focus Teams to address the problems of the school is a format for improvement that over 1000 schools across the country use without receiving direct support from SREB. At the end of grant funding it is an objective of SREB for the school to have these focus teams ingrained into the school culture and continue their use long after grant funding ends.

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Lead Partner

The High Schools That Work school improvement framework is the nation's largest and oldest school improvement design for high schools. Since 1987, SREB has served more than 2,700 schools across the nation and currently serves over 1,400 secondary schools in 41 states, including Illinois. Of these schools, 392 are high-minority schools (50 percent or more minority students). SREB's Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference has had over 100,000 attendees in the past 23 years and SREB has conducted the Getting Students Ready for High School Institutes over 20 times nationally, as statewide institutes and within districts during the past four years. In 2002 SREB created its Learning-Centered Leadership Program (LCLP) in order to improve the quality of school leadership training and support so that the leadership necessary to improve schools can be found. The LCLP developed 19 leadership training modules that have now been used to train thousands of educators. SREB's staff members are highly qualified and experienced practitioners of school reform initiatives throughout the nation. A cadre of school leadership consultants for SREB coordinates major activities throughout the duration of the project, and its leadership provides guidance and oversight for the management process.

SREB has developed unique capacity and expertise in a variety of strategies to assist schools to take redesign implementation to the next level. This expertise has been developed over time by support from numerous foundations and by direct contract work in many high schools and districts. The Illinois schools that identify HSTW as their lead partner has the following SREB staff (at a minimum):

- 1) **HSTW School Leadership Coach:** Each partner school is assigned a coach with successful experience in leading a high school and in turning around low performing schools; most of the specialists come from leading a HSTW school or are identified and selected based on a rigorous interview and vetting process. The HSTW School Improvement Specialist provides daily support to the school and frequent communication and contact with the district.
- 2) **HSTW Project Director:** This HSTW Director monitors the progress of the site, holds weekly conversations with the HSTW School Leadership Coach to discuss progress and challenges, and conducts monthly onsite visits to the school and district to debrief successes and challenges and plan further actions.
- 3) **HSTW Content Specialists:** Specialists in content curriculum and instruction work with teachers through professional development and job-embedded content coaching to strengthen curriculum and instruction. All specialists are highly regarded trainers with advanced degrees, successful classroom instructors and have field experience working with faculty from challenged schools.
- 4) **SREB Support Staff:** Clerical and management support staff support the HSTW School Leadership Coach, HSTW Project Director and Content Specialists to provide materials and other functions to support the school's efforts to implement the design.