

The Oklahoma Story

Situating School Improvement Grants within a Coherent System of Support

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When a state education agency takes on a demanding new initiative, like the revamped federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, situating it within an established, coherent statewide system of support is a great advantage. SIGs have been allocated to fund the states' school improvement efforts since 2007, but the 2010 federal guidance included several new requirements. States and districts have been working to improve schools for years, but these new mandates significantly raised the bar by requiring new oversight roles at the state level and increased implementation capacity at the district and school levels.

Oklahoma's established statewide system of support proved to be a fertile field for planting the new SIG program, and the state was prepared to escalate its supports for the districts and schools receiving SIG grants. The Oklahoma State Department of Education's (OSDE) support for SIG implementation is based on a refined and coherent set of research-proven strategies. The state is not using external Lead Partners or bringing in a large number of external consultants, but has instead focused on a small set of intervention supports, each elevated in intensity and focus for the SIG program.

A Coherent and Focused Statewide System of Support

Oklahoma's statewide system of support has evolved over the years and now includes the following key components:

- Classification of schools into three tiers based on state assessments;
- Differentiation of supports based on classification and diagnosis of practices relative to the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements and their 90 indicators;
- External expertise from School Support Teams that guide schools in improvement status to bring their operations into alignment with the standards of practice;
- School improvement planning process based on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements, including 90 indicators, and facilitated by the web-based WISE Tool; and
- What Works in Oklahoma institutes and publications derived from ongoing research on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements and their indicators by Marzano and Associates.

In 2010, Oklahoma, as a member of the Academy of Pacesetter States, developed an operations manual for its system of support as a project in the Academy. The operations manual describes the system of support and Oklahoma's policies and procedures relative to it.

Classification of Schools Based on Performance

Schools are categorized into tiers based on their performance on state assessments, as per the pyramid in Figure 1. Most schools are performing adequately and have access to the same standards-based resources to assist in academic instruction, school and district operations, and planning. Schools that are in *school improvement* status, the mid-section (second tier) of the pyramid, receive more targeted and differentiated supports. Schools that are in *corrective action*, *restructuring planning*, and *restructuring implementation* receive the most intensive state supports. For the intensive support schools, School Support Team Leaders provide one-on-one educational leadership

coaching for principals, assist with data analysis, and prepare comprehensive School Support Team reports based on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements. The strategies implemented at the top tier of the pyramid have effectively removed dozens of schools from the school improvement list, and based on this success, the strategies have been intensified for SIG schools.



**Standards of Practice
Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements**

Oklahoma adopted the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements in 2005 as a framework for school improvement for all its schools. The Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements evolved from Oklahoma’s participation in a consortium of states through the Chief Council of State School Officers (CCSSO). Oklahoma adapted standards (essential elements) and indicators of effective practice first piloted in Kentucky. Oklahoma developed a self-assessment rating scale of the performance indicators that provided specifics for each of the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements, and created resources to help schools improve their practices, as defined by the indicators. The Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements now include scoring rubrics with descriptions for each indicator (link included in references). In 2010, OSDE revised the indicators to add an “active voice” and to designate the person or groups responsible for each indicator.

Using the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements is optional in most schools but required in all improvement schools (including the SIG-funded schools). Many districts choose to use the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements to assess their schools, establish a common language, create a focus for improved teaching and learning, and to create stronger professional development plans. The Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements, illustrated to the right, are subdivided into ninety indicators of effective practice that represent all aspects of school operations.

