SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT (SIG) PRACTICES:
MAKING DATA-BASED DECISIONS

LESLIE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

LESLIE COUNTY SCHOOLS ♦ HYDEN, KENTUCKY

To effectively personalize instruction to the needs of its students, Leslie County High School (Leslie) developed an integrated, multifaceted system of instructional support. This system features the intensive use of data tracking tools by teachers, administrators, and students combined with monitoring by school leaders. This strategy for using data allows staff and students to continuously assess and track student performance in order to identify and respond to students' needs.

Leslie County High School at a Glance
SIG Model: Transformation
Start of SIG Implementation: 2010–11
Locale: Rural, Remote
Grades: 9–12
Enrollment: 502
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch: 77%
Racial/Ethnic Composition: 99% White, 1% Black, <1% Hispanic
English Learners: 0%
Students With Disabilities: 12%

Student Outcomes	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Reading % proficient	65-69%*	80-84%*	35%–39%***
Math % proficient	40-44%*	50%–54%*	15%–19%***
Graduation rate	**	**	**

Note: Percentages for English Learners and students with disabilities are from the Civil Rights Data Collection and may be based on a different total enrollment of students than the enrollment figure reported by the Common Core of Data.

* Because the school's number of test takers aggregates to 200 students or fewer, the proficiency rates are displayed as a range.

**Kentucky received a "timeline extension" from the U.S. Department of Education, pursuant to which it is not yet required to use an adjusted cohort graduation rate that meets the regulatory requirements. Accordingly, Kentucky did not report adjusted cohort graduation data for the 2009–10, 2010–11, or 2011–12 school years.

*** Data are not comparable to prior year.

THE STRATEGY: Integrated, Multifaceted System of Data-Driven Instructional Support

The Leslie system is organized around the use of two data tracking tools—student and teacher data notebooks—and a monitoring strategy—classroom walk-throughs.

- Student data notebooks are used daily by students and teachers to track student performance on formative assessments, inform teacher-student discussions, and plan needed support. This strategy includes students' participation in daily support periods and reviews during quarterly "data days," a structured time when students meet with staff to review progress.
- Teacher data notebooks are reviewed by teachers during weekly professional learning community (PLC) meetings—or more often—to track individual and class-level performance and inform instructional planning, student supports, and parent communication.
- Walk-throughs are twice-monthly classroom observations of teacher practice by teachers and administrators. Walk-throughs may be prompted by a need identified by Leslie leaders, coaches, or teachers during data analysis. Information gathered through walk-

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throughs further enhances student-level support by informing improvements to the overall quality of classroom instruction.

The student and teacher data notebooks are central elements of Leslie's overall approach to using data to drive improvements in the school.[1] These two data tracking tools document student performance, inform data reviews, and guide decisions about needed student supports. Their broader purpose is to engage students and teachers in the use of data to direct their own progress toward improvement goals. For teachers, the notebooks also provide a consistent and structured system for assessing each teacher's contribution to the overall school improvement goals.

Student Data Notebooks. Student data notebooks enable students to clearly understand course expectations and share responsibility with teachers for tracking their own academic performance. Teachers use student data notebooks together with students to document the results of frequent formative assessments (e.g., teacher-developed quizzes, school benchmark assessments), guide discussions about student learning needs and progress, inform the assignment of daily instructional supports, and reflect on student growth over time.

Each student at Leslie maintains four student data notebooks: one for each of the four core subjects (mathematics, English, science, and social studies). Stored in a three-ring binder, these data notebooks are carried by students from class to class throughout the day and inform each individual student's discussions with teachers about areas in which the student is struggling. Students are responsible for sharing their notebooks with teachers during the student-teacher discussions, and teachers frequently will ask to see evidence of improvement in areas in which a student is struggling. These student-teacher discussions occur both during structured time and informal discussions. All student data notebooks contain the same core information, which is listed on the contents page:

- Course syllabus
- Classroom-specific practices (e.g., class rules)
- Vocabulary words
- Student journal
- Classroom notes
- Printout of results from quarterly assessments and practice ACT test
- Formative assessment tracking form
- Reports from an online practice ACT test
- Student-specific attendance reports
- Student-specific discipline reports

Teachers also customize the student data notebooks to reflect specific course requirements. For example, one Leslie teacher added interim tests to her students' data notebooks so that the students are able to observe progress and areas of need with greater frequency. All teachers of core courses keep an electronic version of the student data notebook contents page as well as the forms needed for each section. This approach allows teachers to update and produce materials needed by students, such as a list of class rules.

