

November | 09

Needs Analysis of Peabody-Burns School District – USD 398

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 & 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 Peabody-Burns School District, USD 398.

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 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 & 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 Peabody-Burns School District, USD 398 (referred to throughout the report as the district or Peabody-Burns).

This rural consolidated district serves 357 students from two communities located 17 miles apart and separated by poorly maintained roads. Peabody, the larger of the two, has

¹ The site visit for Peabody-Burns occurred October 20-22, 2009.

a population of 1,400. Burns has 300 residents, including a small Mennonite community that operates its own school. Some students from Burns attend school in nearby Remington.

Despite its small size, Peabody-Burns leaders and staff are working hard to ensure that all students receive a high-quality educational experience. Rex Watson has been the superintendent of Peabody-Burns for two and a half years, and during his tenure, a number of positive steps have been taken. New high school teachers have been hired, raising the quality of the teaching force, and the district has established a day-care program for staff members' children as an incentive for teachers to work in the district. The district has also developed a Success Center for students who fall behind in coursework or want to accelerate their academic progress. There is Boys Town Training program that helps develop students' character. And, while the district offers no AP courses, students can take college courses through a co-operative arrangement.

Peabody-Burns is understandably not satisfied, however. The percentage of students at the junior-senior high level demonstrating adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state reading tests has fallen from 83.9 percent in 2005-2006 to 75.3 percent in 2008-09. And, junior-senior high math achievement, while on the rise for a couple of years, fell last year as well, from 72.7 percent in 2007-09, to 59 percent in 2008-09. Further, students with disabilities are failing to demonstrate AYP in both reading and math, and economically disadvantaged students at the junior-senior high level are failing to demonstrate AYP in reading. Of the five school districts in Marion County, Peabody-Burns has the highest percentage of students receiving free and reduced priced meals, as well as a high percentage of students in foster care. Economic stagnation, an aging population, multigenerational poverty, and limited political leadership continue to threaten this district's vitality.

As the findings below demonstrate, stakeholders appear to have faith in Peabody-Burns leadership and potential for improvement. Currently, however, the district lacks systemic coherence—there is not a clear vision for improvement or a strategic plan to ensure improvement. And while there have been many positive developments within the areas of curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development, these efforts are not enough on their own. Peabody-Burns must address the larger challenge of developing a focused approach to improvement.

The report elaborates on 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 Peabody-Burns are summarized below in the areas of Leadership; Empowering Culture; Human Capital; and Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development.

Leadership

There is widespread optimism in the community about the district’s leadership and the superintendent’s work to accelerate improvement. In the words of one board member, “this is the best leadership we’ve had in 30 years.” The superintendent is focused on attracting and retaining quality teachers, and the district has already begun the process of hiring new teachers at the high school level. The superintendent has also identified professional development as a key improvement priority.

“Until last year, we had no real professional development.” – *Peabody-Burns administrator*

Under the superintendent’s leadership—in an effort to ensure that more young people stay in school and graduate—the district created a Hot Rodders Club and is working to expand vocational/agricultural activities. The superintendent is working to strengthen professional development offerings and has developed a monthly newsletter, so that citizens have regular information about what’s happening in the district. When asked during interviews why this superintendent is a good fit for the district, one board member responded: “he’s what we need here because he thinks ‘outside the box.’” Other board members agreed.

Despite these very positive signs, however, it was clear from the needs assessment 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 Though the district is moving quickly, and has implemented a number of improvements, Peabody-Burns lacks a focused and clearly articulated strategy for improvement.

The superintendent recognizes that the district’s improvement efforts are only loosely connected and not driven by a strategy that spurs a systematic agenda for change. Moreover, since the district is small and leadership has broad support, there is a risk that leaders may move too quickly, or be too flexible, losing sight of overall district priorities for improvement in the process. Peabody-Burns needs to develop an instructionally focused theory of change and create and implement a strategic plan tied to the theory of change, with specific action steps, milestones for progress, and outcome measures.

Additional challenges in the area of leadership include the following:

- Increasing the performance capacity of teachers should be a priority. More than one-third of teachers surveyed felt that subject matter is not delivered with sufficient rigor. There are currently only two classroom coaches for the junior-senior high school, and the mentoring of new teachers appears inconsistent.

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

- In the opinion of some teachers surveyed, large class size in several grades restricts teachers’ abilities to work effectively with at-risk students and students with disabilities.
- The district has a small mix of important extracurricular activities, e.g., the new Hot Rodders Club, a quality stage band, an outstanding BPA program (Business Professionals of America), and an active forensics team. At the same time, there is no systematic plan for growing and deepening expanded learning opportunities beyond the normal school day.³
- Some interviewees felt that school board members could play valuable roles as ambassadors to the community—to build greater support for improving student success. The superintendent has begun to engage board members in this way, and this is a positive sign.
- A final area that would benefit from a more strategic and coherent approach is special education. While leaders and staff are working to improve services for students with disabilities, principals and teachers acknowledge that these students are not viewed as all educators’ responsibility. Improved communication and coordination could lead to improved service quality for and increased achievement among students with disabilities.

