

Needs Analysis of Lansing School District, USD 469

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 469, Lansing School District. 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 Lansing occurred October 13-14, 2011.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Joftus for the district’s leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary results. This report represents the culmination of the needs analysis for Lansing School District, USD 469 (referred to throughout the report as USD 469 or Lansing).

Lansing Student Demographics

In the 2010-11 school year approximately 2650 students enrolled in Lansing, an increase of almost 15 percentage points from 2006-07, when 2293 students attended Lansing schools. The district employs 153 certified and classified full- and part-time employees, and houses three schools—Lansing Elementary, Lansing Middle, and Lansing High School.

Demographic patterns have shifted considerably in Lansing over the last five years, and the district has become more racially and economically diverse. The number of students identified White has decreased by seven percentage points, from 85.4% to 78.4%; the percentage of students identified as Hispanic/Latino has more than doubled, from 3.6% in 2006-07 to 7.8% in 2010-11; and the percentage of students identified as multiracial has almost doubled as well, climbing from 2.5% in 2006-07 to 4.7% in 2010-11. In 2010-11, 22.1% of students qualified for free and reduced priced meals, an increase of almost 10 percentage points since 2006-07.

Table I—Demographic Shifts in USD 469

Race-Ethnicity	2006-07	2010-11
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%	.9%
African-American	5.8%	6.6%
Hispanic/Latino	3.6%	7.8%
Asian/ Native Hawaiian/Pac. Islander	N/A	1.5%
Multiracial	2.5%	4.7%
White	85.4%	78.4%

Approximately 13.5% of students are classified as students with disabilities—on par with the state average of 13.5%—and an increase of 2.8 percentage points from 2006-07, when 10.7% of students were identified as students with disabilities.³

Student Achievement

Overall, Lansing students have demonstrated high levels of student achievement in reading, as measured by state assessments. All student groups have exceeded state assessment benchmarks in reading for the past three years, and the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency or above on state reading assessments increased each year for almost all student groups (for additional detail, see Table II below). Further, Lansing

³ KSDE and district data.

schools received 13 Kansas Standards of Excellence Awards for the 2010-11 school year, including building-wide awards at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

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

Reading – Met AYP in 2009, 2010 and 2011; not on Improvement.

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2009 - 76.7%	2010 - 81.3%	2011 - 86%
All students	Met (90.4%)	Met (92%)	Met (92.9%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (82.1%)	Met (84.7%)	Met (87.5%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (76.5%) ⁴	Met (77.1%) ⁴	Met (80.9%) ⁴
ELL Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
African-American Students	Met (85.1%)	Met (82.4%)	Met (77.2%) ⁴
Hispanic	Met (80%)	Met (89.2%)	Met (90.3%)
White	Met (91.5%)	Met (92.8%)	Met (94%)
Asian*	N/A	N/A	Met (95.5%)
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Multi-Racial*	Met (86.4%)	Met (92.2%)	Met (97.3%)
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 (85.1%)	Met (84.9%)	Met (85.5%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (79.5%)	Met (71.9%) ⁴	No (74.8%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (63.2%) ⁴	No (60.9%)	Met (66%) ⁵
ELL Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
African-American Students	Met (76.1%)	Met (67.6%) ⁴	Met (71.4%) ⁵
Hispanic	Met (74.4%)	Met (80.7%)	Met (78.4%) ⁴
White	Met (86.4%)	Met (86.2%)	Met (87.4%)
Asian*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Multi-Racial*	Met (81.4%)	Met (84.1%)	Met (83.1%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Overall Graduation Rate: 2009—95.1%, 2010—90.5%, 2011—80.4%[^]

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.

[^]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

⁴ The group made Safe Harbor through the hypothesis test at the 75% level of confidence.

⁵ The group made Safe Harbor.

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 469 faces some clear achievement challenges. Students with disabilities failed to meet benchmarks on the state math assessment in 2010, and students qualifying for free and reduced priced meals failed to meet benchmarks in 2011 placing the district on improvement in math. Moreover, in 2011 a number of groups of students met benchmarks on the state math assessment through safe harbor or confidence interval designations.

The Big Picture

USD 469 is located in Leavenworth County and is a part of the larger Kansas City metropolitan area. The latest census data indicate that there are close to 11,000 people living in the Lansing area, a 22% increase from 2000 data. The median household income is approximately \$70,000. Lansing is also home to the Lansing Correctional Facility, formerly the Kansas State Penitentiary.

