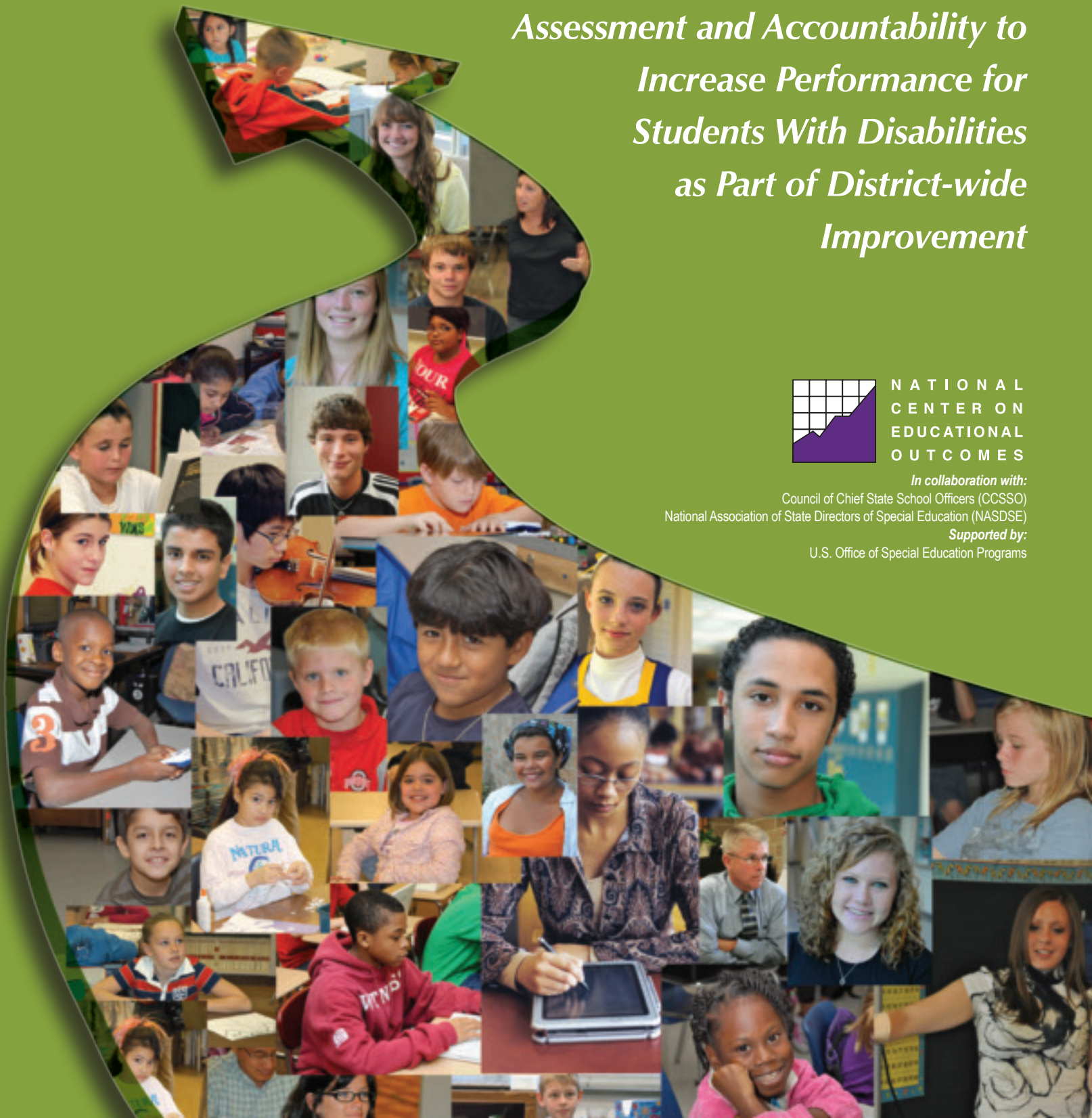
Moving Your Numbers

Five Districts Share How They Used Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students With Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement



NATIONAL CENTER ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In collaboration with:

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

Supported by:

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

About Us

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). Since its establishment, NCEO has worked with states and federal agencies to identify important outcomes of education for students with disabilities, and to bridge general education, special education, and other systems as they work to increase accountability for results of education for all students.

NCEO works in collaboration with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). NCEO initiated *Moving Your Numbers* as part of its work to disseminate relevant information, provide technical assistance, and foster shared learning and networking activities that build on the expertise of others to benefit all children. *Moving Your Numbers* is coordinated through funding by NCEO to the University of Dayton (Columbus Office) in Ohio.

The leadership of NCEO thanks the districts featured in this work, which include the Bloom Vernon (Ohio) Local Schools, Brevard (Florida) Public Schools, Gwinnett County (Georgia) Public Schools, Lake Villa (Illinois) School District #41, and the Wooster (Ohio) City Schools. Without the commitment and willingness to share on the part of these districts, this work would not be possible.

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For additional information about *Moving Your Numbers*, visit movingyournumbers.org.

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Table of Contents

About Us ..... Inside Front Cover

Why We Support This Work 3

Introduction 4

District Achievement Profiles

- Bloom Vernon Local Schools, Ohio 7
- Lake Villa School District #41, Illinois 17
- Wooster City Schools, Ohio 29
- Brevard Public Schools, Florida 43
- Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia 55

What Matters Most: Key Practices Guide ..... Center Insert

References & Resources ..... Inside Back Cover

Why We Support This Work

From Martha Thurlow, Director, NCEO…

Since 1990, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has provided national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). Since its establishment, NCEO has conducted needs assessment and information gathering on the participation and performance of students with disabilities in state and national assessments and educational reform efforts, has provided technical assistance and information dissemination support through a variety of forums, has assisted states in continuing to meet the challenges of collecting comprehensive, accurate, and consistent data on the participation and performance of students with disabilities, and has worked to build the leadership capacity and expertise of others to improve educational outcomes for all children.

During the intervening years, it has become more and more apparent that the best strategy for improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities is to focus more attention and resources on improving instructional practices in the "regular classroom" for all students. *Moving Your Numbers* features the work of five districts that have done just that by using assessment and accountability to change the dialogue from individual and often isolated efforts to more collective and strategic action for improving instructional practice and student learning on a district-wide basis. Each of the districts featured – *from Bloom Vernon with fewer than 1,000 children in rural Appalachia Ohio to urban Gwinnett County Georgia with more than 162,000 students* – has a "we can and we must do it" attitude where adults believe that their actions and those of their colleagues make the greatest difference in student learning. High expectations have replaced excuses, and old notions that have limited opportunities for students because of assumptions about poverty or disability have been replaced with relentless determination to guarantee that every student is prepared for life after school.

State education agencies play a critical role in setting the stage for the kind of work described in *Moving Your Numbers*. We believe state education leaders are committed to creating a public education system that prepares every child for lifelong learning, work, and citizenship. They can provide decisive leadership and collective state action needed to assist every district in preparing students, regardless of economic circumstance, race/ethnicity, or disability, who are ready to succeed as productive members of society. *Moving Your Numbers* provides insights into the kind of leadership and practices that should be supported by states as they redefine their organizations, increasing their own capacity to transform public education in their states.

We hope that you take the time to read these stories, understanding that these districts have not arrived at the solution. Instead, read with the understanding that while there are no silver bullets inherent in this work, there are certain practices that, when coupled with hard work, dedication, and the absolute refusal to give up on any child, have contributed to the districts' ability to *move their numbers* on behalf of all children.

From Bill East, Executive Director, NASDSE…

Over the past decade, the focus on subgroup reporting under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has fostered a new understanding that schools and school districts need to focus on the progress of ALL students for their schools to be successful. That is a powerful message that the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) supports. I am pleased that the National Center on Educational Outcomes has gathered stories of the five districts featured on its Moving Your Numbers website that provide concrete examples of how successful districts have improved achievement for all of their students, including those with disabilities. We encourage special educators to mine these stories for their practical strategies and inspiration that can help schools and districts move the numbers to ensure that all students are successful.

Introduction

In *Moving Your Numbers*, five districts with vastly different demographics share their journey in using assessment and accountability as an impetus for positive change. In each case, assessment data were not held up as the reason why teachers couldn't teach or children couldn't learn beyond a narrow focus on teaching to the test. Instead, each district used the increasing demand for accountability for all students and groups of students to change the conversation and practice across the district, moving their numbers in a positive direction for all children as a result.

In each district, shared responsibility for student success involved shifting from a departmental or programmatic orientation to a more collaborative organization where adults at all levels of the education enterprise work together to build each other's capacity around the common goal of supporting the learning of all students and student groups at significantly higher levels. Assessment/accountability data were used in every case as a tool for analysis and action, informing the system. The notion of monitoring was redefined – from a heavy-handed gotcha to a joint responsibility for continually gauging progress and holding each other accountable for reaching common goals. Fear and isolated practice were replaced with collective, open dialogue among adults across the system.

ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

- Successful outcomes (including college and career readiness) for students receiving special education services requires their inclusion in standards-based reform efforts and their participation in statewide assessment and accountability systems.
- Improving the educational outcomes of students receiving special education services, as for any other student group, requires a sustained focus on teaching and learning, aligned actions across the district, and continuous monitoring of the degree of implementation of such actions to assess the impact on student learning.
- Consistent, high quality implementation of effective practices is a challenge for many districts.
- Students receiving special education services are as different from each other as the members of any other group; assuming pre-determined levels of achievement based on disability status limits these students' opportunity to learn and diminishes the collective responsibility of adults to provide high quality instruction aligned with grade-level content to these students.

The preservation of special education as a separate silo also gave way to a culture more characterized by inquiry and organizational learning where adults from all levels of the organization understood how their daily responsibilities were related to district goals for improving student learning. At each level, the fundamental questions became more about building the capacity of others in the organization to support higher student learning, while addressing gaps in student performance became the collective work of the adults, regardless of their role or title. The achievement gap referred not only to gaps in the performance of subgroups against grade-level standards, but also to the performance of all students against more rigorous, international standards. Equally important was the realization that the achievement gap was related to an *implementation gap*, spurring the district to establish structures for fully implementing, and monitoring the degree of implementation, of core work related to instruction and achievement. In each of the districts featured, special education students were not viewed as the group that caused the district to fail to make adequate yearly progress, but rather as the group whose instructional needs caused the district to rethink priorities, thus putting in place practices that elevated the quality of instruction for all students.

This work, undertaken by the National Center on Educational Outomes, is not intended to tell people what to do. Rather, it is designed to showcase the work of these districts as an impetus for encouraging people at all levels of the education enterprise to examine what they do and the degree to which their collective actions are making a positive difference for all students, including those identified as special education students, English Language Learners, and other children often characterized as high need. While the conclusions provided through this work are limited to the districts featured, it should be noted that these districts share many of the same demographics and characteristics of large numbers of districts across the country.

Assumptions. Several assumptions underlie this work and are provided in the sidebar above. They challenge presumptions that still too often persist today and that limit opportunities to learn for students with disabilities and other high need youngsters through a belief that children, once labeled, cannot learn, or be expected to learn, challenging content aligned with grade-level standards. The assumptions underlying this work assert that students receiving special education services are as different from each other as are any other group of people, that such students must be able to access

standards-based instruction in meaningful ways, and that it is the responsibility of the district to provide the kind of focused instruction and opportunities for shared learning that allow every student to achieve at higher levels. It is also the responsibility of state education agencies to support all districts, schools, and teachers in affecting the learning of all students in significantly different ways.

Essential Practices. While each district featured in *Moving Your Numbers* had its own way of organizing for accelerated improvement, each of them implemented a set of practices that was very similar. Evidence suggests that these six practices (listed below), when used in an aligned and coherent manner, are associated with higher student achievement:[1]

1. **Use data well**;
2. **Focus your goals**;
3. **Select and implement shared instructional practices** (individually and as a teacher team);
4. **Implement deeply**;
5. **Monitor and provide feedback and support**; and
6. **Inquire and learn** (at the district, school, and teacher team level).

All six practices are described within the context of the district achievement profiles included in this publication. They are also organized for easier reference as a center insert that provides suggestions for state education agency personnel, district and school personnel (including regional technical assistance providers), and parents/family members who might be interested in learning more about what questions to ask, or how to initiate and/or contribute to a conversation in their state, region, or district that supports all students to learn at higher levels.

The district profiles presented in this publication are sequenced from the smallest (Bloom Vernon) to the largest (Gwinnett County Public Schools) and this sequence is not meant to connote that one district's work is more relevant or of a higher quality than the work of any other district. Each was identified for inclusion based on three factors: (1) the district was known to be engaged in certain practices believed to be associated with higher student learning; (2) the district was committed to district-wide implementation of such practices; and (3) the district was committed to and showing evidence of improving the performance of all students and student groups.

As you read about the journeys of the featured districts, we hope you do so with the understanding that more powerful teaching begets more powerful outcomes for all children, including those who often experience challenges, such as special education students. Look for the attitudes, structures, and leadership and instructional practices used by these districts that are making a positive difference in students' lives. While the districts' work to continually improve adult practice and student learning is not done, each is making remarkable progress through focused, intentional action, sustainable and district-wide efforts, and the belief that they can positively affect the future of every child.

Who *Are* Special Education Students?

Special education students are a diverse group of students nationally and within states, districts, and schools, comprising 13% of the population of all public school students. Individual states vary in their percentages of special education students, from less than 10% to 19% across the states.

One way to describe the characteristics of special education students is by their disability category, even though students within a single category have diverse needs. Nationally, there are 13 special education disability categories. The percentages of students in each category vary tremendously across states. For example, the percentages of special education students with specific learning disabilities (LD) varied from 15% of the special education population in one state to 60% in another. The percentage of students with intellectual disabilities varied from 3% to 19%. Other categories of disability also show considerable variation. Categorizing special education students, or any other group of students, should be done with caution. It is inappropriate to assume that the labels of "special education" or groups within special education, describe the characteristics of individual students. Rather, it is important to look beyond the group name (special education students) to develop appropriate mechanisms to accurately understand the characteristics and learning needs of these students in greater detail.

It is also important to understand that special education students receive their instruction in the general education setting for varying amounts of their instructional time. In most states, however, more than 50% of special education students spend more than 80% of their instructional time in general education classrooms. And, most of the 6.5 million special education students in the country (except for a portion with the most significant cognitive disabilities who may fall in such categories as intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities) participate in the general state assessment, rather than in an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards.

Source: *Understanding Subgroups in Common State Assessments: Special Education Students and ELLs (NCEO, 2011).*

[1] Taken from McNulty, B.A., & Besser, L. (2011). *Leaders make it happen! An administrator's guide to data teams.* Englewood, CO: Lead + Learn Press.

Bloom Vernon Local Schools: Achievement Profile

South Webster, Ohio

"People will die for a cause, but they won't follow an initiative," explained South Webster Elementary School Principal Scott Holstein in talking about the natural inclination of the staff to resist externally imposed programs or strategies. Located in rural Appalachian Scioto County, the district serves 883 children in two buildings – the K-6th grade South Webster Elementary and the 7-12th grade South Webster Junior/Senior High School. "We're simultaneously 'tight' on values and 'loose' on how you get there," said 4th-5th Intervention Specialist Heidi Holstein. The husband and wife team have been with the district a number of years, having taught in Texas prior to joining Bloom Vernon.

Bloom Vernon Local Schools Student Demographics

Total Enrollment: 883
% Students Identified as Students with Disabilities: 11.6
% Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged: 45.9
% Students Identified as Minority: 0.4
% Students Identified as Limited English Proficient: 0

Often described as the Little Smokies, Scioto County is located in the south central part of the state bordering the Ohio River and close to Shawnee State Forest, Ohio's largest state forest with more than 60,000 acres. With a population of a little over 2,200 people, the village of South Webster has an unemployment rate of 11.8 percent and a per capita personal income below $30,000.[1] About half of the district's students are categorized as economically disadvantaged, and about half also live with family members who are unable to read. But that is viewed as a reality to be addressed, not as a reason for low achievement. "There is no whining here about what parents do or don't do for their kids. There are conditions that may present challenges, but they can't be used as an excuse for low expectations," stated Heidi Holstein.

A 'No Excuses' Culture

Today, a 'no excuses' attitude pervades the conversation at the district level. However, that wasn't always the case. South Webster Junior/Senior High School Principal Bob Johnson, in his 27th year with the district, describes the turning point in the district's journey to becoming a much more focused organization. "About nine years ago, we didn't make AYP for students with disabilities and that had a huge effect on me personally," said Johnson. "I was embarrassed," he recalled. Heidi Holstein remembers that time well, explaining that "NCLB sent a clear call to action and made us realize that kids can do this; we just weren't set up to teach them what they needed to do well."

Use Data Well. The failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) caused the district to move into school improvement status and that triggered the involvement of the regional school improvement team operated through the South-Central Ohio Educational Service Center (ESC). "With the help of the ESC, we began to focus on the data; most of the staff embraced this, but some got moved to 'different seats,'" said Johnson. "We had always paid attention to student learning, but we started to also focus on the kids who weren't achieving," he added. "Bloom Vernon was one of the districts that pioneered the use of data to look at the learning needs of individual children," said Eric Humston, single point of contact for the Ross-Pike ESC, one of 16 ESCs across the state that provide support to districts through a regional state support team (SST). The state's establishment of a coordinated SST regional structure replaced the former school improvement teams that were in operation prior to 2006. "The ESC laid out the data in a way that couldn't be ignored; it was a real eye opener," said Johnson.

> *"I believe in the power of unification around purpose and ours is to help all kids learn at high levels. Our greatest challenge involves eliminating the mindset that because we're poor and rural, kids can't achieve."*
>
> **Rick Carrington, Superintendent**

[1] Sperling's Best Places to Live and Retire, 2010; *Southern Ohio Environmental Scan & Market Analysis*, Prepared for Southern State Community College. December 2010, Washington, DC: Hanover Research.

Since 1940, the Jeep has been the unofficial mascot of South Webster's high school athletic teams. Based on the 1938 cartoon with Popeye and the Jeep, the Jeep was a mystical creature that could do anything, including walking through walls, teleporting, and telling the future. While the character was first used in the 40's to describe the then-basketball coach's penchant for smuggling answers to his players for how to address problems caused by the opposing team (in 1940 coaches were not permitted on the playing floor to instruct players), the Jeep's ability to look ahead provides an apt metaphor for the current practice of the district.

But, unlike the Jeep, there's nothing magical about the district's progression from being in academic watch to becoming excellent according to the state's accountability designations. Rather, it's the district's effective use of data to identify the right problems, and monitor the degree to which their actions are having the desired effect, that has led to its success. "Even more than the effective use of data, Bloom Vernon's practices have led to a culture where every teacher takes responsibility for every student," said Humston.

"I believe in the power of unification around purpose and ours is to help all kids learn at high levels. Our greatest challenge involves eliminating the mindset that because we're poor and rural, kids can't achieve," explained Superintendent Rick Carrington, now in his 31st year in the district and his 9th as superintendent.

Percentage of Students With and Without Disabilities by Performance Level

Levels	2009-2010									
	Reading		Writing		Math		Science		Social Studies	
	RE	IEP	RE	IEP	RE	IEP	RE	IEP	RE	IEP
Limited	2.1	9.1	1.7	0	4.9	10.9	1.6	8.3	3.4	9.1
Basic	9.6	10.9	6.9	10.0	9.6	5.5	17.3	8.3	8.6	27.3
Proficient	43.9	38.2	44.8	70.0	38.8	29.1	30.8	45.8	31.0	36.4
Accelerated	25.0	29.1	44.8	20.0	26.2	34.5	31.9	20.8	27.6	0.0
Advanced	19.4	12.7	1.7	0.0	20.6	20.0	18.4	16.7	29.3	27.3

--- denotes not calculated/not displayed when there are fewer than 10 in the group
RE denotes regular education

Percentage of Students With and Without Disabilities by Performance Level

Levels	2010-2011									
	Reading		Writing		Math		Science		Social Studies	
	RE	IEP	RE	IEP	RE	IEP	RE	IEP	RE	IEP
Limited	2.6	11.1	0.0	---	1.9	20.4	1.7	0.0	4.5	---
Basic	6.3	16.7	9.0	---	9.6	13.0	16.8	23.8	11.9	---
Proficient	39.6	37.0	47.8	---	38.0	24.1	34.6	23.8	40.3	---
Accelerated	30.3	22.2	43.3	---	26.6	16.7	26.8	33.3	16.4	---
Advanced	21.2	13.0	0.0	---	24.0	25.9	20.1	19.0	26.9	---

--- denotes not calculated/not displayed when there are fewer than 10 in the group
RE denotes regular education

In addition to reviewing state assessment trend data annually, the district uses teacher-developed, short-cycle assessment data on an ongoing basis to gauge student progress. "Even using short-cycle assessment is too long; we need to look at how we're doing daily," said Carrington.

Bloom Vernon Performance Index Calculations

School Year	District	Elementary School	Junior/Senior High School
2010-2011	100.4	100.4	100.4
2009-2010	99.6	98.3	100.8
2008-2009	99.4	99.6	99.2

Bloom Vernon's Performance Index (PI) calculation exceeded 100 for the first time this year – a goal of the district leadership team. The PI is one of four measures used as part of Ohio's state accountability designations, with the others being AYP, state indicators, and a value added indicator. The PI measures how well students performed on assessments across all tested subjects and grade levels. The PI score is a weighted average that includes all tested subjects and grades (3rd-8th and 10th), and untested students, with the greatest weight given to advanced scores (i.e., 1.2) and a weight of zero given to untested students. The highest PI score a district can achieve is 120.

Further, an examination of student assessment data over the past two years shows an increase in the number of students receiving special education services who scored at the accelerated and advanced levels in some areas (e.g., reading), and a general narrowing of the gap between children with and without disabilities at these levels.

The district experienced a drop in math performance for students with disabilities, as evidenced by a higher percentage of students scoring at the limited and basic level, from about 11% (limited) and 6% (basic) in 2009-2010 to about 20% and 13% in 2010-2011. While there are fewer children with disabilities at some tested grades, resulting in data not being reported (i.e., NC = not calculated), Superintendent Carrington states that the overall performance of students with disabilities, as well as students who are economically disadvantaged, continues to improve. "Every child counts," he said.

Carrington attributes the decrease in the number of students with disabilities from 2009-10 to 2010-11 to several factors. First, the general population in South Webster and surrounding Scioto County has been declining due to the economy and lack of available jobs. He also attributes the decreasing number of students identified as students with disabilities to the district's intentional efforts to intervene as early as possible, thereby reducing the number of children who are referred for special education services. "We believe that if we don't intervene and get kids on track early, by the time they get to the fourth grade, it's much more difficult to change the path the child is on," said Carrington.

About 10 years ago, the district began putting what Carrington describes as "a lot of energy and resources" into Pre-K through first grade by adding teachers and reducing class size at those grade levels in an effort to teach every child to read. "Shame on us if kids come through here and can't read," he exclaimed. According to district administration, the children who present the most challenges to staff are the ones who move into the district at the 5th and 6th grade level.