Empowering Culture

The district and surrounding communities appear to display a “can do” spirit in the face of limited resources and restricted capacity to grow. Interviewees reflected a sense of guarded optimism about meeting the needs of all students. There appears to be substantial individual initiative on the part of teachers and some parents to tackle issues and find ways to improve learning opportunities. Children’s healthy development and academic success remain a priority for the larger community. For example, there is a community center in town (the “Hub”) that serves as a popular gathering place for teens. Its founders, a local professional couple, recognize the important role it serves and are struggling to keep it open with help from local churches.

The board is proud of teachers’ commitment to helping students succeed. As one member put it: “our staff is second to none when it comes to doing what’s best for our kids.” Several parents of academically advanced students expressed enthusiasm for the district’s efforts to provide these students with extra opportunities to learn. One parent who has lived in communities outside the state exclaimed that her child was getting a wonderful education in the district, noting that “this is the best school system I’ve ever been in.” Some interviewees also expressed the sentiment that the district’s real strength is being a close-knit community.

³ For resources and information on expanded learning opportunities, see Deich, S. (2009). *Using Expanded Learning to Support School Reforms: Funding Sources and Strategies*, Bethesda, MD: Cross & Joftus, LLC. The report can be accessed at http://edstrategies.net/focus_2.php.

Nonetheless, the needs assessment uncovered a number of ongoing challenges:

“The greatest crime we commit here is having low expectations for too many of our students.” –
District administrator

- Some educators and community members appear to have preconceived notions about which students are most inclined to succeed academically. All students are not expected to do so. The district needs to pay greater attention to the learning needs of children and youth with disabilities and to accelerating their progress.
- Community members, teachers, and students express frustration about limited opportunities for out-of-school learning. The Hub is struggling to remain open, and other opportunities are very limited. In the opinion of some interviewees, however, there is also resistance to opening alternative programs that might detract from the district’s efforts to meet high academic goals. This ambiguity could be helped with a more coherent approach to expanded learning.
- In addition to a small county newspaper, the superintendent’s monthly newsletter keeps citizens current about the progress of their schools. The superintendent’s newsletter aside, however, there appear to be continuing questions about how to improve communications inside the district and between the district and community. Some believe the district’s communication efforts are insufficient to generate civic enthusiasm for change. They emphasize the need to inform people in ways that highlight significant areas of progress, clarify difficult issues, and address the interests and expectations of the district as well as the community.
- The superintendent is a strong believer in the need for teachers, students, and citizens to take active roles in improving the vitality of the learning environment. This goal, however, appears to be hampered by having too few people doing too many important tasks with too few resources. There is little doubt that the small size of the consolidated district and continuing financial pressures limit the district’s approach to improvement, innovation, and the effective empowerment of all to participate.
- Neither the district nor the community has paid much attention to the opportunity of having older students serve as mentors and coaches for younger students. On a related note, student voices do not appear to be part of the discussion about how to make the district a better place for learning or how to improve the social environment for children and young adults.

Human Capital

The district budget (roughly \$3 million this year) supports a lean operation that requires Peabody-Burns to be very economical—there are no individual directors or managers for personnel, facilities and grounds, curriculum, sports, or finance, for example. All of the district’s human resources functions are handled by building principals with help from support staff. Moreover, principals and select teachers who shoulder additional responsibilities receive no added support in these roles.

This lack of resources creates several challenges for Peabody-Burns:

- The district is working to accelerate the progress of students unable to keep up with the curriculum through differentiated instruction. Teachers, however, note that they have limited capacity and technical support to use differentiated instruction. The district recognizes this and is making an effort to pay greater attention to teachers’ needs and to develop a more systematic and effective strategy to make differentiated instruction work.
- It appears that there are no clear performance expectations for staff positions or protocols for evaluating performance overall.
- Teachers also expressed the need for a more positive work environment that supports teachers and staff who cope with difficult student learning situations.
- There appears to be little opportunity for teachers to learn from one another on the job. One teacher expressed strong interest in having more engaged discussions with other teachers across grade levels about how to help students overcome specific learning challenges. Another teacher observed that there is a need for the use of more effective diagnostic tools in the early grades to help keep children from falling too far behind.
- The district has invested substantially in technology to support learning. It’s unclear, though, to what extent this resource is helping teachers work more efficiently and effectively. Some teachers expressed the need for more assistance in using technology to monitor student progress and adapt instruction to different learning needs.

Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development

Findings related to the areas of curriculum, assessment, 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 Parsons’ 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.

The need for a clearly articulated strategy of improvement is evident in many areas throughout the following sections of the report. While the district has taken several steps to strengthen curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development, a number of these steps appear disconnected from each other—or at the very least, are not working seamlessly to improve learning outcomes for students.

