

Executive Summary
Strong Start to Finish
Scaling Site Evaluation

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Overview

The Executive Summary of the Strong Start to Finish Qualitative Evaluation captures valuable lessons and insights that can inform state and system efforts to design, implement and scale developmental education reforms. The SStF network has become a valuable resource to the field through its ability to direct resources to states and systems to implement and scale the reforms in the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within A Comprehensive Student Success Strategy. Included in the Executive Summary are brief overviews of the four scaling sites, the practices and strategies they used to engage institutions in the work of implementation and scale, and how SStF supported scaling sites throughout the initiative. Key insights from the evaluation reveal how the states and systems that were awarded scaling site grants enhanced their existing efforts to scale developmental education reforms through targeted investments that were informed by the evidence and strategies included in the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within a Comprehensive Student Success Framework. Lessons from the evaluation reveal how scaling sites can leverage their governing, policy or convening capacity to engage institutions in the work of designing, implementing, and evaluating developmental education reforms that have proven to dramatically improve the success of all students. The evaluation outlines how states and systems can design their efforts to achieve equitable outcomes for students who are racially minoritized, those with low incomes and adults who are returning to college. In addition, the evaluation addresses ways that data can be more effectively utilized to assess and continuously improve the reforms. The Executive Summary concludes with recommendations on how SStF can continue to create a culture of learning within the Strong Start to Finish network.

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Introduction

Strong Start to Finish (SStF) is a network of policy and research partners, institution and systems leaders and foundations advancing system reforms in developmental education, so every student can succeed in their first year of college. SStF was born from over a decade of research and practice that transformed the field's collective understanding of developmental education. Researchers and practitioners revealed the root causes of systemic failure that prevented students from successfully accessing and completing gateway math and English courses and identified the solutions that resulted in dramatic improvements in the success rates of students in those same courses. [The Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within a Comprehensive Student Success Framework](#) is a powerful and evolving statement to the field on the strategies and practices that institutions, systems, and states should pursue to meet the needs of students who are assessed as needing additional support in gateway courses. The Core Principles provided a blueprint for a national initiative to scale reforms that eventually became SStF. In 2017, a joint investment from the Ascendium Education Group, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Kresge Foundation to the Education Commission of the States created SStF. It was designed as a national network of postsecondary leaders rooted in the Core Principles and committed to taking collective action to ensure students get the support they need to succeed in their first year of college. The first-year benchmarks included completion of gateway math and English, entering a program of study, and ideally earning 30 credits toward a postsecondary credential. Further, SStF sought to reduce equity gaps in student achievement through an understanding that Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students; adult students and students experiencing poverty are more likely to be enrolled in ineffective prerequisite remedial education and are therefore disproportionately affected by the structures that delay and deny students access to gateway courses.

The initial project from Strong Start to Finish was to invest in states and systems that had committed to and made significant progress toward implementing and scaling reforms outlined in the Core Principles. The states and systems would serve as “scaling sites” that would accelerate the implementation of reforms in order to impact many more students in a shorter time frame and serve as models of scale that could be replicated across the nation. The investment of the Ascendium Education Group, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Kresge Foundation enabled SStF to make three-year grants, beginning with the fall, 2018 academic year to the City University of New York (CUNY), Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), the State University of New York (SUNY), and the University System of Georgia (USG) to implement and scale Core Principle reforms.

The SStF network has continued to grow by investing in additional states and systems, where reforms were typically not as advanced, to achieve discrete goals; building a network of service providers that support states, systems and institutions; and funding research to deepen the evidence-base in support of reforms.

Purpose

This evaluation captures valuable lessons and insights that can inform state and system efforts to design, implement and scale developmental education reforms. Included are brief overviews of the four scaling

sites, the practices and strategies they used to engage institutions in the work of implementation and scale, and how SStF supported scaling sites throughout the initiative. The evaluation used multiple methods and sources to include a review of documents produced by SStF and the scaling sites; a review of data submitted by scaling sites to NCHEMS and SStF; and interviews/focus groups with SStF staff and leaders, scaling site representatives, institutional faculty and staff, and leaders of color who served in various roles at their respective institutions.