Bloom Vernon's proficiency test results, when compared with similar districts (i.e., districts with similar demographics, incomes, housing prices, etc.), exceeded the similar district average in 25 of 29 tested grades/subjects. But that's not good enough according to Johnson. "We have the highest achievement in math at the high school level in the region, but we still don't have a national merit scholar," he laments.

Focus Your Goals. While district leadership is quick to point out that "weighing the pig won't make it fatter," the use of data to pinpoint areas of need, develop goals, and track progress – rather than using data for datas' sake – is seen as an absolute priority. "Looking at the data to identify needs" is one of my favorite things to do," remarked Scott

South Webster Elementary School
2010-2011 Ohio Achievement Assessments

Grade	Subject	Disability Flag (No/Yes)	# Students at Least Proficient	# Students Tested	Proficient Percentage
3rd	Reading	No	55	60	91.7%
		Yes	9	11	81.8%
	Math	No	55	60	91.7%
		Yes	9	11	81.8%
4th	Reading	No	67	71	94.4%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Writing	No	---	---	---
		Yes	---	---	---
	Math	No	67	71	94.4%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
5th	Reading	No	38	46	82.6%
		Yes	9	14	64.3%
	Math	No	37	46	80.4%
		Yes	7	14	50.0%
	Social Studies	No	---	---	---
		Yes	---	---	---
	Science	No	37	46	80.4%
		Yes	11	14	78.6%
6th	Reading	No	69	72	95.8%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Math	No	64	72	88.9%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC

South Webster Junior High/High School
2010-2011 Ohio Achievement Assessments/ Ohio Graduation Tests

Grade	Subject	Disability Flag (No/Yes)	# Students at Least Proficient	# Students Tested	Proficient Percentage
7th	Reading	No	37	47	78.7%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Writing	No	---	---	---
		Yes	---	---	---
	Math	No	36	47	76.6%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
8th	Reading	No	63	66	95.5%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Math	No	57	66	86.4%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Social Studies	No	---	---	---
		Yes	---	---	---
	Science	No	54	66	81.8%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
10th	Reading	No	62	67	92.5%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Writing	No	61	67	91.0%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Math	No	64	67	95.5%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Social Studies	No	56	67	83.6%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
	Science	No	55	67	82.1%
		Yes	NC	< 10	NC
11th	Reading	No	52	53	98.1%
		Yes	6	10	60.0%
	Writing	No	53	53	100.0%
		Yes	8	10	80.0%
	Math	No	53	53	100.0%
		Yes	9	10	90%
	Social Studies	No	50	53	94.3%
		Yes	7	10	70.0%
	Science	No	49	53	92.5%
		Yes	8	10	80.0%

Holstein. "We look at data from the Ohio Achievement Assessments and Ohio Graduation Tests, ACT data, and item analysis data to identify weaknesses and establish goals for improving performance in content areas. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that every child is college and career ready when they graduate," said Carrington.

"Rick regularly shares information about what successful organizations do and goal setting is number one," said Johnson. Even though the district was not in school improvement status, it chose to use a web-based tool developed by the Ohio Department of Education called the Ohio Decision Framework (DF). The DF is used at Stage 1 of the Ohio Improvement Process by district leadership teams and building leadership teams to make informed decisions about where to spend their time, energy, and resources to make significant and substantial improvements in student performance. The DF is populated with the district's own trend data, which are organized in such a way as to allow leadership teams to answer essential questions and make decisions about their greatest concerns and needs, leading to a needs assessment that is data-driven and that easily translates into the development of focused goals, strategies, and actions for impacting student learning.[2]

BLOOM VERNON NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY
Identifying greatest concerns and priority/focus areas

The district needs to continue to focus on providing intensive intervention with IEP students — AYP was met with students with disabilities for the second consecutive year — the current focus is on the right track with students showing growth. Formative assessment techniques are used in many grade level/subject areas; however, more widespread intensive training is needed and is set to occur starting with the 2011-12 school year. Parent surveys show a 97% satisfaction rating at the elementary level. There is a need for value-added training to bolster teacher understanding of the concept and to encourage the use of value-added data for school improvement purposes. Therefore, the three main areas of focus will be formative assessment techniques in the classroom, use of value-added data for instructional improvement, and intervention with students with disabilities.

Bloom Vernon identified one overall goal: *By 2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in core academic areas.* The district also identified a limited number of strategies for reaching this goal, which include:

1. Align research-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the State's academic content standards, transitioning to the Common Core State Standards;
2. Collect and analyze data to identify patterns, pose hypotheses, design action steps, define evaluation criteria, conduct action research projects, drive decisions about practice, and commit to results;
3. Provide prevention/intervention services in reading, science, and math for children most at risk in these areas;
4. Align systems of intervention and special education services with scientifically based curriculum, instruction, and assessment and with the Common Core State Standards;
5. Distribute core academic highly qualified teachers equitably; and
6. Provide comprehensive family literacy services.

Bloom-Vernon Local School District Needs Assessments
Identifying greatest concerns and priority/focus areas

Area 1: READING

Concern: IEP Reading — District All Students = 87% proficiency, Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students = 80%, IEP students (i.e., Students Receiving Special Education Services) = 80%

Focus: Continue to focus on intensive intervention with IEP students [AYP was met with students with disabilities for second consecutive year-current focus is on the right track with students showing growth]

- ***Curriculum issues***: Current subscale performance shows the weakest area is in Informational Text. The strongest subscale area is Vocabulary
- ***Assessment issues***: High alignment of formative/short-cycle assessments-K-12; moderate use of clear learning goals K-12; moderate use of monitoring grades K-5 and 9-12; moderate use of student self-reflection, self-assessment, and use of descriptive feedback
- ***Instructional practice issues***: High use of academic content standards with learning goals and activities to guide students' progress; moderate use of learning goals communicated to students and families; high use of research-based instructional practices; moderate use of learning tasks that use higher-order thinking skills
- ***HQPD issues***: High use of PD aligned to reading instructional strategies for low learners/intervention; high use of PD sharing; moderate use of PD follow-up; moderate level of monitoring processes for PD; moderate use of data from PD; 100% of core subject teachers are HQT

Using the DF, the district identified three main areas of focus, which include using formative assessment techniques in the classroom, using value-added data for instructional improvement, and improving performance for students with disabilities. The district places great emphasis on (1) clarity of vision, including ensuring that new staff, students, and community members are carefully inducted

[2] The DF is the major tool used at Stage 1 of the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), Ohio's strategy for developing a statewide system of support designed to assist all districts and their schools improve instructional practice and student performance. While developed for use by all districts, under Ohio's federally approved differentiated accountability model, all districts in school improvement (SI) status or that have one or more schools in SI, are required to implement the OIP as their intervention.

into the district's core values, (2) annual goal setting, and (3) the sharing of practice across staff – all intended to help all students achieve at the highest levels. And the school community, including the board of education, appears to be united around these core values.

Carrington explains: "This is a very small town and the Board president has been president for 14 years and on the Board for more than 25 years. The Board supports what we do." Bloom Vernon is also one of only a handful of districts in Ohio that has no teacher union. "We've never had an 'administrator versus teacher' mentality here. We're trying to row the boat together," said Carrington. An attempt in November 1996 to establish a union for classified employees was voted down on a three to one basis. "Our emphasis is on kids and our disagreements should be about what's best for them," he added.

Bloom-Vernon Local School District Needs Assessments
Identifying greatest concerns and priority/focus areas

Area 2: MATHEMATICS

Concern: IEP Math — District All Students = 85% proficiency, ED students = 80%, IEP students = 84%

Focus: Continue to focus on intensive intervention with IEP students [AYP was met with students with disabilities for second consecutive year-current focus is on the right track with students showing growth]

- ***Curriculum issues***: Current subscale performance shows the weakest area is in Number Sense. The strongest subscale area is the area of Geometry
- ***Assessment issues***: Moderate alignment of textbooks; high alignment of formative/short-cycle assessments-K-12; high alignment of other teacher-made instructional materials
- ***Instructional practice issues***: High use of academic content standards with learning goals and activities to guide students' progress; moderate use of learning goals communicated to students and families; high use of research-based instructional practices; moderate use of learning tasks that use higher-order thinking skills
- ***HQPD issues***: High use of PD aligned to math instructional strategies for low learners/intervention; moderate use of PD sharing; moderate use of PD follow-up; moderate level of monitoring processes for PD; moderate use of data from PD; 100% of core subject teachers are HQT

"Years ago I felt like a glorified babysitter. I was trying to teach 12 of the neediest children at the same time, and meanwhile, they missed out on regular instruction. You can't catch a moving train and regular ed moves on."

Heidi Holstein, 4th-5th Grade Intervention Specialist

First Who, Then What

The drive to achieve is pervasive among the teaching force in Bloom Vernon and fueling that drive is the priority of the small core that makes up the district leadership team. "The teachers are relentless; they have the same high expectations for all kids and believe that every child must achieve," said Scott Holstein.

Ranked in the bottom third of the county in terms of teacher pay (in a county that is itself among the poorest in the state), Bloom Vernon seems to attract educators interested in working in the district and there is little teacher turnover. "About half the staff live in the district and went to school here, but just because you live here doesn't mean you're qualified to be hired," said Carrington. "If you pay attention to the who, you'll take care of most of the what," added Carrington.

The district team places great stock in making sure that every person hired into the district understands the core values of high expectation, no excuses, and shared practice. "It's imperative that we get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats on the bus," said Carrington." Carrington uses student achievement data to place teachers, ensuring that teacher strengths match identified needs. "We've had to remove very few people, though, through the years we have moved people to where we thought they could have the most impact on student learning," he said.

Bloom-Vernon Local School District Needs Assessments
Identifying greatest concerns and priority/focus areas

Area 3: EXPECTATIONS & CONDITIONS

Concern: School climate — overall discipline referrals are up; student discipline-grades 7, 10, 6 (Attn: minority, male, and ED); student expulsions/out-of-school suspensions-no expulsions for 10, suspensions grades 9, 7, and 10 (Attn: SWD and male)

Focus: Continue focus on student success with high priority given to language and math instructional time

- ***Leadership issues***: High use of data to improve student performance; high use of monitoring staff use of data; High use of common short cycle assessments to monitor student progress; high use of data to allocate district resources; high alignment of building plans to district CIP plan
- ***Communication issues:*** High effectiveness at informing and building families knowledge and skills in supporting their child's learning at home.
- ***Community issues:*** High engagement of preschool to actively participate in district professional development; moderate working with parent organizations and community organizations to focus on academic success of students
- ***Resource management issues:*** High teacher and PD alignment: high use of using teachers in making key decisions; high use of assignment of faculty flexibly to meet student needs in cost effective ways

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices.

Getting the right people in the right seats is not only the responsibility of district administrators. In fact, a team primarily comprised of teachers makes the recommendation on all new hires.

For example, if a 4th-grade teacher is being hired, the six-to-eight member team would include the 4th-grade teachers, the counselor, and the principal. "We make sure that the person we select is committed to kids first and we ask questions to find out if that person will go the extra mile for kids," explained Heidi Holstein. "Years ago, we hired a paraprofessional and the determining question was 'how do you feel about lice?'"

Common planning time is built into the schedule in both the elementary and junior high/high school. At the elementary level, teachers meet in grade-level teams and the principal meets with the teams regularly. At the junior high/high school, they meet in subject- or content-area teams. Weekly meetings are required; however, the teachers meet almost daily on an informal basis. "You'll see teachers meeting at the copier, in the halls before and after classes, and in other settings, and the conversation is most often about how kids are doing," said Johnson.

Teachers work together to meet the instructional needs of all children. At the elementary level, there is one licensed intervention specialist per grade, except at the fifth grade level. Heidi Holstein is the only teacher who is solely licensed as an intervention specialist; all other teachers assigned as intervention specialists are dual certified in special as well as general education. "We're going to hit them with everything we've got whether they have an IEP or not. We catch them early and intervene a lot," said Heidi Holstein. "Years ago I felt like a glorified babysitter. I was trying to teach 12 of the neediest children at the same time, and meanwhile, they missed out on regular instruction. You can't catch a moving train and regular ed moves on," she said. Rather than providing "different" education to children who receive special education services, the district provides "double" instruction. "The intervention specialists help all children work to meet grade-level standards, while providing remediation based on students' gaps," said Holstein.

At the junior high/high school, all 9th- and 10th-grade at-risk students receive 'double instruction' in math and reading. At the same time, teachers are working to increase the rigor for all students. "Our greatest moment came when we looked at our growth data," said Johnson. They weren't good and the teachers took it personally," he added. Johnson recalls that when he saw the growth data, he found out which districts in the state were showing the greatest gains. Having identified Olentangy High School as one of the high-performing schools, he called his counterpart there and asked if South Webster teachers could meet with Olentangy High School teachers in the areas of math, science, and social studies. Contact between the teachers at the two schools continues today, and South Webster teachers have been able to bring back and share with their colleagues at home what they've learned from dialogue/discussion with teachers at Olentangy High School.

Excerpt from High School Model Curriculum in Mathematics

High School Conceptual Category: Algebra

Domain: Seeing Structure in Expressions

Cluster: *Write expressions in equivalent forms to solve problems*

Standards

3. Choose and produce an equivalent form of an expression to reveal and explain properties of the quantity represented by the expression
   a. Factor a quadratic expression to reveal the zeros of the function it defines
   b. Complete the square in a quadratic expression to reveal the maximum or minimum value of the function it defines.
   c. Use the properties of exponents to transform expressions for exponential functions. *For example the expression1.15t can be written as (1.151/12)12t ≈ 1.01212t to reveal the approximate equivalent monthly interest rate* if *the annual rate is 15%*
4. Derive the formula for the sum of a finite geometric series (when the common ratio is not 1), and use the formula to solve problems. For example, calculate mortgage payments.

Content Elaborations (in development)
This section will provide additional clarification and examples to aid in the understanding of the standards. To support shared interpretations across states, content elaborations are being developed through multistate partnerships organized by CCSSO and other national organizations. This information will be included as it is developed.

Expectations for Learning (in development)
As the framework for the assessments, this section will be developed by the CCSS assessment consortia (SBAC and PARCC). Ohio is currently participating in both consortia and has input into the development of frameworks. This information will be included as it is developed.

Source: Ohio Department of Education, 8/1/2011

Now, having received the "excellent with distinction" status for the third consecutive year, the subject-area teams are working toward the more systematic use of formative assessment to gauge student progress and the effectiveness of teaching practice. "When we looked at the data, we hypothesized that we were doing better in meeting the needs of at-risk students, but we were not pushing our top performers," said Johnson. "We started an Advanced Placement lab and all freshman have college-prep Algebra, World History, and English; the only difference for students who are at-risk or receive special education is that they receive additional instruction and support," he said.

South Webster Junior High/High School participates in a state pilot using end-of-course (EOC) exams to assess student growth. "Using the ACT Quality Core has helped us as a staff to increase expectations even further for all kids, and to be clear about those expectations. It's also helped us ramp up the rigor of the courses we teach," explained Johnson.

Constancy of Purpose

"Borrowing from the CEO of Coca-Cola Company, we believe in constancy of purpose and continuous discontent with the present," explained Carrington. While much of what South Webster teachers do is not formalized, they are committed to continually improving their own practice and believe that other teachers are the greatest resource they have in supporting each other's continuous growth and development. "We have great people here," said Johnson.

Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. High school English teachers Katie Kilgour, Judy Ellsesser, and Julie Haines exemplify the use of a professional learning community where teachers provide feedback and support to each other around what works best with students. The team meets frequently, sometimes informally and weekly as a content-area team to share strategies and discuss progress of individual students, improving consistency in expectation and focus across classes. Teachers are developing or refining course web pages where class assignments and learning objectives are posted. One outcome of using technology this way is that no matter how many 'snow days' the district encounters this year (there were eight during 2009-10), students can access instruction and assignments. "Our goal is to have school every day this year, no matter what kind of weather we get. We lost too much instructional time last year," explained Johnson.

Other staff members are leading the way in the use of formative assessment. One such teacher, Angie McAlister, just completed her dissertation on the effects of the use of formative assessment on classroom performance. Others, such as 8th-grade math teacher Jamie McCorkle, is

Ohio's Participation in The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Assessment Consortia

CCSS is an initiative led by states and coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). According to the CCSS site, "the standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce."

The standards are informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live.

The standards, which define the knowledge and skills students should have from kindergarten through twelfth grade, are aligned with college and work expectations; are developed to be clear, understandable and consistent, include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and are evidence-based.

Ohio adopted the CCSS in English/Language Arts and Mathematics in June 2010 and aligned model curriculum in March 2011. Additional work is under way to develop content elaborations, and to contribute to the development of a framework for assessment through federally funded assessment consortia designed to develop the next generation of summative assessments. Ohio participates in both – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC).

For more information on the CCSS initiative, go to http://www.corestandards.org/. For information on assessment consortia, go to the following sites:

SBAC: http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/
PARCC: http://www.fldoe.org/parcc/pdf/apprtcasc.pdf

described by value added professional developers in the state as an outlier, exceeding one year of growth every year. These teachers are sharing what they know and, more importantly, what they do with colleagues through informal and more formal opportunities to learn.

Rather than use state-allotted waiver days for the traditional workshop format, the district requires that these days be used by teachers to work together to review student data and identify instructional strategies for addressing students' needs. "Every nine weeks, we use a waiver day and teachers meet in teams to review short-cycle data and other student data and discuss student learning," explained Carrington. "Many teachers have commented that they do 'two days of work in one day' during the waiver days," he added. "It would be easy to use the waiver days for housekeeping, but we are steadfast in ensuring that they be solely used for analyzing student assessment data and discussing instructional strategies," added Johnson.

At the elementary level, students are frequently assessed on reading fluency. "Our goal is to have every child reading 100 words a minute fluently," explained Heidi Holstein. Described as the data guy by his colleagues, Principal Scott Holstein knows the fluency rate of every child in the building and tracks it over the course of the year. All children in the school engage in timed repeated reading for 15 minutes each day, and every "non-intervention" teacher in grades 2 through 5 works with at least three children a day, providing additional intervention as part of the instructional process. "We start in 2nd grade by administering a fluency test five times a year and use the results to review instructional approaches and identify needed intervention," explained Holstein. "Every six to eight weeks we're revamping what we do to meet the needs of children based on what the data tell us," he added. A commercial fluency program is also used by the staff to improve consistency across the building.

"Years ago, teachers would send kids with disabilities to me to 'take care of them.' Now, they say 'this is my reading or math time and you can't have them!' This is the true barometer of adults taking responsibility for the success of all kids," said Heidi Holstein.

It's Not About Us

"We're not charismatic leaders and it's not about us," said Carrington. It's also not about programs. "We haven't relied a lot on outside people to do much; we take responsibility ourselves," he added. "I can play golf with Snedeker's clubs and I'm still lousy," he said, referring to professional golfer Brandt Snedeker. As a district, Bloom Vernon believes that people – effective teachers and principals – are more important than programs. One example of new work that involves every teacher in the district is the transition to the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). All teachers at all levels are engaged in transitioning from Ohio's academic content standards to the new CCSS. "The teachers want to do it themselves," said Carrington.

Inquire and Learn. While bringing in outside people to tell staff what to do may not be looked upon favorably, Carrington constantly brings the work of national researchers and leading thinkers to his staff. He also shares the 'good news,' regularly describing accomplishments of staff, the two schools, and the district. "He spurs others to say 'if they can do it, so can we," said Heidi Holstein. "Rather than mandate a program or initiative, Rick asks questions and puts ideas out there as ways to get better at teaching children," she added.

"Success is a motivator, it spirals up," said Johnson. And the staff collectively feels that good instruction leads to even better instruction across the board. "We're believers in the flywheel effect," said Johnson. The notion of a flywheel is used by Jim Collins[3] to describe how some organizations have moved "from good to great" by preserving core values, while continuously getting better through consistency, focus, and hard work. Tangible evidence that the work is paying off leads to increased momentum for continued hard work, resulting in the wheel turning faster and faster – or real and lasting continuous improvement. In *Good to Great*, Collins chronicles the progress of companies studied during a five-year project, describing what contributed to the change process: "In each of these dramatic, remarkable, good-to-great corporate transformations, we found the same thing: There was no miracle moment. Instead, a down-to-earth, pragmatic, committed-to-excellence process – a framework – kept each company, its leaders, and its people on track for the long haul. In each case, it was the Flywheel Effect over the Doom Loop, the victory of steadfast discipline over the quick fix." (web interview with Jim Collins by FastCompany.com, December 19, 2007, page 2).

The district leadership team, which meets monthly, uses a traditional model in that it is comprised of the superintendent, the two principals, and assistant principals. Student data from grade-level and content-area teaching teams is given to and reviewed by principals who, in turn, monitor progress and discuss needs during the DLT meetings. "We never have an administrative team meeting where we don't focus on student learning," said Johnson. In addition to formal meetings of the leadership team, the superintendent and principals eat lunch together in the high school cafeteria most days of the week.

Embracing Discontent

Hard work and staying focused on continuing to get better at supporting all students at higher levels is the mantra of the district leadership. "Looking at our progress is gratifying, but we don't want to get content with where we are," said Carrington. "It's about avoiding minutiae, getting the right people, and keeping them focused on student learning," said Carrington.

Advice from Bloom Vernon Local School District

1. Avoid minutiae.
2. Stay focused on your core purpose – teaching and learning.
3. Make clear the expectations for supporting all children to learn at higher levels.
4. Hire the right people and put them in the right positions.
5. Use data to identify and prioritize needs, and monitor student progress.
6. Avoid programs or initiatives as the "answer" or silver bullet.
7. Work hard and support each other.

For additional information about the district's work, contact Rick L. Carrington, Superintendent, Bloom Vernon Local Schools, P.O. Box 237, South Webster, OH 45682-0237 at 740.778.2281, or via email at rick.carrington@bv.k12.oh.us.

[3] Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Collins.

Lake Villa School District #41: Achievement Profile

Lake Villa, Illinois

Lake Villa School District #41, a suburban district in the far northeastern corner of IL, serves approximately 3,300 students in kindergarten through grade 8. The district encompasses four elementary schools (1 PK-6 and 3 K-6) and one middle school (grades 7-8). At the conclusion of eighth grade, Lake Villa children graduate from the district and enroll in one of three area high schools.

Lake Villa School District #41 Student Demographics

Total Enrollment: 3,231
% Students Identified as Students with Disabilities: 13.0
% Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged: 18.5
% Students Identified as Minority: 26.6
% Students Identified as Limited English Proficient: 5.4

Of Lake Villa's 3000+ students, about 13% are identified as students with disabilities and receive special education services accordingly. The district serves primarily non-minority mid-income families; however, the Lake Villa community is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of socio-economic and racial composition. About 19 percent of Lake Villa's students are economically disadvantaged and there is a growing number of children identified as limited English proficient.

In the immediate years leading up to 2006, the Lake Villa School District #41 struggled to find ways to tackle the lack of significant student progress in core academic subjects across the district, while trying to identify a workable strategy for getting the middle school out of Academic Watch status. Then, in July of 2006, a new superintendent, assistant superintendent, and director of special education were hired and began the hard work of changing the ways in which adults worked together to raise the level of instructional practice and student performance across the district.

