October 09

Needs Analysis of Ottawa School District – USD 290

Conducted by and for the Kansas State Department of Education's Learning Network

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I. Introduction

In September 2008, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) contracted with Cross & Joftus, LLC to implement a model for working with KSDE and five Kansas districts—Garden City, Kansas City, Topeka, Turner, and Wichita—struggling to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In 2009, this model, the Learning Network, was expanded to reach all 17 Kansas districts not making AYP, including Ottawa School District, USD 290.

The rationale for the Learning Network is that districts struggling to demonstrate AYP need a combination of support and pressure to make difficult changes that will result in higher overall levels of student achievement and a narrowing of achievement gaps. Unfortunately, there is no “silver bullet” for making improvements, and the KSDE has finite capacity to help. Districts and the KSDE, however, can make significant progress if they think and act systemically, focus resources and energy on improving the teaching and learning process, and work collaboratively and with support from an external “critical friend.”

The goal, then, of the Learning Network is to improve school and district quality and increase student achievement through a collaborative, organization-development approach focused on applying systems theory and using data effectively.

One of the first activities in pursuit of this goal is to conduct a needs assessment of KSDE and all participating districts, focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis encompasses an analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and three-day site visits[1] that include interviews and focus groups with students, parents, civic leaders, teachers, academic coaches, principals, district administrators, and board members as well as classroom observations using a process designed by Cross & Joftus called Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities are designed to both produce findings leading to recommendations for technical assistance and to train school and state officials to do their own needs assessments and classroom observations in the future.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Joftus for the district’s leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary findings. This report presents all findings and represents the culmination of the needs assessment for Ottawa School District, USD 290 (referred to throughout the report as the district or Ottawa).

Ottawa has much to be proud of—overall, student achievement is generally higher than state averages in both reading and math. In 2008, 85.8 percent of Ottawa’s 2,356 students—94% of whom are White and 38% of whom come from low-income families—were proficient in math and 84.7% were proficient in reading. Both percentages represent

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[1] The site visit for Ottawa occurred October 5-7, 2009.

significant increases since 2005, when Dean Katt first became superintendent. The district has built a strong leadership team and dramatically improved support systems in a number of areas. Ottawa also has committed teachers and administrators who are student oriented and open to new ideas.

Despite these accomplishments, Ottawa is not, and should not be, satisfied. The district has struggled to ensure that students with disabilities achieve at high levels. As a result Ottawa has not demonstrated adequate yearly progress (AYP) consistently in either math or reading for students with disabilities in the last four years, placing the district on "corrective action." There are a number of other challenges facing Ottawa as well: the district has not yet fully implemented an instructional reform strategy; the curriculum, while improved, is not meeting the needs of either gifted or academically challenged students; most assessments are not yet being used effectively for instructional purposes; and overall, professional development in some buildings is not tied to instructional needs.

The report elaborates on each of these strengths and challenges in the Findings section below. Detailed recommendations about how to address them can be found in the section titled, Recommendations for Technical Assistance.

II. Findings

Findings from the needs assessment of Ottawa are summarized below in the areas of leadership; empowering culture; human capital; curriculum and assessment; and instruction and professional development.

Leadership

One of the main, overarching findings of the district needs analysis is that the district is now in a state of "readiness" to implement fully an instructional reform strategy that has a significant impact on student achievement. Indeed, Ottawa School District has had great success over the last few years establishing a very strong leadership team—with a high-functioning school board, central office administrators, and principals—and drastically improving support systems in the areas of special education, facilities, human resources, and technology. Moreover, student achievement in Ottawa is well above state averages.

Implementation of instructional improvements, however, must go much deeper in Ottawa in order to reverse the district's declining graduation rate and to raise student achievement to the levels that educators, students, and families expect. Fixsen et. al (2005)[2] define three levels of implementation:

- *Paper implementation* means simply putting new policies and procedures in place to support change. One study estimates that 80-90% of people-dependent innovations in business stop at paper implementation.

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[2] Fixsen, D., Naoom, S., Blase, K., Friedman, R., and Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature*. University of South Florida.

- *Process implementation* means putting new *operating* procedures in place—e.g. conducting training workshops, providing supervision, and changing reporting forms. The activities related to an innovation are occurring, events are being counted, and innovation-related languages are adopted. Fixsen et. al (2005) note, however, that not much of what goes on is necessarily functionally related to the new practice. For example, training might consist of merely didactic orientation the new practice or program, supervision might be unrelated to and uninformed by what was taught in training, information might be collected and stored without affecting decision making, and the terms used in the new language may be devoid of *real* meaning and impact. In business, this form of implementation has been called the "Fallacy of Programmatic Change."

- *Performance implementation* means putting procedures and processes in place in such a way that the identified components of change are used with good effect, in this case, for students.

Though Ottawa has made significant improvements in recent years, the district is currently between the paper and process implementation stages. The goal, of course, is to implement improvement at the performance level. To do so, Ottawa needs to define an instructionally oriented theory of change and then develop, implement, and monitor policies, systems, and practices that support that theory.[3]

Many of the findings throughout this report are related to the need to develop and fully implement an instructionally focused theory of change.

Other key findings in the area of leadership include the following:

- The district has a strong board and leadership team and very good relationships with policymakers and community leaders.

- The district went through a thoughtful and productive strategic planning process that resulted in a strategic plan that defines priorities for each academic year. The board continues to have retreats twice a year to discuss strategic issues. The strategic plan, however, would benefit greatly from the addition of outcome measures to help the system track and report progress.

- The district also went through a thoughtful and productive budgeting process that—despite the need to cut $1.4 million (out of a budget of $34 million) due to the recession—was inclusive and successful in protecting instructional priorities such as all-day kindergarten and early childhood education, academic coaches, and

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[3] For an excellent discussion of theory of change and the need to focus on the instructional core, see City, E., Elmore, R., Fiarman, S., and Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Harvard Education Press. Also, Childress, S., Elmore, R., Grossman, A., and King, C. (2007). *Note on the PELP Coherence Framework*. Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University.

assistant principals. Unfortunately, the district will likely need to cut additional funds (approximately $200 per pupil) during this academic year. And there are several high-impact priorities that it would like to expand as well, including improved professional development, additional academic coaches, expanded early childhood education, and further improvements to technology.

