



EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

Impact Review of Simulations on Participant Success

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Executive Summary

SIMs, developed and administered by SchoolSims, are interactive modules covering specific, challenging scenarios faced by school leaders, allowing the participants to make choices at key decision points to view outcomes. These exercises allow the development of decision making and judgement skills, competencies that are central to effective leadership performance.

Between March and June of 2017, Alma Advisory Group (Alma) conducted an Impact Review of SIMs for SchoolSims. The Impact Review was designed to capture feedback and impressions on the utility of SIMs by conducting interviews and surveys with select user groups identified by SchoolSims to be the most experienced SIMs users. The results of the Impact Review presented in this report summarize:

- how the SIMs fit into the overall context of professional development programs for school leaders;
- how SIMs are deployed in the specific user group contexts; and
- how user groups have utilized the SIMs to date in order understand their efficacy vis- à-vis the professional development objectives of each user group.

Five user groups participated in the review. Their length of experience using the SIM was the primary criteria for inclusion in the study. Administrators, training facilitators and participants from three school districts, a state department of education and a state level principal and supervisor association participated in the study. We are very appreciative of their contribution to the study.

Alma carried out interviews with administrators from each user group and administered an on-line survey to 121 SIMs training facilitators and participants. Capturing information from these three constituencies allowed for the inclusion of different yet interrelated perspectives. This report presents the findings from the interviews and surveys, and proposes key considerations for a prospective evaluation and future SIMs deployment. The study yielded the following select findings:

- All groups report that the SIMs provide opportunities for rich discussions and provide a “sandbox” for aspiring leaders to experiment with making decisions in a safe environment.
- The theory of action is that taking the SIMs will improve school leaders’ ability to successfully handle similar situations when they emerge, and will also help them make better decisions overall by 1) increasing awareness of the potential (negative) results certain decisions and 2) modelling reflective decision making. Responses from program administrators as well as the facilitators and participants support this theory.
- In implementing the SIMs program, users can encounter some constraints. Specifically, because they often position the SIMs into a pre-established instructional plan and practice, there may be time constraints for covering all components of the syllabus.
- Administrators reported that the SIMs were well-aligned to their standards. Survey responses from facilitators and participants support this finding.
- There is consensus across groups that SIMs engage participants in the material and that participants learn as much or more when using the SIMs compared to other professional development, and there is near universal satisfaction with the SIMs.

SIMs in Context

Overview of the SIMs

Simulations (SIMs) are interactive modules covering specific, challenging scenarios a school leader will likely face. The SIM sets up the situation, and then has several decision points. At each one, participants are faced with a choice of possible responses that lead to different results. The SIMs are aligned to leadership performance standards, and user groups select the specific SIMs that are deployed in a training. There were 15 SIMs available at the time of this study, and the SIMs library is being continually expanded.

The theory of action is that the simulation will help leaders make better decisions through the following mechanisms:

- 1) When they are faced with a similar situation, leaders will make better decisions as they will have had the advantage of “experience,” having already thought through the consequences of choices during the SIMs, and
- 2) Experiencing the SIMs will make participants more reflective and lead to better decisions in general, as the SIMs:
 - a. Pause the decision-making process at key junctures, allowing the participants to weigh the benefits and risks of different choices
 - b. Allow the participants to explore the potential ramifications of different decisions – even those that may seem minor- in a safe environment

All of the SIM user groups that participated in this review used the SIMs within the context of their professional development programs for school leaders or aspiring school leaders.

SIMs within School Leader Preparation Programs

To gain a richer understanding of SIMs usage, we start by looking at the SIMs from the broader perspective of how it fits into a quality school leader preparation program. The Education Development Center (EDC) with the support of the Wallace Foundation developed a Quality Measures Rubric for assessing principal preparation programs run by school districts and their partners.¹ The EDC Quality Measures Rubric looks at the quality of leadership preparation programs in four main domains, each with their own quality measures:

Table 1: Quality Measures Rubric	
Domain	Area of Focus
1	Course Content and Pedagogy
2	Supervised Clinical Practice
3	Candidate Recruitment and Selection
4	Graduate Performance Outcome

The SIMs are a mechanism for delivering program content and provide participants with opportunities to engage in scenarios that simulate actual issues they can encounter on the job. As such, the SIMs are situated in the rubric's first domain.² Going deeper, we then look at the alignment between the SIMs and the quality indicators within this domain. Table 2 shows how the SIMs map to the EDC quality indicators and how they are currently being used to meet these indicators.

¹ King, C. Quality Measures Principal Preparation Program Self-Assessment Toolkit. Education Development Center EDC (2013). Report funded by the Wallace Foundation.

² There may be additional opportunities to use the SIMs in other domains. The SIMs are not positioned to be used as a candidate selection tool and current user groups do not report using the SIMs for candidate recruitment or selection. The SIMs are also not positioned to measure proficiency of graduates. Potential for using the SIMs as a tool within these domains will be discussed in the Potential Next Step section.

**Table 2:
SIMs Mapping to the ‘Developed’ level for Course Content and Pedagogy Quality Indicators
from the EDC Quality Measures Rubric**

EDC Quality Indicator	EDC Measure of Developed SIMs Mapping		SIMs Usage ³
I. Includes required course content domains	Requires coursework in most of the following content domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vision for learning - School culture - Instructional supervision - Mgmt. of resources and ops. - Ethical practices, and Political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts. 	SIMs map to these standards. No one SIM is designed to provide complete training, rather they provide practice using the relevant skills to resolve real life issues in these content domains.	User groups reported that SIMs are used to help participants work through how to deal with issues associated with these domains in a classroom setting. The SIMs are used in conjunction with other materials to address these domains.
II. Curriculum is logically and sequentially organized	Most required courses are logically and sequentially organized, and aligned to state and professional leadership standards.	SIMs have been mapped to the 2015 PSEL standards; Programs determine how to organize the SIMs within PD courses.	Users groups reported that they developed a logical and sequentially organized curriculum, and slotted the SIMs in when it was an improvement on the prior class material used to cover standards.
III. Incorporates project-based learning methods	Most required courses incorporate project-based learning methods as the comprehensive approach to instruction that includes adequate opportunities for students to practice an array of skills in real school contexts.	SIMS incorporates aspects of project based learning ⁴ .	User groups reported that the SIMs provided program participants with the opportunity to practice handling realistic scenarios within a classroom setting.
IV. Is linked to performance expectations for principals	Most required courses link successful completion of coursework to current district performance expectations for school principals.	SIMs are designed to help participants meet performance expectations which are defined by their LEA and / or SEA.	User groups reported that they believe the SIMs help school leaders make better, more reflective decisions. As such, the SIMs contribute to participants’ ability to meet performance expectations.
V. Includes formative and summative assessment measures	Most required courses implement well-defined formative and summative assessment measures for use by faculty, the candidate, and peers to evaluate candidate performance.	Formative assessment is embedded within the SIMs, as consequences resulting from decisions made during the SIM lead to participants self-assessment.	User groups reported that participant decisions during the SIMs and during the debrief encourage self and peer assessment. The users did not report using the SIMs as part of a formal candidate evaluation process.