School Support Teams

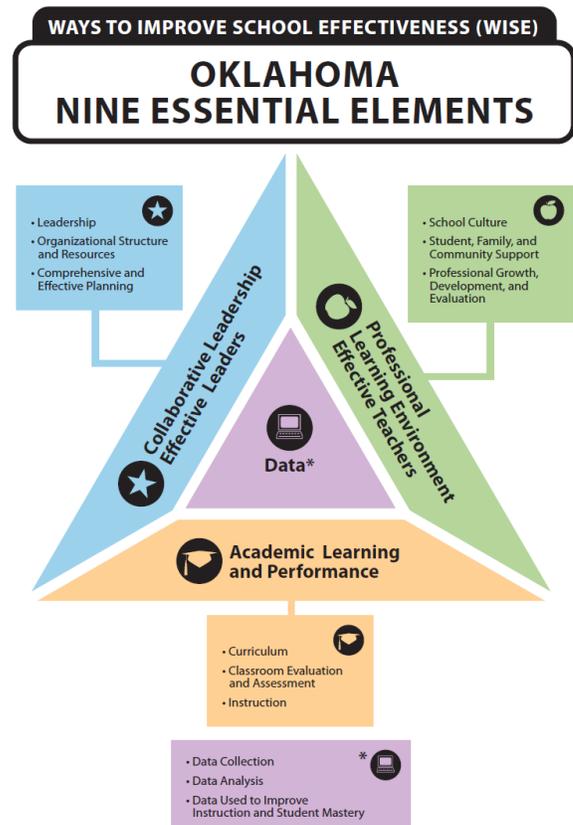
As prescribed in the federal Title I statute, Oklahoma recruits educators to serve on School Support Teams to

assist schools in need of improvement. School Support Teams started using the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements rubrics in 2005-2006 and currently use these as “look-fors” during School Support Team visits and to document evidence of implementation. The Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements frame recommendations and form the basis of School Support Team reports. (To see a sample School Support Team Report template visit, <http://www.sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/Essential/default.html>)

The WISE Tool for Improvement Planning, Implementation, Coaching, and Monitoring

Oklahoma initiated the use of the WISE (Ways to Improve School Effectiveness) Tool in April 2010. The system, which is based on the Center on Innovation & Improvement’s (CII) Indistar® platform, was adapted to meet the needs of Oklahoma. At this point, only schools that are in improvement are required to use WISE, however, additional districts are piloting the system, and others are waiting for training for the 2011-2012 school year. OSDE plans to expand the use of the system, but has limited capacity to train all 1,790 school sites within 526 districts in Oklahoma.

Indistar®, created and managed by CII, is being used by ten states and the Bureau of Indian Education for the 2010-11 school year. The online portal allows local teams (district, school, and partners) to track, develop, coordinate, and report improvement activities with each other and with the state. A number of evidence-based practices



and indicators are provided to inform improvement efforts, but the system can also be customized to reflect the user's own indicators of effective practice or rubrics for assessment. Indistar® can be used by all schools, and also allows the state to differentiate subsets of schools (i.e., a zone or cluster) so that separate sets of indicators can be used as needed.

Indistar® is used to collect meeting minutes, professional development activities, strategies for extending learning opportunities, and parent activities as well as indicators of effective leadership and instructional practice. The system includes an electronic repository for planning and implementation materials for the teams, and also allows the support teams and other OSDE staff members to access the materials as they are created at the local level and to provide coaching comments.

Oklahoma's WISE Tool is their customized version of Indistar®, based on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements, and is designed to help district and school staff identify which performance indicators to assess, plan, and monitor. The

WISE Tool provides best and promising practices, as well as the federal model requirements, yet still allows districts/schools to determine how to implement those requirements at the local level. Districts that had strong planning systems in place made the transition to the WISE Tool more easily than those who did not. Districts' and schools' staff now see the benefits of the WISE Tool, such as helping assess the realities of their schools as they create a culture of candor as well as reflecting on current practices and considering options for future practice.

Knowing What Works in Oklahoma Schools

In order to continuously assess the effectiveness of its system of support and the efficacy of the strategies it recommends for schools, Oklahoma holds *What Works in Oklahoma Schools* institutes, twice a year, for all schools in improvement. The presentations highlight strategies employed by Oklahoma schools that have demonstrated effectiveness, including strategies related to:

- Instruction;
- School Culture;
- Leadership;
- Motivation and Discipline;
- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); and
- Collection, Analysis, and Use of Data.

Oklahoma contracted with the Marzano Research Laboratory (MRL) to conduct a research study based on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements performance indicators. The study includes 33 schools in improvement and 28 schools that are not in improvement, but have similar demographics. The study is designed to: 1) validate the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements and performance indicators that are integral to the success of Oklahoma schools, 2) provide feedback on strengths and areas of need for a sample of Oklahoma schools, and 3) use the results to create a replicable system for all Oklahoma schools to better identify areas of strength and need.

