

Needs Analysis of Dodge City – USD 443

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 Kansas Learning Network (KLN), was expanded to reach 12 more Kansas districts not making AYP, and subsequently in 2010, to reach 11 more, including Dodge City Public Schools, USD 443. Since that time, one district has left the Network because it demonstrated AYP two consecutive years.¹ Seven additional districts demonstrated AYP in the area(s) identified for improvement, and they will continue to remain in the Network for at least one more year.

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 visits² 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 the Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities are designed both to 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 Dodge City Public Schools, USD 443 (referred to throughout the report as USD 443 or Dodge City).

¹ Under the No Child Left Behind Act, a district must demonstrate AYP two consecutive years in order to be removed from the “needs improvement” list.

² The site visit for Dodge City Public Schools occurred October 11-13, 2010.

USD 443 Student Demographics

Currently, Dodge City has 6,377 students who are served in one pre-K center, eight K-4 elementary schools, two intermediate schools (grades 5-6), one middle school, one high school, and an alternative education site with multiple programs. Seventy-eight percent of district students are identified as Hispanic, 19% as White, 2% as African-American, and 1% as Asian. Fifty percent of students are identified as English Language Learners, and 80% are identified as economically disadvantaged. Over 1,000 students, approximately 16% of the student population, have been identified as students with disabilities—well above the state average of 13.5%.³

Contrary to most cities across the country, the Dodge City community has experienced economic growth during the recent recession, and this economic growth has supported an increase in student enrollment from 5,836 in 2008-09 to 6,204 in 2009-2010. This trend appears to be continuing in 2010-11, as the unaudited enrollment count is 6,377. Despite economic growth, however, USD 443's poverty rate has also increased over the last few years.

Student Achievement

Dodge City has a history of relatively high academic achievement. The district has consistently made AYP over the years, and in 2009, district schools garnered 30 Standards of Excellence awards from KSDE. Over the past three years, the district has seen increasing levels of student achievement for most groups of students, from 70.4% of all students at or above standard in math in 2008 to 77.7% in 2010. In reading, the percentage of students performing at or above standard has improved from 74.4% in 2008 to 77.4% in 2010. Additionally, all groups of students except one have met or exceeded state achievement benchmarks in mathematics for the past three years (for additional detail, see Table I below).

Table I—Dodge City Summary Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data

Reading – Met AYP in 2008; did not meet AYP in 2009 and 2010. On Improvement

| Student Category | Year & State Target | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| | 2008 - 72% | 2009 - 76.7% | 2010 - 81.3% |
| All students | Met (74.4%) | Met (77.1%) | No (77.4%) |
| Free & Reduced Meals | Met (71.2%) ⁴ | Met (74.6%) ⁴ | No (75%) |
| Students with Disabilities | Met (50.9%) ⁵ | Met (53.8%) ⁵ | No (55.7%) |
| ELL Students | Met (69.5%) ⁴ | No (69.2%) | No (69.9%) |
| African-American Students | Met (68.8%) ⁴ | Met (76.9%) | Met (88.9%) |
| Hispanic | Met (70.7%) ⁴ | Met (74.7%) ⁴ | No (74.6%) |

³ 2010 USD 443 data.

⁴ The percent of standard or above is below the state target but above the criterion percent when the hypothesis test (at the 99% level of confidence) is applied.

⁵ The group made safe harbor through the hypothesis test at the 75% level of confidence.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| White | Met (83.9%) | Met (84.4%) | Met (87.2%) |
| Asian & Pacific* | Met (80.9%) | Met (79.6%) | Met (86.4%) |
| American Indian or Alaskan* | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial* | Met (88.9%) | Met (80.5%) | Met (78.6%) ⁴ |

Mathematics – Met AYP in 2008 and 2009; did not in 2010. Not yet on Improvement

| Student Category | Year & State Target | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | 2008 - 64.6% | 2009 - 70.5% | 2010 - 76.4% |
| All students | Met (70.4%) | Met (75.2%) | Met (77.7%) |
| Free & Reduced Meals | Met (67.8%) | Met (73.2%) | Met (75.7%) ⁴ |
| Students with Disabilities | Met (51.2%) ⁵ | Met (56%) ⁵ | No (56%) |
| ELL Students | Met (68.9%) | Met (69.8%) ⁴ | Met (73.4%) ⁶ |
| African-American Students | Met (54.7%) ⁴ | Met (71.7%) | Met (84.8%) |
| Hispanic | Met (68.3%) | Met (79.8%) | Met (75.6%) ⁴ |
| White | Met (76.9%) | Met (82.8%) | Met (84.2%) |
| Asian & Pacific* | Met (75.6%) | Met (75.5%) | Met (88.4) |
| American Indian or Alaskan* | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial* | Met (88.7%) | Met (82.4%) | Met (74.5%) ⁴ |

Graduation Rate: 2008—92%. 2009—88.3%, 2010—85%⁷

Notes:

*These categories were reconfigured in 2010—Asian-Pacific Islander was split into two categories: Asian and Native Hawaiian or Pacific; Multi-Ethnic was changed to Multi-Racial, and, Alaskan was added to American Indian.

