

# ESSENTIAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

## *the leadership challenge*

**It takes courageous leadership to challenge prevailing operational principles and push for meaningful reform.**

**T**he complexity of secondary schools, especially high schools, challenges any school reform. Implementing the Essential Program Components of the Academic Program Survey is no exception. We have written separately about the world of EPC fiscal challenges (see page 8), especially of adding sufficient FTEs to the master schedule to serve “Intensive” and “Strategic” students. Unfortunately, although adequate fiscal support is foundational to success, dollars alone will not ensure improved student results.

Waters and Cameron (2006) point out that unwritten, often hidden principles underpin policy and practice in organizations. Tradition, seniority, teacher autonomy and adult preferences are a few of the most prevailing operational principles in schools and districts, although written documents, such as mission statements and Expected Student Learning Results, may suggest otherwise.

Given adequate funding, courageous

leaders who are willing to challenge these hidden principles can effectively implement the EPCs.

### **Student interventions**

Student interventions present the first area where strong, knowledgeable leadership is essential. EPCs No. 2 and 8 require additional time and support for students who do not perform at grade level in mathematics and English language arts. Replacement curriculums are required for Intensive students — those more than two grade levels behind in English language arts, and Intensive support curriculums for those lacking seventh-grade skills in mathematics. Extra time and support is also needed for Strategic students — those up to two years behind.

Even when schools make a genuine at-

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*By Terry Wilhelm*

tempt to implement these EPCs, a stunning constellation of implementation errors can cause these initiatives to fail, with the school community concluding, “This doesn’t work.” Whenever we hear this lament, we urge the speaker to investigate the implementation details of the purported non-working program. Many of the errors can be traced back to those hidden principles.

The English-language arts Intensive curriculums have been available longer than those for mathematics. Some districts have postponed adopting the Intensive mathematics programs due to the inadequacy of funds for purchasing new programs.

It should be noted that the new 4-7 interventions for mathematics are not replacement/stand-alone curriculums as in ELA. The most needy high school students in mathematics could be enrolled in one period using the 4-7 intervention, but would also be enrolled in Algebra Readiness. Another alternative for Intensive students with slightly higher skill levels would be a double block of Algebra Readiness. Careful assessment of specific foundational skills is key to making the most appropriate placement.

As schools gear up for the new mathematics adoptions, or temporarily continue with whatever they are currently using for Intensive students, it is useful for them to examine ELA implementation errors in order to avoid making similar ones in mathematics.

### **Common staffing errors**

First and foremost, too often the intervention programs are not staffed with the best teachers for the assignment. The teachers for these classes simply must be those who are the *most* competent, organized, willing, hard-working and student-centered.

The ELA programs are sometimes viewed as “scripted,” and as such, unattractive to experienced teachers who feel their creativity and autonomy will be diminished. Although each program is based on a highly structured daily format, only strong teachers deliver effective instruction. The intervention classes with the best results tend to have the most creative teachers. They deliver these programs with both fidelity and flair.

One common staffing error is to place a first-year teacher in the class, given the dif-

ficulty of finding volunteers among current faculty. The frequency with which we observe this decision supports the finding of Kati Haycock (1998) that the most needy students tend to be taught by the least experienced teachers. Learning problems are often exacerbated by discipline problems in classes comprised solely of the lowest-achieving students.

In most cases, a first-year teacher or intern will not arrive possessing the ability to quickly develop positive relationships with high-needs students, motivate and manage a classroom of 22-25 such students, learn and instruct a highly formatted program with fidelity and flair, and correctly interpret and apply the individualized data from its assessments to move students forward.

## **Leaders of successful schools under the EPCs operate from a highly transparent principle of student achievement, which trumps the hidden principles that impede implementation.**

On the other hand, sometimes the classes are simply assigned to experienced teachers who have poor instructional skills or classroom management problems, with the rationale that they may be more successful in the assignment, given the high structure of the program. We have never observed a single instance where this came true.

