

Needs Analysis of Shawnee Heights, USD 450

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 450, Shawnee Heights 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, academic 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 Shawnee Heights occurred September 26-27, 2011.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Joftus for the district’s leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary strengths and challenges. This report represents the culmination of the needs analysis for Shawnee Heights School District, USD 450 (referred to throughout the report as USD 450 or Shawnee Heights).

Shawnee Heights Student Demographics

A suburban district located in southeastern Shawnee County, Shawnee Heights is situated 50 miles from Kansas City, about half way between Topeka and Lawrence. Shawnee Heights is also conveniently located near several higher education institutions including the University of Kansas, Washburn University, Kansas State University, and Emporia State University. The district is comprised of four elementary schools, a seven-eight middle school, and a 9-12 high school.

Over the last several years, USD 450 has experienced a shift in its student demographics. Although the overall population has fluctuated around 3,500 for a number of years, the Hispanic population has grown markedly, from 6.7 percent in 2006-07 to 12.8 percent in 2010-11. A comparable decrease has occurred among White students, who represented 81.0 percent of the student population in 2006-07 and 73.7 percent in 2010-11.

Table I—Demographic Shifts in USD 450

Race-Ethnicity	2006-2007	2010-2011
White	81.0%	73.7%
African-American	6.4%	5.9 %
Hispanic	6.7%	12.8%
Other	5.9%	7.7%

Additionally, 13.2% of students are classified as students with disabilities—just below the state average of 13.5%,³ and 32% are eligible for free and reduced priced meals, an increase of almost 10 percentage points since 2006.

Student Achievement

Overall, Shawnee Heights’ students have demonstrated relatively high levels of student achievement. All students, as a group, have exceeded state achievement benchmarks in both reading and math for the past three years (for additional detail, see Table II below). Further, Shawnee Heights’ schools at all levels—elementary, middle, and high—received several Kansas Standards of Excellence awards in the 2009-2010 school year, and five of six schools achieved building-wide Standard of Excellence in both reading and math in 2011. Interestingly, one school received a building-wide Standard of Excellence award, but did not make AYP.

³ See district data for Shawnee Heights.

Table II—Shawnee Heights 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 (86.8%)	Met (86.6%)	Met (86.2%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (78.2%)	No (75.5%)	Met (77.1%) ⁴
Students with Disabilities	Met (71.4%) ⁵	No (68.6%)	No (68.4%)
ELL Students	Met (71.8%) ⁵	No (63%)	Met (62%) ⁴
African-American Students	Met (72.2%) ⁵	No (68.6%)	Met (77.7%) ⁶
Hispanic	Met (83.6%)	N/A	Met (82.9%) ⁵
White	Met (88.3%)	Met (88.5%)	Met (87.7%)
Asian*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	Met (80.6%) ⁵	N/A
Multi-Racial*	Met (89.1%)	Met (79.1%) ⁵	Met (83.3%) ⁵
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Mathematics – Did not meet AYP in 2009, 2010, or 2011. On Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2009 - 70.5%	2010 - 76.4%	2011 – 82.3%
All students	Met (83.1%)	Met (82.6%)	Met (84.6%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (73.7%)	No (70.2%)	Met (77%) ⁶
Students with Disabilities	No (63.3%)	No (61.8%)	No (61.9%)
ELL Students	Met (57.9%) ⁵	No (51.1%)	Met (64%) ⁶
African-American Students	Met (67.6%) ⁵	No (59.8%)	Met (73.3%) ⁶
Hispanic	Met (77%)	N/A	Met (78.7%) ⁵
White	Met (85.4%)	Met (84.9%)	Met (86.2%)
Asian*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	Met (69.4%) ⁵	N/A
Multi-Racial*	Met (80.4%)	Met (75.4%) ⁵	Met (85.7%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Overall Graduation Rate: 2009—90.7%, 2010—86%, 2011—90.1%[^]

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 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.

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

⁵ The percent standard or above is below the target but above the criterion.

⁶ The group made Safe Harbor.

