

It Was a Very Good Year

Happy summer!

The end of the school year is a time of celebrating all that has been accomplished as well as offering time for reflection and planning for the upcoming school year. The District and School Improvement Center at American Institutes for Research (AIR) has much to celebrate. After six years of successfully operating the Illinois Center for School Improvement on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education, we increased our staff and capacity by merging those team members into the work of the District and School Improvement Center. The knowledge of the combined staff has provided us with the opportunity to develop new support services for leaders and teachers. Keep checking our website for updates on additional new services that will be coming as we prepare to launch a new school year. We will continue to provide quality services for leadership and instructional coaching, professional learning communities, and comprehensive school improvement support.

Summer is a great time for districts, charter networks, and schools to consider the processes in place to engage in continuous improvement, reflecting on and identifying what worked, what didn't work, and why. Engaging in continuous improvement also charts the pathway to critically think about how your system can align summer professional development supports for kicking off a new school year and to facilitate long-term planning to ensure that you are meeting expected outcomes for the new school year.

We hope that this issue of *DSI Digest* will offer some thoughts for your school improvement planning. This issue brings you highlights from our work with education leaders, featuring an urban district implementing professional learning communities and a suburban district focused on strategic planning for school improvement.

It was a very good school year, and we look forward to helping districts and schools with summer work as we prepare for the next school year.



Catherine Barbour
Managing Director

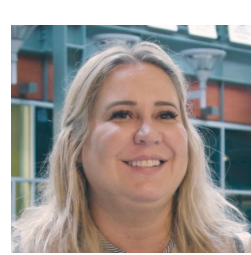


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To request a meeting with our school improvement experts [Click here](#), contact us at dsicenter@air.org, or visit our website at www.air.org/dsicenter to learn more.

Collaboration That Makes a Difference



Christy Taylor, Director, Office of Professional Learning, Prince William County Public Schools

Services: District Professional Learning Community Implementation Support

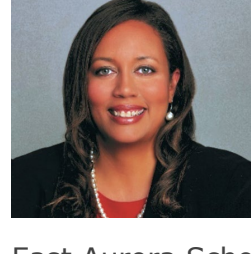
Prince William County Public Schools is the second-largest district in Virginia, with more than 100 schools and learning centers and a long-standing reputation as a high-achieving school district. Building the capacity of teacher leaders throughout the school building is essential to carrying out and sustaining quality instruction. Professional learning communities (PLCs) in Prince William County Public Schools are the backbone of any school and the vehicle of change for school improvement.

Prince William County has focused on PLCs for more than 13 years, using professional development to strengthen a shared vision for a divisionwide culture of collaboration with high-functioning learning teams. But results were inconsistent across the division. The goal was to increase consistent practices and successful PLC implementation across the district. The District and School Improvement Center at AIR brought an evidence-based approach to differentiated divisionwide professional learning to lay the necessary foundation for PLCs to thrive and make a sustainable impact on teacher practice and student achievement. AIR worked with a cohort of 22 schools (elementary, middle, and high school) to implement consistent practices, creating a shared PLC vision and language and effective structures and processes while building the capacity of district staff to support and sustain the work. Each school participated in professional development sessions and received site coaching from an AIR PLC coach. PLC coaches worked with principals to serve a dual purpose to provide (a) targeted support to school teams composed of PLC leaders and administrators, and (b) the opportunity for instructional leaders and coaches to shadow an AIR coach to provide real-world "train-the-trainer" experiences.

"In working with AIR, what we've really found is that they are coaches of coaches and that they make adjustments, changes, and plan together. AIR is a collaborator. A lot of companies will come in and say, 'this is what we're going to do,' but I feel like we've been included in every step of the way. They have really changed the way that professional learning could look like in Prince William County Schools."

– **Christy Taylor**, Director, Office of Professional Learning, Prince William County Public Schools

District staff participated in training specifically designed to build their capacity to effectively lead, monitor, and support PLCs across the district. Training was provided in the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) which is a framework that provides tools for district leaders to assess implementation progress and determine solutions to deepen implementation.