Curriculum

Peabody-Burns exhibits some clear curriculum strengths:

- Both teachers and administrators identified the District Curriculum Council as a valuable district asset. The Curriculum Council has developed an explicit and systematic process to evaluate and review the curriculum.
- The district has a written curriculum for all grades and subjects, with the exception of vocational technology. The curriculum appears to be aligned with state standards and assessments.
- The curriculum also offers links to continuing education. Students can receive dual credit through several area colleges. And, Peabody-Burns is working to build a partnership with Tabor College to begin a teacher-preparation program at the high school. The district day-care program is also staffed in part by Peabody-Burns high school students who earn valuable work experience while they attend school.

The district also faces several curriculum challenges, many of which are related to the larger issues of focus and coherence:

- Both surveys and focus groups with principals and teachers noted that the district lacks an effective process to monitor and assess implementation of the curriculum. There is a disconnect between the District Curriculum Council’s written curriculum and what is taught in the classroom. When asked what practices should be implemented by the school or district to support increased student achievement, the most frequent response teachers and administrators gave was “the district curriculum needs to be followed.”

“Our district curriculum is aligned with the state standards and IF taught, our students should be able to achieve well on the assessments.” -- *Classroom teacher*

- Peabody-Burns lacks a systematic process to ensure curricular alignment between the elementary school and the junior-senior high school. Informal conversations occur between teachers and administrators at both schools. When disagreement results, however, there is no formal process for reaching a solution or a policy to guide decision-making, resulting in a lack of alignment between the schools.
- Improved communication is needed between special education and general education teachers and staff around curriculum issues and student learning outcomes. Likewise, communication between the district and the cooperative regarding special education goals and professional development is also lacking.

Assessment

Peabody has a number of strengths related to assessments and the use of data.

- The district provides time for all staff to review state assessment data. Teachers and administrators use the Red, White, and Blue process to evaluate student performance on tested indicators.⁴ Teacher focus groups and survey results indicated that professional development on the evaluation of state assessment data was the most effective professional development facilitated by the district.
- The district has coordinated the implementation of the state required assessment program. Teachers and students have access to computers for practice of the Center for Education Testing and Evaluation (CETE) formative assessments, and the Kids Identification System (KIDS) is updated for accurate student identification so that student data can be disaggregated.
- The elementary school teachers regularly use formative assessments—DIBELS and teacher-developed quarterly assessments in mathematics—to guide tiered instruction.

Peabody-Burns also faces several assessment challenges, most of which are directly connected to its strengths:

- Although the district provides time for all staff to review state assessment data, there is currently no district-wide process that enables educators to work together to use data to inform instruction—enabling educators to examine student work, modify instructional practices, develop lessons collaboratively (including special

⁴ The Red, White, and Blue is a process used to identify students who scored “below standard,” “meets standards,” and “exemplary” on the Kansas State Assessments. This process allows teachers to then focus instruction on specific areas of the curriculum.

education staff), and continuously review assessment data to inform future practice.

- The district lacks a longitudinal data system to track student performance and to link performance data from multiple assessments (e.g., screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, formative assessments, and state assessments). The district has access to technology and personnel to create such a system. Staff will need professional development, however, to manage and interpret data effectively, and most important, use it to inform instruction.
- The junior-senior high school does not have common formative assessments to inform instruction. Individual teachers use end of unit tests, which provide summary grades but may not inform instruction.

Instruction

Table 1 presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 57%) and principals (response rate 100%) administered online by Cross & Jofus. 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.

Since the number of survey respondents was small—two of two principals participated along with 20 of 37 teachers—data in the following table should be interpreted carefully. Please note that the table does not include “evident” responses, to highlight differences.

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

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited by 50% of principals as strongly evident and 0% as not evident or minimally evident)
- collaboratively functioning as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources (cited by 50% of principals as strongly evident and 0% as not evident or minimally evident).

The sound instructional strategies that *principals* believe to be ***least evident*** include:

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited by 100% of principals as minimally evident or not evident)
- measuring the effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (cited by 100% of principals as minimally evident or not evident).

At least one principal cited several strategies as “minimally or not evident.”

- empowering students to participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities
- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress
- delivering subject matter to students at an appropriately rigorous level
- administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.

Teachers' views are not entirely dissimilar from principals' views, but there are some significant differences.

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

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 80% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 1%)
- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited as strongly evident by 50% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0%).

While teachers believe that a few strategies are strongly evident, *teachers' responses were divided* on a number of strategies between ***least evident*** and ***strongly evident***, for example:

- collaboratively functioning as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources (cited by 30% of teachers as strongly evident and 25% as not evident or minimally evident)
- participating in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation (cited by 30% of teachers as strongly evident and 30% as not evident or minimally evident)
- participating in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation (cited by 30% of teachers as strongly evident and 30% as not evident or minimally evident)
- applying research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students (cited by 25% of teachers as strongly evident and 25% as not evident or minimally evident).

