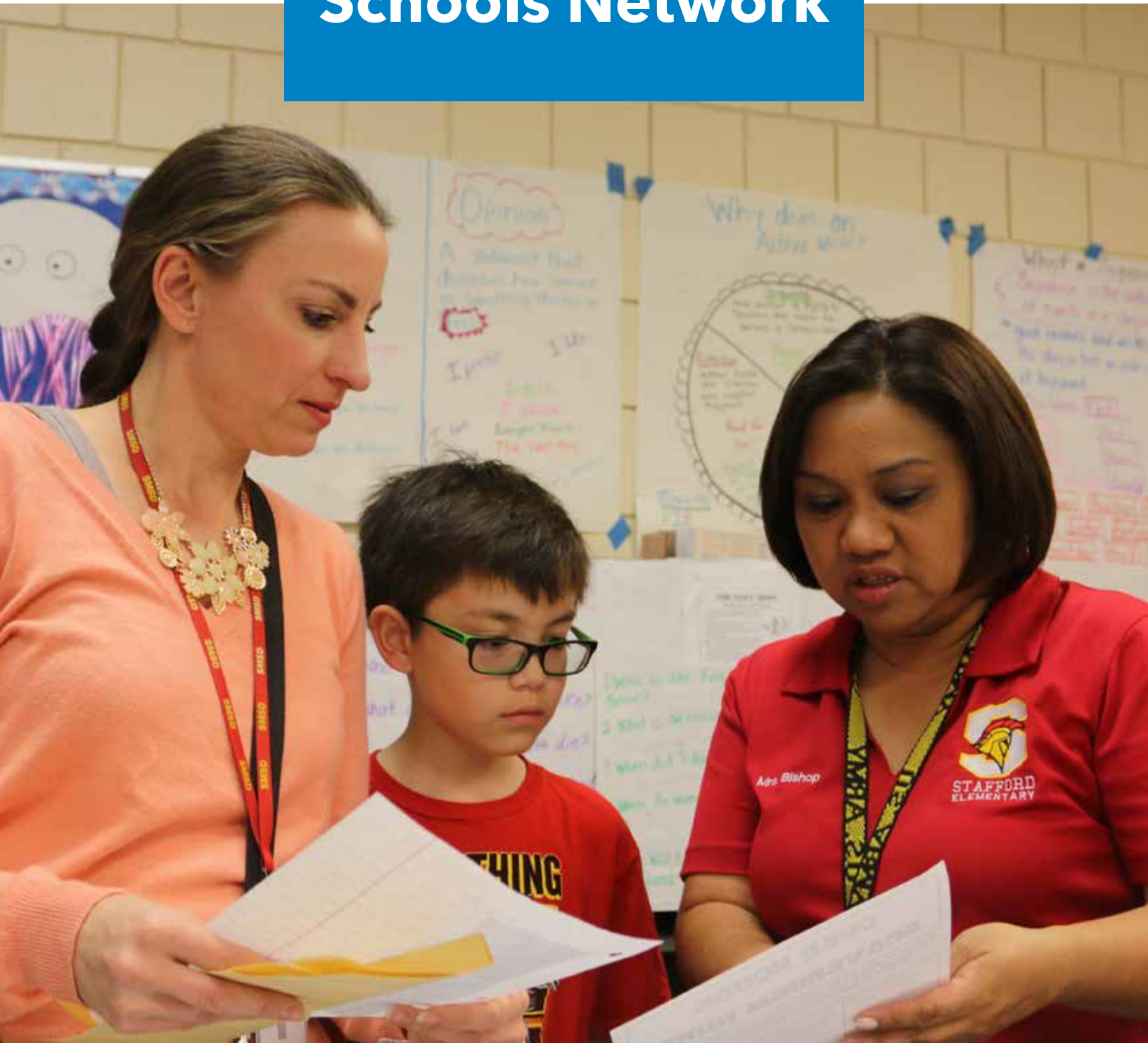# System of Great Schools Network

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

February 8, 2018

Dear Superintendent:

I am excited to announce the launch of Cohort 2 of the Texas Education Agency's System of Great Schools Network (SGS). The goal of The Network is to increase the number of students in high-quality seats year after year.

