SCHOOLS OF INNOVATION IN ARKANSAS:

A CASE STUDY OF IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND EARLY IMPACTS

December 2019

Office of Innovation for Education
College of Education and Health Professions
University of Arkansas

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Purpose

The Office of Innovation for Education (OIE), at the request of the Arkansas Department of Education's Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), contracted with an external researcher to conduct a case study in five public schools in Arkansas that are in the early implementation stages of becoming a School of Innovation (SOI). The purpose of the case study was two-fold.

A primary purpose was to inform schools and districts interested in the SOI process as to the benefits of this work for students, staff, and community and to provide lessons learned from the field as to common challenges involved in this work.

A secondary purpose was to guide the work of OIE and the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (formerly ADE) in providing support to SOIs and schools applying to become SOIs to increase their chances for success, and potentially, increase the positive impacts on students, staff, parents, and community.

Background: SOI Policy and Process

Act 601 of 2013, an "Act to improve education in Arkansas by creating Districts of Innovation…." (p. 1) was the first of several state statutes that created enabling policies for existing districts and schools in Arkansas to pursue innovation through waivers of state requirements without full conversion to a charter school. Innovation is explicitly defined in Act 601 (2013) as "a new or creative alternative to the existing instructional and administrative practices that is intended to improve academic performance and learning for all students" (Act 601, 2013, p. 2).

Schools struggling with student achievement, student attendance, and graduating students who are college and career ready may seek innovation, rather than reform or incremental improvement, to engage in practices intended to improve academic performance and learning for all students. The process of going from a culture of improvement focused on addressing current problems, to a culture of innovation that devises and tests new solutions, is extremely challenging and requires different ways of thinking (Duty and Kern, 2014). Thus, understanding the unique benefits, challenges, and lessons learned by schools in the early stages of implementation may inform other schools involved in the SOI process, as well as schools interested in engaging in innovative practices through SOI or other waiver processes.

Three phases guide the SOI journey for schools. The first phase is a learning and planning phase that results in an SOI Application submitted to DESE. In this first phase, the first step to becoming a SOI is the submission of an Intent to Apply Form to the DESE Office of Educational Options. This generally occurs in October and is followed up with a required technical assistance meeting to review the application process and requirements in the law. Technical assistance continues throughout the application process with on-site support and trainings by OIE in collaboration with DESE. The final application, which includes the SOI Plan, is reviewed by a team of educators in the DESE the following spring semester and submitted to the Secretary of Education for final approval (ADE, 2019).

The second phase, or Designation as a School of Innovation, occurs after a school demonstrates successful implementation of critical elements of the School of Innovation plan. A school is recommended for designation as a School of Innovation based on an on-site visit by a DESE review team and evidence generated throughout implementation, provided before, during, and after the DESE on-site visit. The Secretary of Education makes the final approval for designation as an Arkansas School of Innovation, and School of Innovation status is granted for a four-year period (ADE, 2019).

The third phase, Renewal as a School of Innovation, occurs at the SOI's four-year mark. This is a phase of continued reflection, further demonstration of implementation, growth toward goals, and future planning.

Currently, 11 schools are in the planning process and 62 are in implementation. Subsets of 33 schools have been designated as SOI with 11 in the renewal phase.

Research Methodology

Five schools were selected from among 45 Schools of Innovation implementing plans for one or more years. An on-line survey of personalized and competency-based learning practices was sent to all Schools of Innovation in December 2018. Responses from the five schools selected for this case study indicated higher levels of implementation of innovative practices. Thus, these schools were more likely to be able to inform implementation challenges and successes—leading to their selection for this purposive sample.

Four of the schools were approved to implement their innovation plan in 2017, and one school was approved in 2016. The sample provided geographic diversity, grade span diversity, and student diversity. One urban, one suburban, and three rural schools from different regions of the state participated. Two elementary schools (grades P - 6 and 3 - 5) and three high schools (grades 7 - 12, 9 - 12, and 10 - 12). These schools were diverse in student demographics (Table 1).

Table 1: Student Demographics by School

School	Percent Low Income	Percent ELs	Percent Special Ed	Race/Ethnicity
S1	78%	14%	15%	73.4% White 21.3% Hispanic/Latino 2.1% American Indian 1.5% Black/AA 1.1% Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander 0.6% Two or More Races
S2	61%	1%	17%	64.0% White 30.5% Black/AA 3.1% Hispanic/Latino 1.6% Two or More Races 0.8% Asian
S3	90%	5%	13%	54.4% Black/AA 32.6% White 9.3% Hispanic/Latino 3.6% Two or More Races
S4	79%	36%	10%	48.1 Hispanic/Latino 25.5% White 11.9% Black/AA 7.3% Asian 5.0% Two or More Races 1.9% American Indian 0.4% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

School	Percent Low Income	Percent ELs	Percent Special Ed	Race/Ethnicity
S5	86%	35%	13%	56.8% Black/AA 35.3% Hispanic/Latino 6.8% White 0.6% Asian 0.4% Two or More Races 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Data were collected from the five SOIs using semi-structured interviews with principals and semi-structured focus group discussions with teachers, students, and parents. To protect against research bias, the external researcher conducted the interviews and focus group discussions. A staff member from OIE was present to provide introductions and connections to school personnel. All interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and coded by the external researcher and a second external researcher that did not participate in the interviews or discussions. One-on-one, face-to-face interviews with principals and face-to-face focus group discussions with teachers, parents, and students were held at each school. Table 2 provides information about the schools' participants in focus groups.

Table 2. Focus Groups Conducted

School	Date	Groups	Number of Participants
S1	March, 2019	Teachers	5
		Parents	5
	May, 2019	Students	4
S2	February, 2019	Teachers	7
		Parents	5
	May, 2019	Students	8
S3	February, 2019	Teachers	6
		Parents	4
	May, 2019	Students	7
S4	March, 2019	Teachers	5
		Parents	6
	May, 2019	Students	6
S5	February, 2019	Teachers	10
		Parent	13
	April, 2019	Students	12

School leaders were asked to invite a representative sample of teachers who were implementing innovative strategies in their classrooms and teachers who were not as far along in implementing innovative strategies. They were asked to invite a culturally and economically diverse group of parents of students attending the school and, to invite a culturally and academically diverse group of students to participate in discussions. Protocols and question prompts are provided in Appendix A.

In semi-structured focus group discussions, students were asked questions about:

- changes in teaching practices they may have heard about or been a part of in their classes;
- how those changes might have helped them;
- opportunities they have had in voicing their ideas about how to improve learning in their school;
- how they might make their school better;
- how their teachers help them as learners;
- how their school is preparing them for life after high schools; and,
- changes in how adults in their school interact with them, other students, and other adults.

In a semi-structured interview, principals were asked:

- their biggest challenges in deciding to become a SOI;
- the most challenging aspect of implementing their innovation plan;
- ways their innovation plan impacted teachers and students;
- professional learning opportunities that were beneficial in implementing and sustaining their changes;
- how they knew their plan was working;
- whether or not they would change performance targets after implementing their plan;
- their overall successes;
- their next steps for innovation; and,
- their most critical support needs.

