

November

11

Needs Analysis of Emporia Public Schools, USD 253

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

I. Introduction

Background

In September 2008, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) contracted with Cross & Jofus 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 and 2010, this model, the Kansas Learning Network (KLN), was expanded to reach 23 additional Kansas districts struggling to demonstrate AYP. In 2011, 12 more districts joined the Network, including USD 253, Emporia Public Schools. Since 2008, four districts have left the Network because they demonstrated AYP for two consecutive years.¹

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 analysis of 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 two-day site visits² that include interviews and focus groups with students, parents, civic leaders, teachers, instructional coaches, principals, district administrators, and board members as well as classroom observations using a process designed by Cross & Jofus called the Focused Classroom Walkthrough process (part of Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success, or K-PALSS).

All needs analysis activities are designed both to identify strengths and challenges leading to recommendations for improvement and technical assistance, and to train school and state officials to do their own needs analyses and classroom observations in the future.

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 Emporia Public Schools occurred October 6-7, 2011.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Jofus for the district’s leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary results. This report represents the culmination of the needs analysis for Emporia Public Schools, USD 253 (referred to throughout the report as USD 253 or Emporia).

Emporia Student Demographics

In the 2010-11 school year, approximately 4600 students enrolled in Emporia Public Schools, a decline of almost 400 students from the 2006-07 school year. The district employs approximately 1,000 certified and classified full- and part-time employees.

The district houses an early childhood center for three- and four-year-olds; six K-5 elementary schools, all of which offer full-day kindergarten; a middle school for students in grades 6-8; and a 9-12 high school. Emporia is also home to Turning Point Learning Center, a virtual and face-to-face K-12 charter school, and the Flint Hills Learning Center, a high school completion and workplace skills enhancement program.

Demographic patterns have shifted considerably in Emporia Public Schools over the last several years. Most students—approximately 90%—are either identified as Hispanic/Latino (45.7%) or White (45.6%), and the district now offers a dual-language program, which allows students to learn in Spanish and English. In 2010-11, 66% of students qualified for free and reduced priced meals, an increase of more than seven percentage points since 2006-07.

Table I—Demographic Shifts in USD 253

Race-Ethnicity	2006-2007	2010-2011
American Indian/Alaska Native	.4%	.9%
African-American	4.6%	2.4%
Hispanic/Latino	41.6%	45.7%
Asian/ Native Hawaiian/Pac. Islander	N/A	2.1%
Multi-Racial	4.2%	3.3%
White	46.8%	45.6%

Additionally, approximately one-third of students are identified as English language learners, and almost 12% of students are classified as students with disabilities—below the state average of 13.5%, but a slight percentage increase from the 2006-07 school year.³

Student Achievement

Overall, Emporia students have demonstrated relatively high levels of student achievement. The group, “all students,” has exceeded state assessment benchmarks in

³ KSDE and district data.

both reading and math for the past three years (for additional detail, see Table II below). Further, eight Emporia schools received Kansas Standards of Excellence Awards, and four schools received Challenge Awards for improved achievement in the 2010-11 school year.

Table II—Emporia Summary Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data

Reading – Met AYP in 2009; did not meet in 2010 or 2011. On Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2009 - 76.7%	2010 - 81.3%	2011 - 86%
All students	Met (82.6%)	Met (84.4%)	Met (86.9%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (77.3%)	Met (89.5%) ⁴	Met (83.4%) ⁵
Students with Disabilities	Met (62.6%) ⁶	No (62.1%)	No (66.2%)
ELL Students	No (72.4%) ⁴	No (76.4%)	Met (79.9%) ⁵
African-American Students	Met (71%)	No (68.5%)	Met (71.2%) ⁶
Hispanic	Met (75.6%) ⁴	Met (79.3%) ⁴	Met (83.1%) ⁵
White	Met (88.7%)	Met (90%)	Met (91.5%)
Asian*	Met (87.2%)	Met (88.6%)	Met (95.5%)
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	Met (78.1%) ⁴	N/A
Multi-Racial*	Met (86.5%)	Met (85.1%)	Met (84.5%) ⁴
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Mathematics – Met AYP in 2009; did not meet in 2010 or 2011. On Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2009 - 70.5%	2010 - 76.4%	2011 - 82.3%
All students	Met (80.9%)	Met (83.1%)	Met (82%) ⁴
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (76.2%)	Met (79.3%)	No (77.8%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (63%) ⁶	No (60.2%)	No (61.4%)
ELL Students	Met (75.3%)	Met (79%)	No (77.3%)
African-American Students	Met (69.6%) ⁴	Met (71.7%) ⁴	Met (68.6%) ⁶
Hispanic	Met (75.5%)	Met (80.3%)	No (78.2%)
White	Met (85.2%)	Met (86.2%)	Met (86.4%)
Asian*	Met (90%)	Met (91.4%)	Met (95.5%)
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	Met (83.9%)	N/A
Multi-Racial*	Met (86.9%)	Met (81.5%)	Met (74.6%) ⁴
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Overall Graduation Rate: 2009—88.9%, 2010—89.1%, 2011—79.2%[^]

