

End-of-Year Report

2013-14

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Office of K-12 Outreach

Office of
K-12 Outreach



MIExcel
Working together for student success.

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Office of K-12 Outreach

Our Mission

The mission of Michigan State University Office of K–12 Outreach is to bring effective research-based practices to K–12 educators so they can use those practices to improve teaching and learning for all students.

In keeping with MSU's land-grant mission, the Office of K–12 Outreach works on multiple fronts to build the capacity of the state's education system to improve student academic outcomes, with special attention to closing the achievement gap between highest- and lowest-performing students. This mission is pursued with the help of a diverse, highly trained, and committed staff, and the tremendous

professional expertise and resources available through the MSU College of Education. Given this mission, it was a natural fit for MSU K–12 Outreach to become a primary partner in MI Excel, the Statewide System of Support for Title I schools facing performance challenges and achievement gaps.



Working together for student success

On September 4, 2012, the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) approved the Michigan Department of Education (MDE)-funded 2012–13 Title I Technical Assistance Grant—Coaching 101 and School-wide System of Support—Intervention Specialists and District Improvement Facilitators Grant submitted by Michigan State University (MSU) in the amount of \$7,000,000. This grant, submitted by MSU's Office of K–12 Outreach, continues to support the successful training and development of instructional coaches; provides significant resources, services, and intervention strategies for designated school districts through MI Excel; and supports the implementation of Michigan's approved ESEA Flexibility Waiver. On June 10, 2013, MAISA approved a revised project Scope of Work document and increased the 2012–13 grant award to \$7,620,000. New and expanded program initiatives were approved to improve achievement in low-performing Michigan schools and are reflected in this report.

The 2012–13 grant built on two prior MDE-funded Title I Technical Assistance Grants awarded in 2011–12, and significantly expands a modified Scope of Work developed at the request of MDE in spring 2012. In collaboration with

MAISA and MDE, the Office of K–12 Outreach is implementing an innovative multi-phase process that supports lasting school-level change and is designed to improve achievement in struggling schools across the state. Under the project's revised Scope of Work, the Office of K–12 Outreach has initiated and is managing a complex set of programs, activities and services.

MDE identified two kinds of schools: Priority schools, which are in the bottom 5% of student achievement and Focus schools, which had large achievement gaps between highest performing and lowest performing students. The grant stipulated that Priority schools would receive up to 50 days of support and Focus schools would receive up to 40 hours of support. The result of this extensive collaboration is MI Excel, a one-of-a-kind system of support for Michigan's struggling schools and districts. In fact, this program, and the support and resources it offers to Michigan's Priority and Focus schools, is unparalleled anywhere in the U.S. Consistent with the contract between MAISA, MDE and MSU, this document serves as the project's end-of-year report and summarizes MSU's work during the first year of the grant, October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013.



Executive Summary



The MI Excel program is unique. Michigan is the first state to go beyond simply mandating improvement in our schools to creating a statewide system of support that helps schools and districts build the capacity they need to improve teaching and learning. MI Excel is broad partnership that includes the Michigan Department of Education; the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, a statewide professional organization; AdvanceEd, a national accreditation authority; and Michigan State University and its top-ranked College of Education. These organizations, in partnership with Michigan's network of intermediate school districts, are striving to give schools the training, resources, and support they need for rapid transformation and to eliminate achievement gaps. As part of MI Excel, MSU's Office of K–12 Outreach has worked to create the necessary infrastructure for the program, hire and train outstanding staff, build relationships and trust with Priority and Focus schools, and design a mechanism for communication and feedback to and from the field.

The challenge of the first year of the MSU MI Excel program was daunting: to deliver immediate guidance and support to schools and districts recently identified as Priority and Focus while continuing to build and refine the delivery mechanism for that support. An added challenge was creating the communication and collaborative structures between and among the MI Excel partners to ensure shared understanding and direction.

The first year of the grant has seen significant progress and successes; perhaps the greatest success has been the ability of MSU and the MI Excel partners to “monitor and adjust” based on feedback from the field, input from the various stakeholders, and practical issues that arose during the year. A parallel and integral success has been the transformation in how school and district personnel have come to view MI Excel, and in particular MSU's specialists and facilitators. Establishing trust was a critical, and successful part of the Year 1 work. Most Priority and Focus school and district staff now recognize MSU specialists and facilitators as supportive resources, who are there to help them understand, identify, and achieve improvement goals in teaching and learning based on their unique circumstances, as revealed by their own data. As the program prepared to enter its second year, educators from around the state were calling MSU about the new school year, eager to begin the work of improving student achievement.

