

SEM Professional Development Delivery System

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The success of implementing any school improvement process can only be accomplished through an organized approach to professional development that uses a variety of formats to translate the principles, goals, and supporting research of any plan or model into practical and regularly used teaching strategies. An effective PD system must include: (1) Needs Assessments, (2) Start-Up, (3) Implementation, and (4) *Sustainability* beyond the original services and consultation by outside trainers.

Our approach is designed to create local ownership and professional development to a community of dedicated and competent teacher leaders who will maintain and “grow” the program in the years ahead. The value of outside consultation is best determined by the expertise, ownership, and commitment to the program’s mission that is “left behind” as well as by various on-site training sessions and resources. In the sections that follow, special attention is given to the ways we promote sustainability of the SEM, including (1) creating a cadre of teacher leaders, (2) defining specific responsibilities for program monitoring on the parts of principals, and (3) creating a Schoolwide Enrichment Team that has major responsibilities for program planning. The four categories of service described below represent how we organize and carry out the SEM Professional Development Delivery System.

1. Summer Confratute Program at the University of Connecticut and Additional Courses for Advanced Training

Confratute. A centerpiece of our PD delivery system is the summer Confratute program held annually on the campus of the University of Connecticut. Confratute is a combination of a professional development conference and a summer institute with a good deal of fraternity mixed in. Our faculty and staff interact with participants from across the United States and around the world, focusing on differentiation of instruction, strategies for high-end learning, and how to facilitate enrichment teaching. We believe that all students can benefit from enjoyable and challenging learning opportunities and that learning can be enhanced and maximized when we consider each student’s abilities, interests, learning styles, and preferred

modes of expression. Our focus is on accommodating these differences in a variety of settings. We have shown through our research that a strength-based approach is the best way to both challenge our most advanced learners and to close the achievement gap for at risk youngsters.

Confratute is organized with week-long mini courses called *strands*, which include in-depth training on a variety of research-based models and strategies for program development and for curriculum and instruction. For example, we include strands on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), the Schoolwide Enrichment Model for Reading, the Mentoring Mathematical Minds curriculum, Cluster Grouping, and other components of the model. We also provide keynote addresses from major leaders, special topics presentations, and networking sessions, as well as a set of special strands and events for school administrators. *We have found that Confratute participation by principals is a key ingredient for successful SEM implementation.*

Everyone who teaches at Confratute is selected from the very best professionals who spend the majority of their time directly involved with schools, teachers, and kids. Our instructors include national experts in gifted and talented education, practicing classroom teachers and educational specialists, and individuals with expertise in a wide variety of disciplines. Our focus on practical skills and personalizing the learning process has resulted in nothing short of superlative evaluations over three and a half decades.

Specific intended outcomes for Confratute participants vary by strand, but overall we intend that participants will increase their knowledge, understanding, and practical skills related to research-based strategies for promoting high-end learning. We also encourage participants to serve as leaders and change agents in their own schools or other settings by implementing the strategies they learn and by sharing and modeling their learning for colleagues. We work directly with participants to identify individualized goals based on their interests and needs, and participants may elect to receive CEUs or graduate credit.

Additional Courses for Advanced Training. The University of Connecticut's Neag Center for gifted education and talent Development offers a variety of on-campus and on-line courses for persons who would like to gain advanced experiences in the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. As will be pointed out below, a part of our comprehensive approach to professional development recommends preparing a group of **teacher leaders** in each SEM school. These advanced training opportunities are considered to be an ideal way for teacher leaders to pursue both the advanced training in the components of the model and professional development presentation skills. Information about the courses available and the on-line program can be found at: <http://epsy.education.uconn.edu/programs/gifted-talented-education/gte/welcome/>

2. Professional Development Materials, DVDs, On-Line Learning Resources and our On-Line Community Resource Data Base (ASPIRE)