SStF positively impacted scaling sites' implementation of reforms

From the perspective of state, system and institutional leaders, being selected as scaling sites recognized years of previous investments and initiatives to address the recognized failures of traditional approaches to assessing and placing students into prerequisite remedial education courses. The investment from SStF elevated the commitment, focus, accountability, and purpose of systems and institutions to scale reforms. Scaling sites all said their engagement in the SStF network was critical to moving their states and systems to scale.

Scaling site leaders agreed that the investment from SStF not only enabled them to make meaningful progress toward scaling Core Principle reforms, but also built their capacity to coordinate student success initiatives in the future. CUNY, ODHE, SUNY, and USG all reported that SStF resulted in valuable insights and the development of their capacity to more effectively engage institutions.

SStF service providers that had deep experience with implementing developmental education reforms agreed that SStF provided a unique opportunity to scale the evidence-based reforms in the Core Principles.

Scaling Site Profiles

The flexibility of SStF and its willingness to respond to scaling site needs allowed them to target their resources to areas they deemed important, but also areas where there were no alternative funding sources. This section provides an overview of each scaling site, their goals and overall outcomes.

The City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY's SStF project was designed to strengthen their systemwide Academic Momentum Campaign and achieve a systemwide goal to eliminate stand-alone remediation. CUNY dedicated most of their SStF resources to 10 degree granting colleges in the system to support faculty responsible for designing, implementing and scaling corequisite support in math and English at their institutions. The CUNY initiative would complement several existing pre-enrollment developmental education programs such as CUNY Start, Math Start, the University Skills Immersion Program, as well as the highly successful Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative. In addition, CUNY implemented a multiple-measures assessment placement system designed to achieve equitable access and success in gateway math and English courses. CUNY saw measurable improvements in the number of students from all racial/ethnic groups who completed gateway math and English courses over the course of the project, but the reforms did not close equity gaps that existed before implementation of reforms. CUNY's goal is for all community

colleges to have fully scaled corequisite support and end the practice of prerequisite remedial education by fall, 2022.

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE)

SStF provided ODHE the opportunity to build on existing efforts to implement the Core Principles by providing resources to institutions to implement and scale developmental education reforms. ODHE engaged 30 institutions in their SStF initiative through sub-grants to campuses that included a clearly stated goal to improve success rates in gateway math and English. Each campus was to implement a suite of strategies to include: institutional-level equity goals, clearly structured course sequences for all majors, aligned gateway courses to programs of study, reformed advising structures to ensure students register in course sequences, and corequisite math and English courses. Ohio achieved declines in the number and percent of students enrolled in prerequisite remedial education over the course of the project. Ohio saw greater increases in gateway completion for Black students than for white or Asian students. Institutions progressed on each of the components they were asked to implement as a condition of their sub-grant. ODHE was able to leverage SStF to help change the state's outcomes-based funding formula to reward gateway success rather than developmental education completion.

The State University System of New York (SUNY)

SUNY's SStF work focused on accelerating and scaling guided pathways reforms, scaling math pathways - including Quantway and Statway, implementing corequisites in math, implementing corequisite English, and supporting the adoption of multiple measures placement, holistic student supports, and other Core Principle reforms. SUNY provided grants to institutions, technical assistance from service providers, and invested in staff capacity to facilitate communities of practice. The SStF grant complemented SUNY's efforts to implement Guided Pathways at 30 community colleges and nine four-year institutions. SUNY far exceeded their goals for implementing Guided Pathways and impacting students through those reforms. SUNY also made considerable progress implementing corequisite English and expanded student participation in Carnegie Quantway and Statway, and made progress on the adoption of corequisite math. Several SUNY institutions implemented multiple measure assessments. SUNY saw gaps between Black and Hispanic students and Asian and White students narrow.

