

**COMPREHENSIVE
APPRAISAL FOR
DISTRICT
IMPROVEMENT**

**Clear Creek
School District**

**Process Completed
November 26-30, 2012**

PREFACE

The Clear Creek School District requested a review of practices using the Comprehensive Appraisal for District Improvement (CADI) process in an effort to move a good school district to great. This appraisal is designed to provide the district with information to analyze the district's current status and performance and to help address identified academic achievement and achievement gap related needs.

The CADI report represents an independent, comprehensive research-based analysis of the district's performance and current educational practices and is intended to be used to support the district in continuous improvement.

This appraisal report consists of three sections:

Section I. Introduction

- Process Mission
- Purposes
- Appraisal Process
- Appraisal Team
- Standards and Indicators

Section II. School District Narrative Report

- Considerations as the District Moves Forward
- District Assets and Attributes
- Findings, Recommendations and Guiding Questions to Consider in the following areas:
 - ◆ Effective Learning Environment
 - ◆ Organizational Effectiveness
 - ◆ Academic Performance

Section III. Standards & Indicators—District Rubric Ratings

- Detail Report: Ratings and Descriptors for the 60 Indicators of District Performance
- Landscape Summary Report – Standards and Indicators
- Bibliography for Clear Creek School District

**Clear Creek
School District**

**Appraisal Report
Section I**

Background Information

Mission and Purposes

Process Mission

The mission of this review is to serve the Clear Creek School District, and consequently the community, staff, and students, by providing data, observations and feedback relative to the current status of the district's educational program based on the research regarding effective districts and their practices. It is designed to help the district identify strengths and assets, needs and challenges, and recommendations for planning to support ongoing improvement efforts. It is intended to be a tool that can guide the district in improving its educational practices, raising student achievement, and closing existing achievement gaps.

Purposes

The purpose of this appraisal is to support the district's self-assessment and planning efforts by providing factual and objective feedback. It is intended to help the district assess its current functioning, support the district in improving its overall performance, and to provide data for developing and implementing a District Unified Improvement Plan. It is also hoped that this appraisal will serve as a tool to guide continuous school and district improvement. While the findings of the CADI report may indicate areas where deeper analysis and identification of root causes could lead, it is not intended nor designed to identify specific root causes.

Appraisal Process

This appraisal process assessed the district's educational practices in nine standards of district effectiveness, consistently identified in the professional literature, relative to the district's (1) academic performance, (2) the learning environment, and (3) organizational effectiveness. The appraisal team reviewed district documents and records, conducted onsite visits, and interviewed numerous staff, students, parents, members of the board of education, and community members.

This Comprehensive Appraisal is:

- a response for long-term continuous improvement;
- an objective, comprehensive, research-based process;
- a snapshot in time of current practices;
- based on multiple sources of data and information;
- a foundation for the district to engage in strategic planning and to implement actions to increase student achievement; and
- a systems approach to continuous improvement.

The Appraisal is not:

- about a single issue, program or solution;
- based on individual sources of information;
- about individuals or personnel; or
- a prescription or quick-fix for the district.

During the appraisal process, the CADI team members conducted 150 interviews including numerous informal discussions with staff, students and community members. The team attended one community-based Board of Education meeting. In visits to schools the team conducted 111 short classroom and school “walkthroughs”. Interviews included the following district and school personnel along with community members, parents and members of the board of education. The interviews were conducted with some individuals more than once to clarify information and are described below:

- Central Administration (16)
- Administrator Interviews (30)
- Classified Staff (12)
- Students (37)
- Parents (10)
- Teachers (31)
- School board members (5)
- Community Members (4)
- Other (5)

Additionally, the appraisal team reviewed documents and artifacts compiled by the district. Documents and artifacts included information from the district web site, electronic documents, surveys, written documents, policies, procedure manuals, data reports, district and school performance frameworks, and unified improvement plans. Categories of documents contained in the district’s portfolio and reviewed by the CADI team included curriculum/assessment/instruction; personnel/human resources; budget/funding/grants; planning and accountability; students/safety; other evidence.

District Appraisal Team Members

<u>Team Member</u>	<u>Expertise</u>
Shelly Lantz, Team Lead	Former Human Resource Director Middle School Principal; Elementary AP; Elementary & Secondary Teacher; Alternative Licensure coach; Leadership and Planning for improvement
Karen L. Benner	Former Superintendent Director of Consolidated Federal Programs Literacy Specialist Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment; District and School Planning/ Improvement
Sandra Hall	Former Superintendent Principal and Teacher with expertise in District and School Improvement Planning, Leadership Budgeting and Resource Allocation. Currently consulting and coaching in Colorado schools to implement achievement initiatives.
Brenda Randel	Former Middle School Principal Elementary & Secondary Teacher, Consultant to Centennial BOCES; Response to Intervention; School Improvement
Colleen Rickert	Former Title I Director Elementary Teacher & Literacy specialist; Middle School learning coordinator; University Faculty member.
Nancy Sanger	Former Director of Student Achievement Assistant Principal; Elem./Secondary teacher, Career and Tech Ed teacher and director; Director of Student Achievement.
Iris Williams	Former Superintendent Systems and Organizations; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment; Leadership and Improvement Planning

The appraisal team extends appreciation to the district, the Board of Education, community members, and school staff members for their cooperation and support in conducting this appraisal. The team found the district to be open, cooperative, and concerned about its current status. The team also found a staff and community that have pride in their schools and want the district to be the best it can be.

NINE STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THE DISTRICT APPRAISAL

This district appraisal report is based upon the interviews completed by the review team, examination of district documents and artifacts, observations, and an assessment of the *Colorado Standards and Indicators for District Improvement*. The specific needs, challenges, and recommendations identified in this report address nine standards for district performance and are organized under the headings of Academic Performance, Learning Environment, and Organizational Effectiveness.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:

The following Academic Performance Standards address district/school curriculum, evaluation and assessment of student performance and the schools' instructional program.

- Standard 1:** The district develops or adopts a curriculum that is rigorous and aligned with state standards.
- Standard 2:** The district creates a body of evidence using multiple assessment and evaluation strategies to inform instruction, monitor practice, promote proficient student work, and meet accountability requirements.
- Standard 3:** The district's standards-based instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

The following Learning Environment Standards address district and school culture, student, family, community support, professional growth, development and evaluation.

- Standard 4:** The district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.
- Standard 5:** The district partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students.
- Standard 6:** The district provides research-based, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS:

The following Organizational Effectiveness Standards address leadership, district and school structures, resources and comprehensive and effective planning.

- Standard 7:** The district provides focus and support for improved student achievement, high quality teaching, organizational direction, high performance expectations, a learning culture, and leadership capacity.
- Standard 8:** The organization of the district, the budgeting process, and allocation of resources align with structures and systems that enhance attainment of high levels of student achievement.
- Standard 9:** The district develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction and action plan focused on student achievement.

Clear Creek Appraisal Report

Section II

Narrative Report

This section includes:

- 1. Considerations as the District Moves Forward**
- 2. District Strengths and Assets**
- 3. Themes with Findings and Recommendations**
- 4. Guiding Questions**

CONSIDERATIONS AS THE DISTRICT MOVES FORWARD

The Clear Creek School District has experienced considerable change over the last seven years with six different superintendents. This has been described by many as a “stop – start” system in which an entrenched culture of “this too shall pass” has developed. The five schools within the district have survived the changes by hunkering down, staying off the radar, and by doing the best they could under the circumstances, thus creating a district of schools rather than a school district. The ability of the district to support and monitor the schools has lacked coherence and sustainability. Therefore, in order to move forward, the first step is to understand and accept the current reality of the district and the brutal facts of that reality. Know that both disappointments and accomplishments will be evident and can be expected.

Many members of the community, staff, as well as parents have expressed optimism that the new leadership for the Clear Creek School district brings an opportunity for renewed energy to the organization that should serve the students, staff, and community well in building the culture needed to move from “Good to Great”. Foundational in this work, and to build a culture in which failure is not an option, is to collaboratively create a belief system based on a common vision, mission and goals. The district leadership team has begun this initiative and is in the process of sharing and gaining input by presenting the current drafts of this work throughout the community. Whether a school system is excellent or mediocre depends on how people work together, how they communicate, how they relate, are involved, participate and share. Building of trust and respect within the district is beginning and while trust alone does not guarantee success, districts with little or no trust have almost no chance of improving.

Brewster and Railsback (2003) cite four components of trusting relationships:

- **Benevolence:** Having confidence that another party has your best interests at heart and will protect your interests is a key ingredient of trust.
- **Reliability:** Reliability refers to the extent to which you can depend upon another party to come through for you, to act consistently, and to follow through.
- **Honesty:** A person’s integrity, character, and authenticity are all dimensions of trust. The degree to which a person can be counted on to represent situations fairly makes a huge difference in whether or not he or she is trusted by others in the school community.
- **Openness:** Judgments about openness have to do with how freely another party shares information with others. Guarded communication, for instance, provokes distrust because people wonder what is being withheld and why. Openness is crucial to the development of trust between supervisors and subordinates, and between colleagues, particularly in times of increased vulnerability for staff.

“District culture is the set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols, and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the district. For years we did not consider how the varied and diverse human elements brought by stakeholders---students, parents and educators—impacted our school. In a positive district culture:

- Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways.
- Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student.” (Mohammed, 2009).

With the multiple changes in leadership both at the district and school levels, it will be important to pay attention to and manage changes that may occur. It will be noteworthy to identify those things that may be first-order change for members of the organization as well as those changes that may be second-order in nature.