In semi-structured focus group discussion, teachers were asked:

- to describe challenges they have had in planning to become a SOI and implementing their plan;
- how their plan has affected their students;
- what professional developments they have had and what was most beneficial; and,
- what overall successes they have had toward achieving their goals and overcoming their challenges.

In semi-structured focus group discussions, parents were asked:

- about changes they have observed in their child's schools;
- changes in teachers approach to learning and the impact those changes might have had on their child; and,
- how they have had a voice in improving learning at their child's school.

The external researchers reviewed the transcripts and grouped the information into common themes through Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis approach to develop valid inferences through inductive coding (Boyatzis, 1998; Krippendorff, 2013). First, they separately coded and clustered the content by reducing the raw data. Next, they identified themes within subgroups (i.e., principals, teachers, students, and parents). Themes were then compared across subsamples and codes were created for each group (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 69). Finally, codes and themes were compared across subgroups to identify a common theme and subgroup related codes were identified.

The individually coded responses were submitted to OIE to clarify the codes, categorization, and themes emerging from the data. Differences between the external researchers' codes were resolved by going back to the primary documents to clarify codes and/or categorizations until agreement was reached on the major themes and supporting evidence.

Findings

The findings and supporting evidence from this case study are organized under the following major themes. Within each major theme several sub-themes emerged and are presented to support the major themes.

- How Innovative Transformation Impacts Students
- Becoming a SOI: Lessons Learned
- Benefits of Becoming a SOI: Stakeholders' Perceptions
- Implications: Advice for Educators and Closing

HOW INNOVATIVE TRANSFORMATION IMPACTS STUDENTS

Becoming a School of Innovation allowed the SOIs studied to initiate new strategies designed to help all students succeed. Across the student focus groups, the following five sub-themes emerged:

- Student-Centered,
- Flexible Schedules,
- SOI as a Family,
- Instructional Approaches,
- "Life After High School," and
- Unintended Consequences.

Student-Centered

Overwhelmingly, students in the sample of schools described teachers as aware of their educational and emotional needs, as effectively addressing student learning needs and helping students learn, and as open to and responsive to student feedback on their instruction. In general, students felt their teachers "tailored instruction" to meet students at their respective levels, at different learning rates, in relation to their specific needs, strengths, and weaknesses, and regardless of academic achievement levels. Students found teachers to be receptive, responsive, and open to student feedback about their instructional approach, curriculum, and classrooms, in varying degrees. Some students connected teachers' ability and willingness to motivate students to the effectiveness of the learning environment. As one student shared, teachers "understand the situations that kids come from, and they understand the backgrounds, and they really try to fit the classroom to every individual need."

Teachers "understand the situations that kids come from, and they understand the backgrounds, and they really try to fit the classroom to every individual need."

Student-centered approaches to teaching correlate with greater teacher satisfaction, less teacher burnout, and student-centered

instruction leads to positive student outcomes such as improved engagement and higher academic achievement (McDavid, Parker, Burgess, Robertshaw, & Doan, 2018). Students described both an academically challenging and fun learning environment at their SOIs. Teachers at SOIs were described as inspiring and understanding, and worked to both "connect to their students," and "help them succeed through what they're learning."

Flexible Schedules

Flexible schedules, another sub-theme, emerged from prompted and unprompted student comments related to increased flexibility in school day schedules. Students enthusiastically noted their favorite thing about becoming an SOI was the flexible schedule. Students reflected that the schedule was less boring, gave them opportunities to make their own choices, taught them time management skills, allowed students to get to know their teachers better, allowed them to spend more time on assignments, and provided opportunities for credit recovery, tutoring, and/or club participation.

A typical insight shared by students, was that learning the art and skill of self-directedness made students "more responsible" because it teaches students to "use time wisely." Students also appreciated more one-on-one time with teachers "to actually learn" and discuss. Feelings of independence were a related insight, and students appreciated the feeling of freedom and choice. Making the best use of time and space was a challenge, at times, as expressed by school leaders, teachers, and students. Most students explained this as part of the process of providing more flexibility. Generally, in their comments they took responsibility for discovering how to best use time and space in their new school model.

SOI as a Family

The sub-theme SOI as a Family emerged powerfully from student comments. The students expressed how they felt the path to becoming a SOI helped create a family-like feel to their schools. This captured students' sense that, at school, they are cared for and that every student has an adult who knows them and will help them, creating a caring, trusting, family-like environment for them.

Teachers "care about us and what is going in our life. Everyone at this school cares about us. They all encourage us."

"It's very comforting to know that we don't have to face things alone."

Students felt their schools were a safe, warm, caring, and welcoming environment in which everyone is connected and important. In fact, during the student focus groups at one school, the group stayed after their lunch bell rang to share more about how much their teachers care about them. They explained that teachers will "doggedly investigate" if something seems off about a student. This type of relatedness is a powerful construct that supports higher forms of extrinsic motivation to learn, mimics outcomes associated with intrinsic motivation, and helps foster intrinsic motivation to learn (Ruzek, Hafen, Allen, Gregory, Mikami, & Pianta, 2016).

Instructional Approaches

In the SOI schools studied, students described the changes in their instruction (sub-theme), noting that they were now more involved in hands-on learning, small group learning, the use of technology, and experienced increased autonomy and self-directedness. Teachers from SOIs were described as offering "more hands-on work" with less lecturing "from the front." While sometimes this applied approach frustrated students because it was different and could be more challenging; students were eager to share the benefits, with one student noting "we learn better this way." Along with hands-on learning, students

shared that they were more likely to work together in small groups, "so we can talk to each other and get help from others if we're confused." At another SOI, students are allowed to select a club to participate in during flexible schedule time that interests them, and one student shared that they "Learn a lot in *clubs*. They are fun. All students like them and come to school on those days."

An interesting finding for schools interested in the SOI path is the described sense of autonomy students felt. Students at these schools felt heard by teachers and administrators and felt that their voice impacted what happens in their schools. While autonomy or student choice was generally discussed as a positive impact across the various student groups, students at one school noted the downside of other students making poor choices during their flexible time. At this school, students have flexible time several times a week to meet with their advisor and receive one-on-one and small group tutoring. The time, however, is mostly student-directed. One student interviewed felt that "students who are failing a class… [will] schedule themselves somewhere else instead of being in the class that they need help with…" and another student added "a lot of students miss opportunities to get some help because they just wanted to go somewhere else." However; across all five schools, most students who participated in the focus groups reported being academically successful and had positive experiences with the increased autonomy that coincided with SOI-related changes.

Students described increased autonomy in what, how, and where they learn, how they demonstrate their learning, and how teachers and leaders respond to input. Students discussed various examples of autonomy in learning, assignments completed, style of submission format to demonstrate learning, or choice of clubs to participate in during the school day. For example, S5 students responded in a way that suggests they appreciated opportunities to make choices and voice opinions related to what and how they learn. For example, one student noted having choices in an assignment as follows, we got to "choose what we did a research project on and had to use the 3-D printer to make something that represented the project." Another student shared that in English the teacher "doesn't just give an assignment. She let us do projects. We can do a video. [...] We can just do a regular slideshow. We have the opportunity to go through and pick what we want to do. That helps a lot of people with retaining information."

