



## Technical Assistance Partner Profile School Improvement Summit – March 10, 2020

### Background

Organization name: Smekens Education Solutions, Inc.

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Organization mission: At Smekens Education, our mission is to help schools and districts improve student achievement in reading and writing by providing relevant and engaging professional development. We seek to help Indiana students thrive by equipping teachers with best-practice strategies that are simple and effective.

### Areas of support:

- Ambitious Instruction
- Collaborative Teachers

### Approach

#### Description of school improvement services:

##### *Ongoing professional development to foster rigorous, standards-based writing instruction*

The customized on-site professional development offered by Smekens Education always starts with a conversation between instructional leaders and a Smekens consultant about the emerging needs of students and teachers. Then, in response to those needs, Smekens consultants deliver professional learning sessions that combine training, collegial sharing, classroom modeling, and observation.

The end goal is to improve achievement in writing by helping teachers:

- Establish the Six Traits of Writing as a common framework used by all teachers.
- Launch an effective writer's workshop that provides daily explicit instruction and daily time for students to write.
- Use skill-based mini-lessons to teach students to write for different purposes.
- Plan for yearlong standards-based writing instruction that is responsive to student needs.

### *Side-by-side & remote coaching to support implementation of rigorous writing instruction*

After teachers have participated in on-site professional learning with a Smekens consultant, the next step is to support full implementation by offering teachers ongoing instructional coaching from a Smekens writing expert. Follow-up coaching sessions can occur on-site or remotely via a Zoom video conference and are designed to improve achievement by helping teachers:

- Clarify and reinforce their understanding of previous professional learning.
- Establish priorities related to previous professional learning and emerging needs.
- Plan for best-practice writing instruction.
- Reflect and evaluate on their own emerging needs, and those of their students, relative to writing.

### **Differentiation of services**

For more than a dozen years, the literacy consultants at Smekens Education have been providing high-impact professional development for schools and districts throughout Indiana and the United States. Thousands of Indiana teachers have been challenged and encouraged after attending Smekens literacy workshops, viewing Smekens online PD videos, or participating in Smekens-led on-site professional learning.

In every on-site engagement led by Smekens, the content is curated to address the needs of the host school and does not require the purchase of a specific curriculum, series, or program. In fact, one key benefit of professional development from Smekens is that it complements any existing curriculum or program that is rooted in best practice and tied to the academic standards.

### **Attributes of our ideal partner**

Our ideal partners are elementary schools willing to put aside “boxed programs” and focus instead on equipping teachers with the skills and confidence to deliver rigorous writing instruction that is shaped by formative assessment and rooted in the academic standards.

## **Impact**

### **FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION | INDIANAPOLIS, IN**

During the 2008-09 school year, before Franklin Township began their writing initiative with Smekens Education, 73.9% of students in the district passed the ISTEP+ English Language Arts exam. In the four years that followed, while providing professional development from Smekens, the percent passing grew to 81.5% in the first year and ultimately reached 86.6% passing by the fourth year.

### **CONCORD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS | ELKHART, IN**

By the end of the 2015-16 school year, it had become clear to the leaders at Concord Community Schools that district-wide change was necessary in the area of English Language Arts. The number of students passing the ISTEP+ ELA exam had fallen by more than 17% over two years to a low of 59.4% passing. In the two years that followed, while providing professional development from Smekens, the percent passing grew to 63.8% in the first year and 61.3% passing during the 2017-18 school year. Additionally, district officials report that Concord has gone from the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile in overall student achievement to the 47<sup>th</sup> percentile, representing a 27-point gain.