Like many communities across the United States, Lansing is becoming increasingly diverse. This diversity, coupled with an increase in the number of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, poses new challenges for USD 469. Fortunately, Lansing possesses a number of strengths and is well positioned to meet those challenges.

The KLN needs analysis uncovered a number of overall strengths in Lansing.

- The superintendent and board of education appear to work well together and are well respected in the community. They work closely with city officials and community supporters and are seen as wise stewards of district resources.
- Principals are given considerable autonomy within their schools; they are expected to support and lead quality instruction.
- USD 469 has begun to initiate and provide support for professional learning communities (PLCs) within Lansing schools.
- Lansing appears to provide a safe, supportive, and caring learning environment for students and staff, and students benefit from a strong teaching staff.
- The district has invested in several valuable resources—a curriculum management system, a professional development council, principal-led classroom observations, and the beginnings of an MTSS framework—which, if fully implemented and used effectively, can serve as the backbone for continual improvement in Lansing.

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

- Increases in enrollment, racial/ethnic diversity, and the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged have created added challenges for the district over the past few years.

- The district currently lacks coherence. While autonomy is valuable and can enable principals to be effective leaders, in order for school systems to work effectively, improvement efforts need to be connected and coordinated. In Lansing, each of the schools and the central office appear to operate fairly independently of each other, and as a result, efforts to improve curriculum and instruction may go unrealized due to a lack of coordination across the district.
- Though the work of the superintendent and board of education is guided by annual goals, the goals would be more effective if they were tied to a long-range strategic plan and shared widely within the school system and the broader community.
- 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 creating mechanisms to ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently across schools.
- MTSS is not yet being implemented effectively and consistently district-wide.
- Moreover, Lansing currently lacks a clear instructional model supported by ongoing, research-based, job-embedded professional development.

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 Lansing 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.

- The Lansing Board of Education seems to be highly respected by the community and appears to work well as a governing body. The addition of new members this past summer doesn't appear to have altered positive working relations among board members and between the board and Superintendent Randy Bagby.
- Focus group conversations with community members indicate that Superintendent Bagby is also highly respected; community members give him a great deal of credit for the successes Lansing has achieved. He is recognized as a community leader, with considerable expertise in fiscal and facility planning and management. This expertise appears to have served the district and community well, as Lansing has seen significant enrollment increases during Superintendent Bagby's eight-year tenure.

- The board and superintendent have established yearly goals since 2004. 2010-11 goals address six areas: Internal/External Public Relations; Finance; Buildings, Grounds, and Equipment; Curriculum and Instruction; General Board of Education; and Personnel. These goals are also used by the board as part of their evaluation of the superintendent.
- The district’s leadership team—which includes the superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum and technology, and the four principals (there are two principals at the elementary school; one for the lower grades and one for the upper)—meets once a week to discuss ongoing issues facing the district, individual schools, and programs such as special education. These meetings allow leaders to share successes and concerns.
- The four principals appear to have a great deal of authority within their schools. The district empowers principals to lead, with minimal direction from the central office. Principals see themselves as deeply involved in curriculum and instruction decisions, and as leaders of quality education in their buildings.
- The district has fared better than many districts in terms of funding, bolstered by increases in enrollment and in the number of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Through good planning by the superintendent and direction from the board, Lansing has not had to cut teachers or programs. The district’s mill levy has remained very stable, at around 53 mills.
- Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been initiated in all schools. Though teachers and administrators report a need for training and support to fully implement the PLC model, PLCs have the potential to provide teachers with time to meet together to discuss curriculum, instruction, student needs, and new programs.

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

- The overriding challenge facing the district’s leadership concerns how to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of an increasingly diverse and economically challenged student body. The demographics of the district are changing significantly, and all groups interviewed recognize that this brings additional challenges to Lansing. The district will need to implement new strategies to engage *all* students and their parents.
- In addition, the number of students is growing, and district facilities were described as “busting at the seams.” Planning is already underway to address the need for new facilities to accommodate expected continued growth. This will likely result in the district asking the community to approve funds for new facilities within the next few years. Getting a bond issue approved in these economic times will require a significant investment of time and a coordinated communication effort from district staff.