Over the past year, the SGS team successfully built and launched Cohort 1 of the SGS Network to support a select group of eight school districts – El Paso, Fort Worth, Galveston, Manor, Midland, San Antonio, Spring Branch, and South San Antonio – interested in shifting their theory of action towards being more responsive to the individual needs of schools and families within the community. The eight districts that joined the Network will continue to be provided with system-level supports as we now seek to add a new cohort of up to six additional districts. Districts across the state will be able to look towards the innovation of those in the Network as models for change.

We have learned many important lessons throughout the first year of implementing the SGS Network. Thanks to regular critical feedback from Network member districts, executive advisors, and multiple internal and external partners, we have begun to plan several changes to how SGS Network programing will be implemented moving forward. In particular, we will provide support to SGS Network leaders to focus more explicitly on implementing the following four levers:

1. **Manage School Performance**

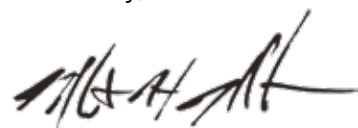2. **Expand Great Options**

3. **Improve Access to Options;** and

4. **Foster School Autonomy**

We will continue providing SGS Network districts with comprehensive, integrated support from the agency. This includes being better positioned to access grant opportunities, technical assistance, and agency services in a host of areas. Our goal, as always, is to support districts across the state that refuse to falter in their desire to provide education environments that maximize outcomes for all students.

Please visit the System of Great Schools page on our website to access the program description and application for Cohort 2.

Sincerely,

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education

CONTENTS

System of Great Schools Network
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Last year, the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Division of System Support and Innovation (DSSI) launched a technical assistance network to support school districts across Texas that are interested in exploring and pursuing the System of Great Schools strategy for system-wide reform.

What is the goal of the System of Great Schools Network?

The System of Great Schools Network supports districts to develop a locally designed system-level innovation and problem-solving approach with the goal of:

Increasing the # and % of students in top-rated schools and reducing the # and % of students in low-rated schools.

Districts that pursue the goal identified above will design and implement a plan to continuously improve how they empower educators to design and lead high-quality schools, support families to access desired best-fit school options, and focus central office on school support, innovation, and oversight.

School and district roles in a System of Great Schools

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL DO?
- Design a model to meet the needs of all students
- Define a mission and vision
- Engage with parents and school community
- Make staffing decisions
- Select curriculum
- Build school culture
- Determine their schedule
- Control their budget

WHAT DOES THE DISTRICT DO?
- Set clear performance expectations for schools and regularly report progress with all stakeholders
- Empower school leaders with supports and resources to achieve performance expectations
- Execute strategic school actions (expanding successful schools, creating new schools, and closing persistently low-performing schools) to ensure more students have access to better schools
- Increase options for families and eliminate barriers for families to access best-fit schools and programs

How do districts in the Network become a System of Great Schools?

While there are multiple models to look at across the country, TEA has defined four levers that districts in the SGS Network will explore, plan, and implement during their time in the cohort. It is expected that districts in the Network will make progress toward the design and implementation of the activities identified under each lever.

1 Manage School Performance

District annually reviews the performance of schools, and takes strategic and transparent actions based on schools' performance.

- Establish a local school performance framework
- Enact annual/regular school performance reviews and planning processes
- Develop office/capacity to conduct an annual review of individual school performance to result in a transparent report recommending strategic school actions based on performance

2 Expand Great Options

District executes strategic school actions such as replicating successful schools, taking aggressive action to improve existing schools, and launching new schools;

- Maximize the impact of existing high-performing schools, implement high-quality district authorizing policies and practices (RFP, application decision-making, contracting, etc.), and close persistently low-performing schools.