Dr. Jennifer Norrell, Superintendent, East Aurora School District 131, Aurora, Illinois

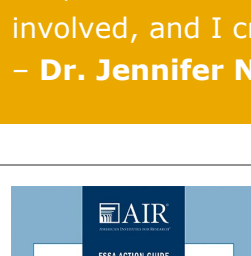
Services: District and School Needs Assessment and Continuous Improvement Planning

East Aurora School District 131, one of the largest K–12 school districts in the Chicago metropolitan area, is on a mission to cultivate "all stakeholders to reach their full potential" under the leadership of superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell. As a first-year superintendent, Dr. Norrell began her journey by partnering with the District and School Improvement Center at AIR on the development of a strategic plan for school improvement planning with leadership coaching and monitoring to chart their course. The kickoff was a multiple-step process beginning with a comprehensive needs assessment conducted in August 2018 of the district's 23 schools. AIR guided the district through the process by collecting and organizing new and existing data that led into a co-interpretationSM event. A cross-section of East Aurora stakeholders, including district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and community members, participated in a review, discussion analysis, and interpretation of data to collaboratively decide priority areas for improvement.

Next, AIR facilitated East Aurora School District 131's comprehensive strategic planning process using the priority areas identified in the co-interpretation process to identify district/school level teams' processes and procedures that could be enhanced by AIR's school improvement experts and lead to increased student achievement. This process led to East Aurora's Strategic Planning Team developing a strategic plan that included a mission, vision, goals, objectives, and common language and understanding about the purpose, elements, and best practices regarding continuous improvement planning, with an eye on increasing student achievement. The result of East Aurora's strategic planning work is a roadmap for the entire district in improving educator practice and student achievement that provides the district with a clear direction for the next three to five years.

"Being a first-year superintendent, having to come into a large district and actually be able to come up with a plan around district and school improvement was a cumbersome task. The partnership that we have with AIR was invaluable to me being able to lift this. I could have done this lift by myself, but the far greater value was the collaboration. AIR really helped to leverage the ownership from all the stakeholders and to foster their value and their input in the process. Ultimately, that will allow us to carry on successfully with the implementation of our strategic plan. Actually building it and having one, to now actually living it is only accomplished with having stakeholders involved, and I credit AIR for the leadership and guidance to make it happen."

– **Dr. Jennifer Norrell**, Superintendent, East Aurora School District 131



From the Research – Selecting Evidence-Based Practices for Low-Performing Schools

What is the proof? How do you know if what you planned and implemented worked? Evidence-based practices (EBPs) are instructional practices, strategies, programs, and interventions that have been shown through rigorous evaluation to be effective at improving outcomes. Education leaders are required to include EBPs in improvement plans for low-performing schools, and AIR researchers developed a guide to assist education leaders in the selection process by offering three actions to integrate ESSA requirements and best practices. Click to view [ESSA Action Guide: Selecting Evidence-Based Practices for Low-Performing Schools](#).

In addition, AIR researchers have compiled a list of key resources to help education leaders choose the right evidence-based practices or program for your district or school to bring positive outcomes for your students.

[ESSA Key Resources: Selecting the Right Evidence-Based Practices](#)

Visit the [District and School Improvement](#) website to learn more about our available resources.

Coming this summer, videos featuring AIR's work with East Aurora and Prince William County. Stay tuned to our website www.air.org/dsicenter.

Client Testimonials

Don't take our word for it; here are client reflections on their work with DSI during the 2018–19 school year:

"Given that the quality of school leadership is a significant factor in student achievement, Chinle Unified School District strives to create conditions to systemically support, develop, and retain highly effective school leaders. The coaching support from AIR for, and our leadership as a model for professional development and school improvement has been an effective way to accomplish this objective."

– Doug Clauschee, Associate Superintendent of Instruction, Chinle Unified School District, Arizona

"Collaborating with American Institutes for Research has helped our department leaders take a more 'systems approach' to continuous improvement. Our learning partner kept us focused on resolving complex issues that needed to be addressed to truly transform our schools and respond to the needs of all students."

– John Donermeyer, Director of Research and Innovation, Dolton-Riverdale School District 148, Illinois

"The continuous improvement work we engaged in with AIR has led my building and the district to be more data-driven and outcome based. Our district planning has truly helped every principal in the district to use the data to drive improvement in every building. The best practices and research AIR was able to provide us, with strategies to implement them, was the real piece of practicality that 'made things happen'."

– Cody Cusic, Principal, Eldorado High School Principal, Illinois

To request a meeting with our school improvement experts, [Click here](#), contact us at dsicenter@air.org, or visit our website at www.air.org/dsicenter to learn more.



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