<i>First-Order Change</i>	<i>Second-Order Change</i>
Expected, most obvious next step within existing paradigms	Dramatic departure from what’s expected and outside of existing paradigms
Incremental step-by-step	Anything but incremental-deep change
An extension of the past	A break with the past
Implemented by experts	Implemented by stakeholders
Consistent with prevailing organizational norms-fine tunes the system	Inconsistent with prevailing organizational norms-can alter the system in fundamental ways
Linear	Nonlinear
Isolated	Systemic
Congruent with personal values	Incongruent with personal values
Easily learned with current knowledge and skills	Requiring new knowledge and skills

For example, monitoring of and accountability for new or existing initiatives may appear as first-order change for some staff members while for others it may constitute second-order change. Marzano and Waters (2005) identified, through the research, twenty-one leadership responsibilities. All twenty-one are related to first order change in that they should define the standard operating procedures in a school or district. Seven of these responsibilities are related to second-order change and four of them are actually negatively impacted by second-order change. In addition, it is important to note that change takes time. It is not something that happens overnight, and institutionalized embedded change, according to most experts, may take five to seven years.

A meta-analysis conducted by Waters and Marzano in 2006 found that effective superintendents focus on creating goal-oriented districts. These superintendents bring together district staff members, building administrators, board members, and others who will have a part in carrying out the work. Together they establish a small set of goals for the district in the areas of student achievement and instruction which are non-negotiable, meaning that every staff member district-wide will work toward the realization of these goals.

Aligning curriculum within and between grade levels is a leadership function that effective districts take very seriously. They also ensure alignment between the essential curriculum supports: instruction, assessment, instructional materials, enrichment and interventions, and the professional development necessary for teachers to deliver the curriculum with expertise (Grogan, 2004). The Learning First Alliance studied five school districts that made substantial improvement in mathematics or reading with all subgroups of students over three years. In each district the superintendent transformed central office policies, structures, and human resources into forces that guided improvement. Such practices included establishing systems to improve principal leadership, coordinating curriculum alignment, establishing and implementing a multi-measure accountability system, and creating system-wide supports for new teachers. (Togneri, 2003).

Effective districts support their aligned curriculum and assessments by providing teachers with the professional development they need to skillfully plan and deliver instruction and evaluate student learning. David et al. (2001) found that districts that communicate ambitious expectations for instruction, supported by a strong professional development system, are able to make significant changes in classroom practices. Clear expectations for instruction are as critical as clear expectations for student learning. Dedicating resources to building the knowledge and skills of educators and to providing additional instructional time for low-performing students is essential if the benefits of standards-based reform are to be realized in increased student achievement for all students.

Districts that have improved substantially over time pay close attention to classroom practice and provide guidance and oversight for improving teaching and learning. They monitor instruction, assessments, curriculum, and changes in instructional practice. Their guidance and improvement efforts require actions such as system-wide agreements, interventions and corrective instruction, tutoring, and alignment. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004).

Not only do effective districts emphasize the importance of student achievement, but they also emphasize the importance of high expectations and accountability at all levels of the system. It is a district-level responsibility to “motivate personnel to raise expectations for themselves and their staff.” (Grogan, 2001). These expectations originate at the district level but pervade all levels of the system and hold all adults in the system accountable to each other for student learning. The superintendent expects excellence by all, monitors performance, and provides feedback.

Using data to make decisions is yet another important practice that highly successful districts use. Educators are trained to interpret data and to make decisions based on an analysis of data. Skillful collection and use of data—whether it is for targeting assistance to individual students, modifying curriculum, planning teacher professional development, or monitoring the instructional program—sets such districts apart from less successful districts. District support for finding the time for schools to disaggregate and digest collected data is critical in ensuring that data is used for the purposes mentioned.

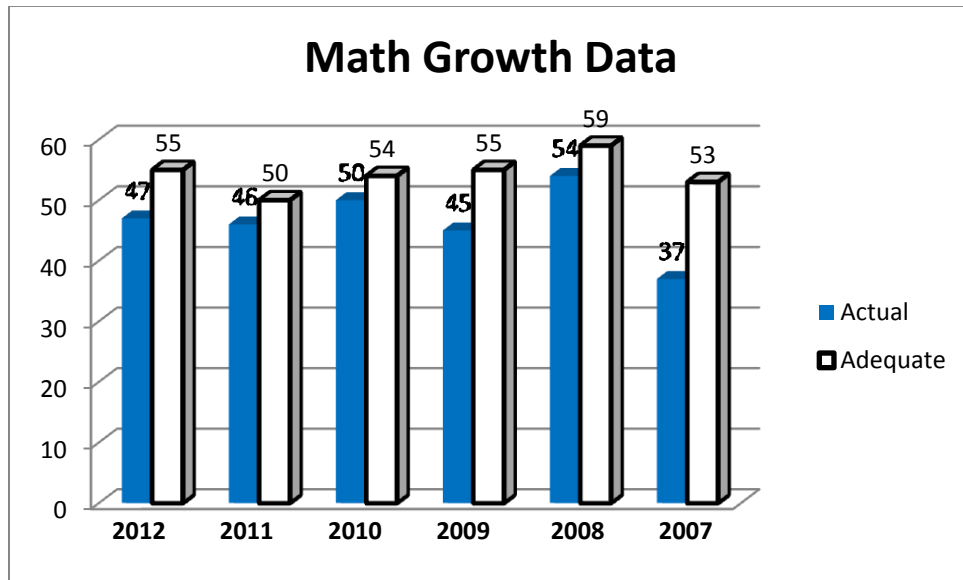
Effective districts take responsibility for collecting, analyzing, and providing data to schools in manageable, understandable forms.

Whether a school is high performing or only performing at an average level, it is important that all students are making growth. The following graphs indicate the actual growth over time that students in Clear Creek School District have made over the past six years in the areas of math, reading and writing.

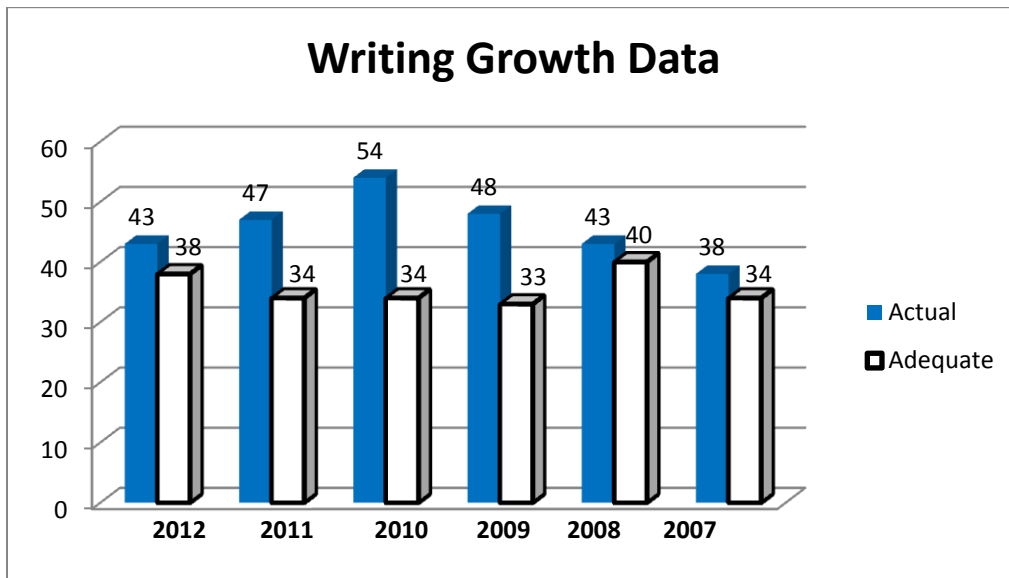
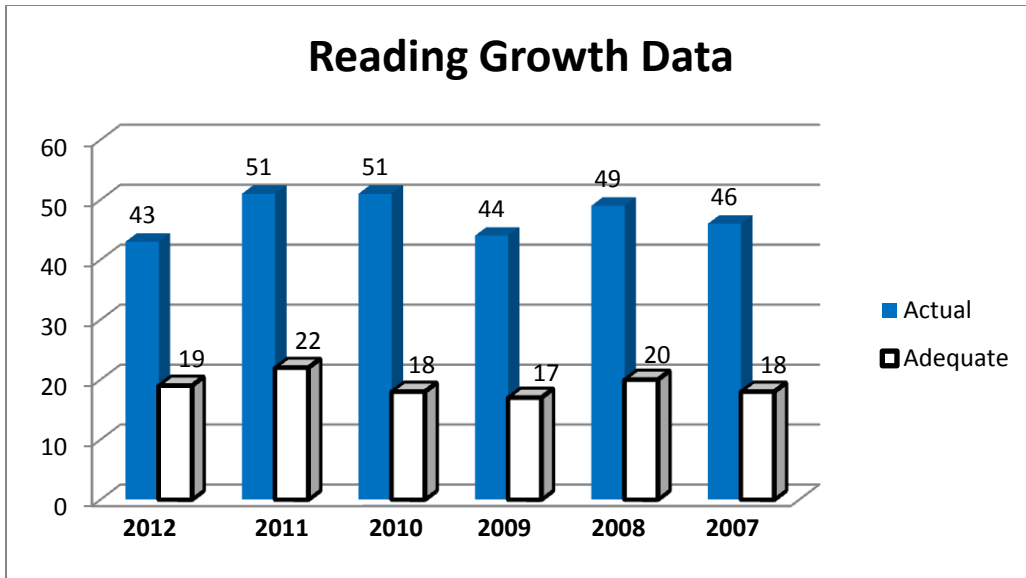
While analyzing the data below, it is important to understand that growth data is based on the Colorado Growth Model which shows us how individual students (and groups of students) progress from year to year toward state standards. Each student's progress is compared to the progress of other students in the state with a similar score history on CSAP/TCAP in that subject area. It indicates the observed growth among different groups of students at the state, district, and school level.