SOI students described feeling their "voice heard" at school, both in what happens in the school generally, and what happens in their learning environments. Students at one SOI shared that teachers will ask students how they prefer content to be delivered, and at another school students reported that teachers encourage them "do what you know works best, which is really good for a lot of students." At another school, students shared that teachers and administrators provided them opportunities to share what they want on a schoolwide level and beyond, and they give students opportunities to lead on those projects when possible. For example, some students wanted to improve the "ballpark." Students "got a grant to renovate the ballpark. [...] They got to pick out the things they could buy with the grant money." Another student worked with a school administrator and the Mayor to create an official city clean-up day.

[Teachers] give you the opportunity to "do what you know works best, which is really good for a lot of students."

Pace of learning and personal goal-setting also stood out for students. With this sub-theme, both autonomy and self-directedness emerge in the students' feedback. Students described their ability to work at their own pace and set personal learning goals. For example, students at some of the SOI schools emphasized that their schools allowed them to work ahead. One student noted the computer

emphasis allows him/her to "work ahead" in classes when he/she is finished with work in another class. Similarly, a student shared that in general the students get to "work at their own pace" and "work ahead." Students also noted that while teachers have set assignments, "You can work on all of them as fast or as slow as you need. They just have to be done by the end of the year." Another student added that when you finish the work for one class, they are also allowed "to work on other classwork in those classes." Student-driven goal setting was also discussed. For example, one student shared that "you can set goals on your own, or you can work with a teacher to set it. If you work with the teacher, she'll tell you how far you're getting to make this goal." Another student shared that students who set their own goals are able to determine their progress toward a goal by examining their personal folders. Autonomy, similar to relatedness described above, increases higher forms of extrinsic motivation to learn and may foster students' intrinsic motivation to learn (Schuitema, Peetsma, & van der Venn, 2016).

"Life After High School."

The "Life After High School" sub-theme arose from three codes: Higher Order Thinking Skills, Life Skills, and College and Career Readiness. This theme captured students' perceptions of how well their schools and teachers were equipping them for success after their K-12 careers ended. The SOI students noted that their schools were flexible in preparing them to go directly into the workforce or to college, and felt that, overall, they were being prepared for "life after high school." Even students in the elementary grade focus groups reported they felt like their school was getting them well prepared for high school and life after high school.

Unintended Consequences

While the feedback from the student focus groups was mostly positive, students surfaced unintended consequences around autonomy and access to technology as a final sub-theme within this major theme. While autonomy and student choice was generally discussed as a positive thing across the various student groups, some students noted the downside of students making poor choices for their flexible course choices. For example, "There will be students who are failing a class and they'll need to go to that class, but they'll schedule themselves somewhere else instead of being in the class that they need help with." Another student added, "I do like the self-scheduling, but [...] there are a lot of students that miss opportunities to get some help because they just wanted to go somewhere else."

Overall, students at various schools seemed to have several issues related to the increased use of technology at their schools. For example, one student shared, "There's a kid in my first period...We had a PowerPoint due for this week. [...] He didn't have WiFi at home and the only time he could work on it was at school, but we don't have computers for him to use all the time. He would have to do it on his phone. [...] when you do it on the phone, it looks different when you pull it up on the computer. It's just a very big mess." Another student added "some students don't have phones," while one student shared that the computers students do occasionally have access to "run slower than Christmas and don't really work at all." These computer limitations make it difficult for some students to access and complete assignments.

BECOMING A SCHOOL OF INNOVATION: LESSONS LEARNED

Becoming a School of Innovation provided communities an opportunity to transform their schools. As mentioned in the overview, the process of going from a culture of improvement focused on addressing current problems, to a culture of innovation that devises and tests new solutions, is extremely challenging and requires a different way of thinking (Duty and Kern, 2014). The lessons learned by the

educators and stakeholders involved in the transformation to a SOI provide a road map for current and future SOIs.

The following sub-themes related to becoming a School of Innovation emerged:

- Planning for SOI,
- Stakeholder Buy-in or Ownership,
- Key Changes,
- Challenges,
- Outcomes and Perceptions, and
- "SOI as Family."

Planning for SOI

Throughout the interviews and focus groups of principals and teachers, the theme of planning for SOI emerged. The theme of planning involved three codes: understanding their why, or their need for change; the critical supports, or scaffolds, for staff while in the planning phase; and leading the change process. For principals that were a part of SOI planning, the need for SOI, or the "why" was clear. Said principals expressed the need to do something to change learning for their students and questioned the current traditional system of schooling, wondering "are we really preparing our kids for life after high school?" Teachers expressed knowing "we had to do something different" whether the change was related to culture, happiness, or students being prepared for the future. Teachers at the various schools noted that planning was critical to the process of becoming a School of Innovation, and as part of this process, staff must first inherently "know their school," or understand the school they serve. Another teacher expressed that "every school is different" and you have to "do what works for you."

> *"We [teachers] knew we had to do something different because our culture wasn't where it needed to be. There wasn't a lot of student happiness, teacher happiness. We just knew things had to be different."*

Principals and teachers expressed the need for change as related to academic achievement and readiness, as some students started their school several grade levels behind in reading and math. On the other end of the spectrum, teachers and principals felt that becoming a SOI would allow them the flexibility and focus to also serve students ahead of pace in some classes by re-examining the one-size-fits-all model, and designing for learning needs, rather than seat time. By focusing on learning, rather than a set pace or seat time, teachers felt they would be better able to serve all students. This was a consistent why and consistent consideration across schools during planning and implementation.

The need for change that both principals and teachers addressed is consistent with learning models rooted in research about how students learn best. Student success needs to be at the center and teaching methods should be aligned with learning and integrate research on student motivation and engagement. By altering pace, rather than learning, students can be supported during what Vygotsky refers to as their zone of proximal development. Proximal development refers to the time during the learning process that exists between what one can do without help and what one cannot do at all. It is the zone in which direction and support is needed in order to become independently competent and is based on providing timely and differentiated supports as a matter of daily practice (Rudenstine, et al., 2018).

In addition to understanding the need, or the why, for becoming an SOI, teachers and principals also discussed the critical supports, or scaffolds, that helped them during the SOI planning process. While some of what principals and teachers shared is also present in the coding of "advice for educators," the details related to the critical supports for SOI planning are shared here.

Critical supports, or scaffolds, were varied across schools; yet, both principals and teachers often related these supports to professional learning that took place as part of the SOI planning process. During SOI application planning, schools are in a "learning and planning phase" for the duration of a school year (for some, more time is spent). During this time, a school forms a Council of Innovation, which includes staff, community members, students, parents, and district leaders who begin to investigate root causes and consider possible innovative strategies. Because this learning and planning period is adaptive to the school and community, at times the related professional learning is more exploratory, and at other times it is more targeted.

Depending on the school and council, sometimes SOI planning involved seeing what was out there first, by going on school visits and attending conferences. Other schools had existing models or organizations in mind and learning was more targeted for implementation. As one teacher explained, visiting other schools helped teachers learn what existed and what was working for different student populations, which supported creating an innovation "a la carte" style plan, so that teachers could "individualize it [SOI plan] for their school." Across the educator interviews and focus groups, being able to see innovative strategies in action was highlighted as a primary support for learning and planning. Another teacher shared that "Going to see other schools helped a lot. Instead of just getting it on paper or just seeing in a proposal...I think that traveling and having conversations with the administrator, the kids, the teachers, and the janitors.... that is a huge advantage."