³ SIMs usage reflects the self-reported usage of the organizations participating in this review only. Trends were consistent across these organizations. However, other organizations may have different usage patterns.

⁴ See Table 3 for more information.

The figure below shows how the SIMs align to PSEL standards.

**Figure 1:
SIMs Alignment to PSEL Standards**

SIMS Alignment to Professional Standards for Education Leaders 2015 (PSEL) (done by ESL)

	Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values	Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms	Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students	Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel	Standard 7. Meaningful Engagement of Teachers and Staff	Standard 8. Operations and Management	Standard 9. School Improvement	
1. Difficult Conversation: Dress Code		*				x		*	*	
2. Girls Basketball Coach		*				*	x			
3. Disruptive Teacher		*		*	*	x		*		
4. Academic Goal Setting			*	*	*	x				
5. Playground Mishap		*	*	*			x	*		
6. Middle School Budget Challenge	*		*		*		*	*	*	
7. New Teacher Evaluation					x	x		*		
8. Student in Crisis		*		x		*	*			
9. Small School District Budget Crisis		*	*				*	x		
10. Board Relations		x	*				*	*		
11. Administrator: First Week on the Job	*					*	x	*	*	
12. Difficult Conversations: Race	*		x	*	*	*				
13. Community Partnerships: Digital Readiness					*	*	x	*		
14. Middle School Turnaround (Implementing Change)		*			*			x	*	
15. Social Media (Integrity in Community)		x			*	*	*	x		
16. Stakeholder Management			*		*					
17. Inclusive School Community - COMING SOON!	*		x	*	*	*	*			
18. Discipline & Instruction - COMING SOON!			*	*	*	*	*		*	
# of SIMs covering as a CORE topic	0	2	2	0	1	1	4	4	3	0
# of SIMs touching on topic	4	9	7	5	4	11	9	12	11	5

* Topics touched on
x Topics represent the core of the simulation

The new Principal Standards are defined by a set of skills that perform the foundation elements that enable a School Administrator to perform the job duties effectively. These skills are important to perform the work job but do not in themselves ensure that the school is fulfilling its strategic mission.

Source: Ed Leadership SIMs website

SIMs within Project Based Learning

It is worthwhile to also examine how the SIMs align with project based learning, a key component of strong school leadership preparation programs. Project-based learning is defined as “a dynamic classroom approach in which students actively explore real- world problems and challenges and acquire a deeper knowledge”⁵ or, similarly, “a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge”⁶.

Each SIM is covered within a single class period or sitting. As such, the SIMs are not designed to be a full project based learning experience as they do not involve sustained inquiry over time or lead to a public work product. Nonetheless, when factoring in the time constraint inherent in the training program delivery, the SIMs indeed incorporate several key elements of project based learning. These are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3:
Elements of Project Based Learning Addressed by SIMs**

Components of Project Based Learning	SIMs Addresses	Reported Usage ⁷
Key Knowledge, Understanding, and Success Skills - The project is focused on student learning goals, including standards-based content and skills such as critical thinking/problem solving, communication, collaboration, and self-management.	Yes	User groups reported that the SIMs include standards based content with a primary focus on critical thinking /problem solving.
Challenging Problem or Question - The project is framed by a meaningful problem to solve or a question to answer, at the appropriate level of challenge.	Yes	User groups reported that one of the benefits of the SIMs is that they address meaningful problems and provide the right level of challenge for participants.
Sustained Inquiry - Students engage in a rigorous, extended process of asking questions, finding resources, and applying information.	Partially	SIMs participants engaged in asking questions and applying information during the SIM. The process is time bound (as opposed to extended) and participants are not tasked with finding additional resources.
Authenticity - The project features real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact – or speaks to students’ personal concerns, interests, and issues in their lives.	Yes	User groups reported that the SIMs are realistic, highly relevant to the participants and aligned standards.
Student Voice & Choice - Students make some decisions about the project, including how they work and what they create.	No	Facilitators / program administrators, not participants, chose the SIMs. The style of work and product is prescribed by the facilitator.
Reflection - Students and teachers reflect on learning, the effectiveness of their inquiry and project activities, the quality of student work, obstacles and how to overcome them.	Yes	During and after the SIM, users reported that participants reflect on their handling of decisions made within the SIM.
Critique & Revision - Students give, receive, and use feedback to improve their process and products.	Yes	User groups reported that the consequences of each action embedded within the SIM provides participants with real-time feedback on their decisions. Additionally, users frequently structure SIMs as small group activities, in which participants give each other feedback on decision choices.
Public Product - Students make their project work public by explaining, displaying and/or presenting it to people beyond the classroom.	No	The SIMs were used as experiential learning within a class and were not designed to produce a public product.

⁵ Source: <https://www.edutopia.org/project-based-learning>

⁶ Buck Institute for Education. https://www.bie.org/about/what_pbl

⁷ SIMs usage reflects the self-reported usage of the organizations participating in this review only. Trends were consistent across these organizations. However, other organizations may have different usage patterns.

Study Methodology

This section describes the respondent selection and data collection procedures for the administrator, participant and facilitator groups.

Administrator Interviews

Alma obtained contact information from SchoolSims for each of the user groups identified by SchoolSims for inclusion in the review and reached out to representatives to conduct individual user group phone interviews, with each interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The user groups identified were based on extensive discussions between Alma and SchoolSims regarding what the optimal composition of the user group would be, and agreed that the most robust feedback would be obtained from those who had used SIMs for the longest period of time.

For the interviews with administrators, Alma prepared a list of questions that would guide each discussion. (The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.) Prior to each conversation, Alma informed interview participants of the main purpose of the interview as well as broad topic areas identified for the conversation so that there was an opportunity to review SIMs-related documentation. To allow for a fluid conversation and encourage participants to open up, Alma asked the questions in the order in which the topics emerged during the discussion, following the logic flow of respondents' answers. Alma welcomed the contribution of additional key staff members as necessary to address specific questions. Brevard County Schools provided written feedback in lieu of a phone interview.