Adequate Growth tells us the level of growth that Clear Creek needed to achieve in order to say that students were, on average, on track to catch up or keep up.

Growth level is completely independent of achievement level for individual students.



The above chart shows that based on 2012 data, the gap between actual growth and adequate growth in math has widened over the past three years indicating that students who are on track to catch up or keep up may be losing ground. It is important to identify these students and ensure that their learning deficits in math are being addressed.



While the district appears to be exceeding adequate growth in reading and writing, individual schools, some subgroups, and specific grade levels may not be meeting adequate growth in these two areas. Attention to “move up” growth, necessary for students to maintain proficiency and move to advanced, may be necessary in order to sustain the current status of achievement.

Upon analysis of the 2012 district growth summary, it appears that the district is growing at a slower rate than the state. The state median growth rate is 50. While some grade levels are growing at a faster rate than the state, this is not the case for all grades and overall district rates fall below the average.

It is the responsibility of all members of the school district to ensure that the organization is a healthy learning and working environment for everyone. Identifying the barriers and issues that have caused the fracturing within the district and helping to mend those issues with honest, frank conversations may serve the district well. Establishing and maintaining systems and beliefs to ensure that a rigorous learning environment exists for all members of the organization may include the following:

- Agreement among instructional staff that all children can learn at high levels, **given the proper rigor**. (All means All)
- The **creation of a culture of accountability** and administrative infrastructure to support it.
- A **focus on thorough implementation** of district identified strategies at the school and classroom level.
- **Focused, substantive, intensive professional development** to support implementation of curricular reforms.
- **Embedded Professional Learning Communities (PLC)** that use collaborative processes to foster trust as staff members implement the teaching and learning cycle.
- A **focus of efforts on lower performing schools**.
- District-wide adoption of uniform **curricula closely aligned with state standards and consistent instructional strategies**.
- The **use of data to drive instruction** and determine resource allocations. (2002 study conducted by MDRC*).

The staff and administration have numerous attributes, skills, and areas of expertise that can constructively impact the success of Clear Creek School District through a sharing and collaborative culture. By everyone working toward the district's common goals and priority improvement efforts, the CADI Team is fully confident district-wide improvements, that will impact a consistent upward trajectory of student achievement and growth, can be realized. Building a collaborative and cohesive staff is critical. Peterson and Deal describe what the research shows, *“Strong, positive district cultures do not just happen, they are built over time by those who work in and attend the district’s schools and by the formal and informal leaders who encourage and reinforce values and traditions.”* (2009).

*MDRC was founded in 1974 as the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. In 2003, this group became simply MDRC. This study was presented in 2002 in Washington, D.C. at the American Youth Policy Forum that addressed closing the achievement gap.

District Assets Upon Which to Build

- It is commendable that district leadership, with the board of education, has invited the CADI team into the district to provide a review of existing practices and to complete a needs assessment based on the current state of the district.
- The district has a number of outstanding staff members who take initiative and have a heart for teaching the children of Clear Creek School District.
- Clear Creek School District is fiscally sound in a time when many districts around the state are struggling.
- In 2010, the district successfully passed a mil levy override that now provides an additional \$775,000 per year to offset revenue loss that has accrued over the past years. This mil levy override was passed without sunset provisions.
- Clear, consistent budgetary procedures are outlined by the district. These are readily accessible through the district's web site and each building's staff handbook.
- There is clearly a sense of pride in the buildings and facilities of the district. Buildings are clean and well maintained.
- District priorities provide for small class sizes and for full-day kindergarten in each elementary school.
- Free transportation to the schools is provided including transportation for after-school activities.
- Stipends are provided to teachers for performing extra duties.
- The district leadership team has been created. Members include the superintendent, a principal and teacher from each building, as well as a special education teacher and a bus driver.
- There are a number of community members with great expertise and talents who express a willingness and desire to help and support the school district.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The strand of Learning Environment includes the areas of Culture, Student, Family and Community Support and Professional Development. Further description of each standard includes:

- ❖ **District Culture and Climate:** The district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. Factors such as a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment, an appreciation for diversity, and the belief that all children can learn at high levels are fostered by district and school leadership and staff. The district's culture and learning environment has a huge impact on whether these practices can be realized with a high level of effectiveness.
- ❖ **Parent and Community Partnerships:** The district partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students. Communication efforts are varied and effective. The district uses multiple ways for working effectively with parents and the community.

Family and Community Support can be powerful elements in the process of building a learning environment which results in high levels of academic achievement for students. The creation of a culture of expectations for the highest quality of instruction and corresponding levels of student performance is basic to genuine partnerships between the school, the families, and the community. Communication of district progress, challenges, and initiatives should be continuous and routine.

- ❖ **Professional Development and Evaluation:** The district provides research-informed, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning. There is a comprehensive, collaboratively-developed professional development plan. Data are used to determine professional development priorities. Educators have professional growth plans to improve performance. Professional development efforts are evaluated for their impact on student achievement.

Professional growth of instructional staff members is essential to the process of discarding ineffective instructional practices, and replacing them with powerful research-informed practices. Professional development that is job-embedded and relevant to the use of data to drive instruction is essential. To fully support the district initiatives for improvement, the teacher supervision and evaluation plan and practices should connect to the district and school improvement goals for student learning.

For a district to be fully operational, it is necessary that it functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. An effective district works in partnership with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of all students. Effective districts also provide research-informed, results-driven professional development opportunities.

FINDINGS

Culture: The district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.

- System-wide processes and agreements to support the operation of the district are not in place. The culture of Clear Creek RE-1 School District has been impacted by at least two decades of continuous turnover in district and building-level leadership. Constant changeover in leadership may have confused and altered the district's focus and direction repeatedly over the years (rather than maintaining a clear pathway forward, and staying the course). Another outcome may have been the inadvertent evolution of the five schools into independent entities, that operate each in their own way, rather than as fully-contributing partners within a district-wide effective learning community in which all staff collaborate to support high levels of achievement for all students. It appears that Clear Creek School District may be functioning as a district of disconnected independent schools, rather than a unified school district.
- Processes by which implementation of all the initiatives of the district are monitored and all staff held accountable to function as members of an effective learning community may not be in place.
- Creation of a level playing field for the purpose of ensuring equitable learning opportunities for students from different socioeconomic groups is a complex and historically-embedded challenge. Each community and school has its distinctive characteristics and perceptions about itself and the other communities. Tensions arise from the focus and importance given to perceptions about the demographic differences between communities. Such tensions may impact the respective schools, in turn carrying over to staff relationships among the district's schools. The transmission of these tensions may negatively impact the capacity and willingness of some staff to collaborate effectively with some colleagues in other schools.
- In some schools collaboration as a core element of professional practice occurs by individual initiative, informally, with a small number of peers. Collaborative processes and skill levels vary by school and by individual staff member, and some school schedules provide no time for continuous collaboration throughout the school year. The newly-formed district leadership team is in the initial phase of developing collaborative processes in its work together.
- PBIS, a research-informed and proven behavioral support program has been in place at the elementary schools for several years. The middle school had the program for a short time but it was never fully implemented nor was it fully implemented at the high school. The data-collection system for the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) which allowed for quick data review and self-assessment surveys on cultural and behavior issues was discontinued several years

ago and replaced with the data collection program from Infinite Campus. It appears that the Infinite Campus data collection requires more time and skill than the SWIS system and may not capture the specific behavioral referrals and follow-up interventions. The data collected by the Infinite Campus model is not part of the nation-wide research data PBIS collects and disseminates. Three administrators from the district recently attended a follow-up training on PBIS.

Partnerships: The district partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students.

- Communication with community members who do not have children in school does not regularly occur, nor is regularly-scheduled feedback on the effectiveness of district communication in place.
- There are community members with expertise who are willing to engage with and support the district.
- PTA and Booster Club groups are among the partnerships that enhance the opportunities for the children of the district. Ensuring equity of resources for all students is an ongoing challenge due to the differences in resources that groups in different communities can provide.
- Some parents express an interest in locating adult education opportunities to help them learn to support their children's education.

Professional Development and Evaluation: The district provides research-based, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

- The Clear Creek Induction/Mentor Program may lack the suggested components for a program intended to allow licensed personnel to move from probationary to professional status. It does not appear that the induction program has been updated within the state-required five-year time period. Reference to the Colorado Teaching Standards is not made in the mentoring handbook. Most of the activities of the two-day initial meetings involve district procedural issues such as sick leave forms, transportation requests, insurance issues, and other housekeeping requirements.
- Mentors are not required to attend the initial meetings. Some mentors report they are not issued the mentor handbook in a timely manner. There is no specific training for the mentors assigned to the inductees although they are charged with the responsibility of observing the inductee and giving feedback and coaching to inductees on effective instruction, curricular issues, and building procedures. There is no follow-up training throughout the year for inductees or mentors. Little collaboration and/or communication among administrators, mentors and the

inductees is expected. If administrators, mentors, and inductees have not received similar training on effective instruction and curriculum implementation, the inductee may not receive coherent, relevant, and targeted feedback on implementation of expected practices. No instructional coaches are available in the district.

