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11

Needs Analysis of Salina Public Schools, USD 305

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 & Joftus 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 305, Salina Public Schools. Since 2008, four districts have left the Network because they demonstrated AYP for two consecutive years.¹

The rationale for the Learning Network is that districts struggling to demonstrate AYP need a combination of support and pressure to make difficult changes that will result in higher overall levels of student achievement and a narrowing of achievement gaps. Unfortunately, there is no “silver bullet” for making improvements, and the KSDE has finite capacity to help. Districts and the KSDE, however, can make significant progress if they think and act systemically, focus resources and energy on improving the teaching and learning process, and work collaboratively and with support from an external “critical friend.”

The goal, then, of the Learning Network is to improve school and district quality and increase student achievement through a collaborative, organization-development approach focused on applying systems theory and using data effectively.

One of the first activities in pursuit of this goal is to conduct a needs analysis of participating districts, focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis encompasses an analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and two-day site visits² that include interviews and focus groups with students, parents, civic leaders, teachers, instructional coaches, principals, district administrators, and board members as well as classroom observations using a process designed by Cross & Joftus 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 USD 305 took place November 3-4, 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 Salina Public Schools, USD 305 (referred to throughout the report as USD 305 or Salina).

Salina Student Demographics

Salina Public Schools is the 9th largest district in Kansas. In the 2010-11 school year, approximately 6,870 students attended Salina Public Schools full-time, representing a decline in enrollment from 2006-07, when approximately 7,085 students were enrolled full-time. The district employs 725 certified and classified full- and part-time employees—almost 600 of which are teachers—and includes eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools.

The racial-ethnic balance has remained fairly stable in Salina over the past five years, though the district has gradually become more diverse. The percentage of students identified as Hispanic/Latino, for example, has increased from 12.5% to 15.3%, and the percentage of students identified as white has declined somewhat, from 73.4% to 70.1%.

Table I—Demographic Patterns in USD 305

| Race-Ethnicity | 2006-07 | 2010-11 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 0.9% | 1.0% |
| African-American | 6.2% | 5.9% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 12.5% | 15.3% |
| Asian/ Native Hawaiian/Pac. Islander | 2.9% | 3.2% |
| Multiracial | 4.2% | 4.6% |
| White | 73.4% | 70.1% |

The most profound demographic shift in Salina relates to the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals. In 2010-11, 58.4% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged—an increase of almost 10 percentage points from 2006-07. At the same time, however, the percentage of students identified as students with disabilities has remained almost the same, at around 13.5%.³

According to district data, in fall 2011, 538 students were identified as English language learners, an 11% increase from the 2010-11 school year.

Student Achievement

Overall, Salina students have performed relatively well on state assessment tests. The group, “all students” has exceeded state assessment benchmarks for proficiency in

³ KSDE and district data.

reading and math for the past three years (for additional detail, see Table II below). Moreover, Salina schools received almost 50 Kansas Standards of Excellence Awards in 2011, including several building-wide awards in seven schools.