- While the board and superintendent have developed goals for the school year, these have not been fully integrated into a long-range plan and have not been articulated to the staff and community. Staff in focus groups raised questions about the district's direction around curriculum and instruction, professional development, and technology, and parents asked about the district's plans to meet the needs of a changing student body.
- There is a lack of coherence in the district. Coherence means that the elements of a school district work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy. While the district has goals, there is not a developed, articulated strategy or theory of change guiding improvement efforts in the district.

Moreover, focus group participants described the district as having four islands, with the central office, the high school, the middle school, and the elementary school operating separately. Though there are exceptions—middle school teachers meet weekly in grade-level teams and middle and high school teachers have met to discuss vertical curriculum alignment, for example—teachers and principals reported little planning and communication between grade levels and between the elementary, middle, and high schools. The district appears to operate as a loosely connected organization.

Staff expressed a desire to tighten up the organization; not to micromanage, but rather to ensure that there is more direction from the central office and more continuity in curriculum, instruction, and professional development work.

- Though Lansing has not cut teachers or programs, the district has made staff cuts at the central office. As Lansing takes up the challenging work of transitioning the curriculum to the Common Core, developing and implementing an instructional framework with tiered supports, planning and providing professional development to support instructional improvement, and developing strategies to meet the needs of a changing student body, the central office will face the challenge of leading and coordinating these initiatives with the current staff. Assistant Superintendent Dan Wessel is the administrator responsible for all of the work mentioned above; he also oversees the technology program, which will also need significant work. The district will need to consider whether one person can do all the work required.
- While PLCs are in place, their effectiveness appears to vary considerably from school to school. Middle school teachers and the principal reported that time is provided for the PLCs in their school, and they believe the PLCs are productive. Staff from the two elementary schools and the high school report much less success in finding time for PLCs to meet, and thus they are not as effective. Educators also noted that they need additional training and support to implement PLCs with fidelity. If the PLCs are to be a key component of the district's efforts

to improve student achievement, the district will have to develop strategies to enhance their effectiveness.

- The use of technology as a productive teaching and learning tool is very inconsistent. Teachers and principals noted that staff need additional training in how to use technology in the classroom, and that educators would benefit from knowing how to use technology to access and use data to make instructional decisions. Middle school staff reported, for example, that the district's lack of attention to their technology needs is impeding instructional progress.

Empowering Culture and Human Capital

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

- Parents interviewed describe the Lansing community as a great place to raise a family, and all focus groups noted that Lansing schools provide a high-quality learning environment that is safe and secure for students and staff. Students spoke highly of their teachers and reported that the teachers cared about them and their futures. Parents and community members stated that the district and its schools are welcoming and make visitors and newcomers feel comfortable. Many who were interviewed spoke of the fact that the success of the Lansing District is a major influence in families deciding to move into the community or to send their children there from surrounding communities. Approximately 300 out-of-district students attend Lansing schools, and focus group participants pointed out that the strong reputation of the district has also led to population growth in the larger Lansing community.
- The Lansing School District has very strong community support from groups such as the Lansing Education Foundation. According to the Lansing Education Foundation's Facebook page, the foundation is "dedicated to the support of public education to provide opportunities for all students to develop the attributes to be critical, creative thinkers, life-long learners, and responsible citizens in a global community." The foundation provides approximately \$22,000 each year to support grants to teachers and innovative projects. It also hosts several district and community events to raise funds and to honor students and teachers.
- The community is also a strong supporter of district fine arts and athletic programs. The local Kiwanis club, for example, sponsors the BUG (Bring Up Grades) program in the elementary schools.
- The board of education and Superintendent Bagby have an excellent working relationship with the Lansing City Manager and the Lansing City Council. The superintendent and city manager meet often to discuss mutual concerns, and both governing bodies meet twice yearly. This ongoing conversation helps both entities keep current on issues affecting the district and the community—such as

neighborhoods, housing, population growth, and taxes—and provides a vehicle to discuss ways the two can cooperate for the good of the community.

