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Needs Analysis of Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools

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

I. Introduction

In September 2008, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) contracted with Cross & Jofus, 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).

The rationale for this model, called the Learning Network, was 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 five participating districts focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis comprised analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and three-day site visits¹ 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 & Jofus called Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities were 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 concluded with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Jofus for the district’s leadership that included a presentation of some preliminary findings. This report presents all findings and represents the culmination of the needs assessment for Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS).

KCKPS—the first district visited by Cross & Jofus as part of the Learning Network—has made remarkable progress in recent years. As noted on its website:

- KCKPS is one of only three districts in Kansas recognized in 2006 by the Academic Development Institute for significant increases in student achievement.
- KCKPS has been cited by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as “one of the most significant reforms in urban education.”

¹ The site visit for KCKPS occurred October 28-30, 2008.

- KCKPS is a recipient of the National School Boards Association MAGNA Award.
- Sumner High School was recognized as #124 on a list of top high schools in the country compiled by Newsweek magazine, the top high school in either Kansas or Missouri.
- Reading achievement has increased from 11% of students being proficient in 1996 to 53% meeting the standard in 2007.
- Math achievement has increased from 3% of students being proficient in 1996 to 53% meeting the standard in 2007. These gains in academic achievement cannot be matched by any school district, anywhere in the country.

Despite these accomplishments, KCKPS is not, and should not be, satisfied. Serving a poor (73% of the students), ethnically and racially diverse (18% White, 45% Black, 33% Hispanic, and 13% ELL) student population of 20,000, KCKPS student performance remains low relative to the state. For example, in 2007, 57.5% of KCKPS fourth graders were proficient in reading compared to 84.8% in Kansas, and 56.3% of KCKPS fourth graders were proficient in math compared to 86.0% in Kansas. And, as is many other districts, significant achievement gaps remain, most notably for English language learners. KCKPS did not demonstrate AYP for the fifth straight year, missing in 2008 for most subgroups including all students (reading and math), students receiving free and reduced price lunch (reading and math), students with disabilities (reading and math), ELL students (reading and math), African American students (math), and Hispanic students (reading and math).

II. Findings

Findings from the needs assessment of KCKPS are summarized below in the areas of leadership, empowering culture, human resources and professional development, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Leadership

One of the main, overarching findings of the district needs analysis is that the district lacks systemic coherence. Coherence means that “the elements of a school district work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy.”²

The district’s goal is to “strengthen instruction, relationships, community connections/PLCs, and belief in students and ourselves.” The (implied) theory of action is that all schools will implement a well-defined, core curriculum consistently across schools while helping teachers to differentiate instruction, engage students, and use high-level questioning of students. This theory of action assumes that the district’s central office has a tightly coupled, centralized approach to managing the instructional process.

² Childress, S., R. Elmore, A. Grossman, and Caroline King (2007). Note on the PELP Coherence Framework. Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University.

The problem is that the district is not organized to support this theory of action. The central office is organized to support instruction as follows: Instructional Executive Directors (IEDs) work with the school principals and Instructional Coaches (ICs) to implement the curriculum and professional development designed by the Teaching for Learning Executive Directors (T4L EDs). This structure fails to support the theory of action for several reasons:

- The IEDs are managed loosely by the superintendent and not coordinated with one another or with the T4L EDs.
- The EDs and ICs, none of whom have a job description, have not been given the time or resources to define their roles, responsibilities, and (non formal) relationship with one another.
- Key concepts, including differentiated instruction, have neither been defined nor planned for implementation.
- The Director of Equity to Close the Gap—who has professional development responsibilities—is another direct report to the superintendent with no connection to the EDs, and the Director of ESL reports to the T4L ED for elementary schools while the Director of Special Education reports to the T4L ED for secondary schools, all of which exacerbates divisions and reinforces “silos” among those responsible for the teaching and learning process.
- The Director of Federal Programs oversees school improvement as it relates to the Kansas State Department of Education but has no line authority within the district other than through the allocation and oversight of Title I funds.
- There is a significant lack of communication or dysfunctional communications between the business (e.g., finance, facilities, procurement, transportation, and nutrition services) and instructional sides of the district.

As a result of this organization structure and the lack of clarity of roles, tensions and “turfism” have arisen among senior staff, inefficiencies and frustration have increased among district staff and some principals, and, most critically, curriculum and professional development have been implemented inconsistently across clusters.

