

MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

Regional/Intermediate Unit Providers

The Critical Role of Regional Providers in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Learning and Achievement for Students with Disabilities



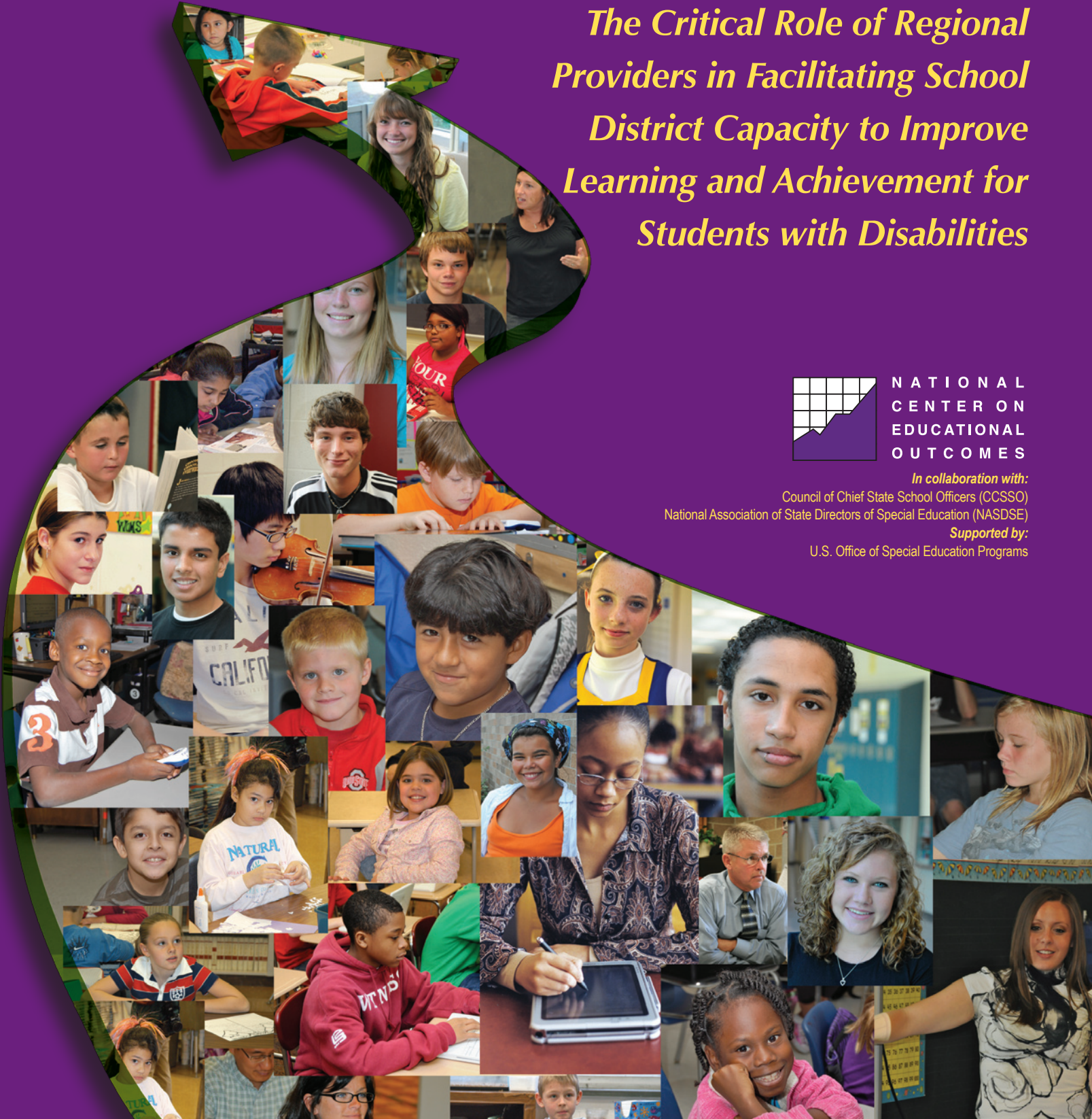
NATIONAL
CENTER ON
EDUCATIONAL
OUTCOMES

In collaboration with:

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

Supported by:

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ABOUT *MOVING YOUR NUMBERS*

Moving Your Numbers: Improving Learning for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Reform, examines how school districts with vastly different demographics increase the performance of students with disabilities and other at-risk learners as part of whole-district reform efforts. Case studies of featured districts, as described in the full report, provide evidence that students with disabilities, like all other students, can learn at higher levels when adults focus their collective efforts on improving instructional practice, consistently implement core work across the district, and use assessment and accountability as a lever for ongoing system and student learning and improvement.