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All schools identified organizations or processes that supported their learning along the way. The support and guidance provided by innovative organizations, such as OIE and iNACOL, were mentioned by several principals and teachers. While the support and guidance described varied, four of the five principals interviewed felt the school visits, often facilitated by OIE, were beneficial and helped them to visualize what they could do. One principal indicated his/her school gets help from the OIE saying "The Office [of Innovation] was very helpful in any support…" and the school visits were "instrumental." iNACOL's national conference and OIE's annual summit were mentioned as helpful in making innovative plans and ongoing changes. All principals had attended OIE's Annual Education Innovation Summit or had sent teachers. Teachers from multiple schools described OIE's support as helpful throughout the process and the OIE Summit as extremely beneficial. OIE's Summit was described a place to go to "gather information, come back, talk, try to make it fit for us, and the teachers and students" and as place to get "fired up."

Other examples of support were noted. One principal shared specific examples, which he described as approaches to the school's learning and planning. The first approach was working with the Arkansas Leadership Academy. The Arkansas Leadership Academy supports and provides developmental learning experiences for different leadership roles. As a member school of the academy, the principal and staff benefited from their guidance, especially from the "organizational development" work. According to the

principal, this work has "streamlined a lot of what we're doing." Another approach has been to support professional learning for teachers, as related to the school's innovation goals and strategies. To increase student motivation, for example, the teachers and leadership used the book *Teach Like a Pirate* for a book study. To support innovation and growth in their area of greatest weakness, three schools decided to include targeted reading and math strategies in their SOI plans, such as creating Reading and Math Hubs. Plans for advisory, in one school called What I Need (WIN) time, and the adoption of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model were common strategies as well. One leader shared that, through collaboration with schools with similar demographics to their own (high ELL), book studies, and professional conferences, they were focusing on "Culturally Responsive Teaching" and "Competency-Based, Personalized Learning."

Teachers discussed the change process during SOI planning as something that relieved tension in the existing school culture, built collaboration, and brought in more voice; yet, it also took a lot of work. Because it was critical to planning and creating a collaborative culture, teachers were involved in many meetings during the SOI planning year. In these meetings, they were sometimes building "buy-in," and other times trying to prioritize and make decisions based on what might make the most positive change for students. Teachers in one school described "we do brainstorming...we use sticky notes, we go and see what other groups brainstorm. That's how we've come to a lot of good solutions, by brainstorming with the whole faculty." As part of the planning process, a change in culture was evident to teachers, "We're all in this together. We all want to be comfortable with decisions." "Everybody in our school has a voice. It's not our principal saying, 'this is what we are going to do.'"

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Principals reported that the change process associated with planning for and becoming an SOI was an ongoing part of a longer, more gradual effort toward continuous improvement. Principals discussed the need to design short-term goals and associated strategies into their long-range SOI plans. These short cycles of innovation allowed schools to implement in chunks and fostered ongoing reflection and refinement by teachers, according to what was working and not working. As one principal said, these shorter cycles helped avoid "overwhelm," and set staff up to "pause, take a step back, discuss why we're doing it" while recognizing that change is "not a one-day, one-shot deal."

Stakeholder Buy-in or Ownership

Throughout the SOI process, expectations for stakeholder co-creation and ownership are built in by design by DESE and are part of the training offered by DESE and OIE. Employees of each proposed school of innovation vote in favor of or against the SOI plan as part of the SOI application process. A minimum of 60% of the eligible employees must vote in favor of the SOI plan in order for it to be considered. In developing the plan, a school Council of Innovation must be in place consisting of individuals from a current or aspiring school of innovation composed of teachers, classified employees, the building level principal or his or her designee, parents, community members, a minimum of two (2) students form the school of innovation, and other interested parties selected by the council to participate. Schools with a 10% or greater minority student population must have minority representation for that group on the council. Given this requirement, it is not surprising that stakeholder "buy-in" was a prominent sub-theme across principal interviews and teacher focus groups. For principals, heavy emphasis was placed on fostering teacher buy-in or ownership with changes associated with SOI plans. Parent and community involvement were important to principals as well. Teachers focused on the buy-in of their colleagues, parents, students, and the community.

Principals were sensitive to SOI feeling like "one more thing" with their teachers and indicated they were aware that teachers were weary of top-down change efforts. The required 60% vote in support of the school's innovation plan, according to principals and teachers, was not enough to move forward. Principals and teachers reported that it was important to have all teachers or most teachers "on board." Principals often used the term "buy-in" but their process reflected more "ownership" rather than 'buy-in." According to Gurteen (2019), when making change we should look for "ownership" not "buy-in. Ownership means involving people from the beginning of any change initiative and involving them in identifying changes needed and problem-solving. In buy-in someone else has done the thinking and development, and then they try to convince others to implement their idea without any involvement in the initial conversations or subsequent decisions. Getting buy-in instead of ownership creates a lack of enthusiasm to implement and may result in little lasting change.

"Staff had to feel comfortable with the changes and teachers and students had to be a part of the problem-solving to come up with different ideas that might work."

Principals described ways they encouraged teacher buy-in or ownership through experiential learning, conference sessions, and lots of dialogue. After visiting schools and going to an OIE summit, one principal described the voting process, and how it was made clear that "there was no pressure." Based on the vote outcomes, the principal worked with teachers to "modify some things" and better adapt the SOI plan to their school. Similarly, another principal stated, he knew he couldn't say "Ok, here's what we're all doing." He knew that staff had to "feel comfortable with the changes and teachers and students had to be a part of the problem solving to come up with different ideas that might work." Principals discussed using different communication strategies: surveys, community meetings, and asking stakeholders to describe their ideal school. Principals wanted all ideas brought "to the table," and elevated the importance of "trying to abide by what that team says and let them have some ownership in it." Some principals expressed surprise at the way some teachers who are nearing retirement have been their "biggest cheerleaders," eager to learn and incorporate new technology and ideas. Regardless of trying to maximize teacher buy-in, not every teacher was willing to provide a full faith effort in adopting innovations. Even with trying to not overwhelm teachers, principals reported that not all teachers were adopters and some considered it as another thing to do. Ultimately, principals shared that they remained guided by school and student needs uncovered during the SOI planning process.

Teachers considered the "buy-in" of their colleagues to be of utmost importance during planning and throughout the process of becoming a School of Innovation. Much of the "buy-in" happened early in the process of planning, chiefly during the time afforded to professional learning. As mentioned previously, professional learning included, but was not limited to, having time to brainstorm and have all voices heard, visit other schools, work with outside organizations, and attend conferences. Teachers at schools who felt SOI was a choice from the very beginning and had time to learn what was out there first, expressed that staff were more supportive and on board. At two schools, teachers felt the process was rushed or forced, and at another school teachers recommended having a teacher leadership "coalition" from the very beginning of the process. In addition, the same school recommended that it was critical to get students on board.

