



Success at the Core:
How Teams and Teachers Transform
Instruction
Summary of Findings from Early Users

Prepared by Inverness Research and WestEd/Learning Innovations
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Success at the Core was publicly launched in July 2010, and the rapid growth in the numbers of *SaC* members and the anecdotal reports of use by educators prompted the *SaC* team to commission research on the experiences of *SaC* users in the early months of dissemination. During October and November 2010, 243 *SaC* members (17% of total members) responded to a survey administered by Inverness Research; of these respondents, 32 participated in an in-depth interview of their use of *SaC*, conducted by Learning Innovations at WestEd. The findings from this use research confirm the interest already expressed in *SaC*, corroborate many positive findings reported earlier from the pilot evaluation, and provide important data on the extent of use of *Success at the Core*. This summary of results from the fall 2010 *SaC* use research begins with a 1.5 page synthesis of findings, followed by a brief discussion of the research design and more detail on major findings, illustrated with survey and interview data.

Synthesis

USABILITY

SaC materials are being used extensively, by a variety of educators. All Leadership Development modules and a majority of Teacher Development materials were reported as being used, indicating that both sets of materials have value to users. Individual users reported using a number of different *SaC* materials; the only “one time use” reported were among the minority of respondents who were

just starting to use *SaC*. These materials were being used by teams of various kinds (grade-level, department, and schoolwide leadership teams, and by professional learning communities), in one-on-one coaching/mentoring work, as well as by individual teachers. *SaC* materials were both used as designed as well as tailored with users selecting components and putting together materials to meet their own needs; the versatility of the materials was noted as a strength. Moreover, *SaC* materials could and were being used without prior training, thus they functioned as “on demand” materials.

ENTHUSIASM

SaC materials are being used with great enthusiasm, with many users noting that they have actively shared them with colleagues and encouraged others to use them too. The extremely positive response to the materials was expressed by various users, from teachers to principals to district and regional personnel. The passion with which users talked about *SaC* was notable.

RELEVANCE

SaC materials are highly relevant for users. They address issues of importance to educators working to improve instruction, and they are directly applicable in educators’ own settings and the improvement agendas to which they were committed. The relevance of the topics featured, the practices shown, and the research represented – the multiple layers of professional knowledge found in *SaC* – was affirmed by users, many of whom commented that, with these materials, they were able to do work that they valued around improving instruction.

APPEAL

SaC has great appeal to users, many of whom noted the high quality of the materials and the fact that they are free – two things that don’t typically exist in the same materials. Users rated *SaC* as higher quality than similar professional development materials. They reported being extremely satisfied with the content, design, and nature of the materials, and their requests for enhancing *SaC* was to produce more materials in the same vein.

QUALITY VIDEOS

SaC videos were the single component that was most widely used (by over 80% of respondents) and most valued by users. The high production quality of the videos was noted, as was the degree to which videos engaged users and helped to make a vision of leadership team work and effective instruction concrete and visible. *SaC* videos modeled the real work of principals, teachers, and students in real settings, giving users access to strategies and practices that could be immediately implemented. Half the users reported using, and valuing, the facilitator guide, multimedia presentation, handouts, teacher commentary and/or classroom instructional materials that surround the videos.

POSITIVE BENEFITS

SaC offers users multiple benefits, at multiple levels. A majority of users reported already experiencing a number of individual benefits from their use of *SaC* materials, as well as identifying benefits for their team or colleagues. In addition, users reported expecting more benefits in the future, as they continue to use *SaC* materials. The most frequently reported benefits are increases in knowledge about effective instruction, in leadership skills, in confidence of self as a leader, and in more effective implementation of the school's agenda for improvement. These benefits are valued by educators working to improve instruction, and are critical to successful school improvement efforts. Over one quarter of users reported that they are already experiencing benefits connected directly to instruction, in changes in their own or others' classroom practice and in their students' engagement, and close to half of users expect benefits in these areas in the future.