"In 2006, each building had different goals and there was no overall strategy for making improvements. We were a confederation of schools, not a school district," said Lake Villa superintendent Dr. John Van Pelt, who moved to Lake Villa from Iowa where he had been associate superintendent of Waterloo Public Schools.

Crucial Elements for Whole System Reform

1. Foster intrinsic motivation of teachers and students;
2. Engage educators and students in continuous improvement of instruction and learning;
3. Inspire collective or team work; and
4. Affect all teachers and students – 100%

Fullan (May 2011) calls this kind of emphasis on district-wide reform 'the name of the game,' asserting, "whole system success requires the commitment that comes from intrinsic motivation and improved technical competencies of groups of educators working together purposefully and relentlessly (May 2011, p. 8).[1] He offers four elements necessary for whole system reform – intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, teamwork, and 'allness' – suggesting they be used as criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a driver or set of drivers. Drivers are defined by Fullan as "policy and strategy levers that have the least and best chance of driving successful reform."

[1]Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform*. East Melbourne Victoria: Center for Strategic Education Seminar Series 204.

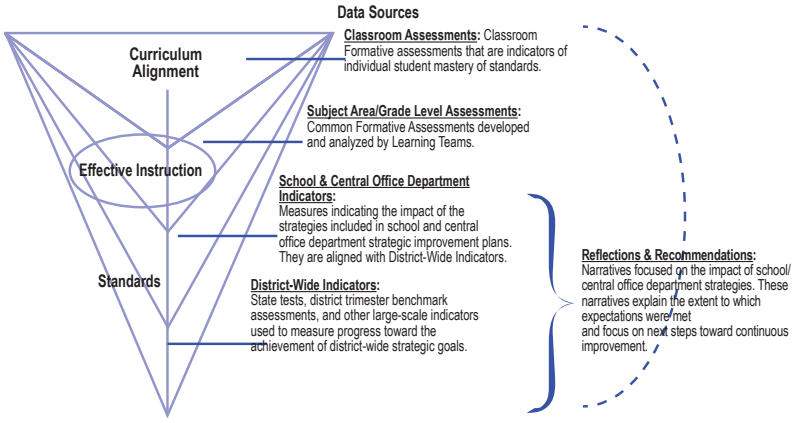
District-wide Focus Fosters Sense of 'Allness'

Over the last five years, Van Pelt and his team demonstrated the kind of relentlessness Fullan describes in their focus on identifying and implementing the right work. And, they've been highly intentional in ensuring that all personnel have the skills and competencies to do the work. "We couldn't have done what we've done here without the support and involvement of the teaching staff and union. The strong relationship that exists has allowed us to move much faster in putting reforms and improvements in place," said Alex Barbour, assistant superintendent with responsibility for teaching and learning. Van Pelt concurs, saying "I know of no examples of districts making good progress that don't have good relationships with teachers and the support of the teachers' union. If you don't have that kind of relationship, you must develop it," said Van Pelt.

Focus Your Goals. Collective ownership for the success of every child is evident in how the district approaches its work on a day-to-day basis, and in its commitment to pursuing common goals through collaborative teams. "Being focused in Lake Villa means using a systemic approach that is grounded in a framework or guiding set of procedures that guides the district," said Van Pelt. Identification of a limited number of strategic goals began in October 2006 when the district embarked on a yearlong process to develop a Comprehensive Accountability Plan for focusing and implementing essential work across the district. An Accountability Task Force – comprised of teachers, principals, central office personnel, community members, parents, and others – identified a limited number of district goals and a coordinated set of district-wide, central office, and school indicators for:

- *Aligning each school's improvement plan with the overall district plan;*
- *Ensuring the provision of targeted professional development (PD) to address district needs;*
- *Monitoring the degree of implementation of key initiatives across the district;*
- *Evaluating, on a continuous basis, the effectiveness of the district's strategies in meeting district-wide goals; and*
- *Communicating progress toward meeting district-wide goals with the board, community, and internal stakeholders.*

Lake Villa Comprehensive Accountability System



The plan incorporates an action and monitoring component, which requires each building as well as central office to target a minimum of two indicators related to student achievement and at least one indicator for each of the other district goals (not to exceed seven indicators). Associated activities or action steps are delineated and a time line, roles and responsibilities, measures for the activity, and related resources are spelled out.

Aligning Essential Work

- ***District-Wide Indicators*** – measure the progress toward the goals of Lake Villa School District #41
- ***Building/Central Office Indicators*** – provide evidence that strategies are being effectively implemented at the building, and central office levels
- ***Reflections and Recommendations*** – provide a qualitative narrative of the efforts toward continuous improvement

Building and central office personnel are also required to complete and submit a progress monitoring report each trimester that provides data supporting progress over time, the strategies that have been implemented to address target indicators, and the inferences/conclusions and reflections and recommendations for what's working and what needs to be modified or dropped.

Also included as a component of the *Comprehensive Accountability Plan* are professional development (PD) and communication components. In Lake Villa, all PD must be directly related to district identified goals. The administrative team described the "use of focused PD as a practice embedded in the philosophy of the district." "We do not support a 'menu' approach to PD," said Barbour. Van Pelt and Barbour are both certified by The Leadership and Learning Center as data team trainers and have personally trained every staff member in the district in the effective use of data by groups of teachers – referred to as Learning Teams (LTs) in Lake Villa.

Appendix B.3 – Action and Monitoring Plan

(Each school and central office department will complete five to seven Action and Monitoring Plans, one for each Building/Central Office Indicator selected. These plans will contain a minimum of two indicators related to student achievement and at least one indicator for each of the remaining goals as identified in the Accountability Plan not to exceed a total of seven indicators.)

DISTRICT STRATEGIC GOAL:

DISTRICT-WIDE INDICATOR:

STRATEGY #_____ BUILDING/CENTRAL OFFICE INDICATOR# _____

ACTIVITY (Action Steps)	TIMELINE	ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES	MEASURES FOR THE ACTIVITY	RESOURCES FOR THE ACTIVITY
Activity #1				
Activity #2				
Activity #3				

Use Data Well. The identification of goals and related indicators grew out of an extensive Task Force review of multiple sources of data, including results of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) data and district assessments for all children and disaggregated results for subgroups such as children receiving special education services. "Data drive the decision-making process; early on, writing stood out as a major need," explained Van Pelt. In fact, while only 50% of Lake Villa's students were proficient in writing in 2007, 78% scored at the proficient or advanced levels by 2010. The team view the use of statewide assessment data as a key strategy for supporting positive change. Accordingly, data are used at all levels of the district – from the use of the district dashboard to the use of district-wide common formative assessment data by learning teams – to monitor the degree of implementation of district initiatives across the district, and to evaluate whether implementation is sufficient to achieve desired results for all children, and for subgroups of children. "We look at gaps in two ways," Van Pelt explained. "We monitor the gap between groups of children, and we also look at how to significantly increase rigor and cognitive demand for all children to assess our progress against international standards," he added.

> *"You have to start with the core, no matter what…we would not run an RtI process that was parallel to our improvement efforts, nor did we want to reinforce the use of interventions based on the preference of individual teachers."*
>
> **Mary Conkling, Director of Special Education**

Requirements for the use of data are made clear by district leadership. "We're careful not to give too much data; the data we want teachers to use must be relevant," said Barbour. For example, the district has identified writing and reading as its primary focus areas (i.e., areas of greatest need); therefore, Learning Teams across the district are instructed to focus on those areas, rather than on other areas (e.g., mathematics) that are not currently identified as high need areas.

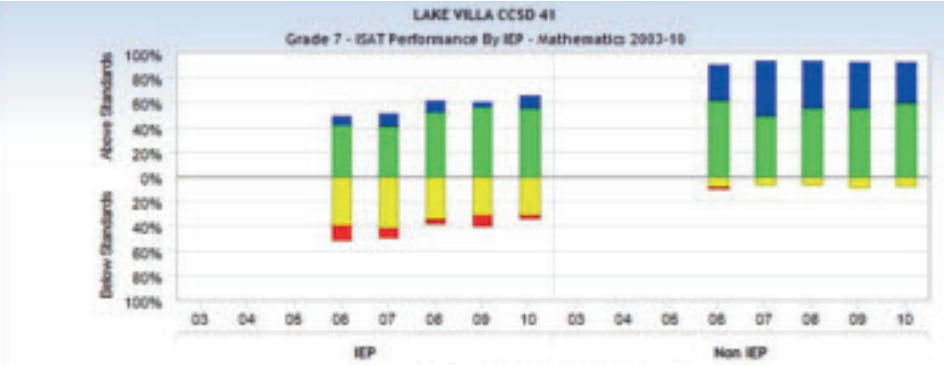
Data are also used to gauge the progress of groups of students and individual students, and to identify additional interventions that some children may need to attain grade-level benchmarks. Mary Conkling, Lake Villa Director of Special Education, credits the district's insistence on aligning and focusing the work with improving results for all children. "You have to start with the core, no matter what.

Grade 7 – Students with Disabilities

Levels*		Reading				Mathematics				Science			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
IEP	District	0.0	43.8	52.1	4.2	2.1	31.3	56.3	10.4	8.2	22.4	57.1	12.2
	State	1.6	60.9	34.3	3.3	8.4	41.5	44.0	6.1	19.4	26.5	47.9	6.2
Non-IEP	District	0.0	11.6	65.8	22.6	0.3	6.5	60.2	33.1	2.8	7.1	55.1	35.0
	State	0.1	16.5	61.4	22.1	0.6	10.0	58.0	31.5	3.4	10.0	62.2	24.4

Source: Lake Villa School District #41 2010 District Report Card, Illinois State Board of Education *1=warning; 2=below; 3=meets; 4=exceeds

We intentionally integrated response to intervention (RtI) practices as part of the overall improvement effort, believing that the use of appropriate interventions meant the intervention had to be integrated as part of the instructional process, had to be evidenced-based, and had to be responsive to the needs of the individual child. We would not run an RtI process that was parallel to our improvement efforts, nor did we want to reinforce the use of interventions based on the preference of individual teachers," said Conkling.



Percent of Students at Each Level

	IEP 03	IEP 04	IEP 05	IEP 06	IEP 07	IEP 08	IEP 09	IEP 10	Non IEP 03	Non IEP 04	Non IEP 05	Non IEP 06	Non IEP 07	Non IEP 08	Non IEP 09	Non IEP 10
% Meets & Exceeds	-	-	-	49	51	62	60	67	-	-	-	92	94	94	92	93
% Exceeds	-	-	-	6	9	8	3	10	-	-	-	29	44	38	37	33
% Meets	-	-	-	43	42	53	57	56	-	-	-	62	50	56	56	60
% Below	-	-	-	40	42	34	31	31	-	-	-	8	6	6	8	7
% Warning	-	-	-	11	7	4	9	2	-	-	-	1	0	0	0	0

Number of Students Tested

	IEP 03	IEP 04	IEP 05	IEP 06	IEP 07	IEP 08	IEP 09	IEP 10	Non IEP 03	Non IEP 04	Non IEP 05	Non IEP 06	Non IEP 07	Non IEP 08	Non IEP 09	Non IEP 10
(N)*	-	-	-	63	57	74	35	48	-	-	-	294	314	263	335	354

The district's focus on core academic areas of need is paying off. District math and reading scores increased significantly over a five-year period, from 2004-2009. From 2006-2008, students in third through eighth grade met or exceeded the ISAT state average across all tested subjects. In 2007 and 2008, Lake Villa students exceeded the state average in reading at every grade level, and in 2008, they exceeded the state average in math and science at every grade level tested. And in writing – the district's initial area of focus – the district-wide average on the writing portion of the ISAT increased from 50% proficient (in 2006-07) to 72% proficient (2008-09), a 22-point gain in two years (Leadership and Learning Center, 2009).[2]

State assessment data for students receiving special education services (IEP subgroup) also show steady progress over the past several years. For example, the performance of 7th graders in reading show an increase in the percentage of students with disabilities that meets or exceeds standards, and an associated decrease in the percentage of students scoring below or flagged with an academic warning. The performance of students with disabilities at grade 7 across reading, math, and science also shows more Lake Villa students with disabilities that meet/exceed state standards as compared to the state average.

Structures that Promote Internal Accountability

Lake Villa's commitment to greater accountability for achievement results led to the formation of aligned team structures across four levels: district management, district leadership, building leadership, and teacher team (i.e., learning team). "We need to be able to connect results to specific action steps. We wouldn't be able to do that if schools worked in isolation," explained Barbour.

Inquire and Learn. Lake Villa's commitment to being a learning organization through a well-established culture of inquiry is evident at each level across the system. At the district level, a Central Office Administrative Team (COAT) meets regularly and is comprised of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of special education, and business manager. In addition to COAT, an Administrative Team that

Reading Implementation

Grade Level: _____ Month: _____

Evident

Whole Group - Direct Instruction

1. Boot Camp Modeling (1st 2-6 weeks) _____
2. Immersion Week/Day
   a. Genre: _____ _____
   b. Anchor charts
      - Teacher created _____
      - Student created _____
   c. Interactive read alouds
      - Teacher model _____
      - Turn and talk _____
   d. Modeling comprehension strategies (circle)
      - Schema, questioning, visualizing, determining importance, monitoring, and reparing comprehension, making interences, synthesizing _____
3. Genre Mini Lessons
   a. Lesson plan (explicit focus) _____
   b. Mentor text _____
   c. Vocabulary enhanced _____
4. Word Work
   a. Word cell _____
   b. Rebecca Sitton priority words and word wall _____
5. Wrap Up
   a. Students sharing NEW information learned _____
   b. Sharing comprehension strategies _____

Comments: _____

[2] The ISAT is administered in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math, in grades 4 and 7 in science, and in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 in writing.

includes COAT members plus all five principals and two assistant principals at the middle school, meet face-to-face twice a month and hold phone conferences on alternate weeks.

The administrative team spends the first part of every meeting reviewing assessment, instruction, and PD data related to district-identified needs, and the second part of the meeting discussing managerial/operational issues. The Administrative Team also completes a walk-through once a month as part of its team meeting and then uses remaining meeting time to discuss what the group collectively believes constitutes good instruction. A walk-through is defined as a short, focused, informal administrative observation, which may result in reflective conversation.

At the school level, building leadership teams (BLTs) are in place and functioning at a high level. At the elementary level, BLTs are comprised of the principal and team leader (a designated teacher) for each grade; at the middle school, the principal, assistant principals, and all teacher leaders for each subject area comprise BLT membership. BLTs meet at least monthly – before or after school – to discuss progress toward reaching goals, achievement gaps, progress monitoring and assessment data and results, intervention needs, and resources, and to identify successes and challenges. BLTs must provide Superintendent Van Pelt with a meeting schedule and any changes to meeting dates. Van Pelt regularly attends BLT meetings and attends unannounced two to three times per year. "The superintendent cannot be a spectator; he/she must make clear that the work is the priority of the district. If the superintendent is not part of the process and guiding the board, it's not going to work," stated Van Pelt.

"We need to be able to connect results to specific action steps. We wouldn't be able to do that if schools worked in isolation."

Alex Barbour,
Assistant Superintendent

Van Pelt believes that superintendents must reinforce key leadership practices necessary to achieving district-wide goals. "How principals are evaluated is key; principals are, and are expected to be, part of a larger conversation about instruction and achievement beyond what happens in their individual school," he said. Accordingly, Van Pelt evaluates every principal in the district, and every principal has been trained in the use of the data team process and receives frequent and ongoing support and feedback from Van Pelt and Barbour on their progress toward meeting district-wide goals. Despite the dramatic shift in the role of the principal in Lake Villa – from a more traditional managerial role prior to 2006 to directly leading and monitoring instructional improvement – there has been no turnover in principal leadership over the past five years, a fact that Barbour believes has contributed to the district's capacity for making district-wide improvement.

"I see huge gains in my students' success, just by getting together with my team and discussing data, strengths, and weaknesses. I see my students from a different viewpoint at times, just showing my coworkers student work, and getting their input. It also creates a positive atmosphere. I am comfortable going to them for anything, and that makes me want to come to work each day knowing that my team is supportive of each other."

LT Member

Principals Sandy Keim and Scott Klene regularly assess the benefits and effectiveness of LTs (described below) with building staff and the feedback they receive suggests that the use of LTs is perceived by many staff to improve learning for students and staff alike.

At the teacher level, all teachers are involved as members of learning teams (LTs). At the elementary level, LTs meet by grade level. At the middle school, LTs meet by subject and grade level. Specialty area teachers (e.g., music, art, technology) have district-wide LTs, while physical education teachers have LTs at both the elementary and middle school level. Special education teachers and related services staff (referred to as special education resource personnel), ELL teachers, and reading resource teachers are involved as members of learning teams (LTs) in their respective schools. Each team is required to have a teacher association representative as a member.

More than 40 learning teams are functioning across the district, all using a consistent and common data team approach to develop long- and short-range goals for improving student achievement based on data analysis. Each LT meets weekly for 60 to 100 minutes and reports results each trimester. Each LT's agenda and meeting notes are submitted to the principal weekly. The LT process involves the following steps:

- Collect and chart data;
- Analyze strengths and obstacles;
- Establish, review, and revise SMART goals[3];
- Select specific instructional strategies (what teachers will do for students) to support improvement;
- Develop common classroom formative assessments;
- Determine results indicators (what students will do so team members know when progress has been made); and
- Implement consistent interventions when students are not making satisfactory progress.

On Learning Teams

Doug Reeves, founder of The Leadership and Learning Center, describes the feedback loop to staff on the overall implementation level of identified strategies resulting from the collection and reporting of data by data/learning teams as an inquiry process that is the most critical component of district and school continuous improvement.

Doug Reeves

After each member of an LT administers the same assessment (typically every six to 12 weeks), the team disaggregates the data to determine which children are proficient, which are close to being proficient, and which need additional support to be proficient. The team then analyzes the data to identify possible reasons why some children are not proficient and the areas in which they're struggling. Strategies are identified for addressing each of these areas and the nature and intensity of supports to be provided are determined. The team puts action steps into place and clearly identifies expected levels of performance, which are then used on a weekly basis to gauge students' response to instruction and intervention, and any needed changes in instructional content and/or delivery.

[3] SMART goals are goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**imely (see Doran, Miller, & Cunningham, 1981).

Special education resource personnel, who include special education teachers and related services personnel such as speech language pathologists and school psychologists, rotate through the LTs. Additionally, at the middle school level, the special education resource personnel lead the LT meeting once per month, and are involved as members of both the color teams (i.e., heterogeneous groups of students organized into middle school teams or "houses") and content area (e.g., reading, math) teams. "One of the greatest benefits of the LT process is the team development of strategies and interventions when students are not meeting expectations. We use a tiered intervention model, but ensure that the ongoing review of assessment results and development of interventions are incorporated into the LT process," said Conkling.

Teachers, who are selected by colleagues or appointed by principals, assume the team leader function, facilitating and guiding the work of the LTs for at least a one-year term. One spin-off of using a shared leadership model is that teachers in Lake Villa have more ownership and accountability for student learning and achievement. LT team leaders are assuming new leadership roles throughout the district, thereby increasing the capacity of the staff to meet learning challenges. "Staff efficacy is clearly increasing," observed Van Pelt.

> *"The superintendent cannot be a spectator; he/she must make clear that the work is the priority of the district. If the superintendent is not part of the process and guiding the board, it's not going to work."*
>
> **John Van Pelt, Superintendent**

Using Structures to Foster Engagement and Sustain Focus. "As we moved along and teachers felt comfortable in voicing concerns, that strengthened the relationship and increased buy-in and support for the improvements we were making," said Conkling. For example, as LTs were put in place, teachers expressed concern about not having enough time to work together. The district listened and responded. Now, release time is built into the schedule and LTs meet for one hour every Friday afternoon – the last hour of the school day.

The community and school board were heavily involved in making the decision to provide four hours of release time per month to support LT work as part of overall district improvement. "Providing four hours of common work time every month meant four hours less of instructional time per month, which seemed counterintuitive to some members of the community. We knew that, politically, we had to show results in improved achievement to justify this kind of investment or we wouldn't be doing it for long," explained Van Pelt.

Active and systemic community engagement – beginning with the development of the district's *Comprehensive Accountability Plan* – has been important in helping the district sustain a focus on the right work. At the end of Van Pelt's third year as Lake Villa superintendent, five of the seven school board members who had hired him were gone. "Having and using a structured framework – and by that I mean the accountability plan – gave the district a solid foundation and strategy for bringing people together around the district's core work and direction. This allowed us to stay on course despite changes in board leadership," said Van Pelt.

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices. But having the plan, while essential, is not sufficient to improve instruction and student achievement. The Administrative Team attends Friday LT sessions on a regular, and sometimes unannounced, basis. The superintendent sets the direction for the work and his visible presence is a strong reminder that the work of LTs is the core work of the district. "The Comprehensive Accountability Plan is put into practice through the work of the Learning Teams. We believe that any plan has limited usefulness until it impacts teaching and learning at the classroom and student level," said Van Pelt.

Practices that Achieve Results

While Lake Villa has made substantial progress over the past five years, the district team is quick to point out that their work is far from done. "A few teams think they do this work for the district; it's something they think they have to do, rather than something they need to do to drive instruction," said Barbour.

Despite pushback, which is minimal, the Administrative Team holds firm on the use of common strategies across the district. "When teachers adopt strategies or interventions on their own, we can't evaluate whether our core content is effective. We have to have consistency in the implementation of specific targeted strategies and interventions to be able to monitor their degree of implementation and evaluate whether their use is having the desired effect on student performance," explained Van Pelt. Conkling agreed, adding "we piloted materials to ensure their appropriateness for kids and their usability by parents."

Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. The formation of LTs is believed to be the most significant and essential initiative undertaken by the district since 2006, providing teacher teams with clearly defined focus and process for improving teaching and learning. Providing feedback to each other on instructional strategies, and using and collaboratively scoring common classroom formative assessments such as writing prompts and rubrics coupled with standardized assessments, are key practices embedded in the LT process.

Comprehensive Accountability Plan
Appendix B.4 – Professional Development Plan (EXCERPT)

Strategy	Program	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline
Reading	Learning Team Internal Staff Development – Learning team peer observations, collaboration, and reflective discussions with Literacy Coaches on the topics of: assessment, modeling instruction, guided reading, literature circles, genre mini-lessons, immersion, and interventions	• Alex Barbour, assistant superintendent • Eileen Huston, Mary Lutgen, and Becky Stellwag, literacy coaches • Sandra Keim, principal • Kathleen Blasius, lead teacher • Team leaders, facilitators	Lake Villa School District 41 Reading Curriculum Rebecca Sitton Word Study Program Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment	September 2010—May 2011 (monthly)

The adoption of a district-wide reading curriculum, which included development of a curriculum framework and student outcomes aligned with the Illinois state and college readiness standards, as well as development of aligned district-wide common formative assessments, was another major undertaking designed to ensure quality and consistency in instructional practice across the district.

The redesign of curriculum to ensure alignment to standards and consistency in implementation is being supported by the district's adoption of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. "It's a game-changer in terms of increased expectations for staff. It's given us a common language for talking about instruction and defining what we believe high quality instructional practice really looks like," said Van Pelt.