Print and Visual Resources. Books, articles, research studies, and DVDs dealing with all components of the SEM support all aspects of our PD for both Confratute and on-site

workshops and coaching. Most print materials (excluding books) can be found on our web site and may be downloaded and reproduced without cost or permission. Although all of our work has a strong research base, the majority of our resource material deals with practical school-based implementation strategies. The main books about the model can be found at: <https://www.prufrock.com>

The Renzulli Learning System (RLS). The “brand” of teaching that is required for a successful SEM program is extremely difficult to accomplish without the use of technology. It is for this reason that we developed and researched an Internet based enrichment program specifically designed for the SEM. This program, called the Renzulli Learning System, enables teachers to identify, select, and *infuse* high engagement activities into any and all curricular areas. Using RLS, teachers can personalize activities for individual students or designated groups according to each student’s electronically generated profiles. Profiles provide information on each student’s academic strength areas, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. Items in the RLS data-bases are organized by these factors and by state or Common Core standards. Teachers use the same system to enrich their lessons by having access to thousands of high-engagement resources in our databases that are also tagged by subject area, topic, subtopics and sub-sub-topics.

The realities of today’s standards driven curriculum cannot be changed but our *infusion approach* to enrichment enables teachers to insert exciting supplementary activities into any regular curricular topic and to match student abilities, interests, learning styles, and product preferences with thousands of challenging, highly engaging activities.

On-Line Community Resource Data Base (The ASPIRE Survey). An important part of our PD model also provides teachers with a data-base of community resource persons and agencies for providing enrichment activities. An electronic survey is designed to increase parent and community engagement in schools by conducting an inventory of six factors: Assets, Skills, Professions, Interests, Relationships, and the Environment (ASPIRE), and utilizing them within a context that connects their value to the school’s educational programs and activities. The identified “human capital data” collected through the ASPIRE Survey provides a searchable databank of resources and information for supporting teachers by engaging parents and community members in enrichment activities, project development mentorships, and differentiated learning experiences. As the Teacher Leaders and the Schoolwide Enrichment Team (described below) develop their “in-house skills” to sustain the SEM program, The ASPIRE Survey will greatly enhance their tool bag of implementation resources.

3. On-Site Professional Development

Small Group Personalized Development. Our on-site PD includes a variety of formats. We do not believe in the “one-shot” method to initiating change nor a purely “talking head” approach. While we do some general lectures to provide an overview of the SEM and descriptions of specific components of the model, we also use other formats to achieve our training goals. These formats range from what we call Small Group Personalized Development (SGPD) to

individual coaching sessions for teachers and administrators. SGPD is conducted by having one of our staff trainers demonstrate a particular teaching strategy with students while being observed by a small group of teachers. These sessions are often videotaped and followed by a debriefing and question and discussion session. The videos can be used for other groups of teachers who will be implementing the strategies covered in a SGPD session.

Coaching. Coaching differs from mentoring by focusing upon a specific competence as opposed to general overall development. SEM Coaching involves a training process in which an individual teacher is supported in a one-on-one session while pursuing a specific teaching strategy or professional goal. Coaching may be applied to an informal relationship between two individuals where one has greater experience and expertise than the other and offers advice and guidance as the other goes through a learning process. In addition to providing coaching to individual teachers, our consultants also work with a select group of teacher leaders (see below) to provide them with coaching skills that reflect our concern for ongoing sustainability of the model.