- Parents and community members reported that the district does a good job of communicating. Parents particularly appreciate the new Skyward portal, which allows them to have ongoing confidential access to teachers and to information regarding homework, assignments, tests, etc. Parents reported that teachers are very good about responding to inquiries. Parents and community members also value school and district webpages; the district newsletter, which is available on line and in print; and the community newspaper, which provides good coverage of district news and events.
- The district is proud of its teaching staff and reports that it is able to hire outstanding teachers. According to the KSDE 2010-2011 District Report, 98% of the Lansing teachers are rated as highly qualified. Lansing’s strong reputation is an asset, helping the district to recruit, employ, and maintain high-quality teachers and administrators. Recruitment and retention are also supported by a competitive salary schedule and Lansing’s location within a metropolitan area, which provides a wider, stronger pool of candidates.

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

- The changing demographics of the district and community have created issues and discomfort for some. While most applaud Lansing’s growth, some people in and outside the district are concerned about changing demographics and increasing poverty. Focus group participants, for example, mentioned that there is some controversy in the community about the development of more low-income housing. All groups interviewed agreed that the district is going to continue to change, as it becomes more and more a part of the larger Kansas City metropolitan area. The district’s reputation and the quality of life in the community will continue to attract families wanting to relocate from more urban areas. As this change unfolds, the district will be challenged to meet the needs of *all* students and families who come to its schools. It will be important that newcomers—regardless of economic status or racial/ethnic identity—be welcomed. To their credit, district leaders recognize this challenge and are beginning discussions to address it; but at this time, no coherent plan exists. Teachers and principals interviewed also recognize this challenge and express a strong desire to address it for all students.
- While interviewees expressed satisfaction with district communication, they also noted a need for training on how to use Skyward, particularly for parents who might not be computer-savvy. They also raised questions about how parents who

“This district is on the verge of being a great school district.”

—*Community member*

do not have computers or Internet access are able to receive the same information that is available to parents on Skyward.

- Like many urban districts across Kansas, the district's staff does not yet reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the student body. As the student population becomes more diverse, Lansing will be challenged to recruit and employ minority certified and classified staff.

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 Lansing 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 to this report.

Curriculum and Assessment

Lansing has some valuable curriculum and assessment strengths.

- The Lansing district has and continues to budget for an electronic curriculum management system, AllofE. Teachers and principals have 24/7 access to curriculum mapped to the 2003 Kansas State Standards. The middle school uses the system to update curriculum, adding essential knowledge and skills.
- Lansing High School students have access to a "college and career-ready" curriculum. Dual credit opportunities are available through Donnelly College and Kansas City Kansas Community College. Advanced Placement (AP) coursework is offered in mathematics and AP English classes are being developed.
- The elementary reading program includes Storytown, a high quality reading program with a strong research base that includes fictional and non-fictional text, resources for differentiated instruction, a cross-curricular focus, and a strong assessment component. Lexia Reading is used as a comprehensive intervention tool to support core reading instruction.⁶ The success of these programs is evident throughout the school system, as 92.9% of the group "all students" (which includes all students who took the assessment at all levels) scored proficient or above on the 2010-2011 Kansas State Reading Assessment.

⁶ Florida Center for Reading Research

- In addition to administering the Kansas State Assessment System, the district has budgeted for several additional assessments to guide data-driven discussion for instructional decision-making. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment is used at all levels, AIMSweb is available to grades K-8, and common assessments have been developed at some school levels.
- Teachers and principals describe data conversations as a regular part of teacher collaboration and planning and professional learning communities' discussions; data are used for student placement. Educators also note that they have begun to use PLCs to develop and implement common formative assessments in all core subjects across grade levels.

To build on these strengths, however, USD 469 must also face some significant curriculum and assessment challenges.

- The district currently lacks a transition plan for implementing the Common Core curriculum standards, and this is a major concern of administrators. Lansing has no overall plan for developing content or ensuring instructional alignment with appropriate strategies and resources.
- Teacher and principal focus groups report that a new mathematics series has been purchased for use at the elementary school, which according to the publisher, is aligned to the Common Core. Teachers voiced frustration, however, because current instruction is aligned to the tested Kansas 2003 Mathematics Standards. Moreover, most teachers have had no professional development around the Common Core standards. The textbook company provided some training regarding how to use the text, but teachers lack understanding of how content and instruction will change as the district transitions. Teacher and principal focus group participants agreed that a transition plan is needed.
- The district would also benefit from implementing a systematic process for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing the curriculum. Although the district has access to a curriculum management system, a review of the system reveals that it has not been consistently updated since 2009. Curriculum committees no longer meet, and curricular revisions and text adoptions appear to happen independently of a larger district vision for curriculum development and delivery.