- The district has made significant progress in improving systems related to special education, technology, grounds and facilities, and human resources. As the district well knows, however, more work is needed to ensure that the system as a whole fully embraces students with disabilities and commits to educating them to their full potential.[4]

Empowering Culture

The state of readiness noted in the Leadership section above is grounded in an empowering district culture that fosters enthusiasm and initiative to improve student success. Despite facing several significant pressures—increasing numbers of poor families, mounting capital costs, the prospect of additional budget cuts, and the need for greater academic rigor—district leaders express and demonstrate the willingness to address challenges head on.

Leaders actively pursue creative solutions to problems and seek new opportunities for improvement. And, the school board is strong and unified in its support for district leadership. Members expressed confidence in their capabilities to govern effectively.

> "If there is a perfect school board, I think we have it." – *School board member*

Ottawa, however, faces a number of challenges related to culture and communication:

- The number of low-income families living in the district has doubled in the last four years. Poverty, drug usage, and a lack of interest in college represent substantial barriers to success for a growing group of students. Concerns about these barriers were reiterated throughout the interviews, and Ottawa must learn to deal effectively with this new reality.

- District leadership has already begun to focus on these challenges by creating a number of opportunities for students to increase their academic skills and motivation to succeed. Programs such as Communities in Schools, FLEX, AVID, Credit Recovery, and an after school program at the middle school orient students toward personal success, improved learning skills, and higher self-esteem. These programs, however, represent a piecemeal approach to expanding learning opportunities. There does not appear to be a larger plan that incorporates these

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[4] Related systems of special education, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development are addressed more fully in other sections of this report.

programs into a comprehensive strategic framework that makes expanded learning—both formal and informal—a more powerful component of students' educational experience. On a positive note, several interviewees were enthusiastic about the leadership of two organizations they feel could bring new energy and ideas to the district's efforts to expand learning beyond the school day, the Children's Coalition and the Ottawa Recreation Commission.

- Although there are "concurrent enrollment" opportunities with the community college, "college-prep" classes, and a potentially powerful relationship with High Schools that Work, there are several challenges related to meeting the needs of high school students:
    - The high school currently offers only three years of social studies (none in the freshman year).
    - There are at least some perceptions that the college-prep classes are uneven in quality and rigor.
    - Concurrent enrollment credits are costly to students.
    - There are no advanced placement (AP) or international baccalaureate (IB) classes at the high school.
    - The "Freshman Success Class" does not appear to be meeting the needs of at least high-performing students who could be using the period for electives. Also, assuming MTSS implementation moves forward, the high school might consider using the period currently devoted to this class for Tier II implementation.
    - The high school is overcrowded and has limited lab opportunities.

- School facilities are in need of an update. The district is in the process of completing a master facility plan for doing so.

- The district's principals and teachers appear satisfied that USD 290 is a high-quality employer and that the district's culture reinforces their value. One principal described relationships with colleagues as "family-like." At the same time, both principals and teachers expressed the need for stronger collaboration to enhance student success. A group of teachers, for example, noted that they feel pressure from demands for greater accountability, yet they do not have sufficient on-the-job technical support to improve results.

- This need for greater collaboration is especially acute for teachers—both general education and special education teachers—who work with students with disabilities. Currently, there appears to be little collaborative planning time for teachers to plan and teach together effectively, especially at the elementary and high school levels.

- At least three separate challenges are related to parent involvement in Ottawa:

    - Many parents are perceived as unenthusiastic about supporting their children's academic success. As a result, increasing numbers of students—many from low-income families—are not making progress and do not appear to be motivated to achieve. Additionally, some district staff and community members do not appear to have high expectations for the success of all students, which may further alienate disengaged parents.

  - A second challenge involves a select group of parents who would like greater opportunities to participate with district leaders in addressing a range of community problems. This group does not feel that the district facilitates active communication about major decisions and policy issues. Without an intermediary organization in the community, such as a Civic Education Council, parents find it difficult to focus attention on challenging issues facing the district. One parent put it this way: "We welcome more opportunities to learn about critical issues and get important information before major decisions have been made."

  - A third challenge relates to parents of students with disabilities. Some parents are disappointed in the communications they receive from the district. Parents noted that they lack user-friendly information that clearly spells out what they can expect from the district. Additionally, some parents are concerned that the district does not value its students with severe disabilities.

- A related challenge for the district, as it works to reinforce a culture of high performance and success, is the perceived need by some board members and civic leaders for greater academic rigor and achievement by all students, and higher performance expectations for teachers.

Human Capital

The district has made substantial progress toward developing and beginning to implement a more systematic and transparent human resources system. The relatively recent establishment of an HR division has resulted in a strong emphasis on the value of high-performing staff at all levels. There are clear public documents explaining the district's employment practices, requirements, and performance expectations, and the district has initiated an ambitious menu of improvement efforts, aimed expressly at building a strong work environment.

There are several challenges related to these improvements as well:

- The district has hired academic coaches to work directly with classroom teachers, a practice that shows much promise. The coaches seem highly regarded and are in great demand for their expertise in tackling difficult learning issues. One of the coaches, for example, has helped teachers learn to integrate reading instruction across the curriculum. There are only 3.5 coaches, however, and it is currently difficult to monitor and evaluate the impact of coaches' work effectively.

- There is no comprehensive action plan for helping teachers gain the skills and knowledge necessary to meet district expectations for success. Teachers acknowledged that the district is taking positive steps in this direction, but noted that there are gaps in planning and implementation, and goals for progress are unclear. For example, several teachers interviewed expressed the desire to have more opportunities to learn from one another on the job and to periodically visit with teachers working in schools where student achievement has improved. In addition, teachers indicated that the district needs a systematic way for diagnosing the learning challenges of students in grades three and above and devising effective instructional strategies to help them make progress.

- There has been considerable turnover amongst special education staff. The current special education director is the fourth director in eight years. During her tenure, she has worked hard to ensure that special education services are in compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), remove incompetent staff, and build relationships with general education staff and administrators. This staffing challenge, however, has clearly contributed to the director's (and others') sense that special education services are "successful with compliance" but must be improved in quality.