Despite these successes, however, USD 443 also faces several achievement challenges. Achievement scores for English Language Learners (ELLs) have been relatively flat, and ELLs have not met state benchmarks in reading for the past two years, placing the district on improvement in reading. While the district made gains on the Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for English Language Learners (AMAOs) this past year, due to not making AYP this year, the district is on improvement in this area for the third consecutive year.

In 2010, several other groups of students—including all students as a group, students with disabilities, students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, and Hispanic students—also failed to meet reading benchmarks, and students with disabilities did not meet mathematics either. Still other groups of students did not meet the AYP targets in math, but gained AYP through safe harbor or confidence interval.

The Big Picture

⁶ The group made safe harbor.

⁷ Dodge City's graduation rate for 2010 was appealed and a change was granted to indicate a graduation rate of 89%. The data, however, has not been changed in the already published state report.

“Dodge City is a great place to raise a family.”—*Community member*

Overall, Dodge City possesses a number of strengths. The district appears to enjoy strong support from the community. In a 2008 survey of district patrons, for example, 74% of respondents said the school district was an advantage for the community.⁸ District facilities are also a point of pride for both the district staff and community. The high school was referred to as a ‘jewel’ for Dodge City.

Given the continuing rapid increase in student enrollment and resulting overcrowding at the middle school, the district developed a bond issue to build a new middle school that was presented to voters in early November. There appeared to be mixed reaction in the community regarding the bond proposal, and ultimately the bond failed. Despite failure to pass the bond, however, the district and community will need to address growing demands for space as enrollment continues to increase.

The district has also invested in the development of a cutting-edge data system to support district staff in identifying student strengths and areas that need improvement. The data system is comprehensive and intended as a tool that will enable staff to make real-time, data-driven instructional decisions. As one district leader stated, “There is no reason we can’t identify each child’s current academic status at a level where we can take specific actions. We now have the tool.”

There is also a sense that the quality of life continues to improve for residents in the area, and that the region is an attractive place for new businesses. As one community member stated, “people have to eat and we are at the center of food production and processing.”

To improve, however, Dodge City must draw on these strengths and others to address four key systemic challenges:

- 1) Language and culture divides in the district, inconsistent expectations for students, and a need to increase Hispanic parent engagement, especially among parents of ELLs
- 2) AYP and instructional challenges facing English Language Learners, and increasingly, other groups of students as well, including students with disabilities
- 3) A need to help educators—staff and administrators—fully implement and integrate key district initiatives (e.g., a new aligned curriculum, a robust student data system, and a data-based, educator-driven approach to instructional improvement and professional development)
- 4) A lack of clarity about what counts as success in terms of achieving the district’s mission—beyond simply demonstrating AYP.

⁸ *Dodge City Public Schools 2008 Patron Survey – Executive Summary*, April 14, 2008.

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

II. Findings

Findings from the needs assessment of Dodge City are summarized below in the areas of Leadership; Empowering Culture and Human Capital; and Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development.

Leadership

Dodge City benefits from a number of leadership strengths.

- The superintendent appears to be well respected by all stakeholder groups. Through his actions, he has created a level of confidence, integrity, and stability in the role that was absent with previous superintendents. School staff and community members interviewed indicated that his only motivation in this role is to improve the schools in Dodge City. Participants pointed out repeatedly in focus groups that the superintendent is “one of our own” and that he is not trying to use this position as “resume builder.”
- District leaders are forward thinking. They appear to consistently look ahead, not waiting for issues to arise and then reacting after the fact. This is exemplified in the district’s outreach to WestEd—a leading national education research, development, and service agency—to support their work in developing an aligned curriculum and assessment system.

“Our district leaders are not waiting to be told what to do. They are forward thinking.”