Although there is some flexibility in the content of the student data notebooks, school leaders have set expectations for their use by both students and teachers. Expectations include using the notebooks for formative assessment tracking and for guiding the regular teacher-student check-ins, student data days, and the type of support offered during the students' daily support period. Teachers are held accountable for using these notebooks in multiple ways. For example, school leaders expect that the notebooks are ready for use during PLC meetings. School leaders participate in these meetings to monitor that notebook usage occurs and aligns with the schoolwide expectations.

Formative Assessment Tracking. Leslie teachers begin each class period by identifying "daily learning targets." The teacher provides students with at least one opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the daily learning target and to track their performance within their data notebooks. For example, the teacher might put a problem on the board related to the learning target. If the student demonstrates an understanding of the concept, she can give herself a checkmark in the appropriate section of her student data notebook; otherwise, the student leaves the target blank in the notebook, which indicates that she needs additional instruction and support. At least every two days, the teacher administers a quiz or gives an assignment on current learning targets. If a student does not demonstrate mastery on the quiz or assignment, the teacher and student revisit the information in the student data notebook to ensure that the student is actually making progress. If it is determined that the student is not learning the content, the teacher works with the student after school, during the dedicated support period, or during another specified time. If several students do not demonstrate mastery on the quiz, the teacher revisits that content during subsequent lessons.

Teacher-Student Check-Ins. During class, teachers talk with students individually about their performance and refer to information in the student notebook, such as results from quizzes and assignments. These unscheduled conversations frequently occur when students are working on individual or group assignments and the teacher has an opportunity to walk around the class and check in with students.

Student Data Days. Quarterly, administrators and teachers convene a student data day by grade level and subject. These meetings between each student and a staff member (either a teacher or an administrator) generally last five minutes—although the first meeting of the year in each subject is typically longer. During the first meeting of the year, the student and staff member review the student's data and set individualized academic goals within the academic subject area. In subsequent meetings, the student-staff pair review the student's achievement data. Students describe their own progress in relation to their goals, and the pair then review the data in the student's data notebook to confirm the student's interpretation of his or her progress. This approach also allows the pair to identify potential challenges to success and strategies for addressing any obstacles.

Daily Support Period. The Leslie schedule includes a daily support period, in which students receive targeted instruction on a specific skill or content area. Teachers use information from students' data notebooks to identify students who might need help and to pinpoint the specific topics and/or content areas of need. Students then are matched with a teacher who has been preselected as having expertise in teaching this particular skill and/or content area. For example, a student who is struggling in writing will work with one English teacher on main ideas on the first day, a second English teacher on detail the next day, and a third English teacher on punctuation and grammar the final day. Students who do not need extra attention in any subject may participate in an enrichment class, such as photography or welding during the daily support period. Decisions about the assignment of students to daily support periods are made during PLC meetings.

Teacher Data Notebooks. Similar to students, each core-subject teacher maintains his or her own data notebook. The teacher data notebook primarily includes class-level data that parallel the information maintained in the student data notebooks. For example, the teacher data notebook has class-level reports on practice ACT test results, which each student includes in his or her own student data notebook. The class-level reports indicate the number of students in the class who showed proficiency in each tested area. Two sections in the teacher data notebook contain individual student data: parent communication and student interventions. This information is used in multiple situations, including PLC reviews and consultations, communication with parents, and tracking of individual students.

Professional Learning Community Data Use. With support of a state-funded turnaround specialist,[2] teachers review and make decisions about instruction during PLC meetings. On a weekly basis, each PLC provides a structured setting in which teams of teachers review student data together and collectively decide on specific strategies and interventions for struggling students. In addition, the teachers assess their progress toward schoolwide and individual teacher goals. The PLCs also participate in 30-, 60-, and 90-day reviews, which require staff to look at checkpoints for each goal-related activity and then evaluate progress using accountability and formative tests, climate surveys, and other data every 30 days.