Principals and teachers described making a strong effort to include parents and community throughout the process of becoming a School of Innovation, especially during planning. Despite targeted efforts,

parental involvement was not as "far reaching" as principals or teachers desired. Several schools noted difficulty involving parents because they often worked night shifts, held more than one job, could not be at school during school hours, or experienced other "family dynamics" that made involvement challenging. For higher socioeconomic status families, involvement was more likely and consistent. Teachers and principals discussed strategies they felt worked during the SOI planning phase, or were beginning to work, such as community breakfasts, alumni banquets, student-led conferences, and student-based community work. As one teacher described, "We had a lot that came to the community breakfast that we had last year and the alumni banquet … it was big...a lot of community members don't necessarily even have kids at school anymore. It was a really good thing, it's new, but it's working." Using student-led conferences has improved parent engagement to a degree, as one school principal shared, "We've been doing student-led conferences for the past two years, that's gone up a lot. The parents want to be here because they know their students are going to present."

According to Sturgis (2016) "community engagement can help to overcome mistrust and build the mutual respect that is needed to create a culture of learning (p. 1)." Three principals described trying to improve the reputation of the school in the community early in the planning process. Some noted that problematic issues in the community infused the schools. For example, one principal described, "What we're finding is the issues from the community are coming to school. Once the students are here at the school, they're in a safe place." Responses ranged from a description of "limited" community contribution to the school, to a concerted effort to engage the community, to success stories of increased community involvement in the schools.

"We had an eight-sector [e.g., church groups, medical group, banks, mayor, and businesses] breakfast…We met…and talked about what we'd done with our innovation plan, where we were going, and [we] had a great response."

One principal described how they have increased connectivity with the community through social media and events, through having a "media specialist with social media, trying to get it out there, trying to get information out there." The principal continued, describing recent media outreach programs. "Last year we had our community-led academy. We had an eight-sector [e.g., church groups, medical group, banks, mayor, and businesses] breakfast...met with them and talked about what we'd done with our innovation plan, where we were going, and had a great response." Another principal described a program that increased community outreach and interaction with students and also better prepared students to be college- and/or career-ready. "Grit, Goals, and Graduation...[is] a student conference that we'll do. Right now, we have over 90 community members signed up to come in. It is an actual student conference, where our kids will get to pick the sessions they go to. It'll be anywhere from college recruiters coming in and talking about how to sign up for freshman year, to...local businessmen [who] talk about how to start a business."

Key Changes

Principals and teachers discussed at length the key changes (sub-theme) that took place as a result of the SOI plan and implementation. From creating advisory groups to opening up "flex-days," they described how staff implemented and revised along the way. For principals, the following was discussed most frequently across the schools: changes in how teachers "teach," relationship-building and creation of advisory groups, increased use of technology, and the need for socioemotional education. Outside of the commonality of discussing advisory groups and changes related to technology, teachers more often discussed details related to the challenges and successes of implementation in tandem. For this section,

the details related to implementation for teacher groups are included, and the successes and challenges are included in the "outcomes and perceptions" and "challenges" section.

Principals, like students, indicated they had seen changes in how teachers teach and relate to students as a result of SOI implementation. According to principals two key related changes were: improvement in teacher and student relationships and a marked difference in teachers' responsiveness to students. As previously discussed, these key changes were noted by students as well. A variety of factors contributed to the changes happening within and outside of classrooms including: built-in advisory periods, flex-periods or flex-days, and blended learning. As one principal described, teachers are now more responsive and do "periodic checks, two, three times a week with the students" to check for understanding. Changes associated with schools' innovation plans provided teachers with "the flexibility to reach the needs of every student in their class. Before …they either got it or didn't… Now… having more time to spend with those that need the extra help" allows teachers to be more responsive to every student. As a result, one principal indicated "I think every kid is getting closer to getting exactly what they need on an individual basis."

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Principals and teachers discussed advisory as a key change in becoming a School of Innovation. Delaney (2018) suggests that advisory is an important tool in building relationships. Delaney (2018, p. 7) states that when "students establish tight bonds with their teachers, they are more likely to take risks, feel positively about school, and ask for help when they need it" and often is a time teachers work with students to establish goals, work on problem solving skills, and plan for their future. In general, advisory programs include blocks of time built into a school's schedule that allow for students to meet with an adviser, at least once a week, who keeps checks in with them regarding their classes, helps them set goals, offers guidance on planning for the future, and assists students with social skills. Typically, advisors are teachers within the school building, although some schools resource additional adults for advisory programs. Often students have the same advisory teacher for several years and, as intended, establish a caring relationship with their advisor. Although creating an advisory program is not a requirement for becoming a School of Innovation, it is a common starting point for schools who identify early on a need to improve teacher-student relationships and shift to more student-focused practices. Teachers and principals discussed that through their advisory program they are able to help students "feel comfortable to talk about issues… to problem solve, to learn how to communicate with one another, [and] to build a team." Advisory time is also used to hold clubs such as book club, gaming, drama, cooking, and other recreational activities. Schools may also use this time to address individual intervention needs. Regardless of academic intervention needs, the focus for the time was clearly articulated as a time to focus on relationships, engagement, and building school culture, through a variety of activities.

When asked, teachers said they believe there is at least one adult in the school that knows each student well. Research has found that students who have a meaningful, positive relationship with adults and students are more likely to be academically motivated (Walker & Green, 2009). When students and teachers know each other well and adults show concern for students' well-being and educational success, a positive school climate is created and student engagement is enhanced (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Teachers expressed that developing relationships with students was a beneficial key change. One teacher said, "One of the things that you have to be in dealing with students

is that you have to be a nice person. Another teacher expressed, "If you have a student that, let's face it, you might not like, or who's having a really hard time, 90 percent of the time, it's because you don't know the student. You only know that student because you have to get on to them because their head is down, or they're on their phone, or they're doing something that you haven't asked them to do." His advice to his co-workers is to "take the time to get to know that kid. Give them a question that has absolutely nothing to do with school...if you build… rapport, I promise you that the attitude of that student and that relationship that teacher-student relationship will change completely." Additional comments shared by principals and teachers, related to positive outcomes, are shared in the "outcomes and perceptions" section of this case study.

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Another key change discussed by principals and teachers was technology: one-to-one device ratios, plans for using technology, advantages, and obstacles related to technology were shared. According to Doran and Herold (2016), the goal of technology in the classroom is to enable teachers to use software to deliver more personalized content to students, to boost students' technology skills, and to empower students to do more complex and creative work. They found in a meta-analysis that schools that have one-to-one laptop computers increased student achievement and enhanced their 21st century skills. Two schools specifically reported being on a one-to-one ratio with Chromebooks and/or iPads. Several principals reported they would soon be one-to-one. One principal shared both the vision and the challenge, "We want to get to a point where we actually have a school with a digital learning platform" and "That was another big change… teachers learning how to go digital." Indicating that teachers were gaining skills to compliment the newly improved access to Chromebooks, the principals indicated that having the curriculum digital allowed teachers to differentiate pace and to better individualize instruction. A different leader shared the goal to install a "hot spot on a bus that could actually be a working classroom [during] travel time." Challenges shared by principals included Internet bandwidth and hesitancy from district administration to increase integration of technology into the classroom. Despite these challenges, principals shared that a broad range of technology use has helped better serve different learner needs, including their English Language Learners (ELLs).

