Investing in Leadership, Improving Student Outcomes:

How OLi⁴ Strengthened Instructional Leadership at Toll Gate Elementary

SCHOOL PROFILE
Toll Gate Elementary, Pickerington Local School District (Grades K–4)

P/ Toll Gate Elementary
Educating for Tomorrow

PRINCIPAL: Erika Lomonico

STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO: 23:1

STUDENT: 860

OLi⁴ PARTICIPATION: 2019–2023

A PRINCIPAL'S TURNING POINT

Instructional leadership is often described in broad terms—vision, support, visibility. But for Erika Lomonico, principal of Toll Gate Elementary, OLI⁴ transformed what that leadership looked like in practice. Reflecting on her experience, she shared:

> *"It reshaped how I think about instructional leadership. It helped me move from reacting to data to proactively using it to guide decisions."*

Before OLi⁴, leadership meant being present and responsive. After OLi⁴, it meant being strategic—intentionally building systems that drive instructional precision and student growth. That shift did not happen overnight. Through coaching, statewide cohort collaboration, and structured leadership learning, Erika and her colleagues began to rethink how instructional systems functioned inside their building.

And that is where the impact began.

BEFORE ▸ AFTER: THE LEADERSHIP SHIFT

Before OLi⁴	After OLi⁴
Reactive data conversations ▸	Proactive, data-driven decision-making
Informal coaching structure ▸	Protected, scheduled coaching time
Isolated leadership role ▸	Statewide cohort and mentorship network
Inconsistent instructional alignment ▸	Shared literacy language and routines

Erika describes the most important change as clarity—knowing exactly what to look for in classrooms and how to guide teachers toward evidence-based instructional moves. She became

> *"more intentional about protecting time for coaching and collaboration"*

—structures that remain firmly in place years later.

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BUILDING STRONGER LITERACY SYSTEMS

OLi⁴ strengthened not just instructional practice — it strengthened the systems that support instructional practice. Pickerington had already begun implementing science-based reading practices. OLI⁴ did not introduce literacy reform—it strengthened it.

Teachers began planning:

- ✓ More deliberately for small-group instruction
- ✓ With tighter progress monitoring cycles
- ✓ Using consistent diagnostic tools such as Acadience and iReady
- ✓ With clearer Tier 1 alignment across grade levels

> *"Teachers plan more intentionally and more deliberately for small group instruction and use of ongoing progress monitoring."*

Weekly teacher-based teams evolved into structured, data-focused conversations centered on student evidence. Instead of simply reviewing scores, teams analyzed trends, identified instructional adjustments, and pivoted quickly. This is what leadership capacity looks like in action: **systems that function consistently—not sporadically.**

IMPACT ON TEACHERS: CONFIDENCE AND COHERENCE

Instructional change only sustains when teachers feel confident and aligned. Through OLI⁴, Toll Gate educators developed:

- ✓ A shared understanding of effective reading instruction
- ✓ A common vocabulary around literacy and data
- ✓ Increased confidence using diagnostic tools
- ✓ Stronger collaboration across grade levels

> *"It created a shared understanding of effective reading instruction."*

The work also influenced onboarding and professional learning structures, ensuring new staff entered a system already grounded in clarity and coherence.

What changed wasn't just strategy—it was culture. Data conversations became routine. Collaboration became structured. Instruction became aligned.

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STUDENT IMPACT: MOVING THE NEEDLE

The clearest evidence of impact shows up in students. At Toll Gate, a group of first graders entered the year significantly below benchmark in phonemic awareness and decoding. Rather than relying on existing structures, teachers and intervention specialists redesigned their small-group approach using principles refined through OLI⁴.

The shift included:

- Explicit, systematic phonics instruction
- Intentional grouping decisions
- Frequent progress monitoring
- Rapid instructional adjustments

By mid-year, progress monitoring showed clear gains in phonemic awareness and decoding—evidence that redesigned small-group systems were accelerating learning.

EXPANDING THE IMPACT: WRITING AND BEYOND

Because OLI⁴ built intentional systems and instructional clarity, Toll Gate was positioned to implement The Writing Revolution with depth and consistency.

Today at Toll Gate:

✓Teacher-based teams meet weekly
✓The Writing Revolution practices are embedded schoolwide
✓Students are demonstrating significant writing growth

> *"What I learned from OLI⁴ and how intentional we need to be was the natural draw to The Writing Revolution."*

Structured literacy principles now influence instruction across content areas—including math—reinforcing that leadership clarity strengthens the entire academic program.

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SUSTAINED SYSTEMS THAT LAST

Years after completing OLI⁴, the structures remain:

- Protected coaching time
- Weekly literacy-focused data meetings
- Cross-grade instructional alignment
- Embedded Writing Revolution practices
- Data-informed intervention systems

This is not short-term professional development. **It is long-term capacity building.**

WHY IT MATTERS FOR OHIO

Across Ohio, principals are navigating literacy reform, accountability expectations, and increasing instructional demands. Programs like OLI⁴ do more than offer training—they build the internal leadership capacity necessary to sustain improvement.

> *"It's imperative that we keep programs like this alive. They are game changers—for kids."*

Intentional Leadership → **Proactive Data Conversations** → **Aligned Tier 1 Instruction** = **Student Growth**

When leadership becomes intentional...
When data conversations become proactive...
When Tier 1 instruction is aligned...

→ **STUDENTS GROW.**

AND THAT IS THE IMPACT THAT MATTERS MOST.

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