PLCs meet primarily in content-area teacher groups. For example, the social studies PLC meets every Wednesday after school for at least 1½ hours. Each month, at least one week of the PLC meeting must focus on data analysis. During that week, teachers examine the data in their teacher notebooks as well as any other school level data (e.g., school-level discipline data). The next week, the teachers make decisions on how to act on these data. For example, if most of the students in a class are struggling with compare-and-contrast skills, the teachers will plan ways to change their instruction. If the teachers cannot identify a viable solution, they will ask the administrative team to help. The turnaround specialist shows the teachers how to adapt their instruction, modeling it and working with the teachers to practice in class.

The PLC leaders also bring the individual student data and associated concerns to the administrative team—typically including the principal and turnaround specialist. If a student is struggling, this team decides whether to move a student to a different class (for example, if a student is struggling in Algebra 2 and needs to move to a lower level class) or across classes to regroup. The administrative team also can decide to put a student into a special support class.

Tracking of Individual Students and Parent Communication. Teachers use student-level data in their teacher data notebooks to track individual students. This approach includes logging and monitoring communications with parents. The student information informs future conversations with parents and provides context if meetings with administrators become necessary. The logs include student names, parent names, topics of conversation, and method of contact (in-person or by phone). Every six weeks, the teachers use information from their teacher data notebooks to identify which students are failing the class and which interventions the teacher has tried with each student to improve achievement. This tool is designed to hold the teachers accountable for the success of their students by ensuring that parents are engaged in supporting struggling students.

Walk-Throughs. The walk-throughs are classroom observations conducted by Leslie leaders and staff. These observations—which consist of specific tasks before, during, and after the walk-through[3]—provide an opportunity to monitor and account for the use of data and strategies to support student learning. There are two types of walk-throughs: administrative walk-throughs and peer walk-throughs.

Administrative Walk-Throughs. In administrative walk-throughs, two members of the administrative team (the principal, vice principal, counselor, and turnaround specialist) go into the classroom and observe instruction. Administrators take notes using a walk-through protocol and meet afterwards to compile data and discuss implications. This meeting is followed by direct feedback to the observed teacher. Next, administrators compile the findings across multiple classroom observations to produce a broader assessment of the quality of instruction within each subject area. For example, administrators might report that 30 percent of social studies teachers had students actively engaged during the lesson.

Peer Walk-Throughs. Peer walk-throughs, conducted by teachers, are referred to as "learning logs." For example, the English teachers are responsible for doing learning logs for the social studies teachers. Prior to each observation, the turnaround specialist briefs the observers on the criteria and focus for the observation. Teachers then observe their peers using the walk-through protocol. After a debrief with the turnaround specialist, the entire group participates in a follow-up meeting to discuss the findings.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Although the data notebooks had all of the information needed for students and teachers to have data-informed discussions, Leslie leaders observed that students and staff began to use these data only after school leaders set expectations and allotted time for these discussions to occur. After expectations were set for the time dedicated to data-informed discussions, students and staff understood the value of maintaining and using their data notebooks in order to be prepared for meetings (e.g., teacher-student check-ins, student data days, and PLCs) and to observe and track individual and collective progress over time—including identification of areas in need of more attention.

Leslie leaders acknowledge that the student and teacher data notebooks—if used as designed—are integral to the continuous improvement process at Leslie; but if the data notebooks are not strongly and consistently connected to structures and practices within the school, they are only static documents.

SUSTAINABILITY

Leslie has taken steps to institutionalize the core elements and processes from its data-driven instructional system so the work can be sustained regardless of staff turnover and other school changes. One such institutionalized process is having established times during the year to collect, analyze, and act upon data. For example, every summer Leslie staff review special education students' data to plan the programs for students with disabilities for the upcoming school year.

CONCLUSION

Multiple data sources, tracking tools, structured data reviews, and daily formative assessments provide continuous information about student progress and individual learning needs at Leslie County High School. Yet, a key to the success of this system is active participation in using data by multiple stakeholders—which, according to the Leslie principal, has resulted in making the use of data "routine" for teachers and administrators as well as students. The system developed by Leslie provides an example of an integrated, schoolwide, data-driven instructional support system and shows how such an approach can be integrated into daily classroom practice.