Despite these accomplishments, however, USD 450 faces some significant achievement challenges. Students with disabilities did not meet reading or math benchmarks on the state assessment in 2010 or 2011, placing the district on improvement in reading and math. Further, a number of other groups of students made state achievement benchmarks through safe harbor or confidence interval designations.

Additionally, one elementary school that draws some students from the city of Topeka, Tecumseh North, was identified for improvement this year and another, Berryton, missed AYP last year and will go on improvement next year if it misses AYP again.

The Big Picture

Like most districts in Kansas, Shawnee Heights is facing the added strain of trying to serve students with a reduced resource base. The district's total operating budget—\$26.3 million in the 2011-12 school year—has declined about seven percent since 2008-09 (despite an increase in student enrollment from 3,430 to 3,574 over the same period). The vast majority of the cut (6.33 percent of the 7.04 percent) occurred during the 2009-10 school year.

Fortunately, Shawnee Heights possesses a number of strengths.

1. The district has a strong leadership team, led by a superintendent who by all accounts is well liked and respected.
2. The community—parents, community leaders, teachers, staff, students, and administrators—express a deep sense of pride in the district.
3. Shawnee Heights boasts a wealth of learning opportunities for students.
4. The district has a clearly articulated and aligned curriculum.
5. A number of resources are in place—e.g. instructional coaches and professional development—to support instructional improvement.

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

1. Students with disabilities have not met math and reading benchmarks on the state assessment for the past two years, placing the district on improvement, and a number of other groups of students met state benchmarks through safe harbor or confidence interval designations.
2. General education and special education teachers and staff appear to operate relatively independently of each other; special education teachers and staff lack access to curriculum and instructional resources, including technology.
3. Budget cuts have put additional strains on the district.
4. There is no systematic process to monitor curriculum implementation.
5. The district appears to lack clear priorities for instructional improvement; teachers and principals are overwhelmed with the number of research-based practices they are expected to implement.

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

II. Strengths and Challenges

Strengths and challenges from the needs analysis of Shawnee Heights are summarized below in the areas of Leadership; Empowering Culture and Human Capital; Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development.

Leadership

Shawnee Heights displays several leadership strengths.

- The current superintendent, Marty Stessman, is currently serving his seventh year in that role. By all accounts, Dr. Stessman is respected and well liked throughout the district. During our visit, his leadership style was described as transparent, inclusive, and collaborative. He is widely credited with developing a very strong and cohesive leadership team, both in the central office as well as at the principal level, which has completely turned over during his tenure.
- Dr. Stessman inherited a clear and appropriate district mission statement focused on ensuring academic achievement for all students and developing caring, productive, and responsible citizens.
- Board goals, also in place since Dr. Stessman began as superintendent, are “tweaked” every year, but serve as a stable foundation for the district.
- In addition, Dr. Stessman clearly articulated a theory of action for boosting student achievement—hire strong teachers and principals and hold them accountable, with necessary supports, for improvement—that most educators seemed to understand.
- The board is extremely pleased with the performance of Dr. Stessman and his team. According to all members, the board works well together in the interests of students and their families and empowers the superintendent to manage the district without undo interference.

Shawnee Heights can draw on these strengths to address a number of related challenges.

- The district’s recent budget cuts have resulted in the loss of nine teaching positions (five at the high school). This has put a strain on teachers and administrators.

- The budget cuts and the district’s emphasis on pushing resources to the school level have also prevented the district from filling an associate superintendent position, which was last held in 2009 by current Kansas Commissioner of Education Diane DeBacker. When combined with the fact that the district has only one person—the curriculum director—responsible for curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development and three instructional coaches (one of whom is focused exclusively on middle school math) for five schools, the district’s central office appears to lack the capacity to adequately support schools. This lack of central office capacity remains a challenge despite the district’s theory of action, which vests authority and responsibility in its principals: as a group, principals and teachers indicated the need for supports in the areas of student achievement analysis, curriculum, instructional coaching, and sharing of best practices.
- The need for greater central office capacity is especially evident in the area of serving students with disabilities—a student subgroup that has not demonstrated adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two straight years in math and reading. The district has a need for a district-level infrastructure and overarching approach to serve students with disabilities. Currently, schools are solely responsible for identifying students who require special education services, developing and reviewing IEPs (a legal document that describes the services to be provided), designing and implementing services, and determining whether and when students’ plans should change. As a result, the type and quality of services for students with disabilities varies greatly from school to school, and there appears to be little accountability for improvement.
- The district’s board goals are not measurable and lack aligned strategies, timelines, and metrics for measurement. As a result, it is difficult to track progress.