Table II—Salina 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 (87.4%) | Met (88.2%) | Met (88.5%) |
| Free & Reduced Meals | Met (82.9%) | Met (83.1%) | Met (84.3%) ⁴ |
| Students with Disabilities | Met (73.7%) ⁴ | No (73.2%) | No (74.1%) |
| ELL Students | Met (72.8%) ⁴ | Met (76.2%) ⁴ | No (75.5%) |
| African-American Students | Met (84.3%) | Met (80.3%) ⁴ | Met (80.3%) ⁴ |
| Hispanic | Met (77.4%) | Met (81.5%) | Met (82.3%) ⁵ |
| White | Met (90.1%) | Met (90.1%) | Met (90.5%) |
| Asian* | Met (90.7%) | Met (94.3%) | Met (94.4%) |
| American Indian or Alaskan* | N/A | N/A | Met (83.9%) ⁴ |
| Multi-Racial* | Met (79.7%) | Met (87.8%) | Met (87.6%) |
| 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 (86.1%) | Met (86.4%) | Met (86.3%) |
| Free & Reduced Meals | Met (80.8%) | Met (82.5%) | Met (81.9%) |
| Students with Disabilities | Met (68.7%) ⁴ | No (70.5%) | No (70.6%) |
| ELL Students | Met (78.9%) | Met (83.7%) | Met (78.9%) ⁴ |
| African-American Students | Met (75%) ⁴ | Met (78.8%) | No (74.6%) |
| Hispanic | Met (79.6%) | Met (82.2%) | Met (80.9%) ⁴ |
| White | Met (88.3%) | Met (87.9%) | Met (88.4%) |
| Asian* | Met (93.6%) | Met (90.9%) | Met (91.2%) |
| American Indian or Alaskan* | N/A | N/A | Met (80.5%) ⁴ |
| Multi-Racial* | Met (84.2%) | Met (84.5%) | Met (86.2%) ⁴ |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.* | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Overall Graduation Rate: 2009—83.7%, 2010—84%, 2011—79%[^]

Notes:

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

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

⁵ The group made Safe Harbor through the hypothesis test at the 75% level of confidence.

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

N/A indicates that data are not available.

Despite these accomplishments, however, there are some clear achievement challenges in USD 305. Students with disabilities failed to meet proficiency benchmarks on state reading and math assessments in 2010 and 2011, placing the district on improvement in reading and math. In 2011, English language learners failed to meet benchmarks in reading, African American students failed to meet benchmarks in math, and some other groups of students met benchmarks on the state reading and math assessments through safe harbor or confidence interval designations.

The Big Picture

Located in central Kansas, near the intersection of I-35 and I-70, Salina is about an hour and a half north of Wichita. A mid-sized city with a wealth of community resources, a number of manufacturing plants, and several good-sized local employers, Salina boasts over 50,000 residents and was selected by Business Week magazine in 2010 as “the best place in Kansas to raise your kids.”

Like families in communities across the United States, though, many families in Salina have been hard-hit by the larger economic recession. The median household income in Saline County is just over \$45,000—below the median household income for Kansas of approximately \$50,000—and 17% of children under the age of 18 in Saline County live below the poverty line, compared to 14.5% of children throughout Kansas.⁶ Moreover, as noted earlier, the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals has increased by almost 10 percentage points over the last five years—currently, almost 60% of students qualify for assistance.

To meet these needs and others, Salina has hired a new superintendent, who has “hit the ground running,” and the district possesses a number of overall strengths that it can build upon to address challenges.

- The new superintendent appears to be well liked and respected by all stakeholders. He and the board have developed clear strategic goals and are committed to moving forward in a positive way.
- USD 305 has a well-articulated strategic plan and a coherent approach to school improvement, and despite having made some difficult choices in the recent economic climate, has built strong curricular and instructional programs.

⁶ See US Census data for 2010, and 2010 KidsCount data for Saline County.

- All stakeholders interviewed expressed pride in the district and describe Salina as a good place to raise a family. Schools provide safe and supportive learning environments for students.
- USD 305 has well-articulated curriculum design, implementation, and monitoring processes and has begun transitioning to the Common Core standards.
- Along with the other supports identified above, the district has a number of important structural and cultural elements in place to support improvement—well-developed instructional models, classroom observation processes and protocols, and a strong emphasis on professional development, for example.

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

- As the student population diversifies, and as the number of students identified as economically challenged increases, the district will need to ensure that it can serve *all* students well and that *all* students receive a high quality education.
- Currently, the district’s four-year graduation rate is 79%, and graduation rates for some groups of students are significantly lower. The district is challenged to improve graduation rates and prepare all students for success in life after high school.
- Salina has successfully developed and implemented a number of initiatives to improve curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development. The district is challenged, however, to ensure that initiatives are fully implemented and integrated effectively, and to provide meaningful and ongoing support for all of these efforts. Salina risks “initiative fatigue.” This challenge will likely be compounded by the district’s transition to the Common Core.
- Despite a strong emphasis on effective instruction and professional development to support instruction, it appears that instructional approaches in special education may be uneven from school to school, and that both general and special educators would benefit from structures and support to communicate, plan, and co-teach.