- The Clear Creek District calendar provides limited time for professional development offerings. There is no comprehensive, results-based, data-informed professional development plan. Time for Professional Learning Community (PLC) structures within and among schools is minimal. Some resources for professional development are available through Title II funds. Use of these resources is largely determined by individual schools with little focus on meeting district or building goals. Some teachers and administrators have attended relevant professional development trainings (i.e. training on interpreting results of NWEA assessments and how to link NWEA results to lesson planning, a District Sample Curriculum Project, and PBIS implementation) but they may or may not be expected to share and implement the training through a structured, collaborative process.
- Non-negotiable best-practice instructional strategies are not identified. Teachers are functioning largely in isolation with little or no training on instructional strategies that would be most effective with the population they serve. The lack of collaborative time and structures, instructional coaches, and follow-up from administrative observations contribute to this isolation.
- A Standards-Based Teaching and Learning Cycle is not deeply embedded in the instructional practices across the district nor is there professional development and collaboration time available for implementing this instructional design for delivery of best standards-based practices.
- Accountability structures for implementing, coaching, and measuring results of professional development are not in place.
- The current district-adopted evaluation policy is structured to enhance the professional performance of all licensed personnel; however, it is not implemented with fidelity in all schools. Professional growth plans which are identified in the district policy, may or may not be collaboratively completed and cyclically reviewed. New administrators have received little, if any, training on effectively implementing the policies. Accountability for implementation of the policies is lacking.
- Administrators and a few volunteer teachers are participating in a pilot of Senate Bill (S.B.) 191. Training on this evaluation model is ongoing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Culture

- Develop systemic and systematic accountability processes that are understood by all staff. This will be critical to the effectiveness of the district. Holding all members of the school community fully accountable for the work of the educational program and all other operations is necessary if the district is to realize the goal of educating every student to high levels.
- Districts that implement effective systemic practices encounter challenges in implementing reform, including changing the role (and attitudes and district-wide perceptions) of the central office, facing controversy when staff performance concerns are addressed, building infrastructure to meet data needs, and gaining support among teachers for more consistency in curricula and instruction. Often this difficulty is reflected through the lens of change. Those districts that are successful, effectively manage the change process. The importance of district-level policy, practice and management of change in addressing the challenges of districts with diverse demographics cannot be overemphasized. Successful districts:
 - Share a stable consensus for change created and maintained by the board and superintendent.
 - Maintain a culture of accountability to support and implement reform efforts.
 - Demonstrate that quality teaching and instructional coherence, made possible by focused, consistent and extensive professional development, can improve learning.
 - Demonstrate that student achievement can increase by providing early and on-going assessment data with training for teachers and administrators in using that data to diagnose weaknesses and develop instructional responses.

Districts that see themselves as making many of the same reforms but are, in fact, less successful are different from the successful districts in several significant ways:

- These districts lack a clear consensus around a vision for improvement.
- District goals are not specific.
- District leadership is less clear about or not committed to specific achievement targets, and goals are not associated with times, deadlines, specific measurement or consequences.
- There is less focus on clear, research-informed instructional strategies and often multiple and conflicting curricula, practices and instructional expectations of staff.

- Improving student achievement is not the specific focus of the day-to-day operations throughout the central office or school board.
 - The central office is not committed to ensuring their strategies are actually being implemented at the school level.
 - Districts do not understand the impact change is having on the system as a whole.
- The responsibility for leadership at the district level is significant. Effective district leaders collaboratively create and sustain changes necessitated by a district vision for high levels of student achievement. In its study *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement (2003)*, McRel researchers reaffirm the importance of leadership in creating a culture of effective district/school performance.
 - An effective learning community is a cornerstone for reform efforts of successful schools all over the nation. These communities emerged as arguably the best, most agreed-upon means by which to continuously improve instruction and student performance. (Schmoker, 2006). Collaborative structures, consensus building, honest conversations and a culture of sharing successes and challenges and accepting no excuses for lack of student learning are important tenets of the work of a learning community. Inherent in this work are structures and processes to examine beliefs and practices of each staff member – to establish what you are willing to do to make this a district of high achievement for ALL students. This is also an avenue to becoming an institution that is responsive to the local community and increases parental involvement from all groups. Productive teacher learning communities engage in joint work that includes a thoughtful and explicit examination of practices and their consequences. (ASCD, 2009).
 - Examine the beliefs and practices that impact the culture and learning environment of the district by examining the following questions:
 - Are beliefs additive or subtractive? Individuals with an additive view see diversity as a rich resource that can be tapped to bridge cultural differences and maximize learning for all children. Because these individuals understand that schooling is a process of cultural transmission, they believe that every student can learn when provided with a culturally responsive education. They also believe that every parent values education and demonstrates this value in a variety of ways, ranging from regularly assisting their children with homework to working two jobs to ensure their children have a “better life” than theirs. Moreover, they believe that developing cultural understanding is not a necessity just for some, but for all students and families. (Guerra, 2009).
 - Is cultural diversity seen as an asset to teaching and learning or are some groups of children viewed as “at risk” or “disadvantaged” by their cultural and economic backgrounds?

- Is every child capable of learning at high levels or only those with the “right” experiences?
- Do we believe that all parents value education, or are some viewed as not making education a top priority?
- Reinstigate trust and rebuild a healthy climate which will result in a district culture focused on student learning. Building new relationships, whatever the circumstances, takes time; rebuilding relationships in which trust has been damaged can take far longer (Young, 1998). If we hope to make meaningful and lasting change within school communities, identifying increased educator trust as a priority and taking the time to develop it looks to be well worth the investment. “Without trust,” as Blase and Blase (2001) write, “a district cannot improve and grow into the rich, nurturing micro-society needed by children and adults alike.” To bridge this gap of trust, the leader(s) may consider the following strategies:
 - Hold regular and public celebrations for the accomplishments of both teachers and students.
 - Do not violate rules you expect others to follow and for which you hold them accountable.
 - Frequently use the pronoun *we* when publicly discussing the accomplishments or future plans of the district.
 - Engage in collaborative and focused problem-solving conversations.
 - Use focus groups to involve more people in the process of defining what you want for the direction, the mission, the vision and the values of your district.
 - Do not ostracize resistant staff for holding different opinions. Guarantee them their right to their opinion in a way that preserves their dignity, even if you philosophically disagree with them. (Muhammed, *Transforming School Culture*, 2009).
 - Consider using the pamphlet *Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers* from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory for study by board and administration.
- Create clarity and openness about norms and expectations around how we work together in the district. This will serve the district well by eliminating the distraction and hesitancy caused by ambiguity. Establish explicit norms for meetings and routine decision making. Publish these norms broadly and conduct periodic checks to be sure they are being followed:
 - Whenever possible, develop these norms in collaboration with those involved and/or affected.
 - Communicate with all stakeholders at predictable, declared intervals and through multiple methods.
 - Provide well-understood avenues for feedback, inquiry and suggestions.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of communication efforts at least annually.

- Conduct business with transparency wherever prudent, ethical and legal.
 - Define and communicate decision-making processes, timelines and opportunities for involvement regarding long-term, large-effect decisions.
 - Publish periodic updates to stakeholders.
 - Identify and declare any non-negotiable expectations and respond when those expectations are not met.
- Develop targeted district practices specific to the purpose of long-term retention of skilled administrators and staff members.
 - Consider a thorough district-wide implementation of PBIS with fidelity, follow-up and sustainability. Adopting and monitoring the program at all levels can support the establishment of a consistent and continuous positive district culture. The program includes family involvement, parenting education resources, strategies for dealing with exceptional students, survey instruments that can assist schools in assessment of culture and planning, and IDEA supports. Train all staff in its effective implementation. Inspect and expect its full implementation including a study of the research and all supports available in this system.
 - Collect student participation data on before- and after-school activities and daily attendance. Disaggregate data across all subgroups in school demographics. Examine practices of creating high expectations and self-motivation goals for ALL students. Create a sense of efficacy in achievement possibilities early in all students' lives. Refer to PBIS resources for support.
 - Collect and correlate data from the implementation of effective instructional strategies with behavior data (e.g. good instruction results in good classroom management).
 - Use this correlated data to inform progress in using PBIS initiatives.
 - Brainstorm ways of bringing more role models and mentors to students.

Partnerships

- Establish a plan for transparent communication of district decisions and policies to all stakeholders:
 - Ensure that the district website is a useful and user-friendly source of information for the community, families and staff.
 - Publish board minutes and minutes of district level committee meetings.
 - Establish protocols for district communication with all district staff and families.
 - Continue forums with community and staff.

- Find ways to ensure that all members of the community can be consistently included in the communication pattern of the district. Consider producing printed copies of district communications and both posting and placing loose copies of them in locations which community members frequent, for their convenient access (e.g., grocery stores, restaurants, post office, library, etc). Make the distribution cycle routine and predictable.
- Engage with various segments of the community to inform the district's understanding of emerging issues and opportunities.
- Consider community partnerships that might be formed to support the adult learning needs of parents. Use partnership resources to respond to the needs of this population. Consider how PBIS resources could be helpful.

Professional Development and Personnel Evaluation

- Research the state requirements and suggestions for an effective induction program. Revise the current induction program to comply with requirements and timelines. Expect ongoing professional development for administrators, mentors, and inductees to occur throughout the year with a focus on the implementation of adopted curriculum and effective instructional and assessment strategies. Expect and ensure regular collaboration among administrators, mentors and inductees.
- High-achieving districts provide district-wide, focused and research-informed, results-driven professional-development opportunities. A student-achievement, data-based and focused professional development plan for the district can lead to improved student learning, achievement, and true collaboration among staff. As an organizational arrangement, the professional learning community is a powerful job-embedded professional development approach and potent strategy for realizing district change and improvement. A district that operates as a professional learning community (PLC) has supportive conditions, collective creativity, and shared practices. Productive teacher learning communities engage in joint work that includes a thoughtful and explicit examination of practices and their consequences. (ASCD, 2009).
- Professional development will be necessary for creating a professional learning community. Being a Professional Learning Community is consistent with being a standards-based district. This means that every teacher is a member of a team that (1) engages in an on-going process of identifying the current level of student achievement for their students, (2) establishes goals for improvement, (3) examines possible ways to deliver instruction, (4) works together to achieve those goals, and (5) provides periodic evidence of progress. Additionally, (6) every team ensures there are multiple opportunities for every student to learn the district's adopted curricular standards when they do not learn through best-first classroom instruction.