Among the strategies *teachers* believe to be ***least evident*** are:

- empowering students to participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments (cited by 10% of teachers as strongly evident and by 60% as not evident or minimally evident)

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited by 15% of teachers as strongly evident and by 45% as minimally evident or not evident).

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.	50%	0%	80%	1%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	50%	0%	30%	25%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	0%	0%	50%	0%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	0%	0%	35%	15%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	0%	0%	30%	20%
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.	0%	0%	25%	10%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	0%	0%	30%	30%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	0%	0%	30%	30%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	0%	0%	25%	25%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school	0%	0%	15%	15%

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^
personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.				
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	0%	0%	15%	25%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	0%	0%	10%	25%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	0%	50%	25%	15%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	0%	50%	5%	35%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	0%	50%	10%	35%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	0%	50%	15%	45%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	0%	50%	10%	60%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	0%	100%	30%	35%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	0%	100%	15%	25%

Teacher Response Rate = 20/37

Principal Response Rate = 2/2

Source: Cross & Jofstus survey of Peabody-Burns principals and teachers October 2009.

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

^The response option “No Opinion” was deleted from this presentation. Zero percent of teachers and 0% of principals selected this option on any response.

Survey responses tell only part of the story. Focus groups with teachers and administrators as well as classroom visits uncovered several instructional strengths in Peabody-Burns:

- Principal and teacher focus groups identified the district’s technology support as an important strength. The district is implementing a District Technology Plan to strengthen the teaching and learning process. Further, every teacher has a computer in the classroom; district-wide, students have access to over 100 computers; there are Smart Boards and Interwrite Pads in some classrooms; and several on-line learning tools (e.g., United Steaming, Learn 360, and Interactive Student Learning) are available. All teachers have the opportunity to acquire needed resources using a “justification process,” through the superintendent’s office.
- During visits to seven elementary classrooms and seven junior-senior high classrooms using the Cross & Jofthus Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success, the following effective instructional practices were observed:
 - All classrooms represented orderly and well-managed environments conducive to learning.
 - Visual and auditory learning styles were empowered in 100% of the classrooms visited.
 - Educators used the strategy “checking for understanding” to monitor student learning needs in 100% of the classrooms visited.
 - Instructional activities requiring some level of analysis were observed in 57% of the junior-senior high classrooms visited.

The needs assessment also uncovered a number of additional instructional challenges:

- Teachers in focus groups noted that strong content knowledge is a strength of staff across the district. At the same time, however, teachers acknowledged that they lack adequate knowledge and sufficient practice to implement effective instructional strategies to support student learning of the content. Further, the district lacks an instructional design and delivery model to select the “research-informed practices” it wishes to promote. It needs to implement a system to ensure that practices are understood and used effectively by general and special education staff members.⁵

“We need a research-based reading program with strategies to address the different learning needs of students, especially at the junior-senior high level. I am left to find it on my own; there is no overall focus.” –*Special education teacher*

- The district lacks systematic procedures for conducting classroom visits—procedures that monitor the implementation of varied and research-based

⁵ The district should consider a model that engages students in instructional activities that are predictably linked to gains in student achievement . See for example, Marzano, R.J, Pickering, DJ & Pollock, J.E. (2001). *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Also see Lazear, D. (1991). *Seven Ways of Knowing: Teaching for Multiple Intelligences*. Palatine, IL: Skylight Publishing.

instructional practices, provide substantive feedback to teachers, and follow-up with support in order to target practices that accelerate student learning.

- Instructional materials and strategies are not jointly selected by the district and the special education cooperative to ensure alignment with the core curriculum and to promote the practice required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)—that special education services must be designed to help students with disabilities “have access to and make progress in the core curriculum.” This year, a co-teaching model was implemented at the junior-senior high school—a positive sign—without, however, any professional development to ensure effective implementation.
- There is a need to develop consistent guidelines for the early identification and support for low-performing students by differentiating instructional practices. This appears to be a serious need—only 55.6% of students with disabilities scored proficient and above on the Kansas State Reading and Mathematics Assessment. The district’s graduation rate fell by 5.1% in 2008-09; moreover, the graduation rate for students with disabilities declined by 46.7% last year. Classroom walkthroughs at the junior-senior high school also found that:
 - 71% of classrooms used worksheets, while manipulatives were used only 14% of the time
 - materials reflecting diversity did not appear to be in use.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Peabody-Burns exhibited the following strengths related to professional development:

- The district calendar provides time for collaboration and professional development. Five days were set aside for professional development before school started; teachers also receive one day of collaboration time per month, and the district has approved more time at the end of the school year if needed.
- Peabody-Burns uses My Learning Plan to manage the professional development points staff members need for licensure and movement on the salary schedule.

