

Building the Capacity of Ohio's Regional Service Providers

What Is the Need?

To help all students achieve, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires state education agencies to identify and provide technical assistance to districts in improvement and in corrective action. Corrective action occurs when a district does not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) by the end of the second full school year after it has been identified for improvement. The goal of providing assistance to districts in improvement and corrective action is to improve the achievement of students not making AYP.

The Ohio Department of Education has made a concerted effort to develop a common language of school improvement, increase understanding of school improvement processes, and provide universal access to data tools aligned with the Ohio Improvement Process. This process articulates four stages of improvement: (1) identify critical needs, (2) develop a focused plan, (3) implement the focused plan, and (4) monitor the improvement process.

Responding to this effort, the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Assistance Center has worked with the Ohio Department of Education to ensure high-quality district and school improvement across the state. Although NCLB requires states to identify low-performing districts and schools, the Ohio Department of Education has embarked to design a larger support system that includes all districts and schools.

How Is Great Lakes East Supporting Ohio?

Great Lakes East has provided leadership and technical assistance in two major initiatives under the larger goal of building the capacity of Ohio's regional service providers: (1) designing a quality assurance process that includes screening, performance-based assessment, selection, and ongoing support of regional service providers to corrective action districts; and (2) leading a group of assistant superintendents, regional staff from educational service centers, and Ohio Department of Education staff to design one focused district improvement planning process that all districts must follow.

Designing a quality assurance process. Great Lakes East, along with the Ohio Department of Education, convened a statewide team to identify the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by regional service providers—particularly those trained to work in corrective action districts. During the conceptualization stage, the team used examples from credentialing work from Illinois and Michigan to inform a design process. Great Lakes East took a lead role in designing the screening and selection process, training regional service providers, and creating a structure for ongoing support. The work focused on connecting the ongoing data-system work with the Ohio Improvement Process and with the training and support of regional service providers. Based on a similar effort in Illinois, the Ohio design effort assessed participant problem-solving, facilitation, and teaming skills; it also introduced the continuous improvement planning process and new data tools to support this process. The department invited potential providers who passed this screening to a training session to help prepare them for working with

districts in corrective action to identify critical needs.

Designing a focused district-improvement planning process. Great Lakes East also worked with the statewide team to design a focused improvement-planning process to be used by all service providers working with districts and schools in Ohio. The purpose of this initiative was to design one rigorous process based on the critical needs of districts and schools. By following this process, district leadership teams will generate one district improvement plan with a limited number of goals and aligned research-based strategies and action steps. The end result will be that all regional service providers in Ohio will utilize a common vetted planning process that ensures consistency, coherence, and quality for schools and districts. Through this development, the statewide team created the Focused Planning Guide, which is based on a four-phase process: (1) prepare for plan development; (2) develop goals, strategies, and indicators of progress and performance; (3) develop action steps and a budget, and (4) finalize the plan. This document will be used by external facilitators, including state support teams, state diagnostic teams, and educational service center staff. A shorter version of this document will be offered to district leadership teams.

What Is the Impact?

With the assistance from Great Lakes East, the Ohio Department of Education now has a quality assurance model that can be modified to ensure that highly qualified and trained regional service providers work directly with district leadership teams. Districts in corrective action are expected to benefit from the guidance of state diagnostic teams that have gone through this quality assurance process and are now implementing a single research-based planning tool. In addition, the development of one focused improvement planning process will encourage districts to identify a limited number of goals based on their critical needs. Aligned research-based strategies, action steps, and the use of performance and progress indicators will bring rigor and focus to district planning. Schools in improvement will go through a comparable needs-assessment and planning process and will have to align their plans with the district plan. This process will contribute to a more focused allocation of resources and monitoring of performance.

What Is the Client Saying?

This capacity-building effort has enhanced the Ohio Department of Education's cross-center work, led to further development of common processes, and enhanced the department's ability to support districts in corrective action. A similar effort is underway to train and support state support teams and educational service centers as they work with districts and schools in need of improvement and with higher performing districts and schools. Regional facilitators from each of Ohio's state support team regions currently are piloting the focused planning process and will work with school districts through Ohio's State Personnel Development Grant. According to Stephen Barr, Ed.D., associate superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education's Center for School Improvement, "Great Lakes East's support has been and remains to be essential in helping Ohio get and maintain the momentum for this large-scale change process. They have helped the state articulate a unified and integrated vision of what a robust improvement process looks like. Together, we continue identifying and creating the tools and training and personnel supports necessary for all students, schools, and districts."