



Raising Student Achievement: Practices That Work

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Linking the Pieces: How Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development in Ohio is Aligning High Schools That Work, NCA, and State and Federal Requirements

Background. Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development is the career and technical education department for 36 affiliated school districts and serves high school juniors and seniors from 38 high schools. Great Oaks includes four campuses located across southwestern Ohio. All four campuses operate as schools within schools, formed around career clusters and designed for the maximum performance of all students.

“We’re passionate about every one of our students being successful.”

Great Oaks believes in taking the best of what is available both within and outside the education industry in an effort to ensure student success. The district’s four campuses are actively implementing High Schools That Work (HSTW) and NCA’s Transitions™ improvement model, as well as Professional Learning Communities and components of the Baldrige Education Criteria. The campuses are also addressing the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, Ohio Department of Education’s Performance Measures, and the Carl T. Perkins Support to Career and Technical Education Priorities.

How are they managing these initiatives without engaging in duplicate reporting and duplicate processes?

One overarching framework. Great Oaks has developed a Continuous Improvement Plan that provides the framework for the district’s operational and reform efforts. The plan contains eleven goals. The district has tied the components of each improvement initiative to the eleven overarching goals. This ensures that each initiative is furthering the district’s goals. It also helps show how each improvement initiative supports and reinforces one another.

Common Elements, Complementary Components. The district’s improvement initiatives share the common elements of being data driven, being whole-school reform models, emphasizing continuous improvement, focusing on every student, and validating performance through external peer review. The initiatives are also complementary. For example, HSTW focuses at the campus level, emphasizing strengthening the core curriculum and narrowing the gap between career bound and college bound students. Transitions focuses on individual students, emphasizing the credentialing of students in academics, career awareness, and career readiness. The different emphases enhance one another.

One improvement process. Another key to Great Oaks ability to align its improvement initiatives is their philosophy. They view all of their work as **one** school improvement process, not multiple processes. They use the same data, documentation, and school improvement plan for HSTW, NCA, and state and federal requirements. They do not engage in duplicate reporting or duplicate effort. The campuses have improvement teams to help ensure alignment across the initiatives. There is a HSTW team and an NCA

Transitions team. The chairs of each team serve as co-chairs of the other team. This helps divide the work and ensures that the components of each initiative are distinct and yet interwoven.

Working smart. They're also smart about how they tie what is needed for one initiative to another. For example, HSTW requires a student and staff survey on the HSTW conditions and practices. NCA requires student and community survey data as part of the school profile. They use the HSTW survey to meet the NCA requirement.

Tapping the strengths of each initiative. They also take advantage of what each initiative has to offer. For example, HSTW requires an assessment every two years of a random sample of students. The assessment results are then compared to other schools in the HSTW network, providing the campuses and district with a useful benchmark. Transitions requires that every student be assessed using multiple assessments. As a result, the campuses use their state assessment, Work Keys, and localized rubrics to assess individual student progress. The end result is that they have useful comparative data at a macro level and clear performance data at the student level. Each is useful in and of itself, but together, they are powerful.

Valuing peer review. Finally, they use the peer reviews of HSTW and NCA to provide validation of their work and a stronger basis on which to build their improvement efforts. They could combine the visits of these two initiatives, but have chosen to keep them separate. They do not view the separate visits as more work, but rather as an opportunity for additional professional input and validation.

Results. Early results of Great Oaks improvement initiatives appear promising. All four campuses received NCA Transitions recognition at NCA CASI's April 2003 Annual Meeting. This means they have attained NCA's exemplary recognition and are credentialing every student in the required areas. In addition, student performance results are encouraging. Students at the Live Oaks campus have increased performance in reading, math, and science from 2000 to 2002 on the HSTW assessment. On Work Keys, the percentage of students scoring at the performance level in math increased from 71% to 81% from 2001 to 2002. Great Oaks will continue to monitor performance at all four campuses.

When asked to give advice to other NCA schools, Jon Quatman, Vice President of Performance and Outcomes, said, "Don't reinvent. Use the initiatives you have in place to develop one coordinated school improvement process. Report your data as it is. Don't waste time trying to make it look good. Start from there. Realize that there will be failures, but your process should help you understand what went wrong and what path you need to go down to ensure success for every learner."

For more information about how NCA CASI can help your district or school align its improvement initiatives and raise student achievement, contact your NCA CASI state office at (800) 525-9517, or visit our website at www.ncacasi.org.

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