Participant and Facilitator Survey

Alma designed an on-line survey to obtain insights on the efficacy of the SIMs from professional development facilitators and participants. Alma coordinated with the administrators from each user group to obtain permission to conduct the survey, and solicited their assistance in distributing notifications to participants and facilitators. The cooperation of the user groups in notifying on-line survey respondents helped encourage participation during the data collection period. To encourage frank and open responses, survey respondents were not asked for self-identifying information. For analysis purposes respondents' role, time in role, and whether they were facilitators (i.e., directed a training session) or participants was captured. Individuals who initially classified themselves as 'other' were asked to clarify their role to determine whether they were then included either as participants or facilitators, and are thus included in these groups. Survey respondents could skip questions. Unless otherwise noted, the results shown are based on the number of participants who responded to each question. All survey respondents were given at least 5 days to fill out the survey. (The survey can be found in Appendix B.)

Interview and Survey Results

A total of 121 individuals, made up of 109 participants and 12 facilitators, completed the web-based survey⁸. Of the 109 SIMs participants, 56 were from one district, 46 were from the state education department, 5 were from the principal and supervisor association and 2 were from another district⁹. Thus, the participant experiences in one state and one district are strongly represented. Most participants were Assistant Principals or teachers (80%) at the time in which they completed the SIMs, with principals (8%) and other instructional and administrative leaders (13%) comprising the remaining job categories represented in the pool of the participant respondents¹⁰. Additional survey data captured by one district and one state education department were helpful in providing additional insights on outcomes.

⁸ Four Survey participants indicated that they were in 'other' role, when asked further questions two of the four more closely identified with facilitators and two with participants.

⁹ The state of residence for five participants was imputed based on survey completion patterns that were highly correlated with location.

¹⁰ Due to rounding, the whole number percentages add up to 101%.

Twelve facilitators filled out the survey, of these nine were from the principal and supervisor association, one each from two school districts and one from the state department of education. All but one have been in their position for at least three years. Of note, in one school district and in the state department of education a single facilitator is designated to implement the SIMs.

As such, their responses cover the overall facilitator perspective for their respective group. Since principal and supervisors association has multiple individuals facilitating the SIMs, their perspective is reflective of input from a diverse set of facilitators.

In sum, this review captures the experiences of five user groups using the SIMs from the administrator, facilitator and participant perspectives. All results are self-reported. Based on Alma's criteria for inclusion, user group administrators selected the pool of participants and facilitators to be invited to respond to the survey. In order to respect restrictions on sharing participant contact information outside of the program, program administrators sent the survey to participants. Survey participation was voluntary. As such, the responses are reflective of the selected participants who opted to respond, and cannot be generalized to be reflective of the full range of SIMs experiences of all SIMs participants.

Key Findings

This section highlights key findings obtained from the Impact Review. Of particular note is that throughout the interview and survey process, there was a high level of agreement both between respondents using the SIMs across programs and between user groups (i.e., program administrators, SIMs facilitators and SIMs participants). Responses across these groups strongly aligned with each other, and the same patterns of benefits and concerns were echoed across groups leading to clear patterns of experiences. The key findings are organized around the following categories:

- Current Usage/ Format of Delivery
- Reasons for Usage
- Considerations Determining Usage
- Impact on Professional Development
- Frequency of SIMs Administration
- User Group Reported Alignment and Relevance
- Participant Learning and Satisfaction

Current Usage/Format of Delivery

In general, most individuals taking the SIMs courses were enrolled in leadership programs designed for early career or aspiring school leaders, with the majority of participants – 56% – being APs and an additional 24% being teachers.¹¹

All programs used the SIMs as part of an overall course curriculum, and in general used various SIMs modules during the course. Additionally, one organization used the SIMs in working directly with school-based leadership teams.

In most cases, the SIMs were administered in a facilitated group setting, where participants were asked to discuss the scenario. Within the group setting, there were several variations on how the SIMs were delivered. In many cases, participants discussed the SIMs in small groups before reporting out to the larger group. In other cases, a large group discussion format was used.

In general, the SIMs were used to facilitate a group discussion. Facilitators used the SIMs to encourage participants to think through the ramifications of different decision-making scenarios. In some cases, small groups were asked to come to a consensus. In others, participants were asked to argue in favor of a choice with which they did not agree. Several program administrators mentioned that if time allowed, groups tried out different pathways to see the results.

Of the facilitators who took the survey, 64% indicated that they used a whole group format, while 36% of the facilitators broke the group down into pairs. Participants also reported on the delivery at the training sessions they participated in: 88% of participants reported the SIMs were delivered in a group, while 9% took the SIMs as individuals (2% took this SIMs in triads and 1% (one person) took the SIMs in multiple formats.

¹¹ Of the remaining participants, 6% were sitting principals and the last 9% were in a variety of roles, including other school and district administrators as well as coaches.

Due to these advantages, several administrators noted that they were actively working to fit more SIMs into their curriculum. However, none of the districts reported changing their overall approach or curriculum based on the SIMs.

Reasons for Usage

Since the SIMs were being incorporated into existing programs, the SIMs were used to address specific topics. Several user groups reported that SIMs usage was left to the discretion of the facilitator. In one case, a SIM was developed in partnership with the user group, and the SIMS became a required module. The most common reason facilitators gave for using the SIMs was that students “learn a lot.” Facilitators also mentioned that SIMs were recommended to them, were easy to use and fit in/worked well in their lesson. Table 4 presents the breakdown of factors that drove facilitators’ decision to use the SIMs.

Table 4: Reasons for SIM Usage	
What factors led you to choose to use SIMs in the training sessions you facilitated?	
Factor in using SIM (Check all that apply)	% Facilitators naming this factor
Students learn a lot using the SIMs	63%
It is easy to use / facilitate	36%
It fit well into my lesson	27%
It was recommended by a colleague	27%
I’ve used it before, and it worked well	27%
It was recommended by a supervisor	9%
Other (3 - part of the program; 2 – facilitated good dialogue)	45%

Considerations in Determining Usage

In response to the question regarding any limiting factors for using the SIMs moving forward, about half of the facilitators indicated there are factors that kept them from using the SIMS more often. For these facilitators, by far the most significant factor was limited class time with students: it was listed as a ‘large factor’ by all facilitators. A few facilitators specifically noted that if there were options for shorter SIMs (or if they could modify an existing SIM to be shorter), it could increase usage. Other factors were: the size of SIMs library; relevance/alignment of existing SIMs with PD standards and time needed to incorporate the SIMs into an existing curriculum.

