

Schools to Watch – Indiana Middle Level Education Association

Background

Organization name – INDIANA MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Organization address – 11025 E. 25TH STREET, Indianapolis, IN 46229

Organization contact person, contact email, and phone number – Shirley A. Wright, Exec.

Director, imlea@iasp.org, Cell -317-439-7329, Office, 317-894-2937

Organization mission – **IMLEA is “dedicated to promoting, improving, and supporting middle level (Grades 5 – 9) education.”**

Approach

IMLEA, a 501©3 non-profit, facilitates and serves as the state office for the “School to Watch” program under the auspices of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. A team of Forum-trained Indiana administrators and teachers provide trainings/workshops for IN middle school educators wanting to adapt and implement this school-improvement program in their schools to prepare to apply to be a School to Watch. Our program is supported through the Lilly Endowment, the IN Assoc. of School Principals and Horace Mann Companies. Failing and struggling schools attend our trainings to learn how to implement and meet the criteria. Our current 13 designated Schools to Watch are models and mentors for schools to visit and network with. We match each school’s demographics to better fit the school-to-school match. STW mentor teams provide appropriate resources and on-site and online PD as needed.

New schools first have their faculty take the Self-Study and Rubric which has 4 domains: Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity and Organizational Structures and Processes. Each domain has a list of examples of evidence that support and meet the domains’ criteria. Certified staff rate each example of evidence as to how well they feel their school meets the criteria. The rubric can be self-rated upon completion or rated through the Univ. of IL that will send the school a report of its individual rank in each domain upon completion.

IMLEA works with each school to develop a SIP plan based on each school’s needs assessment and results from their STW self-study and rubric survey. Our designated Schools to Watch are available at any time for site visits from other schools; they will also send teams to do a site visit “climate audit.” Schools then receive a summary report on the “Strengths” and “Areas for Growth.” After the school completes the self-study and reviews any low ratings of evidence, they can then determine areas that need to be addressed. We have experience collaborating with other third-party providers to support collaborative district and school improvement efforts. Of note is our collaboration with Close Education who is working as a partner supporting academic interventions with the middle school for which we are currently providing technical assistance.

In addition, IMLEA co-coordinates with the IN Association of Principals (IASP) The **INSPIRE3, Indiana Service-Learning Philanthropy Initiative Resources to Educate, Engage, Empower** formerly known as *generationOn, Indiana*. Their free professional development, resources, tools, support and training help students **engage in meaningful real-world learning through service**. This program connects students’ civic lives to academic learning. Service-Learning demonstrates employability skills and engages students in meaningful service to enrich and apply academic knowledge, teach civic and personal responsibility, and strengthen communities.

IMLEA is also a collaborative partner with “Champions Together” a Special Olympics program that “promotes servant leadership among student athletes while changing their lives as

well as the lives of those with intellectual disabilities – our schools note that this is a program that positively changes the “culture of a school.

Our ideal partner is any middle-grades configured school from grades 5 – 9 who is fully committed at every stage and ensures accountability for implementing the customized plan. This includes attending meetings, ensuring all stakeholders engage in training, and monitoring the use of the program by regularly reviewing and publicly sharing action steps and progress. Our ideal partner plans for sustainability by providing on-going PD and continued use of the Schools to Watch criteria with fidelity based on the customized plan.

Impact

Three i3 STW Project schools were successful in making substantial improvements in both programs and practices (STW criteria, collaboration, instructional practices) and math achievement during the grant period. Therefore, they applied and were designated as a STW school by the National Forum before the end of the grant. Project stakeholders hypothesized that the reason for their rapid turnaround was threefold. First, they had a high degree of readiness for improvement with the principal and faculty that was unique among project schools and allowed them to gain quick teacher buy-in for the project. Second, they had a strong principal leader who was not only the curriculum leader of the school but also the model for the teachers.

The Schools to Watch: School Transformation Network Project meets the Moderate Evidence threshold for evidence-based interventions as defined by ESSA. The Schools to Watch: School Transformation Network, a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) Development Grant, Final Evaluation Report is a quasi-experimental study examining 5,650 students.

This study took place in the lowest-performing middle-grades schools, serving students in grades 6 to 8 in California, Illinois, and North Carolina United States. There were a total of 34 schools that were tracked over four years (17 schools in the intervention condition and 17 schools in the comparison condition). 85% of the intervention group students qualified for free/reduced lunch; 85% of the intervention group students were considered minorities; and 27% of the intervention students were English language learners. Of the intervention students, 54.7% were Hispanic, 17.5% were Black/African American, and 14.1% of the students were White.

This intervention is a school-wide reform model that focuses on the intervention at a systemic level. It provides focused professional development and was designed to improve educational practices. The intervention was implemented in 18 urban and rural middle-grades schools from October 2010 to September 2014. The schools in the intervention condition had an intensive multi-layered system of support including: tools and data for assessment, goal setting, action planning and monitoring, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and professional development for school personnel.