- If the district truly embraces these tenets identified above and intends they be lived throughout the district, there is still much work to do. Leadership and staff need to fully understand what it means to be a Professional Learning Community, to accept and commit to the PLC belief system, and to implement and monitor the practices of the school to ensure it is truly a Professional Learning Community culture.
- Visit the beliefs and practices inherent in a Professional Learning Community. It may require a comprehensive cultural shift of thinking about the way the school has done business in the past. “Organizations only improve “where the truth is told and the brutal facts confronted.” (Jim Collins as quoted in *Results Now*, Schmoker, 2006).
- Help staff understand that the work of a PLC is more than simply getting together as a team to talk. According to Schmoker (2006) *...this time must be very focused; most of it must be spent talking in concrete, precise terms about instruction with a concentration on thoughtful, explicit examination of practices and their consequences.*
 - The deep training for PLC work needs to be supported to build skills in the process for working collaboratively throughout the district and in each building.
 - Use PLC protocols to guide the work, monitor for fidelity, and ensure that the focus is about students and their learning.
 - Use vertical and horizontal articulation to maintain consistency of programs, practices, and strategies throughout the district.
 - Use PLC time and structures to analyze data and to share research-based, effective instructional strategies across the district.
 - Set clear specific expectations for the use of PLC time. Train staff members in procedures and protocols that will focus their work in ways that will result in the school becoming truly standards-based.
 - Within a PLC framework and a standards-based approach to teaching, design, implement, and evaluate interventions that guarantee success for all students in attaining identified learning targets.
 - Model the elements of an effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) by using protocols to focus leadership team meetings. Train school leaders in facilitation skills to ensure that they model and foster effective PLC strategies during professional development days and faculty meeting times. Encourage the PLC concept in Board of Education meetings and beyond.
 - Expand leadership opportunities and build leadership capacity by empowering dedicated and focused staff members to assist in the work of PLCs and the district’s and schools’ leadership teams.
- Consider adding additional days in the calendar for specific professional development throughout the year. Know that one exposure to any training is not

sufficient. Embedding new practices takes time, multiple exposures, collaborative discussions, reflection, and monitoring for implementation.

- Create a focused, systematic and systemic multi-year professional development plan that will ensure high levels of professional practices.
- Implement a targeted professional development strategy that assures that all staff become proficient in the implementation of the standards-based teaching and learning cycle.
- Use student achievement data to inform professional practices. Establish base-line data for all individual students
- Use data collected from student, staff, and parent surveys to inform professional practices.
- Study the research on effective, research-informed instructional strategies. Implement training on a focused few strategies as a start, and, as expertise is gained, monitored and embedded, expand the repertoire of specific trainings to include more strategies.
- Conduct a focused staff-wide review of achievement/behavior and adjust instructional practices according to student achievement results in real time (two – three times a year).
- Explore the possibility of using some master teachers as instructional coaches at all levels.
- Continue the implementation of S.B. 191 for the personnel evaluation process. Capitalize on the training and reflections of those who are participating in the pilot of this initiative. Include the components of this process in the induction program as well as the focused professional development plan. Establish accountability procedures to make certain the evaluation process is implemented and sustained.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ✓ How do we establish trust among ourselves, the schools, and leadership at all levels?
- ✓ What can we do to establish a climate that is conducive to performance excellence for our students? For ourselves?
- ✓ How do we go about establishing more “additive” beliefs and practices to what we know about student achievement for ALL?

- ✓ Which research-informed instructional strategies are recommended for students of diverse cultures and poverty?
- ✓ How can we deepen our professional learning community practices to make this district a shared, trusted, collaborative problem-solving organization focused on student achievement results?
- ✓ How do we encourage positive teacher leadership in our district?
- ✓ How do we celebrate our students' successes? Our teacher successes?
- ✓ What steps can we take to ensure the district communication process is transparent? Each building's communication process is transparent?
- ✓ How can we actively engage more parents in their students' education?
- ✓ How can we help acculturate our community and ourselves to expect higher achievement and growth results from all students?
- ✓ How do we help our students create higher expectations for themselves and a belief in their ability to attain higher levels of achievement?
- ✓ How do we establish a district-wide, continuous and consistently implemented behavioral system that supports our students in becoming fully-functioning and contributing members of society.
- ✓ How can we better support beginning teachers/administrators in an effective, updated induction program?
- ✓ How do we combine the elements of S.B. 191 with an effective professional development plan?
- ✓ How do we prepare for and effectively implement S.B. 191?
- ✓ How do we establish and use more collaborative structures throughout the district?

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Organizational Effectiveness addresses the following three broad areas of district practices:

- ❖ Leadership that provides focus and support to improve student achievement, high quality teaching, organizational direction, high expectations, development of a district-wide learning culture, and building of leadership capacity. Both administrative and teacher leadership are responsible to guide the work of the district and its schools to effectively engage in best educational practices.
- ❖ Allocation of resources, including both financial and human, that are aligned to structures and systems that support attainment of high levels of student achievement. The strategic allocation of resources is tantamount to ensuring the work of the district can be accomplished.
- ❖ Improvement planning, with goals and actions is designed to support high performance of students and personnel. The organizational work of leadership ensures that the district and its schools have clear direction, goals and action plans focused on the improvement of student learning, collaborative processes in place, and an intentional focus on closing achievement gaps. Efforts need to be evaluated for effectiveness on impacting student achievement and fidelity to implementation of district goals and actions.

Central to attaining school district effectiveness, defined by high student achievement, is organizational commitment to the vision, mission, goals, and priorities of the district. This commitment is demonstrated by cohesion, consistency, and clear effective communication throughout the organization. Cohesion and consistency occur when staff members work collaboratively to accomplish agreed-upon goals, follow clearly-articulated practices, and consistently implement curricular programs and instructional strategies.

FINDINGS

Leadership: The district provides focus and support for improved student achievement, high quality teaching, organizational direction, high performance expectations, a learning culture, and leadership capacity.

- Staff members report that with frequent turnover in superintendents and principals the district's priorities were frequently changing and often unclear leading to a lack of consistency in expectations and direction from the district. They also state that they would go through the planning stages of district initiatives, but rarely see things come to the implementation phase, because the superintendent would leave the district.
- This fall a district leadership team composed of the superintendent, the principal and a teacher representative from each school, a special educator, and a classified staff member was created. This district leadership team is examining a variety of literature on school reform, e.g. Collins (2001), McKinsey (2010), McKeever (2003). The intent of these studies is to build capacity for the reform work needed to take the district to high levels of character, achievement and performance.

- The current district leadership, i.e., board of education, superintendent, principals, and district leadership team, is in the process of developing a vision, mission, and goals for the district. Feedback to the drafts of proposed revisions to the district vision and mission statements is currently underway. Public meetings are being held for interactive dialogue with staff, parents, and community members. The newly-formed representative district leadership team participated in the development of these revised statements. Adoption by the Board of Education is scheduled for December, 2012.
- The establishment of building leadership teams is inconsistent. There is not a district requirement to have a building leadership team.
- There is little evidence of systematic monitoring of instructional programs, organizational practices, and physical facilities by the district leadership. Instructional and support programs, (e.g., counseling, technology, maintenance, transportation), are not routinely evaluated for effectiveness. The evaluation that occurs is either a self-examination of the program by the individuals employed in the program, or prompted by the raising of a concern.

Resource Allocation: The organization of the district, the budgeting process, and allocation of resources align with structures and systems that enhance attainment of high levels of student achievement.

- The development of the district budget precedes the development of the District Unified Improvement Plan (DUIP). Although some of the budget items may be in alignment with the DUIP, this alignment is coincidental. General perceptions of student needs, which may be based on data, are used to prioritize expenditures. However, it is largely based on pupil count rather than the unique needs of the students in a particular school. Consequently, while this provides for equal funding, it may not result in equitable treatment. Although funding is provided for student interventions, these interventions are not always research-based. The effectiveness of these interventions is not closely monitored.
- Although district priorities are not always clear, budget requests are screened for perceived value to students. The preliminary evaluation and prioritizing of budget requests are screened for perceived value to students, but may not always be research-informed. Resources are provided for remediation/intervention through federal program grants (Title I, ECEA) as well as general fund allocations. Title II funds are predominantly used to fund professional development.
- District leadership is in the process of moving toward a multi-year budget planning model that would support the district's vision, mission, and goals, with the intent that allocations are educationally based and prioritized to more closely align to intentionally meet identified student needs. A proposal is under development that would strategically place more funds in higher-need schools and

those that have less external support in an effort to address equitable access to fiscal and human resources for all Clear Creek students.

- Adequate resources are allocated for facilities maintenance; however, the district currently has a number of facilities that are not used to full capacity (e.g. old high school building, downtown football field, empty school in Empire) resulting in additional expense to the district and a loss of trust by the community.
- District-level staff members are assigned to meet the needs of students and staff in the schools on an equal basis. Some additional mental health and social program services are provided to high need schools through partnerships with community agencies.
- Some district-level support to write grants and obtain funds for specific projects occurs; however, building-level staff members write grants as well as receive additional funds in varying degrees through such groups as PTA, Booster Club, the District Foundation, and the local Economic Development Council. The extent of this type of external support varies because of economic circumstances affecting individual schools, with resulting perceptions of inequities in school amenities, materials, and access to supplementary funds.

Comprehensive and Effective Planning: The district develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction and action plan focused on student achievement.

