

Success AT THE Core

How Teams and Teachers Transform Instruction

A free field-tested professional development toolkit designed to help leadership teams and teachers elevate classroom instruction and improve student outcomes.

www.successatthecore.com



Greetings!

What tools have you used lately? In our families, carving knives for the Thanksgiving turkey, scotch tape for gift-wrapping, and extension cords for holiday lights have remained close at hand.

As educators, we also assemble tools in our kit to help refine our practice. We think that *Success at the Core* is an essential component of any instructional improvement toolkit.

This month's newsletter looks at some SaC tools and shares lessons learned about how to make effective use of them. We also point you to some helpful materials for sharing SaC with your colleagues. After all, it is the season of giving!



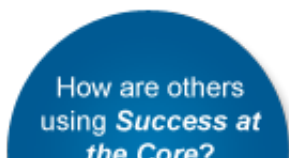
Sincerely,

The *Success the Core* Team

What's New

SaC team members Sonia Caus Gleason and Wendy Sauer along with Victoria Duff from the New Jersey Department of Education authored an article titled "A state for excellence: New Jersey boosts learning power with online video resources" for Learning Forward's *JSD* October 2011 edition.

Download the article (free for LF members/\$3.00 for others) [here](#).



Unpacking SaC's Toolkit

Because we have so many new members, we thought it might be helpful to unpack *Success at the Core's* essential tools.

Introductory Materials

The following materials provide a good overview of *Success at the Core*. Already an experienced user? Use these materials to introduce SaC to your colleagues.

- [Introductory Video](#): A short video on SaC's purpose and core components, featuring Harvard professor Richard Elmore
- [Web Tour](#): A five-minute, narrated website tour to aid in navigation
- [Success at the Core 101](#): An archived webinar to provide new users with an in-depth overview of the materials

Leadership Development Modules

Designed to help leadership teams work together to define quality instruction and advocate for it in their schools, these resources include:



See our Stories
of Use!

- Seven topical modules with accompanying facilitator guides, handouts, and multimedia presentations
- Twenty-one videos that showcase the work of real leadership teams engaged in activities to improve instruction

Teacher Development Strategies

Designed to help teachers strengthen classroom instruction, spark student interest, and improve student outcomes, these resources include:

- Best practice content, instruction, assessment, and support strategies with accompanying instructional plans, class handouts, and samples of student work
- Twenty-four videos that showcase teachers and students engaged with each strategy

Spread the Word

Success at the Core was a proud sponsor of Learning Forward's Annual Conference in Anaheim (December 3-7, 2011).

SaC users and team members partnered to deliver two sessions:

- "Build Capacity and Collaboration to Improve Instructional Quality"
- "Video as Transformational Coaching Tool"

Session participants and conference attendees agree: SaC tools are relevant and valuable to their work!

Help us spread the word. Encourage colleagues to register at:

<http://www.successatthecore.com>

Keep in Touch

Comments, questions, concerns? Contact us at:

info@successatthecore.com

Also, dialogue with other members on our *Success at the Core* Facebook page.



Stories of Use

This month's use story comes from Cathy Gassenheimer, executive vice president for the Alabama Best Practices Center.

Learning from You

SaC is a toolkit of useful resources for educators to use time and again, in various ways and for multiple purposes. However, we've learned from our research efforts that some approach it more as a program - to be used once and then set aside as new programs come along.

Our research partner, Inverness Research, highlighted this phenomenon in its Sustainability Study summary. Specifically, researchers remarked that, "Many users were conceptualizing SaC more as a program and less as a toolkit applicable to a wide range of improvement efforts ... the identity of SaC as a program, rather than as a flexible tool, inhibited continuing usage."

In this summary, Inverness also discussed the following as factors that supported continued use of SaC:

- Champions: As SaC members become continuing users ("champions"), they are able to coach colleagues on how the materials can be used in multiple contexts over time.
- Deep familiarity with the materials: Users can make strategic and in-depth use of the materials only when they take the time to familiarize themselves with SaC's rich and plentiful resources.
- The capacity to engineer use: Users need to design ways to align SaC with existing priorities and programs so that, like any tool, it can accomplish what it is intended to do. (Note: We've created an [Issues of Practice](#) document to help with this.)

We hope that sharing these lessons learned from research can help you and your colleagues maximize your use of SaC. Let us know how we can support you! Please visit our [Research](#) page for summaries of all SaC research efforts, including the Sustainability Study.

I first learned about *Success at the Core* from a Harvard newsletter. Richard Elmore's involvement in the project attracted me. Once I checked out the website, I was hooked!

The Alabama Best Practices Center has three educator networks. Currently, these networks are focused on using formative assessment to improve teaching and learning and student motivation. *Success at the Core* has many relevant resources for this work. Because of that, we have shared SaC's link widely with all our educator networks, and we have shown several of the videos during our network meetings.

SaC's formative assessment videos - including the five [Teacher Development](#) assessment videos and the two videos embedded in the Leadership Development [Common Formative Assessments](#) module - are reported to be the most used resource by the center's network members. Our educators have also reported using both the content and instruction strategies that appear under the Teacher Development tab.

One of our district partners, the Shelby County Schools (adjacent to Birmingham, AL), is using SaC as the primary professional development tool for all district middle schools. Lewis Brooks, the middle school director for Shelby County, reported that the quality and caliber of SaC materials is "outstanding."

The Alabama Best Practices Center is also using SaC resources with a pilot program focused on repurposing school-based reading coaches to instructional coaches. The three middle school coaches in the program have found the materials to be particularly valuable, but our elementary coaches have also benefitted from the free tools offered in *Success at the Core*. We have the link to SaC on our "valuable learning tools" tab and several instructional partners have shown a variety of the videos to their colleagues, both during the coaching cycle and during professional development.

In this time of limited resources, *Success at the Core* is an invaluable resource to educators. It should be an essential part of any middle school teacher or administrator's "toolkit."

Cathy W. Gassenheimer
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