

SWIFT Center

SWIFT Intensive Technical Assistance Process

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Abstract

The national center on Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT Center) is now approaching the halfway point in its first full year of providing intensive technical assistance (TA) to 68 schools in 20 local educational agencies across five states. The purpose of this brief is to provide a thumbnail sketch of how this TA process works. Readers interested in more detail should request: *SWIFT National Technical Assistance Mapping, White Paper* (2014), Amy McCart, Wayne Sailor, Michael McSheehan and Melinda Mitchiner.

Purposes of SWIFT Technical Assistance: School Transformation

If every child received needed academic and behavioral supports, they could succeed in their local schools. However, today for most U.S. schools, delivering the intensity and range of supports that meet the needs of every child in their community would require much more than simply adding new programs or making incremental adjustments to current initiatives. Fully inclusive, integrated education requires major transformation of the school and its stakeholder relationships. Sixty-eight schools and their local educational agencies (LEAs) across the nation have entered into this transformation process through partnerships with the SWIFT Center, a federally funded technical assistance (TA) provider.

SWIFT TA simultaneously produces three necessary outcomes: integration, school improvement, and prevention. *Integration* results when administrators, educators, support staff, families, and community members enact their shared vision for excellent and equitable education for all students. *School improvement* results when schools achieve measureable increases in academic achievement and social-emotional well-being for all students and all subgroups of students. *Prevention* results when LEAs and state education agencies (SEAs) have developed the internal capacities to install and implement integrated and preventive practices, and they do so with no loss of momentum within and across schools following cessation of SWIFT TA activities (i.e., sustainability in a school, scale up within an LEA and across a state).

Conceptual Foundations

The SWIFT Center's unique TA processes for inclusive schoolwide transformation rest on four conceptual foundations: implementation science, intensive and differentiated support, strengths-based practices, and data-based decision making. Each of these foundations is briefly described along with their current application to the SWIFT TA process.

Implementation Science. The organizing system for providing SWIFT TA is from the Active Implementation Frameworks, which were developed by Dean Fixsen, Karen Blase and associates of the State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center. Their work shows that implementation of new practices occurs over time and in stages (exploration, installation, partial implementation, full implementation) that overlap and are revisited as necessary. Also, purposefully connected implementation teams at each level of the education system (school, LEA, SEA) work in concert to coordinate, support, and lead implementation. SWIFT TA, likewise, utilizes stages and teams. However, SWIFT TA is unique from school-specific TA because we view the school/LEA combination as the primary unit of analysis—the pivotal relationship for TA intervention and SWIFT implementation—with additional TA provided to the SEA. Exploration stage TA facilitates team development (including functioning, operations, and communication), while ensuring shared understanding of the features of SWIFT and of the school’s vision for transformation among the many stakeholders. (See www.swiftschools.org for descriptions of the SWIFT features.)

To date, all 68 schools in partnership with their respective LEA implementation teams received TA to set the foundation for SWIFT transformation, demonstrating readiness (i.e., will and capacity) for the process. The foundation setting, that is, exploration, continues in each school/LEA until data from a number of sources indicate that the school is ready to move ahead with other stage-based work (installation, partial implementation, full implementation). Preliminary data indicate that many schools are presently (March, 2014) nearing completion of the exploration stage and have firmly established their school/LEA partnerships. Some schools are already leveraging their LEA partnership to assist them as they install and partially implement new practices.

Engaging schools/LEAs in the exploration stage *prior* to delivering additional TA related to specific features of the SWIFT framework is important to achieving both initial school improvements and establishing the prevention capacities. The research accumulated and reviewed by SISEP clearly shows, and our experiences over the past decade confirm, that *readiness* to engage in evidence-based interventions, let alone systems change, is critical to overall implementation success and sustainability.

Intensive and differentiated support. Many other educational reform TA models use a three-tier structure (e.g., universal, targeted/specialized, and intensive/sustained) that escalate in terms of the provider-recipient relationship as well as in the nature of the content. In these models, *intensive* TA is (a) highly individualized and addresses the unique needs of the recipient; (b) involves a stable, on-going negotiated relationship between the TA provider and recipient; and (c) includes a purposeful, planned series of activities designed to reach an outcome that is valued by the host organization. For the 68 schools and 20 LEAs, *all* SWIFT TA is always intensive because it always involves these three characteristics.

