

National Charter 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 principals and teachers who have implemented practices and are willing to share those practices that drive student achievement gains. The cases produced through EPIC will spotlight the practice and include a rich contextualized framework to be shared with educators across the country through an online knowledge platform. New Leaders has partnered with Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) to identify the participating charter schools that have made the highest student achievement gains based on value-added analyses of student-level data. Once identified, schools will participate in a rigorous process aimed at uncovering and sharing with others the practices they are using that contribute to these gains. New Leaders is partnering with SchoolWorks to lead the process which will begin with a self-study conducted by the school and will culminate in the production of text-based and multimedia cases from schools making the highest gains.

Needs Assessment Results and General Information

Over 75 charter schools are participating in EPIC, and the pool is poised to expand next year, given many interested schools will then have the minimum data necessary to participate. For the first year of awards, approximately 70 percent of the students in the participating schools are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Charter schools in high-need areas tend to have more new teachers than their district counterparts and high rate of teacher and principal turnover. Therefore, it is the goal of EPIC to support both retention and recruitment of a high quality teachers in the charter schools in the grant.

Background

Like other award models, the EPIC model of incentive pay recognizes the paramount importance of student achievement in evaluating educators. Additionally, it is

predicated on the belief that those who are seeing gains in achievement should make their practice public and allow colleagues to learn from them. Given the lack of time and lack of research-based systems in place to capture and share their successes, many charter schools work in isolation. By providing incentives and through a highly structured, thoughtful process of documentation, New Leaders will be able to take the lessons learned by educators in schools across the country and share them with the broader education community. Ultimately, the cases produced though EPIC will serve as a powerful professional development platform for schools interested in strengthening their practice and improving their performance.

Incentives

Through Mathematica's model, highest gain schools will be identified as "Gold-Gain" schools, and the high

LOCATION(S)	7 charter schools in nine states and Washington, DC, including the Bay Area in California; Los Angeles; Denver; Milwaukee; Chicago; Houston; San Antonio; Baltimore; New Jersey; New York City; and Boston
AWARD DATE	November 2006
DURATION	5 years
PARTNERS	New Leaders New Schools (NLNS); national charter schools and charter school networks, including Knowledge Is Power Program network, Achievement First, Uncommon Schools, Aspire Public Schools, and YES College Prep Schools; Mathematica Policy Research (MPR); NewSchools Venture Fund

gain schools as “Silver-Gain” schools. All instructional staff in Gold-Gain schools will receive \$1,500 while Silver-Gain school instructional staff will receive \$750. Principals in Gold-Gain schools will receive awards of \$20,000, and in Silver-Gain award schools \$15,000. Individual teachers will be eligible for Spotlight awards in Gold-Gain schools. These awards will be in the amount of \$10,000 and will be made starting in the second year of awards. Principals and Spotlight teachers will be identified based on school- and classroom-level achievements gains. Only those who are open to sharing strategies and willing to work with New Leaders to document them will be eligible to receive an award.

Evaluation

As noted above, teachers and principals will be evaluated on student achievement and sharing effective practices via site visits, observations, and quarterly evaluations. New Leaders has partnered with MPR to develop and conduct an extensive evaluation of the EPIC program. This evaluation will address research questions analyzing the following impacts as they relate to principals, teachers, and the overall school environment: the impact of incentives on recruitment, retention, and student achievement gains; the impact of effective practices and the online knowledge community on recruitments, retention, and student achievement gains; the impact of the online knowledge community on teaching, learning and the leadership of teachers and staff leaders; and how student proficiency and graduation rates are impacted by 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 will include interviews with leaders and staff, as well as classroom observations of spotlight practitioners.

Resources

Grant funding was awarded at a level of 62 percent to be used for performance/practice incentives. In addition

to the Teacher Incentive Fund grant, New Leaders and the Charter School Consortium will each match over \$1.9 million. New Leaders has secured \$10.5 million in private support for the EPIC program nationally.

Data Systems

New Leaders has found the collection of complete data sets for over 75 independent charter schools in 17 states and D.C. to be a large challenge. There is no standard format, data system or central repository. Therefore, MPR designed a data collection template to increase the uniformity of charter school data submissions. The limitations of charter schools’ data warehousing systems or the lack of them altogether has increased the time New Leaders has given to schools to submit the data. Originally, New Leaders believed that most of the schools in the grant would be part of CMOs which have a greater ability to collect, track, and store data; however, as New Leaders recruited independent charters, MPR was faced with data that was both incomplete and in need of cleaning. For the second year of data collection, New Leaders and the Charter Schools Consortium will explore the best way to increase the capacity of charters to build effective knowledge management systems.

Year 1 Program Activities and/or Outcomes

Throughout the first grant year, activities focused on the process of collecting student achievement data from the schools. Working closely with MPR, New Leaders created a statistical model to identify schools with the highest one-year gains. For the second part of the EPIC grant, New Leaders worked with SchoolWorks to create a protocol for Effective Practice Team visits that will occur in award-winning schools as part of the process of identifying the specific effective practices driving academic gains. Finally, New Leaders contracted with the communications firm, Lipman Hearne, to improve communications to school staff, boards and parents, the media, and the general public.

Outlook for Year 2

In the second year of EPIC, over 75 schools across the country were recruited to the grant and submitted data and memoranda of understanding to meet grant participation requirements. Regularly scheduled conference calls provide information to schools on grant guidelines, awards, requirements and expectations. In January of this second grant year, New Leaders will be announcing the charter schools with the highest gains in student achievement as Gold and Silver award winners. In February, these schools will receive a self-assessment

that will guide the work of the Effective Practice Teams as they work with school leaders to identify the practices that will be documented either through videos, written case studies or other methods and incorporated into the EPIC Web site in the summer 2008. All instructional staff will receive their rewards in March. Also in March, Principals will receive 75 percent of their award and the final 25 percent in June when the documentation of effective practice is complete. New Leaders plans to invite more charters to participate in year 2.