- A new evaluation framework for classified staff appears to be yielding initial performance improvements and has strong support from building principals. There is also a system for the evaluation of the superintendent and teachers. Yet, the district lacks a formal system for evaluating principals. Additionally, Ottawa does not provide sufficient support for principals who have been asked to identify and help to counsel out ineffective teachers. The district cannot afford to leave principals "out on a limb" when they take on this challenging, yet critical, duty.

- Substitute teachers play an important and sometimes overlooked role across the district. Their jobs are difficult, and they have not received the kind of help their situation requires. HR is aware of this issue, and wants to make substitute teachers an integral part of the district's personnel improvement efforts. The district must also create a professional development plan to ensure greater substitute quality.

- Hard-to-staff academic areas such as math and science, languages, and special education present the district with the same challenges that other districts face. To identify, attract, support, and retain staff in these areas, the district and community must work together aggressively to meet this challenge. The district could also look at virtual schooling as a way to expand learning options to students and staff hard-to-fill subjects.

Curriculum and Assessment

Findings related to the areas of Curriculum and Assessment, and Instruction and Professional Development are based upon a comparative analysis of information from the following three sources: (1) student achievement data; (2) perceptions identified by Ottawa educators on "Surveys of Educational Practices," and by representatives from all constituent groups during focus groups and interviews; and (3) data collected during classroom visits, which document to what extent effective teaching/learning practices are being implemented.

More detail about the data collected during classroom visits using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process can be found in the Appendix of this report.

Curriculum

Ottawa displays a number of curriculum strengths:

- The district has detailed curriculum guides for all grades and subjects, which are available online. Some teachers are using these guides regularly to plan lessons and revise curriculum. The guides appear to work best in buildings where their use is monitored and coaches follow up with support. Teachers also use the sequence in the curriculum guide as a sort of general monthly pacing guide.

> "High school math is our 'biggest success…' Teachers are excited about using the guides." – *Ottawa administrator*

- The full-time curriculum director is knowledgeable and communicates effectively with teachers and principals, the director of special education, and the reading and math coaches. When district personnel make text selections, they use a data-driven decision making process based on research and state standards. And, the curriculum provides access to a common academic core for all students.

- Curriculum implementation has been responsive to three different—and potentially conflicting—sets of needs: fidelity to a particular curriculum; the requirement to fulfill student needs; and the mandate to meet state standards. Meeting state standards is first priority. The district has linked textbook selection to standards, and teachers work to ensure that students pass state achievement tests in reading and math. Where meeting standards conflicts with fidelity to the curriculum, meeting standards comes out on top. For example, in cases where Everyday Math units on tested concepts are designed to be taught after the state achievement tests, the teachers re-sequence delivery of the curriculum so that tested concepts are covered before the state tests.

There are several less-easily resolved conflicts, however, between the requirement to meet student needs and the prioritization of state standards:

- Implementation of curriculum currently does not meet student needs at both ends of the continuum: for gifted students, on the one hand, and for lower performing general education students and many students with disabilities on the other hand.

- There is no gifted curriculum or curriculum strand, and, there are no advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB) classes, or use of virtual instruction to offer advanced courses. According to students, the once a week "gifted" period in the high school is no more than a study hall. The focus on meeting standards does not give gifted students a planned path to excel. For example, there are excellent Algebra 1 classes at the middle school for about 50 students. When the students reach high school, however, they are enrolled in geometry courses with sophomores and juniors who may have little or no interest in math—resulting in a loss of momentum for many students.

> "In the quest to meet standards, we should make sure we're not *just* meeting standards." – *Ottawa parent*

- On the other end of the continuum, the needs of lower performing general education students and students with disabilities are not being met effectively after second grade.

    - For example, teachers in K-2 have been thoroughly trained in teaching reading, but some students still need guided reading instruction in the third grade. In Ottawa, the third grade reading curriculum changes from Kansas Accelerated Literacy Learning (KALL) to Readers Workshop. Although Readers Workshop provides for differentiated instruction, it expects students to be able to engage in independent reading for most of the reading period. Third grade teachers lack guidance from the curriculum about how to provide the needed reading instruction for students who are not yet independent readers.

    - At the middle school, teachers use the 6th grade Everyday Math program, which advises a 75-90 minute lesson period. Middle school periods, however, are only 50 minutes long, creating problems for lower performing students and students with disabilities. A math coach also observed that although the teacher guides in Everyday Math have a section on reaching lower performing students, she has never seen teachers use the guides.

    - For many Ottawa students with disabilities, as in many districts, there is a conflict between meeting academic goals on their IEPs and demonstrating proficiency on state tests. Further, although improvements have been made recently, many IEPs are not standards-based, and special education teachers and aides need additional professional development, support, and collaboration with general education teachers to effectively teach the core

> curriculum. Since there is inadequate time for teachers to plan together, both general education and special education teachers are unsure about what to teach, about who should teach what, and about how to meet the needs of students with disabilities effectively.

There are other curriculum challenges as well:

- Across the curricula, there appears to be little systematic prioritization of activities, and the amount of time teachers spend on a subject appears to vary significantly.

"Everything is first priority! Nothing is taken off the plate so you can start something new…It's overwhelming." – *Curriculum coach*

"In classrooms I've been in, the time spent on math each day varies from 30-90 minutes. I would guess the same thing is happening in reading." – *Curriculum coach*

- There appears to be a lot of general vertical communication in K-5 and 6-8. Vertical communication on curricular transition points, however, takes place differently within each school, or informally through friendships or carpool arrangements. The middle school has monthly vertical teaming. Some elementary schools do as well. There was no evidence of vertical communication taking place at the high school level, though, outside of the math team, which meets regularly.

Assessment

Ottawa uses a broad range of tests to assess student achievement and progress,[5] and the district is beginning to use the Kansas Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as a systemic way of assessing and meeting student needs over time. This is a promising development.

Despite the use of a variety of rich assessment tools, Ottawa faces several challenges related to assessment.

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[5] Kindergarten assessments are given in September, January, and May. The Kansas Accelerated Literacy Learning testing (KALL) and Reading Recovery testing is done in first grade, and the Qualitative Reading Inventory is given in October and May of second grade. The Kansas reading and math assessments are given in grades three-eight and again in high school (available in grades 10 and 11). The Kansas science assessments are given in grades four, seven, nine, and 10. The Kansas reading and math assessments are used to judge annual yearly progress (AYP). Students with disabilities may be assessed on the Kansas Assessment Modified Measures (KAMM) and Kansas Alternative Assessments (KAA). To assess growth, the district administers the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests in September and May for reading and math for general education students in grades 1-10, and three times a year (September, December, and May) for students with disabilities. MAP science tests are administered to students in grades seven, nine and 10 in September and May. English language proficiency is assessed by the Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessment (KELPA).