- Conduct a regular "call for quality schools" to identify partners to redesign existing schools and/or launch new schools

- Develop office/capacity to creating and growing innovative schools and programs

Midland on the Move

Through a Call for Quality Schools, Midland ISD sought applications from entities outside the district as well as individuals or teams within the district to produce innovative ideas focused on creating great schools in Midland.

3 Improve Access to Options

District supports families to understand, navigate, and access best-fit school and program options.

- Build and launch "school chooser" tools & supports (websites, navigators, expos, etc.)
- Design and implement a unified enrollment system
- Develop office/capacity to support enrollment, enrollment analytics, and family choice activities

San Antonio ISD's Office of Access and Enrollment is a one-stop-shop for parents and guardians needing information on student enrollment, the registration process, transfer requests, and attendance. SAISD offers a number of specialized schools and programs that are open to students across the entire county.

4 Foster School Autonomy

District empowers school leaders with increased autonomy over talent, budget, program, and schedule.

- Evaluate the design of central office to ensure that maximum resources are distributed to schools
- Establish and define school autonomy provisions and timelines
- Design and implement student based budgeting processes and supports

What is the System of Great Schools Network?

The SGS Network is an opt-in program that will provide superintendents and district leaders with customized consultative support and opportunities to learn from each other and from national experts on implementation of the SGS strategy. Districts will receive 24 months of support, including, but not limited to, the following services:

Consultative Support

Each SGS Network district will be matched with a vetted SGS executive advisor (EA). EAs are experts who have worked to implement the SGS strategy in their past work experience. The executive advisor will provide the superintendent and his/her leadership team with at least 200 hours of support in the following areas:

- Conducting the SGS District Readiness Assessment process in collaboration with TEA and a third-party vendor: 2-3 days on the ground conducting interviews, focus groups, and data collection

- Facilitating district participation in the annual SGS Summit.

- Supporting the district development of the SGS Implementation Roadmap

- Facilitating ongoing development and implementation of the SGS Roadmap.

- Connecting the district with additional experts and technical assistance providers who can support the district with specific initiatives

- Supporting the superintendent and cabinet with leadership and change management coaching

TEA will also provide a vetted list of additional technical assistance partners that districts can engage with local funds or excess SGS funds at any time.

Network districts can expect from TEA that they will:

1. Be supported throughout all phases of their work

2. Receive pertinent information in a timely manner

3. Be matched with an appropriate executive advisor

4. Receive technical support from vetted advisors with experience in that specific work

5. Have regular access to TEA staff and leadership

6. Be active participants in a professional learning community of districts and national experts

Resources:

The Texas Education Agency recently launched the website www.systemofgreatschools.org to serve as a comprehensive resource hub. The website is available to the general public and includes:

- Thorough toolkits with implementation guides to support implementation of specific activities and initiatives;
- Access to curated district resources and case studies; and
- Webinars and other interactive resources for individuals at any place on the learning curve to utilize

Professional Learning Community:

In addition to acting as our resource hub, the SGS website will serve as the backbone of our professional learning community. SGS Network members will receive access to a restricted portion of the SGS website where they will be able to interact with one another. Districts will be will be able to share, and receive potential solutions to, problems of practice in real time. This forum will also connect SGS Network districts to national experts beyond those that they have directly contracted with. In addition, Network members will build a community and gain knowledge through:

- System of Great Schools Summits
- Facilitated working groups for LEAs on targeted topics of interest
- Trainings, webinars, and facilitated collaboration activities to learn from fellow SGS Network members, national experts, and leaders from other LEAs both within and outside of Texas

Commitments of SGS Network Districts:

1. Demonstration of commitment to making the SGS strategy a top priority and the base of the district's theory of action;