The University System of Georgia (USG)

Before their SStF grant, USG fully scaled corequisite support for 100% of students who were assessed as needing learning support at all 26 institutions in the system. Improvements in gateway course success rates due to increases in enrollments in gateway courses were already captured before the start of the grant. Going into the grant period, they focused on a Momentum Year strategy that sought to increase the percentage of students who completed gateway courses, earned 30 semester credits, and enrolled in nine credits in a program of study in their first academic year at all USG institutions. Institutions implemented advising supports to enable students to make a "purposeful choice of a program of study" and instructional improvements to contribute to a "productive academic mindset" for students. The SStF investment enabled USG to invest in deeper instructional reforms in gateway courses and corequisites,

and to expand other advising tools like academic focus areas and degree maps. SStF enabled the system to move from a “cafeteria model” of student success where institutions pick and choose student success reforms to a “recipe model” where institutions were expected to implement all Momentum Year reforms. USG used their SStF resources for their annual Momentum Summit and professional development workshops. In addition, they dedicated significant resources to service providers to support instructional improvements and the Momentum Year work. They saw dramatic improvements in course success for first-time students who enrolled in corequisite courses. All demographic groups saw improvements in DFWI rates. USG also ensured that students enrolled at system institutions either selected an academic focus area or major within their first academic year.

Scaling Site Implementation

The work of the four scaling sites provided valuable insights on how states and systems can work effectively with postsecondary institutions to drive the implementation and scale of evidence-based reforms. Understanding how states and systems can support institutional leaders to facilitate the adoption of reforms has tremendous implications for the role of states and systems in the work of institutional transformation.

Governing authority impacted how scaling sites approached the work

The different approaches that each scaling site took to implement Core Principle reforms before and during their SStF projects were largely a reflection of their governance structure and policy context. The level of authority scaling sites had over institutions, the policies that guided efforts, and the traditional role of the scaling sites as primarily accountability structures, rather than facilitators of student success efforts impacted how they approached their work.

Scaling sites with governing authority required institutional participation

Those scaling sites with governing authority could require institutions to participate in the initiative, while those without that authority needed to make participation voluntary. Scaling sites with governing authority were able to articulate expectations for institutions through a coordinated strategy or by providing clear guidance on how resources provided to institutions were to be used to support implementation of Core Principle reforms. Those scaling sites without governing authority invited institutions to participate and provided sub-grants with the flexibility to allow institutions to determine how to use resources to achieve project goals consistent with their institutional context.

Policy accelerated reform efforts

Three of the scaling sites had policies or policy goals that either set the context for the SStF reforms or specifically required institutions to implement SStF reforms. Two scaling sites had either policy or policy goals that eliminated traditional developmental education in favor of corequisites. A third scaling site utilized a reform to their state funding formula that rewards institutions for students passing gateway courses to create an incentive for institutions to design and implement reforms. In all three cases, policy was important to moving reforms quickly and providing administrators cover to move reforms forward.

Scaling Site Strategies: Setting the Context

Scaling sites leveraged the goals of SStF to set the context for large scale reforms. The alignment of the Core Principle reforms with the student success goals of each scaling site provided clarity on the expectations for institutions and focused the support provided by scaling sites to institutions.

Scaling sites aligned their work to the Core Principles

The Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within a Comprehensive Student Success Framework provided clarity to scaling sites on the specific evidence-based reforms that they should prioritize. All scaling sites referenced how the Core Principles shaped their proposals and work plans. Scaling sites set goals that extended beyond simply implementing reforms to developmental education to include strategies to demonstrate improvements in other Core Principle metrics like credit accumulation and students entering programs of study by the end of their first year.

Policy development process impacted implementation

The process for setting and implementing policy had implications for institutional implementation of reforms. System leaders that deliberately engaged institutions in the policy development process and were clear about how to implement the policy were able to build momentum for the effective implementation of reforms. Scaling site leaders who engaged institutional leaders, faculty and other institutional stakeholders directly during the policy formation and development processes were able to generate greater support for the reforms.

Effective messaging from scaling site leadership focused institutional efforts

Scaling sites benefited from system-level leaders who effectively framed the SStF work within a broader student success initiative and developed a consistent message that provided greater clarity about project goals and strategies. Examples of strong leadership included effectively making the case for reforms and clearly articulating expectations to institutions. When the goals and rationale for reforms were well communicated, institutional leaders understood what was expected of them and designed their project workplans and dedicated resources toward meeting those expectations. In cases where the goal of the initiative was not clearly distinguished from other student success reform efforts, institutional efforts were not as focused and impactful.