- While there is ongoing aspiration that the Clear Creek School District be more than a good district, actions toward realization of that accomplishment are not articulated or guided by the district. Years of changing goals and minimal implementation of plans has resulted in the district thinking in terms of one year at a time rather than multi-year planning. Actions become reactive rather than proactive, not applied strategically and cohesively, nor evaluated for effectiveness or fidelity to implementation. Should emerging needs be identified through the course of the year, practice has been to have schools assume responsibility to take care of things, with limited district support, direction, and accountability.
- The District Unified Improvement Plan (DUIP) has been represented by previous administration as a document for "meeting a state requirement" but not as a road map for district direction for realizing student learning. The present UIP has not been viewed as a plan that guides the work of the district through unified efforts.
- The 2011-2012 DUIP has no relevance to schools. Few people are aware of how the district goals are determined, nor has there been a collaborative process for input and decision making regarding their development or selection. District Improvement Plans have typically been written by one or two individuals at the district. Past practice has been that the district UIP is developed by incorporating elements of the school UIPs into the district plan rather than unifying school

efforts with district priorities and direction.

- District goal setting has changed with each new superintendent. There is a high level of distrust and disappointment that the district has not had clear direction for many years. Although goals may be set, implementation has been minimal.
- Specific details that describe insufficient development of essential components of a high-quality unified improvement plan include:
 - Achievement and growth targets are not always adequately rigorous to reach or exceed state expectations. Some targets are vague or without specific data points.
 - Although closing achievement gaps between schools is recognized as a district-wide issue, an acceptance of life circumstances often supplants specific efforts to intentionally take action to address the gaps. Schools have had the implied responsibility to close their achievement gaps. Inclusion of goals to do this in building improvement plans is school-dependent.
 - The action steps are broad and general, without supporting steps that scaffold realistic accomplishment of the DUIP's major improvement strategies. Some financial or operational resources are identified, but no dollar amounts are provided.
 - Progress monitoring for student achievement and growth is planned to be conducted through NWEA fall and winter benchmark (interim) assessments. However, no interim targets or indicators of success (metrics) are identified to guide determination of progress throughout the year. Any use of NWEA interim data is done at the school level, generally at the grade, class/course and individual student levels.
 - NWEA interim assessments are also listed as the primary measurement for determining implementation benchmarks. It is unclear that the district has an understanding of measuring results of both student and adult actions. NWEA is intended to measure student action whereas implementation benchmarks are to measure adult actions.
- Principals have had limited training in the data analysis process necessary to development of the District Unified Improvement Plan (DUIP) and each school's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). This includes determination of priority challenges and deep analysis of root causes impacting student success.
- Schools may access CEDAR, the CDE data source regarding CSAP and TCAP data; however, access is secured and limited to a few people within the district. Some use of SchoolView (CDE website) achievement and growth profiles is evident. NWEA data are used predominately at the school level. General achievement and growth data are looked at by the district but strategic, intentional disaggregation and analysis of subgroup (minority, gender, free and reduced

lunch, students needing to catch up, keep up, and move up) and sub-content areas is atypical, especially for purposes of improvement planning.

- Other data sources are minimally used for improvement planning purposes, such as surveys, behavior and discipline records, and interviews of parents exercising choice attendance for their children in an out-of-district school.
- District expectations for the development of high-quality school improvement plans have been minimal. Oversight of school unified improvement plans has not been a priority, since the plans have not been required to be submitted to CDE for review. Schools have fundamentally been left on their own to develop and implement their improvement plans with little training or accountability.
- There is limited evidence that elements of strategic change management are present within the district to guide the rigorous work needed to become a highly-successful school district. A few isolated efforts are emerging such as broadening the stakeholder groups to build consensus on district direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership:

- Expand leadership skills and responsibilities across the district. Waters and Cameron identify shared leadership as one of the necessary characteristics of communities that experience a sense of “collective efficacy”. They explain that, “Leadership is widely shared throughout the community. Rather than being seen as a position and defined only through positional authority, leadership becomes everyone’s responsibility and all community members have opportunities to lead.” (2003). Continue the use and development of the District Leadership Team.
- Continue the use and development of the District Leadership Team by developing the Leadership Team’s understanding of its roles and responsibilities. These might include:
 - Accepting the responsibility of communicating the team’s preliminary thinking as well as final recommendations. This includes defining how the team will determine consensus, and what actions this might imply for members of the team,
 - Ensuring that communication goes both ways by actively gathering input from a variety of stakeholders, as well as communicating the final recommendations of the team,
 - Acting as a think-tank to brainstorm solutions to district-wide problems, and assisting each other in solving building-specific concerns,
 - Serving as a reflective body to assess the effectiveness of district initiatives,
 - Determining guiding principles for how team members will interact with the larger community as representatives of the District Leadership Team.

- Build the team’s understanding of systems thinking and capacity for school reform. Involve the District Leadership Team in the development of the District Unified Improvement Plan (DUIP) including the identification of root causes through a deep analysis of data, goals, action steps, and implementation benchmarks.
- Develop a systemic view of the district as an interdependent organism in which all parts impact and influence the whole. In districts where systems-thinking is prevalent, plans and actions are interlinked, and staff members maintain a laser-like focus on student achievement in both academics and character. Develop district-wide processes and procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of all aspects of the organization, e.g., instructional programs, organizational practices, and physical facilities. Ensure accountability across the system for implementation of district programs and practices.

Resource Allocation:

- Ensure the development of the DUIP before the development of the budget. Intentionally align the budget priorities with those of the district and school UIPs. Screen all budget requests for alignment with district goals and the DUIP strategies and action steps.
- Align all school UIPs with the priorities provided in the district’s plan.
- Consider placing more resources, including staff, in higher-needs schools thereby providing equitable educational access to all the district’s students.
- Engage in multi-year budget planning that would closely align with the long-range strategic priorities identified by district leadership. Regularly revise and update the budget as new data reveals a needed shift in priorities.
- Explore with district and community stakeholders the most effective use of existing district facilities. Engage in long-range facilities planning to ensure that all facility resources are contributing to the realization of the identified vision and mission.

Planning and Implementation of the District Unified Improvement Plan (DUIP):

- Strive to use district planning as a leverage tool for improving student achievement, academic growth, and closing achievement/growth gaps across all schools. Effective school districts have a plan of action and establish clear goals that permeate the entire organization. (American Institute for Research, 2005). To accomplish this, broaden participation of stakeholders to develop the District Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) and build understanding for the necessity of shared commitment and shared responsibility for plan implementation.
 - Implement communication strategies to disseminate the key focus areas and strategies outlined in the DUIP to accountability committees, staff, parents, and community. Reduce this into a document that can be used as

a continuous reference point for what the work of the district is regarding the advancement of student achievement and growth and performance of its schools. Ensure, too, that all stakeholders have access to the full DUIP document. Use building-level discussions with staff to strategize ways each school and teacher will contribute to the implementation of the plan.

- Following development of the DUIP, each school should construct its Unified Improvement Plan, aligned to the district plan, while also incorporating targets, goals, and actions that address the school's unique needs as identified through rigorous root cause analysis. The rationale for tight alignment of all UIPs is to create a critical mass of effort on prioritized strategies that will impact success of all students and schools across the district.
- After identifying representatives from each school (District Leadership Team, parents) to form the collaborative group for the development of the DUIP, ensure that all have a basic understanding of processes necessary to its development. Valuable sources include the 2012 UIP Handbook, Quality Criteria for both the district and schools, and the Online UIP Tutorial. All are easily accessed through the Colorado Department of Education website. Attend all trainings and support sessions provided by CDE. Consider using a qualified unified improvement planning facilitator to support and guide the district through this initial endeavor. (CDE has a roster of qualified facilitators on its website.) Through participation in this process, principals and building staff members will have hands-on training and modeling for the development of their UIPs.
- A cornerstone of astute improvement planning is to start the work with comprehensive data dialogues to study, analyze and interpret a clear data-based picture of the district's status. To do this, use multiple data sources such as achievement, growth, behavior and discipline reports, demographic profiles, and survey results. "Districts that do not study their data in a comprehensive fashion cannot lead their improvement efforts through comprehensive data analyses nor realize sustainable improvement." (Bernhardt, 2004). Use of a qualified planning facilitator is invaluable in providing embedded training through this phase of plan development.
- While the CADI report provides insight into probable root causes, another critical step to identify actual root causes is necessary to the UIP planning process. Use a root cause analysis process such as the "5 Whys" or select from the rich source provided by the UIP Handbook or reference tool by Pruess. Root causes are the deepest underlying cause(s) of a problem or situation that, if resolved, would result in elimination or substantial reduction, of the district's identified performance challenge(s). Root causes describe why the challenges exist. They are the things we most need to change and can change. Root causes then must become the focus of major improvement strategies and actions the district will use to mitigate them. It is important to remember that root causes are not student attributes (such as poverty level or student motivation) that the district cannot

control. Root causes should be something within the school's realm of control. (Colorado Department of Education, 2012).

- Develop specific, relevant targets, goals, and action plans that especially address the root causes that are impeding strong academic growth and the closing of achievement and growth gaps. Reference the quality indicators for each step in this planning process when developing the Action Plan section of the DUIP.
- Study the literature and research behind any initiatives, actions, or resources that are being considered to ensure they have a history of high impact (effect size) on student achievement and growth, particularly for meeting the needs of Clear Creek students.
- Work together to determine how implementation of the action steps, strategies, and resources outlined in the UIP will be monitored to determine their effectiveness on raising student achievement and growth and closing gaps. Expect fidelity to the implementation of these action steps, selected strategies, and resources as intended.
- Ensure accountability for implementation of “best” professional practices in every classroom to optimize maximum student learning. Collectively clarify what accountability (implementation benchmarks) will accompany implementation of initiatives and fidelity to expected common practices (measuring adult actions). This includes using common protocols for monitoring and evaluation across the district. Come to common agreements with each other regarding what professional practices are non-negotiable, with an emphasis on research-based practices, and district and school goals and initiatives. Elevate the practice of timely and continuous monitoring throughout the school year as a priority in supporting steady gains for all students.
- Through collaborative leadership processes, filter new goals, ideas, or actions to ensure they are supportive of the overall goals of the district. Ensure their implementation will be value-added, and without exception, supportive of the core practices of teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Implementation of the new DUIP will significantly impact the way the district and schools have become accustomed to going about its work. It will truly move teachers and principals into second-order change. Being aware of what some of those changes look like will help to guide understanding, decision-making for support, and strategic management of the magnitude of impact this type of change has on everyone in the district. To paraphrase Charlotte Danielson, “District improvement does not happen by itself. Serious district improvement does not consist of merely fiddling around the edges of the district organization, implementing a single new program, or establishing a partnership with a business in the community; rather, the process should be comprehensive and should encompass everything in the district. A comprehensive project of district

improvement requires clarity of vision, breadth of view, and a determination to overcome inevitable obstacles that permits others to participate with confidence...and helps support the district's staff to maintain forward momentum." (2002).