The two phases of the study include: a survey phase and an onsite observation phase. Surveys were given to teachers, site administrators, parents, and students. They were then asked to respond to survey questions related to use and implementation of indicators for the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements related to their school. The responses of the improvement schools versus the non-improvement schools were then analyzed for significant differences. Correlations were also completed to compare the average scores on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements and the proportion of students scoring proficient or above on the state test.

Final results for Phase II will be released in March 2011, when Dr. Marzano and his team present the findings at the Spring *What Works in Oklahoma Schools* institute in

Components of the WISE Tool:

- Wise Ways® – Each indicator (including 90 Performance Indicators and 29 Rapid Improvement Indicators) is linked to a summary of related research, examples, and resources.
- Oklahoma's Nine Essential Elements Rubrics – Specific rubrics which serve as “look-fors” indicating level of implementation on the WISE Tool for site and district self-assessment.
- Coaching Comments – Allows external coaches to offer feedback on the plan. Comments are tracked in a dialogue and can be saved or printed as a report.
- Parental Involvement Analysis (developed by Academic Development Institute) – A five-step process that includes a needs assessment, Title I compliance, and the development of objectives for improvement. Additional resources to increase parental involvement are included in an online library.
- Progress Tracking Report – Displays progress for the performance indicators as aligned to the action plan.
- Electronic Reporting – Allows for administrators to monitor school and district progress and to compile reports for internal or federal purposes.
- Built-in Documentation – Provides a platform to create agendas, record minutes, assign tasks, set timelines, allocate resources, coach, and monitor implementation.

Oklahoma City for all school improvement schools. His keynote will address the significance of the findings. Early results indicate that the following factors make a difference for improved student learning:

- Using varied instructional strategies;
- Providing a schoolwide focus on strategic intervention;
- Making student engagement a priority; and
- Implementing the entire process of Building Academic Vocabulary.

The results of this research encourage continuous improvement not only in persistently low-performing schools, but in all schools. The correlations that compare the average scores on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements and the proportion of students scoring proficient or above on the state test are especially enlightening for the low-performing schools. Over time, additional research will contribute to a greater understanding of which strategies are the most effective at the different stages of improvement.

The Academy of Pacesetting States and Oklahoma's Operations Manual

In 2009, Oklahoma joined eight other states in the Academy of Pacesetting States, administered by CII in collaboration with the regional comprehensive centers where these states were located. Oklahoma is one of four states served by the Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center (MC3), based at the University of Oklahoma. The purpose of the Academy of Pacesetting States is to develop and improve statewide systems of support for school improvement.

As one of its projects with the Academy, OSDE administrators created *Advancing Student Achievement: Oklahoma's Statewide System of Support for Districts & Schools Operations Manual* (included in references). The *Operations Manual* is designed to create common language, processes, and structures within the state and to clearly explain the cycle of support for schools in improvement. The *Operations Manual*:

- Defines the various levels of improvement;
- Explains the supports available to schools;
- Clarifies the responsibilities of the state personnel, School Support Teams, districts, and schools;
- References relevant state and federal laws; and
- Describes the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements performance indicators.

Once completed, the *Operations Manual* was presented at an Oklahoma State Board of Education meeting and then at numerous venues throughout the state. It was also featured in several e-blasts via a variety of OSDE specialized listservs (i.e., Title I, WISE, superintendents, curriculum directors, etc.). OSDE has presented the

Operations Manual to the other states in the Academy of Pacesetting States (15 states and the Bureau of Indian Education are now members of the Pacesetters) to aid them in their development of similar manuals.

In developing the *Operations Manual*, OSDE articulated the mission for its school improvement: "to create and maintain a statewide system of intensive and sustained support and improvement designed to increase the opportunity for all students to meet Oklahoma's challenging academic content and achievement standards, eliminate achievement gaps, and prepare students to be contributing citizens." In order to meet the needs of schools with differing circumstances, past performance, and current practices, OSDE differentiates state supports according to the school's performance, and by analysis of the school's practices according to the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements and their indicators.