Notes:

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

⁴ The percent standard or above is below the target but above the criterion.

⁵ The group made Safe Harbor.

⁶ The group made Safe Harbor through the hypothesis test at the 75% level of confidence.

^This percentage represents the four-year graduation rate for 2011. As of 2011, all states are now required by the US Department of Education to calculate schools' graduation rates based on a cohort model, in this case, the percentage of students who graduated in four years. The change is designed to ensure that all students are accounted for in the graduation rate calculation.

N/A indicates that data are not available.

Despite these accomplishments, however, USD 253 faces some clear achievement challenges. Students with disabilities failed to meet reading and math benchmarks on the state assessment in 2010 and 2011, placing the district on improvement in both reading and math. Further, in 2011 several other groups of students, including students qualifying for free and reduced priced meals, ELL students, and Hispanic students failed to meet state assessment benchmarks in mathematics as well.

The Big Picture

Patrons we spoke with were supportive of the Emporia Board of Education, administration, and teaching staff, and it is clear that Emporia provides a variety of powerful educational and extracurricular opportunities to students.

Yet, Emporia is very much a district in transition. Over the last ten years, the Emporia student population has changed significantly. The number of students identified as English language learners has more than doubled, and students qualifying for free and reduced meals have gone from nearly 40% ten years ago, to over 65% today. Like all school districts in the state of Kansas, Emporia has also faced budget cuts.

Despite these challenges, however, the district has been able to maintain vital educational supports for students.

Emporia possesses a number of strengths.

- The superintendent appears to be well respected, and she and the board of education have made several difficult financial decisions, enabling the district to remain fiscally sound and to ensure key instructional supports for students.
- Despite some communication challenges, the district enjoys considerable support from students, parents, and community members.
- The district offers a wealth of college and career and extracurricular opportunities to students.
- Emporia has invested in instructional coaches, a data management system, and professional learning communities, all of which are key levers for powerful and ongoing instructional improvement.
- USD 253 has also built a culture of professional learning.

The district can draw on these strengths and others to address five key systemic challenges as it works to improve.

- Students with disabilities have not met benchmarks on the state assessment test for the past two years, placing the district on improvement. Moreover, services

and supports for students with disabilities appear to vary greatly from school to school.

- Budget cuts, coupled with an increasingly diverse student body facing added language and economic barriers, have created added challenges for the district.
- The district is in the midst of a leadership transition, which may be masking transparency in decision-making and communication—as the district moves from committees comprised of volunteers, to committees where members are strategically selected to represent all stakeholder groups in the schools and community, utilizing existing communication streams.
- As part of its transition to the Common Core, the district faces the challenge of developing a viable and rigorous written curriculum for *all* students, and implementing mechanisms to ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently across schools.
- The district would benefit from strengthening instruction by deepening its culture of professional development—implementing coherent, ongoing, job-embedded professional development around data usage and instructional interventions.

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

II. Strengths and Challenges

Strengths and challenges identified in the needs assessment of Emporia are summarized below in the areas of Leadership; Empowering Culture and Human Capital; Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development.

Leadership

The district displays a number of leadership strengths.

- Theresa Davidson is in her second year as superintendent of Emporia Public Schools. She served in other leadership positions in the district prior to being named superintendent, and she is well respected throughout the district and community.
- The board of education and superintendent have been proactive in anticipating challenging financial times. They have developed several strategies—offering early retirement incentives, closing older school buildings and consolidating schools where possible, and eliminating certified and classified positions when necessary—which have enabled Emporia to keep instructional coaches, classroom paraprofessionals, and other key supports for student learning and achievement.
- Under the leadership of the superintendent, Emporia has developed an equitable method for allocating resources to the school buildings, based on students needs.