While the majority of facilitators have not exhausted the current SIMs library, “power users” cited library size as an issue: 2 out of the 3 facilitators who have run 6-10 SIMs sessions wanted more SIMs and administrators from one user group noting that they exhausted the SIMS library.

While all program administrators felt that that the SIMs were well aligned with their professional development standards, the facilitators conveyed that some SIMs were more highly aligned with their particular course needs than others. One of the five organizations reported that several modules in the SIMs library were not seen as relevant to its schools - references to school boards and lack of minority students and faculty were cited as topics not germane to their group.

Administrators also mentioned that several facilitators needed to be heavily encouraged to use the SIMs, as it required a change in their existing curriculum and time for the facilitators to become comfortable using the SIMs. Several mentioned that they had to model the SIMs for other facilitators to encourage usage.

While administrators and facilitators alike felt that overall the SIMs were easy to use, three facilitators indicated that the time needed to learn how to facilitate the SIMs can inhibit usage. More specifically, users noted that some of the SIMs needed to be read out loud or had significant amounts of reading, which had made them more difficult to use (as opposed to having a video narration).

Impact on Professional Development

The program administrators interviewed reported the SIMs were an innovative tool that enhanced the efficacy of their overall PD curriculum. Several stated that they saw the SIMs as an improvement on the traditional “flat” case studies, as the SIMs are more interactive and generate richer discussions. As opposed to traditional case studies, the SIMs create several decision points for participants to practice and explore. This allows for real-time feedback on choices, which administrators saw as an advantage. Additionally, administrators appreciated the SIMs allowing for the option of going back and seeing how a different scenario would play out, providing another advantage over flat case studies.

All of the administrators interviewed also felt the SIMs generated rich discussions and provided the participants a safe environment to explore how they would react to certain situations. Administrators noted that when difficult situations come up in a school setting school, leaders often need to react quickly, thus having the opportunity to work through a scenario in advance and see the unintended consequences of certain actions was seen as highly beneficial. As one administrator put it “seemingly small decisions can have huge consequences.” The SIMs allowed aspiring leaders to see this in a risk-free environment in advance and this was considered a main advantage.

A related advantage noted by administrators was that the SIMs allowed participants to see how different decisions play out, either through group share out or through doing the same SIM more than once. As a result, participants experienced the advantages and disadvantages of different decisions, especially ones they may not have been inclined to take. In this way, the SIMs provided a “sandbox” for allowing aspiring leaders to explore different decisions in a safe environment. All of the administrators note this as an additional advantage of the SIM.

Frequency of SIMs Administration

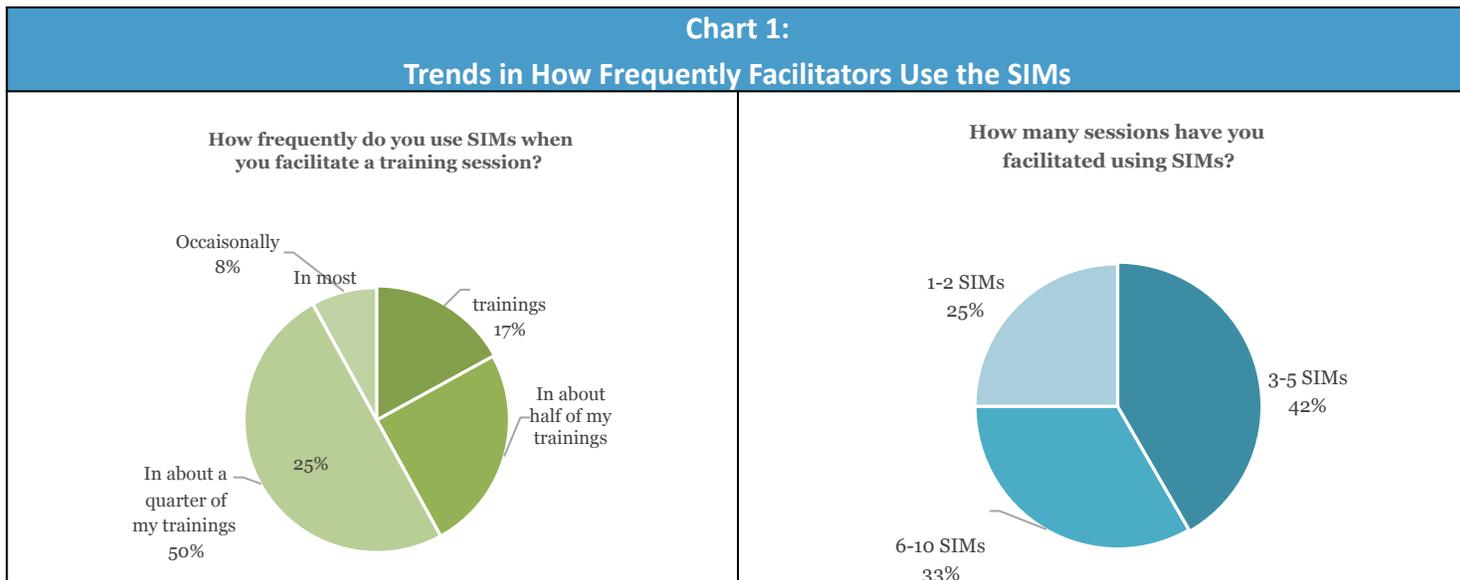
At the time this study was conducted, the user groups had been using the SIMs between 9 months and 1½ years.

Table 5:

SIMs User Groups by Start Date

User Group	Start Date
Public School District 1 (PPI)	March 2016
Public School District 2 (PPI)	January 2016
Public School District 3 (non-PPI)	August 2015
Principal and supervisor association (non-PPI)	September 2015
State department of education (non-PPI)	June 2016 (Pilot started in January 2016)

Program administrators noted that the SIMs were frequently used as part of professional development programs. Two administrators indicated that they primarily left it up to the facilitator to decide how often to use the SIMs. One user group administrator indicated that each training group cohort meets seven times, and they use the SIMs in 2-3 of the seven sessions. Facilitators varied in how often they used the SIMs and the total number of SIMs they have facilitated, with most using the SIMs in a plurality of their lessons. See Chart 1 for details.