“We need a district vision around the Common Core, instead of each school acting as an island unto itself.”

—*Principal*

“We talk about what is happening if we run into each other at the gym.”

—*Classroom teacher*

- Vertical alignment and communication around the curriculum is also needed. Teachers report that they seldom have the chance to discuss curriculum from one grade level to the next within schools and across school levels. Opportunities have been scheduled and then postponed due to other initiatives.

“I think aligning our curriculum horizontally and vertically would definitely increase our student achievement.”

— *Classroom teacher*

- District expectations regarding student access to the core curriculum need to be more clearly defined, communicated, and monitored to ensure that all students have access to a rigorous, common academic core curriculum. School leadership team members and building principals report that they believe they are “implementing the MTSS framework,” following structuring training in reading from a local Kansas service center. Yet, teachers and principals note that schools have implemented a number of practices that are not consistent with the Kansas State Department of Education’s MTSS model.⁷

The following examples were noted:

- Many students with disabilities appear to be grouped homogenously and gain access to the core curriculum through a Direct Studies class taught by a special education teacher. Teachers reported that of the 86 middle school students with IEPs, 33 students (38%) received core instruction in math from the special education teacher in the resource room setting. Similar examples were described at all school levels for reading, mathematics, and science.
- In some cases, we heard about paraprofessionals providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction for reading and mathematics—under the guidance of highly qualified teachers in some grades, but not all.
- There is a lack of communication between general education and special education teachers to accommodate flexible grouping for Tier 2 placement.
- Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction is offered before school hours, 7:30 to 8:00am, as opposed to being an integral part of the school day.
- Though each building has addressed assessment issues, Lansing has not developed a coherent district-wide system for defining and implementing the four types of assessments (screening, diagnostic, benchmarking, and progress monitoring) in the MTSS framework.

“We need comprehensive MTSS training. I would like to go visit other schools to see how they are doing it, rather than one or two people coming back and telling you what it is supposed to be.”

—*Classroom teacher*

⁷ See www.kansasMTSS.org.

- The district would benefit from implementing a systemic process to determine formative assessment selection and use. Currently, there appear to be no district criteria to guide decision-making about which assessments will be used at each school level, when, and for what purpose. Schools use multiple assessments—MAP testing, AIMSWeb, and a multitude of other assessments—differently for different purposes. During focus groups conversations, teachers noted that they were just finding out what assessments other buildings were using.
- As district staff members learn to fully utilize Skyward, Lansing would benefit from building a data warehouse within Skyward to support easy access to student scores from multiple assessments over time. Such a system would allow users to access student data from a single source—a source that tracks student progress longitudinally by class, building, etc. The district would also benefit from implementing a data analysis process to guide the use of data in decision-making. Teachers in focus groups voiced a need for professional development to understand how to analyze data and use it to implement effective interventions

“We need to streamline assessment data. We are currently using at least six different formal assessments and trying to compile data from all these different places into a useful format is not realistic given the time we have available.”

—Teacher

Instruction

Table III presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 46%) and principals (response rate 50%) 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.

Teachers and principals are generally in agreement about which strategies they believe to be most evident in Lansing schools. The sound instructional strategies that *principals* and *teachers* believe are most *strongly evident* in their schools is:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 100% of principals and 83% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0% of principals and 1% of teachers)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited as strongly evident by 67% of principals and 56% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0% of principals and 19% of teachers).

The sound instructional strategy that *principals* believe to be *least evident* is:

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities (cited as

strongly evident by 0% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 67%).

The strategies that *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 5% of teachers as strongly evident and by 54% as minimally evident or not evident)
- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support student learning (cited by 10% of teachers as strongly evident and by 40% as minimally evident or not evident)
- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 18% of teachers as strongly evident and by 46% 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 as strongly evident by 19% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 47%).