Empowering Culture and Human Capital

Shawnee Heights displays several strengths in the area of Empowering Culture and Human Capital.

- Perhaps the most overriding strength of the district is everyone’s deep pride in the community and district. All stakeholders interviewed—board members, teachers, parents, principals, students, and district administrators—described some element of this pride, from the quality of the schools and staff, to the high quality of life shared by residents, to the competitiveness felt with nearby districts and communities. The power of this strength cannot be overstated; it provides a solid foundation to build upon and some political capital in case any difficult decisions need to be made in the future.
- Principals and teachers appear to hold very high expectations for all students.

- The district boasts many opportunities for students, including:
 - full-day kindergarten
 - physical education and music for elementary school students
 - a variety of AP and concurrent enrollment classes for high-performing students
 - supports and an early warning system for low-performing students
 - electives and extra-curricular activities at the high school, which posts the pictures and awards of student athletes, as well as those in areas such as debate and forensics, year book, and the newspaper.

Stakeholders repeatedly stated that the district and schools “don’t panic” with regard to meeting AYP; they are proud that schools have not narrowed the curriculum to focus predominantly on math and reading and have not “taught to the test.”

- The district prides itself on hiring outstanding teaching candidates. Administrators note that they benefit from being in close proximity to four teacher colleges and from their streamlined decision making process, which they believe enables principals to make offers to prospects more quickly than nearby districts.
- Facilities are conducive to learning and well maintained. USD 450 is currently undergoing a facilities review to ensure that the district’s needs are met into the future.
- The middle school is implementing a new math curriculum in which every student uses an iPad.
- The district appears to have a “teacher-friendly” contract and a positive working relationship with the teachers’ association, a result of the leadership of the superintendent, transparency of the district, and strong communication, facilitated through monthly meetings between the superintendent, board members, and the association.
- The high school has late start every Monday, providing time to implement professional learning communities (PLCs).
- The district has in place a systematic process for teacher evaluation. Evaluations of principals, though less structured, appear to convey appropriate expectations.

To capitalize on these strengths, Shawnee Heights must also address several challenges in the area of Empowering Culture and Human Capital.

- A number of stakeholders expressed concern in focus groups and interviews that three of the district’s four elementary schools are at capacity may become

overcrowded. In addition, class sizes in the three schools have increased over the last three years. The district tried, prior to the 2007-08 school year, to change the boundaries of the elementary schools to address this perceived overcrowding. The challenge is that the one school not perceived to be overcrowded—Tecumseh North—has been identified as needing improvement and serves significantly more low-income students than the other schools. As a result, according to district administrators, even though class sizes are smaller at the school, families that could be included in the school’s enrollment boundary resist attending the school and several families that are in the current boundary have opted out of the school through NCLB’s choice provision for schools that are on improvement.

- The evaluation of teachers neither considers student achievement nor systematic observation of instructional practice.
- There appears to be a need for additional counselors. Currently, there are only three counselors in the high school that serves 1,100 students, and the counselors provide a range of administrative duties in addition to working with students.
- The high school offers a number of elective courses that appear to have very low enrollment. For example, there are at least 97 courses—including graphic design (two students), drawing 4 (three students), sculpture 3 (two students), drafting 2 (four students), French 3 (three students), and acting 3 (two students) with fewer than 10 students enrolled. While likely wonderful opportunities for students, these courses represent a high cost to the district.

Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development

Strengths and challenges identified in 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 Shawnee Heights 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

Shawnee Heights has some valuable curriculum and assessment strengths.

- The district is beginning to align curriculum to Common Core standards in identified subject areas.

- The district has an articulated curriculum and has devoted significant time, energy, and resources to developing the curriculum and supporting documents. During focus groups, the district shared the “USD 450 Curriculum Process.” The process begins with a strong site-based approach, which includes seven steps to adoption of curriculum and resources. We saw evidence of vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment, along with alignment to state standards.
- USD 450 has worked hard to provide teaching staff with the materials they need to successfully implement the curriculum. Teachers work to build curriculum maps. PLC time is used to complete these tasks.
- According to teachers, students with disabilities are held to the state standards appropriate for their grade level.
- Students at Shawnee Heights High School have the opportunity to enroll in courses for college credit offered at the high school through Washburn University. Students also have access to expanded learning and career opportunities through a large selection of classes offered at the high school and through the Washburn Institute of Technology.
- Shawnee Heights has made an effort to maintain consistency in its reading program. During the 2010-2011 school year the district administered a survey on the use of Guided Reading at the elementary schools. The survey uncovered inconsistent delivery of the Guided Reading curriculum. At the start of the 2011-2012 school year the district developed a “Guided Reading Reset” to provide consistency in delivery of the reading curriculum.
- The district uses a variety of assessments to track student achievement. Among these are: Kansas State Assessments, Measures of Academic Progress, American College Testing (ACT) exams, Advanced Placement (AP) exams, alternate assessments, the Kansas Assessment of Modified Measures (KAMM), KCA formative assessments and locally developed common formative assessments.
- The district has attempted to implement a multi-tiered system of supports and is at various stages of implementation in the district. Each building has its own schedule for implementation.

USD 450 also faces some significant curriculum and assessment challenges as well, however.

- While the curriculum development process and supporting materials for teachers appear to be very sound, Shawnee Heights has not implemented a process to monitor curriculum implementation. Teachers and principals in focus groups indicated that the curriculum is not being delivered consistently at some grade levels and varies from

"Reading is taught differently in each building."

—*Elementary Teacher*

building to building.

- Though the district has invested a great deal of time and resources into the Quantum Teaching and Learning strategies, there appear to be varying degrees of teacher and administrator acceptance and use of the methodology.⁷
- Teachers expressed concern that students with disabilities may be missing out on the delivery of curriculum due to the inconsistent allocation of resources. For example, special education teachers and paraprofessionals with whom we spoke noted that they did not receive the textbooks and technology that the regular education teachers received.
- Though the district uses a variety of assessments, it appears that the assessments are not reaching a deep enough level to identify specific areas of strength and weaknesses at the individual student level.
- The district appears to rely heavily on local common assessments developed by each school site. These are developed building by building. While these may provide good classroom level formative data, they do not necessarily provide the information needed to target a student's individual learning needs. Moreover, implementing common formative assessments created at the building level minimizes the opportunity to compare student achievement—and the teaching and learning practices contributing to the achievement—across schools.

Instruction

Table III presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 53%) and principals (response rate 100%+) 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:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 100% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited as strongly evident by 62% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- facilitating, monitoring, and guiding the continuous improvement of instruction (cited as strongly evident by 62% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 12%).

⁷ For more information on Quantum Learning, see http://www.qln.com/what_is_quantum_learning.html.

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

- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support student learning (cited by 12% of principals as strongly evident and by 25% as minimally evident or not evident)
- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (cited by 12% of teachers as strongly evident and by 38% as minimally evident or not evident).

Teachers’ views did not differ markedly from principals’. *Teachers* identify a number of strategies as *strongly evident*:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 76% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited as strongly evident by 58% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 11%)
- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited as strongly evident by 52% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 10%).