2. Participation in a comprehensive District Readiness Assessment to assess current SGS strengths and opportunities;

3. Dedication of capacity (FTE and/or office) to transformation and innovation work;

4. The development of a locally approved school performance framework (SPF)

5. Successful completion of Lone Star Governance board training;

6. Sharing of knowledge, lessons learned, and materials and tools created throughout the process;

7. Access to central office leadership and staff; and

8. Superintendent and leadership participation in SGS network summits and meetings

Functional Support Across TEA

The Texas Education Agency is committed ensuring that SGS Network districts are supported across all divisions within the Agency. These specific supports include, but are not limited to:

The Specialized Application Negotiation and Technical Assistance Program (SANTA)

With the goal of more effective and strategic use of federal funds in districts, TEA has developed the Specialized Application Negotiation and Technical Assistance (SANTA) program. SANTA is a new support available exclusively to SGS Network districts that will involve extensive collaboration between districts' federal programs staff and TEA.

TEA will provide each district historical data of its federal fund expenditures (by class-object code) and carryover amounts. This will allow a district and its advisors to better analyze its historical use of federal grant funds and determine if those uses have been effective and aligned to the district's strategic priorities and student outcome goals.

TEA will provide the following support to districts:	Collaborative analysis of historical use of federal grant funds to determine if those uses have been effective and aligned to the district's strategic priorities and student outcome goals. Collaborative review of the district's needs assessment (required for the district's ESSA application) by examining information from the district, including: • Student performance data. • School improvement plans and activities. • Lone Star Governance goals. • Teacher quality goals and issues. • System of Great Schools Implementation Roadmap
Following the above supports, TEA will support districts to identify specific uses of ESSA funds that are most aligned to the district's strategic priorities and student outcome goals.	Technical assistance may include: • Serving as a thought partner and sounding board as you consider new uses of your ESSA funds to support your improvement initiatives. • Providing expert advice on the allowable uses of ESSA funds and how you can maximize your ESSA funds. • Suggesting specific, research-based programs, activities, and strategies that address your identified needs and align with your overall improvement plans. • Helping you incorporate your innovative ideas into the ESSA consolidated application. • Helping you monitor your implementation and progress throughout the school year. • Helping you define your expectations and evaluate your success. • TEA will prioritize application and amendment reviews for districts above others across the state

Lone Star Governance

The intention of Lone Star Governance is to provide a continuous improvement model for governing teams (Boards in collaboration with their Superintendents) that choose to intensively focus on one primary objective: Improving Student Outcomes. In addition to Lone Star's singular focus on improving student outcomes, it provides a system for governing the secondary, but vital, legal and fiscal responsibilities of the Board.

The intention of the Lone Star Governance 2-Day Workshop is to create a supportive space in which governing teams can learn about and can prepare for the intense focus on improving student outcomes as described by the Lone Star Governance implementation integrity instrument. You can view the implementation integrity instrument by downloading the Lone Star Governance Manual (PDF).

Members of the SGS Network (full board of trustees and superintendent) are required to attend and successfully complete a Lone Star Governance workshop within the first 6 months of membership. Networks districts will be reimbursed for any costs related to attending and successfully completing a workshop. Districts interested in attending more than one work shop, or sending other leaders, will be reimbursed for all associated costs.

Local Accountability Systems

House Bill (HB) 22 (85th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2017) established Local Accountability Systems (LAS) which allow districts and charter schools to develop plans to locally evaluate their campuses. Once a plan receives approval from the agency, districts and charter schools may use locally developed domains and indicators together with the three state-mandated domains to assign overall A–F ratings for each campus. SGS Network districts interested in leveraging their school performance framework as the district's official local accountability system will be supported throughout the process.

Case Management

SGS Network superintendents will enjoy the support of a single point of contact within the Agency that will be able to respond directly to inquiries and/or ensure that the appropriate person/team is looped into the conversation. This will both serve to minimize the amount of searching that districts have to do to find answers as well as to ensure the SGS team always has the most up-to-date district context.

What funding do SGS Network districts receive?

