



National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform

i3 Project: Schools to Watch Transformation Network

June 2013

Project Highlights

The Schools to Watch (STW) Transformation Network Project seeks to improve student achievement in low-performing middle-grades schools. The four year project began in October 2010 in California, Illinois, and North Carolina with 18 schools. We are using a multi-layered system of support and an extensive set of school improvement strategies, including a STW coach, principal coach, STW site visits, professional development, early indicator systems, and networking activities. The evaluation is conducted by the Center for Prevention Research and Development.

The i3 STW Project is currently in its third year of implementation, and the work is gathering steam and surging forward. The three state hubs have been intensely busy delivering the multi-layered set of supports to project schools and participating in the data collection elements of the evaluation. Several project highlights include:

- **Hamlet Middle School** in Richmond County, North Carolina **has been designated as a STW school at the 2013 STW conference**. Congratulations to Jim Butler, the North Carolina i3 project team, and all the administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents at Hamlet for this accomplishment!
- **Coalinga Middle School** in Fresno County, California improved its school performance on the state standardized achievement tests in both language arts and mathematics to the degree that the **state of California moved Coalinga to "Safe Harbor" status**, a positive step forward as a Title I school making Adequate Yearly Progress to move out of Program Improvement Status.
- **Peter Murphy**, California League of Middle Schools and i3 team member, co-presented at the May 2013 i3 Project Directors Meeting in Washington, D. C. in a session entitled: "Who's Driving? How School Leaders Influence Project Efficacy." The session **highlighted lessons learned about the importance of principal leadership practices**.
- **Debby Kasak**, project director, **represented the i3 STW project at the first i3 project briefing held by the U. S. Department of Education**. The briefing, entitled "Investing in Innovation (i3) Three Years Later: How Grantees are Successfully Improving Low-Performing Schools via National Reform Networks," was held in Washington, DC in May 2013. It was an honor to be selected as one of three i3 projects out of 92 to participate. To view the briefing, go to edstream.ed.gov.
- The i3 National Evaluation Analysis and Reporting Team completed a formal review of our project's evaluation design and analysis plan. We are pleased to report that **our evaluation received the highest rating possible for a quasi-experimental study**. The only higher rating is available solely to projects with randomized control samples. Receiving this rating means that our evaluation meets the strength of evidence criteria for i3 projects, is scientifically sound, and that our findings will be included in the i3 national final evaluation report.

- Data collection efforts in the project continue to support the evaluation as well as facilitate data-based decision making in project schools. The table below shows the data collected, all of which is reported to schools and state project teams for reflection, needs assessment, goal setting, and monitoring progress.

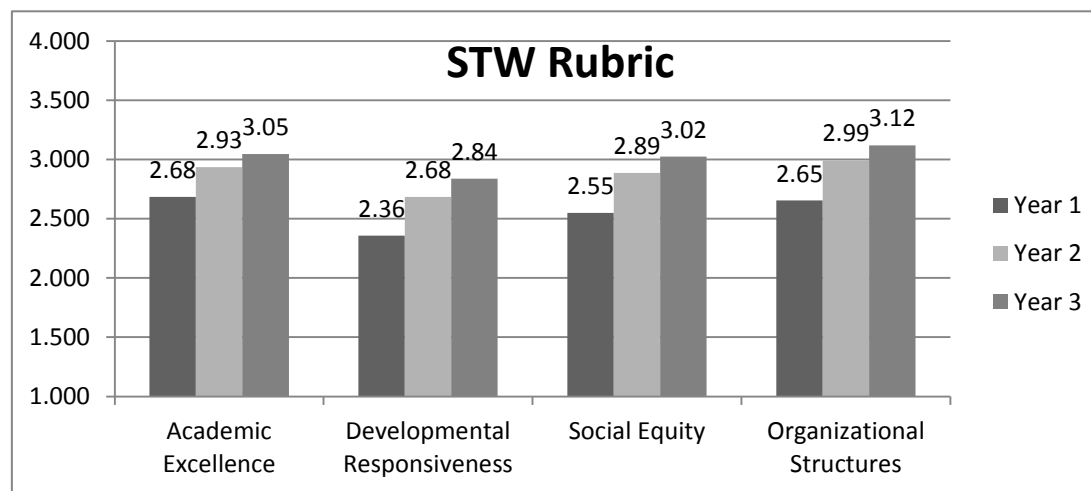
Data Component	Year 1 (2010/11)	Year 2 (2011/12)	Year 3 (2012/13)
STW Rubric	364 staff	402 staff	478 staff
Self-Study Surveys	275 teachers 5,315 students 1,820 parents	395 teachers 6,520 students 3,550 parents	379 teachers 6,189 students 3,436 parents
Coach's Log	179 visits by coaches	660 visits by coaches	697 visits by coaches (In progress)
Focus Groups	10 coaches	9 coaches and 8 principals	In progress
Site Visits by Evaluation Team	NA	NA	3 schools
Achievement Data	17 project schools 17 comparison schools	17 project schools 17 comparison schools	In progress

Data Findings

Below are selected findings from data collected from the 17 schools implementing the i3 STW Project. Data sources for the findings include: a) STW Rubric; b) Self-Study Teacher Surveys; and c) Student Achievement Data.

