Challenges and Triumphs of Assessing Implementation Status and Progress Toward Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

Increasing Participation of Underserved Student Populations in Gifted Education Programs

Montgomery County Public Schools — ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

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PURPOSE OF THE INITIATIVE

To increase identification of students ready for accelerated and enriched instruction among underserved populations (i.e., Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students and FARMS and special education students).

SETTING

- Large public school district in the United States with diverse population
- Elementary (K–5) schools with majority of students participating in Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS)
- A federally funded initiative with common goals, inputs, activities, and target population across schools

Instruments

School-level action plan: School-level foci and status of implementation of five outcomes

School-level training logs: Record of site-specific contacts with school staff, students, and parents related to the initiative

Teacher training inventory: Record of teachers trained to support initiative, professional development offerings completed by teachers, and assessment of training needs

Student instructional services tool: Record of accelerated and enriched opportunities provided to individual students

Annual teacher survey: Teachers' perceptions of professional development and their capacity to provide accelerated and enriched instruction

Purpose of the Evaluation

Examine the implementation and outcomes of the initiative within and across schools. Specifically to—
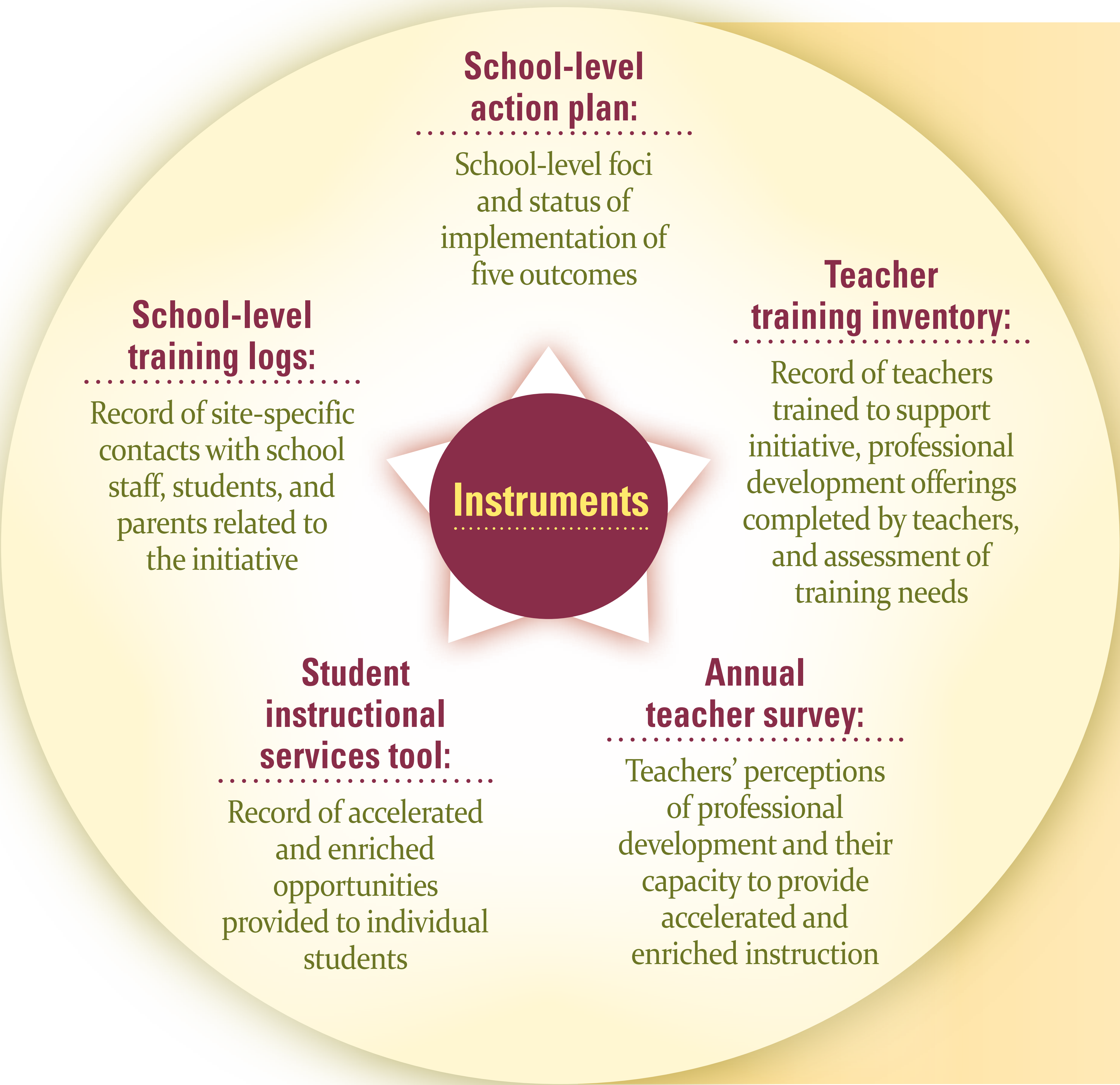
- assess fidelity of implementation of components of the initiative;
- assess progress toward attainment of short- and long-term goals specified in program logic; increase—
  - implementation of components of the initiative,
  - districtwide teacher training in differentiated instruction,
  - application and acceptance of underserved students for accelerated and enriched instruction,
  - parents' advocacy for their child's accelerated instruction,
  - access to accelerated and enriched instruction among underserved students,
  - academic achievement among underserved students; and
- identify areas needing improvement.

Challenges

1. Multiyear dynamic initiative with ongoing enhancements
2. Getting uniform data across multiple schools—at least 30 sites per year
3. Diversity of target audiences and settings: school, teacher, instructional program, classroom, and student
4. Variability of implementation across schools
5. Data management and analyses
6. Staff capacity for data collection and use of technology varied across sites
7. Program staff turnover

Addressing Challenges

- **Developed five common instruments** and instituted consistent timelines for administration of each instrument across all sites
- **Collaborated with stakeholders** at each stage of instrument development and refinement
- **Simplified data collection instruments:** language, usability, technology demands
- **Used electronic technology** to collect and manage data across multiple sites
- **Provided regular professional development and ongoing technical assistance** to increase program staff capacity for data collection

TRIUMPHS AND VALUE-ADDED ASPECTS

The Evaluation—

- kept the program logic in focus and ascertained alignment of activities implemented with the intended goals from year to year;
- clarified components and expectations of initiative to schools, teachers, and administrators;
- served as a form of professional development by explaining the program logic, providing training for data collection, use of technology, and use of data;
- ensured consistency of implementation of initiative across schools; and
- enabled the development of an electronic data infrastructure system that allowed schools and teachers to retain and access their school-level data.

Result:

The evaluation standardized data collection procedures and increased the knowledge of contextual factors that contributed to or hindered effectiveness of the initiative.