—Principal
- Professional learning communities (PLCs) are in place and viewed as the district’s primary engine for improving teaching and learning. Dodge City has created a PLC framework and an expectation that PLCs will empower staff to discuss student achievement data, examine student work, share best teaching practices, and collaboratively plan to improve student outcomes.
- There appears to be trust and confidence in district and building leaders. This trust is in part due to the longevity that many leaders have in the system. The leadership has leveraged this trust and made moves to improve the Dodge City school system. Administrative team members also participate in book studies to continuously build their leadership capacity. Currently, leaders are studying *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results* by Douglas Reeves.

- The district has built teacher leadership capacity by engaging K-12 staff throughout the Dodge City system to discuss and build an aligned curriculum and assessment system, collectively. Teachers in focus groups expressed repeatedly how powerful it was to meet with colleagues who taught above and below their grade level and come to agreements around what needed to be taught and at what level of rigor. Staff members were empowered as they saw their fingerprints on the final curriculum and assessment product.
- The district and board of education have a vision, mission, and goals in place to guide the work and decision-making of district administration. Dodge City’s “Guiding Principles” serve as theory of action for the district.

While Dodge City displays some clear leadership strengths, the district also faces some significant leadership challenges.

- The board of education is acknowledged across the community and within the school district as a well-intentioned group that has the best interests of the students at heart. It is also consistently acknowledged that board members have varying perspectives about the board’s role in district management decisions—and may sometimes be overly involved in administrative decisions. While a diverse board with different perspectives and healthy debate can be a positive attribute, the board should be focused on policy and governance issues. The administrative team was hired by the board to lead and effectively manage the district; board members’ time and energy can be used most effectively in reviewing, updating, and setting policies that will move the district forward.
- There appears to be considerable variation in the way in which PLCs are implemented across the district. Routines, expectations, and time spent on PLCs differ from school to school. The district is banking on the power of PLCs to support teachers as they take action to improve student achievement. For this to be realized, Dodge City needs to have clear and consistent expectations and supports for the PLC process across the district.
- Many district leadership team members are at or near retirement. The loss of key leaders could potentially cause USD 443 to lose the positive momentum the district is currently experiencing. While there is not an impending retirement rush, the fact that many administrators have the option of leaving at any time is a clear signal to the system that succession planning should be a priority.
- District indicators for success are unclear. Given this lack of clarity, the implied district mission has become meeting AYP, and the goal of meeting AYP seems to permeate the district. While meeting AYP is a necessary and expected outcome, it will not likely drive the district to excellence, or enable Dodge City to reach its stated mission of *preparing students to be capable, contributing participants in a changing world*.

- Elementary and secondary principals report to separate district office leaders. Historically, this reporting structure has contributed to different expectations and a lack of coherence between the elementary and secondary systems in the district. The new K-12 curriculum and assessment system is a move in the right direction to bridge the gap that exists between administrators elementary and secondary levels.

Empowering Culture and Human Capital

Dodge City embodies several strengths in the area of Empowering Culture and Human Capital:

- The district has an extensive set of programs to build its own leadership capacity. The leading example of these efforts is the Dodge City Educational Leadership Academy (DCELA). Teachers apply and are selected to participate in this highly regarded leadership development program—a collaborative effort between the district and Kansas State University which enables participants to earn a masters degree while attending the program. Graduates now occupy both formal and informal leadership roles throughout the district.

Other leadership development examples include:

- Aspira, a program to support bilingual paraprofessional staff to become certified teachers
- Reading Specialist development, a program that enables teachers to become certified reading specialists;
- and English as a Second Language (ESL) Endorsement, a program that allows teachers to gain official ESL endorsement.

Dodge City provides financial support for teachers and other staff to participate in various programs, and participants move forward on the salary schedule as they accrue graduate credits.

- The district has implemented an aggressive effort to recruit and retain high-quality staff, and as a result, USD 443 has been able to fill vacant positions with high-quality applicants and lower staff turnover. In 2009-10, the district needed to fill only 45 positions, compared to 2006-07 when the district had 82 vacancies. Factors contributing to Dodge City’s success in this area include a competitive salary schedule, positive staff and community feelings toward the district, and a robust local economy.
- Parents, students, and community members participating in focus groups noted that educators in Dodge City care deeply about the students they serve. Staff members appear to work hard to develop relationships with students and go out of their way to ensure that students’ basic needs are met.