The many adjustments in structure, training, communication, and program delivery have positioned MSU and the MI Excel program to provide even more effective guidance and support to Priority and Focus districts and schools as they strive to improve overall achievement and eliminate achievement gaps in Year 2.

The purpose of this report is to describe how the work of MI Excel and MSU K–12 Outreach has evolved over the first year of the grant, highlight key successes, and describe how identified challenges were addressed along the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Markle". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Barbara Markle, Ph.D.
Associate Dean

2012–13 Overview

The core of the MSU MI Excel work is directly with school districts and their constituent schools. In the first year of the program, MSU K–12 Outreach hired 60 highly qualified facilitators and specialists to service 188 Focus schools and 77 Priority schools identified for the 2012-13 cohort, representing over 85,000 Michigan K–12 students. This was an ambitious undertaking requiring the design and development of a process that could address the complexities of the work.

Finding the Right People

MSU recruited and employed 60 specialists and facilitators from a field of 219 applicants and 114 interviewees using a robust, multi-stage screening process. Multiple interview teams were trained to evaluate candidates as they completed a content interview and data simulation and provided a writing sample. Rubrics were developed and utilized for each phase of the interview process. Applicants were judged based on their knowledge of and commitment to collaborative school improvement processes. MSU also built a solid management structure consisting of regional managers and regional leads to oversee the work of specialists and facilitators working in the field.

Developing Personnel

It was apparent from the beginning that professional development for both MSU field staff and school and district leaders was a critical component to success. In response, MSU hired a Director of Professional Development position with extensive expertise in this area to develop a set of trainings that would ensure both consistency and coherence in the delivery of the MI Excel program. The MSU specialists and facilitators were extensively trained to assist districts in identifying barriers to student achievement, whether at the school or in the central office. Content training areas included:

- MDE requirements for Priority and Focus schools;
- the foundations of educational coaching;
- a deep understanding of the data dialogue process, with opportunities to practice and refine skills;
- the use and interpretation of the “Golden Package” data, including Z scores and Top-to-Bottom rankings; the use and interpretation of the “data wall” portal of MI School Data in preparation for 2013-14.

Additional in-depth training was provided during the fourth quarter of the grant year, to MSU specialists and facilitators as well as Priority and Focus school and district leaders. The context and description of the training programs are detailed in a later section of this report.



Creating the Infrastructure

The first year of the program required creating a complex structure of supports to facilitate the work in the field. By design and necessity, the process was an organic one, both anticipating and responding to the needs of the field staff and the project as a whole. Elements of that structure included:

- A top-notch technical team of MSU experts who could implement various software and hardware systems, train field staff in their use, and provide technical support.
- Utilization of iPad technology. MSU went beyond simply providing iPads; each iPad was configured so 1) software applications could be “pushed out” and updated remotely, as needed; 2) field staff had access to a shared MI Excel calendar; 3) assistance reports using a common template could be generated by field staff to provide data for both payment and evaluation.
- A dedicated MSU data team that developed data tools, training, and resources to support the work of the specialists and facilitators in the field. They also developed the “data wall” functionality on the MI School Data portal to support the work in 2013–14.

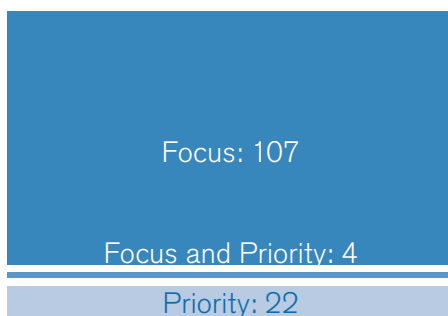
- Planning, organization, and logistical support of training programs for field staff, as well as for summer institutes for Priority and Focus schools. This included computerized registration and check-in processes, as well as online session evaluation.
- Communication structures and systems between office and field staff; MSU and MI Excel partners; Priority and Focus school educators and MI Excel staff.
- Development, design, and production of informational materials for school and district personnel;
- Development, design, and production of web-based resources, including *mitoolkit.org*; *miexcel.org*; *coachesregistry.org*; and *coaching101.org*. MI Toolkit, a combination webzine and repository of school-improvement tools, has been specifically designed to meet the needs of Priority and Focus schools.