Moving Your Numbers identifies six essential practices that must be in place to improve the performance of students with disabilities. Evidence suggests that these six practices, when used in an aligned and coherent manner, are associated with higher student achievement. These practices are *use data well*, *focus your goals*, *select and implement shared instructional practices (individually and collectively)*, *implement deeply*, *monitor and provide feedback and support*, and *inquire and learn*.

Moving Your Numbers was initiated and is supported through the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) under the leadership of Dr. Martha Thurlow, NCEO Director; Rachel Quenemoen, NCEO Senior Research Fellow; and Dr. Laurene Christensen, NCEO Research Associate. Dr. Deborah Telfer, Director, School of Education and Allied Professions Grant Center, University of Dayton, coordinates the development and review of *Moving Your Numbers* on behalf of NCEO. NCEO was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs).

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Additional case studies of featured districts will be added to the *Moving Your Numbers* website as they are developed. Go to www.MovingYourNumbers.org for the complete report and additional tools and resources, and to submit success stories.

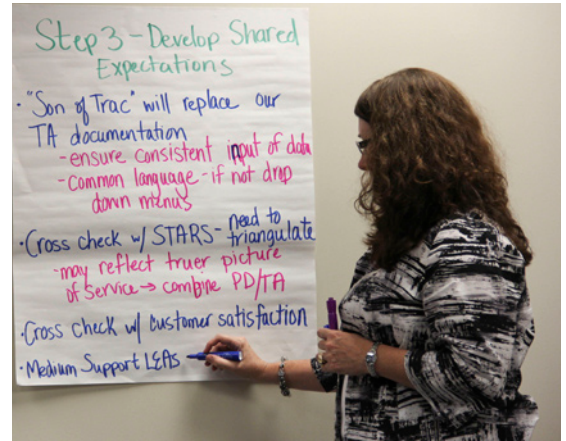
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REGIONAL/INTERMEDIATE UNIT PROVIDERS

The Critical Role of Regional Providers in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Learning and Achievement for Students with Disabilities

“Our focus is on service delivery, not program development, and we’ve shifted from using a ‘menu approach’ to using data much more strategically to meet the real needs of districts in our region,” said Michele DiMuzio, director of Ohio’s State Support Team Region (SSTR) 5. SSTR 5 is one of 16 state support teams that form the foundation of Ohio’s statewide system of support (SSoS), and serves districts in the northeastern most part of the state.

The 2001 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act created a federal mandate for state education agencies (SEA) to develop statewide systems of support to build the capacity of districts and schools to improve achievement and outcomes for all children. According to the United States Department of Education (USDoE)-funded Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII), a statewide system of support (SSoS) is a system that supports the improvement of districts and schools that are themselves systems (*Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*, 2007, p. 293). Whether referred to as intermediate units, district/school support teams, differentiated accountability regional teams, or state support teams, entities like Ohio’s SSTR 5 serve as a bridge between their SEA, and districts and schools, in the state. They also serve as a key mechanism for developing the state’s capacity to support district and school improvement in different and more focused and meaningful ways, and to ensure that the instructional needs of all children are addressed through district-wide reform efforts.



BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF THE SYSTEM

Michael Fullan (2007) asserts that “the main reason that change fails to occur in the first place on any scale, and does not get sustained when it does, is that the infrastructure is weak, unhelpful, or working at cross purposes” (*The New Meaning of Educational Change*, p. 18). The challenges associated with developing an SSoS that is truly systemic in nature and statewide in scope are numerous and involve negotiating and balancing expectations to monitor and provide support, building organizational cohesiveness (i.e., within and across SEA offices/departments) around district and school improvement, and addressing external conditions (e.g., budget shortfalls, changes in policy direction) hindering district and school improvement (Lane, B., 2007, pg 12-

13). However, the need to radically change the way in which SEAs work, and by extension, those regional providers working as part of the state’s support system, has never been greater. Paul Reville argues that the transformed SEA should focus on the systemic improvement of instruction and, by extension, the state’s role in improving instruction (2007). Reville asks, ‘how can states assist districts to help schools to help teachers improve instruction? How can teachers, through enhanced practice, help students to learn more?’ (2007, p. 17).

State Support Team Region 5
Serving Ashtabula, Trumbull, Mahoning, and Columbiana Counties



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Vision
SST Region 5 will support educators and families to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps.

Mission
SST Region 5 will collaboratively provide timely and relevant professional development, technical assistance and consultation to support school leaders, families and communities to ensure each and every student is successful academically and socially.

Slogan
Build capacity of leadership to support “All means all.”



