SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT (SIG) PRACTICE:

TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP – CURRENT LEADERS

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ♦ MIAMI, FLORIDA

Developing the skills of school turnaround leaders who serve in the district's lowest performing schools is a critical challenge for Miami-Dade County Public Schools (Miami-Dade). In response to this challenge, Miami-Dade has developed a strategy to improve the school turnaround leadership skills of current school principals and assistant principals in the district and to hold them accountable for student achievement results. This strategy seeks to increase the number of skilled and experienced principals who understand the needs of students in Miami-Dade's SIG and priority schools. Through this strategy, district officials are able to set common expectations for turnaround leaders.

THE STRATEGY: Developing Turnaround School Leaders

The district's Education Transformation Office (ETO)[1] leads the effort to build the skills of principals and assistant principals in current SIG and priority schools, also called ETO schools. The leadership development activities align with the district's broader turnaround framework as follows: provide learning and support opportunities

Miami-Dade Public Schools at a Glance
Start of SIG Implementation: 2010–11
Locale: Suburb, Large
Enrollment: 350,239
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch: 72%
Racial/Ethnic Composition: 66% Hispanic, 24% Black, 9% White, 1% Asian, <1% American Indian, <1% Other
English Learners: 19%
Students With Disabilities: 10%

Cohorts 1 and 2 SIG Schools in Miami-Dade			
SIG Model	# of Schools	School Level	# of Schools
Transformation	12	Elementary	9
Turnaround	14	Middle	7
Restart	0	High	10
Closure	0	Other	0

through ongoing professional development and targeted assistance, narrow the turnaround focus to instructional improvement, and monitor progress using data. Thus, the three components of the development strategy for school turnaround leaders are:

- Professional development

- Instructional reviews

- Data, assessment, and technical assistance/coordination of management (DATA/COM)

Miami-Dade uses these components together to build the turnaround leadership capacity of ETO school leaders.

Professional Development. On a monthly basis, ETO school principals and assistant principals meet for a day of professional development focused on instructional improvement and leadership training.[2] The district organizes and facilitates the professional development, and ETO school principals and assistant principals are required to attend.[3] The training on instructional strategies is sometimes content-specific (for example, principals participated in a science experiment demonstrating concepts that their students were learning), and sometimes it focuses on broader topics (such as implementation of the Common Core State Standards). At these training sessions, leaders have the opportunity to discuss and share challenges and best practices.

The professional development sessions typically combine large-group training with small-group breakout sessions. The large-group trainings provide principals with a common instructional leadership language and understanding across the district. The small-group breakout sessions provide differentiated support to groups of principals. The small groups may be organized by school level (elementary, middle, and high school principals) or by common needs based on school achievement data. Specific data trends may guide the clustering of principals into either homogeneous groups (for more intense training on specific areas of need) or heterogeneous groups (in which principals who have been successful in an aspect of school improvement and principals who are struggling with the same issue can share successes as well as challenges with one another). Trainings are sometimes held at ETO schools where there are opportunities for the principals to conduct "instructional rounds," in which principals visit classrooms and then debrief on best practices and opportunities for improvement.

Instructional Reviews. Three times per year, members of the district's ETO support team (which includes district curriculum support specialists, the district instructional supervisor, and the district administrative director) conduct an instructional review of each ETO school in partnership with the school site's leadership team.

The one-day instructional reviews occur in the fall, winter, and spring of each school year and follow a common structure.

- *Orientation.* Each instructional review begins with an orientation during which the principal presents to the ETO support team the school's action plan and most current school data, including benchmark achievement data and other data associated with the school's improvement goals.

- *Classroom Observations.* Then, the ETO support team and the school's leadership team conduct visits to every classroom in the school to observe teacher performance and the use of effective instructional strategies (e.g., differentiated instruction, questioning strategies). Observation teams use walk-through rubrics developed by ETO to assess instructional practices, student engagement, and the quality of student work.

- *Debriefing.* The day ends with two debriefing sessions led by the ETO support team. The first debrief occurs with the school leadership team; the second debrief, conducted with all school staff, is optional and may be requested by the principal. These debriefings focus on successes and areas of concern identified during the classroom observations.

- *Continuous Improvement.* After each instructional review, the school leadership team refines the school's action plan (required as part of the annual school improvement plan submission) so that the plan targets the specific needs identified during the instructional review. The revised action plan guides the improvement strategies implemented between each instructional review, includes assignments for school leaders, and directs the specialized support from the ETO support team to the school. This plan is shared with school staff and community members.

Data, Assessment, and Technical Assistance/Coordination of Management (DATA/COM). DATA/COM meetings occur four times per year, are held in the Miami-Dade district office, and focus on student achievement results. All ETO principals meet with the Miami-Dade superintendent, cabinet members, and key central office staff (e.g., staff from the finance office, human resources, facilities, and personnel). The meetings occur over two days each quarter: one day for elementary schools and one day for secondary schools. Each meeting lasts 4–6 hours. The timing of the meetings is coordinated with the results of the district assessments and annual state assessment.