Many of the findings throughout this report are related to the need to foster and sustain systemic coherence throughout the district. Other key findings in the area of leadership include the following:

- The district has recently demonstrated significant gains in student achievement and, as a result, has some momentum. The district should take this opportunity to build support among the community by “marketing” its success.
- The board has a comprehensive improvement plan and has identified priorities:

- Expand enrollment in preK
 - Increase cooperation among Head Start and district preK programs
 - Increase understanding about the needs of and effective services for immigrant and language minority students
 - Expand and reinvigorate the family advocacy program
 - Increase community support
 - Increase high school graduation rate and readiness for college
 - Improve schools' ability to address student discipline issues.
- District leadership—which includes talented and committed educators and administrators—has demonstrated a willingness and ability to implement bold reforms and take important steps for improving student achievement. In addition, the school board is stable, unified, and focused on improving student outcomes and has a good relationship with the Mayor's office and other elected officials. That said, the district and city do not appear to work together effectively or systematically.
 - School facilities are old (average age of 52 years old) and ill equipped, and many are crowded. One result is limited opportunities for students to play and participate in high-quality fine arts and physical education programs. Capital needs have been estimated at \$147 million, and the district only has \$15 million budgeted. Despite the huge difference between facility needs and budget, and the relatively light debt burden (in 2006, the most recent year for which there are comparable data, the district spent \$449 per student on debt service compared to the state average of \$788 and the county average of \$1,130), the school board is opposed to asking the community for a bond.
 - Principals report that the central office maintenance, supply, and finance functions do not work efficiently enough to support high student and staff performance. For example, repairs frequently take a long time, the storeroom does not provide materials to the school in a timely fashion, and finances are not always accurate (money goes to the wrong school or “disappears” from principals' account without notification).
 - Despite a significant increase in the district's at-risk budget from the state, there is a perception in the district that the state's funding formula is not equitable because of the intense student need relative to surrounding districts. In addition, the district must contribute \$11 million out of its general fund to cover the cost of mandated special education services.
 - Although the district is planning to implement zero-based budgeting for supplies and equipment in 2009-10 (2010-11 will include staffing), principals will require significant amounts of persuading and training, and communication between the business and instructional departments of the district will need to be greatly improved for the program to be effective. Currently, some principals do not know

how much money they have in their budget, feel that rules for how they spend their money change arbitrarily, and are frustrated by the procurement process.

- The initiative to provide laptops to all high school students has met with early success and could become a promising practice if implementation goes according to plan. There is, however, a need to define the needs for computers at the elementary and middle school levels.

Empowering Culture

KCKPS exhibits some clear strengths that help to foster a school and district culture that supports the teaching and learning process:

- Teachers, administrators, and principals agree that the culture encourages risk-taking, such as addressing difficult subjects such as race (through Courageous Conversations) and self-assessment (through Critical Friends), and trusting teachers to make curriculum decisions.
- Teachers, administrators, principals, and students also agree that the culture fosters relationship building. For example, the Family Advocacy program builds relationships between students and teachers, SLCs in high school fosters relationship building among students and teachers.
- Teachers appreciate instructional supports such as the Instructional Coaches, building staff development, and classroom walk-throughs.
- There are some youth support services, such as those provided by the Workforce Partnership's Wyandotte County Career Center and the YWCA, available in the community.

KCKPS also must address some challenges relative to an empowering culture:

- The district serves an extremely needy student population. Almost 5 percent of KCKPS's student body was homeless (740 children, 20 of whom were unaccompanied) at some point in 2007-08, and that figure is expected to increase this year due to a difficult economy. Currently, there is only one homeless shelter (with 30 beds) in all of Wyandotte County and no services for homeless students who are 14-19 years old. There is a need for a shelter (similar to Joe's Place in Maplewood, MO) that houses and supports homeless teenagers. Also, with the exception of Rosedale Middle School, Washington High School, and Bridges-Wyandotte High Schools, school-based social, health, and economic services are not available in the system.
- There is a lack of support staff, particularly counselors, for social, emotional, and academic issues related to students and teachers. There are no counselors in the elementary schools. Some middle schools have one or two counselors, but others

have none. High schools have limited support staff. By putting all the support functions on the principals and teachers—who acknowledge needing assistance addressing severe student-behavior problems in classes—they are unable to meet student needs and time is taken away from the instructional focus.