- The school board appears to be focused on governance and policy issues rather than operations. This allows district and school staff members to do their jobs with little inappropriate interference.
- Emporia principals and assistant principals appear to have significant building-level responsibility. Principals are able to exercise a great deal of authority within their schools, and when time permits, serve as instructional leaders.

The district can build on these strengths to address a number of leadership challenges.

- There is a need for greater central office oversight in the area of serving students with disabilities. Emporia is the sponsoring district for the Flint Hills Special Education Cooperative, and Emporia is also the largest district in the Cooperative. Despite this seemingly close connection, however, the quality and types of services available to students with disabilities appear to vary greatly from school to school. There also appears to be little accountability for improvement.
- Recently the board of education and the superintendent met to set new goals for the school district. The new goals, however, are not measurable. Moreover, strategies to meet the goals do not appear to be aligned. Timelines and processes for implementation and monitoring have not yet been determined.
- District decision-making would benefit from improved transparency and community involvement. Focus group participants expressed concern that decisions were made by the board of education and the central office with very little input from other stakeholders.
- There appears to be a lack of clarity about USD 253's expectations for students. Many participants in focus groups (parents, community leaders, and teachers) were challenged to answer when asked what the district expects of all students when they graduate from Emporia High School.
- The district is in the midst of leadership transition. Ms. Davidson was appointed interim superintendent at the start of the 2010 school year. In February 2011, she was designated superintendent. Board members, staff, and patrons like her. Focus group conversations with board members, principals, teachers, and community leaders, however, indicate that there is a need for team building among district and building level administrators. At this point in the transition, administrators appear to function as a group of individuals, not yet as a team.

Empowering Culture and Human Capital

Emporia exhibits several strengths in the area of empowering culture and human capital.

“We have some great teachers and principals in our schools”

—Community Leader

- There is significant community support for Emporia Public Schools. Parents, community leaders, and board members expressed support for the school district and staff in the school district.
- Emporia State University and Flint Hills Technical College provide ample opportunities for students to further their education. Both schools provide valuable post-secondary options, allowing many Emporia students to remain in town and continue their education beyond high school. Emporia State is also a strong source of professional development for teachers.
- There is a great deal of community support for extra curricular activities offered in Emporia Public Schools. Community leaders, parents, students, and staff with whom we spoke are proud of the music, speech, debate, drama, athletics, and afterschool programs.
- Focus group conversations indicate that stakeholders believe Emporia schools provide a safe and orderly environment for learning to take place. There are anti-bullying programs in place in the schools.
- The district’s Interest-Based Bargaining (IBB) process is viewed positively. The Emporia Board of Education, district staff, and the teacher’s association appear to have positive working relationships.

Despite these strengths, however, several challenges are apparent as well.

- The district recently closed the fifth grade attendance center, and in January, will close the sixth grade attendance center. A number of stakeholders in focus groups expressed concern about resulting overcrowding in some of the elementary buildings, noting that class sizes in the elementary schools are becoming too large.
- Parents in focus groups expressed concerns about the lack of communication between district/school and home. Some parents do not feel like they have an opportunity to provide input on issues that concern them.

“We were told that class sizes would remain the same and the schools wouldn’t be crowded; that hasn’t happened.”

—Parent

“When we have a problem, we don’t know who to contact.”—Parent

- Confusion over the designated school start time for the 2012-2013 school year has generated some angst among parents and community members. There is a rumor that elementary schools will start at 9:30 a.m. In reality, the starting time has not yet been established, and the district is working to address rumors. It appears this

issue has created some ill will toward the district, however, and more specifically toward the board of education and the superintendent.

- Teachers, principals, and community leaders expressed concern about the number of instructional and professional development initiatives undertaken by the district.
- The current teacher evaluation instrument based upon the Charlotte Danielson framework does not take into consideration student achievement or systematic observation of instruction.
- Parent and community leader focus group participants expressed frustration that schools stress testing too much and place a greater emphasis on AYP than is necessary. Parents noted that many schools begin preparing students for state assessment tests early in the year.