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

- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support student learning (cited by 13% of principals as strongly evident and by 43% as minimally evident or not evident)
- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (cited by 12% of teachers as strongly evident and by 42% 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 create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	100%	0%	76%	0%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	62%	0%	52%	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^
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	62%	12%	35%	13%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	50%	9%	58%	11%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	50%	0%	47%	12%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	38%	0%	48%	5%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	38%	12%	43%	16%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	38%	0%	40%	17%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	38%	25%	39%	20%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	38%	12%	30%	13%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and	25%	0%	46%	9%

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^
resources.				
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	25%	0%	42%	8%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	25%	0%	25%	34%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	12%	0%	48%	4%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	12%	0%	28%	26%
Educators use a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections.	0%	0%	48%	14%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	0%	0%	30%	29%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	12%	25%	13%	43%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	12%	38%	12%	42%

Teacher Response Rate = 132/250

Principal Response Rate = 8/6 (assistant principals completed the survey as well)

Source: Cross & Jofus survey of Shawnee Heights' principals and teachers September 2011.

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

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

Survey results only tell part of the story. Classroom observations, reviews of assessment data, and conversations with focus group participants suggest some important instructional strengths in USD 450.

- 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.
- The district has been deliberate in its decision to support instruction through the use of instructional coaches, reading specialists, and literacy tutors—despite daunting budget cuts. Instructional coaches are invited in by the teacher, or in some cases by the principal, to support instructional improvement at all school levels. Elementary schools receive support from reading specialists for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction.
- Recently, the district has purchased the McRel walkthrough system. Building administrators are using the template designed to observe Marzano instructional strategies, teacher directed technology, student use of technology, and evidence of student learning.
- District resources are used to support best practice and research-based strategies and programs that can improve instructional delivery. For example, Quantum Learning and Kagan cooperative learning approaches are available to teachers district wide; the Optimal Learning Model and Read 180 support language arts instruction; and the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) supports reading instruction from elementary to high school. This year, the district is working to develop conceptual mathematics instruction in grades K-6 with hands-on and project-based approaches for grades seven through high school using the Common Core I, II, and III pathways.
- Classroom observations also revealed instructional strengths. During observations of 82 classrooms in Shawnee Heights, using the Focused Classroom Walkthrough process:
 - The majority of classrooms displayed an environment conducive to learning.
 - Classrooms were viewed as orderly, well-managed, and adaptable to the learning task, with clear expectations for student behavior and participation in the learning process.
 - Likewise students demonstrated a willingness to participate in the learning task in over 70% of classrooms observed and were actively engaged in 85% to 100% of classrooms observed at all school levels.

- Positive “student to teacher” and “teacher to student” interactions were consistently observed. (See Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies).

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

- There is a need for a clearly defined instructional framework to support effective development and implementation of the Kansas MTSS approach. Interviews with district staff, principals, and special education teachers indicated that although a tiered instructional process is “in place” in buildings across the district, there is no consistency from school to school and teachers have not participated in formal Kansas MTSS training at the district or building level.
- Specifically, general and special education teachers shared that they need support to help identify content-based instructional strategies for tier 1 and tier 2 in reading. Further, the district appears to lack clearly defined instructional interventions to address the needs of students with disabilities who have not demonstrated adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two straight years in math and reading.
- During classroom walkthroughs, differentiation to match students’ various learning needs and strengths was minimally evident (less than 45% of the time) at all school levels; and, strategies to meet diverse language and cultural needs were evident in only 29% of classrooms observed at all school levels. Differentiated instruction is needed to support English language learners who have demonstrated declining scores for the past two years. According to the Curriculum Director, some teachers use the Sheltered Instruction (SIOP) model; however, it’s not clear that this model is being implemented consistently or effectively.
- There is a need to increase the use of instructional technology. Para and teacher focus groups report that they are not able to use technology consistently due to either a lack of hardware, software, or bandwidth. Special education teachers report that technology provided to general education students and teachers has not been purchased for either teachers or students with disabilities. Consequently, teachers have limited access to online resources and instructional support materials that would be helpful to all students, but particularly to students with disabilities.
- Classroom observations revealed embedded technology (Universal Design for Learning, instructional, and assistive technology) was observed in 54% of classrooms visited at the primary level, but in less than 50% of classrooms visited at the intermediate elementary, middle, and high school levels. Moreover,

“We need more creative ways to teach our kids—like graphic organizers and manipulatives and technology.”