Districts that become members of the SGS Network do not receive any direct funding. The SGS program does not include a formal competitive process and therefore districts invited to join the network cannot receive direct funding or priority points in other TEA competitive processes because of Network membership. However, districts do receive access to services and supports that represent a significant financial value including, but not limited to:

- Up to $100,000 in consultative and technical support; and
- Travel allocation up to $7,000 for visiting other SGS districts, conferences, and other professional learning opportunities.

What is the timeline for Cohort 2?

2018 DATES	ACTION
February 8	System of Great Schools (SGS) Network application release
February 8 – March 2	Assistance for districts interested in submitting an application, email: mike.herschenfeld@tea.texas.gov
March 12	Application due by 10:00 a.m CT to: DSSI@tea.texas.gov
Late March	Invitation sent to districts to join the SGS Network and MOUs signed
Early April	Districts are matched with an Executive Advisor
By Mid-April	SGS District Readiness Assessment process begins (will vary between districts)
By Early June	Districts are sent their final District Readiness Assessment report
June 18-20	System of Great Schools Network Kick Off Summit (in Austin)

Note: Dates are tentative and subject to change

What is the process for a district to join the SGS Network?

The application process for the upcoming cohort of SGS Network districts will include multiple phases.

Phase 1: Districts will complete the initial application.

Phase 2: Districts will respond to a set of questions based on local data which we will compile and send to applicants.

Phase 3: Districts will be involved in an interview to include the superintendent and other leadership.

Following Phase 3, TEA will send invitations to up to 6 districts.

The primary purpose of the application is to determine the will of district stakeholders to adopt a System of Great Schools strategy as the foundation of its theory of action. It is expected that participating districts will also have the interest and capacity to provide TEA's Division of System Support and Innovation with critical feedback on how to improve network services and programing.

What services and/or supports are available to districts that are not invited to join the SGS Network?

TEA is continuously improving and developing a set of services and supports that will be available to any district interested in learning about and/or engaging the SGS strategy. This includes access to:

- The System of Great Schools website which contains a comprehensive set of informational materials, implementation guides and blueprints, recorded webinars, etc.
- Self-assessment materials
- Profiles of vetted practitioners across the country with specific SGS related experiences
- Support from TEA to better understand the work that SGS districts implement.

Should our district begin to think about applying for a future Cohort?

Districts that are interested in the SGS strategy, but are not ready to apply for Cohort 2 can take early steps to prepare to submit a strong application for future cohorts of the Network. We encourage districts to utilize the network application as an initial self-assessment tool until a formal self-assessment is developed. DSSI is available to offer support to districts interested in learning what they can do over the next year to prepare a strong Cohort 3 application.

What districts are members of Cohort 1 of the SGS Network?

Fort Worth

Midland

El Paso

Manor

Spring Branch

San Antonio

South San Antonio

Galveston
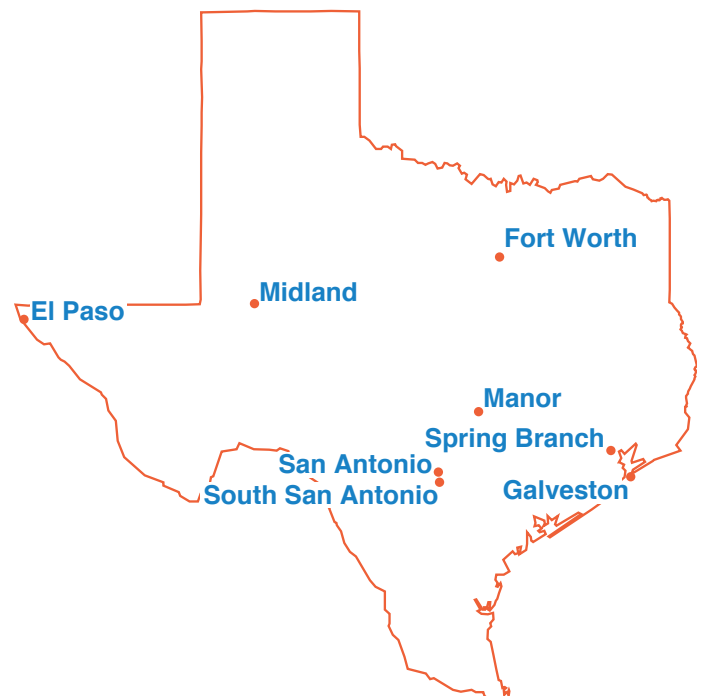
What is a School Performance Framework (SPF)?