Implementation of STW Criteria

There is **significant change** in teacher ratings of their implementation of the four key STW Rubric criteria:



- 4 = High quality, complete, mature, and coherent implementation - NEARLY PERFECT, LITTLE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
- 3 = Good quality, maturing but not fully implemented by all – GOOD QUALITY BUT STILL ROOM FOR REFINEMENT and IMPROVEMENT
- 2 = Fair quality, mixed implementation, immature practice, sporadic by some – SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT NEEDED
- 1 = Poor quality, low level of implementation, new program, by a few – CONSIDERABLE STRATEGIC PLANNING, CONSENSUS BUILDING AND IMPROVEMENT NEEDED

<p>Collaboration and Climate</p>	<p>Teachers report significant improvements in the following areas from the first year of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Team Practices Increased – Teachers reported engaging more frequently in planning and coordination activities, curriculum integration, coordination of student assignments and assessments, and contact with parents. → Quality of Team Interactions Improved – Cohesion and harmony among teachers working together improved, teachers felt more prepared to work together in a collaborative way, and teachers agreed that they not only address student needs but have consistently high expectations for students. → Team Decision Making Increased – Teachers reported increased decision making opportunities among their teams regarding team practices, school-wide policies and practices, and student performance and assessments. → Work Climate Improved – Teachers reported higher levels of commitment to their school and stronger feelings of being recognized for their contributions by the school administration. → Collective Teacher Efficacy Improved – Teachers have an improved collective commitment to the success of their students.
<p>Instructional Practices</p>	<p>Teachers report significant increases in the use of “best” middle-grades instructional practices. Teachers report engaging more frequently in the following instructional practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small group active instruction ▪ Integration and interdisciplinary practices ▪ Authentic instruction and assessment ▪ Critical thinking practices ▪ Writing skill practices
<p>Leadership</p>	<p>Teacher ratings of the leadership practices of the administration at their school increased significantly. Teachers report that areas such as communication, follow-through, and problem-solving strategies have improved.</p>
<p>Student Achievement Scores</p>	<p>Preliminary analyses of the first two years of matched, individual student achievement scores on state standardized tests show that the majority of project schools (10 schools) have an upward trend in achievement (6 schools improved in English/reading; 7 improved in mathematics), but the gains are not statistically significant. This trend is encouraging, particularly in light of the contextual improvements measured at schools (i.e., improvements in implementation, collaboration, climate, instructional practices, and leadership), which must occur in order to impact student achievement. It is not surprising, however, that the achievement gains are not significant after two years because turning around low-performing schools such as those in this project (i.e., schools performing below the state average) is not a quick fix, but rather, there is often a delayed impact on student outcomes as measured by standardized tests.</p> <p>Additional analyses to explore the factors that are related to student achievement show that academic efficacy (i.e., a student’s belief in their own ability to be academically successful) predicts student achievement. Students with higher self-ratings of academic efficacy tend to have higher English/reading and mathematics achievement scores. This positive correlation (i.e., association) was evident in both year 1 and year 2, and for student subgroups (i.e., English language learners).</p>

Lessons Learned

Several lessons learned through the work of the i3 STW Project include:

Coaching

Coaches report three types of coaching that are necessary when working with schools on whole-school reform:

- 1) Reform Coaching – Working on global culture and environment and building collaborative leadership.
- 2) Instructional Coaching – Working one-to-one with teachers on instructional practices and providing small group and whole school professional development and resources.
- 3) Responsive Coaching – Mentoring and responding to the changing needs of the principal and teachers.

The key elements coaches used to create positive relationships in their schools include:

- 1) Keeping the school on track and focused, using the STW criteria as a guiding vision.
- 2) Cultivating relationships with everyone.
- 3) Promoting collaborative relationships that ensure a safe environment for listening, communicating, and sharing ideas.
- 4) Providing the school with the benefit of their experience, knowledge, and resources.

Schools Using Data

Key features to facilitate the use of data at schools:

- Utilizing existing groups to examining data (e.g., leadership team, PLCs).
- Structuring time on a regular basis for looking at data.
- Using a process or protocol when examining data.
- Focusing on individual student data.
- Making students responsible for their own data.

Effective ways to use the STW criteria and rubric:

- Familiarizing staff with the language and concepts.
- Having a process for examining the information and realistic goals.
- Making the criteria and rubric visible to reinforce the work.
- Revisiting the rubric to maintain focus.
- Using the criteria and rubric as a valuable tool to validate existing practices, move beyond the plateau, and empower teachers.

Project Plans for Year 4

The focus of the work of the STW Transformation Network Project in year 4 will be to build upon the successes achieved thus far, specifically focusing on:

- Classroom instructional strategies to raise individual student achievement.
- Addressing intervention needs of students “falling off track” for graduation using the early indicators systems.
- Building capacity development within each building/district.
- Preparing schools to apply for Schools to Watch Designation.
- Developing products and tools to expand the work to other regions of the country including the preparation of other STW state teams to conduct the i3 model.