—*Special Education Teacher*

students were observed using technology in the learning process less than 20% of the time in classrooms observed at all school levels.

- Focused Classroom Walkthrough observations identified other instructional challenges. There is a need to increase the following *teaching practices*, which were observed in less than 50% of the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies):
 - Using interdisciplinary or real world instructional examples
 - Using metacognitive strategies: teacher modeling of the thinking process
 - Identifying similarities and differences
 - Organizing learning in groups (54% at the intermediate level)
 - Representing knowledge using linguistic/non-linguistic forms of information
 - Setting objectives, providing immediate/continuous feedback that is accurate, specific, timely, and fair (69% at the primary level)
 - Summarizing and taking notes.
- The district should provide 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 65% of classrooms observed.
- 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 (e.g., note taking and constructed response tasks)
 - Investigates and solves problems
 - Participates in group work and dialogue about the learning task
 - Participates in individual reflection.
- Moreover, the following strategies used to illustrate how students demonstrate physical and cognitive engagement and learning at high levels were minimally evident (observed in only 30% to 49% of classrooms visited) at all school levels.
 - Answers questions, engages in discussions that demonstrate learning
 - 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

USD 450 has three clear professional development strengths.

- The board of education is to be commended for recognizing the need for teacher and principal professional development. There are six full days of staff development built into the calendar, plus one flex day for differentiated needs.
- All schools have a scheduled time for professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers use this time for data review and curriculum development. According to respondents to the Cross & Jofus Teacher Survey, PLCs are valued and should continue.
- Professional development is identified with input from the Professional Development Council. The professional development schedule is well organized and includes many learning opportunities for both returning and new teachers. The schedule identifies the focus and expectations for adult learning for the entire 2011-12 school year and appears to be communicated effectively to all staff.

To capitalize on these strengths, however, Shawnee Heights must also address some important professional development challenges.

- The district lacks priorities, consistent definitions, and usage protocols for the large number of “research informed practices” it wishes to promote. Goal 1 of the School Improvement Action Plan for Staff Development names 11 different programs or instructional approaches that the staff is to know, do, or apply. General and special education teachers described being “overloaded” as they try to keep up with all the district initiatives. Moreover, principal and teacher focus groups explained that the large number of instructional initiatives makes it difficult to keep initiatives straight and to understand how they complement each other and/or work together.
- There is a need for data-driven staff development. Currently, there is no data to monitor the extent to which district initiatives are effectively implemented by teaching staff. Elements of research based professional development—such as experimentation, grade-level appropriate demonstrations, and support for practicing activities with feedback from coaches and/or colleagues—is needed to ensure that practices are understood and implemented with fidelity by all staff. Further, USD 450 lacks mechanisms to share best practices across the district and build the capacity of schools and individuals to analyze outcome data.
- Special education teacher and paraprofessional focus groups shared a need for both participation in district and building staff development and time to collaborate with each other and with general education teachers. Currently there is not enough time to clarify roles and responsibilities, share resources and instructional support strategies, or discuss modifications necessary to meet students’ needs. The curriculum director reported that special education teachers

“There are so many initiatives, they start blending together and may get watered down.”

—*Building Principal*

and para support staff can participate in building and district staff development with principal approval and also may participate in building PLCs. For special education teachers and paraprofessionals, however, the reality is much different.

- Focus group participants noted that principal approval for special education staff development is rarely granted due to funding, and participation in PLCs is limited because general education teachers meet in PLCs while special education staff are working with students in the resource rooms or providing direct instruction for reading and math. The challenge is further illustrated through the Class Within a Class (CWC) model. CWC is used to ensure that some students with disabilities participate in learning in the “least restrictive environment.” Although the CWC model is a common practice, general and special education teachers receive no formal training around the inclusion model and little collaboration time to enable better planning and communication.