Teacher Leaders. A secondary goal of our PD is designed to identify and prepare a small number of highly motivated teacher-leaders in the buildings in which we work. Many programs implode after outside consultants and trainers complete their work. In order to produce the *sustainability* of the SEM (or any other programming model for that matter) it is necessary to have a group of teachers who perfect the teaching skills to the extent that they can continue to provide the training and coaching for new teachers or teachers who need additional training and support. A teacher-leader initiative is highly dependent on the role of the principal and his or her willingness to identify potential candidates for this role, provide them with release time to carry out their coaching responsibilities, and allow for flexibility in scheduling in order to facilitate their work. This is what defines innovative administrative leadership. When all is said and done, this kind of *capacity building* is what will keep the change process going beyond the services provided by outside consultants. This initiative will also give some teachers an opportunity to grow professionally, and help to create a cadre of leaders in the school that promotes more ownership of the change process. An additional advantage of a teacher-leader focus is that it will enable the principal to identify and showcase some of the more active teachers who are doing a great job and give them opportunities for coaching and extensions in the months and years ahead. This approach will help to guarantee sustainability after the initial training and professional development work has been completed.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Team. The teacher leaders mentioned above, the principal, and other teachers representing various grade levels and/or subject matter areas should be actively involved in planning and reviewing all SEM activities. As mentioned above, sustainability is enhanced when teachers take ownership of the program and build the within-school expertise that guarantees that program components will be *authentically* implemented after the training and consultation are completed. Leadership is *critical* and the principal must be an active member of this team, provide the time for this team to meet on a regular basis, and allow the team to be the major decision makers in the planning process.

Monitoring PD Impact for Continuous Progress. In order for professional development to have a lasting impact, school leadership must be actively committed to monitoring the implementation of SEM program training components. This must be part of a comprehensive PD system. When people tell us “nothing has changed” it is often a function of little or no monitoring of implemented components, the use of readily available resources or administrative support for time that needs to be spent on planning and follow-up. It’s what happens in classrooms *after* the professional development training has taken place that is the real value of any training. This includes walk-throughs, discussions, interactions, updates at faculty meetings, and some good old-fashioned encouragement and enthusiasm on the parts of administrators to support the initiative.

4. Visitation To Highly Effective SEM Schools

A final part of our PD approach is arranging for visitations to SEM schools. If the cliché, “Seeing is believing” has any merit, it certainly applies to the importance of seeing SEM schools in action. Although every SEM school is designed around a set of *common goals*, the individuality of the SEM schools that have been developed over the years comes from the *unique means* and creative innovations that teachers and administrators have used to build their own program. All roads lead to Rome (The Common Goal), but what makes the trip interesting is that there are many ways to get to Rome. (Unique Means) and getting there is what brings out each faculty’s creativity and builds ownership, involvement, and pride.

The Concept of “Friendly Validation”

Authentic programs of any type are often asked to “show evidence” that they are doing what they claim to be doing and have “the data” to prove it! In research, this concept is called validation; and we use a similar process within the context of SEM programs to guarantee that we are on task and true to our beliefs. Such data is also used in formative assessment studies to provide feedback to teachers and to help make mid-course corrections toward the pursuit of desired goals. Formative assessment is a friendly process and *always* geared toward program improvement rather than evaluation.

We have developed a small number of easy-to-complete data collection forms and checklists (attached) that allow you to estimate the impact of training and determine areas where additional training or “tune up” might be provided. Data is also available for the types and extent to which Renzulli Learning and ASPIRE are being used. It is the responsibility of program leaders (e.g., Principal, Teacher Leaders, and/or Enrichment Team Members, Program Coordinators) to use these guides to examine the extent that components for which training has been provided are actually being used. Otherwise, the cost and the time teachers have invested in the training have been wasted.

This monitoring should not be used for “teacher evaluation” or in any other form of assessment. Rather, the guides are ways of assessing impact and taking constructive action toward the goals to which the school has already made a commitment.

To summarize, successful professional development never results from any “one-shot deal,” talking heads, or total reliance on outside consultants. And creating a culture of what we call the 3 Es, *Enjoyment, Engagement, and Enthusiasm For Learning* on the parts of both students and teachers isn’t a job for one or two people. Rather, it is the result of a blend of the strategies described above combined with small group activities, coaching, and regularly scheduled deliberation, discussion and feedback utilization on the parts of teachers and leaders. When we stop talking to one another about how we are attempting to implement the SEM the change process has probably failed! Strong, central and building administrative support, active teacher involvement and leadership, conscientious program monitoring, and the collective willingness of everyone to adopt a can-do attitude will change the culture of the school. And as a poster at the entrance of one of our schools points out:

“Attitude Is Everything”