Targeted PD and Intentional Resource Use. District resources are intentionally used to support focused PD, purchase instructional materials directly related to curriculum implementation, and technology to support the work. Rather than target small numbers of people for PD, or allow individuals to identify and pursue PD separate from the district's plan, all staff are required to complete data team training, which is delivered by the superintendent and assistant superintendent annually to new staff. The superintendent also facilitated training in classroom walk-through and observation with all administrators in 2006. Since then, new administrators have been trained and all are required to conduct walk-through observations for the purpose of monitoring the progress of district initiatives.

Providing the training in-house has helped Barbour and Van Pelt develop a high level of professional expertise, built the capacity of the staff as a whole, and saved money. "We want a curriculum-driven district and use a system approach in the intentional use of resources, rather than allowing each building to decide how it spends a certain amount of resources," said Van Pelt. District leadership has avoided buying off-the-shelf products, believing that any product or tool they use must ensure that the specific practices the district wants to implement are the ones that are monitored.

As a case in point, administrators use commercial walk-through software, but adapt it to collect observation data against key identified district practices. Use of a common electronic tool to conduct observations has helped the Administrative Team develop a common, collective approach to monitoring implementation and identifying PD needs. "We're careful not to characterize walk-through observations as teacher evaluation," explained Van Pelt. "We do, however, use the data to identify relative strengths and challenges," he said.

Balancing Fidelity of Implementation with Flexibility to Meet Student Needs. Buildings have the latitude to identify indicators and activities to determine the needs of the students they serve, but all schools have the same district-wide goals that

Goal #2: Increase the percent of special education resource students scoring proficient or higher in the area of reading

Goal Not Yet Met: 32% 24/76		

Percentage of Special Education Students Proficient on Benchmark Assessments in Reading (Target: 40%; 31/78; based on pre-assessment data) Reported Three Times Per Year

- Activity #1: Ensure professional development on reading interventions has been completed for all pertinent staff and continued with in-house support from literacy coaches
- Activity #2: Ensure Tier two and three interventions are implemented appropriately
- Activity #3: Progress monitor students within the special education subgroup; provide instruction based on students' needs and modify instructional approaches if needed
- Activity #4: Further utilize literacy coaches as a resource to provide special education and resource teachers with training specific to their field
- Activity #5: Collaborate and utilize staff members that are having greatest impact on student achievement as a resource
- Activity #6: Focus on moving our students from the not meeting to meeting state standards by identifying the students in the not meeting category and providing instruction based on the students' individual needs to move such students to the meeting category

According to our district-wide Fountas and Pinnell fall 2009 assessment data, 22% of our students were reading at benchmark at the beginning of the school year. By the end of the school year there was an increase from about 20% of students reading at the benchmark level in the fall to 40% of students reading at the benchmark level in the spring of 2010. It is our goal to again have a similar trend for the 2010-2011 school year.

guide their work. Staffing assignments are one way the district addresses building-identified needs. For example, the best way to structure services and supports for ELL students and students at risk of being identified as learning disabled was taken into account in allocating and assigning personnel. The Administrative Team ensured that resources were provided to address needs and assigned literacy coaches to the buildings with the greatest needs. The special education resource teachers – viewed as equal members of LTs charged with working to ensure that every child reaches/exceeds grade-level expectations – use the services of the literacy coaches as much as their general education counterparts do.

Each building reports to the board twice a year and uses a mid-year reflection/recommendation template (i.e., part of the Comprehensive Accountability Plan) to list building activities and report progress against each district goal. An excerpt from the Thompson Elementary School reports that the percentage of students receiving special education services who were proficient on benchmark assessments in reading doubled -- from 20 to 40 percent over the course of a school year. Another section of the document reports that 62.5 percent of students receiving special education services were proficient on ISAT Reading (Lake Villa District Report Card, 2010).

District review of the progress being made by subgroups of children has led to greater collaboration and dialogue among teachers. When the district noticed that state assessment results for fifth grade writing for students with limited English proficiency (LEP)

were much higher in one of its buildings than all others, the Administrative Team pulled all fifth grade LTs together to talk about instructional delivery and promote sharing among teams. "Our biggest challenge is how to provide more time to students who need it within an already busy schedule," said Barbour.

Beginning in 2011-12, Lake Villa will designate a specified time in the daily schedule to address the need for intervention for students with disabilities and/or other learners who may be struggling. A 50-minute daily time block will be incorporated into the K-3 schedule for intervention and enhancement/extension. During this designated time, all teachers will provide intervention to students who need it to successfully master the core curriculum, and extension activities to children who are already proficient. In grades 4 through 6, the same process will be used during a 40-minute daily time allotment. "We're committed to minimizing interruptions and maximizing the amount of direct instructional time for all children. The intervention time won't be a cure-all, but it will provide another strategy for responding to the instructional needs of children who require additional time and services," agreed Conkling.

A Foundation for Sustainable Improvement: What Matters Most

The Lake Villa administrative team believes that the district has addressed the biggest challenge it faced in 2006 – that of schools working in isolation. However, when asked to rate the degree to which the improvements put in place beginning in 2006 have been effective in achieving desired results, he and his team are quick to point out that they're not done. "We can't say our actions are achieving desired results in every respect until every child is achieving at high levels. And they're not, not yet anyway," said Van Pelt.

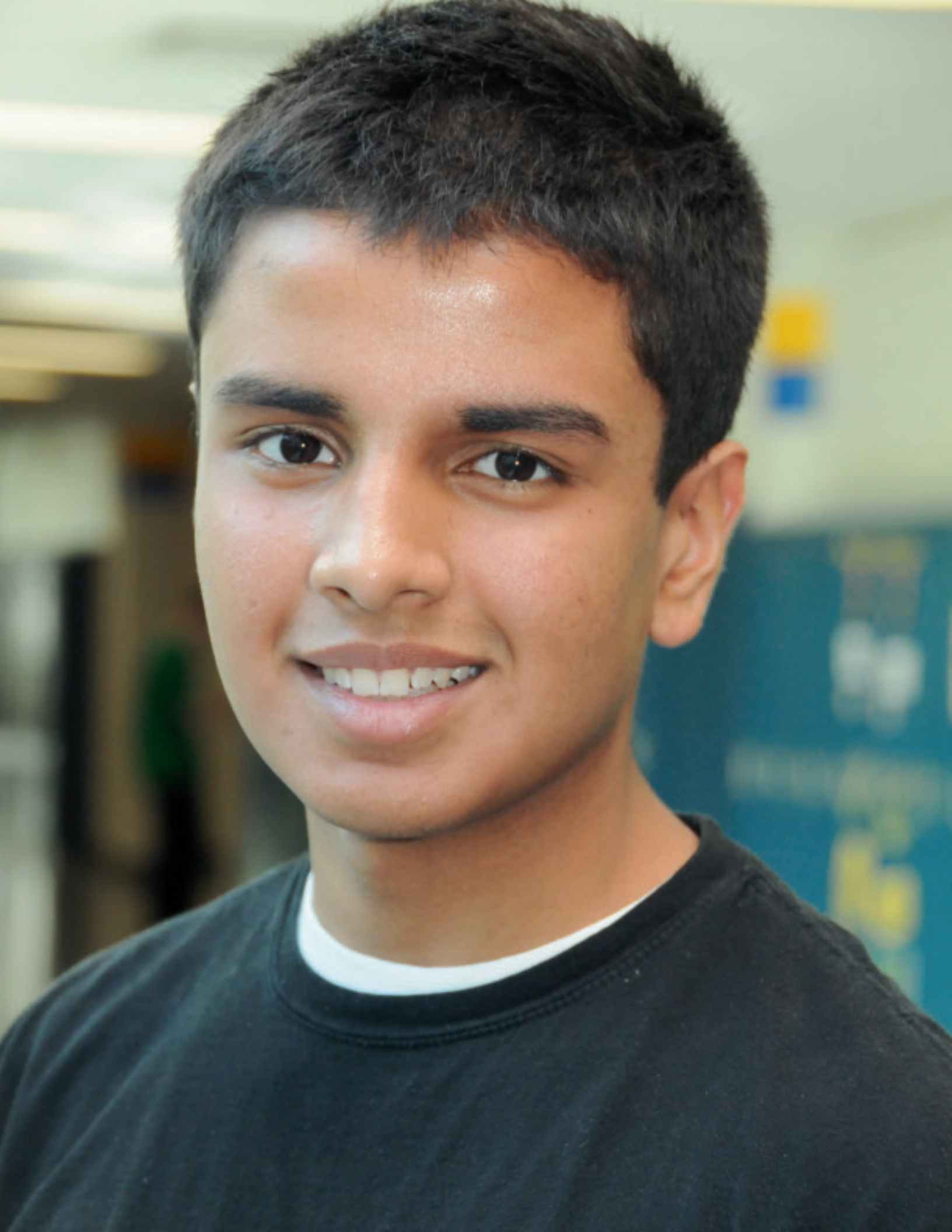
The next big pieces of work for the Lake Villa School District #41 involve finalizing development of a standards-based report card, and instituting a new teacher evaluation process – including a principal and related services staff evaluation component – based on Danielson's *Framework*.

"The more evident it becomes that our work results in improved performance, the easier it is for more people to embrace the direction we've taken and stay focused on the work," said Van Pelt.

Advice from Lake Villa

1. Move from a focus on individual buildings to a focus on district-wide implementation to sustain the work.
2. Use data at all levels.
3. Establish a foundation to guide the work.
4. Share leadership and support the development of essential leadership practices across the district.
5. Use external facilitation to provide an outside voice, especially at the beginning of a change process.
6. Focus PD on a few initiatives aligned with district-wide goals and train everyone.
7. Ensure interventions are embedded as part of the instructional process.
8. Intentionally target resources to meet district needs.

For additional information about the Lake Villa School District #41 story, contact Dr. John Van Pelt, Superintendent of Schools, 131 McKinley Avenue, Lake Villa, IL 60046 at 847.356.2385 or via email at jvanpelt@district41.org.



Wooster City Schools: Achievement Profile

Wooster, Ohio

Three years ago, the Wooster City School District (WCSD) took a leap of faith, signing on with the state education agency as a partner district to help design and test the development of a statewide improvement process that could be used by any district, regardless of size and demographics, to improve student learning.

Wooster City School District Student Demographics
Total Enrollment: 3,748
% Students Identified as Students with Disabilities: 17.6
% Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged: 53.3
% Students Identified as Minority: 13.5
% Students Identified as Limited English Proficient: 0.5

Dubbed the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), it was the state's vehicle for establishing a state system of support focused on instructional leadership and improvement – a system that was truly statewide in scope and systemic in nature. Built around the use of an embedded set of connected, web-based data tools, the OIP is being used by well over half of the 612 traditional public school districts and 100+ charter schools in the state to enact essential leadership practices as identified by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC), a broad-based stakeholder group jointly sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators.[1] It is also a key component of the state's Race to the Top (RttT) strategy.

New to the district in 2008, but not to the superintendency, Michael Tefs initially used the district's involvement in OIP to get the lay of the land, conducting an environmental scan to identify the district's most pressing issues and develop the kind of collaborative partnerships needed to focus and align core work across the district. "As a superintendent, you have to be willing to check your ego at the door because you're not going to be the keeper of the initiatives. It's synergistic, it's an entire team process that's a makeup of your cabinet, your management, teachers, even parents and students," explained Tefs.

Today, after three years of OIP implementation, the district has redefined the role of central office; forged a strong district-union partnership; instituted an aligned leadership team structure across the district, school, and teacher team levels; and become very intentional in reducing initiatives to increase the district's focus on student learning. Wooster's nine schools (one preschool, six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school) are working in more coherent ways to consistently define and implement high quality instructional strategies, and also continually evaluate the effects of their efforts on the progress each child is making. "Having a very focused, intentional strategic

OLAC
Ohio Leadership Advisory Council

OHIO LEADERSHIP ADVISORY COUNCIL & THE OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS:
CORE MESSAGES/NON-NEGOTIABLES

- **Leadership is a shared responsibility...**
- **Leadership is a process distributed across an entire school system...**
- **Accountability for school improvement requires leadership structures that foster internal accountability...**
- **A collective focus on full and sustained implementation is necessary for school improvement...**
- **The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) provides a vehicle for initiating Ohio's Leadership Development Framework...**
- **All learning, including teachers' learning of instructional practices, depends on changes in behavior that respond to precise and relevant feedback...**

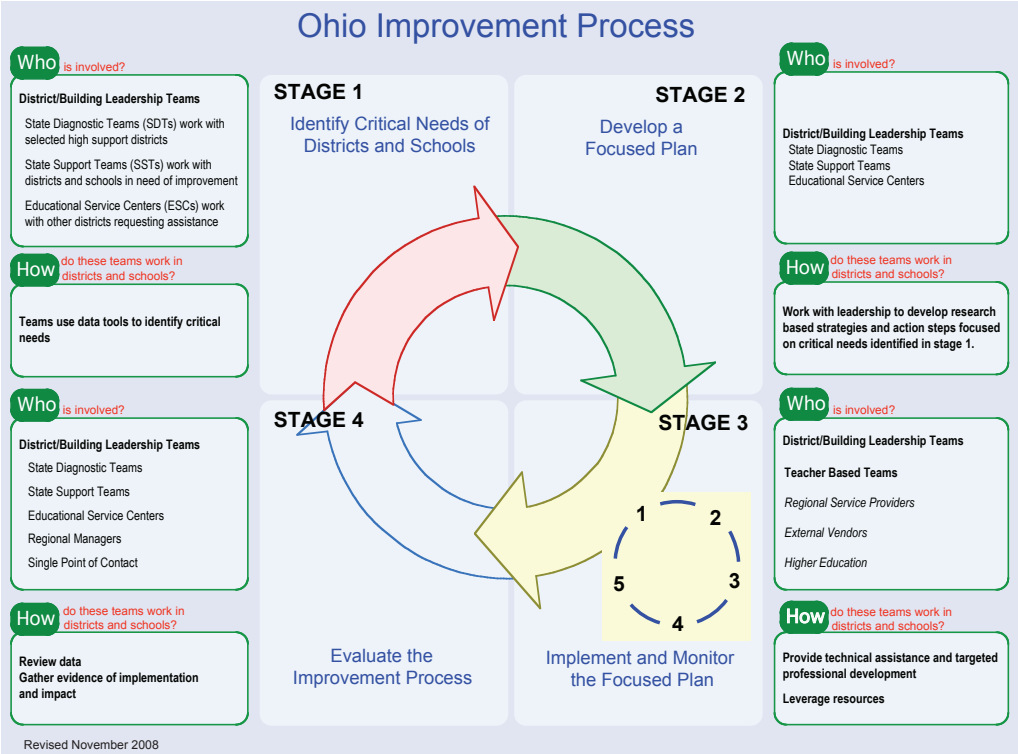
For more information, go to www.ohioleadership.org

[1] While developed for use by all districts, under Ohio's federally approved differentiated accountability model, all districts in school improvement (SI) status or that have one or more schools in SI, are required to implement the OIP as their intervention.

priority helps us gain and grow. It's the foundation for our school improvement system here," said Tefs.

Collective Focus Reduces Fragmentation

Building the foundation for growth starts with narrowing the focus so that a limited number of strategies and actions can be implemented well. Categorized by the state as an urban district with low median income and high poverty, Wooster's progress has been slow but steady. At the end of the 2009-10 school year, the district made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all student groups for the first time since the inception of the state's accountability system under NCLB. More important, the performance of all groups of students has increased over the last year, moving the district from the effective category to excellent.

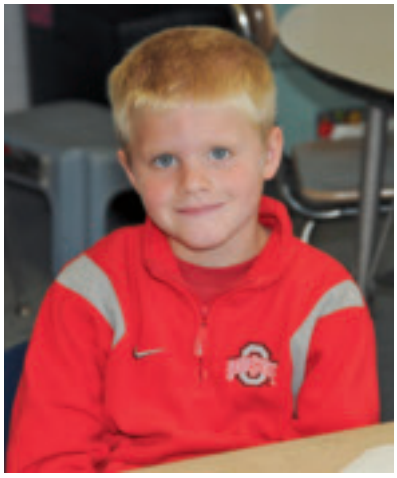


Use Data Well. Part of using data well involves who's using it and whether its use leads to meaningful action. The OIP, as a process designed to assist all districts in implementing essential leadership practices, had as a core belief the notion, borrowed from Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Richard Elmore, that "the purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role."[2]

To that end, the OIP required the development of a district leadership team (DLT), aligned building leadership teams (BLTs), and teacher-based teams (TBTs) – as defined by OLAC – for the purpose of redesigning everyone's role to be primarily about improving the capacity of someone else. The *leadership framework* recommended by OLAC serves to distribute key leadership functions, align and focus the work across the system, and hold adults at all levels accountable for improving instructional practice and student achievement.

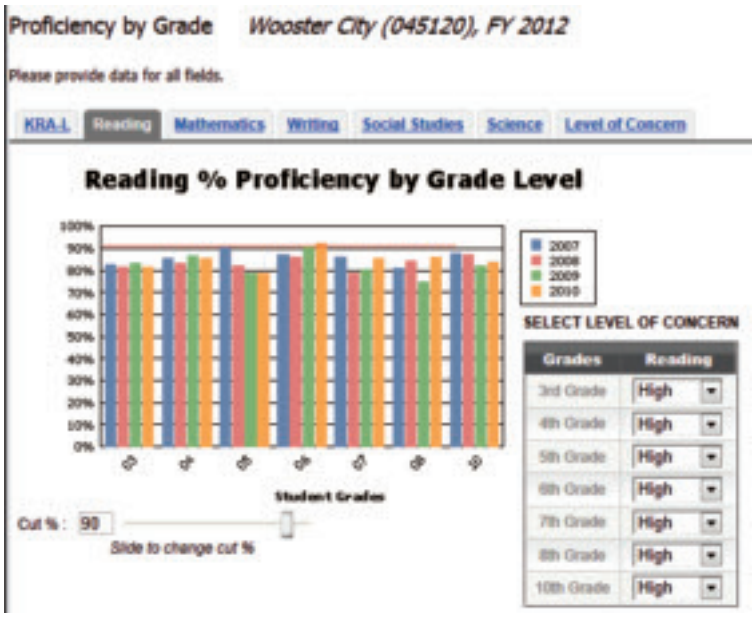
> *"As a superintendent you have to be willing to check your ego at the door because you're not going to be the keeper of the initiatives. It's synergistic, it's an entire team process that's a makeup of your cabinet, your management, your teachers, even parents and students."*
>
> **Michael Tefs, Superintendent**

As an OIP partner district, Wooster's first step, then, was to establish its district leadership team (DLT), and that team had to be comprised of more than the cabinet-level membership common in many districts. "You get one chance to make a first impression with OIP, and the development of that DLT is absolutely crucial. If this would've been a DLT of central office staff and principals, we would not be where we are today. Having the union president and the union grievance chairperson on our DLT was strategic and incredibly beneficial," stated Tefs. Among Wooster's DLT members were selected teachers and the principal from each school, teacher association president and first-grade teacher Peter Larrousse, central office staff such as the director of pupil services, and other personnel from across the district.

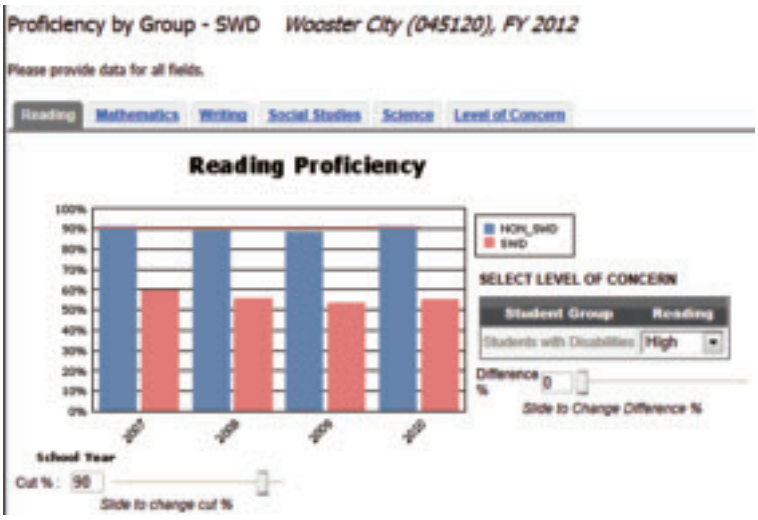


[2] Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice and performance*. Boston, MA: Harvard Education Press.

This cross-sectional team – a requirement of the OIP – was meant to ensure that data were being viewed from multiple perspectives and that resulting decisions made about the district's areas of greatest need were based on an honest account of how well and to what degree the district had engaged in essential practices on a district-wide basis.

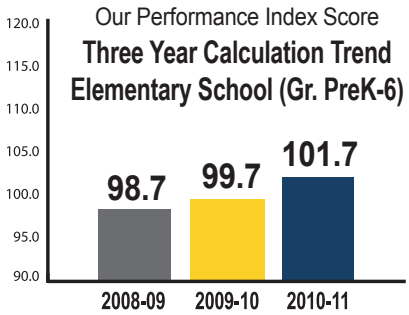


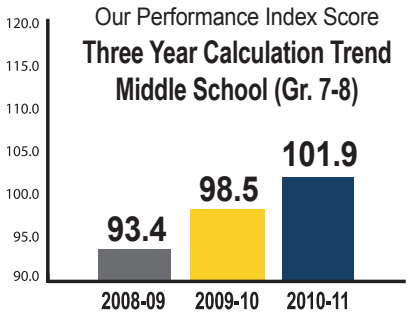
Once established, the DLT used the Ohio Decision Framework (DF), a web-based tool used at stage 1 of the OIP. As a decision-making aid, the DF is designed to assist districts in making informed decisions about where to spend their time, energy, and resources to make significant and substantial improvements in student performance. Each district, school, and community (i.e., charter) school in the state has a DF populated with its own data, which are organized in such a way as to allow leadership teams to answer essential questions and make decisions about their greatest needs. The DF is organized around four levels and is structured to help teams sort through and categorize data, prioritize areas of need, identify root causes of prioritized needs, and develop a more focused plan for impacting student learning.



"The biggest change for us as a district was in working with the data and using it to make decisions," said Rich Leone, formerly the principal of Edgewood Middle School and newly appointed as the district's Director of Secondary Education. "Using the Decision Framework helped us look at data in a very different way, versus just having a theory or an opinion of what was happening with students," he added.

The DF tool presents state assessment trend data for all tested children (not only those counted for accountability purposes) for each content area in three ways: by grade level, by building level, and by disaggregated student group. Teams review the data, discuss what an acceptable level of proficiency should be, and make decisions about which areas are areas of high concern. Tefs concurs with Leone, explaining "if I heard it once I heard it many times – it was powerful for the team to look at district-wide data, rather than only having buildings look at their own building-level data." "That district-wide view was essential in moving toward collective ownership for the work of the district and for helping us identify the priority areas that we needed to tackle together," he added.





