

AN INTERVENTION TO IMPROVE SCHOOL AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Becky Shaver

Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) used ISPI's 10 Standards of Performance Technology to share the design, development, and implementation of an intervention striving to help Georgia districts and schools share their success stories in a clear and concise format. This intervention took the form of a PowerPoint presentation, GLISI Promising Practices, and has become a successful tool for districts to share and communicate their success.

INTRODUCTION

By Deb Page, Senior Executive Director, GLISI

Since 2001, Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), a public-private partnership, has worked to improve the performance of education leaders in Georgia to improve school, teacher, and student performance. GLISI identifies leader performance and supply needs in Georgia, analyzes the underlying causes and barriers, and incubates and tests solutions, blending best practices from education, industry, and government. To guide its approach for seeking solutions to the state's needs, in 2005 GLISI adopted the standards from the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) Certified Performance Technologist (CPT).

Since its inception, GLISI's work has been funded in part by the Wallace Foundation, a private foundation that seeks to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people by sharing effective ideas and practices. One of its areas of focus is devoted to strengthening educational leadership to improve student achievement. In 2007, the Wallace Foundation challenged GLISI's leaders to capture and share its own best practices—how it thinks and works—so that other organizations can learn from it. The Wallace Foundation also indicated strong interest in capturing and sharing the evolving best practices of the education leaders and school systems across the state, particularly in Atlanta public schools, a large urban district in Georgia that receives Wallace funding. By investing in GLISI's development of a knowledge management strategy and system, the Wallace Foundation helped GLISI take steps toward capturing these practices.

GLISI again turned to the CPT standards, using them as a template for documenting solutions and innovations. Using the standards not only captured the interventions, but also documented the actions and decisions that led to their development, outcomes, and results. Becky Shaver, research associate at GLISI, used the standards to document the way GLISI motivated and supported collection and sharing of the Promising Practices of Georgia education leaders by testing and adapting an ISPI tool called Got Results? using GLISI's Web site (www.glisi.org) to collect and publish the practices and convening education leaders to showcase and share those practices. The resulting document made explicit the lessons learned and decisions that led to GLISI's suite of solutions.

GLISI's staff is documenting several of the proven solutions that have been developed using the CPT framework. GLISI projects that are using this framework to share its practices with others who support educational improvement will encourage understanding and adoption of the methods that human performance technology practitioners use to support performance improvement.

OVERVIEW

Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement develops and supports innovative interventions and programs that prepare and develop leaders and build state and district capacity to improve leader performance. The core work of Georgia's education leaders is to continuously improve schools, ensure schools are designed so that every child succeeds in meeting high standards, and model democracy through practice.

THE PROJECT AND THE SOLUTION

A GLISI Promising Practice is a story that describes one district or school team's success in setting and attaining an improvement goal. These Promising Practices are for district and school leaders to share their school improvement success, as well as to find out how other districts and schools have dealt with their challenges and to learn from their successful strategies.

GLISI adopted the 10 standards used by CPT practitioners to guide the work of developing the Promising Practice process and strategy. As the team worked on the intervention it used the standards as a documentation framework to record its work and decisions so that it could easily share its practice with other organizations and other states engaged in improvement of education, as well as the private organizations funding its work.

Standard 1: Focus on Outcomes

District and school leaders did not have an avenue for sharing successful practices across the state to celebrate their own success and help other leaders meet their school improvement goals. Generally, education leaders do not talk about their successes. In addition, the evaluation team for GLISI had considerable amounts of information but no formal way of communicating the good work that was being done across the state. GLISI also needed to help leaders learn to speak and share in a common language focused on results.

GLISI committed to having 5 GLISI Promising Practices published on the Web site in the first year, 12 the second year, and 20 the third year (rolling count). Promising Practices underwent strict review based on criteria determined by GLISI. Each practice required these steps:

- Tested using action research (plan-do-check-act cycle).
- Proven by 2 years of quantitative data demonstrating a positive difference in student achievement (less than two years of data is a GLISI Emerging Practice).
- Strengthened by qualitative data demonstrating a positive difference in working conditions, student learning, staff or student morale, or other conditions of practice.
- Submitted through the approved Promising Practices PowerPoint template.
- Sponsored by the appropriate leader from the district prior to GLISI review using a signed Promising Practice district sponsor form.