Situating School Improvement Grants within the Statewide System of Support

The 2010-11 School Improvement Grant Program

In 2010, Oklahoma received nearly \$37 million through the federal SIG program to raise student achievement in the state's persistently lowest achieving schools. The funds are part of the \$3.5 billion in school improvement funding for states in the 2009 federal budget and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Like all states, districts in Oklahoma must implement one of the following four federally defined improvement models in their persistently lowest achieving schools:

- Turnaround Model: Replace the principal, screen existing school staff, and rehire no more than half the teachers; adopt a new governance structure; and improve the school through curriculum reform, professional development, extending learning time, and other strategies.
- Restart Model: Convert a school, or close it, and re-open it as a charter school or under an education management organization.
- School Closure: Close the school and send the students to higher achieving schools in the district.
- Transformation Model: Replace the principal and improve the school through comprehensive curriculum reform, professional development, extending learning time, and other strategies.

Oklahoma's SIG Application and Approval Process

The OSDE provided technical assistance for eligible SIG applicants to acquaint them with the new SIG guidance and intervention models and to help them prepare competitive applications for the funds. OSDE used materials

Oklahoma's Numbers 2010-2011

Schools eligible for SIG Funds	43
Schools applied for SIG Funds	19
Schools implementing turnaround model	1
Schools implementing transformation model	9
Total schools receiving SIG funds	10
Total schools not receiving SIG funds	33

provided by the United States Department of Education (USDE) and CII to orient eligible districts to the SIG program. OSDE prepared information on external provider selection, job-embedded professional development, implementation of the four models, and increased learning time; held video conferences and webinars; sent information via the Title I listserv; and met with districts for one-on-one support and meetings.

OSDE's technical assistance highlighted and explained the four federally prescribed intervention models and provided suggestions on how to select a model. The video conferences explained the requirements and supports available for writing the grant; webinars focused on explaining and reviewing SIG guidance and responding to questions from eligible participants. In addition, one-on-one assistance in the OSDE computer lab provided a way for eligible recipients to complete a needs assessment aligned with the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements on the WISE Tool. Assistance was provided before the applications and budgets were prepared, during preparation, and after submission, review, and approval.

Each application was reviewed by three different individuals, all external to OSDE. State staff then compiled the scores and comments from the reviews and provided the districts with the feedback. Revised applications were submitted, rescored, and identified to receive grant funds. Successful applications were determined based on the reviewer scores and Tier priority. Each budget was examined to ensure it met the selected model requirements. OSDE was able to fully fund ten of the eligible applications.

Oklahoma's Intensified Support for SIG Districts and Schools

Schools which were successful with their applications receive an enhanced set of state services. SIG schools receive OSDE's basic system of support services, plus the following intensified services:

State Turnaround Office

To provide specialized support to SIG districts and schools, OSDE created a Turnaround Office within its state-wide system of support. It operates as a Professional Learning Community with frequent conversations about the SIG data reviews, School Support Team reports, visits to SIG schools, and review of the status of implementation of SIG models. This Professional Learning Community includes OSDE staff as well as School Support Team Leaders and Data Facilitators assigned to SIG schools.

The vision of this office is to improve student achievement and instruction through intensive reform efforts and continuing support from the State Turnaround Office.

Intensified SIG Support

1. State Turnaround Office
2. District Turnaround Offices/Officers
3. SIG Implementation Meetings
4. Educational Leadership Coaches
5. Oklahoma Data Reviews
6. Quarterly Status Reports
7. School Improvement Grant (SIG) Advisory Board

District Turnaround Offices/Officers

SIG districts were required to create their own Turnaround Offices and to designate a district staff member as a Turnaround Officer to assist the SIG schools. The Turnaround Officer serves as a facilitator of all implementation functions of SIG and acts as the liaison between the district, OSDE, and external providers. Building the capacity of districts to support the rapid improvement of SIG schools through turnaround offices is a priority for OSDE in the coming two years.

SIG Implementation Meetings

OSDE maintains close contact with each school receiving SIG funds through a variety of practices. The Assistant State Superintendent and the Turnaround Director personally visited each school to meet with the administrators and faculty, explain the process, and to clarify what that school's SIG grant plan specified. The OSDE staff ensured that each teacher understood the purpose of his/her work each day and the goals of the improvement effort for the year.

District Turnaround Officer

Each district must establish a full-time employee (FTE) (the percent of FTE will be contingent upon LEA capacity) for an LEA-based Turnaround Office or Turnaround Officer(s) that will be responsible for the day-to-day management of reform efforts at the site level and coordinate and communicate with the SEA.