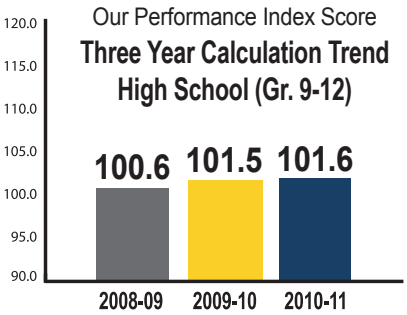


Table 1: Students Scoring Proficient or Above
Fall 2010 OAA - 3rd Grade Reading

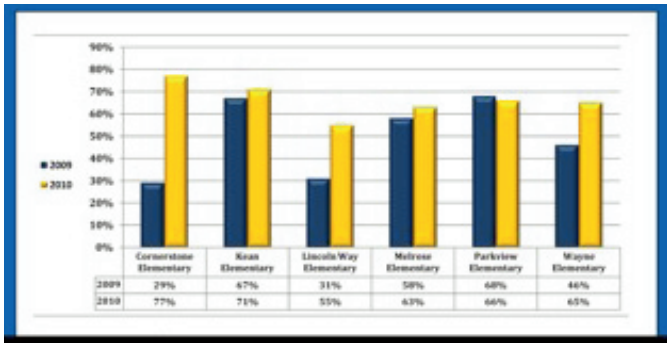


Table 2: Students Scoring Proficient or Above
Fall 2010 OAA - 3rd Grade Reading

The focus on effective data use doesn't stop with the identification of needs. That's only one necessary part of the process. According to Karen Arbogast, principal of Wayne Elementary School and Title I coordinator for the district, structures have been put in place to support the common use of multiple types of data. "We've established some consistent protocols and the beginning, middle, and end-year assessment must-have data collection pieces for reading and math and, for the first time, we're looking at data that are consistent across the district," she explained. "This allows the DLT, BLTs, and TBTs to talk about the same data and use these data to make better instructional decisions," said Arbogast.

Better instructional decisions are paying off. For example, Wooster's performance index (PI) score – a measure of growth based on a weighted average that includes grades 3-8 and 10 for all tested subjects, and untested children – shows improvement across elementary, middle school, and high school, with the greatest gains at the middle school level. A review of 2008-09 and 2009-10 state assessment data for the district and each elementary building shows significant gains in the majority of buildings and an overall improvement across the district as compared to the state average.

Wooster City Schools Ohio Graduation Tests in Reading & Math: High School Level							
Test Grade	Test Subject	2010-2011 *% Proficient*		2009-2010 *% Proficient*		2008-2009 *% Proficient*	
		Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP
10th	Reading	94.1	58.7	92.9	45.7	94.5	34.0
	Math	95.7	49.2	93.7	45.7	>95.0	42.0
11th	Reading	98.7	80.5	>95.0	59.6	>95.0	65.2
	Math	98.7	65.9	>95.0	63.8	>95.0	65.2

% proficient denotes scores at the proficient level or above

Wooster City Schools Ohio Achievement Assessments in Reading & Math: Middle School Level							
Test Grade	Test Subject	2010-2011 *% Proficient*		2009-2010 *% Proficient*		2008-2009 *% Proficient*	
		Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP
7th	Reading	92.2	44.4	94.0	50.0	90.7	31.0
	Math	90.5	50.0	92.2	52.3	87.6	31.0
8th	Reading	96.2	64.3	94.7	51.4	85.3	35.1
	Math	94.1	45.2	84.1	35.1	88.7	29.8

% proficient denotes scores at the proficient level or above

Wooster City Schools Ohio Achievement Assessments in Reading & Math: Elementary School Level							
Test Grade	Test Subject	2010-2011 *% Proficient*		2009-2010 *% Proficient*		2008-2009 *% Proficient*	
		Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP	Non-IEP	IEP
3rd	Reading	92.3	71.7	89.9	52.2	87.7	74.4
	Math	94.4	75.5	89.4	65.2	92.3	59.0
4th	Reading	94.1	66.7	89.5	73.3	90.2	71.7
	Math	91.4	66.7	86.4	46.7	87.3	60.9
5th	Reading	86.7	51.2	85.2	58.7	82.2	56.8
	Math	85.6	46.3	86.3	58.7	73.7	43.2
6th	Reading	95.8	75.6	>95.0	75.6	93.5	85.7
	Math	95.9	68.9	94.0	61.0	93.5	59.2

% proficient denotes scores at the proficient level or above

Further, an examination of Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) and Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) results in reading and math for students with and without disabilities show significant improvement across many tested grades. While gaps still exist, the district has made substantial gains in the percent of students who scored proficient or above in areas such as 8th-grade reading (from 35.1% in 2008-09 to 64.3% in 2010-11) and 10th grade reading (from 34% in 2008-09 to almost 60% in 2010-11).

Finally, data provided by the state that rank districts in terms of performance indicates that WCSD had the highest poverty level of any Ohio district rated as Excellent with Distinction. "We have never allowed poverty to be an excuse in the WCSD," said Tefs.

Focus Your Goals. While none of Wooster's schools is in school improvement status, the district has chosen to stay the course in using the OIP as its school improvement mechanism. "Being focused is a

key part of Wooster's improvement strategy," explained Tefs. "The OIP, with its connection to the work of OLAC, is so much more comprehensive and far less fragmented than other improvement models we've explored," he added. Once teams complete the first stage of the OIP using the DF tool, a very focused and usable needs assessment is produced and teams then use it to identify a limited number of district goals, strategies and actions.

Moving from multiple goals and initiatives to three goals that are used to structure the work across the district is what Tefs calls "weeding the garden." Leone explains that in addition to narrowing the number of things they do, they also look at how they do their work in a different way. "We look at what we do daily in terms of the value add it will have in impacting student achievement," he said. Each of the district's three goals has no more than three strategies and a limited (no more than five) number of associated action steps. These steps – along with sources of evidence for gauging progress, the groups or individuals responsible, and a three-year time line – are detailed in the district's single plan, the *OIP Implementation Plan*. Each school in the district has a plan that provides for flexibility at the action step level, but that is written to meet district goals and strategies.

WCSD's three goals state that, by 2012, the district will:

- Implement a sustainable instructional process that will positively impact student achievement
- Increase performance on state standardized reading assessment by 3% annually
- Increase performance on state standardized math assessment by 5% annually

Wooster City School District (WCSD) OIP Implementation Plan – GOAL 2		
Goal #2: By 2012, all PreK-12 students will increase performance on state standardized reading assessments by 3% annually.		
Strategies & Action Steps	**Indicators**	
	Adult Implementation	***Student Achievement***
2A. Implement a district-wide approach to balanced literacy **Action Steps** • Develop a district-wide common understanding of balanced literacy • Establish expectations of roles and responsibilities of staff in delivering a balanced literacy framework • Provide initial and ongoing embedded PD for district literacy framework • Ensure the use of the board-adopted literacy-based framework	100% of teachers will incorporate the district balanced literacy framework within instruction	100% of students will demonstrate improved achievement in reading and writing on common formative assessments
2B. Develop and implement a district-wide approach to pre- and post-common assessments for reading to guide instruction and intervention **Action Steps** • Ensure a district-wide common understanding of the use of reading assessments in instruction • Ensure that all teachers use identified common reading assessments and scoring rubrics, and interpret results of assessments to guide instruction • Develop a schedule and time line for test administration and reporting • Design and implement record-keeping systems to monitor student progress by substrand	100% of teachers will analyze and interpret the results of the assessment, and formulate and implement an instructional plan	Each student will demonstrate improvement on achievement as measured by reading post assessments
2C. Use data-driven decisions to target appropriate reading instruction and intervention for students with disabilities, minority students, LEP students, and students who are economically disadvantaged **Action Steps** • Identify and implement district-wide scientifically research-based instructional practices • Develop a systematic approach to ongoing data analysis, interpretation and utilization over time • Outline and implement an intervention plan • Expand the use of technology as an efficient means to make data-driven decisions	100% of teachers will use scientifically-based research instructional strategies and interventions to meet identified needs	100% of students in identified subgroups will demonstrate improved achievement in reading

Unified Focus, Decentralized Roles

"I think the biggest culture shift has been the changing role of the Central Office, from one that controlled the work to a decentralized approach that works with and supports the implementation of shared practices in every school," said Tefs. A common practice for many districts involved central office analyzing data by department and presenting those data to school principals. Now, through the use of the OIP and embedded tools, such as the DF, teachers are engaged from the bottom up in analyzing data for instructional improvement. But that engagement would not have happened without intentional action on the part of the district.[3]

Wooster City School District

3rd Quarter Rubric Grade 6

Language Arts Rubric - Third Quarter			
Reading Standard	**1**	**2**	**3**
Determine the meaning of unknown words by using context clues and concepts	Uses a variety of strategies (e.g. pictures, context clues, word origins, word analysis) to determine the meaning of unknown words less than 7 out of 10 times	Uses a variety of strategies (e.g. pictures, context clues, word origins, word analysis) to determine the meaning of unknown words 7-8 out of 10 times	Uses a variety of strategies (e.g., pictures, context clues, word origins, word analysis) to determine the meaning of unknown words 9 out of 10 times

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices. The greatest benefit of the change in culture has been "the ability to form the BLTs and really empower teachers to make and then hold each other accountable for building priorities," said Arbogast. Wooster's DLT meets every other month, while each school's BLT meets monthly and TBTs meet weekly. And, while district leadership is quick to point out that they're still not there yet, they have taken concrete steps – through the establishment of aligned team structures – to define and implement shared instructional practices.

In fact, the Wooster Board of Education felt so strongly about the need to focus district work on instruction and achievement that it restructured the key functions of the superintendent within the Superintendent/CEO Job Description to emphasize such elements as:

- Placing a primary focus on improving instruction and enhancing student learning;
- Leading the creation of instructional systems designed for high student achievement;
- Expecting, modeling, and supporting the effective use of data;
- Setting expectations for effective data-based decision making at all levels of the system;
- Requiring the use of an established curriculum;
- Creating and executing a coherent plan with a limited, achievable number of goals and objectives; and
- Implementing and monitoring the district plan.

Other foundational changes that have contributed to the district's capacity for shared work include the development of a *K-12 Literacy Framework*, which "addresses the reading needs of all students through quality instruction in the classroom" and embeds short- and long-term intervention strategies; and the development of a standards-based report card at the elementary and middle school levels. The new report card, developed to better communicate the progress each child was making toward meeting performance-based standards, was implemented in 39 classrooms across six elementary schools during the 2009-10 school year. All elementary-aged children will receive the report card during the 2011-12 school year.

The district literacy framework is a key part of the district's plan to implement a district-wide approach to balanced literacy (Goal 2, Strategy 2A). Teachers use specific quarterly

[3] See Mac Iver, M.A., & Farley, E. (2003). *Bringing the district back in: The role of the central office in improving instruction and student achievement.* Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University.

learning targets – aligned with academic content standards and the district framework (in the case of reading and writing) – that are measured with a rubric-based system to check for proficiency. In reading, the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment is administered three times a year through 6th grade, while the middle school uses the Star assessment, which provides grade- and lexile-level indicators on progress. In math, a mid-year and end-of-year assessment that is part of the Everyday Math program is used to assess student progress.

In all content areas, the development of common assessments to be used by groups of teachers is continuing as the district gets better at implementing high functioning TBTs. "Having the formative assessments and then the conversations that take place at grade level meetings about what's being taught and how it's being taught is priceless," said Tefs.

Universal Education: Ohio Study on Students with Disabilities
Common Themes

Focus on Instructional Practice and Student Learning
Access to general curriculum/grade-level content
Using research-based practices

Leadership
Starts at the district level and uses data to address issues
Principals and teachers are knowledgeable about data and take ownership for learning of their students

Intentional Culture Shift
From "old" SE model to shared responsibility (they're all our kids)
Eliminating a culture of isolation – no one works in isolation

Collaboration
Structures in place for adults to talk about data and inform instruction

Assessment & Curriculum
Use of common formative assessment
Focus on aligned curriculum, use of power standards, pacing guides, curriculum calendars and relationship to formative assessment

Source: Silverman, S.K., Hazelwood, C., & Cronin, P. (2009). *Universal Education: Principles and Practices for Advancing Achievement of Students with Disabilities*

Intervention as Part of Instruction. Another critical element of the district's work to improve reading and writing across all student groups involves the integration of selected interventions as part of overall instruction. Intervention specialists (Ohio's term for special education teachers) are regular members of all leadership teams – at the district, building, and teacher team level – and the district promotes the use of co-teaching models that allow struggling students to receive in-class support and additional instruction as needed. At Edgewood Middle School, an intervention specialist chairs the BLT.

In Wooster's model, intervention is something that is provided to students above and beyond the core instructional program, not in lieu of it. Rather than view its response to intervention (RtI) work as a separate initiative, the DLT has used it as another leverage point to ensure that the individual needs of all children are being met as part of OIP implementation. "We're not trying to build a silo; we are making sure that students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and other high-need children are getting what they need," explained Elaine Karp, Director of Pupil Services. Prior to Karp's arrival, WCSD had six different directors of pupil services in six years. "We had absolutely no continuity. Now we have consistency and the whole system is working so much more fluidly and coherently," explained Tefs.

That continuity in effective data use at all levels and for all groups of children is key. "Our teacher teams look at subgroup data as part of the process, not only for IEP kids, but for other kids such as those who are economically disadvantaged. Our teachers have a good awareness of those data and are looking at how kids performed and what needs to be done instructionally to help each child achieve," explained Leone. "I think all children benefit from the way the data are used," he said.

Arbogast agrees, explaining that the TBT review of data across subgroups ensures that all children are part of the conversation. "We're pulling those data apart to see who's at, below, or above grade level, and continuously revamping instruction and that has

led to a much more center-based approach in math and a more leveled grouping approach in reading," she said. "We used to think our role was to make sure regular ed teachers knew who was in their rooms so they could make the right modifications. Now, we know our role is to provide time for all teachers to work together to improve instruction for all students and, as a part of that process, to understand what interventions have been successful or unsuccessful and what needs to change instructionally to support student learning," said Tefs.

Two years ago, the Ohio Department of Education interviewed about 30 districts that showed good progress for the subgroup of children with disabilities to learn what factors most contributed to their success. In every case, the factors cited by districts included leadership for changing the way in which staff across the district talked about their role in educating all children, away from a focus on regular or special education to a focus on universal education for all children. This philosophical shift is evident in WCSD. "There is not one spot like an Office of Accountability or a Curriculum Department that is responsible for student success. Because of our leadership team structure, I could say today it's the BLT, DLT and in another year all TBTs that are collectively accountable for the success of every student," stated Tefs.

Facilitation Integral to Implementation

The WCSD team credits the improvements they've made, in part, to the structures and protocols (e.g., TBT Rubric, step 3) that have fostered shared expectations and helped to change conversations among teachers. And, they credit the external facilitators assigned from the State Support Team (SST) 9 – operated by the Stark County Educational Service Center (ESC) – as being essential in helping the district put these pieces in place. Beginning in 2008, regional technical assistance providers from across Ohio were

Ohio TBT 5-Step Implementation Rubric

STEPS	ADVANCED	PROFICIENT	BASIC
GOALS	○ Students can explain their own individual goals, what they know and can do, and what strategies they are using to reach their goals.	○ Classrooms have goals: • **S**pecific • **M**easurable • **A**chievable • **R**elevant • **T**imely	○ Established goals are academic or behavioral but may not be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, or timely ○ Goals are made public to students
STEP 3: Establish shared expectations for implementing specific effective changes in the classroom	○ Team members establish shared expectations for implementing specific instructional changes in classroom and develop plans collaboratively ○ Strategies are research-based and impact multiple content areas ○ Strategies are prioritized for impact on student achievement ○ Differentiating to meet individual student needs is evident ○ Team members agree on instructional time for strategy implementation and post-assessment standards	○ Team members discuss shared instructional changes but do not always agree on consistent implementation ○ Discussed strategies are research based ○ Strategies are prioritized for impact on student achievement ○ Strategy instruction is observed ○ Teachers usually model strategies	○ Strategies are identified but are not identified as significantly impacting student achievement ○ Teachers introduce strategies but do not model instructional strategies with consistency

Source: Ohio State Support Team 9

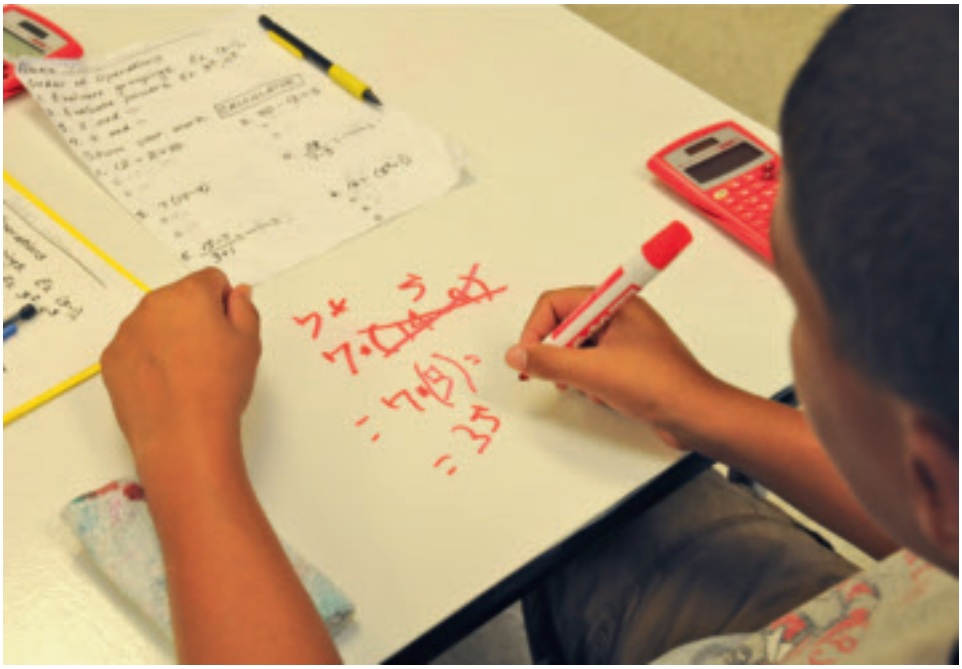
assigned to serve as external facilitators to partner districts, and to other districts in improvement status. The role of the facilitator was to work with/alongside the district, helping it to establish or refine leadership teams at the district, building, and teacher team levels; look at and use their data in more meaningful ways; identify a limited number of goals, strategies, and actions; put monitoring and evaluation systems in place for gauging the degree of implementation and its effects on student learning; and ultimately building the capacity of the district to make and sustain improvements in student learning.

Facilitators served the critical role of being part of but separate from the district team and, as such, were in a unique position to ask the tough questions, probe and redirect, and push back as needed. Their role in building district capacity involved the development of internal facilitators, usually central office personnel who could foster inquiry and learning across the district. "You can't run this process without an external facilitator. The role they played allowed me as superintendent to engage in the process," stated Tefs. "When the problem became the focus of our conversations, our facilitator could move us forward. She was integral to our capacity to improve," he added.

WCSD initially received support from ESC consultant Dr. Sue Long who had previously worked as Akron City Schools' deputy superintendent. According to Long, "even though teaching and learning is the business of school districts, I don't think we've done a good job talking about how we get people from different levels and different perspectives talking about the work and having a few focused goals that we **implement deeply** and across the district to make a difference and leverage a change."

When Long retired, WCSD received support from SST 9 consultant and former principal Peg Deibel, who also serves as one of the state's four regional quadrant leads, providing support to other ESC, district, and school personnel in northeast Ohio. The district was also supported by SST consultant Laurie Langenfeld, who worked in tandem with Deibel on the integration of RtI strategies into the work of TBTs. Langenfeld then used the feedback she received from WCSD to develop an RtI Core Team Training Series for districts in the Stark County ESC region.

Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. After three years of OIP implementation, the district is well on its way to not only having high functioning teams at every level, but to using the work of the teams to increase the consistency in and quality of what gets taught at each level. Deibel and Superintendent Tefs are now spending much of their time helping to systematize the work of TBTs. At the same time, they're ensuring that relevant instructional data generated by the teams are being used by the BLT and the DLT on an ongoing basis to evaluate whether district-wide strategies and actions are (1) being fully implemented as designed, and (2) having the desired effect on student learning.



A five-step rubric – the *Ohio TBT 5-Step Process Implementation Rubric* – is being used to support this work, which involves:

1. Collecting and charting data and results;
2. Analyzing student work specific to the data;
3. Establishing shared expectations for implementing specific effective changes in the classroom;
4. Implementing changes consistently across all classrooms; and
5. Collecting, charting, and analyzing post data, and evaluating impact on student learning.

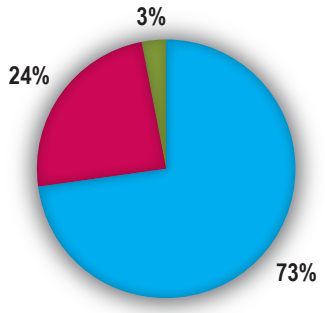
In addition to evaluating the impact that strategies and actions are having on student learning, the effectiveness of the DLT and BLTs are evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that improvements are made on a continuing basis. All teams have responded to the *DLT Effectiveness Survey* and *BLT Effectiveness Survey* providing feedback about the degree to which they believe indicators of effective leadership teams are being met. "One of our biggest successes has involved taking six elementary schools and making them more alike than different in terms of the quality and consistency of instruction being provided to all kids," said Tefs. "The survey data from our teams is phenomenal," he added.

> *"We're getting better at focusing all of our conversations, including typical staff meetings, on reviewing the data and making decisions. We've found more efficient ways to take care of operational business so we can spend our time on instruction."*
>
> **Karen Arbogast, Principal, Wayne Elementary School**

Intentional Resource Use and PD. "In real estate, they say location, location, location," quipped Tefs. "In school improvement, it's called time, time, time!" "There's not a better place to be than to watch our teams work, but I wish I could give them more time," he said. But, time means money. WCSD, along with many other districts in the state, is experiencing an unparalleled budget shortfall. Ohio's newly released

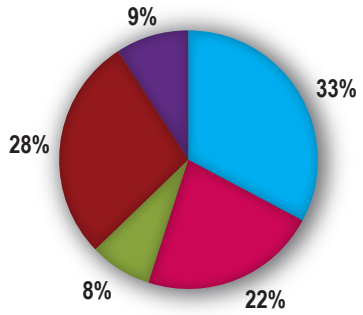
Item Name	SEL	%
1. Student understood learning objective and relevance of lesson	90	73%
2. Student somewhat understood learning objective and relevance of lesson	29	24%
3. Student could not state learning objective or relevance	4	3%
Total	123	100%

Learning Objectives are stated by the student



Item Name	SEL	%
1. Observed: Teacher Modeling	41	33%
2. Observed: Students working together	27	22%
3. Observed: Differentiated lessons for different groups	10	8%
4. Observed: Independent Practice	35	28%
5. Not Observed	11	9%
Total	124	100%

Gradual Release Model



state budget revealed that operating funds for Ohio school districts were cut by nearly $780 million. "There are only 22 districts in the state of Ohio that are going to receive a larger reduction than Wooster due to the budget bill and that's because of our incredibly high reliance on tangible personal property tax. We're going to lose 19% of our budget over the next eight years," lamented Tefs. "And that reality brings us back to the discussion on the importance of focusing our work." In discussing professional development and related resource needs, Tefs explains "if it isn't immensely focused on our goals, we're just not going to do it."