- Most assessments are not used for instructional purposes. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments, for example, can be used to fine-tune instruction for individual students through the DesCartes process built into the program, but few teachers use this tool.[6]

- Most teachers are overwhelmed by the amount of data available. The curriculum director believes that coaches are the key to addressing this problem. Once the teachers have the data they need, coaches can help them understand what to do with it. Currently, the high school math coach looks at the assessment results of top tier students to determine where students are struggling, and uses those results as a signal that certain concepts are not being taught effectively.

- There is little coordinated assessment review and planning. The curriculum director also notes that one elementary school's primary teachers work together on assessments, and that the middle school has started to do so. We saw no evidence that others are doing similar analyses, however.

- Teachers in focus groups and interviews indicated that they believe too much time is spent on giving and preparing for assessments.

> "Three-fourths of the year is about teaching to assessments!" *Ottawa Teacher, expressing the sentiments of many teachers*

- The district does not have common formative assessments. Individual teachers use end of chapter and unit tests, which provide summary grades but may not inform instruction.

Instruction

Table 1 presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 77%) and principals (response rate 90%) administered online by Cross & Joftus. Instructional strategies that principals and teachers believe are most strongly evident and are least evident, are highlighted below. Additional instructional strengths and challenges are identified later in this section.

The sound instructional strategies that ***principals*** believe are most ***strongly evident*** in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited by 89% of principals as strongly evident)
- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited by 56% of principals as strongly evident)

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[6] For more information about the MAP assessment's DesCartes process, see Northwest Evaluation Association. (2009) *State Requirements and NWEA's DesCartes: A Continuum of Learning*, accessed online at http://www.nwea.org/support/article/552.

- students participating in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments (cited as strongly evident by 56% of principals)
- fostering collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being (selected as strongly evident by 56% of principals).

The strategies believed by ***principals*** to be ***least evident*** include:

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (selected as strongly evident by 11% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 22%)
- measuring the effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (selected as strongly evident by 22% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 22%)
- applying research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students (selected as strongly evident by 22% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- facilitating, monitoring, and guiding the continuous improvement of instruction (selected as strongly evident by 22% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%).

Generally, the sound instructional strategies that teachers believe are most strongly evident and least evident in their schools are similar to those selected by principals.

Teachers believe that the strategies that are most ***strongly evident*** include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 83% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- providing equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners (cited as strongly evident by 59% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 3%)
- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited by 57% of teachers as strongly evident and not evident or minimally evident by 3%)
- using a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections (cited as strongly evident by 56% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 4%)
- students participating in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments (cited as strongly evident by 54% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 3%).

The strategies believed by ***teachers*** to be ***least evident*** include:

- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (selected as strongly evident by 11% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 43%)
- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support student learning (selected as strongly evident by 16% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 38%)
- measuring the effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (selected as strongly evident by 20% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 25%).

Table 1. Extent to Which Principals and Teachers Believe that Sound Instructional Strategies Are Present in Their Schools

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	**Principals**		**Teachers**	
	Strongly Evident*	**Not Evident or Minimally Evident^**	**Strongly Evident***	**Not Evident or Minimally Evident^**
Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	89%	0%	83%	0%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	56%	0%	57%	3%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	56%	0%	54%	3%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	56%	0%	42%	11%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	44%	0%	59%	3%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	44%	11%	51%	4%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	44%	0%	44%	17%
Educators use a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical	33%	0%	56%	4%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections.				
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	33%	11%	50%	9%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	33%	0%	47%	10%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	33%	11%	42%	13%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	33%	0%	30%	22%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	33%	22%	23%	29%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	33%	0%	16%	38%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	22%	0%	32%	18%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	22%	0%	32%	12%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	22%	0%	11%	43%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	22%	22%	20%	25%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	11%	22%	26%	21%

Teacher Response Rate = 160/208
Principal Response Rate = 9/10

Source: Cross & Joftus survey of Ottawa principals and teachers September 2009.
*The response option “Evident” was deleted from this presentation to help highlight differences.
^The response option “No Opinion” was deleted from this presentation. Generally less than 2% of teachers selected this option on any response; 11% of principals (the equivalent of one principal) selected this option a number of times.

The theme of “readiness” aptly describes the district’s status in terms of instruction and professional development. Ottawa’s culture supports instructional improvement, and positive steps have been taken to bolster that improvement.

- Academic coaches are providing much needed support to classroom teachers, and this support is helping teachers to deepen their skills and improve their teaching practices.

- The district has begun to implement the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS), which is designed to enable staff to provide a “continuum of increasingly intense, research-based interventions” that help students to learn by responding appropriately and effectively to their academic and/or behavioral needs.[7]

- Classroom observations throughout the district revealed that, on the whole, classrooms are inviting places where students demonstrate a desire to learn. Students appear to be actively engaged and involved in lessons.

There are several challenges facing the district, however, as it moves from “readiness” to effective implementation:

- Even though the classroom observations demonstrate that students are involved in various and often engaging activities, contrary to teachers’ perceptions on the Cross & Joftus survey, in general students are not being asked to think critically and/or at higher levels. Teachers need to take instruction and activities to the next level, by engaging students in learning that require them to explain, create, compare, evaluate, etc.

- Classroom observations found very little evidence that MTSS was actually in place, or that it was being used regularly and effectively. Additionally, conversations with teachers revealed that there were significant gaps in their understandings of MTSS, especially as MTSS applies to meeting the needs of gifted students or students who are academically challenged.

- Even though differentiated instruction has been a part of the district’s professional development, and district surveys reveal that teachers feel good about their knowledge and practices with differentiated instruction, neither focus groups nor

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[7] Kansas State Department of Education. (2009). *Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Innovation Configuration Matrix*.

observations found a significant percentage of teachers using differentiated instruction effectively.

- During approximately 70 five-minute classroom observations, technology was found to be in use in about 40% of classrooms. It was being used to varying degrees, and in many cases the "technology" in use was no more than an electronic workbook.