Scaling Site Strategies: Supporting Institutional Implementation

Scaling sites had a set of valuable assets and strategies at their disposal to guide their work with institutions. Each approach was rooted in their state or system level context and built upon preexisting efforts to implement Core Principle reforms. In all cases, scaling sites learned a great deal about how to implement and scale Core Principle reforms.

Sub-grants to institutions provided focus, funding, and accountability

Sub-grants from scaling sites to institutions resourced campus-level efforts, but also had symbolic value. Institutional leaders reported that reform initiatives rarely come with funding so having resources for this initiative demonstrated that the scaling sites valued the work being done at the institutional level. Even institutions that were skeptical of reforms were more likely to engage in the work because of the

availability of resources. Scaling sites used a variety of approaches to disseminate funds to institutions. Examples included providing funding once institutions submitted a detailed workplan and after making adequate progress toward initiative goals, and providing funding to institutions with precise guidance on how the funds were to be spent in order to achieve project goals.

The differences in how funds were disbursed were largely consistent with how they monitored overall progress toward project goals. Those scaling sites that were focused on fulfillment of workplans, monitored funding against achievement of workplan activities. Those scaling sites that were focused on achievement of project goals and outcomes tracked the extent that achievement of larger goals and outcomes were commensurate with the investment made in respective institutions. For example, one scaling site tracked whether faculty who received professional development on corequisite approaches actually taught sections of corequisites in subsequent semesters after receiving training.

Cross-institutional collaboration was valued

Scaling-site and institutional leaders agreed that scaling site facilitated activities to connect with colleagues at other institutions resulted in collaboration and professional learning. The cross-institutional engagements provided opportunities for institutional leaders to learn from both service providers and from one another. In addition, convenings provided the opportunity to reinforce key goals and priorities for the initiative to institutional leaders. Early in the project, scaling sites hosted in person system or statewide convenings where institutional teams incorporated new information shared by state and system leaders, institutional peers, and service providers into their implementation efforts. Eventually, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, those convenings became virtual. An unintended benefit of the shift to virtual convenings was that institutions were able to broaden attendance to those who would not otherwise have participated in-person. This shift resulted in deeper engagement and more effective dissemination of information to scaling sites.

Scaling sites expanded their use of service providers

SStF trusted that scaling sites could effectively assess their technical assistance needs and identify the appropriate service providers to deliver them. For the most part, scaling sites chose to work with service providers that they already knew. Over time, scaling sites discovered new providers that offered unique services and interventions. In particular, the shift to online learning precipitated new opportunities to work with service providers to train faculty in effective online learning.

Institutional Successes and Challenges

As institutions engaged in the work of scaling Core Principle reforms, they discovered successful approaches for driving implementation and encountered some challenges.

Aligning SStF work to institutional student success goals

Scaling sites indicated how institutions had varying levels of success implementing SStF-related reforms. What distinguished successful institutions from those that struggled was the extent that the SStF-related reforms were seen as an institution-wide effort aligned with existing or aspirational student success reforms. Institutions that recognized SStF as a student success initiative, not just a developmental education initiative, experienced better collaboration and significant cultural change among faculty,

advisors and other staff. Institutional leaders articulated that the SStF reforms brought about a shift in mindset among themselves and their colleagues. Institutions that struggled with the reforms typically lacked strong leadership or buy-in from presidents, provosts and other institutional leaders. Sometimes the lack of leadership was due to leadership turnover. In other cases, leaders were not engaged in the initiative, leaving faculty and lower-level staff to fend for themselves.

Accessing technical assistance

When institutions had resources from their project sub-grants or the opportunity to access technical assistance for their campus, they often struggled to assess their technical assistance needs and to identify the appropriate service provider. Institutions often sought out service providers without full understanding of whether they needed a service or not. SStF network providers felt that states and system leaders that provided sub-grants should have helped match institutions with the service providers that could best meet their needs.