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:

1. Students with disabilities have not met math and reading benchmarks on the state assessment for the past two years, placing the district on improvement, and a number of other groups of students met state benchmarks through safe harbor or confidence interval designations.
2. General education and special education teachers and staff appear to operate relatively independently of each other; special education teachers and staff lack access to curriculum and instructional resources, including technology.
3. Budget cuts have put additional strains on the district.
4. There is no systematic process to monitor curriculum implementation.
5. The district appears to lack clear priorities for instructional improvement; teachers and principals are overwhelmed with the number of research-based practices they are expected to implement.

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

1. Align strategies, timelines, and metrics to the school board goals. Implement a process for monitoring implementation of goals and strategies. A key focus of this work should be to build the capacity of the central office to support schools’ efforts to increase student achievement.

2. Develop a district-wide infrastructure and approach for serving students with disabilities: articulate a common, district-wide philosophy for meeting the needs of *all* students and serving students with disabilities; increase leadership and accountability; provide additional support (e.g. guidance that further defines how state and federal laws and regulations should be interpreted and implemented) for schools to develop IEPs, define when IEPs should change, etc. Work with KSDE's TASN (Technical Assistance Support Network) to access staff IEP training. Make sure that students have both access to the general curriculum and the materials/technologies that are used to support the curriculum. Create a professional development structure that enables all teachers—both general and special education—to participate in shared professional development and have time for collaboration, to encourage better planning and communication.
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 accountability and address the following:
 - a. Implementation of an aligned curriculum and student assessment system across the district. The system should include frequent, common assessments that explicitly relate to what has been taught. This tight alignment between curriculum and assessment will provide a common context for instructional planning among teachers. Identify the four types of assessments (screening, benchmarking, progress monitoring, and diagnostic) to be used and use results to conduct data analyses.
 - b. Development and implementation of a comprehensive data system to link assessment data and track student performance over time; this system should include procedures to ensure data based decision-making on all district initiatives.
 - c. Implementation of a system-wide instructional model tied to rigorous standards. This model should draw on an analysis of student achievement data, eliminate ineffective or conflicting practices, and prioritize research-based instructional practices that will have the greatest impact on increasing achievement, for ALL students, especially students with disabilities and other students whose learning needs are not being met.
 - d. Systematization of PLCs and classroom observations as catalysts for implementing research-based effective educational practices, by:
 - creating structured time for teachers and para support staff to work together
 - increasing the number of instructional coaches to be used at each school level
 - conducting classroom visits 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

- o determining future professional development practices using observation data.
 - e. Official training with a state-approved MTSS facilitator and consistent implementation of MTSS across the district.
 - f. Development of a monitoring system to measure the implementation and impact of professional development on changes in teacher behaviors.⁸ In addition to classroom walkthroughs, the district may consider the use of tools such as the Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM).⁹ 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. Incorporate an assessment of student achievement and instructional practices observed using the McRel observation system, into the teacher evaluation process, and incorporate consideration of student achievement and implementation of PLCs into the principal evaluation process.
 5. Consider eliminating high school electives with few students enrolled (or adopting virtual high school or college-based courses) to free up resources for counselors, instructional coaches, and/or an additional district administrator who can support the curriculum and instruction function. In addition, look for ways to share staff and resources (e.g., data analyst) with other districts.
 6. Consider implementing a magnet-type program in Tecumseh North, which will draw interest from families, boost achievement, and help the district address concerns about overcrowding and enrollment issues at other schools.

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 and Formative Assessments (including transitioning to the Common Core), Stage I
 - Instructional Framework, Classroom Observations, and Use of Data to Improve Instruction, Stage I
2. Your district facilitator will be in touch with the superintendent within the next couple weeks to discuss the CoP recommendations, answer questions, and begin planning for the drafting of the district's Integrated Improvement Plan.

⁸ Reeves, D.B. *Transforming Professional Development Into Student Learning Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010.

⁹ 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.

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.¹⁰

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:
 - 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.

¹⁰ 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.