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 create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	100%	0%	68%	1%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	67%	0%	56%	19%
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.	67%	0%	36%	18%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	67%	0%	32%	27%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development	33%	0%	42%	8%

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^
levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.				
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	33%	0%	42%	18%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	33%	0%	38%	13%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.	33%	0%	38%	16%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	33%	0%	27%	39%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	33%	0%	5%	54%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	33%	33%	18%	46%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	0%	0%	39%	21%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	0%	0%	33%	19%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	0%	0%	26%	40%

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 collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	0%	33%	45%	24%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	0%	33%	30%	32%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	0%	33%	19%	47%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	0%	33%	10%	40%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	0%	67%	44%	31%

Teacher Response Rate = 84/181

Principal Response Rate = 3/6

Source: Cross & Jofus survey of Lansing principals and teachers October 2011.

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

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

Survey responses tell only part of the story; classroom observations, reviews of district and state assessment data, and conversations with focus group participants indicate a number of instructional strengths in Lansing.

- One indicator of effective instructional practice is the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the Kansas State Assessment. Spring 2011 AYP data indicate that almost 93% of the group "all students" demonstrated proficiency in reading, well above the reading proficiency benchmark. Moreover, reading scores for almost all groups of students have steadily increased over the past few years.

- During observations of 90 classrooms using the Cross & Joftus Focused Classroom Walkthrough protocol, the following effective *teaching* and *learning* practices were evident in the classrooms visited (See Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies):
 - The majority of classrooms displayed an environment conducive to learning.
 - Classrooms were orderly, well-managed, and adaptable to the learning task, with clear expectations for student behavior and participation in the learning process.
 - Students demonstrated a willingness to participate in the learning task over 70% of the time and were actively engaged 70%-100% of the time at all school levels.
 - Positive “student to teacher” and “teacher to student” interactions were consistently observed.
 - Standards/skill-based lessons were communicated to students.
- The district uses Reading Recovery as an intervention for students needing extra support in the first grade. Administrators report positive results from the program.

To capitalize on these strengths, Lansing must address some important instructional challenges, as well.

- Currently, the district lacks an overall instructional model to support effective implementation of research-based instructional practices.
- Interviews with district staff, principals, and special education teachers confirmed that although MTSS is “in process” in buildings across the district, MTSS is not being implemented consistently, or in some cases, appropriately, from school to school.
- There is a concern that a high percentage of students with disabilities are not receiving instruction in the core curriculum from classroom teachers. As noted earlier, a significant percentage of students with disabilities at the middle school receiving core instruction in the special education resource room.
- Currently, Lansing principals use a classroom observation process to monitor instruction. However, principals do not use observation data systematically to guide instruction and professional development, and provide timely and relevant feedback to teachers so that they can improve their instructional practices.
- Though survey results suggest that teachers and principals believe they are using effective instructional practices to meet rigorous academic standards, observations of 90 classrooms in Lansing identified the need to increase the following *teaching practices*, which were evident in less than 50% the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies).

Improvement in these areas may bring about higher student achievement for all students:

- Use of strategies to meet diverse language and cultural needs
 - Use of interdisciplinary or real world instructional examples (75% at primary level)
 - Use of metacognitive strategies: teacher modeling of the thinking process
 - Use of Marzano's research-based instructional strategies⁸: identify similarities and differences; summarize and take notes; represent knowledge in multiple ways; provide opportunities for cooperative learning (63% at the primary level; and generate and test hypotheses
 - Differentiation to match student learning needs and strength.
- Observations revealed that *student learning strategies* designed to bring about high levels of cognitive engagement were visible in less than 50% of classrooms observed across all levels. Those strategies include:
 - Asks/answers higher level questions
 - Engages in active reading, note taking and constructed response tasks (intermediate 54%)
 - Investigates and solves problems
 - Participates in group work and dialogue about the learning task
 - Participates in individual reflection
 - Uses technology in the learning process.
 - The following strategies used to illustrate how students demonstrate physical and cognitive engagement and learning at high levels were observed in less than 50% of classrooms visited at all school levels:
 - Demonstrates responsibility for learning and explains why it is important
 - Differentiation is evident in activities/materials and products/assignments
 - Displays a real world connection
 - Engages in peer and self-assessment of the learning.

Professional Development

Lansing has a number of professional development strengths.

- During an era of challenging economic times, the district has set aside ample funding for professional development support, enabling educators to build skills by going to conferences and bringing experts to the district to work with staff.
- Professional development is identified with input from representatives of each building who comprise the Professional Development Council. The council holds

⁸ Marzano, R. (2001). *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

a planning session in June of each year to plan for the upcoming school year and organize professional learning for both returning and new teachers.