These practices codify good work being done in the districts as part of the GLISI work and teachings. Through the submission of a Promising Practice, GLISI is able to affirm that the lessons taught to districts and schools can make student achievement gains.

A Promising Practice allows the submitter to showcase his or her work for others across the state to see. The leader then has a clear, concise format in which to communicate the team's actions and success to others. Districts can also break silos through Promising Practices by sharing and communicating with each other across lines of school levels and geographical barriers.

Promising Practices are helpful to other leaders in the state because they share practices that can be replicated in other areas with similar challenges instead of leaders' always reinventing the wheel.

Standard 2: Take a Systems View

Leaders who are creating Promising Practices must use the lessons and strategic solutions taught by GLISI to show improvement success. The actions the leaders take are related to GLISI's core training or ongoing leadership support systems, which tie all of GLISI's programs together.

These factors were present at the GLISI work, worker, and the workplace levels:

- **Work:** GLISI was losing critical data from its districts because it was not providing a means of communication between the work and that of others.
- **Worker:** The evaluation team was expected to record this work but was overwhelmed by the amount of good work being told, and it was unable to capture this material in a way that could be shared.
- **Workplace:** As a partially nonprofit organization, GLISI has the burden to prove to funders and other groups that good work is being done with their leaders. Also, GLISI depends on success stories as marketing tools to help with funding and to get more leaders involved.

These factors were present at the district work, worker, and workplace levels:

- **Work:** The work was being done by leaders but not shared. The leaders simply did the work and moved on to something else. There was also pressure for the work to show that they were making a difference because of new accountability laws and federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind reform mandates.
- **Worker:** The leaders were not in the habit of talking about their work and their successes with one another. They worked in a silo of their school and grade levels.
- **Workplace:** There seemed to be a cultural barrier of leaders not sharing what they had accomplished publicly.

In fact, there were no rewards or incentives for leaders to codify and share their practices. Education leaders generally work in silos within their schools and districts, so

there was more to creating Promising Practices than just filling out the PowerPoint template. GLISI tried to align the reward of recognition to Promising Practices by asking for district support and sign-off, which made the district aware of the good practices occurring within their district that could be showcased on their own Web site, at board meetings, in grant applications, and elsewhere. An event, GLISI Display of Excellence, also came from this need to align the work to recognition. The event is designed to showcase leaders with Promising Practices: these leaders share their practices with a large audience that is there to learn what other school leaders are doing about similar problems they are encountering.

There were time barriers to completing the Promising Practice, because taking time to codify their work was not something leaders generally did. The work and the workplace provided no time for this. There also seemed to be a cultural barrier of leaders not talking to each other within districts, and sometimes even their own schools. There was also a performance gap in that the perception was just to do the work and move on to the next thing.

GLISI approached the development of the template systemically by ensuring that the tool captured the work done in the school by not only the leader, but by the teachers and other staff members. The leader was charged with showing how they made their solution strategy a collaborative team effort. By using the lessons taught in GLISI and creating the template to reflect on work that was done systemically within the district or school, the leader was forced to think about all they had done and learned that led to their solution implementation.

Standard 3: Add Value

GLISI realized the need to help leaders share their Promising Practices with others in the state while also affirming that the work GLISI was teaching could lead to positive school improvement results through the collection of data. The GLISI evaluation team was given the task of developing a tool to meet these needs. The tool needed to be easy to use and follow, and it needed to tell the story in a way that would interest others and provide them with some guidelines to replicate the work. The Promising Practices PowerPoint template was designed along the same lines as the ISPI Got Results? template but uses the logic and language of GLISI.

The first attempt at this work was a Word document asking leaders to answer questions about the work they were doing. The document was used with one leader and proved to be helpful, but it was not easy to use and was not a good communication tool. The second attempt was modeled after a tool already proven in the business community. The evaluation team created the first draft of the tool and then elicited comments and help from other

GLISI team members. Once a draft was completed, the evaluation team went to a high-performing GLISI school to interview a leader to test how her story would be codified in the existing template. This was a pilot project for the template. Changes were made to the template after the pilot and with the help of the leader. The template was tested with four other high-performing GLISI leaders to test its viability with different challenges and situations.

The users of this tool benefit considerably, because they are able to easily document the work they are doing within their districts and schools to foster student achievement. The template provides them with questions to answer about their work, and the result is a presentation they can use to share their story in a logical, clear, concise way.