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

The core messages listed below represent the “non-negotiables” associated with the work of the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) and the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP). Based on research about the effective practices that must be in place for districts to make and sustain improvement in instructional practice and student performance, these tenets are reflected in the work of OLAC and are used to guide continuing development of products and services associated with OLAC and OIP.

- 1. Leadership is a shared responsibility** and needs to be viewed, not as a role, but as a set of essential practices directed toward the improvement of instruction with the ultimate aim of increasing students’ learning.
- 2. Leadership is a process distributed across an entire school system**—its central office and all of its buildings—involving shared responsibility for and concerted action on behalf of improved instructional practice and school performance.
- 3. Accountability for school improvement requires leadership structures** (that is, district leadership teams, building leadership teams, and teacher-based teams) through which personnel take responsibility and hold one another accountable for organizing, implementing, monitoring, and learning from improvement processes.
- 4. A collective focus on full and sustained implementation**—and monitoring of the degree of implementation—of a few potent yet flexible strategies provides the conditions necessary for school improvement.
- 5. The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)**—a structured process based on the use of a connected set of tools for reviewing, analyzing, and basing decisions on relevant data—provides a vehicle for initiating *Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework* in ways that are responsive to stakeholders’ insights about local commitments, needs, and assets.
- 6. All learning, including teachers’ learning of instructional practices, depends on changes in behavior** that respond to precise and relevant feedback. Procedures (e.g., routine classroom monitoring) that provide teachers with feedback and support constitute the most powerful way to enable teachers to improve their instructional performance. For professional learning to occur teachers must be deeply engaged in understanding and responding to such feedback and support—not simply trying to comply with external requirements.



Focus on instruction. Two interrelated statewide initiatives – the *Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC)* and the *Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)* – have been used by Ohio to develop an SSoS focused on the improvement of district-wide instructional practice to support higher levels of learning for all children, including those with disabilities. At the heart of Ohio’s SSoS is the belief that the work at every level of the system (i.e., classroom, school, district, region, state) must be designed or redesigned to help build the capacity of other levels of the system.

OLAC’s work redefined leadership in Ohio as a set of shared practices that can be learned, allowing the SEA to move from a conversation about leadership as the personal attributes or character traits of the individual “leader” to a different conversation about what adults at every level of the system (e.g., board, central office, school, classroom) can and should do together to continually improve instructional practice and hold each other accountable for improved student learning on a district-wide basis (i.e., in every classroom in every building across the district). It also led to the development of a structured process – the OIP – that relies on an embedded and connected set of web-based tools to assist districts in enacting essential leadership practices.

The OIP is not a program. Rather, it is Ohio’s strategy for developing statewide capacity through the regional infrastructure, and for providing consistent high quality services to all districts – not only those in improvement status – based on a commonly understood and implemented approach that uses a consistent set of protocols and tools directly aligned with the tenets of OLAC.

Under Ohio’s approved differentiated accountability plan, OIP was designated as the required intervention for districts and their schools, including community schools, in improvement status and more than half of Ohio’s 609 public school districts are using OIP today. Further, an increasing number of districts *not* in improvement status and therefore *not* required to use OIP has elected to do so because district leadership sees the benefits of the process in gaining focus, changing practice, and gauging progress.

“A unified system of support - one that helps all adults in the system work together in meaningful ways to improve instructional practice - is essential to building the capacity of teachers, schools, districts, regions, and states to support higher levels of learning for all children, including students receiving special education services.”

Dr. Sue Zake
State Director of Special Education
Ohio Department of Education

Reconceptualizing the work of the Ohio SEA and its regional provider network to be about improved instruction and achievement has led to fundamental shifts in the way adults work together at the regional and district level. Among these shifts in practice are:



- The consistent use of OIP tools to help set the boundaries for a more collective and strategic conversation at the local level.
- Aligned structures at the district, school, and teacher team level that help districts increase coherence across the district, while building their own system-wide capacity for ongoing and shared learning and growth.

- More effective and ongoing data use for shared instructional decision making.
- Better use of time at the district and school level characterized by more time spent on identified problems rather than excessive time spent in corrective action/restructuring activities that are not related to the district’s identified problems.
- Data-driven needs assessment and planning, resulting in coherent and aligned district and school improvement plans structured around a limited number of goals and strategies.



- Increased understanding of the need to fully implement agreed on actions, as well as the development of monitoring systems geared toward gauging adult implementation and student performance.
- Improved communication and decision-making across levels of the system as an indicator of emerging cultures of inquiry and learning.
- A more focused approach that fosters shared purpose and understanding – rather than competition – between and among regional providers.

