GETTING THE CONDITIONS RIGHT: READINESS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Traditional school improvement efforts emphasize standards-based accountabilities, curriculum alignment, quality teaching and instruction, effective school and district leadership and other "walled in" or building-centered reform strategies. These models are often exclusively oriented toward what goes on inside schools, and limit educator influence over the factors outside of the school that also impact learning. The OCCMSI is Ohio Department of Education's expanded school improvement model that builds from these traditional school reform strategies by also addressing the other factors in student's lives that may impact learning, including non-academic barriers such as mental and physical health problems, substance abuse issues, family support for learning, and/or economic or employment issues.

The OCCMSI is a community-centered model designed to promote collaborative leadership structures within schools that focus on the implementation of effective academic learning activities, as well as evidence-based youth development programs, parent/family engagement and support strategies, health and social services, and related school-family-community partnerships. Continuous improvement planning processes are prioritized focusing on needs and resource assessments, gap analyses, process and outcomes evaluations, and continuous quality improvement in support of academic achievement, healthy development, and overall success of schools.

WHAT IS READINESS?

Readiness is the capacity to implement programs, processes, and policies. Readiness can be broken down into components including the attitude towards the intervention, the amount of leadership support for the program, the level of long-term commitment of key stakeholders, and the perceived efficacy to successfully implement a program.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT READINESS?

Several researchers have provided guidelines for assessing readiness for innovation in various communities (Edwards et al., 2000; Rogers, 2003; Davis, 1978). These determining factors broadly fall into four categories: (1) attitude regarding the intervention, (2) the degree of leadership support offered for the intervention, (3) the stakeholders' length of commitment to the project, and (4) the perceived ability to implement the program successfully. In addition, limited research has offered support for readiness being a factor in the relative success of implementing an innovation.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ADOPTION OF INNOVATION (ROGERS)

- Perceived relative advantage of the innovation
- Perceived compatibility of the innovation to values and beliefs of adopters
- Perceived complexity of the innovation
- Perceived trialability of the innovation (the degree to which the innovation can be introduced in small installments - not requiring wholesale change)
- Perceived observability of the innovation (the degree results of the innovation are observable to others)
- Communication channel through which the innovation is presented
- Values, norms, and beliefs of the social system into which the innovation is introduced
- Activity and credibility of a change agent

# ASSESSING READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF OCCMSI

Several factors were considered in the decision of which schools and districts to include in the pilot study. First, the schools and districts must have received 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) funding, which assists schools in the development of school-family-community partnerships designed to enhance academic interventions and enrichment activities, offer youth development opportunities, and implement family literacy and support programs. Secondly, the recipients of the 21st CCLC s grants were to attend one of two informational meetings that gave an over-view of the OCCMSI and described expectations for pilot schools. Lastly, those who attended the meetings were invited to complete an application to participate in the OCCMSI pilot project. Those schools deemed to be most "ready" for implementation of the OCCMSI and that were unlikely to have internal resources to engage in the program were ultimately chosen to participate.

A multi-stage assessment process was adopted to select the participating schools. The first instrument utilized was the OCCMSI Pilot Project Readiness Assessment, which asks the applicants to rate their readiness to participate in a quantitative manner. The second measure, the OCCMSI School Staff Readiness Tool, requires teachers and other school staff to rate their school on each component of the A-VICTORY readiness model (Davis & Salasin, 1975).

Legend: ■ Pilot □ Not pilot

Categories: Ability, Idea, Timing, Resistance
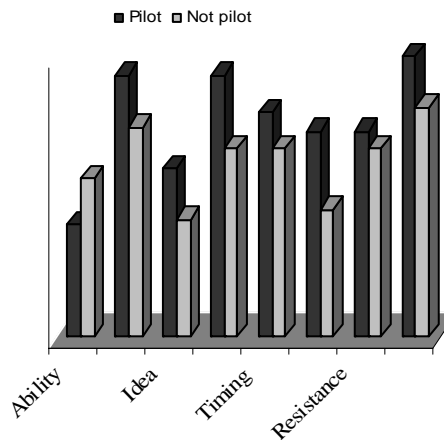
"YOU CAN'T PUSH ANYONE UP THE LADDER UNLESS HE IS READY TO CLIMB HIMSELF."
-ANDREW CARNEGIE

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Several Lessons were learned as a result of assessing readiness to implement the OCCMS:

- Assessment of Readiness can serve a "filtering" function. Readiness can help to guide both monetary and human resources toward schools that are more "ready" for interventions.

The act of assessing readiness likely reduced the number of potential applicants. Those that were not ready did not apply.

- Information about readiness can raise awareness regarding the complex process of implementing programs in school and community settings to maximize their chances for success.

Assessment of readiness allows potential participants to know what is expected of them and how they should prepare to engage in the process.

- Ongoing assessment of readiness can help to avoid barriers to implementation or negotiate barriers as they arise.

Ongoing assessment of readiness in projects of longer duration and intensity may provide a way of avoiding additional barriers that may emerge during implementation.

THE A-VICTORY MODEL

Does your school have the internal resources and capabilities to implement and evaluate the model? (**Ability**)

How does the model fit with your school's organizational and educational philosophy? Is there value place on addressing non-academic barriers to learning your school community? (**Values**)

Do you feel that you understand the model and required action steps to implement it? (**Idea**)

Are there particular features of the school and its environment that make it easier or harder to successfully adopt the model (**Circumstances**)

Is the time right for your school to participate in the pilot? (**Timing**)

Do you and other school leaders feel a strong obligation to try the new model? (**Obligation**)

Are there significant factors or barriers - organizational or individual - which will act against adoption of the new model? (**Resistance**)

Is there an overall perception that the new model has significant payoff for the school? (**Yield**)

OHIO COMMUNITY COLLABORATION MODEL for SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT