What Is The Schoolwide Enrichment Model and How Can Implementation Be Explored?

An Overview Based On The Seven Most Frequently Asked Questions

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Note: A vast array of print and media resources are available that describe the theory, research, and practical strategies for implementing the SEM. The purpose of this brief overview is to present the "big picture" that will allow interested persons to determine whether or not they would like to pursue an adoption of this model by considering the seven most frequently asked questions by teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers.

You can't DO SEM, you have to BE IT!
Dr. Nora Friedman, Principal
Groundbreaking SEM School

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is an organizational plan designed to improve academic achievement, student engagement in the learning process, and the professional skills and enthusiasm of teachers and principals seeking to infuse a more engaging brand of learning into their regular curriculum. *Simply stated, the SEM is built around a commitment to and a series of strategies for applying the pedagogy of gifted education to enrichment learning opportunities for all students*.

The mission of SEM schools is very up-front and avoids long lists of educational jargon – **we expect the majority of our students to pursue continuous matriculation toward four-year colleges and universities.** One of the schools we have worked very closely with in Hartford, CT (98% Black and Hispanic) was the *only* urban school in the entire state to recently have been named as one of Connecticut's Schools of Distinction and we earned one of the highest ratings on the State Department of Education's School Performance Index last year when compared with all other schools in the state. More importantly, our kids have taken all kinds of honors in things like National History Day, Invention Convention, Future Problem Solving, Math competitions, and other ways that our model focuses on the application of knowledge in addition to improvements in test scores.

A condensed version of at least three books dealing with how to implement the model

can be found in Attachment A. This item can be reproduced and distributed without obtaining permission. There is also a video on our website that covers many (not all) of the main ideas underlying the SEM. It is under the "SEM Articles & Presentations" section of the SEM Folder (http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart.html) . Click on: **"Learning, Leading, and Lighting the Way: Applying the Pedagogy of Gifted Education to Total School Improvement (An Overview of Schoolwide Enrichment Model)."** A figural depiction of the blended theory of knowledge underlying the SEM is presented in Attachment D.

The SEM includes a series of services that enable teams of educators to develop plans for implementing as their program evolves and matures. The full list of SEM Components is included in Attachment B, but school leaders should understand that not all schools are expected to implement all components and it takes approximately three to five years for a comprehensive SEM program to be developed. Nevertheless, some of the basic services are easily implemented at the outset of a new program.

A vast array of print and media resources are available that describe how to implement the SEM so the purpose of this brief overview is to present the "big picture" that will allow interested persons to determine whether or not they would like to pursue this adoption by considering the seven most frequently asked questions by teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers.

1. An Understanding of the SEM: How does the Schoolwide Enrichment Model differ from other plans for school improvement?

This is the most frequently asked question on the parts of school administrators, board of education members, and persons attempting to address policy issues about school improvement. Other questions that are often asked include:

"Does the SEM throw out or replace the regular curriculum?"

"Does the SEM dismiss the importance of learning basic skills and traditional curricular content?"

"Does the SEM ignore the importance of improving achievement test scores?"

The answer to these questions is clearly and unequivocally *No!* All public schools have state mandated responsibilities to:

- Address prescribed sets of standards for curricular topics and skills.
- Develop schedules and even prescribed numbers of minutes that allow for the coverage of the basic subject areas.
- Employ teachers that are certified for specified grades and/or particular subject areas.
- Prepare students for required state achievement tests.
- Abide by collective bargaining negotiations.
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The SEM is an *Infusion Based* approach to school improvement. It is *not* the intent of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model to disagree with or minimize the importance of these state requirements, but rather to infuse a more engaging brand of learning into the regular curriculum through the use of model-specific teacher training experiences and the use of research verified resources. Any school improvement plan that threatens the national focus on improved achievement test scores will simply be rejected out of hand! Making schools more student centered and promoting what I call the 3 Es (Enjoyment, Engagement, and Enthusiasm For Learning on the parts of ***both*** students and teachers) must strike a balance between improved achievement and the kinds of student centered activities we are seeking to promote the 3 Es and to infuse cognitive and creative thinking skills into the curriculum.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model has often been referred to as "organized common sense," and it was specifically designed to make learning more enjoyable and engaging for all students by infusing teacher selected enrichment activities into the learning process. At the same time, we recognize that there is a range of achievement levels and potentials in every school; and we cannot improve performance with a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. Rather, our approach is to personalize at least parts of every student's learning environment. We do this in the following three essential ways:

A. Pedagogically. The SEM is based on an easy-to-learn approach to curriculum enhancement called the Enrichment Triad Model; but our pedagogy has as much to do with *attitudes* about teaching and learning and the sense of belonging atmosphere that our model creates as it does with long lists of principles, platitudes, and educational clichés. Teachers and students develop a small number of skills about different ways to acquire knowledge or new ideas by using various questioning techniques, thinking skills, and

opportunities to apply knowledge to investigative and creative projects. Teacher training in the SEM provides the know-how and technology-based resources that allow teachers to infuse various enrichment activities into selected units and lessons. Ready-made materials in Reading (SEM – R) and Mathematics (Project M3) have been specifically developed for infusing highly engaging enrichment experiences into these two areas of the curriculum and Science and Social Studies resources are also available through our Internet-based technology program called the Renzulli Learning System. We don't say "Change your reading program!" We say, "Make it more interesting and engaging!" That is what is meant by infusion and that is how we improve achievement.

A pedagogical practice that we recommend for the development of basic skills also uses a personalized technology-based program called Odyssey Learning. This program uses computer technology to diagnosis specific basic skill competencies and electronically sends to students individualized skill building activities. Individual student growth is constantly monitored and records are maintained automatically.

We are aware that improved achievement is and always will continue to be the most important outcome of schooling, but we also have shown in our research that *enjoyment, engagement, and enthusiasm for learning* (The Three Es) are equally important contributors to higher achievement. Rather than constantly teaching-to-the-test, we have found that improved test scores are the *by-products* of a pedagogy that promotes investigative learning.

B. A Focus on Strength Based Assessment and Personalized Learning. Although the pedagogy briefly described above was originally developed for programs that serve gifted and talented students, the SEM provides enrichment experiences and highly engaging learning activities for all students. We do this by using technology that creates individual profiles of each student's achievement levels, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression and matching enrichment-based resources to these student profiles. Teachers then use the same technology to identify, select, and infuse high engagement resources into any and all aspects of the regular curriculum.

C. Organizationally. Organizationally, the model provides:

• A specified process called Curriculum Compacting that is designed to adjust the rate and pace of learning according to each student's achievement level. When it comes to basic or required curriculum, "one size does not fit all." We adjust the pace and levels of challenge so that students in need of remediation can be targeted and served according to their specific achievement levels and students who have already mastered particular skills can be provided with accelerated or enriched learning experiences. Technology tools such as Odyssey Learning and the Renzulli Learning System allow teachers to easily provide the resources for these processes.

• Specially designated time blocks called Enrichment Clusters are set aside each week during which time all students who share common interests are organized across grade levels and come together to pursue their interests using an investigative model of learning. Once again, our technology-based resource program is a valuable tool for teachers facilitating these clusters.

• Cluster grouping within and across classrooms is sometimes used to facilitate learning when wide ranges of achievement levels are present in particular schools or at certain grade levels.

• Planned parent and community involvement is facilitated through a technology-based resource program called A.S.P.I.R.E. This program provides a systematic procedure designed to increase parent and community engagement in schools. This engagement is created by inventorying six factors: assets, skills, professions, interests, relationships and the environment, and utilizing them within a proper context that connects their value to the school's educational programs and activities. The identified "human capital data" collected through the A.S.P.I.R.E. Survey™ provides a databank of resources and information for supporting teachers in engaging parents and community members in enrichment activities, students' authentic product development, mentorships and differentiated learning experiences.

The SEM is an ***infusion based*** approach to school transformation. We do not criticize nor recommend "throwing out" basic curriculum, current practices, programs, or projects if they are currently producing positive results in *both* achievement and joyful learning. Rather, the SEM strikes a balance between traditional approaches to learning and approaches that promote 21st Century learning skills and creative productivity on the parts of all students. Our goals are to minimize boredom and school "turn-offs " and to improve achievement

and creative productivity by the infusing Three Es (Enjoyment, Engagement, and Enthusiasm For Learning) into the culture and atmosphere of a school, the tool bags of teachers and administrators, and the mindsets of students.

II. Is the SEM research based?

Yes, the SEM is research based and grounded in a learning theory that has stood the test of time. More than thirty years of research has been carried out on various components of the SEM. And this research has been published in the most prestigious professional journals and is available on our web site. All studies can be downloaded and reproduced without cost or permission.

III. Are all SEM schools the same?

No. School populations, leadership, faculties, resources, and commitments to existing programs and practices differ across SEM schools. The only thing that we specify for all SEM schools is that a commitment must be made to three very simple but straightforward common goals – what we call The 3 Es for both students *and* teachers: Enjoyment, Engagement, and Enthusiasm for Learning. We strongly believe that each school must devise its own unique means for pursuing these goals. Thoughtful educators usually become interested in the SEM because they are tired of over prescription and school improvement plans that have largely factored out their own intelligence, creativity, and the unique demographics and conditions that characterize every school! Each SEM school faculty should develop pride and ownership of their own program because they took part in building it. This opportunity for more flexibility and local ownership also encourages ongoing reflection and creative opportunities to pursue continuous modifications for direct services that promote the 3Es of enrichment teaching and learning. As one teacher said, ***"When it comes to SEM, the attitude and the culture of the school is everything."***

IV. How does the SEM differ from other school improvement models and how does it relate to our regular curriculum and the use of state or common core standards?

First and foremost, because of the 3Es that underlie the SEM, this approach is a strength-based rather than a remediation or deficit-based approach for pursuing school improvement. When it comes to practical implementation, we think of the SEM as an "infusion based approach" that introduces more enrichment and challenging curricular modifications into any and all aspects of the present

curriculum. We do not advocate "throwing out" the existing curriculum! Rather, we recommend that practitioners examine selected parts of the regular curriculum for opportunities to infuse more engaging and enjoyable learning material that relate to existing curricular topics.

At the practical level, we accomplish this approach through the use of differentiated teaching strategies and an Internet-based technology program called Renzulli Learning System (RLS: see Attachment C). Using RLS, teachers can personalize activities for individual students or designated groups according to students' electronically generated profiles. Profiles provide information on factors that include academic strength areas, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. Items in the RLS data bases are multiply tagged by these factors to facilitate personalization. Teachers use the same system to select, infuse, and extend upon thousands of high-engagement resources in our databases that can be infused into almost any regular curricular topic.

V. Does the SEM replace our existing gifted program?

No. If your school has a special teacher(s) for identified gifted students, we do not recommend eliminating either the program or existing services. In some states, legislative requirements for such services exist and parents of identified students exert strong pressure to protect services for these labeled students. SEM simply provides vehicles whereby more enrichment opportunities can be extended to larger proportions of the general student population. An existing teacher with special training in gifted education can be a valuable asset to the implementation of SEM program services by providing staff development, facilitating the implementation of SEM components such as Enrichment Clusters and Curriculum Compacting, and also in coaching teachers in the use of gifted education pedagogy in their classrooms and in implementing Enrichment Clusters.

VI. What are the personnel requirements of a SEM program?

We recommend that all schools using the SEM establish a Schoolwide Enrichment Team to begin and maintain the process of full implementation; however, our experience has shown that an enrichment specialist in each school or a person who shares his or her time between two schools is the best way to ensure that a full range of SEM services is implemented. In the absence of a designated enrichment specialist, we recommend that one or two teachers be provided with some release time or supplementary compensation to serve as the coordinators of the Schoolwide Enrichment Team. Again, experience has shown that leadership and

task-dedicated responsibility are essential to practical implementation of SEM components, sustained longevity of programs, and ongoing introductions of innovations that make each SEM school relatively unique.

A second essential consideration is the building principal. This person must be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about all aspects of the model, committed to a change process in his or her school, and most of all, have a vision for the school that will make him or her eager to implement SEM and to establish an open door policy for parents and visitors to visit the program. We have found that pride of ownership, collective trust between the principal and teachers, and a willingness to "work things out" when differences of opinion occur is the best definition of effective leadership. Not all principals have the kinds of flexibility necessary to guide a school program that, by definition, thrives on flexibility and differences from a business-as-usual organization.

VII. What steps should a school take if it wants to implement a SEM?

The first step should be to gather and circulate some general information about the SEM to members of a planning or steering committee. Recommended introductory articles as well more detailed (book length) sources are listed on the website below that include numerous research studies, articles about implementation, slides from PowerPoint presentations, videos, and a directory of schools that have agreed to be visitation sites (http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/). Following discussions among the planning group, and if a decision is made to take further action, contact should be made with the SEM Outreach Coordinator to explore next steps. These steps typically include: (1) participation in our annual summer institute at the University of Connecticut (See Confratute at website - http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/confratute/), (2) discussion about on-site staff development sessions, and (3) plans to visit one or more very successful SEM schools.

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