

# Strengthening Ohio's Data System and Improvement Process

## What Is The Need?

Successful school improvement and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act require all levels of an education system—from teachers to regional service providers—to use data in various ways: to make decisions about instructional choices, evaluate the effectiveness of curricula and programs, improve the performance of schools and districts, and target state support to districts. Teachers use curricula, content standards, and knowledge to plan and deliver instruction and to assess student learning. Principals manage the workings of their schools, communicate with parents, and offer instructional leadership and support to staff. District leaders assess needs, identify goals and proven strategies to improve schools, implement and monitor these strategies, and allocate resources where they have the most impact. Regional service providers assess district needs and provide state-supported services to districts.

From a system's perspective, each of these levels should work toward the same end: making schools better to improve achievement for *all* students. But each level needs slightly different supports and access to different layers of data. Within this system, one question should drive the use of data: How can we make better, more informed decisions and choose strategies that will make a difference? The answer to this question lies in accessing, analyzing, and making sense of all kinds of data: student achievement data, perception data, and district- and school-based data.

The Ohio Department of Education, along with numerous external partners, has embarked on an ambitious agenda: to support the effective use of data at all levels of education and to develop systems and tools that enable access and analysis of data and support for district and school improvement. It faced the challenging task of designing data tools at the same time as it began to redesign how to provide effective regional-level support to districts and schools and coordinate multiple silos and service layers that previously had not worked together. As an important piece of the redesign, the department wanted to build the capacity of regional service providers to use these tools in support of the Ohio Improvement Process.

## How Is Great Lakes East Supporting Ohio?

The Great Lakes East Comprehensive Assistance Center has provided resources and contributed expertise in the design of data tools and professional development modules to build the knowledge capacity of data users in Ohio. Great Lakes East also has assisted the Ohio Department of Education in aligning these tools and professional development to the larger Ohio Improvement Process. At the heart of data work in Ohio is Data Driven Decisions for Academic Achievement (D3A2), a statewide data system designed to connect student achievement data with schools and classrooms as well as content standards and benchmarks. This data system is a long-term initiative with many working committees consisting of representatives from multiple education sectors. Specifically, Great Lakes East has worked with these committees to support the design and content of three tools: the Ohio Data Primer, the Professional Development Data Modules, and the Decision Framework Process.

**Ohio Data Primer.** The Ohio Data Primer is a Web-based tool designed to help teachers who are novice data users become more skilled at using data to inform teaching and learning. It is organized around four modules: (1) Where are we? (2) Where have we been? Where do we want to be? (3) Are we leaving anyone behind? (4) How can we improve? Principals can use the Data Primer as a data training tool for their staff. Tutorials guide users through the Data Primer. Each tutorial provides opportunities for users to practice analyzing simulated student data or practice with their own student data. Learning Point Associates contributed to the content and functionality of the Data Primer.

**Professional Development Data Modules.** These modules support teachers in the use of D3A2 and build the capacity of teachers to use data effectively. The modules will be used for different delivery systems: regional training and online courses. A link to the Ohio Data Primer will be built into the modules.

**Decision Framework Process.** This process, used by district leadership teams, asks essential questions organized by four levels: student performance, instructional management, leadership and school climate, and resource management. As much as possible, the teams use data to answer these questions. At the end of the process, districts will identify two critical needs for improvement focused on reading and mathematics and one critical need focused on leadership and school climate. These needs become the district's improvement goals. The process identifies the causes of problems and the needs of the district and illuminates potential strategies for achieving the district's goals.

## **What Is the Impact?**

The Ohio Department of Education will have in place a coherent system of support to districts, as described in the Ohio Improvement Process. Trained regional service providers will be able to guide district leadership teams in the use of the Decision Framework Process to identify their most critical needs, which then become the foundation for their focused improvement plan. Users will pull data electronically from the D3A2 warehouse to answer essential questions focused on student performance or school climate within the Decision Framework Process. Principals will access the Ohio Data Primer on the Web and use it to build the capacity of staff to make sense of data. Teachers will access professional development data modules through regionally based facilitated sessions and online courses. Ultimately, this coherent constellation of data tools and professional development will help educators at all levels of the system to make better choices for students.

## **What Is the Client Saying?**

According to Stephen Barr, Ed.D., associate superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education's Center for School Improvement, "The assistance provided by Great Lakes East has been critical in developing the foundation tools, training, and professional development needed to drive a robust statewide data-driven process. The potential for success is very high."