Professional Development

The needs assessment uncovered a number of professional development strengths:

- Professional development is guided by a Professional Development Council, consisting of representatives from each school and the central office, each of whom serves a term of three years. They review and recommend that the Board of Education approve or disapprove five-year professional development plan for the district. They also meet monthly to design, coordinate, recommend, and approve results-based staff development activities in conjunction with each school's school improvement team.

- Teachers have all had extensive professional development in using the KALL curriculum to teach reading at the K-2 level.

- Academic coaches are a wise investment for the district. They are adding to the district's capacity to begin to identify and address professional development needs.

Several challenges remain, however, as Ottawa works to improve professional development:

- Focus groups with teachers and principals, and feedback from the curriculum director and superintendent, indicate that professional development, while often engaging, covers too many subjects and lacks sufficient depth. Professional development priorities are unclear. Currently, staff members attend trainings or meetings and are then expected to return and train others. Professional development lacks follow-through, ensuring that educators are able to implement, practice, and refine what they have learned so that they can continuously improve.

> "We've started too many things without coherence or follow-through." – *Curriculum coach*

- Principals lack a consistent classroom observation process to collect data about what is happening in their school's classrooms and to define and implement professional development priorities.

- The district has developed a mentoring program, which can serve as a vital component of Ottawa's professional development. Focus group participants noted however, that the program needs to be refined and strengthened to deepen its impact on teachers.

- On paper, Ottawa has committed to supporting professional learning communities (PLCs), but various groups interviewed and schools visited showed little evidence that PLCs are defined clearly or being used effectively to enhance instruction.

- Principals noted that there is *not* a common understanding of and approach to differentiated instruction across the district and professional development has not addressed this issue effectively.

- Specific professional development is needed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to create classroom experiences that cause students to consistently think at the application level and above.

- Schools use the Student Improvement Team (SIT) process for discussing specific student needs and suggesting strategies for intervention. Teachers need training, however, in how to collect and analyze the data needed to meet the specific learning needs of a student. Additionally, once alternative strategies are recommended, teachers need the knowledge and skills to implement recommended strategies and collect appropriate data to take back to the SIT so next steps can be identified. This is especially problematic in instances related to students with disabilities.

III. Recommendations for Technical Assistance

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district could most benefit from technical assistance and to design that technical assistance in a way that will have the greatest impact on the district's school quality and student achievement. Based on this needs assessment, Cross & Joftus, LLC recommends that the technical assistance provided to Ottawa address one or more of the following general recommendations:

1) Define an instructionally oriented theory of change and then develop, implement, and monitor policies, systems, and practices that support that theory.

2) Plan for and fully implement MTSS.

3) Conduct an in-depth special education needs assessment and audit to determine how to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and to ensure that students have access to and make satisfactory progress in the general curriculum.

4) Develop and implement a system for classroom observations, tied to the instructional focus and used to inform professional develop and academic coaching.

5) Fully implement professional learning communities as a mechanism for improving curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development.

6) Add outcome measures to the strategic plan and develop and implement a system for tracking and reporting; ensure that the special education plan is integrally connected to and part of the larger strategic plan.

7) Develop and fully implement a systematic process for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing the curriculum to make sure that it is addressing the needs of all students, including gifted and lower performing students. Consider developing an accelerated math program for students at the middle school level and continuing through high school.

8) Develop and use a principal evaluation form and a systematic process for principal evaluation.

9) Ensure that principals feel supported in their efforts to evaluate teachers and to identify those that require remediation, and consider increasing principal contracts from one year to two.

10) Fully implement High Schools that Work and consider adding AP or IB programs to the high school and/or making use of virtual schools to expand academic options for students.

11) Propose a joint district, city, and county strategic planning process during regularly scheduled monthly meetings.

12) Improve communication with parents of students with disabilities so that parents understand their rights and the district's responsibilities.

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Joftus will contact the Ottawa superintendent to finalize a technical assistance plan that includes 24 days of external support for the time period January through September of 2010. This plan, developed in collaboration between the senior leadership of the district and Cross & Joftus will describe in detail the goals, objectives, activities, service provider, and timeline of the technical assistance.

APPENDIX
Findings from Classroom Observations
Ottawa School District

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process, Cross & Joftus staff in collaboration with representatives from the Kansas State Department of Education and district staff visited classrooms and recorded observations of effective "teaching" demonstrated by the teacher and "learning" demonstrated by the students.

The entries under the "plus" column on the left side of the charts below show the percentage of classrooms visited in which research-based practices that consistently contribute to enhanced learning were observed. The entries under the "delta" column on the right side highlight areas that the district should address to improve the teaching and learning process.

Data were aggregated in school-level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) groupings to determine the percentage of classrooms in which evidence of the specified practices were observed. For reporting purposes in the narrative, we describe practices as having ***strong evidence*** if they were observed in 70% or more of the classrooms visited, ***evidence*** if they were observed in 50-69% of classrooms visited, and ***minimal evidence*** if they were observed in less than 50% of classrooms visited.

Elementary Schools (66 Classrooms)

	OBSERVED PRACTICES +		PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
	Learning Environment	TEACHING	
83%	Orderly/Clean/Well-Managed		Students would benefit from having models of their work displayed as samples of expected performance accompanied by rubrics/scoring guides.
91%	Safe/Conducive to Learning		
24%	Evidence of Learning/Displays student work		
	Instructional Design		
52%	Standards-based lesson		Few observations show that data are being used to make instructional decisions.
8%	Data-based instruction is explicit		
36%	Modeling		Use of explicit modeling needs to increase.
74%	Checking understanding		
41%	Guided Practice		Consistent guided and independent practice should be built into the design of instruction.
24%	Independent Practice		
12%	Teacher/Student Evaluation/Summary		Students need an opportunity to self -reflect/evaluate learning.
	Strategies Used		
	Adjust for multiple learning styles:		
26%	visual		Students need to receive instruction in various forms to meet the needs of various learning styles.
30%	auditory		
5%	kinesthetic		
0%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives		
2%	Address diverse language needs		Little was observed to address diverse learning needs.
18%	Identify similarities & differences		
3%	Summarize & take notes		
62%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition		Of the nine research-based effective instructional strategies, only two were used in over 55% of the classrooms visited; need to provide skills to build use of additional practices.
6%	Use homework & practice opportunities		
6%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways		
23%	Organize learning in groups		
35%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback		
5%	Generate & test hypotheses		
55%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers		