***SaC* Use Research Design**

In order to answer questions about the extent, nature, and benefits of use of *Success at the Core* among registered members in Washington State and beyond, a two-part research design was implemented by Inverness Research and Learning Innovations at WestEd from October—December 2010. Inverness conducted a survey of *SaC*'s members and WestEd followed with 30-minute interviews of a sample of survey respondents. The survey garnered key data from a large group of people, while the interviews probed the particulars of experience, perspective, and meaning of use of *SaC* materials. The two types of data (broad landscape, with some "post-holes") are necessary to yield good interpretation about use of *Success at the Core*. The findings showed use of *SaC* from its public launch in mid-July to mid-November 2010, a four-month period that included the first couple of months of the academic year. As part of a research portfolio, this use research tested and confirmed findings about use from the Pilot evaluation while the Sustainability and Impact studies currently underway provide important context for these use studies.

***SaC* Use Research Findings**

Findings about *Success at the Core* use are drawn from 243 survey respondents (17% response rate from the 1450 registered *SaC* members at the time the survey was administered in October 2010) and 32 interviewees (45% of 70 survey respondents who indicated willingness to be interviewed and had used *SaC* since July 2010). 44% of the survey respondents were from Washington State, and 56% from 13 other states. Focusing primarily on Washington State users in the interviews, 28 of the interviewees were from Washington State, with the others from Texas, New Jersey or Alabama.

This study design did not include a full non-respondent analysis, so the precise extent to which the respondent pool represents the experience and perspective of the full population of *SaC* members is not known. At the same time, the distribution of the survey respondents by organizational role (e.g., school-based educators, district-based educators, SEA, non-profit) is similar to the distribution of *SaC* members, as of October 2010. Typically, respondent pools are skewed somewhat more

favorably toward the project in question, so we caution against over-generalizing from the survey or interview results.

OVERALL LEVEL OF USE

Overall, 57% of survey respondents reported using *SaC* materials since July 2010, and 43% reported not using materials. Of the 107 Washington respondents, 64% reported using *SaC* materials, and 36% reported not using them. Given that the survey was conducted only two months into the school year, 57% represents a high level of use and indicates the high motivation of *SaC* registrants and, more generally, to their desire for this kind of resource and its overall fit with the improvement agendas as they start off their academic years.

Of all survey respondents reporting use of *SaC* materials, 53% reported using Leadership Development materials, and 58% reported using Teacher Development materials. The table below shows that overall levels of usage are quite comparable, with Washington users somewhat more likely to have already used LD materials. These results suggest that both sets of materials—LD and TD—have comparably high relevance and utility.

Table 1. Usage of both types of materials

	All users	WA only
LD modules	53%	60%
TD strategies	58%	54%

Among the 32 interviewees, 10 reported “just getting started” -- viewing, assessing, and discussing the videos and how they might use them with colleagues. Several emphasized how excited they were about the resource and were doing everything they could to expose others to *SaC*. Another 8 (who had been part of the pilot in 2009-2010) have continued their use of the materials and extended the reach with other colleagues. The remaining 14 reported using the materials in a number of ways: engaging with them individually or with one other colleague; on a school-based content, curriculum or vertical team; with a PLC or a school improvement team; at whole faculty meetings; or to provide professional development across districts.

I used Leadership Development modules last year with principals and this year I am using Teacher Development strategies with others in a coaching role and with struggling teachers...I like the depth; it's not a 'drive by' and I don't have to be an expert. The whole script is there and additional resources. The quality is the same across all layers ... Awesome. (High School Academic Coach)