“We just add more and more and never take away anything; we need to focus.”

–*Teacher*

Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development

Strengths and challenges identified within 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 Emporia 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 the extent to which effective teaching/learning practices are being implemented in the classroom.

More detail about the data collected during classroom visits using the Cross & Joftus Focused Classroom Walkthrough process can be found in the Appendix of this report.

Curriculum and Assessment

Emporia has some important curriculum and assessment strengths.

- The underlying goal of the district is to graduate students “college and career-ready.” This means that students are prepared for any postsecondary education or training experience—including study at two- and four-year institutions leading to a postsecondary credential. The district offers career exploration classes, a career pathways program, STEM classes, an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, and project-based learning opportunities at the Turning Point Learning Center. Emporia High School is also one of four Kansas high schools participating in a grant to implement rigorous courses in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) career cluster.

- The district supports curriculum development and implementation through the office of Teaching and Learning. A full-time director of curriculum and multiple instructional coaches and reading specialists work with building-level professional learning communities (PLCs) to define what students should know and be able to do.
- The district has embraced the state’s adoption of the Common Core standards. District leaders have attended several national conferences. Teachers and administrators also attended the KSDE Common Core Summer Academies and received training to deconstruct the standards. The district has also drafted a three-year implementation timeline.
- The district assessment system employs a variety of assessments across all school levels.
- K-12 common assessments have been developed and used across the district for each unit/chapter. MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessments are administered three times per year K-8, twice in grades 9-10, and as needed in grade 11. Building leaders have been trained by NWEA certified trainers in use of the MAP results to target instruction. Literacy First Assessments—phonemic awareness, phonics, BEAR inventory (spelling patterns), comprehension, and fluency are administered three times per year K-5, and to select groups of students in grades 6-12. Language Acquisition System (LAS) and Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessments (KELPA) are given to all ELL identified students.
- Teachers and principals in focus groups see the district’s data management system as very helpful. The “Crystal Report” system enables every teacher to access individual and class reports that contain all testing information for their students. Teacher focus groups explained how the system is used to track and support students with high mobility rates within the district.
- Teachers are expected to discuss data within every PLC. By focusing on the question, “How will we know students have learned what we want them to know?” PLCs focus on using data to help teachers and administrators make informed instructional decisions.

To build on these strengths, however, USD 253 must also face some significant curriculum and assessment challenges.

- The district is currently in the process of developing a written curriculum based upon the Common Core standards with resources to support teachers’ content knowledge and implementation in the classroom. Teacher and principal focus groups noted that the district would benefit from a curriculum that clearly defines what students should know and be able to do. Revised pacing guides that include

skills, academic vocabulary, culturally relevant resources, and instructional approaches are needed as well.

“We are given standards and big ideas and are left to fend for ourselves to figure it out.”

—*Classroom teacher*

- The need for a viable written curriculum has become perhaps even more pressing as the district begins to make the transition to the Common Core. Teachers and principals in focus groups both expressed anxiety about making the transition.

“We need a curriculum process and plan for using the Common Core. We need a leadership model to support us and to make sure we are using teacher time wisely.”

—*Building principal*

“There is no time for us to even look at the Common Core standards let alone work with them right now; we are trying to learn Literacy First, the data reports, and teach. I am feeling very overwhelmed.”

—*Classroom teacher*

- More vertical communication with an intentional focus on key curriculum transition points within grade configurations (e.g., from elementary to middle and middle to high) is needed. Teacher and principal groups noted that they had limited opportunities to discuss and align curriculum from grade to grade. This is especially challenging at the elementary to middle school transition point, where students from six elementary schools move into one middle school.
- District expectations about how students receive access to the core curriculum need to be more clearly defined, communicated, and monitored to ensure that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum. In some schools, the Multi-Tiered System of Support is fully evident, as students all receive 90 minutes of core instruction. Some students receive tier 2 support for an additional 30 minutes, and a few students receive tier 3 support for another 60 minutes. There are co-teaching models in place to support this approach. In other schools, however, students are tracked into different levels and participate in core replacement programs of less than 90 minutes. In some cases, programs have been added to the core curriculum or have replaced the tier 1 curriculum. Examples of replacement programs include: Pin Point Math, Do The Math, Read 180, and leveled English/ Language Arts classes at the high school (e.g. English 1-2, English 3-4). Within these levels, students with disabilities, low-performing students, and English language learners are grouped together with a focus on the state standards.
- The district has focused on the reading curriculum for several years, through Open Court, Balanced Literacy, and Imagine It. Elementary teacher groups report that although they now have resources and a process for teaching the curriculum, the district still lacks a strong, coherent reading curriculum. Moreover, teachers

and principals report that the focus on reading appears to have slowed the district's progress on developing a viable math curriculum.