Elementary Schools (66 Classrooms)

	OBSERVED PRACTICES +		PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
	Cognitive Level	LEARNING	
23%	Knowledge		Students need to be provided with consistent opportunities to think at higher levels.
26%	Comprehension		
23%	Application		
11%	Analysis		
2%	Synthesis		
0%	Evaluation		
	Environment/Resources		
20%	Textbooks		Need to increase the use of a variety of resources.
58%	Supplemental materials		
26%	Manipulatives		
39%	Technology		
0%	Materials reflect diversity		
20%	Worksheets: Open-ended/Fill-in/Multiple choice		
	Interactive Behaviors		
64%	Active involvement in classwork		Questions and feedback were observed in nearly 50% of the classrooms; students, however, need to be given more opportunities to reflect on their work and learning.
48%	Asks/answers questions		
48%	Receives feedback on performance		
6%	Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		
	Strategies Demonstrated		
	Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways:		Students need to be provided opportunities to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. Only verbal-linguistic was observed at a relatively high level.
32%	interpersonal		
9%	intrapersonal		
59%	verbal-linguistic		
11%	logistical-mathematical		
45%	visual-spatial		
29%	bodily-kinesthetic		
8%	musical-rhythmic		
	Work Produced		
	Individual Work		This area not explicitly observed.
	Group Work		
	Written work		
	Project		
	Presentation/Performance		
	Self-Evaluation/Reflection		

Middle Schools (22 Classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +			PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
	Learning Environment	TEACHING	
95%	Orderly/Clean/Well-Managed		Students would benefit from having models of their work displayed as samples of expected performance accompanied by rubrics/scoring guides.
95%	Safe/Conductive to Learning		
32%	Evidence of Learning/Displays student work		
	Instructional Design		
50%	Standards-based lesson		
5%	Data-based instruction is explicit		Need for more data-based instruction.
9%	Modeling		
64%	Checking understanding		Need for more modeling in the instructional design of lessons.
45%	Guided Practice		
36%	Independent Practice		
9%	Teacher/Student Evaluation/Summary		
	Strategies Used		
	Adjust for multiple learning styles:		Students need to receive instruction in various forms to meet the needs of various learning styles.
25%	visual		
35%	auditory		
0%	kinesthetic		
5%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives		Little was observed to address diverse learning needs.
0%	Address diverse language needs		
36%	Identify similarities & differences		
23%	Summarize & take notes		Of the nine research-based effective instructional strategies, only one was used in 50% of the classrooms visited; need to provide skills to build use of additional practices.
50%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition		
36%	Use homework & practice opportunities		
14%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways		
18%	Organize learning in groups		
18%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback		
9%	Generate & test hypotheses		
14%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers		

Middle Schools (22 Classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +			PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
	Cognitive Level	LEARNING	
41%	Knowledge		Students were not asked consistently to think at higher levels. Professional development needs to focus on strategies to encourage students' higher-level thinking.
36%	Comprehension		
9%	Application		
9%	Analysis		
5%	Synthesis		
5%	Evaluation		
	Environment/Resources		
9%	Textbooks		Students need to have a variety of supplemental resources and materials to enhance the learning process.
64%	Supplemental materials		
18%	Manipulatives		
18%	Technology		Limited amounts of technology use was observed.
0%	Materials reflect diversity		
14%	Worksheets: Open-ended/Fill-in/Multiple choice		
	Interactive Behaviors		
59%	Active involvement in classwork		
68%	Asks/answers questions		
27%	Receives feedback on performance		More feedback on performance is needed.
14%	Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		Students need to be given more opportunities to reflect on their learning.
	Strategies Demonstrated		
	Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways:		Students need opportunities to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. Only verbal-linguistic styles were observed at a relatively high level.
27%	interpersonal		
18%	intrapersonal		
50%	verbal-linguistic		
36%	logistical-mathematical		
9%	visual-spatial		
5%	bodily-kinesthetic		
0%	musical-rhythmic		
	Work Produced		
	Individual Work		This area not explicitly observed.
	Group Work		
	Written work		
	Project		
	Presentation/Performance		
	Self-Evaluation/Reflection		

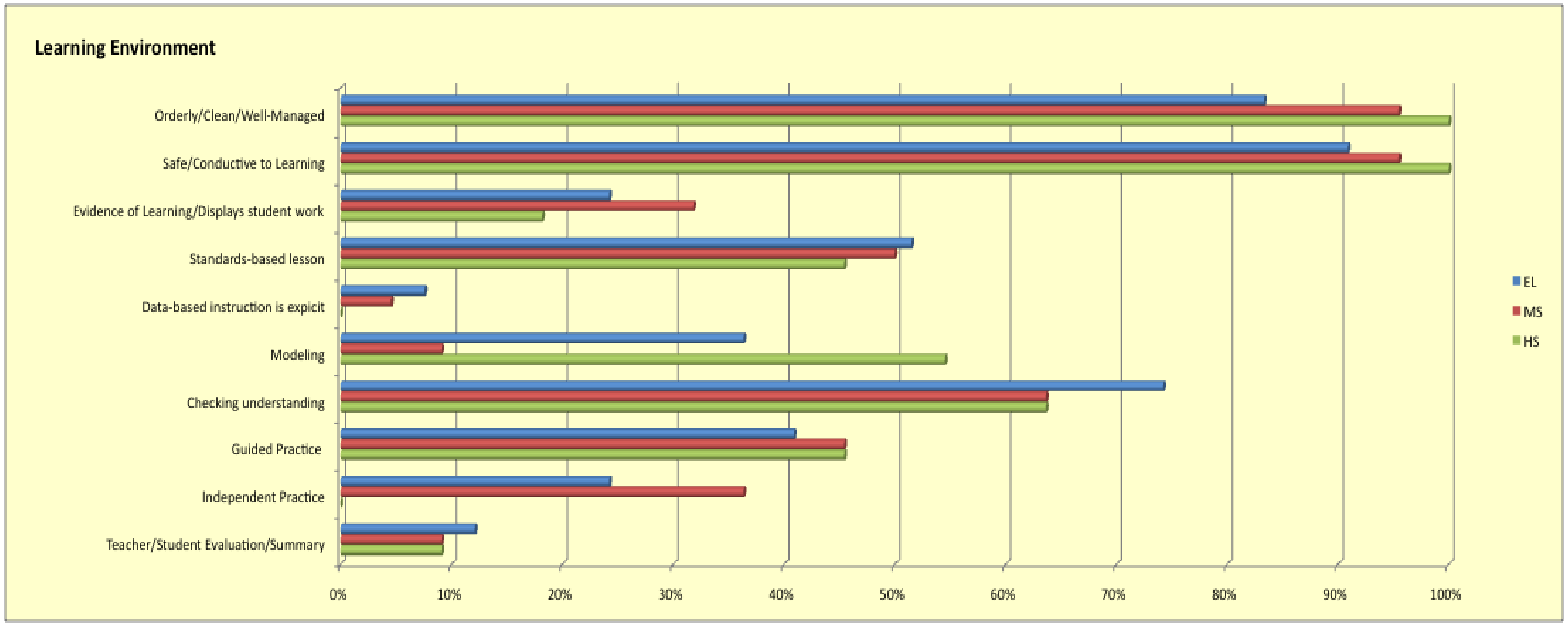
High School (11 Classrooms)