Teachers addressed several changes and advantages related to the role of technology for classroom instruction, individualized education, credit recovery, and concurrent credit. Integrating strategies for online and face-to-face learning, such as interactive notebooks, has helped students learn to be more organized and reflective. Teachers describe that this approach has increased their students' self-regulation- "students keep up with, and are (*sic*) more aware of their learning." As a result, learning is more tailored to students' needs and more under students' control. A teacher noted, "Yes, we have goals and we want them to hit those targets within a week, but it's individualized based on their weak areas. What do you need to be working on? I have students working on DreamBox, but they are all assigned different lessons, based upon testing data. They're working at their pace." Yet another teacher said, "It [technology] makes it easier to work with those that need that closer attention when there's a lot of them that are taking ownership and that are going with it."

The socioemotional code within this sub-theme reflected common comments from principals about the role of social and emotional education and an increasing role played by mental health professionals (i.e.,

counselors and social workers in the schools). Social and emotional learning is the process of developing and using the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that help youth and adults to identify and regulate emotions, develop positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2013). Several principals discussed the importance of social and emotional learning in their schools. One principal discussed integrating "social and emotional" learning into the curriculum and another principal noted that one of their administrators was trained as a counselor and incorporated "restorative justice" as part of their discipline plan. Restorative justice is a discipline process in which the offender and the offended work to reconcile through open response dialogue typically facilitated by a teacher or counselor. The discipline process relies on a school-based intervention team and often offers an alternative to suspension. As a result of the school-based intervention team, adults are better able to understand the root of discipline challenges.

A school leader noted that through this work they realized the great need for mental health professionals and swiftly hired a new social worker, who in turn brought numerous interns to work with students. As a result, the leader shared "We've seen that's [restorative justice] working because our discipline numbers are down." Another principal shared that "We have two Spanish speaking counselors," as part of a plan to "involve our Hispanic community." One of the school principals indicated that meeting with counselors was mandatory for all students- "We actually schedule them [students and counselors] in small groups now" and our "counselors have stepped up incredibly with their sessions they're offering."

Challenges

Challenges related specifically to any perceived impediments to planning for, adopting, or implementing innovations are included in this section. For principals and teachers, challenges with administration and communication were discussed. Staffing emerged as a challenge for principals, whereas teachers' challenges were related to implementation.

With regard to administration, two principals reported hesitancy on the part of higher administration to allow certain innovations and many of the principals reported that changes to leadership were challenging. As previously noted, one principal reported some hesitancy from a newer superintendent related to needed technology and some of the innovations the school had planned to adopt. Another leader also shared, "There's a lot of things that hold us back because it's out of my decision-making. It's a decision-level higher than me." Two leaders interviewed each found themselves in new positions in which they inherited a former leader's SOI plan. One principal discussed the difficulty of walking in as a new leader with "things already vetted out… and in policy." Losing core people who helped design the SOI plan was another implementation challenge shared by leaders.

For teachers, challenges were also primarily related to district administration. Teachers in one school felt their plan was altered by the district after they had co-designed as a school staff, and with their council, "at the very last minute, the plan was ready to be turned in…and there were some last-minute changes made by central office." In another school, teachers felt like onboarding a new principal, while implementing a new innovation plan, was particularly challenging, and created chaos at the beginning of implementation.

Whether it was communication from principals to teachers, principals to parents and community, or DESE to principals, communication was a challenge across the board. Several principals shared that their status as a School of Innovation was unclear from DESE. Originally, the SOI process did not involve a designation phase. Schools would apply for SOI by submitting their application to the state, and would be labeled SOI upon approval of the plan. The original process did not include an implementation or "designation" phase. As such, in 2016, the state began working with OIE and existing

SOIs to develop a designation phase. During this time, and in the years following, it was a new expectation for SOI schools. School level changes, such as new principals coming on board during the change, and the new expectations from DESE, and a need for better communication from DESE, made it challenging for schools to understand where they were in the process. During this time, increased communication facilitated by OIE may have helped in the transition. Two principals shared that at one point, they were not sure where they were in the process, one stating "I found out when I actually called… [OIE]...We hadn't gotten anything from the Department of Ed. It was a holding pattern," and another shared, "We found things out more through the Office of Innovation than we did through the Department Ed's branch of it." Teachers felt like the lack of communication was associated with doing something new and not always understanding the "parameters" and, for one school, a history of distrust between the school and the district contributed to the need for better communication.

Principals frequently mentioned being understaffed (interchangeably discussing faculty and staff shortages) as a challenge to implementing their innovation plans and facilitating change. For example, one leader shared, that "My needs would be more staff… so that I can create smaller classes for those real high-need students in reading and writing. In addition to lowering core class sizes, one principal discussed wanting to decrease the size of advisory classes.

Teachers tended to discuss detailed implementation challenges. Working with stakeholders, implementing a flexible schedule for the first time, adapting to technology, and the amount of collaboration and communication required (both internal and external), were challenges discussed by teachers. Teachers at three of the schools discussed the day-to-day challenges of changing their instructional approach. Teachers noted letting go of control, altering pacing, becoming a "facilitator" instead of a "dictator" and making sure learning was engaging and more student-centered, were challenging, yet fruitful. One school described the new thinking that helped them with this instructional challenge, we began to "think of it as how to individualize…to push each [student] along their own path."

"We began to "think of it as how to individualize…to push each [student] along their own path."

Teachers were more likely than principals to discuss the details of challenges they experienced in implementing their School of Innovation plan. A positive consequence of implementation challenges, according to one teacher, is that it has required her to reach out to parents and the community more often, and include them in weekly innovation meetings. At the same time, teachers shared that stakeholder engagement was new to them and challenging- "getting parents to come to our weekly innovation meetings, getting community members involved, to see the purpose of why we wanted their input"…"It's made us get out of our comfort zones. We're out there [in the community] now. We're uptown. We're delivering t-shirts. We're passing out order forms. We're trying to better get out in the community."

Another teacher shared that while the flexible schedule is a now a beneficial change, that it was a stressful transition- "It [the flexible schedule] got me. For 20 years, I've had a bell telling me when somebody was coming and going and what's next. That was challenging to remember to tell my students to go. Most of them were telling me." Another teacher echoed this implementation challenge, when she shared, "a lot of things that happened in the beginning and it was trying to get the time changed [to flexible schedule]"…"it was the logistics, how to make it work."

Several teachers agreed that a "lack of technology" was their biggest challenge. The primary challenge was outdated device ratios and outdated equipment. With innovations such as blended learning and

flexible scheduling, teachers felt like this challenge significantly hampered their ability to implement technology-related strategies. Principals expressed trying to meet this need was hampered by the need for one-to-one computer ratios and one principal described a lack of understanding of the need for improved technology by district administration.

Learning how to be "more of a facilitator versus a dictator in my classroom. That was a challenge."

Teachers reported that they felt challenged to continue to monitor their students while simultaneously letting go of some of their control over their students' learning. One teacher noted that now that while she was "letting them go at their own pace. [...] That's been tough because I like to be in control of my room." Another teacher echoed this by stating that with the added- "I think control is probably one of the biggest challenges. [...] Not being able to hover over them the whole time." Learning how to be "more of a facilitator versus a dictator in my classroom. That was a challenge." Teachers also felt that re-designing classroom activities for a student focus, especially with an eye toward engaging activities that would benefit students overall, was also a challenge.