Intensive SWIFT TA is a catalyst for a strengths-based, differentiated transformation process that is highly individualized to the unique needs of the school/LEA. SWIFT TA providers examine school/LEA policies, programs, practices and operations to identify strengths and areas of opportunity. Although all the schools/LEAs receive SWIFT’s core and foundational TA that

is robust and evidence-based, each receives the particular TA supports appropriate for their context. The process is analogous to the way schools provide student supports, wherein one student might require sustained individualized behavioral supports, but only universal/core reading instruction; and another student might participate in only the schoolwide behavioral supports, but receives a specialized reading intervention. For each school/LEA, the SWIFT TA staff, content, methods, frequency, duration and so on vary across the ten SWIFT features and over time. Presently (March, 2014), SWIFT TA staff and LEA leaders are together meeting with school leaders to review data and determine strengths upon which to build and areas where support is needed. To date, all the schools/LEAs indicate need for most intensive TA support related to the integrated education framework feature.

Regarding the second feature of intensive TA—stable and on-going negotiated relationships—SWIFT TA uniquely specifies the intensive point of intervention as the LEA. However, SWIFT TA also engages all school/LEA personnel and other stakeholders like families and community members as full partners in the transformation process. This broad engagement situates the SWIFT transformation as a *general education initiative* that fully integrates special education, ELL, Title I, gifted and other support systems. With assistance from SWIFT staff, the LEA personnel play many of the on-site roles that in other TA models would be filled by an external provider. The SWIFT Center opted for this approach as a capacity building mechanism; and because the SISEP research reports as a “lesson learned” that the LEA is the place to enter into sustainable school change.

Finally, SWIFT TA’s purposeful and planned series of activities engaged all 68 schools early. Those schools that demonstrated the most need for TA in terms of poor academic performance did not necessarily get served first while other higher performing schools waited to receive attention. The intensive TA activities began and proceeded according to each school/LEA measured readiness to respond and sustain interventions. The context-specific information SWIFT gains through various data sources and sustained relationships leads to tailored TA activities for each school/LEA.

Strengths-based practices. Some would argue that a TA center should immediately send experts in to individual schools and deliver interventions designed to provide new staff competencies and to quickly impact student achievement. These types of school-based interventions have been shown through research to have a short term impact, to be associated with deteriorating impact over time, and to have little or no impact on other schools within the same LEA and state. Taking the time during the exploration stage to assess capacity and organizational strengths and to put sustainable structures and practices into place is expected to pay off in terms of long term impact and spread of effect (e.g., moving results of rigorous research to practice on a larger scale).

The SWIFT Center methods represent an advanced form of intensive TA by delivering all interventions in concert with the current state-of-the-art strengths-based practice. This approach begins with the assumptions that schools, LEAs and communities have strengths and resources from which to draw, and that they can be resilient, resourceful and capable of learning new strategies to overcome adversity and move in the direction of their shared vision. Although

SWIFT’s mission is to facilitate transformation to integrated education, the TA processes have embedded the freedom and responsibility for schools/LEAs to make meaningful choices about their specific goals and paths to attaining them. SWIFT TA extends the list of choices, clarifies them, and supports the LEA and SEA to eventually take on this facilitative role.

As previously indicated, SWIFT TA views the school/LEA as the pivotal relationship in the TA process. In doing so, SWIFT ensures that all expenditure of effort not only impacts student level outcomes within schools but also builds capacity of the LEA to scale up transformational processes in other schools over time. Similarly, it builds the capacity of the SEA to scale up SWIFT practices over time in other LEAs and their schools. Further, by pairing SWIFT Center staff with several LEAs, the strengths they bring to the TA process can be leveraged for the benefit of many more schools/LEAs and states.