“Building leaders go out of their way to welcome parents. They know every student's name.”
—Parent

- The Skyward parent access portal enables parents to gain real-time information on student progress, student activities, and student fees. During interviews, parents noted that the portal has enhanced communications between schools and parents.
- According to staff and community members who participated in focus groups, the school district is a selling point for the community in recruiting new businesses and professionals to Dodge City. Potential residents are impressed with school facilities, programs offered, and the district's reputation.
- Parents new to the district—who had been there less than a year but had experience with other school districts (in Florida, California, Minnesota, Texas)—were very positive in their comments in focus groups about how the district welcomed and treated them and their children. They especially noted the district's attention to each child, the special attention they received as newcomers, good opportunities for schooling, and the tranquility of the school district and town especially in comparison to other places they had lived.

“The newcomer program made us feel welcomed and supported.”

—Parent of ELL student new to Dodge City
- The district's Learning Center is a unique facility designed to meet the needs of parents, students, and staff members. Dodge City used various funding streams to make this facility a reality. It has first-class meeting space for professional development sessions, a one-stop service for parents and students who are enrolling in the school district, and a library for parents, students, and staff.
- An agreement between the school district and the local community college provides scholarship funding to Dodge City Community College for all Ford County High School graduates, including Dodge City High School.

Along with these strengths, however, several challenges were also apparent.

- While the district seems to have a culture of caring about all students, Dodge City does not have a corresponding culture of believing that all students can and will graduate from high school college and career ready. This difference in expectations is illustrated by the low the numbers of Hispanic students who access higher-level college prep courses at the high school—only 37% (494 out of 1,342) of students enrolled in honors classes are identified as Hispanic, and AP enrollment for Hispanic students is 25% (22 out of 89).

“We have made progress, but there are cracks in the system and too many of our kids are falling through.”

—Hispanic parent

- Despite the fact that almost 80% of students are identified as Hispanic, only 25 out of 420 (5.95%) certified staff members are Hispanic, although the percentage of Hispanic administrators is slightly higher—10.87% (5 out of 46 total). This lack of certified Hispanic staff members presents a challenge for the district; there are few professional role models who look like the majority of the students.
- The Hispanic parent community—especially parents of ELL students—does not appear to be consistently engaged in USD 443. Concern over lack of engagement was a common thread in our conversations. Throughout interviews, participants made the point that effective Hispanic parent engagement is crucial to improved student achievement. This perception was consistent among district staff, community members, Anglo parents, and Hispanic parents.

Though participants agreed that Hispanic parents need to be engaged more effectively, perspectives about why they are not engaged differed considerably. District staff members noted they believe they are doing everything possible to engage parents and are frustrated that many Hispanic parents are not more engaged in schools. Conversely, Hispanic parents—except for newcomer parents—felt the district is not reaching out to the Hispanic parent community effectively. In addition, Hispanic parents felt that when they did voice concerns about the schools, less attention was given to the issues they raised.

- The relationship between the Board of Education and the local NEA affiliate is fractured. Over the years, a culture of mistrust and negative expectations has developed. This culture has made it difficult for the district and the affiliate to reach agreements during the bargaining process—the 2009-2010 contract negotiations, for example, were not settled until June of 2010. Both NEA leaders and board members perceive that the other side is hiding something and not bringing their best intentions or complete information to the table.
- While students are supported in idiosyncratic ways as they transition from one school level to another, there is not a system-wide strategic effort to ensure that every student is seamlessly transitioned from one level to the next. This is particularly important given the additional transition Dodge City students experience as they move from primary to 5th-6th grade intermediate schools, then on to middle and eventually high school—meaning that there are three transitions from one level to the next, instead of the traditional structure seen across the country of two transition points.
- Several district-wide communications are published in English only. This makes it difficult for parents who only speak and read Spanish to use various district communication tools, such as the Skyward parent portal, the district Web site, and school Web sites. Building communications, including newsletters, notifications, etc., are typically provided in at least two languages.
- Special education administrators we spoke with noted that finding qualified staff

was their biggest problem, followed by getting principals and regular teachers to accept students with disabilities as “ours.”

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 Dodge City educators on surveys of educational practices, and by representatives from all constituent groups during focus groups and interviews; and (3) data collected during classroom visits, which document to what extent effective teaching/learning practices are being implemented.

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

Curriculum and Assessment

Overall, Dodge City displays a number of curriculum and assessment strengths.