Finally, these assignments can be left unfilled and a long-term sub may begin the class, even continuing part or most of the year. Potential classroom management problems aside, the in-depth, five-day training in each specific program by an approved provider is an absolute essential for effective implementation, with follow-up on-site coaching. Districts are unlikely to invest in training for long-term subs. Lack of training is also problematic when a new staff member, experienced or not, is hired at the last minute.

Instead of following the tradition of the English chairperson surveying the faculty

for volunteers, at the most successful schools the principal personally lobbies and convinces the best teachers on staff to teach the classes, providing all the resources necessary for success. These include adequate instructional minutes, advance training, regular coaching, complete student and teacher materials and technology that works from the first day of instruction in programs that have this component.

### **Respect for intervention classes**

Unfortunately, the status of the intervention classes has too often been characterized by the lack of regard and respect once reserved for special education. With resourcing of core classes given priority, these classes may be operating with incomplete sets of materials and in programs using technology with non-working machines and classrooms not properly wired. Even the best teacher cannot overcome issues like these.

As outlined in our companion article, these programs cannot be delivered as designed in a single period. It is important to note that the double block should be two contiguous periods, and should be with the same teacher.

A related development may be that a school or district will cobble together a homegrown Intensive intervention, using a little core, a little of one of the approved intervention programs, and a little of whatever the teacher may have up her sleeve on a given day. So far, the data on such programs would hardly compel others to follow suit.

At the high school level, the misunderstanding of “access to the core” (now defined, for Intensive ELA students, as teaching them to read) or the concern about graduating “on time” has caused some schools to place students in a core English class, typically without a support block, as well as Intensive intervention, often for a single period, since the student only has six in a day. The Intensive intervention cannot be implemented in a single period and thus is rendered ineffective.

Since it is unlikely that the student will attain a passing grade in core English if s/he can’t read the text, graduating on time is precluded by their failure in this kind of placement. To facilitate success in the replacement

## More resources for implementing the EPCs

### ■ **California Department of Education:**

High school EPCs: [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/documents/hsaps.doc](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/documents/hsaps.doc)

Middle school EPCs: [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/documents/mgaps.doc](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/documents/mgaps.doc)

Elementary EPCs: [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/documents/egaps.doc](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/documents/egaps.doc)

Other resources from the virtual library: [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl)

■ **Center for Educational Efficacy**, [www.educationalefficacy.com](http://www.educationalefficacy.com). This company offers a variety of technology tools and other services to support the implementation of the EPCs, especially collaboration. (EPC No. 5 and 7)

■ **Gallup Education Division**, <http://education.gallup.com>. Gallup provides tools and training for teacher and administrator succession planning and selection. (EPC No. 4)

■ **The Leadership and Learning Center**, [www.leadandlearn.com](http://www.leadandlearn.com). This organization, founded by Douglas Reeves, provides a variety of training, including data teams for site-level team leaders and data-driven decision-making for district leaders. (EPCs No. 5 and 7)

■ **Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning**, [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org), offers resources including the Balanced Leadership 360, an online assessment of a leader's use of the 21 research-based leadership responsibilities discussed in "School Leadership That Works" for leading a specific site initiative. (Leading the EPCs)

■ **Solution Tree**, 304 W. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47404. This company sponsors the nationwide Professional Learning Community institutes, support services and follow up training, [www.solution-tree.com](http://www.solution-tree.com). For the company's PLC support tools, go to [www.allthingsplc.info](http://www.allthingsplc.info). (EPCs No. 5 and 7)

■ **"Collaborative Principal Teams,"** (Terry Wilhelm, 2006). This video showcases principals and district office administrators using a discussion protocol to use classroom walk-through data for improving implementation of adopted materials. It can be ordered from the Educational Materials link of the Educational Leadership Services page of the Riverside County Office of Education Web site, [www.rcoe.k12.ca.us](http://www.rcoe.k12.ca.us)

■ **"RCAT Data Protocol,"** RCAT PRO (Terry Wilhelm, 2005). This video showcases a team of fourth-grade teachers discussing their students' math progress using a discussion protocol. It can be ordered from the same link as above. (EPC No. 7)

ELA curriculum, a few high schools are beginning to counsel Intensive-level students and their parents that their high school program may require five years.