Data Collection and Use by Scaling Sites

Scaling sites gathered and analyzed their own data to monitor progress

Many scaling sites and institutions conducted robust analyses and tracked their own progress at a local level. However, because that data was not reported to SStF, they were not able to participate in shared learning across scaling sites on how reforms were impacting student outcomes. As a result, SStF had little information that would enable them and the scaling sites to make course corrections during the project. Instead, most of the insights on the effectiveness of reforms that were discussed among SStF and scaling sites were anecdotal and not rooted in quantitative data.

Institutional use of data was uneven

Institutional use of data fell into two categories, institutions with strategic data use that resulted in program modifications and improvements and institutions that did not use data effectively or at all. Institutions that did not use data, which were often smaller in size, expressed frustration at their lack of capacity and expertise to do so. In addition, there was little clarity on what data elements institutions should be examining since the centralized SStF data collection was not necessarily aligned with the data points that scaling sites were monitoring. Institutions that had a strong culture of data use looked beyond gateway pass rates and incorporated other elements to include student experience and learning outcomes.

Scaling Site Equity Strategies

There was a growing recognition by SStF and the scaling sites that increasing access to gateway courses through developmental education reforms was insufficient to achieving equitable outcomes. While progress for all students improved in scaling sites, there was nothing about the structural reforms that were specifically designed to address equity gaps, which means these gaps were likely to remain. Eventually, SStF adopted a new vision for equity in education to ensure that “ineffective developmental education policies and practices must be replaced with procedures and perceptions in support of students who are racially minoritized, those with low incomes and adults who are returning to college.”

Scaling site planned equity strategies did not target specific student populations

Scaling sites varied on how they intended to use disaggregated data and close equity gaps. For the most part, sites relied on implementation of reforms that eliminated or dramatically reduced prerequisite developmental education courses to create more equal access to gateway courses in order to close equity gaps. Some scaling sites set goals for ensuring that the students served by the reforms were consistent with their demographic representation at institutions. Others established key performance indicators to track progress toward equitable outcomes. One scaling site worked with service providers to look at course-level data to redesign gateway courses with the goal of achieving improved and equitable outcomes. Overall, the efforts did not involve the identification of data and strategies intended to meet the unique needs of various student populations.

Institutional leaders were not effectively engaged in equity work

Some faculty and staff were concerned about the lack of leadership and clarity on equity from institutional and system leaders, leaving them to navigate those issues on their own or feeling that their concerns were not heard. Service providers perceived that most of the equity work was focused on faculty and should also have included institutional leadership. When there was not a commitment to equity from institutional leadership, institutional teams faced greater challenges when engaging their colleagues on equitable practices.

As the initiative progressed there was a greater focus on equity

The pandemic and the heightened racial awareness that resulted from the murder of Black people like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020 offered the opportunity for scaling sites to reprioritize their efforts and investments. SStF responded by providing webinars around topics related to equity in education. Service providers helped scaling sites by emphasizing equity in their service engagements on the implementation of equitable placement and instructional practices, equity trainings for institutional leaders, strategies for surfacing deficit-based language in course names and descriptions, and sessions on how to use disaggregated data to generate equity-focused solutions. Scaling sites learned about effective practices from one another through sessions on using disaggregated data to better understand the impact of faculty mindset on equitable outcomes, and the design of equitable advising strategies. SStF provided scaling sites with toolkits, such as the [Success & Equity in Through Quality Instruction](#) and the [Faculty & Staff Support: A Toolkit for Mid-Level Managers](#) that describe targeted strategies to address institutional barriers that affect students, particularly those from underserved populations. A majority of institutions interviewed across scaling sites said that these activities increased their ability to approach implementation from an asset-based, student-centered perspective. Specifically, institutional stakeholders found webinars sponsored by scaling sites that focused on equitable teaching and learning to be extraordinarily helpful in reflecting on and refining their practice.