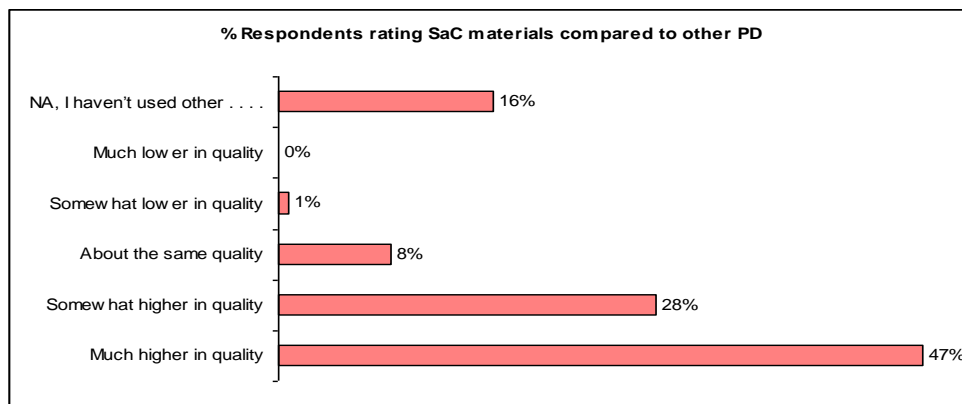
QUALITY OF *SAC* MATERIALS

Interviewees consistently described *SaC* materials as relevant, authentic and adaptable, and appreciated that the materials focused on content, teachers, and student demographics that are

similar to their own classrooms and schools. The practices are based in current research of best practices and addressed issues the users are facing. A Regional Science Specialist commented, “The materials that are available focus on what we’re focusing on. They are right in line with the changing-teaching-practices research base. It is nice to have a resource that is so highly aligned to best practice.” Interviewees also described the materials to be easily integrated into practice: the topics are accessible and well organized on the easy-to-navigate website, and the materials may be readily incorporated into other activities within the school or district. The majority of the interviewees and a number of survey respondents expressed appreciation and surprise that such quality materials were free and easily accessible online at all times.

Three of four (75%) survey respondents rated *SaC* materials as being somewhat higher, or much higher in quality, compared to other internet- or video-based professional development or leadership development materials. 16% of respondents had no basis of comparison, so the proportion of those who can make a comparison, and prefer *SaC*, approaches 90%.

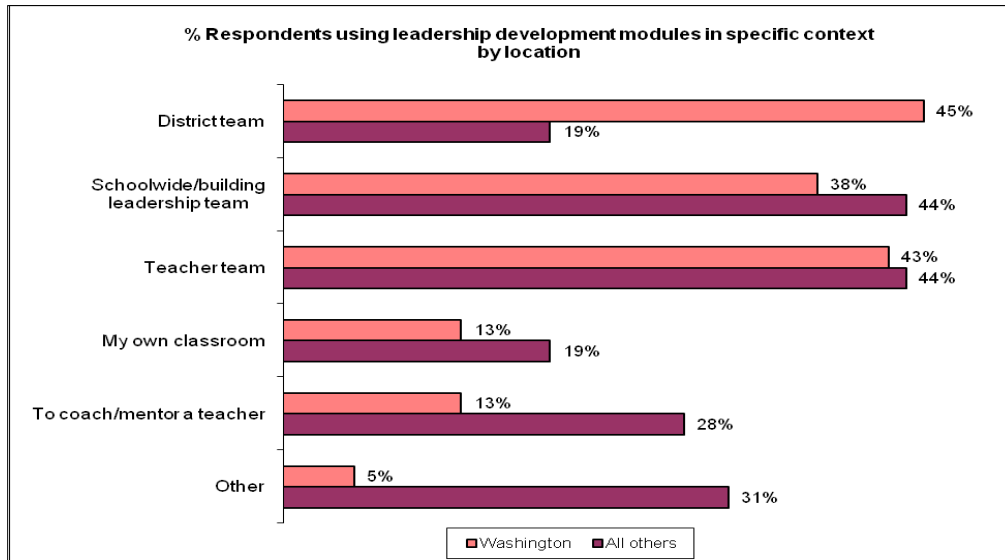
Figure 1. Comparison of *SaC* to other video-based or on-line Professional development resources



USE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MODULES

As found in the survey study and corroborated in the interview study, use of Leadership Development (LD) modules is comprehensive – all modules, all parts of modules, by all user types. LD modules are being used in a variety of contexts, beyond the middle school leadership teams for which materials were initially conceptualized. These results indicate that a wide range of educators finds the topics to be relevant and the types of materials valuable, and that the construction of the modules optimizes usage. Even though LD modules are available to be used “as is,” it is also true that there is not just one way to use a module. Rather, individual users selecting from among the components, thus allowing users in widely varying situations to tailor the tool to their individual needs, circumstances, and capacities, can design usage. The modules allow people in many roles and contexts to use them in many ways, from district-based, to school-wide, to groups of teachers within a school. This suggests that they achieve a great degree of flexibility, which is a characteristic that is necessary for widespread appeal and usage.

Figure 2. Multiple team and individual contexts for LD usage



Consistently, videos were cited as the module component that was used most often (80% of survey respondents) and were rated as excellent quality (4.72 on a scale of 1 to 5 by interviewees). The videos model the real work of principals, teachers and students in real settings so that the suggested strategies and practices can be immediately implemented, and provide reflections by the teachers and principals that make their thinking more obvious. The accompanying materials were also widely used; over half the users in the survey reported using the facilitation guide and the multi-media presentation and interviewees commented on the quality and user-friendly format of these materials. As an instructional coach noted, “Anyone could facilitate this; the Facilitator Guide guides you right through it.”

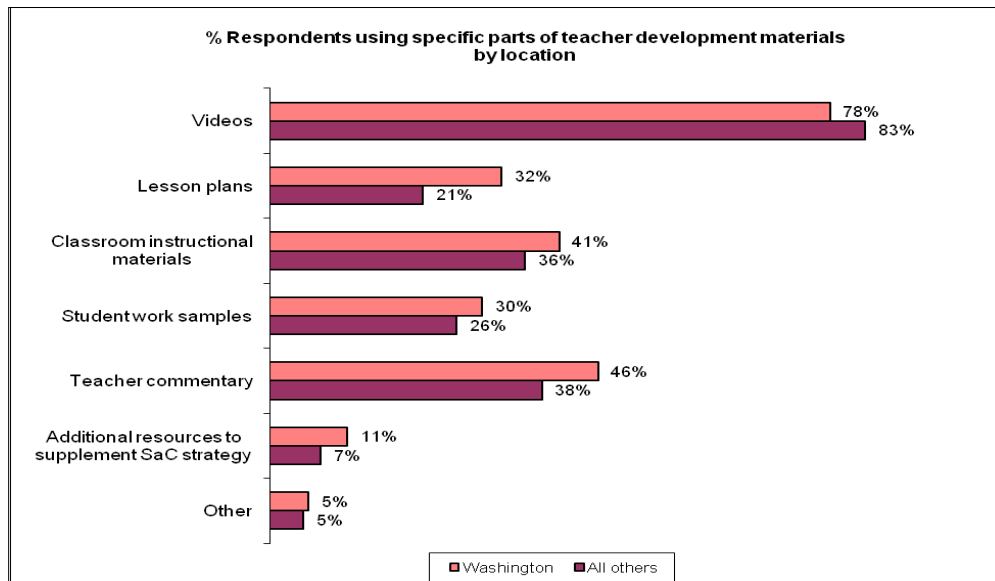
USE OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

As found in the survey study and corroborated in the interview study, usage of Teacher Development (TD) strategies is very strong: all parts of the TD materials were used by a wide range of users and in various contexts. The component-based construction of the TD strategies encourages multiple ways of using the materials. Users can mix and match, essentially designing their own usage based upon their context-specific needs and purposes. Taken together, these results affirm that the TD strategies are both relevant and useful.

As shown below, by far the most popular component was the videos, which were used by almost twice as many users as any other TD component. This high rate of usage indicates not only the high quality of the videos and their appeal, but also the probable efficacy of using video to promote *SaC* and communicate to on-line users. Also notably, about 40% used the teacher commentaries and

classroom instructional materials, which indicates strong interest both in the professional thinking and judgment behind the strategies depicted in the video and in implementation of them.

Figure 3: Usage of components of TD strategies



Interviewees noted that part of the appeal of the materials was that they didn't need to create materials in order to implement the strategies.

The way the materials are laid out is brilliant. The videos with the [student work] samples and resources, and especially the teacher voice reflection – that is really critical. The teachers can see exactly what the strategy is in the classroom—what the students and teachers do. (Junior High School Principal)

BENEFITS FROM USING *SaC* MATERIALS

Survey respondents reported benefits they were already experiencing from their use of *SaC* materials, as well as expected future benefits. As shown in the table below, of the many possible benefits—13 identified on the survey as well as others named by respondents—at least a quarter of Washington respondents and sometimes more than half are already experiencing *multiple* individual and collective benefits, as well as expecting more benefits in the future. In Washington, the most frequently reported benefits are increases in knowledge about effective instruction, in leadership skills and confidence, and in more effective implementation of the school's agenda for improvement—all of which are necessary individual and collective contributors to instructional improvement school-wide. About one in five users in Washington say they are already experiencing benefits connected directly to instruction—changes in their own or others' classroom practice and in their own student engagement. Respondents in other states are experiencing benefits too, although usually in slightly smaller proportions. This indicates that usage is probably somewhat farther along in Washington, which is not surprising since both the development and pilot occurred there.

Table 2. Current and expected benefits of *SaC* usage in Washington and other states

	Washington		All others	
	Benefits I have begun to experience	Areas in which I expect benefits	Benefits I have begun to experience	Areas in which I expect benefits
N	67	67	64	64
Gains in my own facilitation skills	52%	38%	50%	38%
Gains in my confidence as a leader	50%	31%	44%	33%
Greater knowledge of effective teaching practices	59%	34%	50%	36%
Gains in the facilitation skills of others	31%	47%	34%	38%
Greater commitment by our team to improvement in instruction and achievement	31%	52%	27%	45%
Greater capacity of our team to improve instruction and achievement	27%	53%	27%	42%
More effective implementation of our improvement agenda by our team and teachers	56%	53%	34%	41%
Dialogue among teachers that is more focused on teaching and learning	38%	36%	28%	50%
More overall cohesiveness within our professional community	38%	44%	30%	45%
Changes in my own classroom practice	22%	27%	17%	25%
Greater engagement in learning by my students	19%	41%	14%	33%
Changes in other teachers' classroom practice	23%	56%	25%	44%
Greater engagement in learning by other teachers' students	3%	48%	3%	44%
Other	5%	8%	6%	6%
None	0%	3%	0%	6%

Many interviewees mentioned observing at least one of the following outcomes: growth in leadership capacity, improved professional culture, or stronger instructional focus. For example: [The materials] gave everyone a vision of a PLC [Professional Learning Community], especially those who didn't yet have a vision of it... Teachers are finally seeing the difference between a team meeting and a PLC. All the work we've done establishing norms, teachers are seeing why they're useful. (Elementary School Instructional Coach)

For our PLC, we have all had our own vision of how things should be in our school. The most important thing [about] the materials is helping us define ‘This is the way we will work together’. (Eighth Grade Team Leader)

I have moved away from being a teacher at the front of the room to being a facilitator. I’m actually listening to kids and conversing with them. (Elementary School Teacher)

Moreover, users highlighted the power of the materials to initiate meaningful conversations among teachers.

I am not getting up there and being a preacher; I can have real conversations about things going on in real classrooms. (Middle School Principal)

[The greatest benefit is the] modeling of effective instructional strategies. [The materials are] encouraging staff members in a safe environment to have meaningful discussions on instruction. Teachers are already putting themselves out there with each other to discuss. (Junior High School Assistant Principal)

The most valuable thing to me would be just the instigation of conversation using what we see on the video as a model of how to talk to each other... I now find myself looking forward to having this discussion with my peers. (Elementary School Teacher)

CHALLENGES IN USING *SaC*

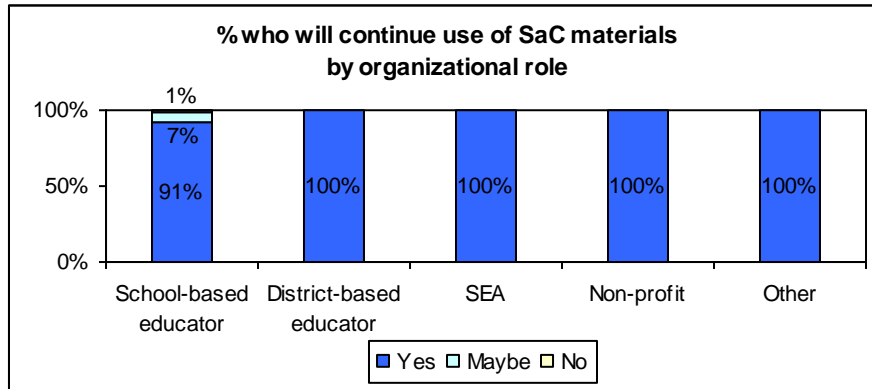
Nine of the 32 interviewees (28%) reported facing no difficulties or challenges in using the materials. 72% said they encountered some minor challenges in getting ready to use the materials or in using them, with finding time to use the materials cited most often. This included time to review and select materials and time to engage with the materials, particularly with other teachers. About one quarter of interviewees cited an issue regarding the accessibility of materials. While commenting on the easy and free access in a web environment, some pointed out that internet access was not available in every space that they might want to use *SaC* materials and a few requested preprinted copies of all materials, given their greater comfort in accessing materials in printed form rather than viewing materials on the web.