Double blocks are also needed for Strategic learners in core to fully implement the EPCs. One common error in scheduling for Strategic students — other than offering no extra support at all, or inviting them to stay after school — is to schedule a double block of 30-40 all-Strategic students.

At one school, the staff complained that

"the kids have been double-blocked for years, and they just aren't getting any better."

What we saw in classroom walk-throughs explained the lack of improvement. Lesson pacing dragged. "It's like pulling teeth," complained one hard-working teacher. Likewise, the program pacing itself lagged behind the core classes for benchmark-level students "because our kids can't keep up."

Selection of instructional strategies contributed to the problem. Most periods consisted of teacher lecture, with the teacher

occasionally calling on one student at a time while the rest of the students daydreamed. Questions at the end of the text selection were assigned for homework. Instead of helping the students improve, the intervention was making them worse.

A second common error is to schedule the Strategic students together — sometimes a period or two before or after their core class, where they are mixed with Benchmark-level classmates, as they should be. However, nothing is offered in the Strategic period related to the core lesson. In some cases this becomes a homework/study hall period, or the teacher may use the grammar book that accompanies the core adoption to assign unrelated drill work. This has absolutely no impact on the students' success in the daily core lesson.

### **Pre-teaching in the double block**

The one strategy with impact is to schedule students who need Strategic support to have pre-teaching of the day's concepts and vocabulary during the period just prior to the core class, with a smaller class size, and with the same teacher the students will have for the core lesson. They are then joined by benchmark-level peers for the core lesson in a class size that is the norm for the teachers' contractual agreement.

Districts should provide training for teachers in effectively teaching the double block, including the whole concept of pre-teaching, use of research-based instructional strategies as identified by Robert Marzano, *et al* (2001) in *Classroom Instruction That Works*, the use of data for evaluating learning and instructional effectiveness and lesson planning. Under the EPCs, ninth- and tenth-grade Strategic mathematics students will be enrolled in a core Algebra I class and a pre-teach class.

To ensure the highest school-wide impact, the high school EPCs focus on ninth- and tenth-graders, with requirements for CAHSEE remediation of students who have not yet passed. Our experience, and the findings of researchers such as Douglas Reeves (2007) has shown that partial implementation is not effective. Failure to use multiple measures that include placement tests from

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## EPCs and leadership

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the adoptions, and relying only on STAR scores to place students, is one cause of partial implementation.

Another is failure to add enough FTEs for Strategic and Intensive student instruction in the master schedule. For example, placing only the STAR far-below-basic students, say in ninth grade, in the Intensive intervention

— maybe even mixing all the levels together when the program is designed to have students grouped according to their instructional level — will have negligible impact on the school's overall performance.

Although high school staff members may express concern that students will lose motivation if they are placed in double-blocked interventions, our observation, if the school fully and correctly implements this strategy for all students who need it, is just the oppo-

site. A WASC accreditation team, interviewing students at such a school, heard students in interventions consistently express their motivation to exit so that they could get an elective, and benchmark students expressing their motivation to work hard in order to keep theirs.

Coaches and counselors need to collaborate to exit students, at agreed-upon points in the year, in a fluid master schedule, from placement in Intensive to Strategic support, and from Strategic to Benchmark. Teacher teams need support from coaches to closely monitor these students' progress, while ensuring that none of the benchmark students begin to fall behind.