	OBSERVED PRACTICES +		PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
	Learning Environment	TEACHING	
100%	Orderly/Clean/Well-Managed		Students would benefit from having models of their work displayed as samples of expected performance accompanied by rubrics/scoring guides.
100%	Safe/Conductive to Learning		
18%	Evidence of Learning/Displays student work		
	Instructional Design		
45%	Standards-based lesson		
0%	Data-based instruction is explicit		Very little evidence of data-based instruction. Professional development should focus on how to incorporate more data- based instructional decisions.
55%	Modeling		
64%	Checking understanding		
45%	Guided Practice		
0%	Independent Practice		More practice is needed, specifically independent practice with learning material.
9%	Teacher/Student Evaluation/Summary		
	Strategies Used		
	Adjust for multiple learning styles:		
25%	visual		Students need to receive instruction in various forms to meet the needs of various learning styles.
35%	auditory		
0%	kinesthetic		
0%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives		
0%	Address diverse language needs		Little was observed to address diverse learning needs.
36%	Identify similarities & differences		
18%	Summarize & take notes		
73%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition		Of the nine research-based effective instructional strategies, only two were used in 50% of the classrooms visited; need to provide skills to build use of additional practices.
18%	Use homework & practice opportunities		
0%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways		
9%	Organize learning in groups		
18%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback		
9%	Generate & test hypotheses		
55%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers		

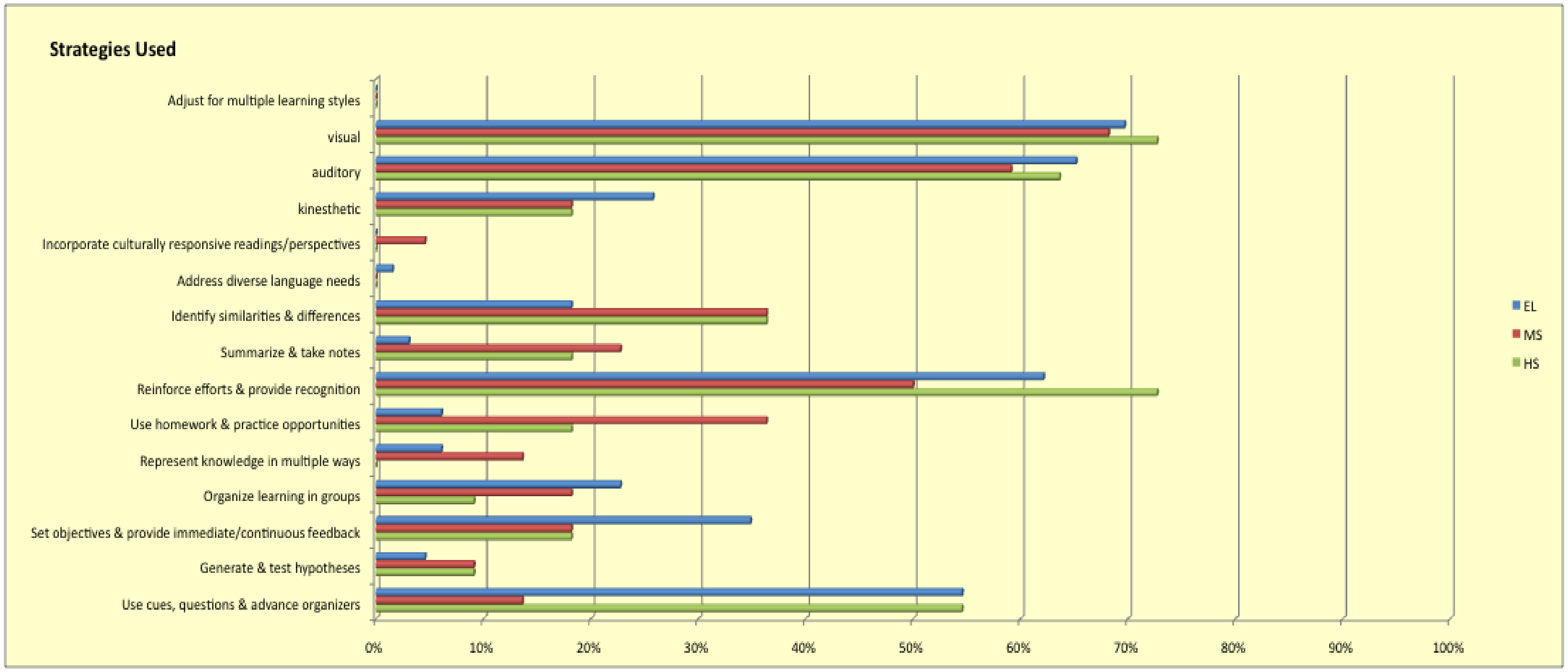
High School (Nine Classrooms)