The Promising Practices template has allowed GLISI to affirm that its work is making a difference in districts and schools. It has helped leaders who need guidance in expressing their good work, and it has provided learning from one leader to another that GLISI cannot teach. GLISI also now has a marketing tool to help with funders and other leaders.

Standard 4: Work in Partnership

GLISI used the ISPI Got Results? template, a proven tool in the business community, as a model for its template. It also used its potential users as testers in the pilot of the tool to see if the template would clearly tell the story of good work being done in districts and schools. GLISI used its own staff to develop the tool and review it.

Standard 5: Needs Analysis

A needs analysis was conducted through GLISI's evaluation group through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and site visits, as well as talking to the staff about the work they were seeing but not always able to communicate. Leaders were also talking about their work, but did not have a way to codify it for others to read and learn from.

The need for a tool to capture leaders' work was brought to GLISI's attention in many ways:

- Leaders were telling the evaluation team stories about the work in their school, but the stories were not being codified.
- GLISI lacked proof regarding the successful transfer of learning, knowledge, and skills from GLISI events to the schools.
- Funders and others were asking how GLISI staff knew they were making an impact.
- Focus groups with leaders were beneficial because they provided the chance for them to talk with peers about problems and solutions.
- There was a noticeable drop in second-year data scores that needed to be analyzed.

- Leaders needed to be encouraged to focus on results and accountability.
- GLISI realized that educators across districts did not use a common language or mode of communication.
- Leaders were working in silos within their districts and even within their schools.

Standard 6: Cause Analysis

To determine key causes, GLISI's evaluation team continued its interviews and focus groups to determine what was behind the lack of knowledge sharing. Leaders from all over the state were asked questions about their work and communication with other leaders to help answer the causes. The following underlying causes were identified:

- Barriers of time in the work to codify their actions.
- A cultural barrier that education leaders did not talk to others outside their schools and districts.
- A perception that there is always more work to do, so the focus is on finishing the task at hand and moving on to something else.
- A lack of focus on results; leaders had not been trained in how to focus on results.
- The No Child Left Behind Act, which was forcing leaders to focus on results and accountability.

The evaluation team recommended developing a tool to help leaders codify their work in a simple, results-focused manner that they could then use to communicate with others about their work. The tool would need to be easy to use and fast, and use the right language of performance-based learning and teaching to showcase the work and the results. In addition, the tool needed to contain some district support for this work: rewards, recognition, time, and avenues for communication.

Standard 7: Design

Based on the results from the needs and cause analysis, GLISI decided to create a PowerPoint template that would focus leaders on writing their stories in results-focused and performance-based language. Their decision solved the problem of codification and the issue of how leaders would communicate their stories. It also incorporates the criteria that GLISI had previously developed to ensure that the practices submitted were worthy of being published and shared with others in the state.

Standard 8: Development

Because the evaluation team was in charge of design and development, ensuring that the development of the tool followed the design specifications was not a large concern. The team nevertheless used its pilot tests and its

drafts to determine if the tool adequately solved the need and provided evidence of the criteria for publication.

GLISI staff and leaders in the field drafted, piloted, and tested the system. Elements of the tool were selected based on GLISI's plan-do-check-act cycle, the lessons taught by GLISI, and also pieces of ISPI's Got Results? work.

Standard 9: Implementation

The implementation strategy started with the evaluation team traveling to talk with four schools and document their Promising Practices through interviews and the PowerPoint presentation. These first practices were done in a hand-holding fashion to ensure that the template would work for a variety of practices and to allow the evaluation team to make sure they captured all that was necessary for the practice to be told clearly and concisely through the template. The completed practices were posted on the GLISI Web site along with the blank template and instructions for submitting a practice. GLISI's staff members were also on the lookout for practices that should be showcased with the template and encouraged leaders to codify their practices. By allowing the template to be self-selected and also tapped helped to ensure that the practices were of good quality.

The implementation strategy incorporated a rigorous review process. The practice first went through checks by the GLISI performance consultant working with that district to check on the accuracy of the work being done. Then the practice was assessed by the evaluation team based on the criteria. GLISI's executive directors reviewed the relevance of the GLISI work to help ensure that the practices were accurate, of quality, and replicable.