Faculty Engagement Findings

Faculty engagement and commitment was important to success

All scaling sites engaged faculty in the design of corequisite courses and other evidence-based instructional practices and involved them in professional learning on effective instruction. Scaling sites that were able to effectively engage faculty, build buy-in for reforms, and provide the support faculty

needed were more effective at getting reforms adopted and implemented at institutions. Scaling sites deployed a wide range of strategies to engage faculty in the design and implementation of reforms. Strategies included direct financial support for release time, professional development workshops on designing and instructing corequisite math and English courses, and creating communities of practice where faculty worked together to explore instructional practices for corequisite courses. Faculty worked with service providers to examine data and consider evidence-based strategies for redesigning gateway and corequisite courses. Faculty working groups examined research on effective implementation of corequisite courses and issued publications making the case for corequisites and providing guidance on how to design and teach the courses.

Coordination of faculty support at the system/state level presented challenges

When state and system level leaders engage faculty in the redesign of developmental education, they are confronting traditional cultural norms that curriculum and instruction are the exclusive domain of faculty. Scaling site leaders found that some faculty questioned the data they heard from scaling site leaders, choosing to believe their personal experiences. Additionally, many faculty perceived the SStF-related reforms in their systems as top down, although it is unclear if this perception impacted the implementation of reforms.

Faculty from institutions that viewed reforms as a college-wide initiative were more engaged and demonstrated a greater investment in the work. Faculty from institutions that took a college-wide approach were more likely to talk about how support from leadership and strong collaborative relationships with other stakeholder groups positively impacted other efforts beyond SStF. At institutions where the work was not a college-wide effort and instead was more narrowly focused on a faculty initiative to redesign and implement corequisite math and English courses, faculty often felt isolated. They reported the desire to connect with advisors and others on campus to help position the work into the larger institutional context.

Some faculty reported frustration by the lack of guidance from scaling site or institutional leadership on specific models of corequisite support. While some scaling sites and institutions wanted to protect the domain of faculty, too little guidance on reforms proved to be problematic in some cases.

Sustainability of institution-level professional learning is a challenge

One drawback to providing resources directly to institutions is sustainability. Some faculty were concerned that without additional funding they may not be able to continue to support and sustain the reforms. This finding suggests that institutions did not use their resources to establish more sustainable professional learning structures at their institutions. Scaling sites that built system-wide professional learning opportunities, like faculty learning communities, are better positioned to support sustainable professional learning opportunities for faculty.

The Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented disruption for postsecondary education systems and institutions and had an unavoidable impact on scaling site work. The abrupt shift to online learning and the psychological toll of the pandemic on students, faculty and college administrators are in many ways

immeasurable. Many scaling sites indicated that the pandemic had a direct impact on course pass rates and student enrollments.

Systemic barriers were magnified

Some scaling sites reported that the pandemic revealed systemic barriers that were present pre-pandemic but became more challenging with the onset of the pandemic. The life circumstances of students who enrolled at their institutions became highlighted for faculty and staff. For example, the shift to online learning highlighted the fact that many students do not have access to broadband internet.

The pandemic created urgency around improving instruction

The pandemic also revealed the need for more professional learning on how to provide online instruction. As online instruction shifted from a complementary instructional model to the primary instructional model, institutions were faced with the need to provide rapid professional development on online instruction. SStF and scaling sites quickly mobilized and enlisted consultants to provide shovel ready professional learning opportunities for faculty navigating an unforeseen disruption to their courses. Service providers developed solutions that engaged faculty in professional learning in on online instruction and other evidence-based instructional practices.

Pandemic complicated efforts to measure impact

The disruption caused by the pandemic made it difficult for systems and institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of reforms. Several institutions noted that they tried to collect data on the student experience, but found that students were too overwhelmed to participate. Institutions also noted that it was hard to know if outcomes were due to new course designs or to the pandemic.

Scaling sites leveraged resources to support institutions

The need to respond to the pandemic provided an opportunity for institutions to mobilize around specific reforms and remain committed to fundamentally reforming developmental education. Scaling sites reported that the pandemic provided institutions the opportunity to implement corequisite support, provide professional learning on virtual instruction and culturally responsive teaching practices, implement multiple measures placement, and provide more holistic supports for students. Scaling site staff and institution leaders observed that the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic complicated their efforts to implement developmental education reforms, but they stayed committed to their work plans. Scaling sites were successful at sustaining their work because of the momentum they had achieved going into the pandemic.