Ohio’s evolution from separate and often overlapping regional subsystems to a cohesive system of 16 regional state support teams was not without growing pains. For many years, special education regional resource centers (SERRCs) operated under the direction of ODE/Office for Exceptional Children. At the same time, regional professional development (PD) centers, and a host of other regional entities, operated under the direction of other ODE offices. Often, services were duplicated and little communication, let alone shared work, occurred across ODE offices or regional providers. Today, school improvement, early learning, and special education functions are integrated within each SST and directed through an SEA-developed performance agreement that details required work and priorities for all SSTs.

SSTs are operated through fiscal agent educational service centers (ESCs) and provide a combination of facilitation, technical assistance (TA) and direct supports to districts, schools, community (i.e., charter) schools, and partner ESCs to meet requirements set forth by ODE. Providing “assistance and support to non-fiscal agent, within-region ESCs to build the capacity of personnel to provide support and technical assistance to district leadership teams (DLTs), building leadership teams (BLTs), and teacher-based teams (TBTs)” is explicitly stated in and required by the *Performance Agreement for Ohio’s State Support Teams: 2012-2013* (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

The ESC-SST connection. Ohio’s work to develop and sustain a universal system of support that can effectively assist all districts and their schools in better preparing all children has been dependent on the willingness of adults to work together toward the shared outcome of improved instruction and higher levels of learning for all groups of students. At the regional level, working together means ESC and SST personnel support each other in addressing district-identified needs – a very different approach than operating a program and delivering PD irrespective of identified needs.

OHIO’S STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (SSoS)

- Ohio’s SSoS is designed to build the capacity at all levels (i.e., state, regional, district and school) to continuously and systemically improve instructional practice to enhance the performance of all children, including children with disabilities ages 3 through 21, as well as to improve services provided to them in order to close the achievement gap and meet the requirements of both Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA).
- The Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) Office of the Network for Innovation and Improvement (ONII), Office for Exceptional Children (OEC), and Office for Early Learning and School Readiness (OEL&SR) collaborate as part of the SSoS in order to coordinate improvement efforts on behalf of children ages 3 through 21.
- The goal of the SSoS is to build the capacity of local education agencies (LEAs) as well as entities that serve preschool age children to engage in inclusive continuous and sustainable improvement in order to meet IDEA State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) performance indicators, raise student achievement and close the achievement gap.
- Continuous improvement is fostered through the use of the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP).

Source: Ohio Department of Education. Performance Agreement for Ohio’s State Support Teams: 2012-2013.

At SSTR5, DiMuzio works closely with Ron Iarussi, in his third year as Superintendent of the Mahoning County Educational Service Center (MCESC), which serves as fiscal agent for the SST. One of 56 ESCs in the state, MCESC is an organization committed to constant improvement with the stated mission of “Inspiring Student Learning and Growth Through Leadership and Service” (MCESC Annual Report, 2012). The focus of MCESC and SSTR5’s shared work is improvement in academic achievement for all students. “Ron brought with him the perspective of having goals and measuring progress, and the strong belief that what we do as a regional entity impacts student achievement,” said DiMuzio.

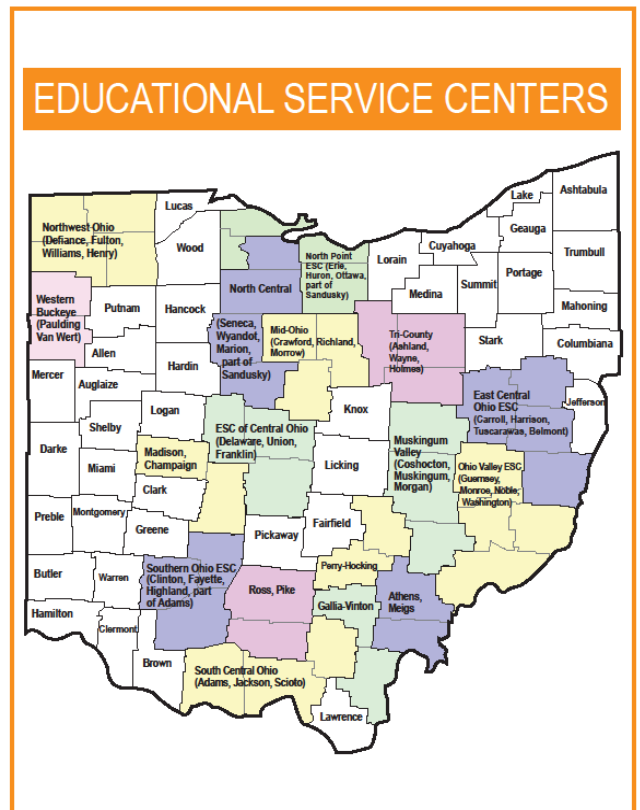
The SST staff, working in collaboration with ESC consultants from the Ashtabula, Columbiana, Mahoning, and Trumbull county ESCs, use the OIP and related tools to collect and chart relevant data, identify priority needs across districts, and plan and deliver universal, targeted, and intensive services and supports to the region’s districts and their schools that are specifically designed to assist districts in addressing their identified needs. Staff members are organized into teams by district and county, as well as topical area (e.g., inclusive best practices, positive behavioral interventions and supports, multi-tiered systems of support, parent supports, etc.). However, regardless of the topic, all services and supports are provided using the OIP as the framework for facilitating the implementation of aligned and focused actions across assigned districts. The OIP provides a consistent structure, aligned tools, and common vocabulary to support collaborative learning and improvement.

