

# SPDG Summary Report:

*Progress Made, Benefits & Challenges Associated with  
Implementation of the OIP to Enact Ohio's Leadership  
Development Framework*

June 2009

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### I. Identifying Information

District Name: Olmsted Falls City Schools

County: Cuyahoga

Cohort:  1     2

#### DLT Team Member Names and Positions

NAME	TITLE	NAME	TITLE
1. Dr. Todd Hoadley	Superintendent	13. Gina Pilko	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher
2. Dr. Jim Lloyd	Assistant Superintendent	14. Pam Rickard	Intermediate Spec. Ed. Teacher
3. Dave Lewis	Chief Operating Officer	15. Neil Roseberry	Primary School Principal
4. Merritt Waters	Student Services Coordinator	16. Michelle LaGruth	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher
5. Dr. Bob Hill	High School Principal	17. Julie Kemper	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher
6. John Gaba	High School English	18.	
7. Mike VonGunten	High School Counselor	19.	
8. Mark Kurz	Middle School Principal	20.	
9. Cindy Bennett	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	21.	
10. Lisa Williams	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	22.	
11. Don Svec	Intermediate School Principal	23.	
12.		24.	

## II. Progress Made

Please describe the progress you made on a district-wide basis by participating as a State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) "test" district. In particular, describe the benefits and challenges associated with implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process as a way to enact Ohio's Leadership Development Framework.

### **A. What We've Learned (*describe what you, as a district team, have learned as a result of OIP implementation*)**

Being involved in the OIP has provided our district with many opportunities and challenges. Most important and perhaps not necessarily something new—we reaffirmed our belief that programs do not matter but people. Taking part in this process has helped our district redefine leadership and emphasize the fact that leadership should be shared (between all people in the system). In addition, has permitted us to become more focused. Our team believes that schools truly need a framework in order to be able to do the work. We have learned that making data-based decisions is not a simple one step process (i.e. look at student effect data). The true inquiry and reflection happens when educators go about the business of linking student effect with adult cause and it is only through this process that one makes real data-based decisions.

### **B. Progress We've Made in the Following Areas (*describe your district's progress as a result of OIP implementation; provide specific examples related to the use of the OIP process and tools*)**

#### **1. Establishment and/or Refinement of Leadership Team Structures to Foster Shared Responsibility and Accountability for the Success of all Students**

The establishment of our District Leadership Team occurred due to our involvement in the OIP process. While we had teacher leaders in all 4 of our school buildings within the district, prior to our inclusion in the OIP there was not a forum to engage in district-wide inquiry and decision making. The OIP provided that opportunity.

We recall the first DLT meeting that occurred and remember how awkward and yet exciting it was. The Decision Framework (DF) provided us a tremendous opportunity to move beyond simply analyzing our student effect data. While at times awkward, the DF helped us structure our conversations around what the teachers did in order to bring about our student effect data. It was until we had these kinds of conversations that we truly realized something very important. While our district has achieved and maintained a very high level of student achievement, we could not reliably and with a high degree of validity indicate that our student effect data was specifically caused by the adults in the system. While our curriculum has been aligned through mapping for quite some time, the building leadership teams did not have structures in place in order to perform implementation fidelity checks.

## **2. Effective Use of Data to Identify and Address Critical Needs**

As previously stated, the Decision Framework provided us the opportunity to learn more about what we didn't know than what did. Previously our data analysis focused on annual student achievement results. The DF helped us identify our areas of relative weakness and begin to attempt a causal link. Our achievement results have been consistently high in all areas compared to state benchmarks. Our team indicated that while this was cause to celebrate, our expectation was to continue to grow and improve. We reasoned that 90% proficient in a given subject area at first glance seems to be acceptable as long as you are the parent of a child in the 90%. While some would say that a passage rate of 100% is unrealistic, we tried to take the perspective of the child or the parent of the child who was part of the 10% and realized that selling students and parents short was unacceptable. While our improvement goal of 5% will not bring us up to 100%, if achieved it will certainly have demonstrated a tremendous amount of progress. Through the DF, our most critical needs were related to the first 3 areas identified by the OLAC.

## **3. Alignment, Focus, and Prioritization of Improvement Efforts Across the District**

The DLT was able to utilize the areas identified through the use of the DF to create a very focused and aligned plan across the entire district. For the first time ever, all buildings and all grades began working on making learning targets clearer for students and providing them with high quality formative feedback throughout the learning process. It wasn't as if teachers weren't engaging in these activities, rather it was the priority was set and articulated multiple times. Our focus became more universal. The OIP process facilitated the development of our DLT which in turn leveraged a re-tooling of our BLTs. We were able to more clearly articulate our district's vision due to our new streamlined approach.