- Since 2009, Dodge City has been working with WestEd to design an intentional, rigorous, guaranteed, viable, and aligned curriculum. The curriculum includes timely interventions for students, additional supports for students performing below grade level in core subjects, and advanced educational opportunities including 19 honors classes and nine Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- The district has also developed a program with the community college which enables students to enroll concurrently—this year 141 students are concurrently enrolled in high school and community college classes—and Dodge City offers students a variety of career and technical educational opportunities (e.g. communication technology, agricultural education, business, cabinetmaking, building trades, family and consumer sciences, health sciences, and computer assisted drafting).
- Dodge City’s curriculum model is based on integrating 21st Century learning skills with an aligned core content of essential indicators—the top priorities in students’ learning based on state standards—effective instruction, and student engagement. The curriculum includes pacing guides and mastery tests designed by district staff.
- The district has also built a superior data system. Using FileMaker Pro, Ray Wipf, the Executive Director of Management Information Systems, has created a data system that includes student assessment data and student profiles with a five-year

academic history. The system automatically generates parent letters to inform parents about how their child is doing in school. It appears to be comprehensive and user friendly, and it forms the foundation for the transition to data-driven decision making. Now that the data system is in place, teachers and administrators are beginning to use data differently. As Wipf noted, teachers used to say to him at the end of a grading period, “I need my data, I have to complete my grades.” Now, they want data throughout the year: “I need my data, I have a PLC coming up.”

- USD 443 offers a full range of supplemental programs and services, including consolidated federal programs for disadvantaged students and neglected and delinquent children, migrant education services, English language acquisition, and drug free schools; state and federal programs for at-risk students, the bilingual education program, the Learning Center/First Stop Enrollment Center, Carl Perkins vocational and applied technology programs; special education services (provided by the Southwest Kansas Area Cooperative), including the early childhood handicapped program, the Therapeutic Education Center, and gifted education; early childhood education programs, including Head Start, At-Risk Four Year Olds, Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Migrant Family Literacy, Kansas Early Learning Center, and Kansas Pre-K; alternative education programs, including the Second Opportunity School, the Dodge City Education Center, Dane Hansen School (Methodist Youthville), Juvenile Services Day Reporting Center, and short term placements; and extended learning opportunities, including the summer school program and the Dodge City Community College concurrent enrollment program.

Table II—Enrollment in Select Supplemental Programs⁹

| Supplemental Programs | 2010-2011 Enrollment | Percent of all students enrolled |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Jump Start (two weeks before start of kindergarten) | 150 | 2% |
| Newcomers (2 nd -12 th grade) | 160 | 2% |
| MTSS Extended Day | 642 | 10% |
| MTSS and Enrichment Summer School | 1854 | 29% |
| Total Students | 6377 | 100% |

- The district appears to have a systematic approach to assessment, which is designed to inform instruction and professional development, group students, identify students needing tiered supports, and update curriculum. The assessment processes include the multi-tiered support process, a walkthrough data instrument (under development), the newcomer’s placement process in middle and high

⁹ USD 443 data.

school, the FileMaker Pro assessment database, and the student improvement team (SIT) process. Placement tests include Concepts of Print, Reading Inventories, 3rd grade Rigby, ELL sight words with pictures, KELPA-P, Scholastic Reading Inventory, Scholastic Phonics Inventory for secondary students, and E2020 Math diagnostics.

Despite a generally strong curriculum and assessment system, there are clear challenges.

- Dodge City’s focus on reading and math appears to have narrowed the curriculum. Some elementary principals noted rather strongly, for example, that “writing has gone down the toilet,” as have science and social studies. Focus group participants also pointed out gaps in meeting the curricular and testing needs of ELLs who come into the system after grade three.
- The district’s curricular emphasis on essential indicators appears to be creating knowledge and skill gaps. For example, teachers told us that some of the skill maps they use indicate that a given skill would be taught in chapters one, two, and 28 of a text. However, between chapters two and 28 a host of other skills and knowledge are introduced, so that students cannot just jump to chapter 28 and competently tackle the material.
- Special education teachers report being overloaded. Moreover, according to elementary and special education teachers, the middle school has struggled to hire and retain sufficient numbers of high-quality special education paraprofessionals.
- Special education teachers with whom we spoke also expressed concerns that the district’s curriculum is too difficult for many students with disabilities other than those who have learning disabilities—students are often frustrated and not able to demonstrate what they are learning. At the same time, special education administrators note that the system still has too many pull-outs, and students are being pulled out during reading block. As a result, students receive less reading instruction, not more.
- Despite the variety of supplemental programs the district offers, Migrant and ELL parents voiced the need for more after-school programs for elementary students. Programs not only enable students to learn more, but also to be occupied and stay out of trouble.
- MTSS has not been fully implemented. According to the superintendent, “each building has designed its own implementation plan that builds around the school’s schedule, staffing, budget, and identified needs of students. While implementation may look slightly different among the school district’s individual school sites, the philosophy and expectations are consistent: Tier 1,2, and 3 interventions, based on instructional objectives (Essential Indicators), and delivered in large group, small group, and individual instruction.” Teachers in focus groups, however, report being unclear about how MTSS should work in practice and would like more support around differentiating instruction, understanding and implementing

intervention strategies, and monitoring interventions.