“A major accomplishment has been the increased amount of collaboration and the development of relationships within service organizations. Shared expectations and commonalities in philosophy and approach have developed through goal setting and effective data use,” explained Iarussi. “We have a direction now, and a directive to function as a support system,” added DiMuzio.

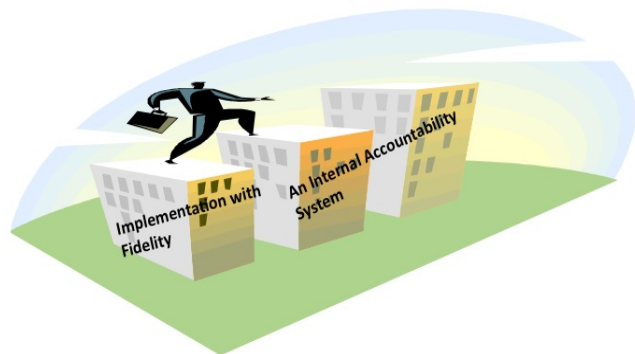


MCESC has four goal areas: (1) increase student achievement, (2) be fiscally responsible, (3) increase customer satisfaction results, and (4) increase the use of technology to improve operational efficiency and to maximize student learning. “We have always been involved in data-based strategic planning; it’s a philosophy we believe in. Using data to make decisions for the purpose of improving academic achievement for all kids is foundational and effective data use is an organizational priority for us,” said Iarussi.

Both DiMuzio and Iarussi believe that using the OIP is tough work for districts, but forces focus. Part of the SST facilitation and coaching role is to ask the hard questions, keep district teams on track, and push back as a critical friend. “Some of the most challenging work has been around helping people to bring all of their initiative-based plans together into a single coherent and focused district plan,” said DiMuzio. “We emphasize the need to have the ‘one damn plan’ that helps districts go deeper into the work and align resources with their priority goals,” said Iarussi. “It has to be about better outcomes for all kids,” he added.



The Purpose of Monitoring the Plan Is Continuous Improvement



Assistant Principal Lydia Hammar and Program Coordinator Cheryl Coutts, both with the Youngstown Community School (YCS), believe that using the OIP helped school personnel get focused on the most important issues related to improving student achievement. “The OIP was invaluable to us because it allowed us to really address underlying causes of poor performance, stabilize the operation, and focus our efforts on improving reading and math performance, as well as put in place consistent behavioral expectations and supports,” said Coutts. “We couldn’t have gotten through the OIP process without SST support; the SST facilitator could say things we couldn’t say,” she added. “The SST was seen as the ‘higher authority’ and the teachers’ perception of SST personnel fostered respect for the work and the process,” said Hammar.

“We used to look at writing the plan as something we had to do to get the money, but it wasn’t a collaborative process. How do you know what your organizational priorities are as one person?” asked Coutts. Having more voices and perspectives at the table – a required part of the OIP – allowed YCS to identify real priorities, and develop a focused plan for guiding the work. According to school officials, the continuity of the relationship with the SST as the external support provider was critical to the school’s capacity to make and sustain improvements.

