

INTRODUCTION

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted with Southwest Missouri State University's Institute for School Improvement to conduct an evaluation of Missouri's SuccessLink professional development programs. The SuccessLink programs evaluated in this study include: *Best Practices*, *Teacher Toolbox*, *TEAMS Distance Learning*, *Great Teaching Ideas*, and the *Missouri Elementary Science Connection (MESOC)* program.

This study reports analyses of data provided by 212 educators from the state of Missouri who responded to a survey questionnaire designed to collect perceptual data regarding the DESE SuccessLink programs. This report also contains content analysis of nine focus group interviews conducted in each of the Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) regions with participants identified by SuccessLink staff as highly involved in one or more SuccessLink program(s).

Centrally located in Jefferson City, Missouri, SuccessLink serves as an umbrella organization for several professional development initiatives involving administrators and teachers in elementary, middle and high school settings. The following descriptions identify the key components and goals of each SuccessLink program; and Tables A – E display program participation disaggregated by RPDC region and year. (See Appendix A.)

Best Practices is a program designed to recognize ideas, lessons and appropriate practices developed by Missouri teachers which have helped to address areas of concern in their school / district. SuccessLink disseminates this information to other Missouri schools / districts and then assists in facilitating the replication of "Best Practices."

Teacher Toolbox provides professional development in Cooperative Learning strategies for Missouri teachers. The program is designed to provide hands-on training for elementary, middle school, and high school teachers who learn techniques and help them to better teach components to students.

TEAMS is a Distance Learning project aimed at providing technology oriented, core subject programs for grades one through eight. The programs are available to school districts via satellite, cable, public television, and video. TEAMS is a federally-funded STAR Schools project serving over 120,000 elementary students in 22 states.

Great Teaching Ideas is a SuccessLink and Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education free resource that provides Missouri teachers with a website containing lessons and teaching units for use in the K –12 classroom.

Missouri Elementary Science Connection (MESOC) provides science opportunities for students in kindergarten through the fifth grade by establishing a core team of instructors who conduct in-service training in "hands-on," "minds-on" science instruction for Missouri elementary teachers.

METHODS

Survey Questionnaire

The SMSU Institute for School Improvement surveyed 500 educators identified by SuccessLink staff as participants in one or more SuccessLink program(s): *Best Practices*, *Teacher Toolbox*, *TEAMS Distance Learning*, *Great Teaching Ideas*, and the *Missouri Elementary Science Connection (MESCC) program*. Survey questionnaires (see Appendix B) were mailed on October 15, 2000, with 42.4% of those surveyed responding.

The purpose of the survey questionnaire was to obtain and examine perceptual data regarding the professional development opportunities provided by SuccessLink, and the impact each of SuccessLink's professional development programs has on teaching and learning. The intent of this method of data collection was to aggregate data defining SuccessLink as a single unit and to evaluate each of the five SuccessLink programs individually.

A statewide profile of the SuccessLink program is presented in this report. All SuccessLink participants are identified by program affiliation according to the data received from SuccessLink staff. Respondents identified as specific program participants often completed survey questions regarding other SuccessLink programs which may indicate that educators involved in SuccessLink professional development opportunities have a working knowledge of at least one, if not more than one, of the SuccessLink programs listed above.

Focus Group Interviews

The SMSU Institute for School Improvement conducted nine focus group interviews to examine issues relating to the SuccessLink program(s). Focus group interviews were conducted from October 14, 2000 to February 6, 2001, one in each of the nine Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) regions. Focus group participants were identified by SuccessLink staff and consisted of educators throughout the state who were familiar with one or more SuccessLink program(s). These educators included elementary, middle, and high school classroom teachers in addition to area administrators, each having some level of involvement in one or more SuccessLink program(s). The purpose of the nine focus groups was to generate information about SuccessLink activities / programs and the perceived impact these programs have had and are having on teaching and learning throughout Missouri.

Focus group interviews followed a semi-structured protocol that included eight questions. Protocol and questions were developed and approved by SuccessLink staff on August 29, 2000 in consultation with the research evaluation team. Focus group interviews lasted approximately 40-45 minutes, and each group was asked the same eight questions with follow-up questions based on individual group responses. Sessions were tape recorded, and facilitators also made field notes. Tapes and notes were content analyzed using the constant comparative method of data reduction and association. Appendix C contains the focus group protocol used in each of the nine focus group interviews.