- Not all teachers are using the assessment data available to them. Administrators noted that there is considerable variation in teachers' technology skills, usage, and willingness to learn. The high school principal estimated that only 30% of her teachers use the technology available to them to access and use student data.

Instruction

Table III presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 91%) and principals (response rate 75%) administered online by Cross & Joftus. Instructional strategies that principals and teachers *believe* are most strongly evident and are least evident, are highlighted below. Additional instructional strengths and challenges are identified later in this section.

In general, principals identified a number of sound instructional strategies as strongly evident. The sound instructional strategies that *principals* believe are most ***strongly evident*** in their schools include:

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited by 67% of principals as strongly evident and by 0% as minimally evident or not evident)
- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited by 56% of principals as strongly evident and 0% as not evident or minimally evident)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities (cited by 56% of principals as strongly evident and by 0% as minimally evident or not evident).

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

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 11% of principals as strongly evident and by 27% 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 11% of principals as strongly evident and by 27% as minimally evident or not evident).

In general, teachers' views are similar to principals'. The sound instructional strategies that *teachers* believe are most ***strongly evident*** in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 77% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited by 64% of teachers as strongly evident and by 7% as minimally evident or not evident)

- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited by 68% of teachers as strongly evident and by 4% as minimally evident or not evident).

The instructional strategies *teachers* believe to be *least evident* include:

- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (cited by 22% of teachers as strongly evident and by 31% as minimally evident or not evident)
- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 27% of teachers as strongly evident and by 24% 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 27% of teachers as strongly evident and by 14% as minimally evident or not evident).

Table III—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 meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment. | 67% | 0% | 64% | 7% |
| Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments. | 56% | 0% | 77% | 0% |
| Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities. | 56% | 0% | 48% | 11% |
| Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction. | 50% | 0% | 61% | 7% |
| School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction. | 50% | 0% | 46% | 10% |
| Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff | 39% | 6% | 68% | 4% |

| Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school. | Principals | | Teachers | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Strongly Evident* | Not Evident or Minimally Evident^ | Strongly Evident* | Not Evident or Minimally Evident^ |
| development. | | | | |
| Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources. | 39% | 6% | 53% | 8% |
| Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers. | 33% | 6% | 45% | 12% |
| 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. | 33% | 11% | 55% | 6% |
| Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning. | 33% | 11% | 28% | 23% |
| Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning. | 33% | 17% | 22% | 31% |
| Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments. | 22% | 0% | 52% | 5% |
| Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners. | 22% | 6% | 53% | 4% |
| Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level. | 22% | 6% | 50% | 7% |

| 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 foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being. | 22% | 22% | 37% | 10% |
| Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation. | 22% | 28% | 45% | 16% |
| Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students. | 17% | 11% | 39% | 11% |
| The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning. | 11% | 22% | 27% | 14% |
| Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress. | 11% | 50% | 27% | 24% |

Teacher Response Rate = approximately 363/400

Principal Response Rate = 18/24 (including 4 central office administrators)

Source: Cross & Jofus survey of Dodge City principals and teachers October 2010.

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

^The response option "No Opinion" was deleted from this presentation. Four percent or less of teachers checked this option on any response, and no principals checked this option.

Survey results only tell part of the story. Classroom observations, reviews of assessment data, and conversations with focus group participants suggest several instructional strengths in Dodge City.

- Dodge City district goals are clearly focused on building an instructional system that meets the needs of diverse learners, with the objective of increasing student achievement. To meet this goal, the district is working to increase the percentage of students achieving proficiency on state assessments in reading and math by 5% annually. On some fronts, the district is clearly moving in the right direction—overall, student math proficiency increased by 4.4% from 2009 to 2010; reading proficiency levels, however, remained flat from 2009 to 2010.
- A safe, orderly, and clean environment conducive to student learning was observed in 100% of classrooms visited at all school levels (see Appendix for

detailed classroom observation data). The USD 443 Board of Education has identified safe and orderly schools as a learning environment goal, measured by discipline, suspension, and attendance rates. Teacher and principal surveys of educational practices (see Table III above) also indicate that 100% of teachers and principals believe that there is evidence or strong evidence that educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.