This overview only provides a summary of the major processes and projects that took place in support of the MI Excel project. The details and specifics of all activities can be found in the four quarterly reports filed throughout the grant period. In the following sections, this report will delve deeper into specific areas, including Coaching 101, identify the lessons learned, and specify how the work has evolved as we continue to engage educators in the work of improving teaching and learning throughout 2013–14.

Who We Served in 2012–13

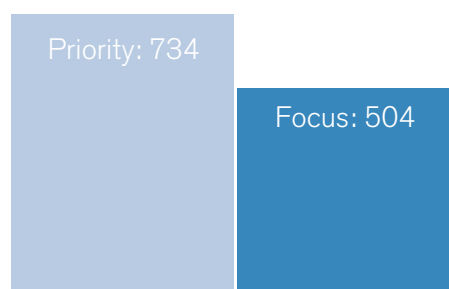
District Makeup

Total: 133 districts



District Visits

Total: 1,238 visits



Time in District

Total: 4,185.25 hours



Getting Started...

Theory of Action and the Data Dialogue

The Theory of Action articulated in MDE's request for ESEA flexibility is as follows:

"If a school's challenges are accurately diagnosed through data analysis and professional dialogue at the building and district levels, then the implementation of a focused and customized set of interventions will result in school and student success. This approach will result in:

- Consistent implementation of career- and college-ready standards
- Rapid turnaround for schools not meeting annual measurable objectives (AMOs)
- Reduction in the achievement gap
- Reduction in systemic issues at the district level
- Improvements to the instructional core
- Better understanding/utilization of data
- Improved graduation and attendance rates
- Building of/support for effective teaching
- Building of/support for school leadership capacity
- Effective accomplishment of responsibilities by district leadership." (p. 19)

The first step was to create the necessary capacity for Priority and Focus school and district personnel to thoughtfully analyze their local data to identify areas for improvement, develop one or two ideas to address those areas, and articulate a plan of action through professional dialogue. The Office of K-12 Outreach elected to employ Lipton and Wellman's (2004) collaborative learning cycle to foster capacity building. This cycle is a coherent framework for promoting constructive collaboration among professionals as they work with data at the institutional, school, and classroom levels.

Discussing data that reveal serious issues in teaching and learning is difficult and often emotional. The data dialogue process gave participants the tools and skills to review, reflect upon, interpret, and come to agreement on the meaning of the data, while acknowledging differing points of view and valuing every voice. For most schools and districts, the process built collaboration and trust, and created a common appreciation for the value of data and the norms, protocols, and routines for its productive use in creating focused and coherent action plans.

MSU Specialists on Using the Data Dialogue

It is not a given that the presence of good data itself will lead to improvement at any level in the system. Cultures of collaboration are also essential. The data dialogue process is primary tool for building those cultures. Here's what MSU Priority School specialists are saying about the results of the data dialogue.

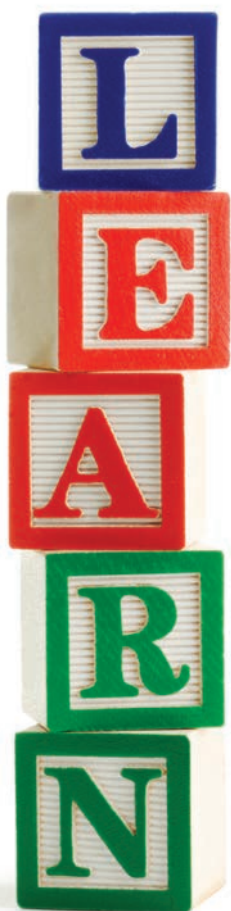
"Newberry Elementary...went from being in the 14th percentile in the TTB [Top-to-Bottom] last year to the 35th percentile for this year's identification. They now see the importance of really digging into the data and making whatever changes are needed to help students achieve."

"It was so refreshing to hear the superintendent say to me [this fall] that they had taken a deep look at the data last year and discovered when [kindergarteners] moved onto first grade and tested at the end of the year, they were either making no progress or going backwards. This was totally unacceptable to them so they made the bold move of putting their best teachers in grades K-3. The important thing is they see the importance of really looking at their data and making the systemic changes that need to be made for the benefit of the students, not the adults."