#### **4. Development of a Common Understanding of High Quality Instructional Practice and Use of High-Probability Instructional Strategies**

During the pilot of the OIP our DLT had a great deal of conversation centered on what constitutes high quality instructional practices. The use of the Decision Framework served as a tool to facilitate conversations. We began looking at our student effect data and previous conversations always started and stopped there. Like most districts, we would look at student data, determine who had and had not met proficiency standards and would develop interventions. This is certainly the model that most districts use; it does however fall short. By looking at our curriculum alignment, materials, formative and summative practices and instruction, we've been able to begin to have discussions about linking student effect data with adult cause.

These conversations led to our development of the first two action steps in our CIP. Creating clear learning targets and providing students with high quality effective feedback are two very powerful instructional practices/strategies.

#### **5. Meaningful Engagement of Internal and External Stakeholders to Gain Support for District Improvement Efforts**

If anything being involved in the SPDG process has helped our organization develop a sense of standardized nomenclature. Establishing a common set of values that turns into an institutionalized goal, strategies, action steps and tasks allows the DLT to begin to leverage a common purpose across our school district. In addition, this common language is shared with external stakeholders. Our teachers are able to articulate to our community members exactly what is valued and what we're working towards. The focus that we have is something that has not been experienced before and it is directly related to our involvement in the SPDG work.

## **6. Intentional Use of Resources (time, money, personnel, etc.) to Address Critical Needs**

Upon our initial involvement with SPDG, our board of education adopted a resolution to eliminate any and all competing initiatives. There were other activities at the district and building levels that pulled our attention and focus away from our SPDG work (example—North Central Accreditation). These were eliminated. In addition, all of our Federal grant resources were aligned to helping us address our critical needs. Recently, we received Federal Stimulus funds as part of the ARRA. These funds in many districts were likely allocated for approved activities according to the guidelines, but may not have been designated for things that would the district to address critical needs. In Olmsted Falls, our dollars were directed towards helping us meet our goal, fulfill our strategies and address our action steps and tasks as defined by our continuous improvement plan.

## **7. Board Member Role in Sustaining Focus on Improvement Efforts**

The Olmsted Falls Board of Education was instrumental in the district's involvement and success with the OIP. When the opportunity to take part in Cohort 1 became available the superintendent and assistant superintendent briefed the board on what our involvement would entail. They were very supportive and advised us to take part. From that point on, we updated our board of education on the progress that we were making due to our OIP involvement. The OFCS board of education adopted a board policy that sought to eliminate any competing initiative that was not in alignment with the district's newly revised CIP that was created as a result of our involvement in the OIP. We have made numerous presentations to our board of education that are located on <http://bulldogCIA.com/CIP.htm> Finally, at the most recent OLAC Summit, board of education member Michelle Theriot presented with our group.

**8. Full Implementation of the District's and Schools' Focused Strategies and Actions to Reach District Goals**

Currently, we are at a very critical juncture. School organizations have done a fine job of writing sophisticated improvement plans and have fallen short when it comes to implementation. The leadership structures that have been provided as a result of our SPDG involvement (District Leadership Team and Building Leadership Teams) created a support mechanism to assist with not only implementation, but the monitoring of implementation. The role and function of the BLT is to take the strategies, actions and tasks and determine what this looks like when being implemented with fidelity. These conversations rarely happen in schools as implementation and monitoring are uncomfortable territory when collaboratively discussed between administrators and teachers. Nevertheless, it is the linchpin to success.

**9. Effective Use of Professional Development to Directly Address the District's Critical Needs**

The Decision Framework tool literally forced the district leadership team to take a look at student effect data (achievement, graduation rate, value-added, etc.) and link it to adult causal data. In short, we needed to move beyond simply looking for students on the bubble of passing accountability tests and focus more on high-quality, good first instruction. In other words, a district's intervention techniques are only part of the puzzle to district improvement. More important, it is critical that instruction is done right the first time. The DF provided the DLT to take a look at what adult behaviors may be linked to student achievement data. This assisted us in creating goals, strategies, action steps and tasks that specifically got at our critical needs. Within this structure, we identified district professional development that was focused and sustained.