One alternative strategy included requiring every GLISI participant to complete a Promising Practice after three years of working with the organization, but this was not followed through because not all practices are successful.

Originally the plan did not allow the opportunity for all leaders to submit a Promising Practice via the Web site. Instead GLISI consultants who observed leaders applying the skills they had learned and getting results invited those leaders to submit their practices and data proving impact. This plan was abandoned because it did not allow all leaders to nominate their work as worthy of publication, and the consultants were not able to observe all the more than 2,000 leaders who had been trained by GLISI.

Standard 10: Evaluation

The Promising Practices template and process was evaluated based on the quality of published practices as well as the number of practices published yearly. In addition, the technology team for GLISI tracked the number of hits the Promising Practices site received each month to determine if the word was spreading.

Promising Practices has had a positive impact on the organization by giving back to the leaders in the way of a template to allow them to showcase their work. Also, the practices gave GLISI a way to discuss its success with other partners and funders.

The GLISI Display of Excellence was created to generate more Promising Practices and showcase practices for leaders to learn from and replicate. The value that participants impart to this event is clear from the event feedback forms. This event also led to Emerging Practices, which showcase work in progress with less than two years of data. Leaders appreciate the opportunity to share their beginning work as it emerges into successful implementation.

This template has been modified for two other programs within GLISI, Leadership Preparation Performance Coaching and Rising Stars Collaboratives, to codify the work and results being achieved through other GLISI programs. The team is now documenting Rising Stars, an alternative preparation program for new school leaders, and Leadership Preparation Performance Coaching, a program that trains veteran leaders to coach new leaders in mastering high priority leadership tasks and that provides the coaches an online support system.

Promising Practices has had success and shown value throughout the organization as it aligns programs, shows their success, and allows GLISI to share the work that leaders are doing after participating in the organization's programs.

The process has documented leadership practices that have engaged teachers and community members in team-based work to improve student attendance, boost student scores on high-stakes state tests, improve graduation rates, and close gaps in achievement among subgroups of students. The Promising Practices have harvested lessons learned by school districts as they focused on better methods of forecasting their leader staffing needs and planning and managing leader succession. It captured regional collaborative efforts among school districts to develop new leaders that fit their local needs and can lead others in supporting continuous improvement. By cap-

turing the work as it evolves in school, GLISI can ensure academic researchers can easily find research subjects and validate the impact of their practices.

The Promising Practices can be found on the GLISI Web site. Some of the stories include modeling 21st-century classrooms, developing a focused professional learning strategy, restructuring of integral school process and practices, implementing a district and school-wide balanced scorecard, and increasing teacher and student ownership to raise cultural awareness.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on this work, using the CPT standards is an example of how CPT professionals are applying the CPT standards in nonprofit areas and demonstrating the value of the standards beyond for-profit organizations. The standards were used to document the decisions and actions of GLISI in its hope to help education leaders share their successes through the Promising Practices work. The use of the standards has also prompted the organization to develop and pursue a more robust and expansive knowledge management strategy.

The Promising Practices template has given leaders a concise and meaningful avenue for sharing their success stories and removed communication barriers. Leaders now have the motivation to create a Promising Practices presentation not only for GLISI's Display of Excellence, but also for improved recognition for their district by statewide peer acknowledgment and GLISI Web site publication. A major lesson of this intervention is that GLISI needs to support its leaders further in sharing their successes so that they can learn from each other and reach higher goals. In addition, internal staff members have used this template to document their own successes, which has helped them better engage with the district leaders they support. The Promising Practices intervention has come full circle from school districts using it to show their work to GLISI consultants who use it to demonstrate their own work with those same districts. 🏡

BECKY SHAVER is a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology and an MBA student at Georgia State University. She has served GLISI's research, evaluation, and knowledge management team as a research analyst, overseeing the evaluation work that tracks and assesses all GLISI programs and projects. She has developed and conducted programmatic evaluation plans, designed evaluation tools, led focus groups, and authored evaluation reports for external and internal audiences. Currently, she is the project manager for the development and implementation of an electronic performance support system to help districts and universities collaborate together and for GLISI's knowledge management strategy, which will codify the resources and information of GLISI districts and staff. In addition, she is an analyst working to collect data from GLISI districts around the state that are implementing best practices. She may be reached at becky.shaver@glisi.org.