SOURCES

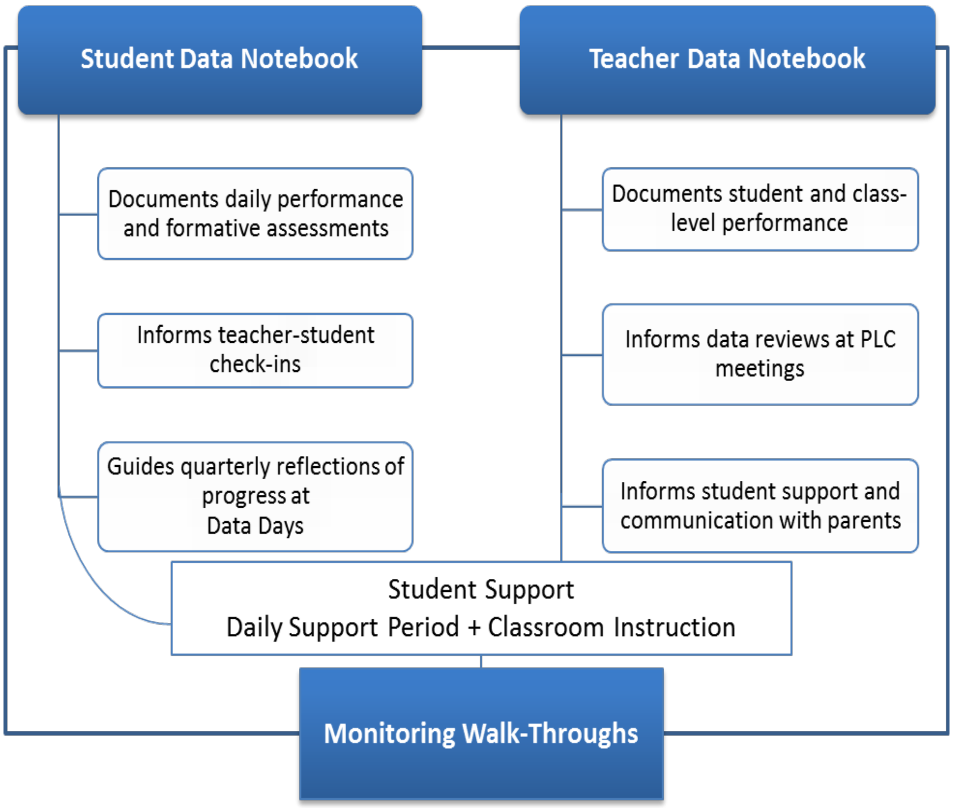
Data for the tables on page 1 are from the following sources: School at-a-glance data are from the NCES Common Core of Data (2011–12); SIG information is from SIG-Awarded Schools (2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13) located at http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html; students with disabilities and English Learner student percentage enrollment data are from the Civil Rights Data Collection (2011–12); and student outcomes data are from ED*Facts* (2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12).

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

[1] Figure 1 (see page 6) provides details of how these notebooks and walk-throughs form the foundation for data use in Leslie.

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS (continued)

Figure 1. Overview of the Leslie Data-Use Strategy



[2] The state-funded turnaround specialist has worked with Leslie since 2010 and has helped to develop and implement the Leslie approach to data use. Over the years, the turnaround specialist has shifted the focus to supporting the teachers with PLC expectations and processes and also provides one-on-one guidance to individual teachers.

[3] Table 1 shows the specific tasks before, during, and after the walk-through.

Table 1. Administrative and Peer Walk-Through Procedure

Before the Walk-Through	During the Walk-Through	After the Walk-Through
• Understand the walk-through instrument (intent, focus, tools or forms, concerns) • Share with staff a rationale for the walk-through process • Identify and discuss the focus of the observation	• Enter classrooms unobtrusively • Observe classrooms for 5–15 minutes per walk-through • Locate and internalize the lesson plan	• Provide specific, meaningful, and timely feedback • Examine data • Discuss the walk-through with the teacher within 24 hours and put a copy of the walk-through document in the teacher's evaluation binder