

Louisiana's Request for Information

Organization: The Urban Learning and Leadership Center (ULLC)

ULLC, Louisiana Believes, and ESSA: Unlocking the Promise of Every Louisiana Child

ULLC has been active in school improvement nationally and throughout Louisiana continuously from 2003 until the present. While we have witnessed significant growth in school and student performance on the whole through the efforts of Louisiana Believes, unfortunately, we have also encountered schools which have flat-lined in their efforts to create positive changes in achievement. The good news is that even in those schools designated as “failing”, we have found leaders at the LEA and SEA levels who have the will and passion to make those schools successful. Lacking is a well-defined change strategy for a holistic, data-driven, and research-based plan of action which is collaboratively developed, implemented and monitored by the school and parish leadership. In short, there is will but no pathway to the promise. The mission of the Urban Learning and Leadership Center (ULLC) is to build the capacity of local schools to increase student achievement by (1) training district and school leaders in research-based best practices of distributed leadership and (2) providing on-site coaching to ensure the implementation of these practices in the school and district culture. The ULLC theory of action is informed by several bodies of research: (a) the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) (b) the COMPASS Louisiana Leader Performance evaluation principles (c) The ULLC S.A.M.E. (Social, Academic, and Moral Education) Framework for School Design, and (d) The ULLC Six Step School Improvement Planning Process.

At the heart of all interventions by ULLC is the S.A.M.E. Framework for School Design. This framework views schools as an integrated set of domains, Social, Academic, and Moral, which define the culture of the school community. The Social Domain defines how members of the school community behave; the Academic Domain defines how members of the school community engage in teaching and learning; and the Moral Domain defines what members of the school community believe. All of these domains can only thrive in a culture of Distributed Leadership. ULLC coaches invest significant energy in collecting data at each school site relative to its status on these critical domains prior to engaging the staff in dialogue around school improvement planning.

How does the ULLC S.A.M.E. intervention connect with Louisiana's ESSA challenge for persistently struggling schools? ULLC is uniquely qualified to partner with Louisiana's schools in need of comprehensive support. Since our inception in 2003, our company has worked almost exclusively with such schools in urban, suburban, and rural districts, including schools in 35 parishes in Louisiana. Our model, S.A.M.E., was born out of a vision that with the proper support structures, public schools can overcome the negative impacts of poverty, ethnicity, second language or learning disabilities and create learning communities where all students excel at a high level. Extensive evidence supporting the effectiveness of the SAME Framework comes from An Achievable Dream (K-8) Academy in Newport News, Virginia (achievabledream.org). This public school served as a “lab school” in which the SAME approach has been initiated, refined, demonstrated, and documented. Independent research conducted by the School of Education at the College of William and Mary — both longitudinal studies and a series of special projects addressing specific research questions — provided the hard data to validate the model. Today, the school has expanded to two campuses serving students K-12.

The most compelling evidence supporting the efficacy of the S.A.M.E Framework at An Achievable Dream Academy is the fact that *poor and minority students perform at levels that are typical of white and non-disadvantaged students*. Essentially, by using this holistic framework (SAME), the staff at An Achievable Dream closed the achievement gap. Students of An Achievable Dream are drawn from the population subgroups that, in schools across the nation, trail on measures of academic success: disadvantaged (today at least 96% are eligible for the federal lunch program) and minority (97% are African-American). Yet they perform at levels that *exceed those of black and disadvantaged students citywide and approach or, in some cases, even exceed those of white and non-disadvantaged students*.

Key evidence is found on eighth-grade Virginia State Standards of Learning tests. Performance at this point indicates whether students are ready for high-school work — particularly at the college-preparatory level.

The table below shows pass rates on Standards of Learning tests for Dreamers compared to black, disadvantaged and white students citywide. The data are typical of a long-established pattern, confirmed in test scores and retention and graduation rates.

Table 1. Percent Passing 8th-Grade Virginia Standards of Learning Tests

An Achievable Dream and Citywide Black, Disadvantaged and White Students, 2009

Subject	An Achievable Dream	Black students city-wide	Disadvantaged students city-wide	White students city-wide
Reading	85%	79%	78%	90%
Writing	96%	84%	82%	92%
Math	81%	73%	72%	81%
Science	80%	83%	82%	95%

In reading, writing, and math, Dreamers — impoverished and black — perform at levels that exceed those of African-American students citywide by wide margins and, in writing and math, match or exceed those for white students. Confirmation of the program’s effectiveness is also found in evidence that the advantage of participation grows the longer students are involved. By eighth grade, differences are dramatic. The longer students are exposed to education based on the SAME Framework, the more its effects are apparent.

Armed with a powerful intervention model for struggling schools, ULLC made a strategic business decision that positions us for success as an external partner. We have chosen to remain small in infrastructure to maintain high quality of implementation and to ensure that we can customize our delivery of services to the unique needs of the client schools without sacrificing quality. The educational leaders on our letterhead are the thought leaders on our LEA and school intervention teams. While this process does not yield large data sets for our company, the clients we serve see the strong gains in student achievement and often continue the relationship with ULLC to support ongoing school growth for years. Since we customize our services to the client needs, our outcome metrics are often measuring leading indicators such as leadership development, safety data, student engagement, or curriculum alignment, and antecedents to increases in student achievement. The voices of our clients demonstrate this strength. In South Carolina, ULLC worked with Rock Hill Schools for two years to build an understanding and expectation for school improvement. According to Associate Superintendent for Instruction and Accountability, Harriet L. Jaworowski, Ph.D., “*Their [ULLC’s] work led us to a more viable school improvement process which has yielded increased student achievement. Two years ago, only two schools made AYP. The most recent reports show that 16 of 26 schools made AYP and 12 were recognized for overall achievement and/or closing the achievement gap by the state. One Title I elementary school has been recognized as a Distinguished Title I School for closing the achievement gap in a school with 72% poverty. They [ULLC] are truly customer-driven school improvement leaders.*” In Illinois, ULLC worked with Waukegan Public Schools District 60 from 2008 to present, and remarkable gains have been achieved. A review of annual test data indicates that of the thirteen schools served by ULLC, each has shown dramatic increases in student performance in all sub-groups of NCLB. Additionally, five met targets to achieve AYP, and two schools that would have been required to submit a reorganization plan to the State this year, did not have to do so because of achieving AYP. State achievement score growth in four high poverty, high LEP middle schools using SAME shown below:

