

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 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 2008-09 school year, EPIC will award educators in 13 to 16 MCS schools, thus likely impacting up to 16 principals, 16 assistant principals, 620 teachers, and 8,500 students. Schools participating in EPIC will have at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced 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 our partner districts and charter schools and in other districts and charter schools throughout the country by offering

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free access to these practices through a robust online community.

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. Spotlight awards to principals, assistant principals, and instructional staff are given in exchange for their leadership in the documentation and sharing of effective practices. 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. Spotlighted school leaders and teachers will be identified based on classroom- and/or school-level achievement gains, observations, their willingness to document and share effective practices, and, potentially, additional factors.

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 aware 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 \$9.3 million in private support for the EPIC program nationally, and is working to raise additional funds to support the operations of EPIC.

Data Systems

Data at MCS 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