- All schools have created time for professional learning communities (PLC's) to meet each week. The amount of time varies from building to building.
- Special education teachers can participate in the same professional learning opportunities available to general education teachers.

To build on these strengths, Lansing must address some professional development challenges.

- While the district does offer job-embedded professional development tied to student learning needs, teachers and administrators in focus groups noted that current professional development is not *consistently* on-going, job-embedded, and specifically tied to the learning needs of students.
- Though the district provides professional development to address a number of educational needs, it would benefit from a more data-driven approach to professional development planning and implementation. Implementation of a systematic classroom observation would enable the district to gather and use data to inform future professional development based on the extent of implementation of research-based effective teaching practices.
- While Lansing uses an annual needs assessment administered by the Southeast Kansas Service Center at Greenbush to prioritize professional development efforts, the district would benefit from establishing criteria for a data-driven, long-range professional development plan based on student achievement learning data and classroom observation teaching data.

“We need to focus on a couple of things and stay with them.”

—*Teacher*

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, six key systemic challenges were identified.

- Increases in enrollment, racial/ethnic diversity, and the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged have created added challenges for the district over the past few years.
- The district currently lacks coherence. While autonomy is valuable and can enable principals to be effective leaders, in order for school systems to work effectively,

improvement efforts need to be connected and coordinated. In Lansing, each of the schools and the central office appear to operate fairly independently of each other, and as a result, efforts to improve curriculum and instruction may go unrealized due to a lack of coordination across the district.

- Though the work of the superintendent and board of education is guided by annual goals, the goals would be more effective if they were tied to a long-range strategic plan and shared widely within the school system and the broader community.
- 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 creating mechanisms to ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently across schools.
- MTSS is not yet being implemented effectively and consistently district-wide.
- Moreover, Lansing currently lacks a clear instructional model supported by ongoing, research-based, job-embedded professional development.

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

1. The board of education and the district leadership team should undertake a planning process to develop a long-range strategic plan based on the established yearly district goals. A key focus of this planning should be how the district will meet the academic and social needs of a growing and more diverse student body.
2. As part of this planning process, Lansing leaders should address the issue of lack of coherence by establishing a focus and direction for the district—with a clear theory of action—and developing better communication between all entities and all levels. This recommendation should also seek to strike a balance between central office direction to schools and departments vs. micromanaging.
3. The district should articulate, align, and fully implement curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development with the goal of continually improving student learning and achievement to support high expectations for *all* students, including students with disabilities and other students at risk. This process should include support for ongoing professional development and monitoring to ensure effective implementation of MTSS across the district, and address the following:
 - a. Creation of a district process for transitioning to a curriculum guided by the Common Core standards, with resources and professional development 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 process to review and align assessments; if possible, the district should develop a data warehouse that enables educators to use and

manage assessment data effectively, and track individual student data over time.

- c. Implementation of a system-wide instructional framework tied to rigorous standards. This framework should draw on an analysis of student achievement data and prioritize research-based instructional practices that will have the greatest impact on increasing achievement.
 - d. Completion of MTSS implementation training to fully operationalize—and ensure effective and appropriate implementation of—MTSS reading within buildings and to scale up instructional practices. As part of this process, Lansing should work with its KSDE approved MTSS facilitator to establish a District Leadership Team for MTSS, decide if the district plans to embark on MTSS structuring training in other subjects, and review current practices not in alignment with MTSS principles.
 - e. Systematization of PLCs and classroom observations as catalysts for implementing research-based effective educational practices, by:
 - conducting classroom observations using common criteria and providing regular and helpful feedback to educators
 - developing and implementing common PLC protocols; monitoring the effectiveness of PLCs
 - identifying priority data and 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.
 - f. Development of a monitoring system to measure the implementation and impact of professional development on changes in teacher behaviors.⁹ In addition to classroom walkthroughs, the district may consider the use of tools such as the Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM).¹⁰ 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. The district should consider the possibility of adding a central office person to take some of the load off of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Technology.
 5. Lansing should develop and implement a practical plan for providing support for principals to serve as effective instructional leaders.

⁹ Reeves, D.B. *Transforming Professional Development Into Student Learning Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010.

¹⁰ 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.

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.¹¹

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.

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:

¹¹ 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.

- 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.