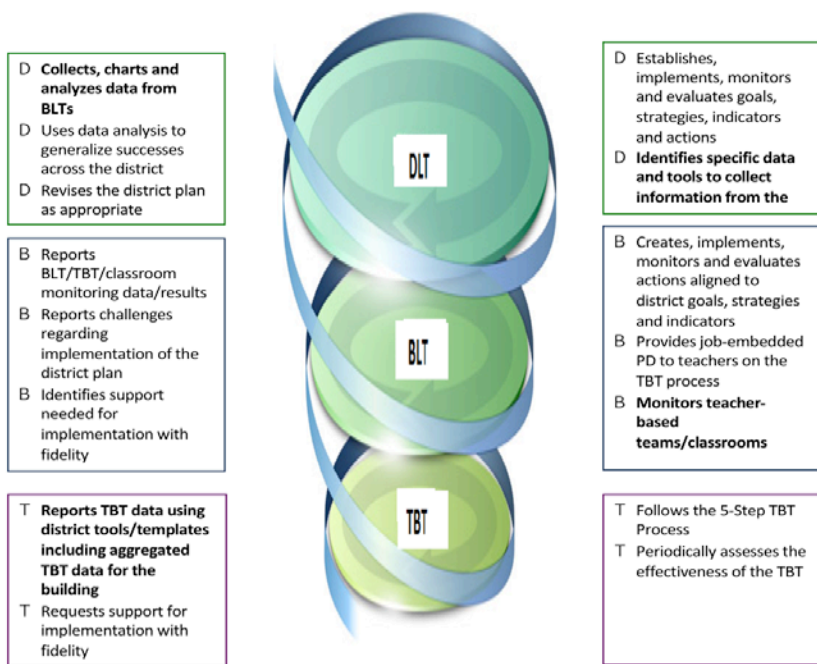
“Now, we have a rating of Excellent and we have fewer and fewer students performing below proficiency. We’ve gotten an ‘A’ for gap closure, and ‘Bs’ for student growth and student achievement,” reported Hammar in referring to the state’s new accountability designations. “The monitoring piece has helped us focus on implementation and realize what we’re doing in actuality,” she added. YCS is one of three community schools sponsored by MCESC.

Promoting a culture of inquiry and learning.

SSTR5 uses the Ohio 5-step process – a process used as part of the OIP by TBTs, as well as BLTs and DLTs – to support districts in the region in effectively sharing data and information between and among levels of the system to promote shared ownership, learning, and decision making. The five steps include: (1) collecting and charting data, (2) analyzing student work specific to the data, (3) establishing shared expectations for implementing specific changes in the classroom, (4) implementing changes consistently across all classrooms, and (5) collecting, charting, and analyzing post data. The SST also uses an adapted version of the process to monitor its own work in supporting districts in the region.

SSTR5 staff meetings focus on plan implementation using the 5-step process as a staff. The *Implementation Management/Monitoring* (IM/M) tool – one of the OIP web-based tools – is used to monitor the degree of implementation using both adult implementation and student achievement indicators. SST consultants use the tool to review their own adult implementation indicators for SST work, and use district data for the student achievement indicators. A variety of data (e.g., state assessment, OIP implementation data, local data) are used and every other month, data are submitted to ODE on the progress of districts in improvement status.

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE DLT-BLT-TBT IN MONITORING PROGRESS



As shown in the illustration, the DLT identifies specific data and tools to collect information from the BLTs/TBTs as evidence of monitoring progress. The BLT monitors the TBTs, and the TBTs report data to the BLT. The BLT reports progress to the DLT.

SST 5 CONSULTANT MEETING SCHEDULE – EXCERPT

DATE	PLAN ACTION STEP/ TASK REVIEW	DATA SOURCE FOR 5 STEP PROCESS	AFTERNOON COLLABORATION 1:00 – 3:00 OR 12:30 – 2:30 (AFTERNOON ONLY SESSIONS)
Year: 2012			
June 11	Goal 1c and Goal 4	Goal 1 Bi-monthly ODE Report	Mahoning and Columbiana County District Cross Strategy (all consultants)
June 25	Goal 1a and Goal 2	Goal 2 Fiscal Goal 1c IMPACT Data	Strategy 1c Evaluation based on IMPACT Evaluation Scope and Sequence Projected PD 1c Tuning Protocol
July 9	Goal 1b and Goal 3	Goal 4 Website	Scope and Sequence Projected PD Strategy a and b Tuning Protocol
Aug. 27	Goal 1b and Goal 3	Goal 1 Annual Measure C	Overall Goal 1 Evaluation based on Closing Achievement Gap GPA Data
Sept. 10	Goal 1c and Goal 4	PD Evaluations (Goal 1a,b, c Goal 4)	High Support Districts (all consultants)

“We’re interested in the practices that adults use collectively to help all kids improve,” explained Barb Williams Robey, Director of Teaching & Learning for MCEC. Once a month, the curriculum and special education directors from each ESC served by SSTR5 meet with the SST to share successes, keep each other apprised of how districts are progressing, and learn from each other. On alternate months, the SST meets with each county’s ESC on an individual basis. Within Mahoning County, the MCEC operates a

Curriculum Council and a Special Education Advisory Council, both of which meet every other month with representatives of districts in the county. SST personnel meet with both groups and work closely with MCEC personnel to support each district in the region. “Before, we had very little interaction with the SST; everything was in separate compartments and the issues were seen as special ed or general ed, when they should have been viewed as issues that affected all kids,” said Williams Robey. “We’ve worked really hard over the last several years to make sure that ESC and SST staff are working together to offer one-stop service to meet district needs. We believe in good working relationships,” she added. “We have to be a team to deliver seamless service to districts based on what they need,” agreed DiMuzio. “Before, we were directed to go into a district and help them ‘fix’ their problem. Now, we use a coaching model that involves a lot of feedback and ongoing PD. We know it’s consistent, ongoing support and follow through that make the difference,” she added.

STATE SUPPORT TEAM IMM (IMPLEMENTATION MANAGEMENT/MONITORING) TOOL

SMART GOALS

Goal 1: Academic Achievement	X	Goal 2: Fiscal	Goal 3	Customer Satisfaction	Goal 4: Technology Use	
GOAL 1:						
By July 2012, the percent of AYP met opportunities will increase for SST Region 5's						
23 identified LEAs from the 2011 data of having met 506 of 718 AYP opportunities for a total of 70% met.						
In addition, the DA districts in Region 5 will demonstrate increases in reading and math proficiency for the subgroup of students' with disabilities and demonstrate a narrowing of achievement gaps in reading and math.						
2011 Baseline Data	SWD Reading Proficiency Average	Non SWD Reading Proficiency Average	Reading Achievement Gap	SWD Math Proficiency Average	Non SWD Math Proficiency Average	Math Achievement Gap
Region 5 DA Districts	48.3%	84.6%	36.3%	41.1%	79.5%	38.4%
Region 5	57.8%	89.1%	31.3%	50.6%	85.4%	34.8%
State	55.7%	90.1%	34.4%	47.5%	85.9%	38.4%
As the new waiver is approved, the two above measures can be replaced with the grade point average for the 23 identified LEAs will show an increase in the area of closing the achievement.						
2011 Baseline Data Gap Closing	A's	B's	C's	D's	F's	Grade Point Average for Region
Region 5 DA Districts	0	13	8	2	0	2.48

STRATEGIES, INDICATORS AND PROGRESS MEASURES

STRATEGY 1A: The SST will provide support to build district capacity to implement the Ohio Improvement Process.										
SST FACILITATOR IMPLEMENTATION INDICATOR	BASELINE MEASURE		PROGRESS MEASURE		PROGRESS MEASURE		PROGRESS MEASURE		PROGRESS MEASURE	
	Measure	Description	(DATE) PROJECTED	ACTUAL RESULTS	(DATE) PROJECTED	ACTUAL RESULTS	(DATE) PROJECTED	ACTUAL RESULTS	(DATE) PROJECTED	ACTUAL RESULTS
Data from Professional Development will show positive responses PD Survey: Item #2- % of "yes" for impact Item #3- % of very valuable & valuable rating for value of PD Item #4- Quality of session % rating Above Average & Excellent	Measured per session by SST Sponsored PD Evaluation Survey	Focus on participant responses on the impact and usefulness in his/her work	April 15, 2012 (SPDG August 2011 to January 2012)	Likely to produce results: 97%	May 15, 2012		Sept. 15, 2012		Dec. 15, 2012	

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DISTRICTS: *RETHINKING THE REGIONAL ROLE*

The changes in culture and practice described by Williams Robey and DiMuzio were seen in districts reviewed through a state-commissioned study designed to identify factors contributing to the success of districts that showed a steady improvement in math and reading proficiency over a four-year period for students with disabilities.

The title of the report, *Universal Education: Principles and Practices for Advancing Achievement of Students with Disabilities* (Silverman, Hazelwood, & Cronin, 2009), reflected the districts' work to break down longstanding barriers between special and general education. Examples of changes noted by the majority of districts studied included:

1. Philosophical shift from a special education/regular education dichotomy to a universal education paradigm;
2. Adoption of a belief structure in which all students have the potential to learn and should be educated with the goal of proficiency in core content;
3. Shift from teacher accountability for student learning to shared leadership and collective ownership for student learning among administrators, teachers, support staff, and students;
4. Gradual dismantling of 'separate but equal' approach and work toward development of full inclusion models; and
5. Shared leadership among all levels of the education system and layers of personal responsibility for student achievement among students, teachers, building administration, and district administration (p. 2).



