

Multiple Case Study on Effective Practices in Urban Schools: Piloting of the *SOP Implementation Inventory*

Executive Summary

The purpose of the *Schools of Promise (SOP)* Multiple Case Study on effective practices in six urban high-poverty schools was to highlight and document their use of effective research-based strategies that are aligned to the *SOP Framework of Practice* – a review of research and literature organized around five themes. A second aspect of this study was to pilot the *SOP Implementation Inventory*, a tool designed to help a school examine and document its practices using the *SOP Framework of Practice*.

In 2005, the Ohio Department of Education selected six urban schools for this study based on student performance on the 2004-2005 state assessments in either reading or mathematics or both. The sample included: Central Community Elementary in Reading, Harold R. Walker Elementary in Canton, Douglas MacArthur Elementary in Cleveland, Eastmoor Academy High School (EAHS) and Columbus Alternative High School (CAHS) in Columbus, and Memorial High School in Campbell. The number of years ODE recognized these as *Schools of Promise* ranged from one to four years. All six schools received recognition as *Schools of Promise* for their performance on reading assessments. Central Community, Walker and CAHS also were recognized as *Schools of Promise* for their performance in mathematics.

Findings from this study indicate that these six urban schools are high-performing, high-poverty schools in Ohio that challenge the low performance trend on state assessments evident in other urban schools. What differentiates these schools is the conscious effort of principals and staff to not only set deliberately high academic and behavioral expectations for the school and students, but to provide the time, support, intervention and resources necessary so all students can reach those standards. Administrators and teachers demonstrated a drive to succeed, a willingness to work hard, and continuous examination and monitoring of the effectiveness of their practices. They held each other and students accountable for meeting these expectations. As a result, these schools exceeded the state standards and average results on assessments in reading and mathematics and graduation rates in 2004-2005.

The study's findings are organized around the five themes of *Schools of Promise*.

Delivering Rigorous Instruction Aligned to State Standards

The first of five *SOP* themes is: *Schools of Promise deliver rigorous instruction aligned to the state's academic content standards*. Research on high-performing, high-poverty schools has documented that effective schools use state standards to explicitly plan, design and evaluate curriculum and instruction, and assess student work (Haycock, 1999).

- These schools not only use the state academic content standards in English Language Arts and mathematics, but aligned their curriculum, instruction, and assessments with the standards to some degree. Most have curriculum matrices or pacing charts that identify the scope, sequence and pacing of instruction aligned with state standards and assessments.

Elementary schools have extensively aligned their curriculum, instruction and assessments both vertically and horizontally to the state's academic content standards, benchmarks and indicators. High schools viewed the state academic content standards as the minimum standards for students.

- These schools restructured the school day or school year to provide teachers more time for collaborative planning, instruction in English Language Arts and/or mathematics, and student intervention. They not only extend instructional time to help students meet the standards but provide additional intervention.
- Instructionally, these schools use a variety of strategies, including large group and small group instruction, individualized instruction and tutoring, inquiry-based instruction, higher-order thinking skills, and cooperative learning. They incorporate technology and software applications into academic subjects.
- These schools set yearly measurable, performance goals for all students on state assessments. They prepare students for the state assessments by explaining terms, using practice tests, or by focusing on specific targeted subtopics based on analyses of student performance. School personnel are actively involved in frequently assessing students and their progress through a variety of formal and informal assessments. The schools immediately intervene when students are struggling to meet expectations.

Providing Leadership that Leads to Continuous Improvement

The second *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise have leadership that leads to the continuous improvement of the school.* Research on effective schools shows that administrators and other leaders continually strive to improve the instructional effectiveness of schools (Cotton, 1995).

- Principals in these schools promote a sense of well-being among teachers and staffs and positive staff relationships and cooperation. They are approachable and open to helping teachers and staff solve problems, providing opportunities for teachers and staff to give input on important decisions. They are highly visible to students, teachers and parents, and create frequent contacts with students.
- Principals also establish high expectations and concrete goals for all students and staff to meet. They work with school teams to establish yearly improvement goals based on student performance data, and keep staff and students focused on reaching those goals and targets. Principals closely monitor the effectiveness of school practices on teaching and learning.
- These schools have improvement teams that meet monthly to review the schools' progress toward meeting the yearly goals and targets, creating a collective sense of responsibility for ongoing improvement.