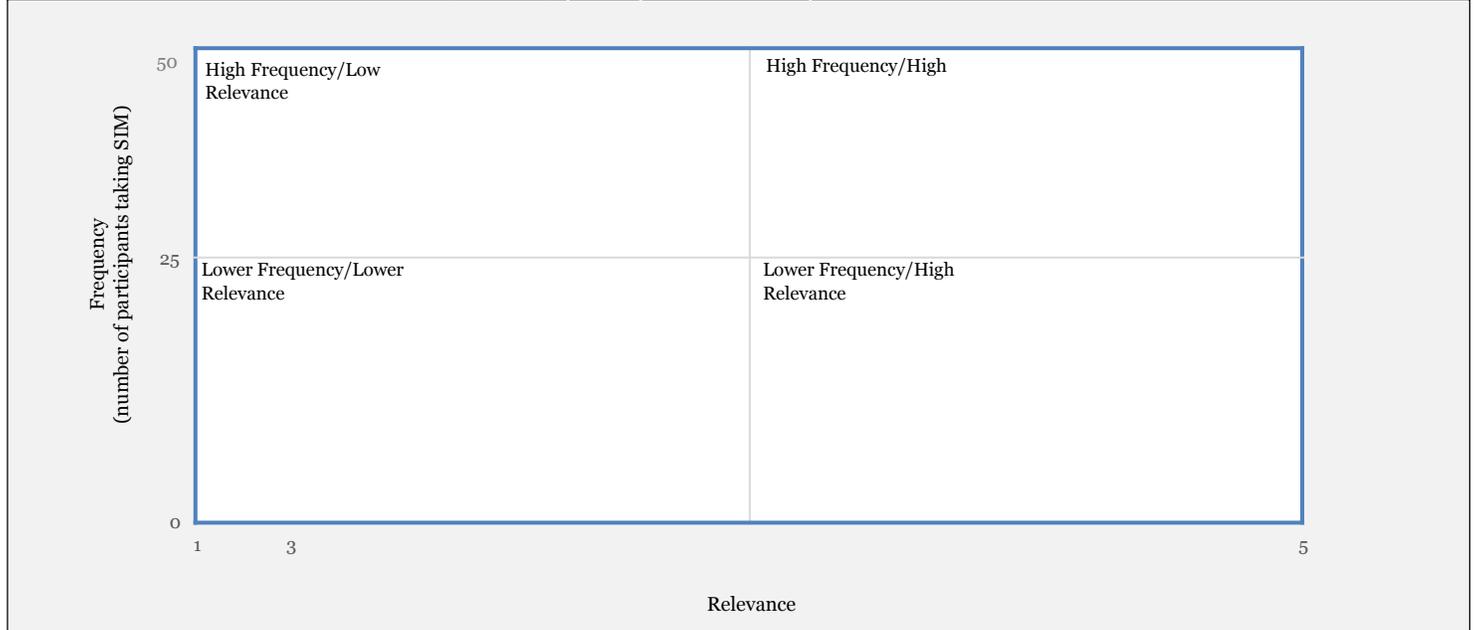
All users reported SIMs usage has either remained relatively constant or has increased over time with the exception one district, which reduced SIMs usage once the library was exhausted. Administrators reported that they would like to increase the use of the SIMs going forward, including deploying them more with district/school based leadership teams and with other leadership programs. The overwhelming majority of facilitators (9 out of 11) intend to increase their usage of the SIMs going forward (one facilitator who intends to keep their usage about is already a “power user,” having facilitated 6-10 SIMs).

SIMs Alignment and Relevance

The program administrators generally found the SIMs to be highly aligned with their standards. One district reported mapping each SIM to its state standards as well as the ISLLC standards, and has recommended guidelines for using each SIM. In terms of relevance, facilitators reported all of the SIMs they used to be either “highly aligned” (66%) or “moderately aligned” (33%) with all of the following: state / district PD goals, state / district performance standards, student (participant) needs and course/curriculum goals.

Participants also found the course topics relevant. As seen in Chart 2, all SIMs trend towards high relevance. To better contextualize participant feedback on usage, we looked at the both the reported relevance and frequency. This helps indicate whether participant experience with the “go to” SIMs are quantitatively different than with other SIMs.

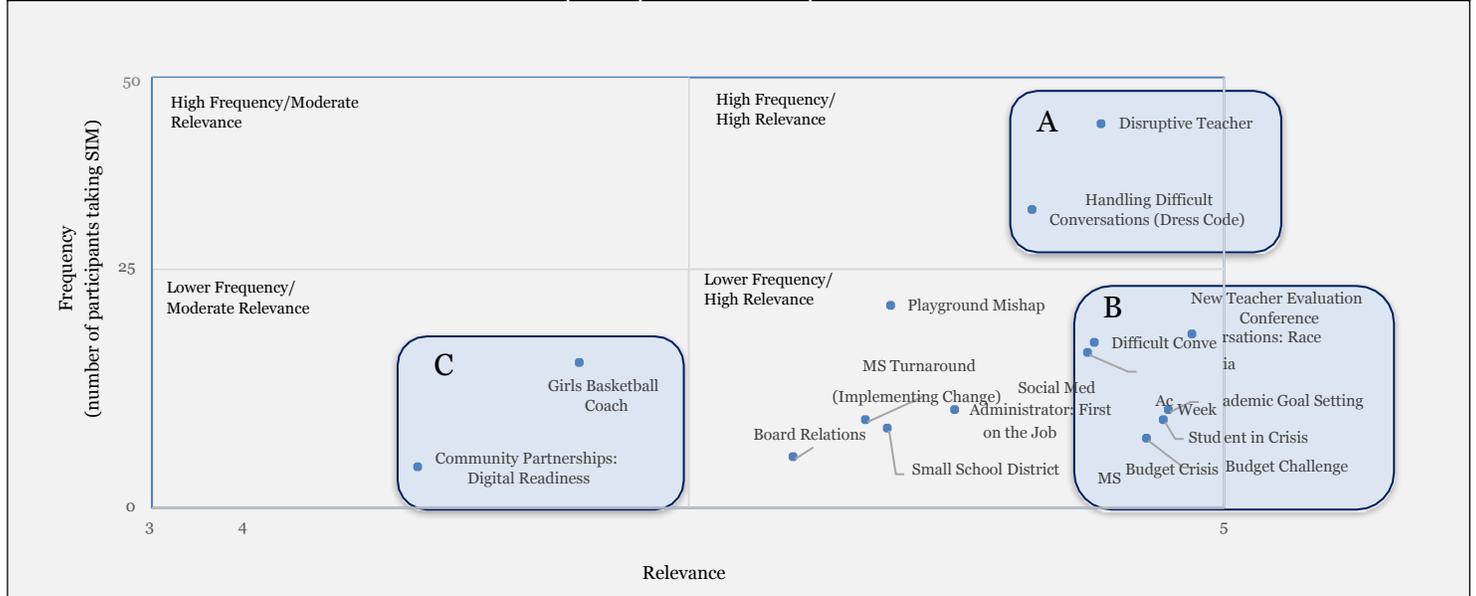
Chart 2:
SIMs Frequency and User-reported Relevance



Note: Relevance Scale Used: Very relevant- 5; Moderately relevant – 4; Relevant –3; Slightly relevant- 2; Not relevant -1.