Job Description of Turnaround Officer –

- Work with the superintendent and district leadership team to manage, oversee, and monitor the implementation of the School Improvement Grant.
- Work closely with the principal and the central office to support day-to-day needs of the school, discuss progress, and identify and overcome barriers to implementation.
- Ensure alignment between the activities of the School Improvement Grant, district initiatives, and external providers.
- Manage delivery of services from external providers.
- Provide technical assistance and support to the schools served with SIG 1003(g) funds.
- Act as a liaison between OSDE, School Support Teams, central office, and the schools served with SIG 1003(g) funds.
- Meet at least quarterly with OSDE staff to discuss progress of each school served with SIG 1003(g) funds.
- Provide quarterly status reports to OSDE.
- Attend all required professional development and meetings.

Educational Leadership Coaches

“School Support Team Leaders are [OSDE’s] eyes, ears, and feet on the ground.” – OSDE Staff Member

Oklahoma has a team of 15 School Support Team Leaders (successful retired educators) who work in the School Improvement schools. Together the teams complete three formal visits a year. Each visit is aligned to the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements (three elements are addressed each visit). Team members observe classrooms, interview stakeholders (including parents, students, and teachers), and evaluate the school using rubrics for each of the 90 performance indicators that are aligned to the WISE Tool and Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements. The team determines scores (based on a rating scale from 1 to 4), compares them to the improvement plan in the WISE Tool,

discusses the gaps, and makes recommendations for continued improvement after each site visit.

School Support Team Leaders who work directly with SIG schools also serve as Educational Leadership Coaches. The leaders are trained in leadership strategies and coaching by Dr. Karla Reiss, author of *Leadership Coaching for Educators*. The Educational Leadership Coaches read the SIG applications and the SIG school improvement plans via the WISE Tool. Therefore, they know what the action plans are and what implementation steps should be evident. During site visits, the coaches monitor implementation of the plan and provide timely feedback. As an additional support, leaders provide coaching comments through the WISE Tool.

The Educational Leadership Coaches meet with the individual principals more frequently than the scheduled team visits, and follow up after each School Support Team report and each quarterly report. In addition, Educational Leadership Coaches visit the schools at least once a month to work specifically with the principal to develop his or her leadership capacity. The coaches provide additional support, attend and facilitate Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and complete classroom observations. Each principal of a SIG school completes an anonymous Leadership Survey to determine strengths in 14 areas of leadership and discusses the results and next steps with their Educational Leadership Coach.

As their own PLC, the Educational Leadership Coaches meet with OSDE staff throughout the school year to discuss general observations from the field and to determine if adjustments should be made to the SIG implementation strategies. Mid-year and end-of-the-year surveys are completed by the Educational Leadership Coaches as another tool to gather feedback to make necessary changes as OSDE continues to improve its support and service to schools.

Oklahoma Data Reviews

OSDE is using a portion of SIG reserve funds to provide on-site data analysis to schools. Two of the Educational Leadership Coaches (experienced in assessment and data analysis) assume the role of “data leaders,” facilitating Data Reviews at each school throughout the year. The data leaders formally monitor progress at least three times a year. Oklahoma analyzes quarterly benchmark assessments as well as the state standardized test to evaluate progress. The data analysis is at the student level, so individual teachers can monitor progress of students, subgroups, and class groups. The data analysis shows not only the broader content areas, but also how performance relates to the state standards.

The influx of SIG funds in 2010-11 also allowed OSDE to provide data training at the school and district levels for

schools receiving SIG funds. The Oklahoma Data Review process focuses the dialogue on what is happening in the classrooms. The data shows the current performance visually, and the process is a non-threatening way to show teachers and administrators the areas of strength and the issues that must be addressed. Although the OSDE capacity to train all teachers is limited, OSDE staff has begun to work with classroom teachers to analyze student benchmark data and work within PLCs to determine next action steps for improving instruction to ensure student mastery. At the final implementation meetings for the year, school and district staff will present progress based on data analysis and other criteria.