The Evolving Work

As the 2012-13 school year began, there was a great deal of uncertainty on the part of schools identified as Priority and Focus, and of the MI Excel partners and field staff as well. This was new ground, with new types of partnerships, a new and diverse staff, and a new delivery mechanism for school improvement. Some of the issues that arose, and the steps taken to respond to those issues, included:

- **There was an early lack of clarity as to the roles of ISD–SIFs and MSU specialists.** Meetings with Priority school ISDs and specialists to discuss issues and roles resulted in strategies to better align the work. ISD and MSU staff now participate in joint trainings and have regular meetings to ensure shared understanding.
- **MSU MI Excel staff encountered initial resistance from local school districts, especially Focus districts.** Many schools responded negatively to their newly designated Focus or Priority status. As the year progressed, the negativity and resistance turned to acceptance as districts recognized the nature of MI Excel's work: to support them in their efforts to improve, not to dictate or monitor change.
- **MSU realized that the intensity of the work needed to be greatly increased for Priority schools.** The original plan was to conduct the data dialogues and assist schools as they revised their reform/redesign plans, reserving implementation in Year 2. The work was altered so that schools would begin implementation in the second half of the school year instead of waiting until the fall to avoid losing the momentum and enthusiasm gained during the first half of the 2012-13 school year.
- **Management structures needed to be adjusted to better facilitate the work.** The regional lead positions were eliminated, streamlining the management structure, and the number of regions reduced from five to four. In addition, the original MI Excel Program Director's position was split into two positions, a Priority Schools Program Director to focus solely the Priority district work and a Focus School Program Director to lead the Focus district work. This reflects the growth in the number of districts and schools we served, the scope and depth of the Priority district and school work, and an increased emphasis on serving Focus schools and eliminating achievement gaps. These expanded leadership roles bring stronger coherence, consistency, and communication with and among the intervention specialists and district facilitators in the field.

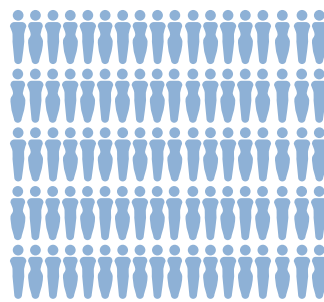


- The logistics and the impact of the initial staff structure (60 part-time specialists) turned out to be problematic. The number of MI Excel service partners assigned to each school (personnel from MSU, MDE and ISDs/RESAs) was occasionally overwhelming for schools, and in some cases created program incoherence and role confusion, making it difficult to build common understanding and collaboration. To address these issues and better meet the needs of both Priority and Focus schools, MSU implemented a revised employment structure for the MI Excel specialists and facilitators that involved transitioning from a part-time field staff to fewer full-time staff and from five regions to four. There are now 28 full-time staff and 2 part-time staff servicing MI Excel schools.

MSU Service Areas and Staffing



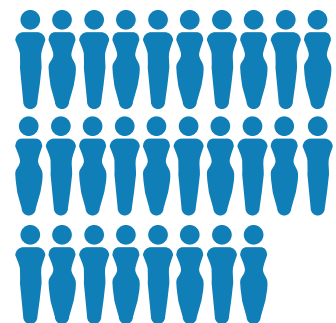
MI Excel Regions 2012–13



60 Part-Time Specialists & Facilitators 2012–2013



MI Excel Regions 2013–14



28 Full-Time Specialists & Facilitators 2013–2014

As these issues were identified, discussed, and addressed, the result was better communication, clearer definition of roles among MSU specialists and facilitators and ISD/RESA personnel, and more positive attitudes among school and district personnel.

“I initially thought this was going to be something negative and intrusive. I was proven wrong quickly and love the work we have done. I personally work with 10 boys weekly that have fallen into the bottom 30th percentile and we have a weekly book club. I don’t think this would have been on my agenda without the intensive data dig and attaching faces to the names. It is truly the best part of my week. The Title I coordinator and I are taking 17 at-risk middle school boys out to lunch next week to celebrate their work and commitment to their book clubs. Boys who were reluctant and upset they were chosen have come to love reading. With that said, I know I am a better leader and model for others after this experience this year.”

- Focus School Superintendent

Preparing for Year 2:

Learning from National Experts

During the fourth quarter, MI Excel leadership at MSU began to prepare for its second year of supporting Priority and Focus schools. As a result of careful and reflective planning, MSU's concept of the work has become even more comprehensive and thus more complex. The challenge of this ongoing and evolving work has been to support customization while maintaining a coherent statewide approach to the overall goal of rapid and dramatic increases in student achievement for all students who attend these identified schools.