Tefs attributes the district's ability to stay focused, in part, to the Board's support for the work, and to the partnership with the teacher association. "The Board wants to know what the return on investment is, and our use of the OIP has made it easier for board members to codify expenditures with very focused work," he said. At the same time the district reduced the number of central office personnel by 4.5 positions, it built time for grade-level meetings into its most recent collective bargaining agreement. "Because of the work we've done through the DLT, everyone saw the need for time for teachers to meet," said Tefs.

Redirecting dollars to focus on the district's goals is occurring at the building level too. For example, two positions were eliminated at the middle school level and dollars shifted to better support work to reach district goals. Leone

FOCUS ON IMPACT:

A Conversation with Dr. John Hattie, Professor, University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education

John Hattie, author of *Visible Learning*, a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to educational effectiveness, offers the following advice on what to pay attention to in improving learning for all students.

- There are several attributes that the system has to have/hold that revolve around "know thy impact." To get the changes that lead to high effect size and change mindsets, we must help people to understand that they are fundamentally evaluators – seekers of feedback about their impact.
- It's a myth that a teaching program or method is what makes the difference and focusing on this allows everyone to have a safe conversation, rather than look at how what we do impacts student learning.
- Feedback isn't only something that's given. It's also something that's received.
- Most teachers have their theories about why kids don't learn. There are few things that differ across different groups of kids – this is an empirical question, not a belief statement.
- Schools are awash in data, but they don't use it well. Data are valuable when they're used as something that helps us know *what to do next*, NOT something that's used to look at what we've already done.
- Focus is important, but the focus needs to be on impact.
- We need to change the conversation from talking about teaching to talking about learning.
- We won't leave it up to individual teachers to decide what to do; it's a system responsibility and we'll judge the school, not teachers, by the quality of their evidence.
- Principals are key, particularly when they function as instructional leaders, not transformational leaders. In schools with large impact, principals can exert indirect influence; in schools with low impact, they need to use very direct influence.

J. Hattie (Personal Communication, June 28, 2011)

explains "by looking at our walk-through data of our adult indicators, we've come back, identified weak spots, and developed PD to address them." Walk-throughs are conducted by Leone and two middle school teachers who are members of both the DLT and Edgewood's BLT.

It's About Collective Learning

"As we get better at the process of gathering and acting on walk-through data, we'd like to get the process in the hands of more of our BLT members in the future," said Leone. The district has customized the use of a commercial walk-through product that allows team members to use electronic devices to gather data on district-developed rubrics.

Inquire and Learn. "We're getting better at focusing all of our conversations, including typical staff meetings, on reviewing the data and making decisions," said Arbogast. "We've found more efficient ways to take care of operational business so we can spend our time on instruction," she added.

Arbogast moved to the principalship from the role of curriculum director for another district. "As a BLT, we're using the data submitted from TBTs and prioritizing instructional strategies. We realized, for example, that a lot of kids weren't making inferences, so teachers met vertically, beginning with grades four through six, and eventually all grades were on board. They came up with a whole school strategy to find specific pictures and place them in the hallway and incorporate inference activities in the classroom. As you walk down the hallway, the walls are covered with examples of making inferences and it's really neat to see what first grades are doing with the picture, and then third grade, and then sixth grade. They're just more willing to tackle things as vertical teams and now understand that this isn't just a fourth grade problem," described Arbogast.

Other examples include curriculum implementation at the middle and high school in the area of algebra. "Although teachers were all teaching Algebra 1, we had to get them to the point where they were more alike than different in how they were delivering the instruction, and that's where formative assessment came in," explained Tefs. "Our TBTs helped a great deal with improving the consistency of the instruction by having common discussions and they're definitely getting better at being more alike than different," said Leone.

Staying the Course

WCSD is gearing up for its fourth year of OIP implementation and its second full year of using teacher-based teams to promote continuous learning about what impacts student learning. As the DLT prepares for the start of a new school year, the district is committed to using the improvement process to realize district goals. "We need to continue to sustain the process of using walk-through data, become a little more critical of the data, identifying the key look-fors, and developing structured processes for supporting peer coaching, observation, and reflection," said Arbogast.

While WCSD has made progress, the DLT quickly points to challenges they're working to overcome. Wider community involvement and understanding of the work, how to fully meet the needs of children with the greatest educational needs, and how to continue to move forward in using formative assessment across the district are among the issues WCSD will tackle in the coming year. "I've seen districts try to take the model they used before and tweak it. For us, it wasn't about tweaking; it was about hitting the reset button and starting over," stated Tefs.

Advice from Wooster City School District

1. Make sure the district leadership team (DLT) includes staff from across the district, not only cabinet level personnel or administrators.
2. Include the principal and a teacher from each school's building leadership team (BLT) on the DLT to foster continuity and alignment of core work across all schools.
3. Use relevant data to focus critical conversations about need and progress, and make sure that team members from across the district are working with district-wide data, not just the data from the schools they represent.
4. Reduce the number of initiatives and ensure that all work directly aligns with a small number of goals and strategies.
5. Measure both adult implementation and student achievement to focus on the impact of district actions on student performance.
6. Focus on sustainability by ensuring that the teacher association/union is a partner in making improvements from the beginning of the process.
7. Align decisions about resource management with district goals.
8. Rely on strong external facilitation to implement a sustainable process, allowing the superintendent to participate as a team member, rather than a facilitator.

For additional information about the Wooster journey, contact Michael Tefs, Superintendent/CEO, Wooster City Schools, 144 North Market Street, Wooster, OH 44691 at 330.988.1111 (ext. 1223) or via email at wstr_mtefs@woostercityschools.org.

Brevard Public Schools: Achievement Profile

Viera, Florida

Brevard Public Schools Student Demographics
Total Enrollment: 72,538
% Students Identified as Exceptional Ed: 17.2
% Students Identified as Free/Reduced Lunch: 43.2
% Students Identified as Minority: 32.6
% Students Identified as English Language Learners: 2.3
% Students Identified as Gifted: 7.1

"All kids can learn at significantly higher levels, we believe it!" stated Cynthia Van Meter, Associate Superintendent of Brevard Public Schools in Florida. As one of only three associate superintendents in a district that serves close to 73,000 children across a 75-mile stretch of east central Florida (known as Florida's *Space Coast*), Van Meter is responsible for curriculum and instruction for every student across the district's 113 schools. Brevard County Schools (BPS) is organized into three areas – *north, central, and south* – spanning 1,300 square miles and 16 municipalities.

Van Meter's responsibilities include not only elementary, middle and secondary school programs, but also accountability, testing, and evaluation; adult and community education; career and technical education, and all student services, which encompass exceptional student education (ESE) services. This organizational scheme is not surprising, considering the district's commitment to eliminating silos, using a common vision to guide the education of every child, and focusing first and foremost on student success.

BPS has been recognized for its achievements in a number of areas, including having 100% of its schools rated as "Grade A" schools by the state, being ranked second overall in the state by the Florida Department of Education, second in the state in graduation rate, and third in the nation for the percentage of teachers holding National Board certification.[1] In 2005 and 2006, the district led the state in science in 5th and 11th grade assessments, had five of the top 10 elementary schools in the state, was in the top 10 in the state in each of the 22 areas of state assessment, led the state in the 10th grade writing exam, and had higher SAT scores than any other Florida school district. More recently, the state's release of the 2011 *Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test* (FCAT) scores – Florida's primary measure of student achievement of the Sunshine State Standards – showed that Brevard's sixth grade students ranked first in Florida in both reading and mathematics, and in June the district was honored for the third consecutive year by the Association of School Business Officials for financial excellence.

These results are true for all groups of children. Karen Denbroeder of the Florida Department of Education's Bureau of Exceptional Children and Student Services explained that beginning in 2004, Florida began to publicly recognize LEAs who demonstrated high rates of students with disabilities in general education classrooms coupled with high rates of proficiency on state assessment. "Brevard was one of the first school districts to be recognized. The State Department often refers other districts to Brevard when questions are asked about how to increase participation in general education classes," said Denbroeder.

While district personnel may appreciate these accolades and others like them, they believe strongly as a group that their work is not done until *every* child is prepared for a productive life after graduation from BPS. And that means ensuring that *every* school across

[1] Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast, 2009.

the district is fully and consistently implementing those strategies the district believes will lead to preparing all students at significantly higher levels. "We're never satisfied with where we are, we're always reaching," said Dr. Michael Miller, principal of Saturn Elementary School, a Florida Grade A school serving Pre-K through 6th graders in the central area of the district. Miller is also a finalist for the state's Florida Literacy Awards in the category of *Elementary Literacy Leadership Team of the Year*.

A culture of higher expectations was fostered under the previous superintendent, who is credited with reshaping the district, leading to tremendous growth. "He got us to believe that hard work paid off," said Secondary Programs Resource Teacher Patty Adams. Holding all adults in the district accountable for the success of all children remains a core value under the current administration, led by Superintendent Brian T. Binggeli. "Dr. Binggeli brings a data and accountability focus and expects all children, including students with disabilities and English language learners (ELL), to achieve and succeed at the same rate as all other children," explained Sue Carver, director of Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Program Services.

When "Less Is More"

Since assuming leadership of the district in July of 2009, Dr. Binggeli's emphasis on what the adults need to do to improve student outcomes has been instrumental in helping the district to become more intentional and focused around core work, beginning with maximizing student potential in core academic areas, closing achievement gaps, and ramping up the level of rigor and cognitive demand associated with content provided to all students. "Our district is committed to high-quality, research-based practices that improve outcomes for all students. Through our strategic planning process, a sustained focus on teaching and learning impacts

Operational Expectations

Goal 1: Student Achievement

1. Maximize student potential in core area achievement.
2. Close achievement gaps.
3. Deliver quality non-core area learning opportunities that provide students with a well-rounded education.
4. Promote student acquisition of 21st century skills.

Goal 2: Safe, Healthy and Productive Work and Learning Environment

1. Provide adequate and appropriate facilities.
2. Maintain a safe work and learning environment.
3. Foster shared purpose and collaboration throughout the organization.

Goal 3: Capable and Engaged Workforce

1. Recruit and retain the highest quality staff.
2. Build leadership and job-related capacity at every level of the organization.
3. Promote continual learning and innovation through reasonable levels of autonomy, accountability and ownership.

Goal 4: Fiscal Responsibility and Organizational Effectiveness

1. Maintain effective and efficient resource management.
2. Utilize strategic planning that provides organizational focus and fosters continuous improvement.
3. Maintain effective school/community communication and partnerships.

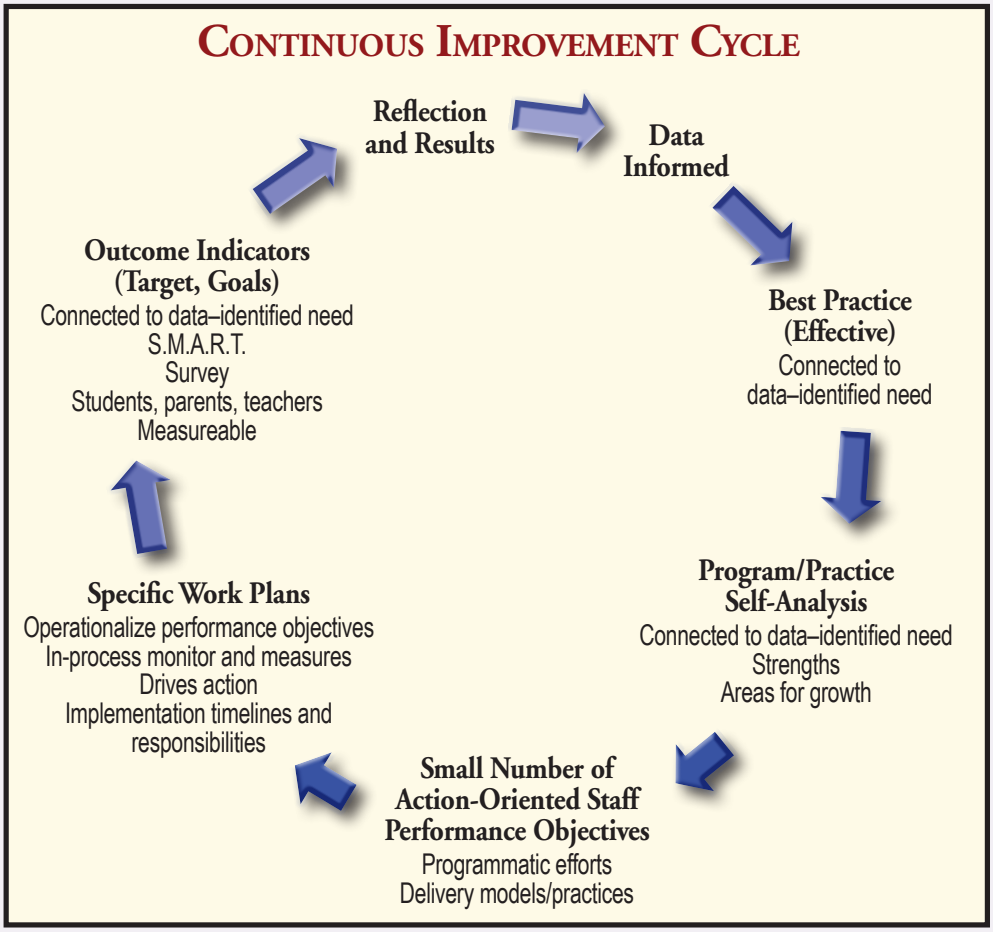
student and teacher performance," said Binggeli. While goals have been in existence for quite some time, it wasn't until about 10 years ago that work began in earnest to develop a usable district plan.

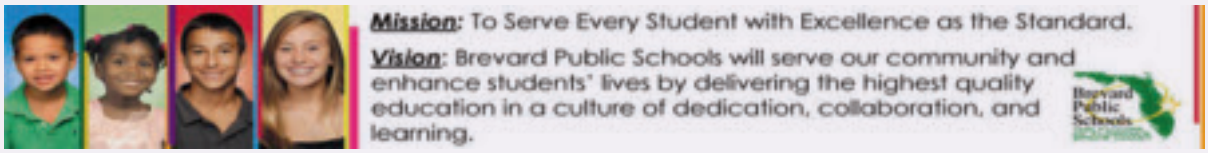
> *"The district strategic plan drives what we do and how we use resources. We're learning to focus on fewer things and do them well."*
>
> **Dr. Elizabeth Thedy, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services**

Focus Your Goals. "We used to have many goals; now we are more strategically focused," explained Dr. Walt Christy, Director of Secondary Programs. "It was exhausting," added Randy LaRusso, ESE Resource Teacher and Alternate Assessment Coordinator. The district's transition from what was described as "an enormous plan" to a few important goals (see Operational Expectations) provided a framework for aligning priorities in real ways. The district strategic plan, now used to guide core work across the system, is described by Van Meter as a living document that is reviewed annually. "There was a time when we knew there was a plan, it was out there. Now, I have to explain how what I want to do relates to the goals in the plan," explained LaRusso. The most recent district strategic plan was approved by Brevard's five-member board of education on September 28, 2010.

District-wide initiatives, such as the implementation of the district's K-12 Literacy Plan, are directly aligned with district goals, school improvement plans are tied to district goals, and all staff members – approximately 9,000 of them – are expected to understand the relationship between what they do every day and the district's expectations. "The district strategic plan drives what we do and how we use resources. We're learning to focus on fewer things and do them well," said Dr. Beth Thedy, formerly BPS Director of Middle School Programs, and now the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services.

The idea of fully implementing a few important things is, in itself, a major change in practice for the district. Schools have flexibility in going beyond the district's four goals to meet the specific needs of the children they serve, but they must align their work, as represented in their school improvement plans (SIPs), with the district goals, and they are not permitted to replace district goals. "Before more was more; now, less is more," said Stephanie Hall, principal of Sabal Elementary School, another Grade A school in the district. "By using the district strategic plan to respond to issues that arise out of daily conversations, we're able to help all teachers and related personnel understand and focus their energy. This creates opportunities for dialogue among the staff and increases their collective capacity to continuously improve instruction and student learning," said Hall.





How Florida's Public Schools Are Graded	
Elementary and Middle Schools	**High Schools**
100% of the grade based on scoring high on the FCAT and making annual learning gains. Schools earn 1 point per content area for each percent of students scoring at 3, 4, or 5 in reading, math, and science; and points for scores on the FCAT writing exam (scored 1 to 6), based on the percent of students scoring 3 or higher, and the percent of students scoring 4 or higher Schools earn 1 point each for each percent of students who make learning gains in reading and math, with special attention given to gains among the lowest 25% at FCAT levels 1, 2, or 3 in each school Schools must test at least 90% of eligible students, and 95% to receive a grade of A	**50%** of the grade based on scoring high on the FCAT and making annual learning gains* 50% of the grade based on non-FCAT components, such as graduation rate for all students and for at-risk students, participation in accelerated coursework, postsecondary readiness **In addition to meeting learning gains for low-performing students and testing requirements, schools that would otherwise earn an "A" must meet a statewide target of 75% for the graduation rate of at-risk students or show sufficient (defined as 1% or more for schools with an at-risk graduation rate of at least 65%, and 5% for schools with an at-risk graduation rate below 65%) annual improvement in that rate*

Source: Florida Department of Education. Go to http://fcat.fldoe.org/fcat2/ for additional information.

Each of the four goals – or operational expectations – set by the district has a limited number of strategies and a short list of measureable outcome indicators associated with it. No strategy has more than eight indicators and, in most cases, there are fewer than five indicators used to gauge implementation of district strategies. The notion of less *is* really more resonates with district personnel who understand the challenges associated with **implementing deeply** any activity across a district with Brevard's distinctive geographical footprint.

Getting – and staying – focused begins with effective data use. A variety of measures is used to continually assess the degree of implementation of strategies across the district and whether that implementation is having the desired effect on student learning. Brevard's continuous improvement cycle begins with data, uses data at every step, and ends with an overall annual review of progress based on outcome indicator data collected over the course of the year. One outcome indicator under Goal 3 involves the incorporation, by 2012-13, of the *BPS Continuous Improvement Model* as part of personnel evaluation. Use of the *BPS Continuous Improvement Model* would be one of three indicators of the district's progress in promoting "continual learning and innovation through reasonable levels of autonomy, accountability, and ownership."

Use Data Well. "Accessibility of data has changed the conversation across the district," affirmed Van Meter. In fact, one of the district's operational beliefs is to "revere data that provide feedback to students, inform programmatic and instructional decisions, and support focused intervention efforts." According to Neyda Francis, Assistant Director of

FCAT Reading:

Change in Percentage of Students Scoring at Level 3, 4, and 5 from 2002 to 2010

Total/Subgroup	Performance (School Year) 2002	Performance (School Year) 2010	Percent Improvement
Total	58%	72%	14%
White	64%	77%	13%
Black	31%	50%	19%
Hispanic	47%	64%	15%
Economically Disadvantaged	45%	62%	17%
English Language Learners	14%	28%	14%
Students with Disabilities	24%	42%	18%

Indicator should increase

FCAT Math:

Change in Percentage of Students Scoring at Level 1 from 2002 to 2010

Total/Subgroup	Performance (School Year) 2002	Performance (School Year) 2010	Percent Improvement
Total	17%	9%	-8%
White	12%	5%	-7%
Black	41%	21%	-20%
Hispanic	25%	14%	-11%
Economically Disadvantaged	31%	15%	-16%
English Language Learners	51%	38%	-13%
Students with Disabilities	51%	31%	-20%

Indicator should decrease

FCAT Math:

Change in Percentage of Students Scoring at Level 3, 4, and 5 from 2002 to 2010

Total/Subgroup	Performance (School Year) 2002	Performance (School Year) 2010	Percent Improvement
Total	63%	77%	14%
White	69%	83%	14%
Black	30%	52%	22%
Hispanic	51%	68%	17%
Economically Disadvantaged	44%	65%	21%
English Language Learners	22%	37%	15%
Students with Disabilities	26%	46%	20%

Indicator should increase

Florida's student achievement level descriptors are provided in the box on the following page.

Accountability, Testing, & Evaluation, the development of a single sign-on learning management system that would provide teachers and principals access to descriptive statistics related to state, district, and local common assessments and teacher-made instruments is under way. A variety of materials aligned to district pacing guides and designed to support effective instruction (e.g., model lessons, video of colleagues delivering lesson-line elements, state assessment item banks, etc.) would also be available to support improvement in instructional practice across the district.

Florida's Student Achievement Level Descriptions	
Level 5	Performance at this level indicates the student has *success with the most challenging content* of the Sunshine State Standards. A Level 5 student answers most of the test questions correctly, including the most challenging questions.
Level 4	Performance at this level indicates the student has *success with the challenging content* of the Sunshine State Standards. A Level 4 student answers most of the test questions correctly, but may only have some success with questions that reflect the most challenging content.
Level 3	Performance at this level indicates the student has *partial success with the challenging content* of the Sunshine State Standards, but performance is inconsistent. A Level 3 student answers many of the test questions correctly, but is generally less successful with questions that are most challenging.
Level 2	Performance at this level indicates the student has *limited success with the challenging content* of the Sunshine State Standards.
Level 1	Performance at this level indicates the student has *little success with the challenging content* of the Sunshine State Standards.

The district uses state assessment data (i.e., FCAT, Florida Alternate Assessment) and district-created benchmark assessments that are aligned with content standards and *Brevard's Effective Strategies for Teaching* (BEST) to identify trends, prioritize areas of need, and monitor progress.

Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA) Percent at Each Proficiency Level

2010	# Assessed	*Emergent* Level 1 2 3	*Achieved* Level 4 5 6	*Commended* Level 7 8 9	*Proficient* Level 4 - 9
Reading grades 3-10	414	32%	25%	43%	68%
Math grades 3-10	413	31%	43%	25%	68%
Science grades 5, 8, 11	134	26%	44%	30%	74%
Writing grades 4, 8, 10	168	33%	34%	34%	68%

Source: Brevard Public Schools *District Accreditation Standards Assessment Report*, January 30-February 2, 2011

At the same time, elementary schools use the *Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading* (FAIR) three times per year, and the *Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener* (FLKRS) to assess the school readiness of kindergarten students. Data are tracked against a Goal 1 indicator that states, "By 2013, 90% of all first grade students and 90% of all second grade students will demonstrate a high probability of success as measured by the third FAIR assessment." A data dashboard, a desktop student data system, and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analyses are used by the district, and every teacher receives data on last year's students, as well as the children assigned to them for the current year. A commercial product is used to provide access to individual student data for all staff working with the student. This product is being modified to incorporate response to intervention (RtI) progress monitoring data, and running records are used to monitor the progress of struggling students. With the exception of district assessment and the use of FAIR, teachers have discretion in how they use other assessment tools.