Professional development challenges include the following:

- Teachers and administrators in focus groups all agreed that district professional development lacks focus and is not data driven. There is a need for a professional development plan that includes a systematic process to identify needs and challenges, support implementation of improvements through coaching and feedback, and measure effectiveness. The plan must be focused on data that identify students’ instructional needs as well as the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) requirements.

“The professional development provided by the district is good for the elementary level, but there is no focus and no time to practice. We don’t have anyone to say, ‘did you try that... how did it go?’” –*Special education staff member*

- Although the district has invested in technology, teachers in focus groups pointed out that there is insufficient professional development to support teachers’ learning. Many reported feeling inadequately trained to maximize the use of technology to support the delivery of the curriculum. Classroom observation data underscore this point: only 14% of the elementary classrooms and 14% of the junior-senior high classrooms demonstrated the use of technology. (See Appendix for more specific walkthrough data by school level.)

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 Peabody-Burns address one or more of the following general recommendations:

- 1) Develop a clear vision and a strategic plan (with measurable goals and action steps) for instructional improvement. Ensure that the plan includes clearly defined roles for the superintendent, principals, teachers and staff members, and that district resources are allocated accordingly. And, as part of this process, redefine the working relationship with the Marion County Cooperative, and establish shared goals and accountability structures for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Develop and implement a process for reporting regularly to the board of education about progress toward fulfilling the district’s vision and meeting the goals outlined in the plan.
- 2) Determine the extent to which the district can and should offer more expanded learning opportunities to students. Incorporate a section on expanded learning opportunities into the district’s strategic plan.
- 3) As part of the visioning and strategic planning process, explore ways to engage the community in a deeper way:
 - Examine opportunities to increase learning and build civic spirit through a volunteer mentoring and coaching program involving students and the larger community.
 - Work cooperatively with the community to develop and implement a strategic communications plan that generates new enthusiasm for making student success essential to local civic vitality.
 - Explore ways to activate the Boosters Club as a means of building greater community partnerships.

- Cultivate an active partnership with the region’s emerging Community Foundation.
- 4) Within the larger strategic plan, develop a coherent framework to support improvement in curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development. This framework should address the following:
- Continue to support the District Curriculum Committee as a valuable resource for the district. Develop a process to monitor, evaluate, and review the impact of curriculum on a continuous basis.
 - Develop systematic procedures to ensure curricular alignment between the elementary and junior-senior high school. Monitor alignment on an ongoing basis.
 - Develop, implement, and continuously evaluate a system-wide plan that enables teachers and administrators to work together to analyze student achievement data collaboratively and systematically; use data to drive instructional priorities.
 - Identify and implement research-based instructional practices that will have the greatest impact on increasing achievement; consistently assess the extent of implementation using a “walk-through visitation protocol” based on attributes similar to PALSS.
 - Move aggressively to develop a systematic approach to professional development, with special attention to improving teachers’ capacity to implement differentiated instruction and learning; ensure that effective technology deployment and usage is part of this plan.

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Joftus will contact the Peabody-Burns 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
PEABODY-BURNS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) 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 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 (7 Classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES			PD RECOMMENDATIONS		
+			Δ		
Learning Environment		TEACHING			
100%	Orderly/Clean/Well-Managed		Displays of student work with performance rubrics are needed to reinforce expectations for learning.		
100%	Safe/Conducive to Learning				
43%	Evidence of Learning/Displays student work				
Instructional Design					
57%	Standards-based lesson		Using student performance data to drive instruction needs to be a priority in lesson development.		
14%	Data-based instruction is explicit				
100%	Modeling				
100%	Checking understanding				
14%	Guided Practice				
43%	Independent Practice				
43%	Teacher/Student Evaluation/Summary				
Strategies Used					
100%	Adjust for multiple learning styles	Students will benefit from instruction that provides kinesthetic learning opportunities. The use of a variety of instructional materials and strategies will support culturally responsive teaching practices and diverse language/learning needs.			
	visual				
100%	auditory				
57%	kinesthetic				
0%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives				
0%	Address diverse language needs				
29%	Identify similarities & differences				
14%	Summarize & take notes				
71%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition				
71%	Use homework & practice opportunities				
57%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways				
43%	Organize learning in groups				
29%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback				
43%	Generate & test hypotheses				
14%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers				
				Only three of nine of the Marzano researched-based effective instructional strategies were observed in more than 50% of classrooms visited; need to increase the use of the other six strategies.	

