Project ASSIST: A Comprehensive, Systemic Change Initiative for Middle Level Schools

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Project ASSIST Background

- ASSIST: Achieving Success through School Improvement Site Teams
- Developed—1995-96 as a service project to Missouri schools
- 1996-1998—First Cohort
  - 8 Elementary Schools
  - 8 Middle Level Schools
  - 9 High Schools
- 1998-2000—Second Cohort
  - 12 Middle Level Schools
- 2003-2006—Third Cohort
  - 4 Middle Level Schools

Project ASSIST Design

- Site-based, school-specific improvement initiative
- Site-based leadership team of teacher leaders and principal
- Bi-monthly external support to build team capacity so team can lead school-specific change grounded in two "frameworks"
  - Student-centered content framework
  - Vision-driven process framework
- Mix of voluntary and leader-determined participation
- Cohorts 1 & 2—cross-section of schools
- Cohort 3—high poverty, low-achieving schools

CARING, COLLABORATIVE CULTURE
TRUSTING, RESPECTFUL CLIMATE

SUCCESS
for each
STUDENT

- Academic
- Social
- Emotional
- Physical

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- **Principal/Administrative Team Leadership**
  - Establish Distributive/Participative Leadership (Capacity)
  - Establish Transformational Leadership (Change)
  - Establish Instructional Leadership (Pedagogy)
  - Establish Managerial Leadership (Efficiency)
- **Staff Leadership**
  - Accept Leader Roles (School Improvement Team)
  - Become a Community of Leaders (Staff)
  - Commit to Success for Each Student (Staff)
- **Parent Leadership**
  - Accept Leader Roles (Committees)
  - Provide Instructional Support (Volunteers)
- **Student Leadership**
  - Accept Leader Roles (Committees)
  - Develop Leadership (Student Governance)
- **Community Leadership**
  - Accept Leader Roles (Committees)
  - Provide Instructional Support (Volunteers)
- **District Leadership**
  - Understand Site-Level Needs
  - Support Site-Level Needs

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- **Change Processes**
  - Establish Comprehensive and Systemic Processes
  - Establish Vision-Driven not Deficit-Driven Change
  - Inform Change via Formative and Summative Data
- **Program Delivery**
  - Embed Basic Skills and Enrichment Programs
  - Require Core and Exploratory Curriculum
  - Provide Co-Curricular/Extracurricular Opportunities
  - Implement Student Grading and Homework Policies
  - Create Small Learning Communities/Teaming Structures
  - Implement Multi-Year/Extended Learning Relationships
  - Implement a Flexible Instructional Schedule
  - Implement Student-Adult Advisement Opportunities
  - Implement Multiple Transition Practices to/from School
  - Provide Service Learning/Volunteerism/Health Services
- **Personnel Policies**
  - Recruit, Select, Retain, Develop, Dismiss Aggressively
  - Engage Staff in the Design/Implementation of Continuous Authentic and Relevant Professional Development
  - Align Teaching Assignments to Teacher Ability and Program Needs
  - Organize Staff by Teams and Content Areas
  - Provide Teacher and Team Planning Times
- **Student Policies**
  - Assign/Group Students Heterogeneously
  - Establish Attendance and Behavior Policies
- **Resource Allocation**
  - Align with Vision/Goals

ORGANIZATIONAL PEDAGOGY

- **Standards-Based, Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum**
  - Align with State Standards
  - Align with Curricula of other Grade Levels
  - Align with Instruction and Assessment
  - Integrate across disciplines
  - Relevant and Authentic for Young Adolescents
- **Standards-Based, Developmentally Appropriate Instruction**
  - Align with State Standards
  - Align with Curriculum and Assessment
  - Engage Learners Actively (Mentally and Physically)
  - Relevant and Authentic for Young Adolescents
- **Standards-Based, Developmentally Appropriate Assessment**
  - Align with State Standards
  - Align with Curriculum and Instruction
  - Align with State/National Testing Methods
  - Relevant and Authentic for Young Adolescents
- **Grounded in Knowledge of Learner**
  - Match Academic Readiness and Capacity
  - Promote Socialization with Peers and Adults
  - Foster Emotional Self-Image and Self-Control
  - Foster Self-Esteem (General & Academic)
  - Match Physical Needs & Development

Organizational Mission
"What is our organization's purpose?"

Organizational Values/Beliefs
"What do we value/believe about teaching, learning, professional development, and the process of change?"

Knowledge of Best Practice
"Do we understand best educational practice and systemic change?"

Assess School Action Plan
"How much of the plan have we accomplished?"

Organizational Vision
"What do we want our organization to look like over the next few years?"