Strong Start to Finish Network Successes and Challenges

The SStF network has become a valuable resource to the field through its ability to direct resources to states and systems to implement and scale the reforms in the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within A Comprehensive Student Success Strategy. The SStF team, national student success leaders, and funders recognized they had a unique opportunity to provide funding to states and systems that had built momentum toward the implementation and scale of reforms. They envisioned a strategy that invested in states and systems that had already made considerable progress toward the implementation and scale of reforms outlined in the Core Principles. They seized the opportunity by

rapidly building the SStF team, conducting a thorough site selection process, and awarding grants to the four scaling sites. This effort alone is a tremendous accomplishment. From there, SStF set to work on building an infrastructure for both supporting and tracking the work of scaling sites. Because SStF prioritized getting resources to scaling sites, the infrastructure needed to evolve over time, often changing focus and approach. While many of the approaches to build and support the SStF network were effective, there are also some valuable lessons learned that could inform the further growth and development of SStF as the national leader and network for developmental education reform.

Successful SStF Network Strategies

SStF's primary mechanisms for engaging scaling sites were to provide the resources needed to facilitate institutional reforms, connect scaling sites to service providers, facilitate cross-scaling site engagements, and conduct data collection and analysis. Valuable insights were gained over the course of the project on how to most effectively leverage these strategies to further support the work of scaling sites.

The funding model accelerated change and empowered institutions

Funding scaling sites that had already made progress toward scaling reforms enabled them to accelerate their work toward scale. Funding created the belief among scaling sites that they could achieve their ambitious goals and bring together various student success efforts into one cohesive initiative. Funding empowered scaling sites and institutions to prioritize and support strategies that addressed stated needs. In addition, the financial investment valued the time and commitment of those involved. The large-scale investment also presented the opportunity for the scaling sites to be models for other states to follow.

Cross-site engagement spurred learning and connection

Scaling sites valued opportunities to engage the leaders from the other scaling sites. The primary opportunities for engagement were cross-site webinars. Scaling site leaders shared ideas, research and resources as each scaling site reported on their progress. While generally valued, some scaling sites felt that differences in governance structure, approach to scale, and level of progress made it difficult to always find value from the interactions. All scaling sites indicated that, in general, cross site engagement added energy and accountability to the work. The annual convening was another opportunity for cross-site engagement. Scaling sites noted that at the convenings, they built relationships and levels of collegiality across sites. While the scaling sites appreciated the engagement at the convenings, it was noted that these events focused more on scaling sites reporting on their progress, rather than working together to grapple with challenges they were encountering and collectively determining solutions.

In addition to formal engagements facilitated by SStF, scaling sites connected with one another independently by attending and presenting at each other's convenings.

Service providers were valued and there are opportunities for greater impact

Enlisting service providers to support and guide the scaling sites and their institutions was highly valued by the scaling sites. Scaling sites appreciated SStF's efforts to match them to service providers. While this coordination was not without its challenges, the work of the service providers was seen as highly productive and a value-add by the scaling sites. Service providers noted that without SStF, their work with

the scaling sites would not have been nearly as extensive. Some service providers valued being a part of the SStF network.

Strong Start to Finish Network Challenges

While there were several successful elements to the support provided by the SStF network to scaling sites, there were also limitations to the Strong Start to Finish network that prevented the network from fully assessing and supporting the work of the scaling sites.

Technical assistance from service providers was not consistently evaluated.

While scaling site leaders and service providers described their working relationships as productive, the impact of technical assistance provided by service providers was unclear. There are only isolated examples referenced in reports and interviews where service providers and scaling site leaders evaluated the effectiveness of services and used that data to refine their services. In the cases where evaluation was done and reported on, there appears to have been positive outcomes.

Focus on a single metric did not show impact or support continuous improvement

SStF asked scaling sites to report on a single metric that was in alignment with the major outcome of the initiative: first-year gateway math and English completion. Twice yearly, scaling sites reported data to NCHEMS, SStF then provided each scaling site a dashboard that allowed them to easily manipulate and review the data. Scaling sites appreciated the rigorous process that enabled them to provide high-quality data and gain insights for their work. The process sustained momentum for their initiatives.