Elementary Schools (7 Classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +	LEARNING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ	
Cognitive Level			
0% Knowledge 14% Comprehension 29% Application 57% Analysis 0% Synthesis 0% Evaluation			Students will benefit from instruction that requires higher-level thinking.
Environment/Resources			
29% Textbooks 71% Supplemental materials 57% Manipulatives 14% Technology 0% Materials reflect diversity 14% Worksheets: Open-ended/Fill-in/Multiple choice			Providing many different types of materials will address learners' diverse learning needs. Students will benefit from more opportunities to use technology actively as they learn.
Interactive Behaviors			
100% Active involvement in classwork 100% Asks/answers questions 100% Receives feedback on performance 14% Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)			Students will benefit from being given opportunities to self-evaluate their work on a regular basis & take responsibility for their future learning.
Strategies Demonstrated			
Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways: 0% interpersonal 0% intrapersonal 100% verbal-linguistic 71% logistical-mathematical 57% visual-spatial 0% bodily-kinesthetic 0% musical-rhythmic		Students need to be able to demonstrate their learning using a balance of Gardner's multiple intelligences.	
Work Produced			
43% Individual Work 0% Group Work 0% Written work 0% Project 0% Presentation/Performance 0% Self-Evaluation/Reflection		Students will benefit from opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in variety of ways, and from group work as well as individual work	

Junior-Senior High School (7 Classrooms)

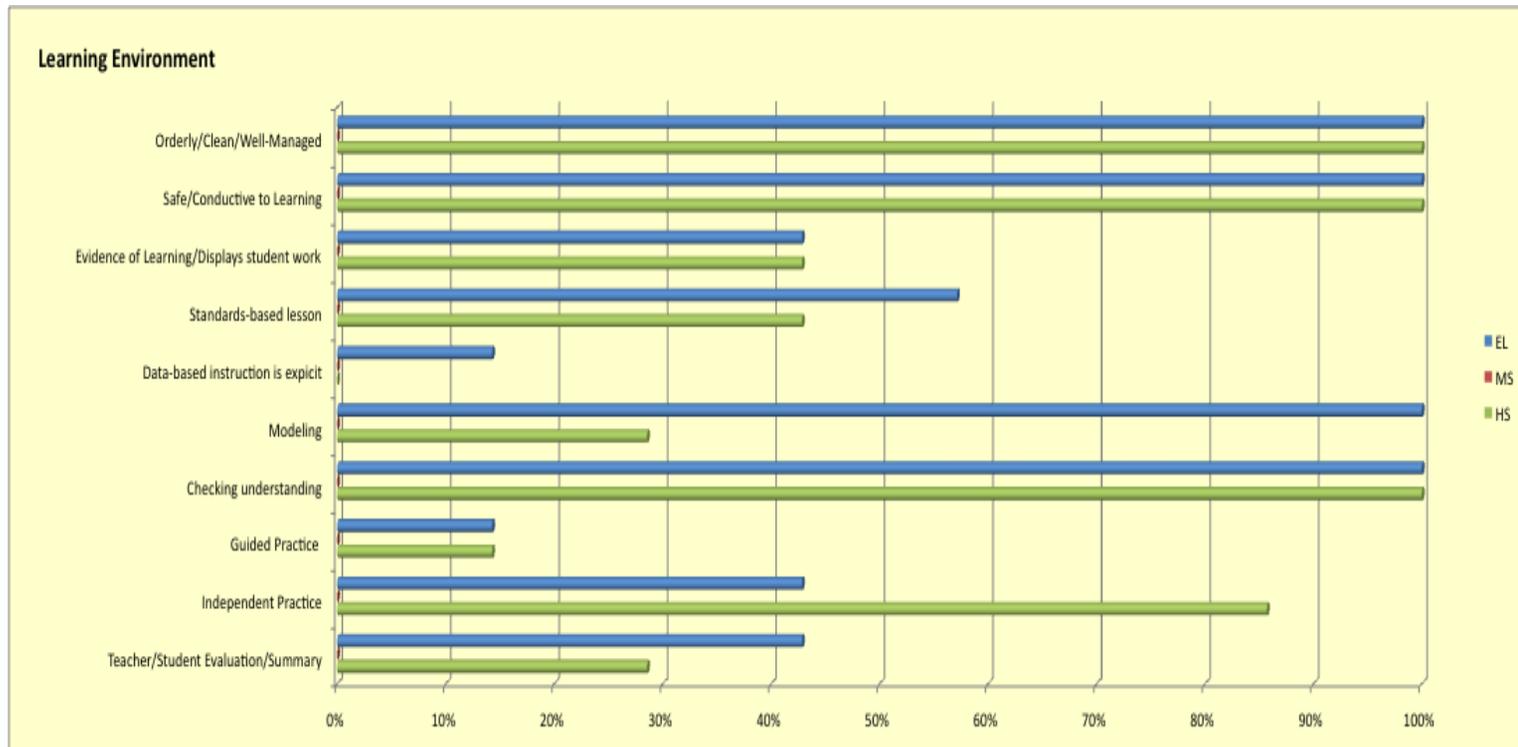
OBSERVED PRACTICES +	TEACHING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
<p align="center">Learning Environment</p> <p>100% Orderly/Clean/Well-Managed 100% Safe/Conducive to Learning 43% Evidence of Learning/Displays student work</p> <p align="center">Instructional Design</p> <p>43% Standards-based lesson</p> <p>0% Data-based instruction is explicit 29% Modeling</p> <p>100% Checking understanding 14% Guided Practice 86% Independent Practice 29% Teacher/Student Evaluation/Summary</p> <p align="center">Strategies Used</p> <p>Adjust for multiple learning styles</p> <p>100% visual 100% auditory 14% kinesthetic</p> <p>0% Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives 0% Address diverse language needs 43% Identify similarities & differences 0% Summarize & take notes 86% Reinforce efforts & provide recognition 86% Use homework & practice opportunities 0% Represent knowledge in multiple ways 14% Organize learning in groups 43% Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback 0% Generate & test hypotheses 0% Use cues, questions & advance organizers</p>		