MSU believes this rapid change involves the total transformation of the school and district in order to build strong classrooms where learning and student achievement for all students is the norm. As a result, MSU specialists and facilitators must have a thorough understanding of various research-based approaches to this work as they support each building and district in distinct ways, depending on the unique needs of each specific situation. To provide them, and the schools and districts they serve, with technical support and expertise, MSU selected multiple bodies of research to establish a foundation for the coherent customization of the MI Excel framework. This body of research focuses on five specific domains: 1) coherent district systems; 2) bold, courageous leadership; 3) use of data in decision-making; 4) rigorous

student learning focused on the Common Core State Standards; 5) healthy climate of high expectations in which all students are expected and supported to achieve at high levels.

During the fourth quarter, MSU planned and executed professional development based on this research, providing opportunities for school and district leaders, and MSU specialists and facilitators to directly connect with leading researchers. In making this direct connection, researchers were better able to understand the context of the MI Excel work, the goal of rapid transformation, and the need for the customized application or implementation of their work. In that same light, school and district leaders and MSU specialists were able to interact with these researchers, providing for a deeper understanding of their work and a stronger ability to utilize the research in rich and meaningful ways to bring about dramatic changes in Priority and Focus schools. Reading the research is one thing; interacting with these researchers, asking questions, clarifying implementation steps, and identifying the nuances of the work allowed MI Excel schools and MSU specialists to deeply understand the research and how it might apply to each school context.



Dr. Joe Murphy presents at the Detroit Focus Summer Institute.

This summer institutes also provided a foundation for direct, ongoing interaction between 800 school leaders, specialists, and these nationally recognized researchers:

- **Dr. Victoria Bernhardt** utilizes multiple measures (demographic, achievement, process, and perception) data for accurate identification of problems, strategic planning, and continuous improvement.
- **Dr. William Parrett and Dr. Kathleen Budge** identify a framework for action (Focus on learning, build leadership capacity, foster healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments) and twelve specific strategies for high poverty schools to utilize in becoming high performing schools.
- **Dr. Joseph Murphy** provides both a definition and historical context for the achievement gap as well as specific recommendations to address how schools and MSU specialists might approach the work needed to support students who are on the “wrong side of the achievement gap.” His work involves strong expectations for academic excellence and the pastoral care needed to support these students to realize academic success.
- **Dr. Lynn Sharratt** brings the story of dramatic district improvement from her work with Dr. Michael Fullan in her own district in the Toronto region in Canada. Her and Fullan’s work identifies 14 key elements that districts can use to dramatically improve student performance. It also offers a simple, practical and meaningful way of addressing individual student needs in their work, *Putting Faces on the Data*.
- **Dr. Franklin Campbell Jones** provides a framework for addressing the most difficult aspect of rapid school improvement, cultural competency. He and his partners identify specific ways MSU specialists and school leaders can address cultural incompetence and specific adult beliefs that exclude certain groups of students from being included in rapid transformation efforts.
- **Dr. Frederick Hess** provides specific recommendations for district and building level leaders who must realize that they have a greater ability to transform schools and districts than they often realize. He believes “uncaged” leadership is necessary to produce rapid improvement in student achievement.

What Summer Institute Attendees Said

Attendees were profoundly affected by the summer trainings, as revealed in their comments.

Priority School Institute What ideas will be most beneficial for your work around rapid transformation?

- *Changing/eliminating specific policies/procedures that get in the way of learning.*
- *Engaging both students and parents in the learning process...the importance of job-embedded PD.*
- *The culture of high expectations has to permeate the entire school community.*

Focus School Institute What ideas will be most beneficial for your work around closing the achievement gap?

- *Focusing on early elementary intervention and making connections with students and building relationships.*

- *It will be important for staff to also recognize the student mindsets in their classrooms.*

- *Think about the gap as one student at a time.*

Superintendent’s Institute What ideas will be most beneficial for your work around rapid transformation?

- *Understanding the importance of measuring programs and processes.*
- *Focusing our Priority into one succinct document that clearly identifies the Priority and how it will be addressed.*
- *The importance of putting FACES on the data and having a place that is secure but accessible to staff for reviewing and displaying that data. There is also a need for ongoing data dialogues and discussions once schools identify the parameters they will focus on. How that data is displayed is also important.*

Building Statewide Capacity Through Coaching

Coaching is a critical piece of the MSU MI Excel Statewide System of Support. The role of the educational coach is to mediate thinking, clarify goals, and to build the capacity among school and district personnel to have high-quality conversations around data and other issues related to improving student achievement. The goal of Coaching 101 is to increase coherence among the various coaching roles (leadership, data, or content) so all coaches can effectively and productively work together on behalf of the schools they support.