Findings on Professional Development Across Schools

Research on effective professional development shows that teachers need to participate in ongoing, continuous, sustained staff development focused on what students are to learn and how to address different problems students may have (*National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching*).

- Principals ensure that professional development opportunities directly enhance the teaching and learning in the schools. In addition to the scheduled district in-service days, schools have rearranged schedules and organized staff so that job-embedded professional development activities are provided during the school day. Teachers assume greater roles in collaboratively planning professional development opportunities.
- Professional development directly relates to teaching and learning. Professional development contributes to the school's improvement processes and keeps teachers up-to-date with the latest literature and research, particularly on instruction.

Providing Instruction to Ensure Every Student Succeeds

The third SOP theme is: Schools of Promise design instruction to ensure every student's success. Research on high-performing schools shows that effective schools establish high expectations for all students and provide the supports necessary to achieve these expectations (Brook, et al., 1989, Howard and McCabe 1990).

- These schools develop plans with yearly goals and targets focused on state indicators, particularly those addressing student performance and meeting adequate yearly progress targets. Goals and targets are based on the analyses of student performance on previous district and statewide assessments, and the district and schools' leadership or improvement teams set these goals and targets. Elementary schools set instructional goals and targets for each grade level, based on item analyses of student performance on state assessments.
- These schools provide additional support and assistance to students. They have scheduled and schoolwide intervention programs and approaches for students who are struggling or are at risk of failing courses or grades. Daily and weekly interventions are available to students and include after-school tutoring and academic content programs.
- To address the needs of English-language-learners, these schools provide part-time tutoring, support for students in general education classes, and direct instruction in English-as-a-Second Language. These schools provide special education services to students with disabilities in general education classes while also using self-contained special education classes. Special educators work closely with classroom teachers to support students with disabilities in general education classes.

Engaging Parents and the Community to Support Student Performance

The fourth SOP theme is: Schools of Promise engage parents and the community to support student success. Research shows that effective schools focus their efforts on engaging families and communities in developing trusting and respectful relationships with school staff and building strong relationships with community organizations (Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

- These schools believe that parent engagement is a key component of improvement efforts and welcome parents as important members of the school community. Parents contribute time, resources and assistance that help make the schools more responsive to their children's needs.

- These schools welcome parents, frequently communicate with them, and provide frequent activities to engage parents in learning more about the school, the school's expectations, and how to support children's learning at home. They communicate expectations for students and parents in each subject at each grade level through phone calls, e-mails or assignment sheets. Student progress in meeting these expectations is also frequently reported to parents.
- These schools build strong connections with community organizations to supplement or enhance the schools' programs. They partner with local businesses, universities or community organizations to support learning and provide internships or career information.

Creating a Culture Where Individuals are Valued

The fifth *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise create a culture where each individual feels valued.* Research on high-performing schools demonstrates that an effective school maintains a safe and orderly environment where students show respect for each other and are free of fear, and where the code of conduct is well-publicized, fair and uniformly enforced (Schwartz, 20001).

- These schools develop strong and supportive relationships among teachers and staff, and teacher-student relationships create a sense of family and personalized learning environments. Teachers are caring, committed individuals who know students well and focus on maintaining high expectations and standards. Students' relationships with teachers motivate them to excel.
- These schools have activities and programs to recognize students when they meet or exceed academic and behavioral expectations. They also have disciplinary rules, policies and procedures that create safe school environments and foster students' sense of responsibility for appropriate behavior.
- These schools have specific activities and programs that foster student engagement in the schools' cultures and promote positive student-student and teacher-student relationships. They have anti-bullying programs, student support groups, and courses and programs to increase the sensitivity of students to the diverse backgrounds of other students.

Given the size and descriptive nature of this study, claiming cause-and-effect relationships is impossible. Yet the findings provide insight into how high-poverty urban schools can use research-based practices aligned with the *Schools of Promise Framework of Practice* to increase student achievement. We encourage school leaders, teachers and others interested in school improvement to develop thoughtful comparisons with their own experience and to further explore the innovative and effective practices of these and other *Schools of Promise* by visiting us on the web at www.ode.state.oh.us and search for keyword PROMISE.