- There is a widespread, regional bias against KCKPS, which affects recruiting, how students and parents perceive themselves, and general expectations for the functioning of the district, its employees, and students (with the exception of those in Sumner High School).
- At the high school level, all teachers, principals, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders with whom we spoke agreed that high academic expectations and opportunities are disproportionately concentrated at one magnet high school (Sumner) which houses all the IB courses and one AP course. Two of the other four high schools have two AP courses each, while the other two have no AP courses available, although they do have a cooperative program with the community college. Exacerbating the perceived difference is the belief that a significant amount of homework is required in the magnet school but none in the other high schools. Also, if Sumner students do not maintain a given academic performance level, they are returned to their local high school, contributing to the perception that there is one academic high school with high expectations and four alternative high schools. Moreover, many of those interviewed also said that accomplishments at Sumner are heavily lauded while the district administration and the community ignore accomplishments at the other schools. Finally, the selection of students for the magnet high school at the end of 7th grade depletes the middle schools of their 8th grade student leaders.

“[Except for Sumner], the District doesn’t believe in homework.” *A parent, with agreement from other parents*

- Principals, parents, and teachers highlighted blockages in and differing perceptions of essential communications pathways. Most of the teachers with whom we spoke complained that often information from district administration does not reach teachers, or does not reach them in a timely fashion (see discussion of professional development below). Teachers believe that there are many unnecessary interruptions (e.g., announcements) to learning time. The parents and some central office staff agreed that many teachers are afraid of parents and children and are therefore not making use of the parental supports for education that are there. Teachers with whom we spoke, on the other hand, said that there was no fear of parents or students.

“There’s no ongoing communication between teachers and parents. Parents are only called in when the school is kicking kids out.” *A parent, with agreement of other parents*

- There appears to be no accountability for teachers who do not perform. And teachers who do not perform complain that those who do are making them (the non-performers) look bad.
- Nearly all teachers and principals complain about a lack of customer service from central office staff providing maintenance and supply services to the schools. For example, principals agreed that the central office is not efficient when responding to schools, remitting supplies or being nice to teachers when they call and ask for help. At the same time, administrators on the “business side” of the central office, indicated that teachers and principals fail to follow clearly described policies or to appreciate that certain requests must go through pre-determined channels and cannot be filled instantaneously.
- There is very little parent involvement in most of KCKPS’s schools, and almost none in middle or high schools. In addition, communication between the district and the community could be improved. In particular, the district needs to educate the community—including business leaders—more effectively about recent impressive gains in student achievement.

“It’s extremely hard to be an involved parent in the district.” *A parent, with agreement of other parents*

Human Resources and Professional Development

Key findings related to human resources in KCKPS include the following:

- All staff positions were filled on the first day of school in the 2008-09 school year. Principals indicated, however, that many teachers hired at the end of August may not be optimal hires and that last minute teacher transfers by the central office plays havoc with master schedules at the high school level and leaves some elementary schools inappropriately staffed. For example, one principal reported that the central office reassigned all the first-grade teachers for looping purposes, leaving first grade to be taught solely by new hires. A middle school principal reported having successfully recruited a minority male teacher, only to have him reassigned by the central office to fill a vacant high school social studies teacher slot.

- The district now offers teacher salaries that are competitive with neighboring districts. All principals and teachers interviewed, however, agreed that new principals and teachers need a comprehensive mentoring program.
- Job descriptions for Instructional Coaches and Executive Directors are either non-existent or not updated so they are uncertain as to how they fit in the organizational structure, what their responsibilities are, and how they will be evaluated.

Key findings related to professional development in KCKPS include the following:

- Wednesday afternoon professional development is a potentially powerful lever for instructional improvement. However, there is very little accountability for principals and instructional coaches for delivering effective professional development on Wednesday afternoons. In addition, teachers, principals, and instructional coaches agreed that staff development is fragmented and that the district and schools deploy initiatives—including curricular and software programs—inconsistently, resulting in uneven or ineffective implementation.
- There is inconsistent evaluation of professional development for assessing the impact of that training on instruction.
- There is a need for additional training and continuous support with integrating technology into instruction.
- Since each school designs its own training and support systems for teachers, there is inconsistency in the quality of the training and therefore the quality of implementing the curriculum at all levels.
- There is a district-wide need to integrate research-based instructional strategies for English language learners into the overarching model for professional development. There is also a need for ongoing support for English language learners.
- Principals and teachers agreed that the Balanced Literacy program is not being successfully implemented as teachers are not prepared for the decision-making necessary and are spending “way too much time” developing lessons rather than implementing them.
- There are instructional coaches in every school and they are widely lauded as key drivers of instructional improvement. All teachers, principals, and instructional coaches interviewed, however, agreed that there are not enough instructional coaches. Moreover, not all ICs have the subject area and coaching skills necessary to be an effective instructional coach.