**10. Effective Monitoring of the Degree of Implementation of the District’s Focused Strategies and Actions to Reach Goals**

We currently use the classroom walkthrough process (McREL Power Walkthroughs) as a mechanism to monitor our non-negotiable goals of clarity of learning targets and the provision of high quality effective feedback strategies. While many districts throughout the state have found our work beneficial, we believe that it is but one data point. In order to truly monitor the effective implementation of our work, we believe that multiple data sources are needed. Perhaps most important, we believe that it is the duty of the building leadership teams to determine what effective implementation looks like. The DLT has defined the district priorities—clarity of learning targets and effective feedback. The BLTs will need to further determine what this looks like when implemented correctly. We believe that this “defined autonomy” is supported in the research literature that Waters and Marzano have diligently worked on.

**11. Use of collaborative assessment data (e.g., collaboratively developed common classroom formative assessment, common interim assessment, short-cycle assessment, etc.) by teacher-based teams, BLTs, and the DLT to continuously improve instructional practice and student performance.**

The creation of these types of assessments is clearly supported by a bulk of research literature; however the completion of them is no short order and it calls for an on-going professional development initiative for many years. The second action step in our CIP calls for the creation of quality assessments embedded in the balanced assessment literature. In order words, prior to moving towards common benchmark assessments, our professional development will start with the need for a balanced assessment approach by teachers (both formative and summative). In addition, the research by Black & Wiliam along with many others cite the significant impact on student learning that formative assessments have. There is confusion in the field related to the benefits of common interim assessments versus formative assessments. While common interim assessments are popular with educators in the field, the research literature on the impact they have on student learning has not yet been document. Conversely, the research on effective student feedback and formative assessment techniques has been well documented (see Hattie, 2009). Our focus will be to collaboratively establish a balanced assessment system that is grounded in the Keys to Quality Assessment (Stiggins, et al) and then introduce professional development that teaches teachers to engage in feedback strategies in order to increase learning target clarity and help students understand what, how and why.

**12. Commitment of the district to “stay the course” in implementing focused strategies and actions on a district-wide basis to reach district goals.**

**As our superintendent likes to say, “we are all in with the OIP.” We are committed to this process and this work as demonstrated by our expenditures, board resolutions and our professional development behaviors.**

**C. Benefits to the District, Schools, and Students Through Implementation of the OIP (*describe the benefits associated with your implementation of the OIP*)**

- Camaraderie between teachers and administrators.
- District focus on a few things that we are able to implement
- The level of state support and commitment has been tremendous
- The expertise of those from Lead and Learn along with the Norfolk people is benefit that we could have never received had we done this by ourselves
- Our neighboring district colleagues are speaking a common vocabulary. While all districts across the nation and our state have been involved with continuous improvement planning, a common vocabulary and degree of cohesiveness has been lacking. If everyone is engaged in the same work why has always been we’ve worked on things in isolation. This model has provided us with many opportunities to learn from others in our own state. In addition, we have finally learned that there are many people in Ohio who can assist fellow Ohioans.

**D. Challenges** *(describe the challenges you've encountered in implementation of the OIP and the steps you took to overcome them)*

- The rapid pace of being part of Cohort 1 was, at times, a bit challenging
- Being out of the district in Columbus for much of the year
- Being part of a project that was not yet complete (although we knew this going in)

There were really no steps to overcome the above. It was just the reality of the situation

- “roll out” or scale up of the work we had been doing in Columbus—we discussed a roll out plan while there and the inclusion of a BLT during the process helped in removing the mystique of what we were doing
- “This is just another initiative”—staying the course proved to be a vital component. People thought that perhaps this would go away and it appeared evident that after we talked about this over and over that it was not

**E. Your Biggest Success** *(describe your district's biggest success as a result of participation as a test district)*

Our biggest success has been the establishment of our collective sense of purpose. Our district has been fortunate in many ways. We have a community that supports education. Our success has attracted the best teachers and administrators in the area and we have operated at a very efficient and high level. We believe that the SPDG process has created a set of conditions that permitted us to pull together a group of administrators and teachers who were committed to learn together. We have been able to take what we have learned and operationalize it into a set of very focused action steps and tasks. This has in-turn trimmed our previous continuous improvement down into something that is focused, understood, easily articulated and believed in.

**F. Your Advice to Other Districts (*describe what you would say to other districts not currently engaged in OIP implementation. What advice would you have for them, particularly if they were reluctant to get involved?*)**

- This process isn't only meant for those that are in school improvement. This can help those districts that have been very high functioning. Creates a common language for assisting districts who are already good make the leap to great
- This isn't going away.
- Get involved and help us establish a large scale learning community throughout the State of Ohio
- This is the right work...we can't state that enough. The work that is being done through this process is supported by the leaders in the field (not just in Ohio), it is relevant, it is timely and it makes you feel like you're part of something bigger

Submitted by:

The Olmsted Falls District Leadership Team

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