- Though teachers and principals appreciate having access to data provided through the Crystal Report, the depth of use of the Crystal Report varies considerably by building, and appears to be determined by the strength of the PLC team members. The district lacks guidance and protocols to help teachers dive “deeper into the data”—to determine root causes, identify interventions, and monitor the success of those interventions. Protocols should include time for teachers in co-teaching classrooms, as well as paraprofessionals and general education and special education teachers to discuss observable and anecdotal data to help all students, especially students at risk of academic failure.
- An emphasis on data-driven decision-making would enhance the district's efforts to better serve all students. Teacher focus groups, for example, noted that many changes have been made in elementary reading programs over the last several years. According to teachers, however, those changes were made despite the fact that elementary reading scores continued to make steady increases. It was unclear why or by whom the changes were made and further, what data lead to decisions to make changes. Effective programs like America's Choice Ramp-Up have come and gone without data to support those changes. These decisions have created skepticism among teachers and principals.
- K-12 common assessments have been developed for use across the district as part of the district's assessment system to monitor student learning. There are students in the “core replacement” programs, however, who are not taking common assessments, raising questions about how the district is monitoring students' learning progress.

Instruction and Professional Development

Table III presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 40%) and principals (response rate 80%) 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, more than 50% of principals surveyed 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 as strongly evident by 92% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)

- monitoring instructional practices and providing meaningful feedback to teachers (cited as strongly evident by 75% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 58% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 8%)
- identifying students who are struggling to master content and providing them with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction (cited as strongly evident by 58% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 8%).

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

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 17% of principals as strongly evident and by 50% as minimally evident or not evident)
- delivering subject matter to students at an appropriately rigorous level (cited by 8% of principals as strongly evident and by 25% as minimally evident or not evident)
- fostering collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being (cited by 8% of principals as strongly evident and by 25% as minimally evident or not evident).

Both *principals* and *teachers* were *evenly split* on the following item:

- measuring the effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (cited by 17% of principals and 21% of teachers as strongly evident, and by 17% of principals and 12% of teachers as minimally evident or not evident).

Teachers' views are generally in line with principals'. *Teachers* identify a number of strategies as *strongly evident*:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 68% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 2%)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited as strongly evident by 65% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 6%)
- identifying students who are struggling to master content providing them with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction (cited as strongly evident by 57% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 10%)
- 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 as strongly evident by 54% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 8%)
- using a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and

emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections (cited as strongly evident by 53% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 7%).

The 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 14% of teachers as strongly evident and by 44% as minimally evident or not evident)
- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support student learning (cited by 22% of teachers as strongly evident and by 32% as minimally evident or not evident)
- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 21% of teachers as strongly evident and by 27% 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.	92%	0%	65%	6%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	75%	0%	40%	11%
Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	58%	8%	68%	2%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	58%	8%	57%	10%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	50%	8%	48%	12%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving	50%	8%	43%	10%

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^
student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.				
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	42%	8%	54%	8%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	42%	0%	42%	10%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	33%	0%	34%	16%
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.	25%	8%	53%	7%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	25%	17%	51%	6%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	25%	17%	32%	12%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	25%	17%	28%	19%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the	17%	17%	21%	21%

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^
level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.				
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	25%	25%	14%	44%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	25%	33%	22%	32%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	8%	25%	42%	9%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	8%	25%	35%	14%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	17%	50%	21%	27%

Teacher Response Rate = 219/approximately 550

Principal Response Rate = 12/15

Source: Cross & Joftus survey of Emporia principals and teachers October 2011.

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

^The response option "No Opinion" was deleted from this presentation. Nine percent or less of teachers selected this option on two responses and typically only one or two percent selected this option on any response; no principals selected this response.