Accomplishments

Coaching 101's accomplishments in the first year of the grant are grounded in the belief that well-trained, highly qualified educational coaches can make a tremendous difference in a school or district's ability to make the often difficult and complex changes needed to improve student achievement. With this belief in mind, Coaching 101:

- Trained 197 proficient coaches through seven Foundations trainings and five Academy sessions.
- Revised the way individuals apply for Coaching 101, and created a consistent set of prerequisites for Coaching 101 participants.
- Developed two advanced online modules for proficient coaches. The modules provided a venue for coaches to delve deeper into their understanding of mediation in the context of coaching, and watch and analyze a variety of coaching conversations.
- Gained national exposure for the Coaching 101 model by presenting at the 2013 ASCD Conference in Chicago, Illinois.
- Convened the second session of Coaching Pathways, the National Coaching Networking Conference, set for August 15–16, 2013. This year's conference was focused on helping 295 attendees understand the importance and power of effective, culturally proficient coaching.

Challenges

One of the major challenges the program faced this year was an influx of classroom teachers and administrators who did not have coaching backgrounds, but had been assigned to coach. In the past, individuals who attended Coaching 101 sessions had some knowledge about coaching. The lack of coaching background in 2012-13 participants impacted the pacing and structure of the instruction. Addressing this challenge required a two-pronged approach. First, staff made modifications in “real time,” creating more time for the construction of meaning by providing more table talk activities, more time for processing, additional modeling of the concepts and techniques, and pausing for in-depth explanations of concepts. Second, based on session evaluations and observations, more videotapes of coaching conversations were added to highlight the knowledge and skills necessary for proficiency, additional activities were designed to scaffold learning, and one-on-one time was provided throughout the day.



Deploying Coaches: The Coaches Registry

Part of the work for facilitating the work of Priority and Focus schools was to create and administer a new Content Coaching Registry that would allow ISD/RESAs to verify eligibility of individuals seeking coaching jobs. The Michigan Educational Coaches Registry launched on August 16, 2013. At MDE's request, the registry was expanded to including tracking of the MVU Core Modules and MVU Content Coach modules. This functionality and the creation of the Coaches Registry job board, which allows eligible districts to post open coach positions and eligible content coaches to apply for posted positions, was added in September 2013. MSU staff facilitated the use of the registry by creating job board video tutorials for both coaches and ISD personnel and designing and distributing the Coaches Registry digital brochure.

MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL COACHES REGISTRY

for MI Excel Content Coaches serving Priority Schools

Home Content Coaches ISD/ESA Seeking Coaches Job Board FAQ

Welcome to the Michigan Educational Coaches Registry

MI Excel, Michigan's Statewide System of Support (SSoS) is expanding its current cadre of content coaches. The Michigan Educational Coaches Registry is designed to support content coaching services. Year 2 Title I Priority schools may choose a content coach who would be hired through the local ISD/RESA using Regional Assistance Grant Funds. Districts can use this site to check the eligibility status of a coach they are considering for employment.



To learn or share more information about becoming a MI Excel content coach, download our printable brochure here.

BECOMING A CONTENT COACH

The Michigan Educational Coaches Registry enables you to check the qualifications of an individual you are considering employing as a coach in your school or district. Please click on the "Quick Eligibility Check" button below to access the tool and search for individuals by name. If the individual is registered with us, his/her name will come up along with a list of successfully completed trainings and whether the individual is eligible to be a MI Excel content coach in Priority schools.

Quick Eligibility Check

Looking Ahead

The vision of Coaching 101 was triggered by the question: Given the complexities of the work of school improvement, how can this program deepen and expand coaching knowledge and practice? We are answering this question by adding "Going Deeper" sessions throughout the coming year, where coaches will have the opportunity to:

- practice while being videotaped, then review and reflect on their practice;
- observe more complex videos and identify discreet skills;
- provide feedback to each other on their coaching; and
- have deeper conversations around the implications of this work.

Supporting the Work

From data to technology, MSU has supported the work of Priority and Focus schools and districts in innovative ways. With an “open door policy,” MSU K–12 Outreach has worked to respond to the issues and needs of the MSU specialists and facilitators, and MI Excel school and district personnel in a timely manner. The MSU K–12 team has also endeavored to find new and creative ways to deliver resources to the field that will expand their knowledge base and expertise as they approach this complex work.