Under EPC No. 6, expert ELA and mathematics coaches, having the respect of veteran teachers and trained side-by-side with their colleagues under SB 472 and in related training, are a key element in student success. Intensive intervention teachers need support to teach the program with fidelity. Teachers of Strategic students need support in remembering and using the ancillary materials available in the adoption. They also need training and support in the use of research-based instructional strategies.

### Teacher coaching an important element

Coaches can be instrumental in helping to ensure fidelity to the core program as well as intervention programs. Many English teachers were English literature majors. It is a grieving process for some of them to give up the sets of novels they chose in their departments during California's era of literature-based instruction in order to adhere to the pacing guide for the ELA adopted materials, which address the ELA standards' emphasis on skills and strategies.

Finally, teachers need coaching during their team collaborations in analyzing student results from the assessments provided by the core materials and planning the re-teaching loop, as well as future instruction for all students.

The principal's leadership is key in addressing the common veteran teachers' belief that they do not need a coach. The best approach is to build understanding that this is an implementation coach — necessary because of the complexity of the adopted ma-

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## EPCs and leadership

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terials — not a performance coach, needed because teachers are poor performers. Tiger Woods has a coach, and it really isn't because he's such a lousy golfer.

In reality, the coach should be able to address classroom management needs of new (or experienced) teachers, and any other performance issues. However, their primary assignment is to help ensure that the adopted programs are implemented with quality, fidelity, intensity and consistency — termed QFIC by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (Waters and Cameron, 2006) — across all classrooms.

### Student achievement is chief goal

Leaders of successful schools under the EPCs are those who learn to operate from a highly transparent principle of student

**Even Tiger Woods has a coach, and it really isn't because he's such a lousy golfer.**

achievement, which constantly trumps the hidden principles that impede implementation. While the EPCs have many layers, a continuous examination of the principles behind the status quo will help a leader move the reform forward.

With adequate fiscal support and full implementation, improvement is often dramatic, and as students exit interventions, the sections are collapsed and electives are restored. As one principal said, "We became the 'intervention school,' and we hated it. But the kids are improving — we can already see it. We're already moving back toward a traditional high school." In reality, they are hardly "moving back." They are moving forward toward a brand-new tradition in high schools: one in which all students are achieving. ■

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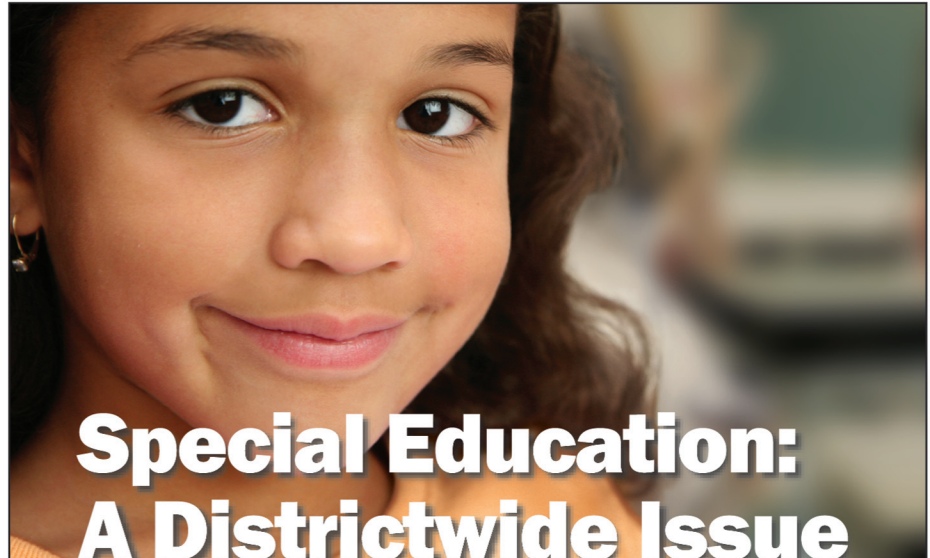
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