In addition to the survey responses, 111 classroom observations, reviews of district and state assessment data, and conversations with focus group participants indicate a number of instructional strengths in Emporia.

- One indicator of effective instructional practice is the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the Kansas State Assessment. The group "all students" has met or exceeded state benchmarks in reading and math for the past three years.
- Emporia maintains safe, orderly, and clean schools conducive to student learning. This was not only evident in the principal and teacher surveys, but was confirmed during the school and classroom visits. Emporia will continue to improve its physical instruction spaces with the new building addition at the middle school, which will place all 6th, 7th, and 8th graders in the same location.

- During Cross & Jofus Focused Classroom Walkthroughs, high levels of engagement (85-100% of the students) were observed at all levels—elementary, middle, and high school. Moreover, 95% of classroom environments visited at all levels were:
 - orderly/well-managed/adaptable to the learning task
 - communicated expectations for student behavior
 - communicated expectations for participation in the learning process
 - exhibited positive student to teacher interactions.

- Focused Classroom Walkthroughs also uncovered consistent evidence in over 70% of classrooms observed at all levels of the following sound *teaching practices*:
 - strategies to promote student participation and address learning styles
 - strategies that accelerate learning including: reinforcing efforts and providing recognition; using homework and practice opportunities; and setting objectives and providing immediate/continuous feedback that is accurate, specific, timely, and fair.

- Emporia has invested in building a cadre of instructional coaches to provide support to teachers. Teacher and principal survey responses indicate that instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and administrators monitor instruction and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.

- Emporia organizes instructional planning and collaboration in the schools around professional learning communities (PLCs). Over 200 certified staff members have attended PLC institutes, and the PLCs have a strong focus on instruction. Teachers meet together to discuss the instructional needs of students and how to deliver instructional services more effectively.

- Literacy First has a history of success at the secondary level in the district. Recently, Literacy First was adopted on a district-wide basis. This should help to ensure that reading/literacy instruction for students operates in a more integrated manner as students move through the system.

- The district-wide adoption of Literacy First will be enhanced by the presence of an additional instructional coach at each of the 3 larger elementary schools.

“We intentionally identified some of our very best classroom teachers and asked them to be instructional coaches. We knew they would be great models of what good instruction is.”

—*District Administrator*

There are some clear instructional challenges, as well, however.

- Beyond the Literacy First approach, the district appears to lack a clear instructional model.
- Further, the district does not currently have a common systemic protocol or process for regularly observing instruction, providing feedback to teachers, and implementing professional development designed to lead to continual improvement in instruction.
- Instruction is delivered at as many as four levels in a single subject area in the high school. This effectively results in “tracking” for most students and may be leading to lower expectations for some students. It may also be compromising the delivery of core instruction that should be available to all students at rigorous levels.
- A relatively small number of 8th grade students—approximately 30%—are receiving algebra instruction in middle school, thus limiting math options for high school students. This challenge, however, should be addressed when the district transitions to the Common Core.
- The instructional coaches provide crucial instructional supports for teachers, but the district is challenged to keep coaches’ work focused on the core function of coaching instruction rather than on non-instructional administrative tasks.
- Emporia schools have an impressive amount of technology to support the delivery of instruction. Teachers, however, would benefit from coaching that helps them embed technology into their instruction.
- Elementary principals pointed out that the Multi-Tiered System of Supports for math was several years behind the MTSS framework in reading. There appears to be no consistent K-12 articulation of math instruction for the district.
- Emporia has a number of ELL teachers, special education teachers, special education paraprofessionals, instructional coaches and Literacy First strategists. The district does not appear, however, to have developed or implemented a plan to bring the work of these individuals together to support students in a consistent and seamless manner.
- Though survey data indicate that teachers believe they are using effective instructional strategies observations of 111 classrooms using the Cross & Joftus Focused Classroom Walkthrough tool, identified several instructional challenges. There is a need to increase the following *teaching practices*, which were observed in less than 20% of the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies):

“We have zero time to talk with our teachers about working with the students.”