To that end, MSU has provided hard-copy and online materials designed to enrich educators understanding of practice, as well as the research that underpins that practice.



Books

More than 20 books were provided to MSU field staff to assist them in working with Priority and Focus schools. Many of these books were written by the experts who presented at the summer institute training sessions. Focus and Priority school and district leaders who attended the summer institutes also received a variety of books, Power-Point presentations, and other supportive materials.

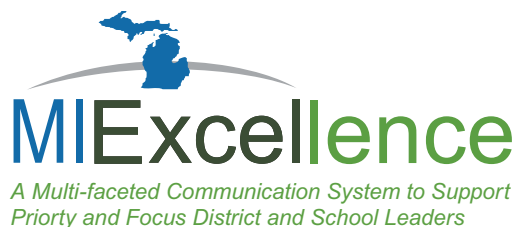
Informational Booklets

Being designated a Priority or Focus school generated a great many questions and the need for clear information about what each designation meant and what schools needed to do. To fill that need, MSU in cooperation with MDE produced several informational booklets designed to clearly lay out the facts about being a Focus or Priority school, the MDE requirements, Title I requirements, and the resources available to these schools, including the MI Excel program. Another booklet detailing the data dialogue process was also produced. These booklets were widely distributed at all training sessions, and made available to all MI Excel partners. The data dialogue booklet titled, *Data Conversations: Using Data to Inform Rapid Transformation and District School Improvement through Data Dialogues*, is already going into its second printing.



Electronic Communications

Using programs like MailChimp, Salesforce, and GoTo-Meeting, MSU has developed a comprehensive two-way communication structure to transmit information and data to and from the field.



Creating Online Tools and Resources

MI Toolkit

The MI Toolkit was launched on August 30, 2013 (mitoolkit.org). It has been designed to provide a rich resource for Priority and Focus educators seeking to improve student achievement, as well as our own specialists and facilitators. The site contains information, research, tools, and best practices, drawn from the vast expertise of MSU's College of Education and beyond, that are presented in a format that practitioners will find useful and easy to use. The Toolkit integrates print, video, downloadable tools and worksheets, and links to outside resource to provide a comprehensive and growing resource for Priority and Focus school and district personnel. Over the coming year, the topics of coaching and data use will be integrated into the site.

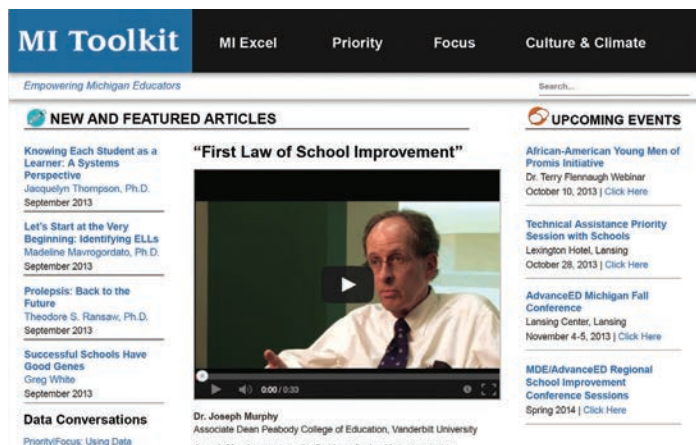
Priority Schools Page. The key feature of this page is the Priority Toolbox. The Toolbox hosts information and tools associated with each of the seven ERS strategies, as well as the MDE District Toolbox built around the same strategies. All tools will be downloadable and some will be interactive. All will be useful. This page also features articles on raising achievement, as well as stories about Priority school challenges, issues, and successes.

Focus Schools Page. This page features articles, resources, and tools that Focus schools can use to address on the achievement gap as it pertains to specific populations: students of color, students of poverty, special education students, and English language learners. The articles are thought-provoking and offer insights into the complex work of supporting all learners, as well as tools and worksheets to facilitate that work. This page also features a Toolbox, with hands-on worksheets and tools to help practitioners address achievement gaps.

Culture and Climate. This page features a publication on the fundamentals of Culture and Climate, as well as articles pertaining to these topics. Since changing the culture and climate of a school is critical to rapid and lasting improvement, this page will be a real asset to the usefulness of the site to both Priority and Focus schools.

MI Excel Page. Because it's important for Priority and Focus school/district educators to understand the MI Excel program and know the partners involved in supporting their improvement, MSU created the MI Excel page. A general description of the program is included, as well as a description of each partner and links to their home web pages.

