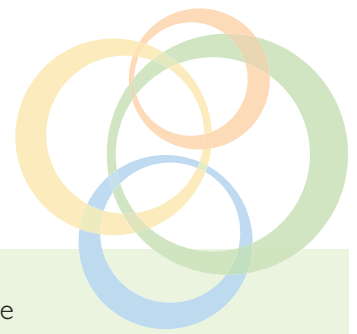


Memphis City Schools Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC)



New Leaders for New Schools (New Leaders) designed the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) to identify and provide incentives to school leaders and practitioners who have implemented effective practices that help drive student achievement gains and are willing to share those practices with educators across the country. Using a value-added model, New Leaders is working with Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) to determine which MCS schools have the highest student achievement gains. Through EPIC, effective education practices will be identified and documented on an online knowledge system that will be accessible to all MCS educators, all schools in the EPIC grants, and eventually to all educators nationwide.

Needs Assessment Results and General Information

In Memphis City Schools, 83 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The city has a high student mobility rate (27%); 14 percent of students receive special education services; and there is a growing student population of English language learners. MCS has had high principal turnover during the past three years, changing or replacing more than 50 percent of its principals.

In the 2008-2009 school year, EPIC awarded educators in 12 schools, affecting 12 principals, over 500 teachers, and 8,500 students. Schools participating in EPIC have at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Background

Like other award models, the EPIC model of differentiated compensation recognizes the paramount importance of student achievement performance in evaluating educators. What makes EPIC unique,

however, is that awards are provided to educators in exchange for sharing their effective practices with other educators in their school, district, and nationwide. EPIC provides the leadership opportunity for spotlighted educators to make available to their colleagues those practices that contributed to the achievement gains made by their students. Led by SchoolWorks, Effective Practice Teams visit award-winning schools to identify practices for documentation and sharing based on protocols developed with MCS. Such practices cover a broad spectrum of topics and may include curricular and instructional strategies, allocation of resources within a school, and professional development approaches. Through this practice-sharing focus, EPIC aspires to improve student achievement both in partner districts and charter schools and in other districts and charter schools throughout the country by offering free access to these practices through a robust online community.

Location(s)	Memphis, Tennessee
Award Date	November 2006
Duration	5 years
Partners	New Leaders for New Schools (New Leaders), Memphis City Schools (MCS), Mathematica Policy Research (MPR)

EPIC in Memphis City Schools builds on a small-scale incentive fund established by MCS in 2004 in schools that were not making adequate yearly progress. The original five “Fresh Start” schools appointed a new principal, re-staffed all positions, and provided all staff with additional professional development and support.

Incentives

As identified by MPR’s approach, the highest gain schools are identified as “Gold-gain” award schools and the high gain schools as “Silver-gain.” All instructional staff in Gold-gain and Silver-gain schools receive \$2,500 to recognize their participation in sharing practices and their contributions to student achievement gains. Principals in Gold-gain schools receive awards of \$10,000, and in Silver-gain schools \$7,500. Assistant principals in Gold-gain schools receive awards of \$6,750, and in Silver-gain schools \$5,000. Teachers in Gold-gain schools will be eligible for \$7,500 in the third year of awards and going forward.

Evaluation

New Leaders has partnered with MPR to develop and conduct an extensive evaluation of the EPIC program. This evaluation will address both the incentive and effective practice components of EPIC. The research questions related to the incentive component of EPIC will include:

- What impact does eligibility for EPIC incentive awards have on student achievement?
- How aware are principals and teachers of EPIC’s performance-based incentives?
- What successes and challenges were encountered in the implementation of the incentive award components of EPIC?
- The research questions related to the effective practice component of EPIC will include:
- Does EPIC appear to affect educational practices?

- How do EPIC Effective Practice Teams identify and disseminate effective practices?
- What successes and challenges were encountered in the implementation of the effective practice component of EPIC?

The evaluation will use administrative and achievement data on students and staff and will include staff surveys and case studies. Case studies will focus on the whole school and include interviews with leaders and staff, as well as classroom observations of spotlighted teachers.

Resources

TIF grant funding was awarded at a level of 44 percent of the projected program costs, including performance/practice incentives. In addition to the Teacher Incentive Fund grant funds, New Leaders and MCS will match almost \$3.5 million total. New Leaders has secured \$9.5 million in private support for the EPIC program nationally and is working to raise additional funds to support operational efforts.

Data Systems

Data are collected through a combination of a relational database, referred to as the Chancery SMS data system, that manages numerous student demographic and performance variables, including student enrollment, attendance, conduct, grades, poverty, and others. Additionally, the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment manages a series of student- and school-level data files that contain information on student achievement, graduation, climate survey feedback, and other data. MCS plans to integrate special education and English as a second language data, which are currently maintained separately, into its Chancery SMS system. The district is currently implementing a transition plan to a new system-wide application that will enhance utilization of the Chancery system. This new application will allow for more systematic data management.

Year 3 Activities

In February 2009, New Leaders and MCS awarded approximately \$1.2 million to 530 educators at 12 of MCS' highest gain elementary, middle and high schools. The EPIC program continued the dual purpose award program by using a value added model to identify schools with the highest level of gain and identifying and documenting the effective practices used to achieve those academic gains at the 12 awarded schools. Efforts with the EPIC Knowledge System continued by working with the 12 award winners to create professional development modules (text-based and video case studies) for the system. New Leaders began Year 3 by populating the EPIC Knowledge System with 17 effective practices from Memphis award-recognized schools and another 45 practices from other partner districts and charter schools across the country. New Leaders also began integrating EPIC effective practices into MCS-led and New Leaders-led professional development for both the entire MCS community of school leaders and the subset of that community that are New Leaders principals and assistant principals.

Outlook for Year 4

New Leaders and Memphis City Schools are looking forward to executing another successful EPIC program by identifying up to 16 award winning schools and awarding some 500 educators. In Year 4, both partners are working together to plan for the expansion of EPIC into more schools as an extension of the MCS' Teacher Effectiveness Initiative. New Leaders and Memphis City Schools are also finalizing the selection criteria and processes for full implementation of individual awards (Spotlight Teacher Awards) in SY10. New Leaders and Memphis City Schools will continue to integrate EPIC effective practices into MCS-led and New Leaders-led professional development for both the entire MCS community of school leaders and the subset of that community that are New Leaders principals and assistant principals.