District personnel acknowledge that the use, across the district, of collaboratively developed and scored common classroom assessments is inconsistent; however, a more structured and system-wide approach to promoting teacher use of formative assessment, aligned with BEST,

is being developed and all staff will be trained in its use. Another Goal 3 outcome indicator states "By 2015, 90% of Brevard's schools will be recognized as national models of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Work." As PLCs are established in schools, the use of common assessments that are collaboratively developed and used by teacher teams will become the norm.

State assessment data suggest that the rate of improvement in the percentage of all BPS students scoring at levels 3, 4, or 5 on the FCAT is matched or exceeded by students with disabilities and English language learners. For example, while the percent improvement in math from 2002 to 2010 for all students was 14%, students with disabilities improved by 20%. Further evidence of growth for all student groups is provided by the reduction in the percentage of students scoring at FCAT Level 1, with the percentage of all students decreasing by 8% and the percentage of students with disabilities and English language learners decreasing by 20% and 13%, respectively.

Randy LaRusso, Alternate Assessment Coordinator for BPS, reports that .67 of the district's tested students in grades assessed participate in alternate assessment, a percentage that is lower than other districts, many of whom BPS officials say request waivers to exceed the allowable one percent of students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in alternate assessment (i.e., students whose cognitive impairments may prevent them from attaining grade-level achievement standards, even with the very best instruction). "A natural consequence of the hard work the schools do, and the support they receive from Resource Teachers Lisa Rogers and Patty Adams, is that more and more teachers and principals say 'why not bring this kid along too?' As a result, we have a population of children that could take the alternate assessment, but instead participate in the regular assessment. The district may take the hit for that, but we do it because it's the right thing to do for kids," explained LaRusso.

"Principals cannot transform a school through their individual efforts. Creating a professional learning community is a collective effort, but that effort has little chance of success without effective leadership from the principal."

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting professional learning communities at work. New insights for improving schools.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Adams concurs, and offers several examples of children no one thought could ever achieve at grade level. "We found two students sitting there and we said, 'let's just see if they're able to perform, we're going to try it.'" One, a student with Down Syndrome, is now performing at grade level and LaRusso reports that he is not in a modified program. "We're changing what people think kids with significant cognitive disabilities can and should learn; my job every day is to convince people to give it a try, give it a go, with kids," said LaRusso.

Guiding the Journey: Structures & Practices that Promote System-wide Improvement

"We know that not all adults believe that all kids can learn at higher levels, or that the use of PLCs is a strategy that can be used to improve instruction for all kids, but there are more in this journey with us than not," added LaRusso. That journey starts with shared responsibility for student success. "No one department is responsible for student success, we all are. Everyone has a role in improving results for every child," said Van Meter. "We work together as a team," she added.

At the district level, senior staff members from every department across the district meet regularly with the superintendent. Also at the district level, a district leadership team meets regularly and includes the superintendent, area and assistant superintendents, and every principal and district director. At the school level, buildings have leadership teams that include guidance counselors, teacher leaders, and literacy coaches. At the classroom/teacher level, PLCs are in place across elementary schools and, in most buildings, every grade has a team. Special education or ESE teachers are included as regular members of PLCs. Binggeli explains, "district and school administrators, instructional and support staff, and community stakeholders are dedicated to establishing an improvement process that identifies the needs of students and to developing and executing a plan to meet those needs. The district will continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan to determine our success in achieving desired results."

> *"All teachers have an important role to play in providing solid core instruction to all children. There are no silos in this district; expectations are so high."*
>
> **Lisa Rogers,**
> **ESE Resource Teacher**

Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. Leadership teams at each level are used to foster shared responsibility for student success, and support a more collective and strategic approach to addressing identified needs. At Saturn Elementary School, for example, PLCs at each grade level meet regularly, and also meet once a week – every Thursday for 45 minutes – with Principal Michael Miller. "The culture in the building has changed so much and accountability is the impetus for changing the culture. When I talk to a teacher about a specific kid, the teacher knows that child in and out. Teachers really know how to use data to drive instruction," described Miller. When I first became a principal, I looked at data but it wasn't a major thing. The district trained principals to use data; I felt supported," said Miller. In BPS, principals report to their area superintendent.

Serving a working class community, about 74% of Saturn's students qualify for free/reduced lunch, while almost 30% receive special education services. All of Saturn's students with disabilities are educated in regular education classrooms, and care is taken to ensure that services are based on the instructional needs of the students. "We've stopped looking at eligibility labels for instructional purposes," said LaRusso. "Instruction is based on what the kid needs to learn, not the label," she said.

As noted by Superintendent Binggeli, data are used to identify those needs on an ongoing basis, and to monitor the implementation of instructional strategies by groups of teachers. Teachers use the time to provide feedback and support to each other. "The highly effective teams chart progress," said Miller. "We saw a big gap and had to ask ourselves, 'how can we expect students with disabilities to perform at the same level when they don't have access to the curriculum and materials'?" explained Miller, who is certified in the areas of elementary education, early childhood education, mental retardation, ESOL, and administration and supervision.

Recognized by BPS as the 2008-09 Principal of the Year, Miller has worked with teachers to move the school from a grade of "C" to an A-rated school designated as the 25th Glasser Quality School in the nation and a model school for PLCs. He credits their – not his – success to the district's requirement that principals put structures in place to support teachers coming together. "Elementary principals are held accountable for meeting, not just as a PLC, but as a team using a structured, data-based process for monitoring instructional effectiveness," said Miller.

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices. "We want all children to have BEST, the district's core instructional program," said Van Meter. Initiated in 2009, BEST is a research-based, integrated professional development instructional model and related training program. The elements of lesson study and effective use of formative assessment will be incorporated into BEST using *Race to the Top* (RttT) funds and all teachers and teacher teams will be trained in their use beginning summer 2011. Extended follow up and support will be implemented through PLCs as a way to embed ongoing PD and promote shared instructional practices within and across schools.

"We live in the research," said Resource Teacher Lisa Rogers, who has worked extensively with Adams to demonstrate co-teaching, how to increase student engagement and differentiating delivery of instructional content to all children. Rogers explains "all teachers have an important role to play in providing solid core instruction to all children. There are no silos in this district; expectations are so high." LaRusso, in describing the district's clear direction and drive for continual improvement states, "we ask, 'is really good instruction good enough?'"

Targeted PD and Intentional Resource Use. Viewing all children as regular education children first required the district to be intentional in its expectations and actions. "At one time there was a separation between special education and regular education teachers. Now, the expectation is that they perform at the same level. This shift began in 2003-04 when we made a decision to include all teachers in everything we do as a district," explained Director of Elementary Programs Dr. Lynn Spadaccini. "There was a time when we used to ask if special education teachers could be involved in PDs. Now, no one asks; it's the way we do business," she added.

[2] Taken from McNulty, B.A., & Besser, L. (2011). *Leaders make it happen! An administrator's guide to data teams.* Englewood, CO: Lead + Learn Press.

The strategic use of PD to improve teaching and learning is supported by the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS), a statewide network that provides support for exceptional education teachers, regular education teachers with ESE students in their classrooms, parents, and agency personnel. Sharon Tolson, Director of BPS Federal Projects within the Student Services department, oversees the PD provided to improve the quality of instruction provided to all students. In addition to PD that is provided to schools that don't make the "A" grade, and PD related to district initiatives such as the K-12 literacy plan, Tolson works with district directors to provide opportunities for school-to-school learning. "When schools make goals, we use the group. We bring schools together and facilitate role-alike sessions so they can learn from each other," said Tolson.

Miller, who uses the same kind of approach to foster shared practice and learning among teachers, explained "we used the data to identify the most effective 2nd grade math teachers and provided opportunities for other teachers to learn from them. Now we're working on putting particular strategies in place across all 2nd grade classrooms," he said.

Focus on Continuous Learning

According to Darling-Hammond (2010), district central offices must "create a new paradigm" in which the role of the district and central office must shift:

- "*From* enforcing procedures *to* building school capacity
- *From* managing compliance *to* managing improvement
- *From* rewarding staff for following orders and 'doing things right' *to* rewarding staff for getting results by 'doing the right things'
- *From* rationing educational opportunities *to* expanding successful programs
- *From* ignoring (and compounding) failure in schools serving the least powerful *to* allocating resources to ensure their success"

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future. New York: Teacher College Press, p. 270.

All PD is tracked through the FDLR network, explained Tolson, which requires a data-based approach to determine the effectiveness of the PD provided. "We get feedback from teachers on whether the PD they participate in has had an effect on student achievement. This forces them to look at the data," she added.

Two district-wide initiatives – the K-12 Literacy Plan and Secondary Schools of National Prominence – were used by the district to establish a framework for articulating high expectations for all children and staff. The K-12 literacy plan articulated the same expectations for all children, while the Secondary Schools of National Prominence identified strategies for ensuring that every child

would be career, workforce, or college ready, resulting in the development of a program of study for every child. "We test every 11th grader with ACT and develop a service plan for each student – it's an equity issue," said Christy.

Intentional use of resources to address identified needs has also been a factor in improving student achievement. For example, when a review of third-grade student assessment did not show as much progress as the district expected or wanted, dollars were targeted to provide PD to K-2 teachers around specific strategies. At the same time, a Summit for all elementary principals was held to review relevant research and provide principals with strategies for how to support teachers in implementing specific strategies, said Spadaccini. "The superintendent is committed to ensuring that budget cuts don't affect what happens in the classroom. He's trying to protect the schools so that cuts affect the central office first," said Van Meter.

Inquire and Learn. BPS' commitment to continuous improvement is grounded in high expectations at every level, and a spirit of inquiry and learning. That inquiry and learning process requires teachers, principals, and central office personnel work together meet the district's Goal 2 strategy of building "leadership and job-related capacity at every level of the organization." By 2012-13, the district will incorporate employee learning as a required and monitored component of the evaluation process (Outcome Indicator 3.2.2). "We believe so strongly in the need for teachers to work together, to share instructional practices, that we're building into our teacher evaluation system a component to assess how they behave and function as part of PLCs," Miller explained.

Time seems to be the greatest challenge. "Finding time, especially at the secondary level, is an issue," said Christy. "We're thinking about the requirement coming for all kids to take and pass Algebra 2 and pass it as a condition of graduation. We're thinking about how to get to that next level of performance to ensure that all kids can graduate, knowing there's variability in the amount of time kids will need to be successful with the content." In response, the district personnel refer to organizational focus, as measured by functionality and effectiveness of the district plan, to stay on track, continue to learn and improve, and excel at ever-increasing levels.

A Relentless Pursuit: *What Matters Most*

The district's attention to developing a culture of dedication, collaboration, and learning is paying off. A relentless pursuit of excellence in the quality of the instruction provided to all students is evident in the way district personnel describe their collective work and mission. While numerous achievements and accomplishments highlight the progress BPS has made in preparing every child across a large and complex district, district leadership – which includes not only central office personnel but also principals and teachers – is quick to list everything they need to do in the coming months to not only sustain improvements, but to reach that next higher level of performance.

But school districts don't exist in a vacuum. Florida's Space Coast is expected to experience a population increase of 100,000 to 300,000 people by 2020, a potential increase of 60%. At the same time, the elimination of the NASA space shuttle program and its implications for Brevard's economy is generating some anxiety among district personnel. "We're waiting for the shoe to drop and asking ourselves, what do we need to do to prepare for an increasing number of children with greater needs," said Patty Adams. "We're also working with all community agencies in Brevard County to address increasing poverty rates, increases in low birth weight, and related heath issues that have implications for education," said Tolson.

Focusing on primary math, aligning standards with the Common Core, addressing instructional issues related to overage middle school students, and ensuring that all staff understand and use the *Brevard Effective Teaching Strategies* (BEST) as the district's common language of instruction are among the immediate next steps for BPS during the 2011-12 school year. And, as a group, district leadership is up to the challenge, referring to their operational beliefs – zero tolerance for destructive negativism, and conviction and intense dedication to the mission of teaching and learning.

Advice from Brevard Public Schools

1. Develop a common vision to guide work across the district, and "feed" it.
2. Use data at all levels to identify needs and gauge progress.
3. Align everything you do with the district strategic plan.
4. Focus all work across the district to meet district-wide goals and strategies.
5. Don't give lip service to teamwork – be a real team.
6. Use the expertise around you.
7. Always reach to the next level; never be satisfied with where you are.

For additional information about the BPS story, contact Mrs. Cynthia Van Meter, Associate Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction, 2700 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Viera, FL 32940 at 321.633.1000 or via email at VanMeterC@brevard.k12.fl.us.

Gwinnett County Public Schools: Achievement Profile

Suwanee, Georgia

Gwinnett County Public Schools Student Demographics
Total Enrollment: 162,589
% Students Identified as Children Served in Special Education: 11.0
% Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 53.0
% Students Identified as Minority: 68.4
% Students Designated as English Language Learners: 15.0

'One document, 10 priorities, one direction' sums up Gwinnett County Public Schools' strategic focus on improving instruction and student learning across the district. As the gateway to metro Atlanta from the north/northeast, Gwinnett County is home to more than 805,000 individuals, one-fifth of whom are children and youth educated by the Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS). In this highly diverse county, which encompasses 15 municipalities across 437 square miles, district leadership believes that it is the responsibility of the adults in the district to not only sustain the district's record of success, but also to continually make the kinds of improvements needed to achieve the goal of being a 'system of world-class schools.'

And, because the district believes that it is within its direct control to change or, at a minimum, influence practice across the district through the attitude and action of adults, it has put reforms in place that are designed to support the people employed by the district while, at the same time, demanding that each of them holds high expectations for student learning and takes responsibility for the results achieved.

This is no small feat in a district with 133 school buildings (i.e., 77 elementary schools, 26 middle schools, 19 high schools, and 11 additional educational facilities). The district has outlined Strategic Priorities, defined as qualities and characteristics stakeholders believe are desirable for 10 major components of the district, which include students; employees; parents and guardians; governance and leadership; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; facilities and operations; financial stewardship; information management and technology; communication; and public image and community pride. These Strategic Priorities keep the district focused on its core business–teaching and learning–and they drive continuous improvement. They link GCPS' vision, mission, and beliefs to the goals, initiatives, and operational management plans/local school plans for improvement.

The details in these plans outline the necessary actions that will bring the Strategic Priorities to life and move the district closer to realizing its vision of becoming a system of world-class schools. For example, part of the vision for the governance and leadership component is that *"leaders (at all levels) will focus on results, particularly as they relate to students, and will value accountability."*

Defined Autonomy

"In Gwinnett, our direction is clear," explained Dr. Colin Martin, executive director of Research and Evaluation for Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS). "We focus on teaching and learning within a structure that supports and encourages excellence." Martin joined the district in 1977 working first as a teacher, then as a lead teacher, middle school administrator, and K-12 language arts coordinator, and eventually moving in the mid-1990's to his current position as executive director with primary responsibility for ensuring the fair and appropriate evaluation of the performance of each school in the district. With almost 35 years of service to GCPS, Martin has watched the district grow from its rural

*The **mission** of GCPS is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behaviors for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.*

roots to an emerging suburban district, to its current status as a large urban district, the largest school system in Georgia, and the 13th largest district in the nation.

Focus Your Goals. "With so many of my years being at central office, I've gotten a pretty good perspective on the nature of change in a large district," said Martin who credits stable district leadership as a primary factor in Gwinnett's capacity for focusing and aligning all work around teaching and learning. "I attribute an awful lot of whatever success we have to a combination of stability, but stability with excellent leadership," said Martin in describing the tenure of Superintendent/CEO J. Alvin Wilbanks, now starting his 16th year as GCPS superintendent and the longest serving superintendent of a large urban district in the country. "Our superintendent believes that the district exists to serve the schools, but not in a way that promotes fragmentation. Instead, he believes in results-based management that supports every single school in being the very best that it can be," explained Martin.

A 2006 report by Waters and Marzano on the effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement suggested that superintendent tenure is positively correlated with student achievement. This finding, one of three resulting from a meta-analysis of 27 studies involving 2,817 districts and the achievement scores of 3.4 million students, found that such positive effects appeared to manifest themselves as early as two years into a superintendent's tenure.[1] A further finding involved the correlation between building autonomy and student achievement, and the role of site-based management. While site-based management was associated with a decrease in student achievement, effective superintendents were shown to provide clear direction for learning and instruction, providing principals and school leadership teams with 'defined autonomy' for taking responsibility for meeting district-defined expectations (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 4).

This notion of defined autonomy – described by GCPS as a balance of accountability and empowerment – characterizes the district's theory of action. Referred to as Managed Performance/Empowerment, the district is unwavering in the high standards it holds for schools, teachers and students, while, at the same time, providing for a certain amount of flexibility at the school level.

Collectively, the expectations outlined by the board and district leadership provide a strategic vision designed to reach the district's stable and longstanding strategic goals, all of which are geared toward improving the core work of teaching and learning. Established in April 2002, these strategic goals are used to:

1. Ensure a world-class education for all students by focusing on teaching and learning the *Academic Knowledge and Skills* (AKS) curriculum;
2. Ensure a safe, secure, and orderly environment for all;
3. Optimize student achievement through responsible stewardship of its financial resources and the proactive pursuit of all resources necessary to meet current and future demands;

Core Beliefs and Commitments of the GCPS Board of Education

Our core business is teaching and learning.
And we will give it priority over all other functions of the school system.

All children can learn at or above grade level.
It is our job to see that every Gwinnett student does so.

All children should reach their learning potential.
And through our best efforts, and theirs, Gwinnett's students will.

The school effect is important and has a profound impact on every child's life.
Gwinnett County Public Schools will have a positive impact on every child's life.

A quality instructional program requires a rigorous curriculum, effective teaching, and ongoing assessment.
We will settle for nothing less in every Gwinnett school and classroom.

All children should be taught in a safe and secure learning environment.
We pledge to provide that for every Gwinnett student.

[1] Waters, J.T., & Marzano, R.J. (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

4. Recruit, employ, develop, and retain a workforce that achieves the mission and goals of the organization;
5. Meet the continuing and changing demand for essential information through technological systems and processes that support effective performance and desired results;
6. Provide and manage the systems facilities and operations in an exemplary manner as determined by programmatic needs and best management practices; and
7. Apply continuous improvement strategies and principles as the way the organization does business.[2]

Gwinnett's Efforts to Improve Instruction and Achievement Wins the Broad Prize!

Established in 2002, the $1 million *Broad Prize* is the largest education award in the country given to school districts. Awarded by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation each year, the prize honors urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among poor and minority students.

Seventy-five of the country's largest districts that also serve a significant percentage of low-income and minority students are automatically eligible for the prize each year. Established criteria for the award include having an urban designation and serving at least 37,500 students in grades K-12, of which at least 40% are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches, and at least 40% are from minority groups. Following extensive analysis of data from eligible districts, the Foundation determines finalists based on factors related to performance and degree of improvement, and conducts site visits. A selection jury comprised of prominent leaders in education, research, and government selected Gwinnett from among the five finalists for the 2010 Prize.

The $1 million award allowed Gwinnett County Public Schools to provide college scholarships (up to $20,000 for students who enrolled in four-year colleges) for high school seniors who graduated in 2011 and who demonstrated a significant financial need and a record of academic improvement during their high school career.

That focus on teaching and learning that is a part of the first strategic goal is embedded throughout the district and lends coherence to this large urban school district. For example, in the Strategic Priority that focuses on the curriculum, instruction, and assessment component, all schools in the district are expected to "accelerate instruction not only for students who excel, but also for those who are academically behind." At the school level, each building's leadership team uses a collaborative process to create a Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) that identifies needs based on a review of student achievement data, and develops specific measureable annual objectives and an implementation design for reaching those objectives.

"Testing is not an event; it's a process, and we can't wait until test data are released to identify and prioritize our needs and plan for how to respond instructionally."

Dr. Jeff Barker, Executive Director, Accountability and Assessment

At Bethesda Elementary School, for example, one of the school's three goals (each goal has one objective) used to align and focus instruction for all learners is "to improve in the areas of reading and English/language arts to meet and exceed state averages on all assessments. Bethesda Elementary will increase academic performance in language arts including reading, writing and the application of those skills in social studies." The accompanying objective is "to increase academic performance in the area of reading/English language arts for all students with focus on the students with disabilities (SWD) subgroup to meet or exceed annual targets through collaborative planning between regular and special education teachers, vocabulary development, guided reading groups, literacy committee interventions and writers' workshop, collaborative and co-teaching, inclusion with support staff and focus on integration of social studies through literacy."

Use Data Well. A variety of assessments are available to be used as tools for measuring performance, guiding instruction, and evaluating results, and teachers are expected to use data to increase academic achievement for every student. This focus on assessment and using data to improve instruction was key to the district's identification as the winner of the 2010 Broad Prize for urban education, an annual award that recognizes and rewards a large urban district that demonstrates the greatest overall performance and improvement, while significantly reducing gaps among poor and minority children.

[2] Gwinnett County Public Schools *Strategic Directions.*

Dr. Jeff Barker, Executive Director of Accountability and Assessment, has been with GCPS for about 15 years, beginning in 1990 as a teacher and then assistant principal, and leaving for a seven-year appointment as the Georgia Department of Education's director of assessment before returning to GCPS. "We've worked to change the way of thinking about testing," explained Barker. "Testing is not an event; it's a process, and we can't wait until test data are released to identify and prioritize our needs and plan for how to respond instructionally," he said.

Gwinnett's commitment to using data and addressing the achievement gaps between subgroups of children is evident in the district's placement of the Office of Assessment and Accountability as part of the Division of Teaching and Learning Support, and in its use of assessment and accountability as a major lever for improving instructional practice. Barker explains, "We intentionally integrate curriculum, instruction, and assessment by incorporating curriculum content specialists into the Office of Accountability and Assessment and that has made a huge impact. In many school systems, curriculum and assessment are in two different parts of the organization. We know that would not be efficient in GCPS, especially as we build our interim and formative assessment system. Our bottom line is what's best for kids." And that bottom line applies to every child in the district. "Our goal is to provide valid and reliable assessments that can be used to improve instruction for *all* learners," said Lorna Gallimore, director of the Office of Student Accountability, which provides support in compiling and analyzing student academic achievement data in relation to school improvement initiatives. Gallimore, who describes herself as a "special education teacher by birth," has been with GCPS for 21 years, starting as a teacher of children with moderate/severe/profound disabilities and moving to an assistant principal position before assuming her current post.