MI Toolkit is a "living" site that is updated a minimum of once a month with unique, high-quality, user-friendly, and mission-oriented content. MSU's goal is to create a "go to" online site where Title I Priority and Focus school and district personnel who are seeking to improve student achievement and eliminate achievement gaps will find the information they need.

The screenshot shows the MI Toolkit website. The header includes the logo "MI Toolkit" and navigation tabs for "MI Excel", "Priority", "Focus", and "Culture & Climate". Below the header is a search bar and a "NEW AND FEATURED ARTICLES" section. The main content area features a video player titled "First Law of School Improvement" with a play button and a video player interface. To the right of the video is an "UPCOMING EVENTS" section listing several events with dates and "Click Here" links. The footer includes "Data Conversations" and "Priority/Focus: Using Data".

Other Online Resources

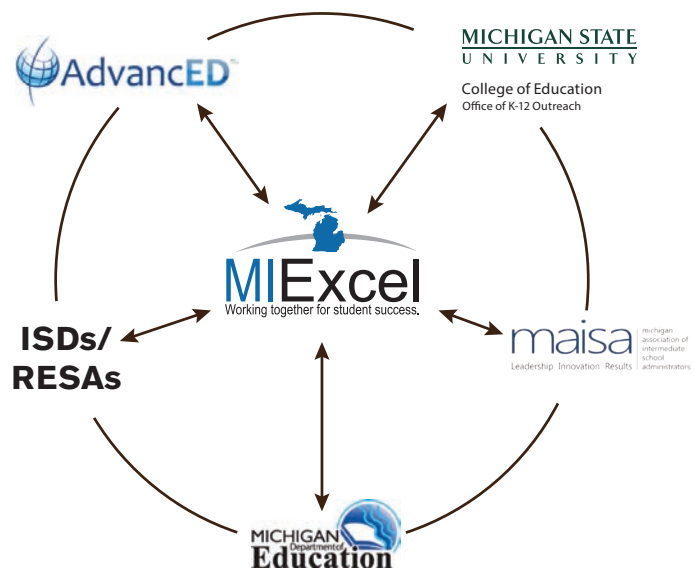
MSU built, implemented, administered, and supervised the MI Excel portal at portal.miexcel.org. Through this portal, staff generate weekly activity reports and access a question-and-answer forum. The portal also creates an avenue for collecting data (73 data collection templates have been developed) and tracking assistance given to constituent districts and schools.

MSU also developed and tested shared calendar and virtual meeting solutions to support cost-effective personnel management. Forms and tools used by Office of K-12 Outreach staff also were extensively revamped to ensure applicability and efficiency).

Moving Ahead with Collaborative Partnerships

One of the hallmarks of Year 1 of the MI Excel program has been unparalleled collaboration between the MDE, MSU and the rest of the MI Excel partners. It hasn't always been easy; but with all eyes on our common mission, the MI Excel partnership has built a coherent and collaborative support system to support Michigan's Title I Priority and Focus schools.

The first-year accomplishments of the MI Excel program are due in great part to the relationships developed between and among all partners. Of particular importance has been the working rapport between MSU's leadership and management teams, and MSU and ISD/RESA field staff. These relationships were developed and reinforced through frequent meetings at all levels of the organizations. ISD school improvement facilitators (SIFS), MSU specialists, and MDE staff collaboratively engaged in meetings, trainings, and conversations in support of Priority districts and schools. The MSU/MDE/ISD Workgroup met regularly to communicate around the work, identify issues, and make recommendations for solutions. The MSU and MDE Management Team also met regularly to discuss management-level opportunities and issues and to collaboratively discuss issues and surface opportunities.



The value of this work was summed up by an MSU Priority School specialist:

I am so glad I'm doing this because there are now kids who have hope and an academic future. I am so glad that educators have been given the opportunity to grow, learn and embrace possibility. I am glad to be part of the dialogue, to be part of the plan, solution, and the future.

MSU is proud to be a part of the MI Excel program, and of the strong foundation that has been laid for Year 2 and beyond. Priority and Focus schools and districts are now accepting of MSU specialists and facilitators, and even more importantly, are becoming more and more convinced that achieving excellence and equity in their schools is indeed possible. A smaller, well-trained, and seasoned staff are enthusiastic and ready to continue working with these schools as they pursue this mission. Strong collaborative relationships among the MI Excel partners will keep this innovative program on the cutting edge as we work together to identify new directions for the work that will provide even stronger support for Michigan's improving schools.