Outcomes and Perceptions

Principals described growth in both terms of positive increases in desired outcomes (e.g., reading and math scores, culture, teacher-student relationships) and decreases in other measures (e.g., behavior problems, absences/tardiness). Some of the more general or broad ranging comments captured a degree of satisfaction with successes thus far from implementations of innovations. For example, one principal shared that the school is closing the "achievement gap," increasing learning opportunities, improving school attendance rate, and strengthening school culture.

All principals indicated they had experienced academic growth. One principal stated "For the first time since I've been here, we actually saw growth in math. We saw reading across the board." Overall school improvement was also discussed, as one principal shared, "We were a D school. We moved to a C school" and we are "still looking to improve." Principals discussed several ways they look at continuous improvement for their schools. One principal reported, "We have recouped 170 credits in the first semester…200 [the second semester] and "41 seniors graduated…[who] would not have graduated." A teacher shared that through online learning platforms students are recovering credits and less likely to drop out- students "are now able to make up credits. That's been a big thing for a lot of our kids… they don't drop out because they now see an opportunity to make up these credits, and it's helping us not have repeaters in the same class over and over again." Teachers further noted that not only have grades improved, they are also decreasing the number of students on the deficiencies list. For the previous year, one school had 200 seniors on the deficiency list, this year there were 80, and one school reported more students taking concurrent classes due to SOI as a result of their new Edgenuity [online] platform which has "has helped move the school to being a little more comfortable with the idea of doing things differently."

"Yes, we have goals and we want them to hit those targets within a week, but it's individualized based on their weak areas." Teachers want students to be able to answer the question, "What do you need to be working on?"

Other areas of growth included increases in school pride, building culture, and club participation some of which was shared as part of the advisory finding. Several principals noted that they have seen an increase in attendance and relate this improvement to several different components of their SOI plan, including improving relationships and engagement. Teachers discussed several aspects of their advisory program that were beneficial to both teachers and students. One teacher explained they keep their advisory students for "six years". She described her advisory relationship and experience as follows, "they're my boys. I'm their school mom. We're very close. I know their home problems. I know their school problems. It's really helped with our culture." Another teacher shared a motto they have adopted regarding their advisory students and the familial nature of them, "it's not 'your kids'. It's 'our kids.' They're all our kids." Another teacher explained that she viewed advisory as having another benefit, "One of the positive things that I see is our teacher retention is way better this year. We have had so many teachers over the years come spend a year, maybe two, and then they're gone…That's tremendous for us when 12 and 13 was the average [number of teachers lost each year] all the years I've taught." Teachers, overall, felt like as a result of advisory and improved relationships, that "kids are happier."

"It's not 'your kids'. It's 'our kids.' They're all our kids."

SOI as Family

As with students, SOI as a Family emerged powerfully as a sub-theme from teacher, principal, and parent comments. As previously discussed, principals expressed that during the SOI process they incorporated socioemotional training and supports for students, which led to a decrease in behavior issues and more opportunities for students to feel connected, and the creation of advisory led to improved student-teacher relationships. Lam et al. (2015) reported safe and caring environments facilitate relatedness in schools. The feeling of relatedness, or connectedness, was expressed across SOI schools and groups. Teacher, student, and parent groups expressed that their school was like "one big family," and that included leaders, teachers, staff, students, and parents. This family-like environment powerfully supports relatedness (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). The cross-connectedness among the school community members is a powerful ingredient needed for successful school change (Epstein, 2018). While these groups were highlighted as part of the school family, it was clear from the teacher and student comments there is a great deal of student-student care, student-teacher care, and teacher-teacher care, which nurtures not just relatedness, but also flexibility and academic success (Schussler & Collins, 2006). As these schools succeeded in the pursuit of being designated a SOI, it was clear that, to them, creating an environment that supported strong relationships and a family-like sense of relatedness was perceived as crucial to their successful change process.

BENEFITS OF BECOMING A SOI: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

Principals, teachers, parents, and students all mentioned the benefits of becoming a School of Innovation. Teachers described becoming a School of Innovation as challenging but exciting. The benefits of being a school of innovation that emerged across stakeholder groups were the following:

- Being a School that "Works for All,"
- Transforming Learning to Emphasize 21st Century Skills for the Future, and
- Increasing Ownership for Students and Their Learning.

Being a School that "Works for All"

Students expressed appreciation for the increased one-on-one time with teachers, and the opportunity to get extra help, or move ahead. A consistent theme from teachers and principals was the use of blended learning to allow for learning that is more personalized for each student. A personalized pathway accommodates all learners. As one teacher said, "Our kids are so much more involved. I think the excitement in our school, that's the biggest change. Kids are involved in their learning. They know where they are, they know where they need to go and we're trying to give them a plan to get there." Another teacher remarked, "I've seen the growth from them from the beginning to now and it's unbelievable. Not comparing themselves to others—just comparing herself to herself—that's proof to me---School of Innovation is the change that needs to happen."

"I've seen the growth from them from the beginning to now and it's unbelievable. [Students] Not comparing themselves to others—just comparing herself to herself—that's proof to me---School of Innovation is the change that needs to happen."

Teachers were also proud that they had "achieved thinking outside of the box and doing something progressive and new and innovative." As one teacher stated, "[I]t's cutting edge. Progressive and that benefits all students." They discussed that their school "letter grade improved." One teacher noted that the school grade was "arbitrary" to him, but instead, the greatest benefit he sees is, "Students taking responsibility and instilling hope for these students. [...] They've grown (*sic*) but they're learning the responsibility." This responsibility was tied to the fact that now, "They have [...] choice." They also noted that "fun" was a successful outcome or change that resulted from adopting their innovations.

Transforming Learning to Emphasize 21st Century Skills for the Future

Principals and teachers expressed the belief that through their innovative strategies they are doing a better job equipping their students with 21st Century Skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking, collaborating and coordinating with others, decision making, cognitive flexibility, and an orientation for service.

SOI students noted that their schools were flexible in preparing them to go directly into the workforce or to college. For example, students in one school noted that their school "bends to how you want to go, either college or straight into the workforce." In a different school, students explained that the teachers, counselors, and leaders are "very focused" on "all" student needs and match students to classes in high school to help prepare for the future and "for the job choices that we want in the future."

Increasing Ownership for Students and Their Learning

Principals and teachers in this study report that encouraging and allowing students to take ownership of their learning has resulted in the students being much more engaged in learning.
When students understand exactly what they're supposed to learn they are better able to monitor and adjust their work (Seidel, Rimmele, & Prenzel, 2005). Students in one school studied reported in every class teachers have the learning goals, objectives, and the level you need to be in order to be considered proficient prominently displayed on the wall so you know when you walk into every class what is expected of you. Some teachers have created conditions for students to fully participate in assessing their needs and progress, voicing their goals and making regular decisions about their learning. This

learner-centered approach aligns with research that underscores the importance of a sense of power and competence to the positive development of children and youth (USDHHS, 2003).

IMPLICATIONS: ADVICE TO EDUCATORS AND CLOSING

Schools considering becoming a SOI would benefit from lessons learned by SOIs further along in the process. The following are essential considerations for schools seeking to transform to student-focused learning systems through an innovative process.

(1) To achieve ownership and sustainability, include all stakeholders from the beginning—meaningfully involve them in the full process:

   a. identifying the need for change through innovation;
   b. exploring root causes that might be impacting what needs to change;
   c. co-generating ideas to meet these needs or address the root causes;
   d. developing the SOI plan;
   e. implementing the SOI plan; and
   f. monitoring implementation and adjusting as needed.