“Instructional Coaches have to be experts in the subject area they are assigned to coach and expert coaches. Some are neither; or only one.” *High school teacher*

- The Fellows program for mid-career changers was noted as a promising practice.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Findings related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment—while frequently overlapping are presented in those categories below. More detail about the data collected during classroom visitations using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process, cited below, can be found in the appendix of this report.

Curriculum

KCKPS exhibits some clear strengths related to curriculum:

- The district has adopted/developed curricular programs at all levels of schooling:
 - Elementary: Read 180, Literacy by Design, Math Investigations, and FOSS science kits.
 - Middle school: Connected Math, Literacy First, Secondary Science written by KCK with lessons and assessments, History/Social Science with benchmark curriculum.
 - High School: Integrated Math Program, Literacy First, District’s Benchmark “I Can” curriculum.
- District and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are available online, and executive directors are expected to use the SIPs to frame their work with principals and coaches.
- The ESOL unit has 75 trained staff to facilitate instructional support for diverse learning needs.
- K-PALSS observations found *significant evidence* (70-100% of classrooms visited) of standards-based instruction.³
- K-PALSS observations found *evidence* (50-69% of classrooms visited) of teachers providing checks for student understanding and feedback regarding progress with the curriculum.

³ Please see appendix for detailed data from K-PALSS.

KCKPS also must address some challenges relative to curriculum:

- At the elementary school level, many teachers were not fully trained to implement the curriculum and were not provided the opportunity to participate in follow-up sessions due to loss of funding.
- Reading First is not being implemented with fidelity across the district and in some cases is not being implemented at all.
- At the middle school level:
 - The curriculum is not aligned with the benchmark tests.
 - Teachers believe that they were not engaged in the curriculum development process.
 - There is insufficient training to support implementation of the curriculum with the rigor needed to impact student learning.
 - Training has focused on teaching to the benchmark, not the curriculum.
 - A lack of funding has prevented purchasing consultant time for Literacy First.
 - History and social science are disconnected.
- At the high school level, the benchmarks have become the de facto curriculum for mathematics.
- Overall, K-PALSS observation found *minimal evidence* (less than 50% of all classrooms visited) of implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum, readings, and perspectives to address diverse learning needs.

Instruction

In general, KCKPS teachers and, to an even more pronounced degree, principals believe that sound instructional practices are strongly evident in their schools. Table 1 presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 15.3%) and principals (response rate 41.7%) administered online by Cross & Joftus.

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

- using data to determine staff development (cited as strongly evident by 80% of principals);
- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (70% of principals); and
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (55% of principals).

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

- delivering subject matter at an appropriately rigorous level (selected as strongly evident by 15% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 5%);
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support student learning (selected as strongly evident by 15% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 35%); and
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (selected as strongly evident by 20% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 20%).

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 61% of teachers);
- using data to determine staff development (54% of teachers);
- identifying students who are struggling to master content and providing them with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction (43% of teachers);
- fostering collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community (42% of teachers);
- 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 (41% of teachers);
- providing equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners (41% of teachers); and
- having students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments (40% of teachers).

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

- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (selected as strongly evident by 13% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 44%);
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support student learning (selected as strongly evident by 15% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 46%); and
- measuring 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 teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 31%).

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

Percentage of respondents rating the extent to which they believe the following instructional practices are evident in their schools.	Principals#		Teachers~	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	80%	0%	54%	8%
Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	70%	0%	61%	2%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	55%	10%	30%	29%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	40%	15%	42%	18%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	40%	5%	32%	27%
Educators use 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.	40%	10%	41%	14%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	35%	0%	40%	15%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	35%	5%	33%	23%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	35%	0%	22%	31%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	35%	15%	38%	16%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by	30%	10%	43%	25%

Percentage of respondents rating the extent to which they believe the following instructional practices are evident in their schools.	Principals#		Teachers~	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.				
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	30%	20%	30%	29%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	25%	5%	41%	7%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	25%	10%	29%	18%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	25%	10%	31%	23%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	20%	15%	26%	36
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	20%	20%	13%	44%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	15%	35%	15%	46%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	15%	5%	31%	16%

Source: Cross & Jofthus survey of KCKPS principals and teachers October 2008.

