| **School Name** | Salem Academy Charter School |
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| **Grade Span Targeted by Best Practice** | 6-12 |
| **Contact** | Stephanie Callahan, Head of School,scallahan@salemacademycs.org |
| **Related Charter School Performance Criteria/Conditions for School Effectiveness** | Effective School Leadership  Curriculum and Instruction |
| **Innovation/Best Practice(s)** | Standards-Driven Instructional Practices |
| **Rationale Supporting Best Practice** | Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) students have demonstrated high growth and achievement on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the school ranks well above state and national averages for AP performance, earning Salem Academy a ranking of 5th Best Public High School in MA from *U.S. News and World Report* in 2013 and among the top 5% of successful schools in 2015.  SACS has consistently met the majority of targets for student growth as determined by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), earning a “Level 1” status, the highest possible, for three years in a row.  100% of SACS graduates are accepted into college with 85% matriculating. |
| **Partner** | Salem Public Schools |
| **Target Audience for Best Practice** | Schools looking to implement Standards-Based Grading or improve student outcomes through proven standards-driven instructional practices. |
| **Objective for Disseminating this Best Practice** | To increase the capacity of school district leaders to support teams and teachers to align instruction and assessment to meet specific standards; raising and sustaining student achievement are the ultimate goals. |
| **Summary** | SACS’s standards-driven instructional practice (SDIP) is based on the research of Dr. Robert Marzano and is driven first and foremost by explicit, measurable standards. The school and its teachers design all instructional practices around student learning outcomes.  The outcomes are informed primarily by state defined standards (MA Curriculum Frameworks / Common Core State Standards) and additionally by school learning goals and other college readiness indicators (e.g., Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and Advanced Placement (AP) skill expectations). They explicitly state what students must know and do in order to exhibit academic mastery.  **Standards-driven instructional practices use a continuous cycle of improvement to raise student achievement.** It is a system of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that is based on students demonstrating mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education.  SDIP ensures that all students can learn and demonstrate mastery of required skills and content when the academic program is designed around a constant cycle of teaching and learning that is rooted in the desired outcome.  **The underlying principle behind SDIP is to “begin with the end in mind.”** The outcome is described by course-specific standards and guides the design of a teaching and learning cycle that answers four critical questions:   * What do students need to know, understand and be able to do? * How do we teach effectively to ensure all students are learning? * How do we know students are learning? * What do we do when students are not learning or are reaching mastery before expectation?   Implementing SDIP requires several pre conditions: intimate knowledge of an agreed upon set of standards, an understanding of what grade-appropriate mastery looks like for each; scales to universally measure progress toward reaching the standard; quality assessments aligned to the standard and measured at least three times; a continual cycle of data collection and analysis to inform both teacher and student; and a reporting system that accurately captures progress toward proficiency and communicates it in a timely way.  **Unless the methodology is fully integrated with the philosophy and organizational structure of the school or district, implementation will flounder**. **SDIP is not a “program” to be delivered alongside or as a supplement to other initiatives; it is the organizing principle through which all other efforts are filtered.**  Fixating on the desired outcome for students is the “ends” and the teaching and learning cycle is the “means”.  Successful implementation of a standards-driven model requires specific supportive conditions be met to support the teaching and learning cycle, these include:   * Visionary leadership focused on high expectations for students and staff. * A common, universally articulated mission, shared values and guiding principles aligned with measurable accountability. * Motivated staff with ample opportunity to build individual and organizational capacity. * Consistent behavioral expectations, classroom management and reinforcement. * Organizational structures aligned with SDIP, including:   + hiring practices aligned with culture of high expectations;   + ongoing professional development aligned with evolving practice;   + support and coaching aligned with formal evaluation;   + universal behavior management policies and procedures;   + opportunities for reflection and improvement;   + tools for design, implementation and monitoring of practices;   + time for team and individual planning, reflection and recalibration;   + balancing consistent classroom procedures and documentation requirements with autonomy of instructional method and professional judgment; and   + clear and consistent communication with students and families. |
| **Reflection** | Through this partnership, we had the opportunity to bring experts, including Dr. Robert Marzano, to Salem through a series of Think Tanks. These Think Tanks provided us with an opportunity to reflect on our practice and make adjustments to better meet the needs of our students. The most significant practice we changed is how we calculate course grades. Rather than assigning a grade based on the percentage of standards met, we now average the standards grades, resulting in a more rigorous and accurate description of overall performance in a course. |
| **Resources** | Our doors are always open to visitors and we have hosted several school leadership groups over the past years. Coming soon – we’ll have an e-book of our SDIP, along with access to our curriculum maps, major assessments, and some lesson plans. |