The Impacts of a University Partnership on the Use of Research in School Improvement Efforts

American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting, April 16, 2012

Kristen Campbell Wilcox
Kwilcox1@albany.edu

Janet Ives Angelis
jangelis@albany.edu
Supporters and Key Players

Original partners:
• School of Education
• Business Council of NYS
• NYS Education Department

Key Board Members and Collaborators:
• Teacher and administrator associations
• Other colleges and universities and the State University of NY
• School boards, business associations, policymakers
• NYS Parent-Teacher Association
• School associations (Big 5, small cities, charters)

Funded by the State of NY (Legislators and the Governor)
The Project Mission

• Inform
  – web displays of achievement data

• Inspire
  – reports, cases of higher performers, best practice framework

• Improve
  – self-assessments

“If you do what you always did, you’ll get what you always got.”
– HS Administrator (NYKids HS Study)
The Project Mission

• Inform
  – Web displays of achievement data
The Project Mission

• Inspire
  – reports, cases of higher performers, best practice framework
The Project Mission

• Improve
  – self-assessments
Our Focus

• Inform
  – web displays of achievement data

• Inspire: Research, Dissemination
  – reports, cases of higher performers, best practice framework

• Improve: Development, Dissemination
  – on-line tools and institutes

“If you do what you always did, you’ll get what you always got.”
— HS Administrator (NYKids HS Study)
COMPASS

- **COMP** are practices (to higher performers)
- **Assess** priorities
- **Select** levers to improve
- **Set** SMART goals

Continuous improvement process + best practice research findings

---

**Step 1: Compare your practices**

*Theme: Relationships... What does your school look like?*

Circle the number in either the A column (1 or 2) or the B column (3 or 4) that most closely resembles your school, and think of a specific example to demonstrate the reason for your selection.

1=very similar; 2= somewhat similar; 3= somewhat similar; 4= very similar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We have not made fostering trusting and respectful relationships between educators and between the school and community an explicit priority and so we do not consistently support this.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respect and responsibility are part of our character education programs, but I'm not sure that we have connected them with day-to-day practice in classrooms, hallways, and faculty rooms.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The processes and practices we have put in place to purposefully foster collaboration and community are “spotty” and tend to be peripheral in the activities at the school rather than spotlighted and ongoing.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average your total circled numbers and place that number in the next column.
Overview of COMPASS Steps

Step 1: Compare your practices to higher-performing schools
Step 2: Assess priorities
Step 3: Select levers to improvement
Step 4: Set SMART Goals

Stage 1: Understanding
- Framing/Analyzing

Stage 2: Formulating
- Identifying Possible Solutions/Selecting Solutions

Stage 3: Applying
- Applying Solutions

Stage 4: Reflecting
- Assessing Outcomes/Evaluating Outcomes

Stage 5: Improving
- Refining Solutions/Repeating the Cycle

COMPASS Institute Agenda

Day 1

• Team building
• Self-assessment and priority setting
• Learning from the best practices research

Day 2

• Setting a SMART goal
• Developing an action plan
• Determining what evidence to collect
This Mixed-Method Study

Research question:

How does a research-based tool and process impact continuous school improvement practice?

Data Sources:

• Two surveys: One focused on the COMPASS Tool and institutes, the other on a variety of project resources (e.g., case studies, cross-case reports)

• Documentary evidence in the form of working drafts of goals and timelines

• Interviews
Theoretical Orientation and Related Research

- Socio-ecological theory (Brofenbrenner, 1993) envisions student performance as related to multiple contextual influences or processes situated both inside and outside the classroom.

- Shared understandings of what is known about a school context and the community that school serves are central to informing what practices and processes are most likely to transform what work is done and how that work is done (Bruner, 1996; Fullan, 2010; Kowalski et al., 2008).


Participants

Cohort I
7 middle and high schools
• 5 urban, 2 suburban, 2 on the state “list”
• 2 days, summer 2010; ½ days, Dec. 2010, 2011; full day, Mar. 2011

Cohort II
9 middle and high schools
• all urban, most on the state “list”
• 2 days, summer 2011 (with partner organization)

Cohort III
• Summer 2012: elementary schools (invited)
An exemplary case:
Echo High School’s Journey

“We didn’t know what we didn’t know.”
- EHS Principal (2011)
Echo High School’s Journey

“There are so many data, getting your arms around them is like wrestling with a mattress.”

- EHS Principal (2011)
Echo High School’s Journey
after 1 year of participation

Progress toward goal of reducing achievement gaps while meeting overall performance targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>✓ AYP</td>
<td>x 4 points shy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>✓ Safe Harbor</td>
<td>✓ Safe Harbor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ. Disadv.</td>
<td>✓ AYP</td>
<td>x Not met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sped.</td>
<td>x Not met</td>
<td>x Not met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We had to take a look in the mirror, dig in, and decide who we really are.”
- EHS Principal (2010)
Preliminary Findings All Schools

How would you characterize the usefulness of the Compass tools and institutes?

“This has been a great resource to further our thinking and planning within our district. It's so wonderful to connect with other districts as well.”

- COMPASS Institute Participant 12/9/2010
Preliminary Findings All Schools
Participants’ Abilities to Sustain a Continuous Improvement Process

“Implementation (and development) of SMART goals have focused our initiatives. The entire building now strives to reach a common goal. [Process] assists with streamlining initiatives.”

Cohort I participant (Dec. 2012)
To know is not enough…

• As schools face shrinking resources yet increasing demands to close achievement gaps and improve graduation rates, developing the collective capacity to assess needs and select appropriate programs or practices to address them at the local level is needed (Wilcox & Angelis, 2009, 2011).
To know is not enough…

– Doing rigorous research and effective school improvement based on that research is not enough.

– Strategic communications of research impacts are neither a luxury nor peripheral to ongoing support.
Thank you!
This presentation will be available at
http://www.albany.edu/nykids/
kwilcox1@albany.edu
jangelis@albany.edu

“Collect, Analyze, Act”
(March, 2012) Principal Leadership

- Poverty, Performance and Frog Ponds. (2011) Kappan