CONTINUED USE OF *SaC*

Overall, 95% of users from the survey say they plan to continue their use of *SaC*, and another 5% say they may continue use. The figure below shows that users of all types share these plans. These results show very high potential for continued engagement with the materials beyond users’ initial forays into them soon after registering. Whether that potential will be realized will depend on the context conditions in which new users are working. Results from the Sustainability Study show that

intentions to use *SaC* further can be thwarted when new priorities and reform activities compete for time and attention.¹

Figure 4. Plans for continued use of *SaC* by educators in a range of organizations



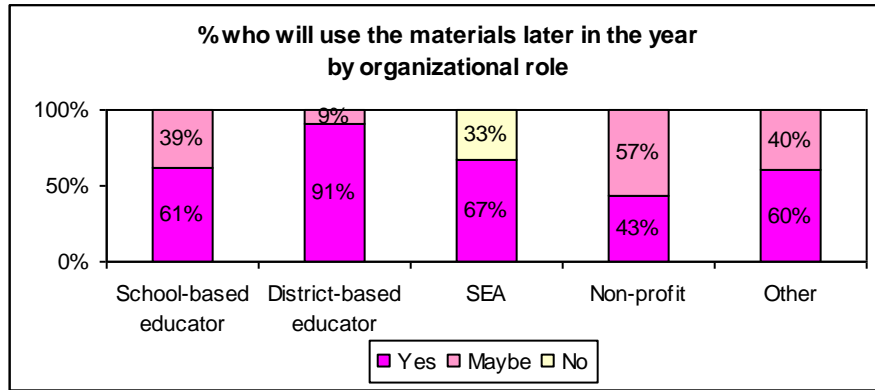
Almost all interviewees (31 out of 32) have plans to continue using all or some of the *SaC* materials. While these interviewees are currently in different places with their use of *SaC*, from “initial use” of just one or two specific materials to orchestrating school-wide use among all faculty, they are committed to continuing. Even though this is a relatively new innovation, some users reflected concerns typical of more veteran or experienced users, e.g., thinking about how to collaborate more with colleagues to use the materials if they are not already doing so and seeking evidence of student impact.

NON-USERS OF *SaC*

About four in ten survey respondents (43%) reported that they had not used *SaC* materials since July 2010. Nearly two-thirds of non-users (64% overall) say they plan to use *SaC* materials later in the year, and another 35% say they may use the materials. This is a quite notable finding, suggesting that the October survey date caught them too early in the academic year. As shown below, non-users of all types have intentions for use later in the year.

¹ See the results of the sustainability study at <http://www.successatthecore.com/artifacts/ResultsofSustainabilityStudy.pdf>.

Figure 5: Intentions of non-users to use later in the year



Note: The 33% "no" for SEA represents 1 of 3 SEA respondents.

The primary reason given by non-users was that they had not yet familiarized themselves with the materials (70%), or that they had not yet had adequate time to learn about (33%) or use (23%) the materials. Of the 29% who responded "other" and explained, most reasons still have to do with lack of time or familiarity (note that non-users often gave more than one reason for their non-use). Again, given findings from the Sustainability Study, it will be important to follow up with non-users to see if, in fact, they find the time amid multiple priorities and demands to translate their intentions into action. Very promisingly, respondents reported that their non-use was not due to the quality of the materials, appeal of topics, or usability of the website.