A School Performance Framework (SPF) is a tool used to assess the performance of schools across multiple, common measures. A SPF tells district leaders and stakeholders how schools are doing and provides the critical data needed to take school actions.

A School Performance Framework helps you:

- Know your schools: The quality of each school will be clearly measured on multiple indicators and accessible to the district and community.
- Define success: Expectations are clear and both the central office and schools can assess the quality of education provided to students.
- Improve schools: The school system is managed with the overall goal of increasing access to quality education programs. This goal is realized by creating and expanding successful schools, and taking action to address struggling ones.
- The development of a SPF is a crucial component of a System of Great Schools district.

What are "strategic school actions?"

Strategic school actions are medium- and high-stakes decisions that a district takes to increase the number of students at top rated schools and decrease the number of students at low rated schools.

- Ensure all high-performing campuses are fully enrolled
- Add grades to existing high-performing schools
- Change attendance boundaries to ensure more students are zoned to high-performing schools
- Give campus leaders autonomy over talent, budget, program, and schedule
- Convert an existing campus into an in-district (Subchapter C) charter to formalize contractual school level autonomies
- Launch a new district school
- Authorize a new in-district charter school (Sub-C)
- Conduct a "call for quality schools" to identify potential school management partners
- Form an office to oversee the district's innovation and transformation work
- Develop a transformation zone with a subset of campuses within the district
- Bring in a school improvement partner to support specific campus needs as identified in a campus needs assessment
- Close a persistently low-performing campus.

How does a district "develop and/or dedicate capacity" towards implementing SGS?

The SGS team believes that success in implementing the SGS strategy requires that a district dedicate capacity towards its SGS goals. In the simplest terms this would be ensuring that, at a minimum, a 1.0 FTE is assigned to each lever of work. Districts that have seen this work sustain and become embedded in the culture of the district have created whole offices with a direct report to the superintendent. Examples include the San Antonio office of Innovation, the Dallas Office of Transformation and Innovation, the Spring Branch Office of Research and Design, as well as numerous examples from districts outside of Texas.

What is the System of Great Schools District Readiness Assessment?

The DSSI will use a SGS District Readiness Assessment to better understand the district's current strengths and opportunities against the SGS rubric. This will allow our team and the district to learn more about the local context and to shape supports and engagement in the most valuable way. At the end of the process, each district will receive a final report that identifies recommendations on leveraging current strengths and addressing opportunities in readiness. The assessment will also allow us to best match districts with partners and create more shared learning experiences. The process includes surveys, interviews, and focus groups of district leaders, central office staff, and school leaders.

What is the SGS implementation roadmap?

Following the completion of the SGS District Readiness Assessment, the executive advisor will work in close collaboration with the Superintendent and his/her leadership team to develop a SGS implementation roadmap. The roadmap will highlight local context and summarize the major SGS initiatives to be undertaken and in what order.

A completed roadmap will likely include:
- initiative prioritization
- initiative owners
- initiative goals and objectives
- timelines
- important milestones and deliverables
- key interdependencies between initiatives
- risk mitigation strategies.

The roadmap will be a guiding document that the district leadership team will come back to as they build project work plans to implement the SGS initiatives.

RELATED LINKS

System of Great Schools

Call for Quality Schools

Midland ISD

Lone Star Governance

Local Accountability Systems

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