*The response option “Evident” was deleted from this presentation to help highlight differences.

^The response option “No Opinion” was deleted from this presentation. No principals and generally less than 1% of teachers selected this option on any response.

#Response rate was 41.7%.

~Response rate was 15.3%.

Cross & Jofthus observations through the K-PALSS process and interviews and focus groups with administrators and teachers confirmed and added depth to some of the positive beliefs of principals and teachers expressed through their surveys. K-PALSS observations found *strong evidence* (observed in at least 70% of classrooms visited) that teachers:

- Provided classrooms that were orderly, clean, and safe and displayed samples of student work in support of high expectations.
- Demonstrated high expectations for students.
- Provided teacher-led instruction in a whole-group setting.
- Adjusted for learning styles using predominantly visual and auditory modalities.
- Used supplemental materials as resources to adjust for diverse learning needs.

In addition, observations found *evidence* (observed in 50-69% of classrooms visited) that teachers incorporated the use of technology into classroom practices (except at the elementary level where technology was used in only 3% of classrooms visited), used cues and questioning of students (although at the high school level only 27% of teachers observed did so), and reinforced student efforts and recognized accomplishments.

Other strengths related to instruction include the following:

- The benchmarking program has focused accountability of teachers and students and has resulted in increasing the percentage of students scoring proficient and above.
- The provision of laptops to all high school students demonstrates the district's commitment to support students being able to meet the demands of the 21st century.
- Libraries serve as vital resources, including an on-line resource bank for teachers with lesson plans.
- The move toward all-day kindergarten should result in significant academic and social benefits for students.

Several challenges related to instruction also emerged during the needs analysis:

- There is limited evidence that technology has been integrated into the instructional program, including at the high school level where all students have been provided laptops.
- Inconsistent training and uneven levels of follow-up support from peers/coaches has resulted in teachers having insufficient skills for integrating benchmarking into the total process of standards-based learning.
- Implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) would benefit students and teachers.

“We are not structured to support implementation. It feels like we are running in a hamster wheel—our days are filled with activity but we’re not making any progress.” *Academic coach*

- There exists a lack of procedures for monitoring and modifying educational practices to build continuity with professional development sessions conducted during Wednesday release and common planning time. There is a need to use the analysis of student work protocol identified in the Critical Friends process (which 700 secondary teachers were trained to implement) and to use information conducted during classroom observation visits to systematically inform future professional development and instructional supports.
- K-PALSS observations found **minimal evidence** (observed in less than half the classrooms) that teachers:
 - Provided instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking (rigor) aligned to state assessment question that require Bloom’s cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
 - Used inquiry-based or student-led lessons.
 - Used small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning practices.
 - Used modeling or guided practice.
 - Provided homework and connected it to instructional practice (except at the middle school level where it was observed in 59% of classrooms visited)
 - Demonstrated the following research-based practices that enhance student learning: (a) identify similarities and differences; (b) summarize and take notes; and (c) represent knowledge in multiple ways.

Assessment

KCKPS exhibited several strengths related to evaluation, assessment, and use of data:

- K-PALSS observations found **significant evidence** (70-100% of classrooms visited) that the results from district and classroom assessments were prominently displayed in classrooms.
- K-PALSS observations found **evidence** (50-69% of classrooms visited) of demonstration of student learned assessed using verbal-linguistic and mathematical-logistical skills.

Other strengths related to evaluation, assessment, and use of data include:

- Benchmark tests have been widely implemented.

- Multiple assessments are administered at all three levels of schooling and were designed to provide feedback on student learning progress.
- A data warehouse has been implemented for the storage of summative test data.
- “Critical Friends” training has been provided to over 700 secondary teachers to establish a common protocol for examining student work.