Since relevance clusters at the high end of the spectrum, Chart 3 further breaks down SIMs frequency and relevance to better convey how the participants were experiencing the SIMs.

Chart 3:
SIMs Frequency and User-reported Relevance



Note: Relevance Scale Used: Very relevant- 5; Moderately relevant – 4; Relevant –3; Slightly relevant- 2; Not relevant -1

Here, the two most frequently given SIMs are considered highly relevant by participants (Group “A”). In further reviewing the data, 11 of the remaining 13 SIMs received a rating of above a 4 in terms of relevance. Interestingly, SIMs highlighted in Group “B” are almost universally perceived by participants as being highly relevant, but most participants didn’t take these SIMs. This represents a potential opportunity for increased utilization of these SIMs.

Additionally, two SIMs in Group “C”, while still receiving overall high marks for relevance, received lower ratings than the other SIMs by participants, representing an opportunity to better understand what is causing this difference (i.e. – delivery style, or specificity of the SIM). For example, the Girls Basketball SIM may seem highly relevant to middle and high school leaders who run schools that have a strong sports program but less so to elementary school leaders that do not have sport programs.

**Table 6:
SIMS Frequency and Relevance**

Frequency	SIM	Relevance: Likert Scale Average	Participants taking the SIM
Most Relevant	New Teacher Evaluation Conference	4.94	18
	Academic Goal Setting	4.90	10
	Student in Crisis	4.89	9
	MS Budget Challenge	4.86	7
	Disruptive Teacher	4.78	40
	Difficult Conversations: Race	4.76	17
	Social Media	4.75	16
	Handling Difficult Conversations (Dress Code)	4.65	31
Highly Relevant	Administrator: First Week on the Job	4.50	10
	Playground Mishap	4.38	21
	Small School District Budget Crisis	4.38	8
	MS Turnaround (Implementing Change)	4.33	9
	Board Relations	4.20	5
Moderately Relevant	Girls Basketball Coach	3.80	15
	Community Partnerships: Digital Readiness	3.50	4

Participant Learning and Satisfaction

Participant Learning

All of the facilitators indicated that students learn more using the SIMs compared with other forms of PD, with 63% stating that students learn much more and 36% reporting that students learn “somewhat more.” Almost all participants felt the SIMs were at least as good as other forms of PD, if not better. Four out of 5 participants (83%) reported that the SIMs is better than other forms of professional development, with one in 5 (15) reporting that it is about the same. One participant (1%) reported it was worse – of note, this person took the SIM as an individual, not as part of a group. The majority of participants, 86%, felt their level of engagement was higher on the SIMs than on other forms of PD, 43% of participants felt their learning from the SIMs was better and 51% felt their time was used more efficiently in the SIMs than in other forms of PD.

The vast majority of participants indicated that they have had the opportunity to apply what they learned from the SIMs to their work. While the majority of participants did encounter similar scenarios to the ones represented in the SIMs, the participants reported strongest results in using the skills learned in during the SIMs. Participants felt the SIMs improved their decision making, improved reflectiveness and made them more aware of the consequences.

**Table 7:
Participants Application of SIMs Learning**

<i>Have you had the opportunity to apply any of the learning to your current position¹²?</i>	% of Participants Responding “Yes”
The SIMs discussions have broadened how I assess my options for decision-making.	88%
The SIMs have caused me to reflect more before acting	96%
The SIMs have made me more aware of the potential consequences of certain actions	91%
I’ve encountered a similar scenario where I applied what I learned from the SIMs	61%

Reported Satisfaction with SIMS

On all levels, satisfaction with the SIMs was high. All program administrators reported overall satisfaction with the SIMs and were enthusiastic about continuing to use this tool. All facilitators also reported that they are satisfied with the SIMS, with responses ranging from ‘satisfied’ (9%), somewhat satisfied” (27%) to ‘very satisfied’ (64%).

Summary and Recommendations

Our review found that users viewed the SIMs as a highly relevant and valuable tool for helping participants gain the skills needed to become a successful school leaders. This review relied on self-reported data from a limited sample, and did not measure student learning. Listed below are recommendations and considerations for conducting a formal evaluation of the SIMs. We also highlight additional considerations for deploying the SIMs that can help inform future SIMs planning by SchoolSims.

Evaluation Design Considerations

The considerations for designing a formal evaluation of the SIMs are based on insights are garnered from conducting the Impact Review, which captured feedback on the efficacy of the SIMs for implementing leadership professional development programs. There are two outcome categories that a SIMs evaluation could address: the efficacy of the SIMs as a training tool to achieve training performance objectives and the leadership outcomes of the training participants based on their SIMs training. Certainly, the latter category is more challenging as there are a number of other factors that can come into play between the training and on-site application; more discussion on this topic can be found below.

The core components of an evaluation study are the presence of the case (i.e., treatment) and control (i.e., non-treatment) groups. An evaluation benefits further from the randomized assignment of cases (i.e., user groups) to case and control sample groups, with minimal sample attrition, in order to increase the reliability of results. Treatment and non-treatment groups should match on key characteristics to allow for examination of differences in outcomes that are owed to the intervention, in this case, SIMs. The following list presents key considerations for the design of an evaluation of the SIMs:

- . Pilot or full study?** In order to ascertain the feasibility of a full SIMs evaluation study, a pilot study can provide useful insights on practical aspects of operationalizing an evaluation design. These include as defining the sample; protocols and requirements for securing study cooperation; developing and testing evaluation questionnaires and/or assessment instruments; and testing data collection procedures. A pilot study is generally on a smaller scale, but maps to the core constructs of the larger evaluation design, and provides essential feedback on the components of the evaluation that would need to be revised prior to a larger-scale implementation.