Principal Presentations. ETO principals are expected to review the updated student data prior to the meeting and present information on school progress. Each principal's presentation lasts approximately 10–20 minutes and follows a common structure:

- *Overview Presentation.* Principals provide a short presentation on the school's latest student achievement data and three-year trends. A common template guides the discussion on the key content areas of reading, mathematics, science, and writing. This approach helps district leaders observe district trends and assess how each particular school fits within those trends.

- *Longitudinal Student Achievement Analysis.* Each principal is responsible for presenting trend data on student performance and comparing school-level data with district and state averages. The ETO helps with the process by providing principals with an Excel spreadsheet that includes three years of school, district, and state student-achievement data in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Although a principal may share other pertinent data (e.g., student behavior, community involvement, and attendance), the focus for the DATA/COM meetings is on progress toward meeting each school's student achievement goals and the goals for the district.

- *Challenges.* In addition to reporting on progress, principals share current challenges and strategies for improvement.

- *Discussion.* After each principal finishes presenting on student achievement results, trends, and challenges, the remaining time is opened to attendees to ask clarifying questions, gauge the current needs at the school, and discuss options for providing support.

Streamlined Support and Accountability. The superintendent and the district cabinet attend these meetings not only to provide senior-level monitoring but also to streamline subsequent decision making about the deployment of support services to individual schools. For example, in a past DATA/COM meeting, a school reported that it was not meeting growth targets in the area of science. Senior district staff decided to provide the school with an additional science instructional coach. Miami-Dade purposefully uses the DATA/COM meetings to ensure that the district responds quickly to meet the needs of ETO schools.

The DATA/COM process for ETO schools holds school principals accountable for meeting the expectations for school turnaround and holds the district leadership and cabinet accountable for providing targeted support in a timely manner. In a school district as large as Miami-Dade, with 380 schools, this process helps prioritize targeted and efficient support for the district's lowest performing schools.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

When Miami-Dade first began supporting ETO schools, the district had a turnaround framework, instructional coaches, and common data-use strategies. However, after the first year of SIG implementation, ETO staff realized that there was great variation in skills among school leaders and these leaders were not receiving ETO support beyond the instructional reviews. After identifying this need, ETO began providing new, more targeted support for principals and assistant principals in SIG and priority schools.

In the face of declining SIG funds and a $15 million shortfall in the Miami-Dade budget, the superintendent committed to continuing to provide supports for the SIG and priority schools. The ETO will continue, but some of the responsibilities of the office will be absorbed into other district offices to realize cost-savings of some duplication of efforts between ETO and other district offices. For example, in the 2013–14 school year, the responsibility for organizing the professional development for all district principals, including ETO school principals, was transferred to the district's Office of Human Capital Management. Now, the Office of Human Capital Management manages and coordinates professional development topics for all district schools using a combination of district and Title I funds. Although ETO schools continue to receive targeted professional development, similar professional development is now offered to non-ETO schools funded through non-SIG monies.

CONCLUSION

Faced with a growing number of identified low-performing schools, Miami-Dade is working to build the skills and abilities of current principals and assistant principals to lead turnaround efforts. In conjunction with the district's efforts to increase the pipeline of new school-turnaround leaders, this work is critical to address the need for skilled leadership in turnaround schools.

SOURCES

Data for the tables on page 1 are from the following sources: District at-a-glance data are from the NCES Common Core of Data (2011–12); and SIG information is from SIG-Awarded Schools (2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13) located at http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html.

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

[1] Miami-Dade's Education Transformation Office (ETO) organizes and provides targeted support to the district's 66 ETO schools (26 SIG schools and 40 low-performing priority schools identified through Florida's A–F grading system). ETO uses a common framework for supporting low-performing schools. The framework's basic components include strong instructional leadership through principals, assistant principals, and content-area coaches; data-informed decision making through district benchmark assessments, state assessments, and weekly classroom observations; and embedded, routine support of instruction through daily coaching, lesson planning, collaborative teacher planning time, and job-embedded professional development. Miami-Dade's 66 ETO schools receive intensive support focused on building school leaders and staff capacity to turn around the school and sustain improvements.

[2] Together, principals and district curriculum and instructional staff determine the professional development topics each year. The topics are determined through feedback collected from a principal survey and through committees of principals and district staff convened for this purpose.

[3] Early on, ETO staff organized and facilitated monthly training for principals of ETO schools. Now, the assistant superintendent of the Office of Human Capital Management leads all professional development throughout the district. This change is intended to improve coordination of topics and resources and create efficiencies as budgets decline.