



Partnership goals

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest and the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) are partnering to support the use of **networked improvement communities (NICs)** and **improvement science** as part of the [Oklahoma Champions of Excellence Program](#). This new state program seeks to identify, promote, and celebrate innovative and effective programs in districts across Oklahoma. Through content-area NICs, REL Southwest researchers, OSDE staff, and participating districts will identify a common problem and then, by applying the principles of improvement science, will conduct a series of rapid minitrials to test and scale promising solutions.

The SWNIC partnership has the following goals:

- ▶ Build state capacity for implementing content-area NICs to test and scale innovative and effective school programs that support a well-rounded education, safe and healthy schools, and the effective use of technology.
- ▶ Increase state and district understanding of improvement science and the use of data for improvement in education settings.

Projects

In partnership with REL Southwest, members engage in a learning cycle that includes training, coaching, technical support, applied research, and engagement activities to support the goals of the SWNIC partnership. This work reinforces member capacity to use research in solving high-leverage education challenges. To learn more about our current projects, please visit <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/partnerships/swnic.aspx>.

Coaching to support the use of NICs and improvement science. Through the Oklahoma Champions of Excellence Program, selected Oklahoma public school districts will use OSDE-developed rubrics to rate promising programs across several content areas. To test and scale these programs, OSDE staff will form content-area NICs to apply the concepts of improvement science. REL Southwest is supporting these efforts by providing OSDE staff with in-depth coaching and consultation on establishing, managing, and sustaining NICs and on applying improvement science to educational settings. REL Southwest's work with OSDE has helped to strengthen their support for four Oklahoma districts as they pilot NICs focused on improvement ideas related to elementary science instruction and safe and healthy learning environments.

Engaging our region

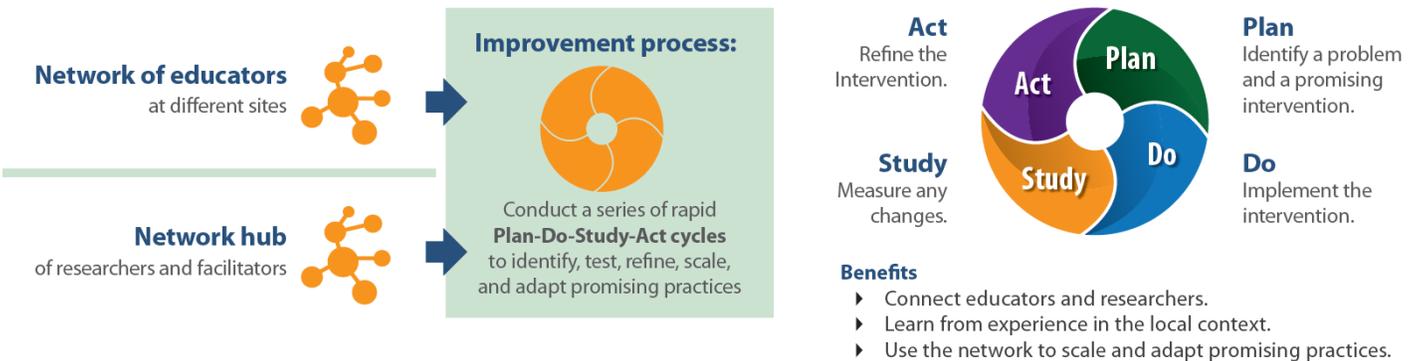
Engaging stakeholders is crucial to the REL mission of translating research into practice. Sharing research, learnings from coaching and training sessions, and insights from partnership members with stakeholders in the region supports Oklahoma's goal to promote and celebrate innovative and effective school programs. SWNIC engagement efforts include an [ongoing blog series](#) highlighting the partnership's work, a [roundup of REL resources](#) on NICs, and a research-to-practice [bridge event](#) in Oklahoma City on the fundamentals of NICs and improvement science.

Visit the [REL Southwest website](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) to learn more about our work. You can also sign up for the [REL Southwest Spotlight newsletter](#) for regular updates and browse our upcoming [events](#).

Building networks for continuous improvement of the Champions of Excellence Program

Educators develop and use many promising practices that often are never shared or tested in other contexts.¹ Although research offers a valuable means to test and inform improvement efforts, formal studies may not always keep pace with real-world demands for evidence to inform practice.²

Networked improvement communities and **improvement science** accelerate the research process to spur innovation and identify **what works, when, for whom, and in what contexts**.³



Oklahoma Champions of Excellence Program: Identify Excellence, Celebrate Dedication, Share Wisdom

REL Southwest and OSDE are implementing NICs as part of the state’s **Champions of Excellence Program**. This program is using Title IV, Part A funds to identify, celebrate, and share innovative and effective programs that promote a **well-rounded education** and **safe and healthy schools**.⁴

NIC structure and participants: Content-area NICs, including:

- ▶ OSDE Curriculum and Instruction staff
- ▶ REL Southwest staff
- ▶ Public school districts

Process:

- 1 Use content-area rubric to self-rate chosen school program [Bronze, Silver, Gold levels].
- 2 Identify desired improvement and intervention.
- 3 Work with NIC to conduct PDSA cycles.
- 4 Celebrate and share results.

NIC and rubric content areas:

- ▶ Computer science
- ▶ English language arts
- ▶ Fine arts
- ▶ Mathematics
- ▶ Science
- ▶ Social studies
- ▶ World languages
- ▶ Safe and healthy schools

References

- ¹ Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America’s schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- ² Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (n.d.). Homepage. Retrieved March 18, 2019, from <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org>.
- ³ Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2018). *Title IV, Part A—Oklahoma Champions of Excellence Program*. Retrieved March 18, 2019, from <https://sde.ok.gov/TitleIVA>.
- ⁴ Proger, A. R., Bhatt, M. P., Cirks, V., & Gurke, D. (2017). *Establishing and sustaining networked improvement communities: Lessons from Michigan and Minnesota* (REL 2017–264). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved March 18, 2019, from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4556>.