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ✓ How can we expand leadership responsibilities across the district? How will this assist us in our journey to move from "Good to Great"?
- ✓ How can we become one school district with an aligned, focused effort to improve the achievement and character of our students?
- ✓ What budgeting practices might we institute to assure that the use of our available resources results in the accomplishment of identified district priorities?
- ✓ How can we achieve the status where all staff members are informed of the UIP goals and strategies, and how can we, as a whole school district, reach the point where implementing the plan becomes a responsibility of everyone in the district?
- ✓ To what extent are we content with our current results?
- ✓ Are we ready to accept feedback about our current practices?
- ✓ Are we willing to be part of changes that produce higher achievement and growth and close gaps?
- ✓ Are we willing to examine our current practices and eliminate what may not be productive, enhance what is productive, and implement needed changes in practices?

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Key components, based on the research-based Comprehensive Appraisal for District Improvement Rubric, include:

- ❖ Curriculum: Development and implementation of an adopted curriculum that is rigorous, intentional, and aligned to state standards. The district ensures access to a curriculum that emphasizes a challenging academic core for all students.
- ❖ Assessment: Use of multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work. Assessments are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with district and state content standards. Students can articulate the academic expectations in each class and know what is required to be proficient.
- ❖ Instruction: Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-informed instructional practices to improve student academic performance. Instructional strategies, practices, and programs are planned, delivered, and monitored to meet the changing needs of a diverse student population. Instructional services are provided to students to address individual needs and to close the learning gaps.

Academic Performance examines the way these vital components work together to provide a systematic approach to teaching and learning. To better understand the findings and recommendations reflecting these components, it is imperative to understand how each (curriculum, assessment, and instruction) work together in the standards-based teaching/learning cycle.

The Clear Creek School District has stated a goal of 90% proficiency as measured by the state assessment. An even more important goal is ensuring that every student is growing at a rate that will allow them to reach proficiency within three years, or by 10th grade, and that every student achieving at proficient or advanced is continuing to grow. This will require the district to provide the leadership necessary to fully implement a standards-based, teaching/learning cycle, aligned to Colorado Academic Standards across the district, in every school. To be truly standards-based includes much more than knowing or posting standards or even ensuring that standards are included in lessons or units. It requires that every student, in every classroom, will learn the standards, concepts and skills to mastery. To achieve this goal requires that “every school district make certain that supportive conditions are in place to ensure standards-based practices are implemented in every school, in every classroom, every day....district and school leaders must commit to a system-wide infrastructure of support that builds the capacity of teachers and monitors and sustains effective classroom practices. Being truly standards-based in practice takes system-wide commitment with focus, fidelity, hard work, follow-through, and continuous monitoring and reflection.” (Benson, 2011).

FINDINGS

Curriculum: The district develops and adopts a curriculum that is rigorous and aligned with state standards.

Becoming truly standards-based in practice begins by answering the question: *What do students need to know, understand, and be able to do?*

- Although teachers and administrators indicate that there have been attempts to create standards-based curriculum aligned with Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) in several content areas, there does not appear to be an expectation from district leadership that there be an aligned written (intended), taught and tested curriculum.
- In some cases curriculum has been developed, but apparently has not been adopted by the district or implemented in all classrooms or all content areas. This has resulted in a lack of a coherent, consistent K-12 learning experience for all students.
- Each school, and in many cases individual classrooms, appear to have created curriculum which may or may not align with the CAS. In some cases and content areas, teachers identify textbooks or instructional programs as curriculum.
- Because there is not an implemented district curriculum aligned with Colorado Academic Standards, there is no guarantee that all students have access to a rigorous academic program emphasizing higher-order thinking or problem-solving skills. No curriculum exists to intentionally accommodate the learning needs of students or maintain expectations for high academic performance for all students. Staff and parents express concerns that the academic programs available to students are not sufficiently rigorous to prepare students for the next grade, school level, or post-secondary life.
- There may be little effort at the district level to identify essential skills or the required levels of cognition, content, processes, products or skills using a common taxonomy. Learning targets or objectives are not routinely presented to students who may not be able to clearly articulate what they are expected to produce or how they will demonstrate mastery of the objective.
- There are no pacing or sequencing guides to ensure that essential knowledge and skills can be learned within the available instructional time and provide students with a guaranteed, viable curriculum necessary for mastery performance. In some cases, teachers are relying on pacing guides provided with instructional materials which may not prepare students for state assessments in a timely manner.
- There is little evidence of district support for vertical or horizontal articulation or alignment. The recent adoption of math instructional materials resulted in different instructional programs for each of three elementary buildings rather than a district-wide adoption. This has resulted in unintended consequences for students and their teachers at the middle school level as learning gaps in knowledge and skills become evident.

- The district has not identified or communicated mastery expectations for essential skills in state-assessed content areas. It has not facilitated nor encouraged the use of rubrics or exemplars in schools to assist students to understand the expectations. Standards-based expectations and mastery levels are not communicated to parents or consistently to students.

Instruction: The district’s standards-based instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

As the intended curriculum is developed and aligned to state standards, the second question must be considered: *How do we teach effectively to ensure all students are learning?*

- The district lacks a systemic approach to the use of standards-based instruction. Staff understanding of standards-based instruction is limited to using standards to plan lessons and units. Any discussion, professional development, or training about instruction as part of the standards-based teaching/ learning cycle occurs as a result of individual teacher initiation.
- The district calendar does not include time for professional development. The two days at the beginning of the year are used for "housekeeping" and four days within the year are designated as teacher work days, although some schools use part of these days for professional development.
- The role of research-informed instructional strategies in a standards-based teaching/learning cycle is not clearly understood by all teachers. The use of research-informed instructional strategies varies among and within schools. There is a sense of autonomy in schools and classrooms. Staff report they value the fact that they can make their own decisions about their content and instruction.
- Reading instruction at the elementary level is not approached within a structured, research-informed, literacy framework devoted to specifically teaching reading skills and strategies. Units of study include reading and writing activities. Skills and strategies are sometimes taught within these units.
- Instruction is observed and feedback is given primarily through the formal evaluation process. Some principals conduct informal observations of classrooms. There has been little common training and few expectations for principals regarding monitoring of instruction for effective, research-informed practices and providing feedback and support based on the observations.
- Structures and schedules for teachers to meet and collaborate are school and/or teacher dependent, not driven by district expectations.

- Poverty is a cultural issue posing challenges for schools and staff in meeting the needs of students. Professional development regarding instructional strategies that are responsive to the culture of poverty has not been provided, although the District Leadership Team is beginning a book study on poverty. A need is expressed for training on how poverty affects behavior and academic performance and how teachers can mitigate these factors and provide all students with equitable access to learning.
- The understanding and practice of using differentiated instructional strategies to remove barriers to learning for students varies among schools and classrooms. There has not been a district effort to provide professional development, support, and monitoring to ensure that instructional practices in all classrooms are differentiated for students.
- Enrichment for advanced students is provided by activities outside the classroom. Little or no training has been provided to staff on effective differentiation including instructional practices needed within the regular classroom for gifted and talented students. Many G/T students are given more tasks rather than more challenging ones as an attempt to meet their advanced learning needs. The plan for G/T coordination includes examining effective instructional practices that differentiate instruction for advanced students.

Assessment: The district creates a body of evidence using multiple assessment and evaluation strategies to inform instruction, monitor practice, promote proficient student work, and meet accountability requirements.

As we implement effective research-informed instructional practices, we are aligning the intended and taught curriculum. Now we must ask: *How do we know students are learning?*

- The use of assessment to monitor learning across the district is inconsistent and there is no district assessment plan. The district directs the administration of the NWEA assessment for math and reading three times a year in all grades K-12 and DIBELS is used at the elementary level to monitor reading achievement. STAR reading and math are used in some schools and some teachers report using Accelerated Reading and Math as assessments.
- Teachers have been trained to access NWEA data online, but there is no electronic database available to assist teachers or principals in the analysis or use of other data, including state assessment data.
- The district has provided little training on the uses of assessment data or assessment literacy. Staff members have received minimal training in analysis of data or its use for decision-making, and few district decisions seem to be data driven.

- The district does not appear to disaggregate or analyze data in terms of student academic growth or to analyze academic growth gaps for all schools. While differences in achievement between schools are noted, data to determine the root causes of those differences may not be examined.
- There seems to be little encouragement for the collaborative analysis of data at the school level, and teachers do not appear to regularly collaborate around data to determine instructional and curricular needs. Selected teachers from the district will participate in Data Teams Training through the Mt. Evans BOCES which will focus on Decision Making for Results.
- There appears to be little expectation at the district level for requiring the understanding and use of formative assessment at the school and classroom levels, and for the multiple uses of different forms of assessment.