	OBSERVED PRACTICES +		PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
	Cognitive Level	LEARNING	
18%	Knowledge		Students were seldom asked to think at levels above application. Professional development should focus on strategies to encourage students' higher-level thinking.
27%	Comprehension		
27%	Application		
9%	Analysis		
0%	Synthesis		
0%	Evaluation		
	Environment/Resources		
0%	Textbooks		Students need to have the opportunity to use a variety of supplemental resources and materials to enhance the learning process.
55%	Supplemental materials		
18%	Manipulatives		
45%	Technology		
0%	Materials reflect diversity		
9%	Worksheets: Open-ended/Fill-in/Multiple choice		
	Interactive Behaviors		
45%	Active involvement in classwork		More feedback on performance is needed.
36%	Asks/answers questions		
18%	Receives feedback on performance		Students need to be given more opportunity to reflect on their learning
9%	Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		
	Strategies Demonstrated		
	Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways:		Students need to be provided opportunities to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. Only logical-mathematical was observed at a relatively high level.
18%	interpersonal		
0%	intrapersonal		
18%	verbal-linguistic		
55%	logistical-mathematical		
9%	visual-spatial		
9%	bodily-kinesthetic		
0%	musical-rhythmic		
	Work Produced		
	Individual Work		This area not explicitly observed.
	Group Work		
	Written work		
	Project		
	Presentation/Performance		
	Self-Evaluation/Reflection		

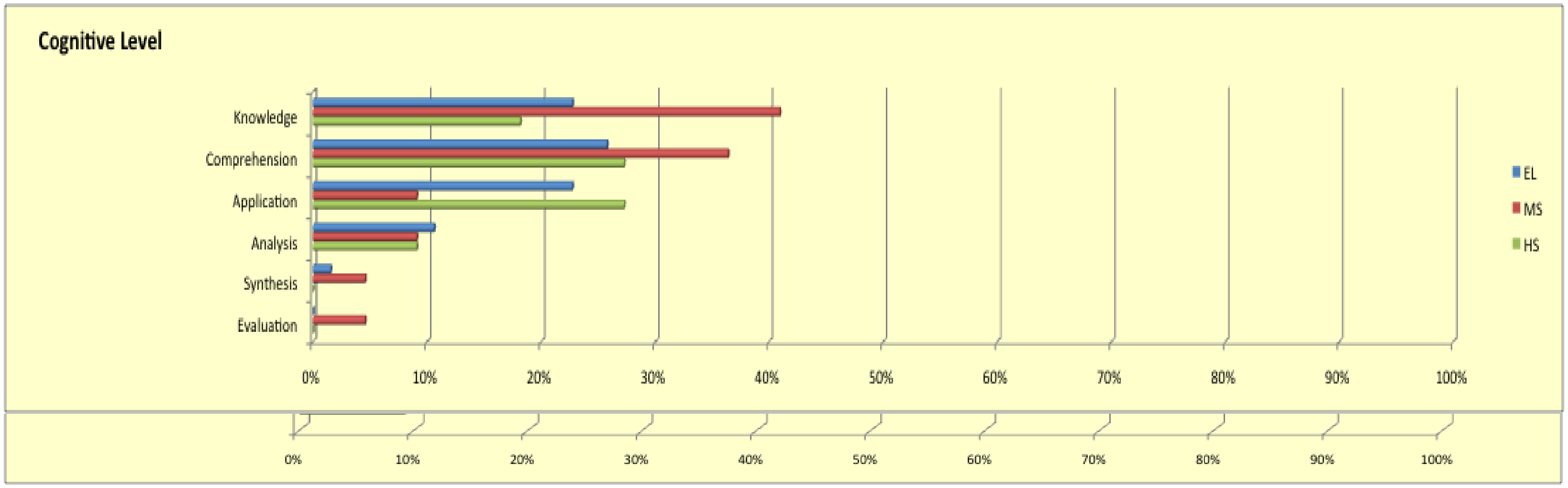
TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN OTTAWA SCHOOL DISTRICT



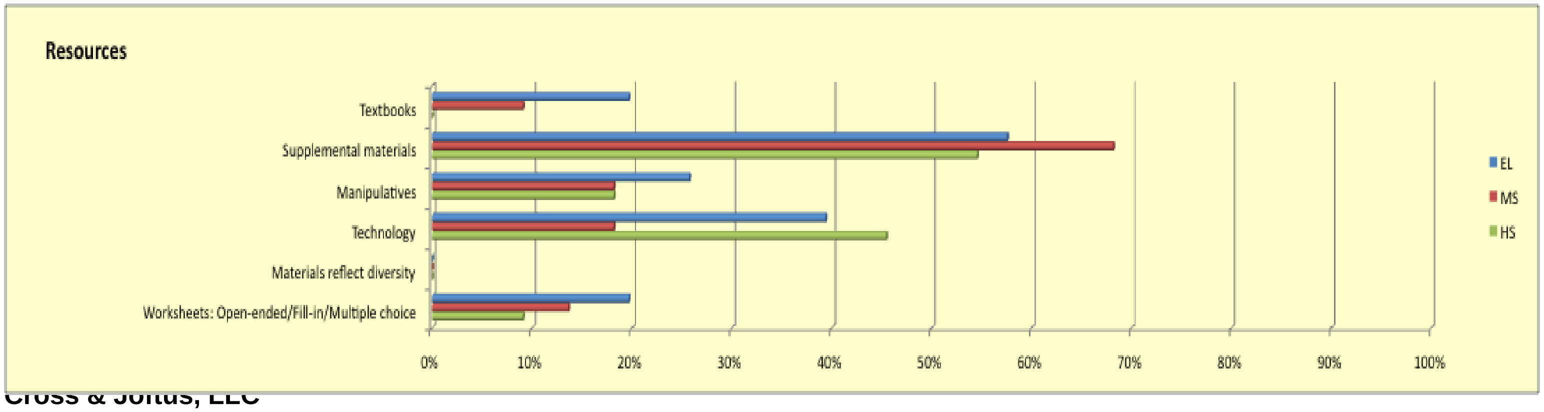
TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN OTTAWA SCHOOL DISTRICT (continued)



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN OTTAWA SCHOOL DISTRICT



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN OTTAWA SCHOOL DISTRICT (continued)


Resources
Textbooks
Supplemental materials
Manipulatives
Technology
Materials reflect diversity
Worksheets: Open-ended/Fill-in/Multiple choice
EL
MS
HS