Several challenges were also identified. First, K-PALSS observations found *minimal evidence* (0-49% of classrooms visited) of students being provided with opportunities for self-evaluation to increase shared responsibility for future learning. In addition:

- No system wide process has been implemented consistently for using data from tests to provide appropriate intervention, share modified lessons based on data analysis during grade level meetings, or support work with coaches/co-teaching/peer visitation program.

Educators are “...overwhelmed and drowning in data, yet parched for information on how to use it.” *Administrator*

- There is an inconsistent process for systematically building capacity of all teachers to use the protocol for the scoring of the Kansas Writing Assessment.
- Assessments are aligned but proficiency levels are not equated.
- Principals and coaches need training on how to access and use the benchmark test data in a timely manner to inform instruction, and there is limited evidence that educators, students, parents, and administrators are regularly and systematically involved in the ongoing student performance data review process

III. Recommendations for Technical Assistance

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district would 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 recommend that the technical assistance provided to KCKPS address one or more of the following general recommendations:

- 1) Develop a plan and create systems for fostering and sustaining systemic coherence, which includes addressing issues related to organizational structure, roles and responsibilities of senior staff, communication among senior staff, strategies for supporting schools and holding them accountable, and strategies for improving the quality and consistency of professional development across

schools. *Due to its impact on all other recommendations, Cross & Joftus strongly recommends that the district implement this recommendation prior to—or at least at the same time as—any of the following recommendations.*

- 2) Develop or refine a plan and strategies for improving instruction to address the challenges outlined in the findings above.
- 3) Design and provide ongoing professional development and support for teachers with English language learners.
- 4) Systematize walk-throughs and other evaluation strategies as a way to hone professional development and leverage instructional improvement.
- 5) Develop and implement a plan for providing social services at schools to address the social, health, and economic needs of students and the discipline problems faced by teachers.
- 6) Develop and implement a plan for expanding access to preK, including an improved partnership with Head Start and other local providers.
- 7) Develop and implement a plan for improving communications internally and externally.
- 8) Develop a plan and implement strategies for strengthening non-magnet high schools, increasing the high school graduation rate, and improving the community's perception of these schools.

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Joftus will contact the KCKPS superintendent to finalize a technical assistance plan that includes approximately 24 days of external support for the time period January through June of 2009. 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 K-PALSS Classroom Observations
KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) protocol and process, Cross & Jofus 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 alike (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, 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 (40 classrooms)

+		Δ	
100% provided orderly, clean, safe classrooms	T E A C H I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of cultural diversity needs to be clearly expressed/demonstrated to students. 	
100 % displayed student work			
35% respected cultural diversity			
92% supported high expectations			
70% showed evidence of standards-based instruction		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active engagement of students in the learning process would be strengthened by using inquiry-based and student-led learning as well as continual checks of understanding occurring throughout the lesson. Use of small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning needs to increase. 	
8% used inquiry-based lesson 78% used whole-group instruction 20% used flexible small skill group			
25% used cooperative learning groups			
78% Teacher-led learning 15% Student-led learning			
35% used modeling			
100% checked for understanding			
25% provided guided practice			
50% provided for independent practice			
85% adjusted for multiple learning styles using a predominance of visual and auditory		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questioning techniques that extend student learning to higher levels of critical thinking are necessary. A larger repertoire of instructional strategies is necessary to provide culturally responsive teaching and address diverse language needs Need to increase demonstration of the following practices which were only evident in 10-43% of the classes visited: identify similarities & differences, summarize & take notes, use homework & practice opportunities, represent knowledge in multiple ways, set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback, and generate & test hypotheses. 	
18% incorporated culturally responsive readings/perspectives or addressed diverse language needs			
93% reinforced efforts & provided recognition			
100% used cues and questioning			

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (40 classrooms)

+		Δ
53% of students demonstrated their knowledge in multiple ways and received feedback on their performance Less than 1% of students were involved in self-evaluation	L E A R N I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rigorous, active engagement in learning needs to be demonstrated by students with opportunities provided for them to be involved in self-evaluation.
25% Knowledge Level		
40% Comprehension Level		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to provide instruction and opportunities for higher-level thinking skills. • Need to provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate their knowledge and be involved in self-evaluation and take responsibility for future learning.
28% Application Level		
15% Analysis Level		
15% Synthesis Level		
Less than 1% Evaluation Level		
55% individual work/projects		
35% performance/presentation		
Less than 1% self-evaluation/ reflection		
23% used textbooks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of technology and manipulatives should be increased to address diverse learning needs and extend the use of resources beyond supplemental materials and worksheets.
78% used supplemental materials/worksheets		
53% used manipulatives		
3% used technology		