School	Content Area	2008	2011
Abbott	Reading	65%	76%
	Math	63%	80%
Benny	Reading	63%	71%
	Math	68%	80%
Juarez	Reading	62%	76%
	Math	63%	72%
Webster	Reading	56%	77%
	Math	64%	76%

In Tangipahoa Parish, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction Theresa Hamilton shares, “Our relationship with ULLC has spanned over the last 4 years in various forms. We originally started with SIG grants in which we had 9 schools identified...We extended our partnership to begin focusing our work on distributed leadership in 5 focus/priority schools in our district. This work included providing monthly seminars to both aspiring and practicing principals. These schools were some of our chronically lowest

performing schools. At this point in 2016 we have decreased that number to 1 focus/priority school where we will be continuing and expanding our work with ULLC. We have also improved the leadership teams of all 5 of these schools by hiring individuals who participated in the ULLC Leadership Seminars and are now serving in those schools in various roles including Assistant Principals, Disciplinarians, Curriculum Support Teachers and/or Teacher Leaders. Our work with ULLC is providing improvements in both adult and student learning and can also be measured through the increase in the number of students scoring Basic and above in these schools, as well as through survey data that is collected from school leaders and through collaboration observation data." The *Louisiana High Poverty / High Performing Schools Initiative (HP/HP)*, a joint collaborative (2009-2011) between ULLC and the Louisiana State Department of Education demonstrated the power of the S.A.M.E. model for school change in a statewide reform effort. The evaluation conducted by the LDOE concluded, "*The data indicate that cultural changes are occurring in High Priority 3 schools. These changes are reasonably large, and students citywide by wide margins and, in writing and math, match or exceed those for white students.*"

ESSA validates the SAME intervention model. A persistently struggling school is usually characterized by technical deficiencies academically (curriculum alignment, engagement, assessment, rigor, etc.), cultural issues among adults and students (goal-setting, learning to life connections, self-efficacy, expectations for success, etc.) and distributed leadership issues (core values, data analysis, implementation and monitoring of action plans, etc.). Unless intervention strategies address social, academic, and moral domains, often students will not exert the effort to benefit from improvement in instructional delivery. The ULLC team begins each intervention with in-depth assessment and data analysis to determine strengths and deficits in all three domains. Through training, modeling and coaching, ULLC consultants will work with school and LEA teams to build capacity in research-based school improvement practices to include those highlighted by the Wallace Foundation research and the COMPASS Leadership standards: (1) Shaping a vision of academic success for all students (2) Creating a climate hospitable to education (3) Cultivating leadership in others (4) Improving instruction and (5) Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. Composition of the ULLC intervention team is customized to the needs as identified in the assessment process. Typically, ULLC teams consist of a leadership coach, instructional coaches, and/or a S.A.M.E coach, depending on need.

The ULLC team has extensive experience in coordinating multiple partners in school change efforts. From 2009-2014, ULLC partnered with LSU and the Rapides Foundation to provide services to 9 central Louisiana parishes in a US DoE funded project called "Central Louisiana Academic Residency for Teachers (CART)". This project provided leadership training for emerging leaders to support teacher cohorts receiving Masters degrees in math and science and created student based projects to increase the numbers of students in AP and honors classes in preparation for college. In 2014-2015 our team partnered with the Orchard Foundation, the Kagan Company and Natchitoches Parish Schools to build school capacity for change in Parks Elementary, a persistently struggling school. In each successful partnership, keys to success are (1) role clarity/definition of each partner (2) consistent and regular communication among partners (3) consistency of message to the school leaders from all partners (4) sharing of pertinent data across all partners (5) buy-in and support from the LEA team and the school team to ensure fidelity of implementation of the new ideas and (6) patience and trust building. Any school improvement effort in Louisiana today needs to be coordinated with the state regional support team, an automatic partner in the process. These teams have extensive data resources to shorten the needs assessment process and have built client trust that this is a collaborative effort. Intervention strategies from external partners need to be aligned to existing professional development initiatives from the support team to ensure common language and consistency of leading indicators of success.

An ideal school or district partner is characterized by a few critical leadership traits. The first and foremost is a passion for the success of all students. School and district leaders must see student success as a moral imperative—we may be the last, best hope for a successful future for our students. Secondly, leaders must be willing to embrace not only first order changes, but second order changes as well. Often school improvement efforts are doing more of the strategies that did not bring success (after school tutoring, remedial classes, etc.) instead of looking at the fundamental structures of teaching and learning. Second order changes require teachers to become learners, to think deeply about their practice, and to adopt new and often challenging ideas about their role in the classroom. Thirdly, an ideal partner understands that fundamental school change is a process which requires dedicated effort over time. It is not a quick fix and it cannot be done "to you", it must be done "with you". Building capacity in administrators and teacher leaders is the goal. Sustainability is the key to success. The changes must be institutionalized to ensure success for students coming after the outside interventionists are gone.