Commitment to Best Practice
"Are we dedicated to the study of best practices and to the systemic processes for change?"

Periodic Assessment of Current Practice
"What data do we regularly collect and analyze?"

Baseline Data About Current Practice
"What do we look like as we begin the process?"

Organizational Goals
"How can we accomplish our organization's vision?"

Implement School Action Plan
"How do we collectively implement our action plan?"

Design Organizational Action Plan
"What objectives, tasks, responsibilities, and timelines are necessary to accomplish our goals?"

Organizational Component Focus Teams
What functions of our organization are necessary for effectiveness (e.g., Curriculum, Leadership, Facilities, Professional Development, etc.)?"

Project ASSIST
Today's Paper

- Changes in Pre-Post Variables for Middle Level Schools in Cohorts 1 & 2
  - Culture and Climate
  - Leadership
  - Pedagogy
- Data Collected Using Factors from:
  - School Culture Survey (Gruenert/Valentine, 1996)
  - Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire Revised Middle (Hoy/Sabo, 1998)
  - Organizational Health Inventory, Middle (Hoy/Sabo, 1998)
  - Staff Assessment Questionnaire (Andrews/Soder, 1987)
  - School Empowerment Scale (Short/Rinehart, 1992)
  - Instructional Practices Inventory (Painter/Valentine, 1996)

Culture/Climate Variables
Pre-Post Significant Differences

Variable	96-98	98-00	Both	Source
Teacher Collaboration	*	*	**	SCS
Learning Partnership		**	**	SCS
Unity of Purpose		**	**	SCS
Professional Development	*	*	**	SCS
Teacher Collegial Support		**	**	SCS
Teacher Committed Behavior	NA	**	NA	OCDQ
Teacher Disengaged Behavior	NA	(**)	NA	OCDQ
Teacher Affiliation	NA	**	NA	OHI
Positive Learning Climate	(*)			SAQ
High Expectations	(*)			SAQ
Dedicated Staff	**			SAQ
Teacher Decision-Making		**	**	SPES
T. Prof. Growth Opportunities		*	*	SPES

Pre-Post Paired Sample T-Tests   *=.05   **=01   NA: Not Available

Leadership Variables
Pre-Post Significant Differences

Variable	96-98	98-00	Both	Source
Principal Collaborative Leadership		**	**	SCS
Strong Principal Leadership	(**)	**		SAQ
Principal Collegial Leadership	NA	*	NA	OHI

Pre-Post Paired Sample T-Tests   *=.05   **=01   NA: Not Available

Pedagogical Variables
Pre-Post Significant Differences

Variable	96-98	98-00	Both	Source
Academic Emphasis	NA	**	NA	OHI
Curriculum Continuity		*	*	SAQ
Early Ident Stu Special Needs		**		SAQ
Freq. Monitor Stu. Prog/Inst	(**)	**		SAQ
Resource Support Classroom	NA	**	NA	OHI
Stu. Engaged H-O Learning	*	**	**	IPI
Teacher-Led Instruction		**	*	IPI
Stu Seatwork T. Engaged		(*)	(*)	IPI
Stu Seatwork T. not Engaged		(**)	(**)	IPI
All Higher Order Learning	*	*	**	IPI
All H-O and Teacher-Led Inst.	*	**	**	IPI
All Student Seatwork		(**)	(**)	IPI
All Seatwork/Stu. Disengage.	*	(**)	(**)	IPI
Seatwork wo T; Stu Disengag		(**)	(**)	IPI

Pre-Post Paired Sample T-Tests   *=.05   **=01   NA: Not Available

Project ASSIST
Summary of Findings

- Positive changes in school culture and climate evident, especially
  - Increased focus on mission of school
  - Increased collaboration among P-T, T-T
  - Increased perceptions of empowerment
- Positive changes in school leadership were evident, especially
  - Increased skill in fostering collaborative relationships
  - Increased skill in fostering collegial relationships
- Positive changes in pedagogy were evident, especially
  - Increased focus on academics
  - Increased curriculum continuity
  - Increased higher-order learning
  - Increased teacher-led instruction
  - Increased teacher engagement with students for instruction
  - Decreased student seatwork

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Final Thoughts

- Initiative positively impacted the culture/climate, leadership, and pedagogy of the participating schools
- External support to a school leadership team to address site-specific change grounded on best practice proved valuable for most participating schools
- Grade-level specific initiative produced stronger results than multi-grade level initiative
- Link between culture/climate, leadership, and pedagogy implies improved student achievement (but not confirmed in this study due to inconsistent achievement measures)
- Cohort 3 schools are receiving significantly more intensive support with a focus on improved student achievement.

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