

Work Session: Peer Consultancy

October 4, 2019

11:15 am - 12:00 noon

Mississippi's Problem of Practice

Leverage Point 6: Monitoring and Evaluating School Improvement

Context:

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), like many other state education agencies, is amidst the school improvement plan review process and expects to have completed its review, approval, and funding of school improvement plans in July. These plans will be fully implemented during the 2019-20 school year. The 2019-20 school year also marks an opportunity for MDE to revisit and strengthen its approach to monitoring identified schools, which has prompted Sonja Robertson, Executive Director, Office of School Improvement, and her team to ask themselves a handful of important questions about their work:

- How do we know what we do to support schools is effective?
- How might we create a monitoring process structure that is meaningful and purposeful?
- What are the changes we can expect to see/be looking for at 30/60/90 days and in the long term?
- When we don't see impact/results, how do we support schools in a way that's improvement focused, not punitive or "gotcha"?
- How can we provide with actionable feedback that schools can use to improve?

MDE has had numerous systems for monitoring in the past, the impact of which aren't clear. Up to about a year ago, MDE did a program evaluation of school improvement through Mississippi State that mainly comprised focus groups with focus and priority schools and surveys with coaches and principals. The agency pulled back on any other evaluations as the agency shifted its approach to school improvement and support structures. Now that these are in place, MDE is interested in designing evaluations to measure their impact. For example, MDE has invested in a team of school improvement coaches who will support their 37 CSI schools and would like to understand their impact on school planning, implementation, and results. MDE is equally interested in feedback on the quality and impact on their agency's technical assistance.

It is also relevant to note that under the leadership of state chief Dr. Carey Wright, MDE staff have been given the charge to ensure the agency's focus has a reach all the way into the classroom. In particular, Dr. Wright is emphasizing measurable impact of the agency's programs and support on literacy and math instruction for every student, especially those most historically underserved and underrepresented. MDE's approach to monitoring school improvement efforts moving forward will need to emphasize quality of implementation and impact of funded strategies and practices on literacy and math outcomes, and tease out which approaches were successful and impactful (and why/why not).

Why is this issue a problem of practice for you? Why is it important to get right?

In order for MDE to be seen as credible by the field, the process that it puts in place to support this first round of CSI schools has to be strong, sound, and viable. It has to be viewed by those that were identified as CSI - and school leaders especially - as something of value. Stakes are high for the SEA right now. MDE needs to meet high expectations. It is critically important that the MDE develop a strong, high-quality, and relevant process so that supports for schools result in improved outcomes for students and teachers as well as leave those engaged with a feeling of purpose and a belief that they benefited from those supports. It is critically important to get this right, right now.

Focus Question(s)

- How might we create a monitoring process structure that is meaningful and purposeful?
- What steps do we need to take to design an evaluation that will help answer the question, "Are supports for schools implementing improvement plans leading to process that helps the schools get to positive and measurable impact?"