Having aligned the written (intended), taught, and assessed curriculum, the final question must be: *What do we do when students are not learning or are reaching mastery before expectation?*

- Although student support teams exist, a common and effective Response to Intervention (RtI) process and structure does not exist across the district. Understanding of the purpose and use of the process varies school to school. The process is commonly viewed as the path to special education rather than a means to provide best-first instruction for all students and subsequent interventions to remove barriers to learning. Staff members in individual schools develop a process and determine the interventions that will be provided.
- Criteria for selecting effective strategies, models, or programs for use in RtI are not established by the district. The selection of interventions is based more on teacher preference, training, and/or recommendations than on matching appropriate intervention strategies with student needs. Consequently research-informed interventions or strategies are not implemented across the district.
- Neither the district nor schools systematically monitor and evaluate the interventions to determine their effectiveness on student achievement. Some individual classroom teachers examine student assessment results to see if their differentiated intervention is making a difference, but it is not a practice initiated by the district or implemented in all schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is critical that the district provide the leadership necessary in order for the following recommendations to be implemented. The development of a coherent, consistent standards-based teaching/learning cycle across the district must not be left to individual

schools. Consider using the guide to standards-based education practices provided by the Colorado Department of Education as a resource for training teachers to implement a standards-based teaching/learning cycle. (Benson, 2012).

Curriculum

- Alignment between the intended, taught, and assessed curriculum is essential if students are to achieve mastery of the standards. As curriculum is aligned to the CAS, build on the work of the teachers currently involved in the District Sample Curriculum project, using their expertise, the templates developed, and the tools available on the Colorado Department of Education website to identify the essential learning goals that will comprise a guaranteed, viable curriculum. “Without a district identifying what concepts or skills are the focus for a given unit or period of time, teachers find themselves either struggling to “cover” standards or making personal decisions about what is most important for students to learn.” (Benson, 2012).
- Work to develop a coherent curriculum using a systems design. “A systems design for curriculum is coherent, balanced, and systematically develops sophistication in knowledge, understanding, and the ability to perform. A systems design addresses four critical components: (a) the student outcomes (what students should know, understand, and be able to do based on the identified knowledge, skills, and abilities they will need as “educated” and successful citizens in the 21st century); (b) the critical content, key concepts, and essential understandings that frame the knowledge base of different areas of study; (c) the major process and skill abilities that ensure quality performance; and (d) quality assessments for measuring standards-based performance.” (Erickson, 2002).
- As the essential learning goals, knowledge, skills and understandings are identified, create curriculum sequencing or pacing guides to sequence grade-level expectations. This is critical to guarantee that teachers can teach and all students can learn within the allotted instructional time and to eliminate curricular gaps and overlaps. Such “curriculum maps” should be flexible to allow teachers to adjust for student needs, but the district should hold schools and principals accountable for their implementation.
- Descriptions or indicators of mastery should be identified to describe the types and levels of performance expected at each grade-level. These should be provided both to students and to parents and be consistent across the grades at each school. As indicators of mastery are defined, ensure that they are compared with other districts and state-level sources to confirm adequate rigor.
- Encourage the development of rubrics and exemplars at all levels and provide them to students. While it will be appropriate to develop individual rubrics for specific tasks, create common rubrics across the district in content areas so that both teachers and students have clearly-defined targets for mastery-level

performance. Ensure that exemplars provided represent both universal models of excellence and local student work.

- As instructional programs and materials are purchased, ensure that they are intentionally aligned with the district curriculum. “It is important that teachers (1) understand how standards and grade-level expectations are integrated with the adopted program, texts and materials to ensure they are taught to mastery, and (2) have sufficient clarity and understanding of adopted programs, texts, and materials to purposefully teach all grade-level expectations for their content area or grade-level.” (Benson, 2012). This is critical if students are to proceed to the next level (i.e., middle school math) with the necessary knowledge and skills in place.

Instruction

- “Comprehensive standards-based practices involve more than knowing state and district standards; posting standards, learning goals, or objectives in a classroom; referencing standards in lessons or units; ‘covering’ a curriculum; or following a textbook purported to follow state standards. Rather, it means consistently teaching with activities, lessons, and units specifically designed to ensure every child learns the grade-level expectations that lead to mastery of the standards”. (Benson, 2012). Provide all educational staff with ongoing professional development on standards-based instruction and support in implementing practices in the classroom. Work toward developing a common understanding and practice of using highly-effective, responsive, rigorous, and standards-based instruction.
- Develop a framework for literacy and language instruction with the expectation that the identified elements will be used in all literacy classes. Include in the framework the following elements: read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, word work and vocabulary. With a team of teachers using professional resources on effective reading instruction and the Colorado Academic Standards documents, identify the knowledge and skills in each element that should be included. For example, in Shared Reading include reading strategies to comprehend text, develop concepts of print, and increase fluency. Check other district websites for samples of frameworks already established. Develop a system for implementing, supporting, and monitoring the framework to ensure that all students are provided with intentional, targeted literacy instruction.
- Make use of the training provided by CDE for S.B. 191 to ensure that the knowledge and skills regarding effective observation practices are provided to all involved in observing instruction. Be sure to include what to look for when monitoring for effective research-informed instructional practices and make instructional practices an important focus of the observations.
- As the professional development plan is developed, include training in best-first instructional practices including high-impact and intervention strategies to

accelerate learning and close achievement gaps. Develop a common understanding of what best-first instruction looks like.

- Ensure that teachers receive ongoing training, support, monitoring, and feedback to guarantee the use and effectiveness of selected research-informed instructional practices.
 - Hold teachers accountable for using differentiated instructional strategies for ALL students targeting both those who struggle and those who are advanced.
 - Ensure instructional leaders monitor implementation of agreed upon instructional practices and provide feedback to teachers in a timely manner.
- In the development of the district calendar consider how time can be built in to provide for ongoing, sustained, and job-embedded professional development.
 - Poverty is a condition that can and does affect student achievement. Many Clear Creek staff members are skilled in their teaching, but need more professional development and support for their teaching to make a difference for students living in poverty. Two classroom factors supported by research that compel success for students living in poverty are standards-based curriculum and instruction and engaging classroom instruction. (Jensen, 2009). Provide ongoing training with follow up regarding standards-based curriculum and engaging classroom instruction especially for those staff members working with students in poverty.

Assessment

- Develop a district assessment plan that clearly identifies how the assessments are aligned with the grade-level expectations in the district curriculum. Ensure that each assessment is valid and reliable and measures those expectations. Ensure that a variety of assessment measures are available to meet the needs of both students and teachers.
- Train teachers and administrators to understand the multiple purposes of assessment, particularly the differences between formative (assessment for learning), interim (to determine progress), and summative (assessment of learning to measure mastery) assessment. An understanding of these different forms is critical if teachers are to be able to accurately adjust to emerging student needs within the teaching/learning cycle.
- Support teachers and principals in understanding and implementing formative assessment practices. Quite plainly put, formative assessment may be described as simple checks for understanding. As assessment is completed, data must be analyzed thoroughly by teachers to inform instructional choices and also by students to understand their own learning and identify learning goals. Dylan Wiliam says that “Assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence

about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners or their peers to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have made in the absence of that evidence.” (Wiliam, 2011).

- Build on the work that will begin with the teachers attending the data team training. Support the extension of that professional development for teachers. Provide time for teachers to both be trained in and implement collaboration around using data for results at the district, school and classroom level. Build time into all building schedules for ongoing, regular teacher collaboration as assessment data becomes available and ensure that data is available in formats that will encourage deep analysis.
- Ensure that analysis of all assessment data includes disaggregation to identify the needs of all subgroups. Verify that all teachers, administrators, and staff understand the Colorado Growth Model and use growth data from both TCAP and NWEA assessments to measure student progress toward academic mastery. Be particularly alert to the academic growth not only of those groups who may not be achieving at proficient or advanced levels, but also of those who are. Use School Performance Data to identify subgroups that are not making adequate growth to reach or maintain proficiency.
- Encourage and support teachers in the development of common assessments, scoring guides, rubrics and exemplars. Even where only one teacher teaches a particular grade or course, teacher teams in a common content area can develop assessments that ensure learning is scaffolded from one grade to the next and one course to the next. Teachers at different schools may be able to support each other in this work.

Response to Intervention

- Develop a common Response to Intervention (RtI) process and structure to be used by all schools in the district.
 - Provide training for all staff members so they have an understanding of the purpose and process of RtI.
 - Collaboratively establish what best-first instruction looks like in a standards-based, data-informed classroom.
 - Develop criteria for selecting strategies, model or programs for interventions.
 - Continually monitor and evaluate interventions for effectiveness on student achievement using valid and reliable progress monitoring tools.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ✓ How can we begin the process of implementing a consistent, coherent standards-based teaching/learning cycle in Clear Creek School District?

- ✓ How can we best use the expertise of those teachers receiving training in curriculum design and data teams to advance the learning and understanding of all staff?
- ✓ How can we ensure that our school community, board of education, administration, teachers, staff, and parents understand the Colorado Growth Model and its implications for our students?
- ✓ How can we develop a framework for literacy that ensures research-informed practices are consistently a part of literacy instruction? What discussions do we need to have so teachers understand that use of a framework does not negate teacher decision-making in the instruction provided?
- ✓ How can we develop a common understanding of the purpose of RtI and the role of best-first instruction in the model?
- ✓ How can we use and expand the training from the pilot CDE project on SB191 to ensure there are common observational practices regarding effective instruction?
- ✓ How do we accurately assess progress of students receiving interventions?

Clear Creek School District Appraisal Report

Section III

Standards & Indicators

- 1) Detail Report: Findings of District Performance**
- 2) Ratings**
- 3) Clarifying Comments**
- 4) Landscape Summary Report**
- 5) Bibliography**

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