¹² 78 participants responded to this question

. **Sample definition.** The SIMs User Groups for the Impact Review were from school districts, a state education agency and state education organization. Each of these groups represents constituencies that engage school leader professional development from different vantage points. As such, it is critical that the evaluation design be deliberate in identifying organizations at the state or local levels, and carry out a pre-evaluation assessment of how the organizations implement leadership training to identify case and control groups that are as alike as possible in their implementation standards. If the district level evaluation is of interest, considerations of district size, demographic profiles of the district personnel, student populations and urbanicity (e.g., rural versus urban) are additional characteristics that can inform case-control groupings that are as similar as possible. If the evaluation design includes individual school leaders, further sample selection procedures will need to be defined, based on school leader types (elementary, middle, high school) and school leader training venue (e.g., school of education, district training program, etc.).

. **Unit of measure.** A SIMs evaluation can be conducted at the organizational or individual level. With the former, it will be critical to ensure that districts or state education organizations selected are as similar as possible and that interviews be conducted with staff responsible for training and assessing emerging leaders to ascertain outcomes on specific measures. We anticipate that selecting districts or organizations that prioritize decision making as a lead competency for leaders will provide better evidence of the SIMs effectiveness as opposed to ones that embed decision making as a second- or third-tier competency. At the individual level, it will be important to have school leader samples that are representative of the populations of interest. With both units of measure, it will be imperative to make sure that the samples are of sufficient size to support the measure of statistically significant differences.

A note about controlled settings. One challenge with assessing the efficacy of the SIMs on school leader practice is isolating the SIMs impact from other phenomena, such as additional training curricula, mentoring or class composition at training, which can impact how the actual SIMs impact plays out. One way to get around this is to conduct a SIMs evaluation in a controlled setting, such as in a school of education. For example, in this environment, one class of aspiring leaders is given the SIMs to train on a particular topic and another is not, and their experience in the field on the decision-making competency is assessed as part of the overall training assessment process. This could allow for capturing a more precise measure of the effect of SIMs on school leader practice.

Deployment Considerations

During the Impact Review Alma identified action steps for SchoolSims to consider as it develops and deploys SIMs. They are:

- Delve more deeply in to the SIMs identified as “moderately relevant” to determine the drivers behind the relevance rating (e.g., is it the SIMs content? Its lack of alignment with training curricula objectives? In the case of Girls Basketball coach, was it the first SIMs used by novice facilitators and/or perceived as more relevant for school with sports teams?) Further investigation could reveal helpful insights on how users orient to these SIMs.
- Develop a protocol for tracking user experience to build a database to monitor patterns of use and to surface user issues that have implications for SIMs planning. This can be accomplished by tracking the number of “pings” created by each user or implementing a user survey that is administered at pre-set intervals to obtain consistent feedback on the SIMs user experience.
- Consider developing a pre- and post-SIMs assessment delivered at the training session, to ascertain the efficacy of the tool at the time of the training.

About Alma Advisory Group, LLC

Alma Advisory Group is dedicated to fostering the people, practices, and culture that enable staff to do their best, teams to do great work, and organizations to accomplish outstanding results. Led by founder and Chief Executive Officer Monica Santana Rosen, we partner closely with our clients to understand their unique context, and the conditions that affect their ability to ensure the success of their staff. Then we work in collaboration with our clients to chart a path to solving their most pressing human capital needs, building the capacity in-house to continue to strengthen their work over time.

Alma's Education Research Practice was founded in 2016 with the objective of implementing rigorous, transparent and high quality research for educational organizations. Engaging in a collaborative planning process, we partner with clients to understand their contexts and key priorities to develop tailored research plans that achieve their strategic goals. Our expertise includes research design and implementation as well as the implementation of stakeholder surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide for SIMs User Groups:

March 15, 2017

Background Info:

1. Please indicate your current role?
2. How long have you served in this role?
3. Were you involved in the initial selection of SIMs as a PD tool?
4. What would you describe as the top three professional development needs in your district/organization?
5. Can you please describe the professional development strategy or theory of action for teachers? Principals?
6. School Districts: Can you send us your district's standards for assessing school leaders? Non-school Districts: Can you provide information on how you align your standards for understanding school leadership to the SIMs?

SIMs Experience:

SIMs Initiation:

7. How did you come to learn about the SIMs?
8. What PD tools do you use other than SIMs?
9. What factors informed your decision to select SIMs to incorporate into your PD strategy?

SIMs Experience (SIMs Selection; dosage; efficacy for meeting PD objectives; future planning):

We would like to talk through the SIMs experience you have had and learn more about how it fits in with your district's/organization's PD approach.

10. Can you walk us through the SIMs that you have used to date? For each SIM, please share why those were chosen and what PD objective is addressed by the SIMs.
11. What considerations other than your district's/organization's PD strategy factor into how you deploy the SIMs?
12. Please describe how your district/organization delivers the SIMs curriculum? (e.g., large group versus small group; timing of delivery; SIMs participant selection process, etc.)
13. How frequently do you deploy SIMs? OR
13b. How are SIMs situated in your PD delivery schedule?
14. What are the three SIMs that are the most directly related to your district's/organization's PD priorities?
15. Can you discuss how the SIMs align with your district (the districts that you serve) standards for school leader effectiveness?
16. Of the SIMs that you have used, which one(s) were least useful? Which ones were the most useful?
17. Why? (limit to three)
18. Overall, what is your sense on to what extent the SIMs influence school leader practice? What leads you to this conclusion? How does this vary by the experience of school leaders (i.e. – differences for aspiring principals, new principals and experienced leaders?)

19. How do you measure the effectiveness of the SIMs? (Here, we want to get at any formal or informal tools that are used, and how the SIMs performance has measured up to their intended goals.)

For the following statements please specify whether you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree (we will run through this for the most frequently used SIMs):

20. SIMs support the PD learning objectives for the participating staff
21. I will use the SIMs to continue to meet my district's/organization's PD needs
22. The SIMs have been well-received by the training participants
23. I plan to use SIMs in my district's/organization's PD strategy in the coming year.
24. Do you have any other comments to share?

As a next step in our review, we will conduct web-based surveys with select SIMs participants. We would appreciate your assistance in identifying a group of potential respondents who have participated in a SIMs training to provide first person insight on their experience. The online survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Can you please provide us the names and contact information of eligible participants? (coordinate process for receiving email contact info.)