Quarterly Status Reports

School status reports are completed each quarter for SIG schools. OSDE staff meet with local staff and superintendents after each report is issued. The status reports are used to examine how each school is progressing toward implementation of the chosen SIG model requirements, gather evidence of implementation of initiatives, and chart any changes submitted in the WISE Tool. OSDE created the report template, and the schools and districts are responsible for compiling the relevant information and completing the reports.

Strategies and practices will be continually evaluated in the SIG schools. The status reports hold the schools accountable for improved student performance and for monitoring the implementation of operational changes. Schools and districts must meet their goals for the 2010-2011 school year in order to continue to receive SIG funds.

Evaluation and Improvement of OSDE's SIG Supports

School and district leaders realize that increased accountability comes with the SIG funding this year. Schools and districts will be evaluated based on the progress made, and if goals are not achieved, federal guidelines require the SEA to assess the continuation of funds. Oklahoma has established a SIG Advisory Board to assist in reviewing the progress of SIG recipients.

Duties of the SIG Advisory Board are:

- To read and be familiar with the components of the 10 SIG schools' applications;
- To review SIG status report summaries to determine progress being made toward established goals and the fidelity to which the model is being implemented;
- To assist with the annual review of progress made toward established goals and the fidelity to which the model is being implemented and make recommendations to the OSDE for the continuation of SIG funds. Possible items to review may include: School Support Team reports, WISE plans, and School Improvement Status reports;

- To participate in an initial SIG Advisory Board training via webinar; and
- To attend the SIG Implementation meeting in Spring 2011 to listen to presentation of progress from the SIG schools.

CONCLUSION

While all State Education Agencies have provided oversight of School Improvement Grant funds in the past, 2010's more prescriptive federal guidance required increased oversight and support to schools receiving funds. OSDE staff are working to support the districts and schools as they implement the components of the federally required models and develop district and school capacity.

Oklahoma created a strong statewide system of support and is now using that foundation to provide SIG schools with additional and more intensive support. The Oklahoma strategy allows districts the freedom to innovate and to expand some of the improvement strategies district-wide (i.e., teacher evaluation systems or expanded learning time) while ensuring that the federal model requirements are met. The strategy's focus on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements ensures that local leaders can innovate as long as they acknowledge and support the basic conditions that have been found to be the most effective in Oklahoma schools. So far, maintaining a clear focus and providing frequent, high-quality coaching at a variety of levels is showing strong promise.

Disclosures:

The Indistar® system, created and managed by the Center on Innovation & Improvement, has been used in Oklahoma since April 2010.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement also works with the Academy of Pacesetting States. Oklahoma has been a member since 2009.

References & Additional Resources

Center on Innovation & Improvement

- Academy of Pacesetting States <http://www.centerii.org/academy/>
- Transformation Toolkit http://centerii.org/resources/Transformation_Toolkit-0409.pdf
- Indistar® <http://www.indistar.org/>

Marzano Research Associates. (2010). *What works in Oklahoma schools: Phase I state report*. Retrieved from http://OSDE.state.ok.us/Curriculum/Essential/pdf/PhaseI_StateReportFinal.pdf

Marzano Research Associates. (2011). *What works in Oklahoma Schools: Phase II state report*. Retrieved from http://OSDE.state.ok.us/Curriculum/Essential/pdf/PhaseII_StateReportFinal.pdf

Oklahoma State Department of Education

- Essential Elements & WISE Tool <http://OSDE.state.ok.us/Curriculum/Essential/default.html>
- Advancing Student Achievement: Oklahoma State-wide System of Support for Districts & Schools Operations Manual http://www.centerii.org/academy/states/oklahoma/OK-SSOS_Operations_Manual.pdf
- School Improvement Grants <http://OSDE.state.ok.us/NCLB/SIG.html>
- School Improvement <http://OSDE.state.ok.us/NCLB/Improvement.html>
- What Works in Oklahoma Schools Fall 2010 Conference Program <http://www.sde.state.ok.us/NCLB/Improvement.html>
- Oklahoma Building Academic Vocabulary <http://www.sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/BAV/default.html>
- Oklahoma Culture of Leadership DVD (available March 2011 through Office of Standards and Curriculum Office)
- Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) Data Reviews <http://OSDE.state.ok.us/NCLB/Improvement.html>

Reiss, K. (2006). *Leadership coaching for educators: Bringing out the best in school administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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Information Tools Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

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