Data-based decision making. SWIFT TA uses data to make decisions about the content and intensity of the assistance they provide schools/LEAs and SEAs. The SWIFT Center utilizes two instruments developed by the SISEP Center (District Capacity Assessment, State Capacity Assessment) together with the SWIFT fidelity estimation tool, SWIFT-FIT, and other sources of information to create school, LEA and SEA data “snapshots.” The data snapshots, which summarize the current status of implementation, are juxtaposed with school/LEA vision for the full-implementation of SWIFT features. Analysis of the data and vision through this process helps the school/LEA answer such questions as: What is right, useful, successful, uniquely good or “alive” that we can build upon? What existing assets and resources can we build upon? What “bright spots” can we call attention to and build upon? How can we amplify what already works? This TA design enables TA staff to make strengths-based and data-based decisions that point the TA activities in the right direction, toward the vision owned by the school/LEA and aligned with SWIFT’s research-based features. Figures 1 through 3 present the data “snapshots” that summarize the decision-making information for each school, LEA and SEA.

In order to formulate data-based answers to the important questions, the SWIFT Center trains assessors to a satisfactory psychometric criterion on two instruments: SWIFT-FIT and a school climate instrument. A third tool, SWIFT-FIA (Fidelity Integrity Assessment), will soon be downloadable for use by schools and LEAs as a self-assessment, progress monitoring device.

The SWIFT-FIT is a fidelity estimation tool that supports the TA planning process. The SWIFT-FIT is a rigorous research instrument that, when administered periodically throughout SWIFT implementation, indicates the impact of the school’s progress on student academic achievement. The data collected with this tool are shared with participating SEAs, LEAs and schools, but otherwise kept “in house”—that is, used for work-in-progress decision making, rather than as program evaluation data. These data are collected twice a year during a school’s TA partnership with SWIFT (beginning Fall 2014). The baseline SWIFT-FIT assessment for the 68 schools occurred Fall 2013.

SWIFT Data Snapshot: School

School			Date
What is right, useful, successful, uniquely good or 'alive' that we can build upon?			
Step 1 Strengths	Step 2 Opportunities	Step 3 Goals	
Identify one strength in each area below.	Identify one opportunity in each area below.	Identify the resources that can have the biggest impact with the smallest effort. Set 2 goals, 1 related to the identified strength and 1 related to the identified need in each area below.	
Stage See Exploration (or Installation) Self-Assessment		Strength:	Opportunity:
FIT Score Overall score, feature score OVERALL: %		S)	O)
FIA Score From School's perspective, refer to FIA OVERALL: %		S)	O)
Drivers See Best Practices Assessment – Competency, Organization, Leadership		S)	O)
Academic – Reading	% of all students/all subgroups scoring proficient or higher in reading	%	Step 4 School Priority Goals Use items identified in Step 3, FIA data, and vision identified in #14 of Exploration tool. (1)
Academic - Math	% of all students/all subgroups scoring proficient or higher in math	%	
Behavior	% of all students/all subgroups receiving ODRs in a year (also consider OSS data)	%	
LRE	% of students with disabilities spending 80% or more time in general education	%	

Figure 1. Data snapshot for summarizing school strengths, opportunities and goals

To fully represent the school/LEA voice and perceptions in the data, SWIFT uses a self-assessment tool, the SWIFT-FIA (Fidelity Integrity Assessment). The SWIFT-FIA items parallel the SWIFT-FIT items, however, schools/LEAs that are in the installation stage complete this assessment every 6 to 8 weeks. These progress monitoring data are also kept “in house” and are used to make adjustments to school/LEA plans as they move toward full implementation.

As an additional source of data, the SWIFT Center is presently negotiating with the developer of a school climate measure that will, as currently planned, be utilized in Spring 2014. This tool is expected to reflect changes in school culture, toward a positive learning environment, associated with progress installing SWIFT features. As such, this research tool will assist TA decision-making processes as well.

SWIFT LEA Data Snapshot: LEA

	Common Priorities		Resources		Date
			What existing assets and resources can we build upon?		
	Step 5 Within LEA (1 to 4 schools) Identify common, across school recommendations	Step 6 In State / District Availability Identify the current in-state and district resources to address identified need.	Step 7 National Availability Identify current national resources to address identified need.		
Stage See Exploration (or Installation) Self- Assessments					
FIT Score Overall LEA score, feature scores Overall: %					
FIA Score From School's perspective, refer to FIAs Overall: %					
Drivers See Best Practices Assessment – Competency, Organization, Leadership					
District Capacity Assessment - not yet					
Academic – Reading	% of all students/all subgroups scoring proficient or higher in reading	%	Step 8 LEA Priority Goals Use items identified in Steps 3& 4, FIA data, and vision identified in #14 of Exploration tool. (1) LEA Reflections: Reflecting on the body of evidence, above, are there additional considerations for sustainability and scale-up of SWIFT schools?		
Academic – Math	% of all students/all subgroups scoring proficient or higher in math	%			
Behavior	% of all students/all subgroups receiving ODRs in a year (also consider OSS data)	%			
LRE	% of students with disabilities spending 80% or more time in general education	%			

Figure 2. Data snapshot for summarizing LEA common school priorities, and district, state and national resources.