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (17 classrooms)

+		Δ
94% provided orderly, clean, safe classrooms	T E A C H I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of cultural diversity needs to be expressed/demonstrated to students using materials/resources.
76% displayed student work		
29% respected cultural diversity		
94% supported high expectations		
82% showed evidence of standards-based instruction		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active engagement of students in the learning process would be strengthened by using inquiry-based, student- led learning as well as guided practice to check for understanding.
94% used whole-group instruction		
1% used inquiry-based learning using small / cooperative learning groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to increase use of small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning practices.
73% teacher-led learning 23% student-led learning		
17% used modeling		
65% checked for understanding		
23% provided guided practice		
40% provided for independent practice		
88% adjusted for multiple learning styles with a predominance of visual and auditory modalities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning techniques that extend student learning to higher levels of critical thinking are necessary. • Need to increase demonstration of the following practices, evident in only 0%-18% of the classrooms visited: summarize & take notes, incorporate culturally responsive techniques/readings, address diverse language needs, identify similarities & differences, represent knowledge in multiple ways, generate & test hypotheses and organize learning in groups.
76% used cues and questioning 59% used homework & practice opportunities		
53% reinforced efforts & provided recognition		
35% set objectives & provided immediate/continuous feedback		

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (17 classrooms)

+		Δ
88% of students actively participated in class work 59% of classes provided feedback to students regarding their performance 23% demonstrated knowledge using predominantly verbal linguistic responses & logical-mathematical skills 0% of students were involved in self-evaluation	L E A R N I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rigorous, active engagement needs to be provided to students with opportunities provided for them to be involved in self-evaluation and to increase shared responsibility for future learning.
4% Knowledge Level		
59% Comprehensive Level		
41% Application Level		
12% Analysis Level		
0% Synthesis Level		
0% Evaluation Level		
94% individual work		
76% written work/project 18% presentation/performance		
0% self-evaluation/reflection		
11% used textbooks 94% used supplemental materials/worksheets 18% used manipulatives 53% used technology		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction needs to provide opportunities for higher level thinking skills and self-evaluation.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons need to integrate students using technology and manipulatives to address diverse learning needs.

HIGH SCHOOLS (11 classrooms)

+		△
100% provided orderly, clean, safe classrooms	T E A C H I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of cultural diversity needs to be expressed/demonstrated to students using materials/resources.
82 % displayed student work		
27% respected cultural diversity		
90% supported high expectations		
70% showed evidence of standards-based instruction		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of content/literacy standards needs to be in every classroom. Use of small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning needs to increase.
73% used whole-group/teacher-led instruction		
27% used small-group instruction		
0% used cooperative learning groups		
1% used student-led learning & modeling		
45% checked for understanding		
54% provided guided practice		
0% provided for independent practice		
36% adjusted for multiple learning styles with a predominance of visual and auditory modalities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questioning techniques that extend student learning to higher levels of critical thinking are necessary. Need to increase demonstration of the following practices which were evident in 0%-18% of the classrooms visited: incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives, address diverse language needs, identify similarities & differences, summarize & take notes, represent knowledge in multiple ways, organize learning in groups, and set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback.
73% reinforced efforts & provided recognition		
36% used homework & practice opportunities		
27% generated & tested hypotheses & used cues and questioning		

HIGH SCHOOLS (11 classrooms)

+		Δ
100% of students actively participated in class work 27% demonstrated knowledge in verbal-linguistic & logical-mathematical ways and received feedback on their performance 0% were involved in self-evaluation	L E A R N I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rigorous, active engagement needs to be provided including self-evaluation opportunities for students.
36% Knowledge Level		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction needs to provide opportunities for higher-level thinking skills & self-evaluation.
45% Comprehensive Level		
0% Application Level		
18% Analysis Level		
0% Synthesis Level		
0% Evaluation Level		
82% individual work/projects		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of technology and manipulatives should be increased to address diverse learning needs and take advantage of all senior high students having access to their individual laptops as part of the high school program.
1% performance/presentation		
0%self-evaluation/reflection		
27% used textbooks 100% used supplemental materials/worksheets 1% used manipulatives		
64% used technology		