—*Paraprofessional*

- using metacognitive strategies: teacher modeling of the thinking process
 - using strategies to address diverse language and cultural needs
 - identifying similarities and differences
 - generating and testing hypotheses
 - summarizing and taking notes.
- The district would benefit from providing instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking that require cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Classroom walkthrough data indicate that thinking levels were below the level of application in 56% of classrooms observed.
 - Observations revealed that *student learning strategies* designed to bring about high levels of cognitive engagement were visible in less than 30% of classrooms observed across all levels. Those strategies include:
 - asks/answers higher level questions
 - investigates and solves problems
 - uses technology in the learning process
 - participates in individual reflection (metacognition).
 - Moreover, the following strategies used to illustrate how students demonstrate physical and cognitive engagement and learning at high levels were minimally evident (observed in less than 30% of classrooms visited) at all school levels.
 - displays a real-world connection
 - engages in peer and self-assessment of the learning.

The needs analysis uncovered several professional development strengths.

- The district clearly supports a culture of professional learning. Professionals at all levels appear to have many professional learning opportunities available to them.
- Emporia has focused on professional learning communities' (PLC) training for several years. PLCs are active in all schools and serve as a forum for teachers to discuss curriculum decisions and alignment issues. PLC time is also used to collaboratively assess student learning and plan appropriate instruction.
- Special education teachers appear to participate in all the professional development opportunities provided to general education teachers.

“Professional development is a very important cog in the improvement process. For example, 200 people have been to PLC Institutes.”

—*District Administrator*

- Some of the strongest professional development in the district appears to be deeply embedded in the classroom, where teachers receive support from instructional coaches.

Emporia must also confront some important professional development challenges.

- Though the district clearly values professional learning, focus group participants suggested that much of the district’s professional learning has taken place during one-time events. Exceptions are the district’s consistent focus on PLCs, SIOP, Literacy First, Imagine It, and Math Trailblazers. By deepening professional development through PLCs, the district could substantially strengthen its overall approach to professional development.
- As the district transitions to Common Core standards, professional development around an instructional model with a focus on rigorous instruction—not on a specific program—would benefit all students.
- The district appears to lack sufficient professional development on how to manage and use student data. The Crystal Report system has strong potential for helping teachers and administrators to make data-driven decisions about instruction. However, without effective professional development designed to help teachers and principals use and learn from the data, the full potential of this resource will not be realized.
- Despite a changing population, the district appears to lack a sustained professional development plan to help teachers and other educators meet the cultural and linguistic needs of an increasingly diverse student body. There appear to be pockets of effectiveness where teachers are more effectively meeting language needs; the district could strengthen its professional development by building on these pockets of effectiveness.
- It appears that counselors—especially at the secondary level—are working in relative isolation. At the secondary level, counselors appear to be the key individuals that develop individual students’ schedules. In order to do this effectively, they need to understand how various classes are connected and aligned and how they impact students. Yet, in focus groups, it became clear that counselors did not generally participate in professional development or in PLCs. It was reported that some students had classes taken off their schedules after a team of teachers had made decisions—that overrode the counselors’ scheduling advice—about the needs of a particular student.

III. Recommendations

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district could most benefit from technical assistance. Building on the district’s current capacities

and strengths, technical support should help increase the quality of individual schools and the achievement of all their students.

At the outset of this report, five key systemic challenges were identified.

- Students with disabilities have not met benchmarks on the state assessment test for the past two years, placing the district on improvement. Moreover, services and supports for students with disabilities appear to vary greatly from school to school.
- Budget cuts, coupled with an increasingly diverse student body facing added language and economic barriers, have created added challenges for the district.
- The district is in the midst of a leadership transition, which may be masking transparency in decision-making and communication.
- As part of its transition to the Common Core, the district faces the challenge of developing a viable and rigorous written curriculum for *all* students, and implementing mechanisms to ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently across schools.
- The district would benefit from strengthening instruction by deepening its culture of professional development—implementing coherent, ongoing, job-embedded professional development around data usage and instructional interventions.

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

1. Continue to update the strategic plan to reflect the district’s theory of action and to build and support a coherent approach to improvement. Align strategies, timelines, and metrics and connect them to the strategic plan. Implement a process for monitoring implementation of goals and strategies.
2. In collaboration with KSDE’s Special Education Technical Assistance Support Network, and external consultants if appropriate, conduct an in-depth special education needs assessment to determine how to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and to ensure that students have access to, and make satisfactory progress in the general curriculum.