When asked, few scaling sites could give specifics about how they used the gateway completion data, other than simply “reviewing the data.” They often cited other metrics that they collected internally as instrumental to their efforts. All scaling sites referenced measuring corequisite enrollment and sometimes course offerings as critical data points for tracking impact. Most scaling sites were looking closely at gateway math success and English success as independent measures. This was particularly important for scaling sites that had been implementing corequisites for a number of years and used SStF funding to refine and fill gaps. Because gateway math and English completion is a summative measure, scaling sites would not have been able to fully understand how they achieved their outcomes without reviewing other formative measures like course enrollments.

Recommendations

The full SStF evaluation includes several recommendations for possible improvements to SStF and its work with scaling sites. Following are a subset of those recommendations that are particularly relevant to scaling site leaders.

Build a culture of continuous improvement and learning

SStF should continue to build a network dedicated to a culture of continuous improvement and learning by:

- Enlisting the network of site leaders, service providers and other partners to collaboratively create and deploy new knowledge on achieving improved and equitable outcomes for all students, with

a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of Black, Latinx, Indigenous students; adult students; and students experiencing poverty.

- Partnering with sites and service providers to review and respond to qualitative and quantitative progress on their goals and priorities.
- Transforming the convening function to generate opportunities for networking and for members to work together to surface, design and implement new solutions to meet institutional needs.
- Implementing approaches such as communities of practice, task forces to study challenges in the field, or piloting of innovative solutions to create a dynamic culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Create a definition of scale and intended outcomes anchored to SStF's strategic goals and commitment to equity in education

SStF should develop common definitions and goals and outline intended project outcomes. They should strengthen their commitment to equity in education by implementing procedures and practices to support racially minoritized students, those with low incomes and adults who are returning to college. Doing so will ensure that if future sites implement different approaches, they are all working toward the same outcomes. Future sites should continue to design their proposals and work plans to achieve intended outcomes and demonstrate progress toward stated SStF goals.

Design a participatory evaluation and data collection approach to support continuous improvement and learning

SStF should build an evaluation approach that utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to support continuous improvement. A robust set of common formative and summative metrics that includes the momentum metrics outlined in the original RFP, a clear definition of scale, project outcomes, and equity goals will enable the SStF network to work and learn together.

Implement strategies to address systemic inequities

While the reforms recommended in the Core Principles have dramatically improved access to and success in gateway courses for all students, research has demonstrated that providing greater access to gateway courses does not result in equitable outcomes. It is clear that future sites should develop a coherent and comprehensive equity in education strategy to ensure that Core Principle reforms both achieve and sustain equitable outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students; adult students, and students experiencing poverty.

Center student voice in all aspects of the work

The inclusion of a seventh Core Principle focused on the incorporation of student voices and experiences meant that it should be a primary focus of future cohorts and the work of SStF as a whole. SStF should require future sites and their respective institutions to have a plan for iterative student feedback.

Continue to grow as a national network and leader in developmental education reform

SStF is poised to become an even stronger national network of states, systems and developmental education leaders committed to the transformation of developmental education. SStF can strengthen the work on a national level by articulating ambitious goals for the entire SStF network. An overarching goal

for SStF will provide coherence within the network and clearly communicate the ultimate objective of SStF to the field.

Conclusion

The investment in four states and systems to build on their commitment to the reforms articulated in the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within a Comprehensive Student Success Framework resulted in meaningful progress toward the implementation and scale of those reforms. Valuable lessons were learned about how states and systems can most effectively support institutions as they adopt evidence-based reforms that can dramatically improve student outcomes. Collectively, SStF and scaling sites have deepened their capacity to drive reform within institutions, but also recognize the ongoing challenges that remain. Foremost, there is a realization that there is much more work to be done to ensure equitable outcomes for students. That work should include a deepening commitment to equity in education, more robust data collection and analysis, and fully engaging the network in continuous improvement of reforms. As SStF enters a new phase, the network is positioned to not only to extend the reach of these reforms to other states and systems, but to continuously improve the work within existing scaling sites to maximize the impact of reforms and serve as models of reform for the field.