- A variety of sound instructional strategies were observed in more than 50% of classrooms visited, including (see Appendix for details on these and other strategies observed):
 - explicit instruction, checking for understanding, and guided practice
 - recognition of student efforts and reinforcement with continuous feedback by teachers
 - the use of homework, practice opportunities, and advance organizers.
- The Dodge City data system enables teachers and administrators to monitor student data in real time and make instructional course corrections based on student data. This system is a very valuable asset to the district.

Dodge City also has some clear instructional challenges, however.

- PALSS classroom observations indicate that students would benefit from participating in organized learning in groups, receiving objectives, and identifying similarities and differences—instructional strategies that were lacking in many classrooms observed (see Appendix for specific detail on these and other sound instructional practices).

“We need to integrate higher order thinking skills in our classrooms.”

—Principal

The use of small groups to enable remedial skill development or cooperative learning strategies—strategies that actively involve students in the learning process—would benefit struggling students and would enable paraprofessionals to play a more productive role in the classroom, as well.

- Though principal and teacher survey results (see Table III above) indicate that educators believe they are providing differentiated instruction, classroom observations (see Appendix) indicate very little evidence of differentiated instruction.
- Student mastery checks are used to ensure that students are mastering skills as they proceed through the curriculum. The ELL focus group, however, expressed a perception that once a student mastery check is completed and the student receives remediation for skill(s), the student misses instruction on the next mastery check, and that puts the student further behind.

- Though principal and teacher survey results indicate that educators in Dodge City believe they are providing students with equitable opportunities to learn based on high expectations, developmental levels, and diverse language needs, PALSS findings do not confirm that belief (see Appendix). Dodge City is a minority-majority district—over 80% of students are identified as Hispanic, and approximately 50% are English Language Learners. The fact that classroom observations found very little evidence of culturally responsive materials and resources addressing diverse language needs should be of concern to the district.
- According to ELL and Migrant staff, most teachers are not aware of the language levels of ELL students and what the pedagogical implications of language proficiency are. This is also problematic.

Professional Development

The needs assessment revealed some clear professional development strengths in Dodge City.

- Professional learning communities have been implemented, to varying degrees, across the district. Where PLCs are most active, they are used to plan instruction, assessment, and professional development activities. The strength of the lesson design planning and teaching strategies is most evident at the elementary and middle school levels.
- USD 443 is developing a classroom observation process that will provide a consistent and systematic procedure for gathering data. This will enable Dodge City to determine the extent to which research-based effective teaching practices are being implemented and use that data to inform future professional development.
- As part of Dodge City's work with WestEd, much of the district's professional development over the last two years has focused on helping teachers to unpack and understand the new curriculum.

A number of challenges are also clear, however.

- Currently, there appears to be considerable variation in the implementation and effectiveness of PLCs across the district. In order for PLCs to serve as the primary vehicle to support teaching and learning, PLCs must be fully implemented with sufficient time at all schools for educators to have meaningful conversations with each other. Trust issues need to be overcome, so collaboration can occur for the benefit of all students.

We found that:

- The amount of time devoted to PLC collaborative work appears to vary considerably from site to site.

- At the high school level it appears that instructional leaders have focused training and support around curriculum development with WestEd, rather than strategies for instructional improvement. Educators are not having regular instructional conversations and/or developing and implementing follow-up action plans.
 - Principal focus groups noted that professional conversations in PLCs were very powerful, but that teachers and principals were not really comfortable yet with the conversations. Principals pointed out, for example, that the student information in FileMaker *was* perceived by some staff members as a weapon that “could be used against them,” causing some teachers to resist using the data. Principals remarked that the hardest part of making the PLCs work was building trust.
- According to teachers and administrators with whom we spoke, there have been so many new initiatives in the past two years that many teachers feel overwhelmed. There appears to be a need to help teachers and administrators better understand what practices they can leave behind as they move forward in integrating new research-based instructional practices.
 - Teachers need support in order to fully implement MTSS, with a focus on effective instructional strategies for tier 2 and tier 3 learners.

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.

Dodge City clearly has a strong student data system. Given that many of the KLN districts face considerable challenges in this area, Cross & Joftus would like the district to consider taking a leadership role in this area with a consortium of interested districts.

At the outset of this report, four key systemic challenges were identified:

- 1) Language and culture divides in the district, inconsistent expectations for students, and a need to increase Hispanic parent engagement, especially among parents of ELLs
- 2) AYP and instructional challenges facing English Language Learners, and increasingly, other groups of students as well, including students with disabilities
- 3) A need to help educators—staff and administrators—fully implement and integrate key district initiatives (e.g. a new aligned curriculum, a robust student data system, and a data-based, educator-driven approach to instructional improvement and professional development)
- 4) A lack of clarity about what counts as success in terms of achieving the district’s mission—beyond simply demonstrating AYP.