SWIFT SEA Data Snapshot: SEA

	Common Priorities		Resources		Date
			What existing assets and resources can we build upon?		
	Step 9 Across LEAs / Within SEA (1 to 4 schools) Identify common, across school/LEA recommendations	Step 10 In State / District Availability Identify the current in-state and district resources to address identified need.	Step 11 National Availability Identify current national resources to address identified need.		
Stage See Exploration (or Installation) Self- Assessments					
FIT Score Overall LEA score, feature scores Overall: %					
FIA Score From School's perspective, refer to FIAs Overall: %					
Drivers See Best Practices Assessment – Competency, Organization, Leadership					
Step 12 SEA Priority Goals Use items identified in Step 5 & 8, and vision identified in #14 of Exploration tool. (1) SEA Reflections: Reflecting on the body of evidence, above, are there additional considerations for scale up and sustainability of SWIFT schools?					

Figure 3. Data snapshot for summarizing SEA common LEA priorities, and district, state and national resources.

SWIFT Technical Assistance Process—Fall 2013 to Winter 2014

SWIFT TA brings together implementation science frameworks, intensive and differentiated support, strengths-based practices, and data-based decisions into a comprehensive TA process. Table 1 presents the sequence of events to provide this TA to the SWIFT partner schools, LEAs and SEAs. The significant involvement of school, LEA and SEA teams throughout the process point to perhaps the most important feature of SWIFT TA: the transformations taking place in each school and community are the result of their vision, their strengths, and their commitment to delivering the intensity and range of supports that meet the needs of every child in their community. We are honored to join them as they transform themselves into excellent and equitable teaching and learning environments for *all* students.

Suggested Citation

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Table 1. *SWIFT TA Timeline Fall 2013 through Winter 2014*

<p>Fall 2013</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory of current resources in the SEA, LEA and school arenas • Meetings and data collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Get to Know You” – Schools teach SWIFT facilitators through local data ○ Cultural climate ○ Placement ○ Academic performance ○ Family and community partnerships ○ FIT baseline <p>December 2013</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data review meeting for SWIFT technical assistance personnel • Create data snapshots of schools and LEAs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consistencies across SEAs, consistencies across LEAs, and school specific ○ Technical assistance mapping process <p>January–March 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School-based Transformation Team meetings (1–2 per month) ○ SEA and LEA Monthly Implementation Team meetings ○ Statewide LEA and SEA Quarterly Leadership Team meetings • Complete Data snapshots with Coordinators and Teams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LEA/School Teams ○ Identify Technical Assistance priorities ○ Provide input on LEA/SEA Professional Learning calendars ○ Complete SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment (SWIFT-FIA) • Match Technical Assistance priorities to existing School, LEA, SEA and Regional resources, giving consideration to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pre-identified and pre-existing resource allocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify needs for additional resources, considering pre-identified technical assistance resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Exploration activities <p>April–June 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School-based Transformation Team meetings (1–2 per month) ○ SEA and LEA Monthly Implementation Team meetings ○ Statewide LEA and SEA Quarterly Leadership Team meetings • Administer District Capacity Assessment • Complete LEA & SEA Data Snapshots • Complete Adoption Vote – moving from exploration to installation • Participate in Resource Matching meetings for feature-specific priorities <p>July - August 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend In-State Professional Learning Institute <p>September–December 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based Transformation Team meetings (1–2 per month) • SEA and LEA Monthly Implementation Team meetings • In-state PLIs/Quarterly Leadership Team meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LEA networking ○ Coach and Principal training ○ Content delivery as determined by technical assistance map ○ Team training • Schedule and conduct SWIFT-FIT assessments • Participate in Resource Matching meetings for feature-specific priorities • Continue stage-based work (installation to initial implementation) • Review technical assistance map and school recommendations
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