The review needs to look specifically at the following:

- Leadership responsibilities within the cooperative.
- The process of how students are identified for services.
- How and what professional development is provided for all staff, including cooperative teachers and paraprofessionals.
- How planning time is scheduled to ensure a common instructional focus for students who experience instruction from general education and special education teachers, as well as paraprofessionals and classroom aides.

3. Articulate, align, and fully implement curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development with the goal of continually improving student learning and achievement. This process should include a framework for monitoring implementation and address the following:
 - a. Creation of a district process for developing a viable curriculum guided by the Common Core standards, with resources to support teachers' content knowledge and implementation in the classroom. A clear communication plan should be developed to inform all stakeholders of the timeline, process, and roll out for implementation.
 - b. Implementation of a system-wide instructional model tied to rigorous standards. Consistent implementation of MTSS across the district with support from a KSDE recognized MTSS facilitator. The instructional model should draw on an analysis of student achievement data and prioritize research-based instructional practices that will have the greatest impact on increasing achievement, especially for students with disabilities, English language learners and other groups of students struggling to meet achievement benchmarks. As part of this process, the central office leadership team along with building principals should work collaboratively with teacher leaders to review and prioritize district instructional and professional development initiatives.

This review should address questions such as the following:

- Based on the instructional needs of students, what's most important for all students? Special attention should be given to students with disabilities and English language learners.
 - How effectively are current instructional approaches and professional development meeting these needs?
 - What can or should be let go?
 - How can new teachers be trained and supported to implement these instructional approaches effectively?
- c. Systematization of PLCs and classroom observations as catalysts for implementing research-based effective educational practices, by:
 - conducting classroom observations using common criteria and providing feedback to educators
 - analyzing data using a consistent protocol to determine the extent of implementation of effective teaching/learning practices
 - determining future professional development practices using observation data.

- d. Development of a monitoring system to measure the implementation and impact of professional development on changes in teacher behaviors.⁷ In addition to classroom walkthroughs, the district may consider the use of tools such as the Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM).⁸ The ICM was designed to ensure that strategies are implemented correctly and with fidelity; it includes teacher self-assessment of the use of best-practice strategies.
4. Continue to work to enhance transparency in communications and decision-making. Attention should be given to address stakeholders' concerns.

Next Steps

1. Based on the findings and the recommendations in this needs appraisal, Cross & Joftus recommends that the district participate in the following KLN Communities of Practice (CoPs):
 - Curriculum, Stage I
 - Instruction, Stage I
2. Your district facilitator will be in touch with the superintendent within the next couple weeks to discuss the CoPs, answer questions, and begin planning for the drafting of the district's Integrated Improvement Plan.

Process for Analyzing Classroom Walkthrough Data

As recently proposed by City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Lee in *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*, “Since what goes on in the classroom is at the heart of instructional improvement, a key part of developing an improvement practice is observation.” Connecting classroom observations to the “larger context of the system’s improvement strategy” is how to support sustained improvement.⁹

In short, observation data need to be used regularly and systematically to improve teaching and learning. In order to do this effectively, districts must determine the skills educators need to develop, practice, implement, and refine during professional development.

⁷ Reeves, D.B. *Transforming Professional Development Into Student Learning Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010.

⁸ Champion, Robby. “The Innovation Configuration can gauge progress of reform initiatives and take the guesswork out of professional development planning.” National Staff Development Council, 2003.

⁹ Elizabeth A. City, Richard F. Elmore, Sarah E. Fiarman, and Lee Teitel, *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2009.

The following process will assist district personnel in identifying what skills should take priority in future professional development:

1. Analyze classroom observation data summarized in the Appendix in the **“Teaching/Learning Practices Graphs.”** Based on work from the National Implementation Research Network at the University of South Florida, Cross & Joftus has developed an implementation matrix that quantifies the extent to which research-based practices are being implemented in classrooms observed (see percentages in the Appendix).
2. To prioritize professional development topics, consider using the following criteria provided by the Implementation Research Network:
 - Mark as a first priority those effective practices that are “*inconsistently evident*” in less than 29% of the classes visited.
 - Mark as a second priority those effective practices that are “*minimally evident*” in 30-49% of classrooms visited.
 - Mark as a third priority those effective practices that are “*partially evident*” in 50-69% of the classrooms visited.
 - Mark as a fourth priority those effective practices that are “*consistently evident*” in 70-100% of the classes visited.