Junior-Senior High School (7 Classrooms)

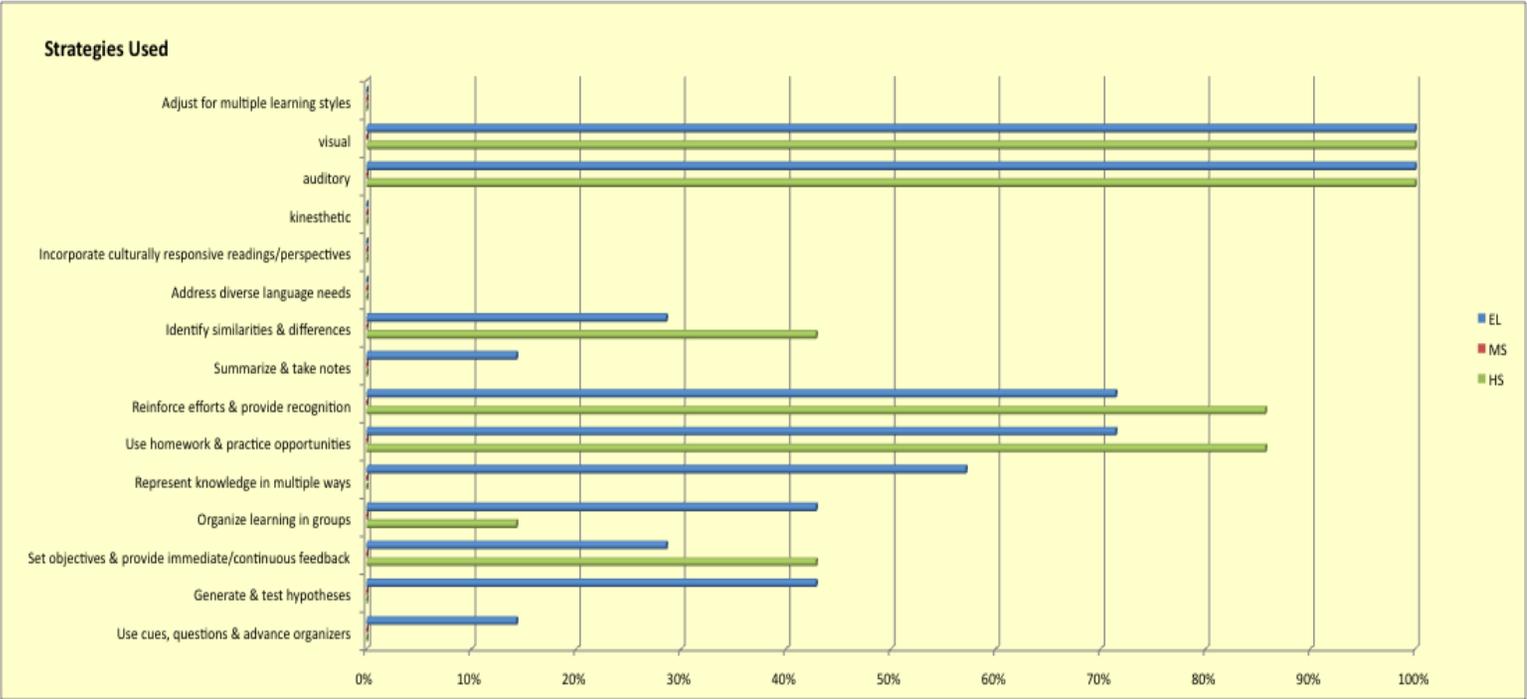
OBSERVED PRACTICES +	LEARNING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ	
Cognitive Level			
0% Knowledge 14% Comprehension 57% Application 29% Analysis 0% Synthesis 0% Evaluation			Students will benefit from instruction that requires higher-level thinking.
Environment/Resources			
14% Textbooks 43% Supplemental materials 14% Manipulatives 14% Technology 0% Materials reflect diversity 71% Worksheets: Open-ended/Fill-in/Multiple choice			Providing many different types of materials, including manipulatives, will address students' diverse learning needs. Students will benefit from more opportunities to use technology actively as they learn.
Interactive Behaviors			
100% Active involvement in classwork 100% Asks/answers questions 86% Receives feedback on performance 0% Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)			Students will benefit from being given opportunities to self-evaluate their work on a regular basis & take responsibility for their future learning.
Strategies Demonstrated			
Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways: 0% interpersonal 0% intrapersonal 100% verbal-linguistic 71% logistical-mathematical 14% visual-spatial 0% bodily-kinesthetic 0% musical-rhythmic		Students need to be able to demonstrate their knowledge using a variety of multiple intelligences; need to increase the five which were evident in less than 50% of the classes visited.	
Work Produced			
57% Individual Work 0% Group Work 0% Written work 0% Project 0% Presentation/Performance 0% Self-Evaluation/Reflection		Students will benefit from opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in variety of ways, and from group work as well as individual work.	

TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN PEABODY-BURNS SCHOOL DISTRICT – USD 398

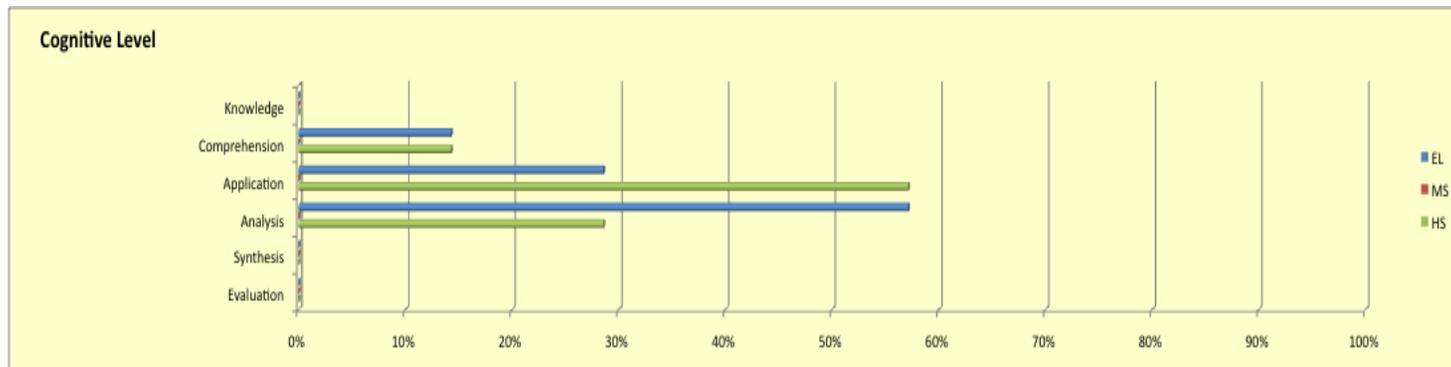
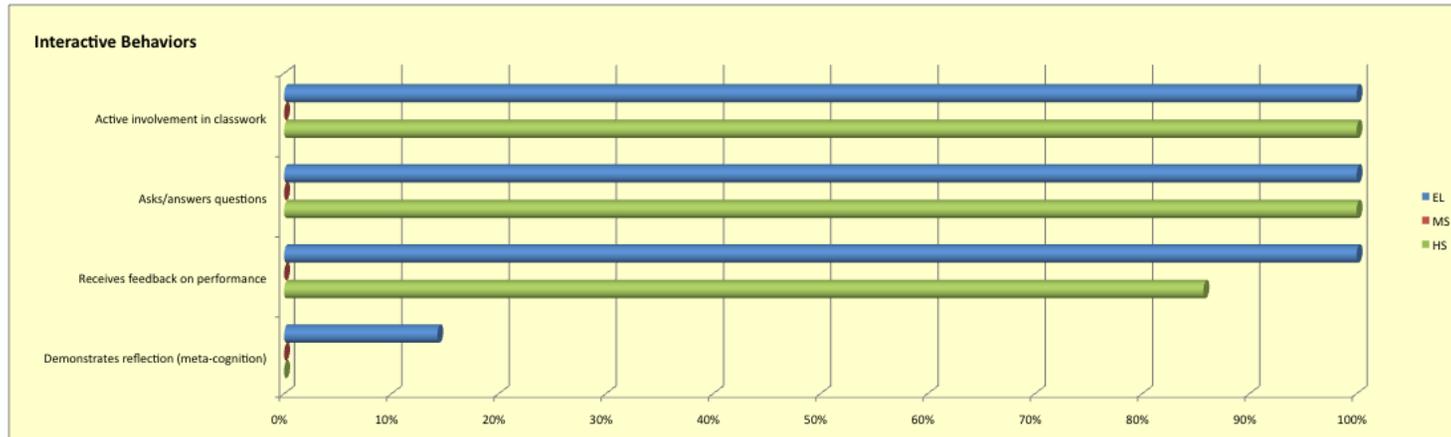
(Please note, since the Junior-Senior High School is combined in Peabody-Burns, “middle school” practices are not included here.)



TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN PEABODY-BURNS SCHOOL DISTRICT – USD 398 (continued)



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN PEABODY-BURNS SCHOOL DISTRICT – USD 398



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN PEABODY-BURNS SCHOOL DISTRICT – USD 398 (continued)