Thank you very much for your time¹³

¹³ Additional notes on SIMs deployment for reference:

Two districts began with the initial 10 SIMs offered and have continued to be a part of the growth of the catalog to the current 16 SIMs.

Timing of the release of the additional six SIMs:

2016, Q1 - difficult conversations, race, administrator support, student untimely death

2016, Q4 - stakeholder management, social media, middle school turnaround)

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Appendix B: Survey Questions

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

SIMs Impact Review Survey

Thank you so much for participating in the SIMs Impact Review Survey. Your responses will be anonymous and we will aggregate your results with other respondents for analytic purposes. Please contact us at sandra@almaadvisorygroup.com or javiera@almaadvisorygroup.com if you have any questions about the survey or issues with advancing through the instrument.

We appreciate your participation.

1. What is your current position?

- Teacher
- Assistant Principal
- Principal
- Other (please specify)

2. In what year did you begin in this position? Please use YYYY format.

3. What state do you work in?

4. What was your role in the SIMs training? (Please choose one option)

- I was a Facilitator (mediator)
- I was a Participant
- Other

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

5. How would you characterize your participation: as a participant developing decision making skills or as a facilitator, organizing the session?

- Participant developing decision-making skills
- Facilitator organizing the session

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

6. What was your reason for participating in the SIMs training?

7. What was your position at the time you participated in the SIMs? (if you have had more than one position since participating in the training, please select the position you held immediately following the SIMs training)

- Teacher
- Assistant Principal
- Principal
- Other (please specify)

8. How was the SIMs training structured?

- Individual – I did it online
- Pair
- Triad
- Group
- Other (please specify)

9. Please fill the table below about your participation in the SIMs and its relevance

	Did you take this SIMs?	If yes, how relevant was it to your work?
Handling Difficult Conversations (Dress Code)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Girls Basketball Coach	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Disruptive Teacher	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Academic Goal Setting	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Playground Mishap	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Middle School Budget Challenge	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
New Teacher Evaluation Conference	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Student in Crisis	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Small School District Budget Crisis	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Board Relations	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Administrator: First Week on the Job	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Difficult Conversations: Race	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Community Partnerships: Digital Readiness	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Middle School Turnaround (Implementing Change)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Social Media (Integrity In Community)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

10. Of the SIMs you identified, how well are they aligned to:

	Strongly aligned	Somewhat aligned	Slightly Aligned	Not aligned	Don't know offhand
District/state's professional development goals	<input type="radio"/>				
Your state/ district's performance standard	<input type="radio"/>				
Your course curriculum goals	<input type="radio"/>				
Your students' needs	<input type="radio"/>				

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

11. Have you had the opportunity to apply any of the learning to your current position?

	Yes	No	I do not recall
The SIMs discussions have broadened how I assess my options for decision-making.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The SIMs have caused me to reflect more before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The SIMs have made me more aware of the potential consequences of certain actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've encountered a similar scenario where I applied what I learned from the SIMs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. How well were the SIMs aligned with

	Strongly aligned	Moderately aligned	Slightly aligned	Not aligned	Don't know
Your PD goals	<input type="radio"/>				
The course curriculum goals	<input type="radio"/>				
Your district's performance standard	<input type="radio"/>				

13. How does the SIMs tool compare to other forms of professional development?

- It's better
- It's the same
- It's worse

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

14. In what ways was it better?

- My learning improved
- My level engagement increased
- My time was efficiently used
- None of the above

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

15. In what ways was it worse?

- My learning did not improve
- My level of engagement was less
- My time was not used efficiently
- None of the above

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

16. Did you select the SIMs you facilitated?

- Yes
- No

17. How frequently do you use SIMs when you facilitate a training session?

- In every training
- In most trainings
- In about half of my trainings
- In about 25% of my trainings
- Occasionally

18. How many sessions have you facilitated using SIMs:

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11+

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

19. What factors led you to choose to use SIMs in the training sessions you facilitated? (Check all that apply)

- It fit well into my lesson
- It was recommended by a supervisor
- It was recommended by a colleague
- I've used it before, and it worked well
- It is easy to use / facilitate
- Students learn a lot using the SIMs
- Other (please specify)

20. Please answer the following questions for the SIMs that you have used in your trainings: (Select all that apply)

	Did you facilitate this SIM?	If yes, how well was this SIM aligned to your <u>district/state's PD goals?</u>	If yes, how well was this SIM aligned to your <u>district/state's performance standard?</u>	If yes, how well was this SIM aligned to <u>your course curriculum goals?</u>	If yes, how well was this SIM aligned to <u>your students' needs?</u>
Handling Difficult Conversations (Dress code)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Girls Basketball Coach	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Disruptive Teacher	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Academic Goal Setting	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Playground Mishap	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Middle School Budget Challenge	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
New Teacher Evaluation Conference	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Student in Crisis	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Small School District Budget Crisis	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Board Relations	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Administrator: First Week on the Job	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Difficult Conversations: Race	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Community Partnerships: Digital Readiness	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Middle School Turnaround (Implementing Change)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Social Media (Integrity In Community)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

21. How did you deliver the SIMs training?

- Pairs
- Triads
- Groups
- Other (please specify)

22. What best describes how you plan to use the SIMs going forward?

- I will likely increase my usage
- I will continue to use them about is as much as now
- I will likely use them less
- I don't know

23. Are there factors that keep you from using the SIMs more than you currently do?

- Yes
- No

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

24. To what extent do the following factors keep you from using the SIMs more?

	Large factor	Small factor	Not a factor	Not sure/don't know
Size of SIMs library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relevance/alignment of existing SIMs with PD standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My current curriculum/materials already works well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time needed to incorporate the SIMs into my curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Limited course time with students: I need to balance what I include	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technology: our spaces don't support the SIMs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Length of time it takes to go through a SIMs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. Overall, how satisfied are you with the SIMs?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Not enough experience to say

26. Overall, how does learning from the SIMs compare to learning in other forms of professional development? Participants learn:

- Much more
- Somewhat more
- About the same
- Somewhat less
- Much less
- Don't know

27. Please feel free to add your thoughts on the benefits and/or drawbacks of SIMs compared to other professional development tools and materials that you use. (optional)

28. Are there any changes you would like to see in the SIMs?

Yes

No

SIMs Impact Review Questionnaire FINAL March 2017

29. What changes would you like to see in the SIMs going forward?

30. Other comments on the SIMs: