

School Turnaround Office
Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround Grant (SSDST)

SYRACUSE CSD – AUGUST 2015

School/District Background	Provide a brief overview of your district including location, size, demographics served, and needs of the district. Please provide an overview of why you decided to participate in this grant.
	The Syracuse City School District (SCSD) is the fourth largest school district in New York state with a prek-12 enrollment of over 22,000 students. A large proportion of our students (80%) are eligible for free/reduced priced lunch. We currently have 16 priority schools and 3 schools that are “phasing” out, having not made adequate progress despite our best efforts to improve student achievement. Over the past two years, the District has placed 22 new principals in our schools and felt that this funding opportunity was the perfect opportunity to partner with an Outside Education Expert (OEE) to support these new principals and the leadership teams in the most struggling, highest needs schools and provide additional support to our turnaround efforts.

Promising Practice to be Highlighted	Thoroughly describe a promising practice currently taking place at your district as a direct result of the strategies through the SSDST Grant with each strand implemented. Also provide an explanation as to why this particular practice was chosen to be implemented at your district.
	<p>One of the promising practices that is being utilized to support school improvement and to increase teacher capacity is the use of frequent classroom observations and providing timely feedback. This has been a major focus of the support provided by Insight Education Group (Insight). Their coaches meet regularly with members of the school leadership teams, including the school-based instructional coaches, to support their observation work in several ways. They will either observe classrooms with school leaders, review the written notes taken by one of the school leaders, debrief the observation along with the school leader and the teacher, or debrief the observation and feedback session with the school leader. The Insight coaches use a gradual release approach to address the key steps in the observation/feedback process, and to ensure that the school leaders continue to grow in their leadership.</p> <p>The school leaders are challenged to identify a focus and to gather various pieces of evidence that tie back to that focus when conducting the co-observation. Any crucial pieces of feedback would be addressed in the moment as appropriate. These observations are sometimes conducted with one school leader and at other times with the leadership team. This helps to norm the team around instructional expectations and finding evidence to address the expectations that are described in the Teaching and Learning Framework. Debriefing the observations and/or the feedback sessions might be done with one leader or with the team. This helps to hold the team accountable for conducting the observations and, again, challenges them to hold the teachers to a common understanding of the language and intent of the Framework. These debriefing meetings often provide growth opportunities for all involved and help them to maintain an instructional focus (especially in schools where there are major culture and climate concerns).</p> <p>This grant has also supported intensive instructional coaching in the targeted schools. The Insight team members provided instructional coaching to teachers and to school-based instructional coaches. By building coaching relationships and maintaining consistent communications with the school staff, Insight</p>

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	<p>coaches were able to provide ongoing feedback and support to help increase their effectiveness. Instructional coaches were supported during their planning for professional development sessions, as they provided assistance to the teachers with student performance data collection and analysis, and as they sought out instructional resources and strategies for teachers.</p> <p>Classroom teachers were provided with feedback on their instructional planning and delivery. By working in conjunction with the school-based instructional coaches and with school leaders, Insight coaches provided direct support to classroom teachers to ensure that they effectively implemented the curriculum. Again, the support typically took the form of observation and feedback, co-planning and “in the moment” coaching during instruction. Insight was able to work along with the leadership members on the direct support to classroom teachers, modeling effective leadership strategies and building leaders’ capacity.</p>
Evidence	How do you know the practice you have described is promising and/or successful? How have you measured its effectiveness and/or success?
	<p>The efforts to increase school leaders’ observation and feedback effectiveness has definitely resulted in more effective instructional leadership. The most basic evidence of this growth has been the increased frequency of those observations on the part of all observers. In addition, observers increased the amount of focused feedback provided to teachers based on a predetermined area of emphasis. This has helped the teachers to continuously develop in a specific area before taking on a variety of other areas. These focus areas included questioning, limiting the amount of teacher talk during the lesson, checking for understanding and clarifying the success criteria in the lesson. While there is still much room for growth and teachers’ evaluation data has not fully caught up to these initial shifts, school leaders have noted improvement with some of their teachers.</p> <p>Instructional coaching has often gone hand-in-hand with the observation and feedback work, as one tends to inform the other. The purpose of the instructional coaching was to ensure that teachers are utilizing increasingly effective instructional strategies that would result in increased student achievement. There has been improvement in student achievement as noted in some of the schools (most notably Dr. Weeks Elementary School as indicated on running records data, Achievement Network data and writing assessments), but the impact of these improved practices are not yet demonstrated in improved achievement across the board. Anecdotally, most of the eight schools being supported through this grant have seen a dramatic decrease in disruptive and off-task behaviors, which they attribute to improved management practices and more engaged instruction.</p>
Looking Ahead	What are your sustainability plans and hopes for the future (both short and long-term) of your promising practice?
	<p>The district has been building capacity through this grant, along with providing direct support to the schools. The work that we’ve done with school leaders to increase the frequency and effectiveness of their observations and feedback will continue far beyond this immediate funding. By developing the capacity of our leaders to move this work forward, we certainly hope that our daily instructional practices will continue to improve. The Executive Directors (ED), who manage the school principals, have also supported the schools in sharpening their skills in observing instruction and providing targeted and effective feedback. The EDs evaluate the principals and play a key role in</p>

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	<p>communicating the importance of this work, and will help us to keep it at the center of the school leaders' efforts. This will be a marked difference from the focus of so many principals on culture and climate alone.</p> <p>Our focus on direct service to teachers is also building capacity and strengthening our daily instruction. This support is also helping grade level teams to strengthen their collaborative planning so that the effective practices that we observe in one classroom are shared and replicated in others. The coaching that is provided to the teachers also serves as a model for our novice instructional coaches to help them to engage more effectively with teachers to improve their practice.</p> <p>In both cases, we believe that the protocols and procedures that are being practiced and developed through this grant will endure in our schools and in our district. We are not only improving what we do today, but how we think about instructional delivery and instructional leadership.</p> <p>Because the District has seen growth in the ability of leaders, yet know that there is more to accomplish, we will be continuing our partnership with the Insight Education Group into the 15-16 school year, targeting new principals and leadership teams.</p>
Additional documentation	Please provide any additional documentation/attachments/website links created/demonstrate/communicated as a result of the implementation of the SSDST grant initiatives.
	<p>Attached is a leadership team meeting template to help focus their meetings, as well as coaching plan template/draft, and a school improvement meeting agenda focused on developing priorities.</p>