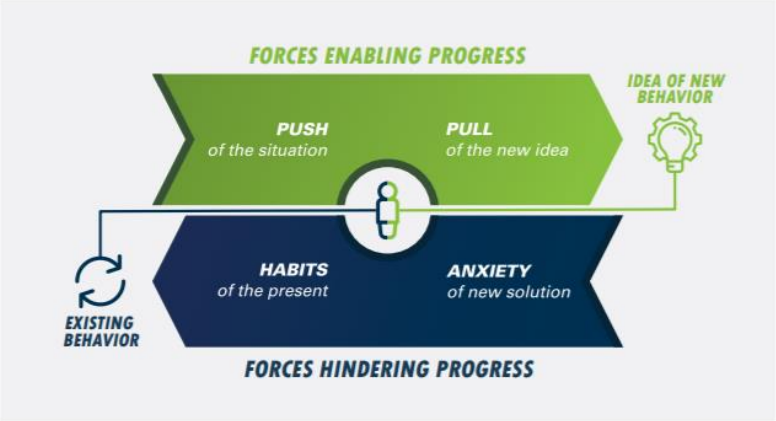
(2) Go slow—develop a shared, long-term vision anchored in your 'why' and set short-term, measurable goals.
(3) Be patient, monitor progress regularly, measure impact periodically, communicate to all stakeholders all along the way.

A special note must be made about the role of teachers in transforming to student-focused learning systems through innovation. The shifts to becoming a SOI are fundamental. The role of the teacher shifts significantly as students take on more responsibility and agency for learning. It is a shift in the power differential that teachers have traditionally held in the classroom. Because this shift is so fundamental, teachers must be involved from the beginning as collaborators in leading the desired changes. Teachers' values and beliefs about teaching and learning are critical considerations. Renaming traditional practices, without modifying basic beliefs about the practices themselves will not significantly alter the nature or quality of a learning environment (Casey, 2018).
Research from the Christensen Institute explains that teachers are likely to respond to change in different ways under different conditions depending on the job to be done. Tapping into the enabling forces that push and pull teachers when they are working within a particular job to be done can help mitigate the challenges and elevate the benefits of fundamental changes to their roles (Arnett, Moesta, and Horn, 2018). In their study, *The Teacher's Quest for Progress: How School Leaders Can Motivate Instructional Innovation*, the authors identified four different Jobs to Be Done that lead to teachers acquiring new practices.

1. Help me lead the way in improving my school
2. Help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that's manageable
3. Help me replace a broken instructional model so I can reach each student
4. Help me to not fall behind on my school's new initiative (Arnett, et al., 2018, p. 12)

Within each Job to Be Done they identified hindering and enabling processes (Arnett, et al., 2018, p. 10).

Figure 1. The Forces of Progress



If teachers are asked to lead the way in improving their school then the recommendation would be to let them lead and direct this work. This would activate the enabling forces, help alleviate their anxiety over new practices as they work toward developing new beliefs and habits (Arnett, et al., 2018). Specific recommendations for each Job to Be Done are available in the full paper. See the link in the reference section for to access the full paper.

Teachers, along with other key stakeholders, including students and parents, have an important role in the implementation of educational innovations. Starting with ownership in the innovation has the potential to result in more lasting change and allows for continual refinement as a key aspect of the change process. Lasting change, according to these five schools, is part of the process of becoming a SOI. As one teacher described, “It’s a process. It’s not just that we made this change and now we stop.”

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Questions for Teachers

Focus Group Questions for Parents

Focus Group Questions for Students

Focus Group Questions for Teachers

Guiding Questions:

- Have you heard about and/or experienced changes in how your child's school or teachers are approaching learning? **Have you heard or has your child been a part of any teaching changes in his/her classes?** This could be a change in how schedules work, how his/her teachers conduct classes, adding advisory or mentoring, etc.
    - If so, could you describe the change and how/if it impacted your child? **What were some of the changes and have they helped your child? If so, how?**
- Do you have opportunities to voice your ideas about how to improve learning for your child or how to improve your child's school?
    - If so, what are some examples of this you have experienced? i.e How does your school ask for your input?
    - If so, what are some of the pros and cons you have experienced through this opportunity? **Do your child's teachers or principal ever ask you what you would improve about school or your child's experience in school? Learning in your child's classroom? Talk more about this…**
- If you were working on changing learning in your child's school and you were able to help the school leaders and teachers in your child's school make decisions, what would you recommend they do to improve? **How might you make learning for your child at his/her school better?**
- Does your child ever get to make choices about how, what, or when he/she learns?
    - If so, how is that working for him/her?
- What are some ways your child's teachers have helped him/her develop as a learner?
- How is your school preparing your child for life after high school?
- Have you noticed any changes in how your child's teachers relate to him/her or interact with you?

Focus Group Questions for Parents

Guiding Questions:

- Have you heard about and/or experienced changes in how your child's school or teachers are approaching learning? **Have you heard or has your child been a part of any teaching changes in his/her classes?** This could be a change in how schedules work, how his/her teachers conduct classes, adding advisory or mentoring, etc.
    - If so, could you describe the change and how/if it impacted your child? **What were some of the changes and have they helped your child? If so, how?**
- Do you have opportunities to voice your ideas about how to improve learning for your child or how to improve your child's school?
    - If so, what are some examples of this you have experienced? i.e How does your school ask for your input?
    - If so, what are some of the pros and cons you have experienced through this opportunity? **Do your child's teachers or principal ever ask you what you would improve about school or your child's experience in school? Learning in your child's classroom? Talk more about this…**
- If you were working on changing learning in your child's school and you were able to help the school leaders and teachers in your child's school make decisions, what would you recommend they do to improve? **How might you make learning for your child at his/her school better?**
- Does your child ever get to make choices about how, what, or when he/she learns?
    - If so, how is that working for him/her?
- What are some ways your child's teachers have helped him/her develop as a learner?
- How is your school preparing your child for life after high school?
- Have you noticed any changes in how your child's teachers relate to him/her or interact with you?

Focus Group Questions for Students

Guiding Questions:

- Have you heard about and/or experienced changes in how your school or teachers are approaching learning? **Have you heard or been a part of any teaching changes in your classes?** This could be a change in how schedules work, how your teachers conduct classes, adding advisory or mentoring, etc.
    - If so, could you describe the change and how/if it impacted you? **What were some of the changes and have they helped you? If so, how?**
- Do you have opportunities to voice your ideas about how to improve learning or how to improve school?
    - If so, what are some examples of this you have experienced?
    - If so, what are some the pros and cons you have experienced through this opportunity? **Do your teachers or principal ever ask you what you would improve about school? Learning in your classroom? Talk more about this…**
- If you were working on changing learning in your school and you were able to help the adults in your school make decisions, what would you recommend adults do to improve? **How might you make learning at your school better?**
- Do you ever get to make choices about how, what, or when you learn?
    - If so, how is that working for you?
- What are some ways your teachers have helped you as a learner?
- How is your school preparing you for life after high school?
- Have you noticed any changes in how adults relate to you or interact with you, other students, or even other adults?