CONSIDERATIONS FOR REGIONAL PROVIDERS

DO REGIONAL PROVIDERS:

- Focus and align their collective work to effectively support ALL districts, schools, and teachers in improving student learning for all groups of learners?
- Use data to identify and respond to common needs related to adult and student learning across assigned districts?
- Support assigned districts and their schools to identify a limited number of goals for focusing all work, rather than multiple goals related to specific initiatives, programs, or funding sources.
- Use structures for providing high-quality, consistent, and ongoing support to assigned districts?
- Provide tools, products, and/or services that facilitate the development, implementation, and evaluation of coherent district plans focused on student learning, and that support districts in fully implementing identified instructional strategies?
- Support districts in designing and using protocols/procedures for monitoring the degree of implementation of agreed-on actions across the district and in providing feedback and differentiated support to their schools and teacher teams?
- Ensure all PD and TA opportunities are designed to meet district-identified needs and involve everyone?
- Take steps to continually reduce fragmentation across regional offices and/or departments, and provide opportunities for collective reflection and learning among regional personnel?
- Evaluate the degree to which regional actions are affecting district performance?

One lesson learned from districts in Ohio is that both ESC and SST personnel – working as part of an SSoS – must be competent in using a consistent approach, including consistent structures, for helping people at all levels of the system put essential practices into place. In Mahoning County, for example, MCEC consultants and SSTR5 consultants attend ongoing state-sponsored training designed to build the capacity of the regional system to more effectively work with all districts. As part of their state-prescribed role, SSTR5 consultants provide additional mentoring and support to their ESC colleagues in how to use the OIP to facilitate district-wide improvement. “The strong relationships we’ve established with our districts, and our approach to harnessing the combined talent of the ESC and SST team, have allowed us to get to the underlying issues of poor performance of subgroups within the context of helping all students reach benchmarks associated with common core state standards,” said Williams Robey.

These lessons are also reflected in the work of ten districts featured as part of *Moving Your Numbers*. In each district featured, external support in the form of facilitation, PD, and TA



was noted by district and school personnel as being critical to the district's capacity to (1) focus and align its work, (2) develop internal accountability for improvement of instructional practice and achievement for all students; (3) move toward the use of shared leadership models that involved redefining leadership around essential practices; and (4) put in place structures that fostered coherence in core work across the system and consistency in the implementation of identified strategies/actions over time.

In Ohio, the work of the SSTs and ESCs has implications for SEAs and their regional systems if the goal is to support the improvement of instructional practice and higher levels of student learning for all students. Such improvement requires focus and alignment across all levels of the system (Fullan,

2011, 2010), as evidenced by Ohio's work to foster district-wide improvement by supporting district, school, and teacher teams in a coherent and aligned fashion. The importance of collaborative learning teams, and the role of districts in setting the stage for sustainable improvement is increasingly recognized (McNulty & Besser, 2011).

For example, a 2010 study by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) emphasizes the role of districts in developing and articulating a vision and set of practices for the work of all schools, crafting a strategic plan that communicates that vision, creating the conditions needed for aligning all policies and resources to the plan, and establishing collaborative and supportive working relationships within each school. The authors encouraged districts to work with external providers to help them identify goals and "create structures that enable school and district leaders to meet performance goals and serve students better (p. v)." Similarly, Honig and Copland (2010, 2008) assert that district-wide improvements in teaching and learning do not happen without substantial engagement by the central office in helping all schools build their capacity for improvement. MacIver and Farley-Ripple (2008) also found that when central office personnel work in isolation, provide conflicting directives and/or reinforce competing priorities to schools, the progress of the entire district is negatively affected. At the teacher team level, Gallimore and others (2009) documented the contribution of teacher learning teams in a five-year study of Title I schools serving more than 14,000 students. The use of effective team protocols and the use of trained peer facilitators to guide improvement efforts – both priority areas of work for MCEC and SSTR 5 – are keys for creating effective teacher learning teams.

"The process is rigorous, systematic, systemic and relevant. We could not have completed the process successfully without the professional development, support and guidance of Michele DiMuzio's outstanding OIP facilitators at the SST5."

Vincent C. Colaluca
Superintendent
Austintown Local Schools

MAINTAIN FOCUS, ACCEPT NO EXCUSES

Regional providers can significantly affect the capacity of districts to improve teaching and learning in ways that better meet the needs of all children, and are in a unique position to support the ongoing capacity building and learning of districts by helping them to use data effectively, focus and align their work, select and deeply implement shared instructional practices, monitor the degree of implementation of such practices while providing feedback and support, and put processes and structures in place that



facilitate continuous learning as a system. “Our next steps include maintaining focus, continuing to operate without silos, and accepting no excuses,” said Iarussi.

Moving Your Numbers offers insights into the direction regional providers should take to more effectively support districts and schools in improving outcomes for all students. For more information about Ohio’s State Support Team Region (SSTR) 5, contact Michele DiMuzio, Director, SSTR 5, 100 DeBartolo Place, Suite 220, Youngstown, Ohio 44512; 800.776.8298 or 330.965.7828, or via email at Michele.DiMuzio@sstr5.org.

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**For More Information on
Moving Your Numbers, Contact NCEO or Visit:
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