To address these challenges and others identified in this report, technical assistance should address the following recommendations:

- 1) Make the engagement of Hispanic parents an explicit goal of the district and consult with an external expert to develop and implement a parent engagement plan that goes beyond the district's current set of parent engagement activities.
- 2) Build on current initiatives and take action to increase the number of Hispanic staff members who are in teaching and administrative positions. Build on the existing development and recruitment efforts to significantly raise this number.
- 3) Clarify the district's vision and mission statement by identifying key student indicators that would define accomplishment of the district's mission—"to prepare students to be capable, contributing participants in a changing world," and realization of the district's vision—"to provide a world class education for every student." Indicators should include metrics beyond the Kansas State Assessments, such as post-secondary readiness assessments like the ACT and Work Keys. This work should also serve to create and reinforce a culture of high expectations for *all* students.
- 4) Fully implement and integrate the curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development systems and processes. Minimally, this effort should include the following:
 - a. A review of the new curriculum to ensure that the curriculum addresses the needs of *all* students—including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, that gaps are closed, and that MTSS is effectively implemented
 - b. A plan to revisit the most critical teaching strategies for new teachers and to develop refresher courses for existing staff; this should help keep the major focus for instruction consistent throughout the district
 - c. Further professional development on the new data management system, so that all staff are comfortable accessing the system, and using and managing student data to improve instruction and student learning
 - d. Full implementation of the district's classroom walkthrough process, in which data are used to inform instruction and professional development
 - e. The creation of common expectations for fully functioning PLCs across the district, including: time required for PLCs to meet, an agenda framework, protocols to use, expected action steps generated, and a process to follow-up on action steps generated in PLC conversations. The administrative team should model this PLC framework as a fully functioning PLC at the administrative level
 - f. Work to raise the cognitive level of instruction. The USD 443 walkthrough data instrument addresses cognitive level by recall, application, strategic thinking, and extended thinking. The data from

- walkthroughs and PLC discussions need to be used to develop professional development opportunities for staff and should be monitored for rigor of implementation
- g. Resources and support for teachers to effectively practice differentiated instruction for all students. Training is needed for both teachers and support staff who work with students in the classroom. The district is already using co-teaching in some classrooms at all levels and could expand this model to meet the needs of ELLs and students with disabilities
 - h. Ongoing conversation and professional development around how to integrate the district's curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development approaches.
- 5) To increase support for all students, especially students who may fall through the cracks, and to increase student engagement:
- a. Institute an advisory/advocacy program where every student is well known by at least one adult in the building and where that adult advocates for the student over the time they are in the building. The adult advocate becomes the point person for keeping track of the student's progress toward graduating ready "to be a capable, contributing participant in a changing world."
 - b. Develop plans for the consistent transition of students across each level (4 to 5, 6 to 7, and 8 to 9). Plans should include explicit conversations between teachers at each level to ensure the student 'story' travels with the student to the new level.
 - c. Review school structures that create multi-track systems that are intended to best serve the needs of specific student groups (ELLs and students with disabilities). These systems have a tendency to 'track' students and create the unintended consequence of limiting opportunities for students who are not in the higher track. This appears to have the greatest impact on Hispanic and ELL students, as evidenced by the low number of these students in the Honors and AP classes in high school.
 - d. Consider expanding existing structures such as 'looping' to support adult-student relationships that lead to a strong continuity of care for students, especially in the two-year schools, (5-6 and 7-8).
 - e. Refresh training around Kagan cooperative learning or a similar model to help teachers increase the level of student engagement at the secondary level.
- 6) Draft a succession plan for top district leaders.
- 7) The Board and NEA should adopt a new model for negotiations. The model selected should be supported by external, unbiased, expert technical assistance that includes training and ongoing support during the implementation of the new approach. An example of a possible model is Interest Based Bargaining (IBB).

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Jofus will contact the Dodge City superintendent to finalize a technical assistance plan that includes 24 days of external support for the time period January through October of 2011. This plan, developed in collaboration between the senior leadership of the district and Cross & Jofus will describe in detail the goals, objectives, activities, service provider, and timeline of the technical assistance.

**NOTES ON APPENDIX (See attached PDF)
Findings from Classroom Observations
DODGE CITY 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 other 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.