CRCT Reading Grade 3
2007/2008 – 2010/2011 COMPARISON
All Students With Scorable Papers

ELL / SPED	2007-2008					2008-2009					2009-2010					2010-2011				
	N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level			N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level			N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level			N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level		
			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
All Students	12,263	838	9	51	40	12,509	835	10	56	34	12,641	840	8	51	41	12,136	845	6	48	46
English Language Learner	1,667	814	23	69	8	1,917	813	24	69	7	2,042	818	17	73	10	1,785	817	18	74	8
All Special Education	1,399	818	28	50	22	1,411	816	30	53	17	1,385	820	24	57	19	1,005	829	14	61	25

Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

CRCT Mathematics Grade 3
2007/2008 – 2010/2011 COMPARISON
All Students With Scorable Papers

ELL / SPED	2007-2008					2008-2009					2009-2010					2010-2011				
	N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level			N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level			N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level			N Counts	Mean Scale Score	% Performance Level		
			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds			Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
All Students	12,305	838	19	38	42	12,553	843	16	38	46	12,673	843	15	41	44	12,114	849	13	37	49
English Language Learner	1,713	810	39	46	15	1,965	817	32	48	19	2,080	817	30	54	16	1,808	815	32	51	17
All Special Education	1,397	808	45	32	23	1,410	815	39	35	26	1,384	813	40	37	23	965	830	26	43	31

Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

The district's work to use assessment and accountability to improve instruction appears to be paying off, not only for poor and minority students, but also for students with disabilities receiving special education services and English language learners (ELL). At the 3rd grade level, for example, the percentage of students with disabilities that met standards increased by 11 percentage points steadily over the past four years, from 50 percent in 2007-08 to 61 percent in 2010-11. The percentage of students with disabilities meeting state standards increased in math

Gwinnett County Public Schools – Testing Program Matrix 2011-12

The GCPS testing plan involves a series of state mandated assessments and locally funded assessment. The matrix provides a summary of tests given to every student by grade level, purpose of the test, and how the test is used. Shaded rows indicate tests mandated by the state of Georgia.

Name of Test (Funded/Provided by)	Grade Level	Purpose	How Used
Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) (State mandated)	K	Determine developing knowledge and skills on the Georgia Performance Standards	Used as one component for placement decisions for first grade
Cognitive Abilities Test (Locally funded)	1, 3, 5, & 8	Assess verbal, quantitative, and non-verbal abilities	Assess reasoning abilities and when combined with ITBS can provide predictive achievement
Georgia Grade 3 Writing Assessment (State mandated)	3	Measure student progress in writing according to state standards	Identifies areas of student strengths and needed interventions
Georgia Criteria-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) (State mandated)	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8	Assess knowledge of state GPS in Reading, English/ Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies	State Promotion Criteria – Grade 3 Reading and Grade 5 & 8 Reading and Math
Gateway Content Area Retest (Locally funded)	4 & 7	Assess knowledge of state GPS in Reading, English/ Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies	GCPS Promotion Criteria – Required if student does meet standards on CRCT
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Locally funded)	3, 5, & 8	Measure achievement in Rdg., Math, Voc., Language, SS, SC, maps & diagrams, and reference materials	Measure student performance against an externally nationally normed standard
Georgia Gr. 5 Writing Assessment (State mandated)	5	Measure student progress in writing according to state standards of writing	Measure student progress on GPS writing skills
Grade 5 Writing Retest (Locally funded)	5	Measure student progress in writing according to state standards of writing	GCPS Promotion Criteria – Required if student does meet standards on Grade 5 Writing Assessment
Georgia Gr. 8 Writing Assessment (State mandated)	8	Measure student progress in writing according to state standards	Measure student progress on GPS writing skills
Grade 8 Writing Retest (Locally funded)	8	Measure student progress in writing according to state standards	GCPS Promotion Criteria – Required if student does meet standards on Grade 8 Writing Assessment
PSAT (State funded - 10th grade) (Optional in 11th grade)	10	Measure student verbal reasoning critical reading, mathematics problem solving-skills, and writing	Used to help students assess strengths related to those skills needed for post-secondary education
High School Gateway (Locally funded)	10	Measure student achievement of AKS in Language Arts (Writing), Science, and Social Studies	GCPS graduation requirement for students
High School Graduation Tests	11	Assess student achievement of Georgia's QCC/GPS	Students in 10th grade or higher beginning in 2011-12 who pass content area EOCTs are not required to take or pass corresponding content area GHSGT. GHSGT remains available for any student not meeting testing requirements through EOCT in any content area.
High School Graduation Writing Test (State mandated)	11	Assess level of student writing	State graduation requirement
End-of-Course Tests (EOCT) (State mandated)	8-12	Assess knowledge of state GPS of specified HS courses – Math I and Math II; 9th Gr. Lit. & Comp., Am. Lit. & Comp., Phys. Sc., Bio., US History, Econ/Bus/ Free Enterprise	Students entering grade nine for the first time during the 2011-12 school year and beyond are required to pass EOCT courses to earn a high school diploma. EOCTs will count 20% of the course grade.
Advanced Placement Tests (Partially funded by state)	9-12	Assess student performance on college level curriculum	College credit possible
ACCESS for ELLs (State mandated)	K-12	Assess English language proficiency	Used to diagnose student strengths and determine placement/exit for ESOL services
Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) (State mandated)	K-12	Portfolio assessment of students with cognitive disabilities	Used to diagnose student strengths and exposure to grade-level curriculum

from 32 to 43 percent, while the percentage of these students "exceeding" the standards increased from 23 to 31 percent. This steady increase is evident across grade levels with Gwinnett students surpassing the state average for students performing at the 'exceeds standards' level.

In addition to using state assessment data, GCPS uses a variety of local assessments to gauge student progress and the effectiveness of instruction. The district has two platforms for interim and formative assessment – My Students and Elements – both of which are intended to help make relevant data accessible to teachers and leadership teams. My Students was developed in-house about 10 years ago and allows teachers and teams to review five years of trend data and answer the question, "How did my students perform?" Data can be disaggregated for groups of children so the answer to that question can be obtained for students with disabilities, children of color, children at a particular grade level, etc. As data become available, they're added to the site and linked to class rosters. Teachers can "drill down" to particular skill areas and get a strand ranking report for strand areas such

as vocabulary, and numbers and operations. The report lists students' performance – from weakest to strongest – and indicates next to each student's name whether the student is part of a particular subgroup (e.g., economically disadvantaged). Any person who teaches a student has access to that student's data.

Elements, begun about nine years ago and under constant refinement, allows teachers and others to determine on which standards students are successful at the indicator level. Reports in *Elements* are generated showing which students selected which distracters, allowing teachers to begin work immediately addressing any gaps in instruction or student understanding. "We believe the power in the system is in highlighting the distracter. Standards may be so broad that it's difficult to know as a teacher what caused a student to miss an item, leading the teacher to presuppose why a particular student answered incorrectly," explained Barker. "*Elements* provides more targeted and focused information to teachers about why children may have selected an incorrect answer, allowing for better use of instructional time," he added. Teachers can make their own assessments and put them into the tool to get additional disaggregated reports.

Gallimore described the kinds of assessments used by the district as (1) local Gateway tests given in addition to state tests for promotion and graduation; (2) district-developed interim assessments that are required for all schools; and (3) common assessments developed and used by teachers to evaluate daily acquisition of what's taught. "Universal design principles[3] are used in the district's development of test items to ensure access for all of our kids," said Barker.

All students (unless otherwise specified in a child's individualized education program) take the same tests, and all schools in the district are required to administer the district's interim assessments at specified times during the year. For example, all levels (elementary, middle, and high) are provided interim assessments every nine weeks with interim assessments (at the 9th and 27th week) and post-tests (at the 18th and 36th week) provided. Elementary schools are required to administer both interim assessments at the 9th and 27th week, as well as the 18-week post-test. The 36th-week post-test, and a pre-test, are optional. The middle schools, since they are on semesters have two optional pre-tests. And, at the high school level, all interim assessments and post-tests are required with only the pretest being optional. High school students also take end-of-course (EOC) district tests. While district-developed tests (i.e., the CRCT-D) mirror the CRCT in terms of content weights and the standards being assessed, GCPS interim assessments are aligned with the district's *Academic Knowledge and Skills* (AKS) curriculum, which, according to GCPS personnel, goes beyond the Georgia academic content standards.

"It is difficult to provide true predictors of performance on the state tests; our tests are really diagnostic," commented Barker. "We do not want to imply that if a student did well on the district-developed interim assessment, then the student would also perform well on the state assessments. Rather, we want teachers to look at areas of weakness and provide instruction to build knowledge and skills in that area," he said. Title I schools have assistant principals with expertise in data management and the data are not used for teacher evaluation, but rather as tools for improving collective instructional practice.

Promoting Excellence in Instructional Practice

GCPS promotes clear expectations for what every Gwinnett student is expected to know and be able to do through the use of the district-developed *Academic Knowledge and Skills* (AKS), which delineates the required academic knowledge and skills and provides accompanying resources for each grade level and content area. Information is provided in K-12 formats for core content areas

[3] Universally designed assessment incorporates seven elements such as maximum readability and comprehension. For additional information, see NCEO's Frequently Asked Questions, accessible at http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/topicareas/UnivDesign/UnivDesignFAQ.htm.

and by school level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high) as AKS Vertical Booklets. In addition to the foundation that AKS provides in terms of a consistent, district-wide instructional program, all schools have a required leadership team comprised of the principal, assistant principal(s), grade-level/departmental, non-core, (e.g., music) and ELL and special education representatives. Team members analyze student data, honing in on the greatest areas of need, and identifying plans of action to address those needs. At the teacher or classroom level, an increasing number of data teams are in operation, using the district common formative assessment data to inform and improve instructional practice.

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices. While schools are allowed flexibility in implementing, and in monitoring the degree of implementation of instructional strategies, each school in the district is expected to use an improvement process based on a plan-do-study-act (PDSA) model, and to use research-based instructional strategies, collectively referred to as the GCPS *Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies*. These strategies (e.g., provide collaborative learning opportunities) are cross-content strategies that are used to facilitate student engagement and the consistent integration of reading, writing, and mathematics into all content areas.

Instructional calendars aligned with AKS and the *Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies* are provided by the district for every course/content area at every grade level. Teachers and teacher teams use the calendars in tandem with formative assessment pretest and interim data to identify particular skill areas (e.g., changing decimals to fractions) that should be introduced earlier in the year, allowing for additional time to learn and practice the skill. According to Chris Emsley, long-time GCPS principal currently working from central office as a principal mentor, "previewing skills at the beginning of the year instead of waiting until those areas would normally be taught gives kids prior knowledge and a chance to acquire greater understanding by the end of the year."

While teacher teams may look a little different from school to school across the district, teachers come together as colleagues to look at data. "We're all responsible collectively for all kids," said Paula Everett-Truppi, Executive Director of Special Education & Psychological Services. "We do a disservice to staff if we look at people in isolation. In the old days, gifted education was separate, but the strategies they used should be used for all kids," explained Everettt-Truppi. "Instructional strategies are instructional strategies," she added.

Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. Emsley believes that the *Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies* provide a vehicle for shared learning around instructional practice. Common understanding around high-quality instruction on the part of teacher teams, as well as groups of principals, is facilitated by having a consistent process and set of strategies for engaging students and tailoring instruction to meet individual learner needs.

Emsley explains: "In my building, I had 20 teachers in fourth and fifth grade and we knew from reviewing our data that we had a weakness in math at that level. My three assistant principals and I conducted walk-through observations in

collaboration:

Provide collaborative learning opportunities.

Evidence of effective use of strategy:

- Teacher provides multiple and frequent opportunities for a variety of collaborative student experiences.
- Teacher provides students with individual and group feedback on specific techniques for effective collaboration.
- Teacher acts as a coach and collaborator to model and give feedback on appropriate strategies.
- Teacher grades student individually on his or her learning of the AKS.
- Students move smoothly among whole-group, small group, and individual learning tasks.
- All learners are engaged in the task at hand.

Source: GCPS Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies

each of the 20 classrooms to determine the degree to which teachers were using specific *Quality-Plus* strategies. We found that we were doing OK in some areas, such as collaboration, but not at all well in others such as summarizing and math vocabulary. Our 4th and 5th grade teacher teams used the data we collected, as well as other formative assessment data, to discuss and provide feedback to each other on common practices used by teachers, what worked well, and what needed to be improved." "As a principal, my area superintendent would ask me, 'How do you know your teachers are really implementing a particular strategy?'" said Emsley. "In every conversation, I had to produce the data," she added. In GCPS, area superintendents supervise principals.

Everett-Truppi echoes Emsley's comments about the focus on results. "The shift has been from looking at teacher behavior to also looking more at student engagement and outcomes in terms of learning with the important question being, 'How are students demonstrating learning and at what level?'" she said. "When I was a principal, we tried not to call the teams anything, but rather focus on using the data effectively, especially just-in-time data," said Everett-Truppi.

GCPS promotes and uses co-teaching models to support students with disabilities and other learning challenges in regular environments so they're educated with their regular peers. Partnering among offices is prevalent and used to address specific need areas. For example, the Office of Special Education & Psychological Services works with math content experts from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction on the SEAM (Special Education And Math departments) initiative designed to improve the math performance of students with disabilities.

"We're all teaching the same curriculum and we exist not only to build the capacity of special education teachers, but also to build the capacity of regular educators to meet the needs of all students, said Everett-Truppi, whose office provides feedback and support to all teachers (including the district's 1,800 special education teachers and 1,000 paraprofessionals) through instructional coaches, and extensive professional development for all staff.

> *"The value of RtI was that it anchored the expectation that teachers must address student needs in the classroom. We're all teaching the same curriculum."*
>
> **Paula Everett-Truppi,**
> **Executive Director, Special Education & Psychological Services**

The district uses a response to intervention (RtI) model for embedding interventions into the instructional process. "I don't like to think of RtI as a program; rather, it is what good teachers do," said Everett-Truppi. The value of RtI, in Everett-Truppi's opinion, is that it has reinforced the notion that just because a child needs additional instructional time does not mean that the child has a disability. "The value of RtI was that it anchored the expectation that teachers must address student needs in the classroom," she explained.

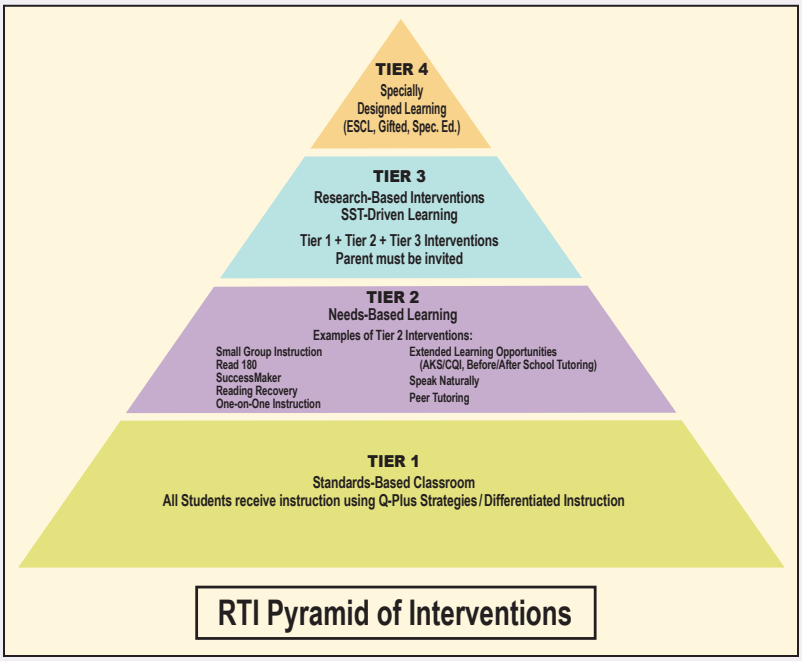
While the percent of GCPS students identified as having a disability and receiving special education services has remained relatively stable (i.e., between 11 and 12%) over the last three years, the district has experienced a decrease in the number of children identified as other health impaired (OHH) and emotionally disabled (ED), and a corresponding increase in the number identified with autism, low incidence disabilities, and young children with significant developmental delays. "Parents of children with more significant needs are attracted to Gwinnett because of our reputation for quality services and this has implications for the number and skills of staff needed to meet the needs of an increasingly challenging

population," explained Everett-Truppi. "No one is going to look a parent in the eyes and say 'We're going to offer less, amounting to an inferior education or we're not going to challenge your child because of budget shortfalls; we just have to make it work,'" she said.

The 3Cs: Continuity, Consistency, and Courageous Behavior

Executive Director of Leadership Development Dr. Glenn Pethel believes that there is no one program or strategy that can serve as the silver bullet educators are often reputed to seek. Instead, he credits hard work and a commitment on the part of district leadership to continuity, consistency, and courageous behavior for the district's success. "Sustained progress is key. If you're using your data and turning it into information that allows you to make better instructional decisions, all children – whether they're students with disabilities, English language learners, or children typically thought of as regular education – will benefit from the district's focus on instruction and learning," said Pethel.

Pethel oversees the district's comprehensive *Quality-Plus Leader Academy* (QPLA) – a local initiative that includes all activities associated with the training, development, and mentoring of principals and aspiring principals (i.e., teachers aspiring to be assistant principals, and assistant principals aspiring to be principals). QPLA focuses on shared leadership and emphasizes such essential competencies as focusing on results, viewing accountability as a value, leading by example, and execution (consistently turning vision into desired results). Pethel was superintendent of a neighboring district before joining GCPS in 1983 and served as Chief Human Resources Officer for the district before assuming his current assignment.



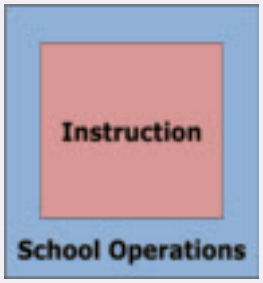
RTI Pyramid of Interventions

Inquire and Learn. According to Pethel, district leaders are students of Peter Drucker and Edwards Deming. Consistent with the district's belief in defined autonomy, QPLA promotes tightly managing the instructional program in place district-wide and loosely managing school operations, ensuring common, high quality standards-based instruction in every building while allowing for flexibility at the school level to address school operational issues.

The district invests heavily in ongoing training and support for both principals and teachers, believing that teachers are its greatest resource. "Teacher capacity is maximized through opportunities for teachers to inform each other's practice," according to Pethel.

Support for an ongoing inquiry process based on the PDSA model is also operationalized through the district-wide use of the *Results-Based Evaluation System* (RBES) – a method for setting expectations, defining accountability, and building a high-performance culture that attends to both results and to the improvement/inquiry process. At the school level, for example, principals have common monthly meeting time that includes:

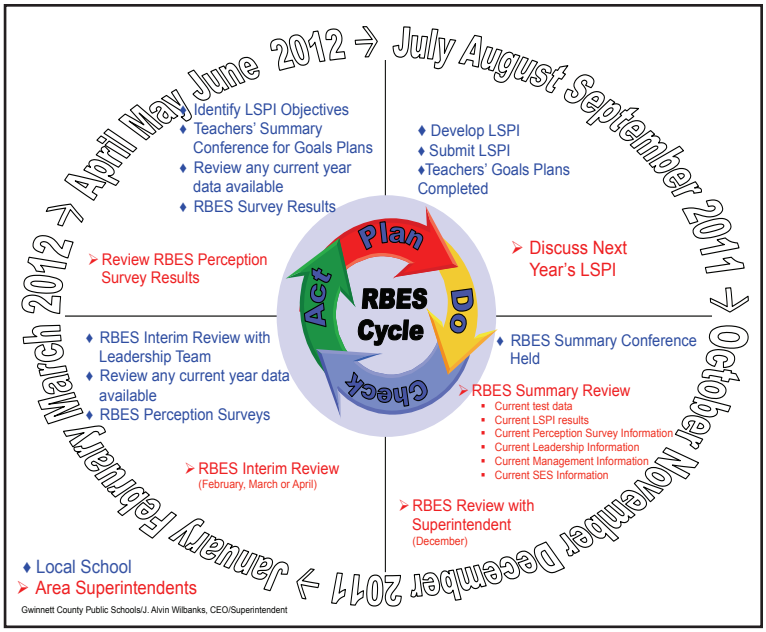
Theory of Action
Managed Performance/Empowerment



- Monthly cluster meetings where principals from elementary, middle, and high schools within a given cluster of the district meet;
- Monthly meetings by cluster that involve principals at a given level (e.g., elementary); and
- Monthly level meetings where all principals at a given level (e.g., elementary) meet.

All meetings are used to discuss progress toward reaching common expectations, brainstorm ideas, and learn from each other. Clusters are defined by a high school and configured so that every high school draws its students from only designated middle and elementary schools.

Indicators of school performance in four categories are used to evaluate each school in the district. Each school receives a weighted school assessment and an annual score (on a scale from 0 to 100) with student achievement worth 70 percent of the total rating, and initiatives to improve, customer satisfaction, and school management accounting for 12, 8, and 10 percent, respectively. The process allows the district to make both within-school and across-school comparisons, and promote shared learning across schools. Martin comments that the district's theory of action is "vigorously implemented" and an accountability continuum is used to measure effectiveness in relation to standards at the student, teacher, principal, division head, and superintendent/CEO levels.



The RBES process is used to both recognize and support schools. Martin explains: "Schools that are in the lowest quartile receive much more directive support from central office that is orchestrated by one of the district's three area superintendents."

Becoming A System of World-Class Schools

The mission of GCPS to become a system of world-class schools starts with the fundamental belief that all students can learn at or above grade level and that the job of the district is to ensure that each student acquires the knowledge and skills he/she needs to be successful in continued education at the postsecondary level and/or in the workforce. A focus on student learning, coupled with high and clearly articulated expectations for academic excellence, supportive structures and a comprehensive and usable data system set GCPS apart as a major urban district that has sustained progress and made steady in-roads in reducing achievement gaps among groups of children.

As noted by Dr. Pethel, "The district, beginning with the school board and superintendent/CEO, exemplifies staying the course, being transparent through the effective use of data, and not backing down in holding all adults accountable for student success."

Advice from Gwinnett County Public Schools

1. Hold all adults in the district to high standards and clearly define expectations around the core work of teaching and learning.
2. Provide a balance of defined autonomy and flexibility for schools to meet expectations, but require that every single school meet them.
3. Require the effective and ongoing use of data at all levels to identify needs, gauge progress, and make continual improvements to instructional practice.
4. Value accountability and make results the central focus of the school system.
5. Align all work across the district with the district mission and vision to improve student learning.
6. Integrate curriculum, instruction, and assessment in real ways.
7. Support shared learning and responsibility among adults for the success of all students.

For additional information about the Gwinnett County Public Schools, contact Sloan Roach, Executive Director of Communication and Media Relations, 437 Old Peachtree Rd., NW, Suwanee, GA 30024-2978 at 678.301.6021 or via email at Sloan_Roach@Gwinnett.k12.ga.us.

References & Resources

References for sources cited in the district profiles, resources readers may want to contact for additional information, and contact information for districts featured in this publication are included here.

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Links & Resources

Council of Chief State School Officers – for additional information, go to http://www.ccsso.org. For specific information on the common core state standards, go to http://www.corestandards.org/

National Association of State Directors of Special Education – for additional information about response to intervention, go to http://www.nasdse.org

National Center on Educational Outcomes – for additional information on assessment and accountability, universally designed assessments, and accommodations, go to nceo.umn.info

NCEO Resources

NCEO offers the following kinds of materials and services for state personnel, educators, parents, and others concerned with the educational outcomes of all students:

- An extensive publications list that includes technical reports, state activity updates, policy documents, and self-study guides.
- Criteria for evaluating existing policies on large-scale assessments.
- Recommendations for developing assessment policies and guidelines for participation, accommodations, reporting, and accountability that include all students.
- Current information on assessment projects and other efforts to collect data on the educational outcomes of all students.
- A national network of people who can assist states and other agencies as they consider assessment issues.

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For More Information on
***Moving Your Numbers*, Contact NCEO or Visit:**
movingyournumbers.org

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