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

II. Strengths and Challenges

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

Leadership

Salina possesses a number of leadership strengths.

- Board members are highly qualified and have strong educational and leadership backgrounds—three board members are former teachers in the district. The board appears to be highly respected by community members and district staff. Members appear to work well together and seem to have a full understanding of the board’s role in governing. The board’s relationship with new superintendent, Bill Hall, also seems very positive. The board appears to be highly committed to the success of all students. They recognize the changing demographics of the student body and the need to provide support to students with greater needs.
- In June 2010, the board adopted a comprehensive strategic plan for the district, with three primary goals:
 - Student Success
 - Continuous Improvement
 - Community Engagement

Each goal is measured against objectives, targets, and indicators, and the administration has developed action steps, timelines, and accountability procedures to ensure that the plan is implemented effectively. District leaders are also developing “a balanced scorecard” to track progress in each area.

- Superintendent Bill Hall is new to the district—he started in July 2011—and as parent and community focus groups point out, he “hit the ground running.” He appears to be making a very positive impact in both the community and district. All focus groups report that Mr. Hall has been highly visible in schools, visiting classes and speaking with students. Community leaders expressed their pleasure with the superintendent’s involvement in the community and indicated that he has met with several groups to provide information about the district. People appreciate his openness and honesty—in his official board briefings and in conversations with the board, district staff, and community members, he shares successes and highlights challenges as well.
- The district has a strong theory of action, which focuses on improving student achievement by improving instruction, and Salina has focused on instructional improvement for several years. Both principals and teachers have participated in extensive professional development centered on research-based instructional practices. All instructional leaders—central office administration, principals, assistant principals, coordinators, and instructional coaches—meet monthly to discuss instructional practices in the district.

- District efforts to improve student achievement appear to operate coherently; coherence means that the elements of the school district work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy. The central office leadership team meets weekly, and members report that meetings have become more focused under Superintendent Hall’s leadership, with more discussion of how to improve student achievement. The leadership team has established a vision for the 2011-2012 school year and created team meeting norms to guide their conversations. Monthly instructional leadership meetings with building leaders and principals’ meetings also help leaders stay on the same page. All of these efforts can help the district implement a coherent improvement strategy.
- Administrators and teachers view principals as the instructional leaders of their schools. To prepare for this role, principals participate in extensive professional development, during the school year and in the summer.
- Principals use a walkthrough process to observe instructional practices—designed through a collaborative effort between central office administrators and principals. Walkthrough data are collected and used by principals to support instruction and help define professional development for teachers. The central office also collects walkthrough information and uses it in discussions with principals and curriculum technologists to make plans for each building.
- The school board and administrators have managed the recent financial downturn well. The district has had to make cuts to staff and programs, but hard decisions have been guided by good planning. Superintendent Hall and the executive director of business make presentations to each school’s site council, for example, to receive input on the district budget. Salina has maintained a fairly level mill levy and plans to use approximately \$1.1 million in reserves annually over the next three years to help meet district needs. Also, the district recently refinanced some bonds, resulting in savings of approximately \$1 million.

“If we have a need in our school, it will be attended to by the central office.”

—Principal

The district can draw upon these strengths and others to address a number of leadership challenges.

- The board’s strategic plan is well conceived and implementation is underway. The plan has also been posted on the district’s website. USD 305 would benefit from sharing the plan more widely, though, so that all stakeholders have knowledge of the district’s vision and focus. When finalized, the balanced scorecard should help the district track progress. District leaders also need to determine when and how they will share progress reports with the board, the district, and the community. As is the case with all strategic

planning efforts, Salina will be challenged to make the plan a “living” document that truly improves the district, not just another notebook on a shelf.

- The board and leadership have identified the district’s graduation rate as a priority for improvement. The overall graduation rate is approximately 79%, and graduation rates for some groups of students are much lower. Salina is particularly concerned about graduation rates for students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, students with disabilities, and Hispanic students. The district’s challenge is to increase the overall graduation rate for all students, while at the same time, increase rates for groups of students who are really struggling.⁷
- In 2011, 75% of Salina seniors reported that they planned to attend college or pursue other postsecondary education,⁸ and focus group participants report that most students graduating from the district are expected to continue their education beyond high school. Parents in focus groups, however, expressed concern that the district does not have high expectations for *all* students—particularly students who are economically disadvantaged—and that not all students are adequately prepared for life after school. Students interviewed from the two high schools noted that advanced classes were challenging and engaging, but this was not necessarily the case for core classes, and some parents interviewed noted their children were often bored in classes.
- Salina has managed district finances effectively, despite recent state budget cuts. Limited resources, however, will continue to present a challenge for the district. For example, USD 305 recognizes the need for all day kindergarten and has made that a priority, but leaders will have to find funds and classroom space to support the program. The district has good facilities as well, but there are growing needs in some buildings. The challenge will be to find ways to address these needs with the understanding that it might be necessary to go to the community with a bond issue in the near future. The district is aware of these challenges and is formulating plans to address them.
- The district has enjoyed good cooperation among four higher education institutions: Salina Area Technical College, Kansas Wesleyan University, Kansas State University, and the University of Kansas Medical Center. As Salina Area Technical College undergoes accreditation to become a standalone higher education institution, however, district students may lose access to much needed technical and vocational programs. District administrators are working to find other avenues to provide these programs to its students who desire them.

⁷ According to Kansas AYP data for Salina, the 2011 four year graduation rates were: 42.9% for students identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native; 60.6% for students with disabilities; 63.6% for students identified as ELLs; 64% for Hispanic students; 68.6% for students eligible for free and reduced priced meals; and 74.2% for African American students.

⁸ District data shared during the KLN site visit.

Empowering Culture and Human Capital

Salina displays some important strengths in the area of empowering culture and human capital.

- All focus groups noted that the Salina community is a wonderful place to raise a family. Participants also pointed out that district schools have safe, secure, and welcoming learning environments, and parents reported that they felt welcomed in their children’s schools.
- The Salina community provides significant support for the schools and the district. For example:
 - The Salina Education Foundation has awarded over \$450,000 in grants for special programs.
 - The Salina Chamber of Commerce has a School-to-Career program that provides internships to high school students.
 - Salina’s vibrant arts community has brought a number of programs into district classrooms to expose students to the arts.
 - The YMCA has an afternoon program for students; and
 - The Salina Regional Health Center provides health-related programs.
- All focus groups reported that the diversity of the district is a great strength. Parents and community participants explained that Salina offers residents the opportunity to live with different cultures and social groups. High school students we interviewed all supported this thinking and expressed appreciation for the diversity of their classmates. While students reported that there had been racial conflicts “years ago,” those problems have largely faded.
- District staff members received high marks from all focus groups. Participants describe educators that care for all students and are committed to their success. Everyone interviewed mentioned the quality of the teaching staff, and the human resources department reported that Salina is able to consistently hire high quality staff for all areas except for some shortages in special education.
- The district’s communication efforts are also valued. Parents appreciate principals’ and teachers’ responses to inquiries and concerns, and community members appreciate the district’s work to keep people informed about school and district activities. District and school websites and newsletters were highlighted, and parents and students noted that they frequently use the district’s online tool that contains confidential information on each student’s progress, homework, grades, attendance, etc. Community and district focus

“We have a fabulous staff.”

—*Parent*

group participants also praised the local media, particularly the Salina Journal newspaper, for their coverage of district activities and news.

- In the last few years the board has initiated community and parent surveys to gain feedback from stakeholders and assist with district planning. One survey completed in 2010 helped the board plan and implement a process to change school boundaries in an effort to balance enrollments. A district and community committee studied the controversial issue before making a recommendation to the board. The plan was initiated this year with little disruption.

Several challenges in this area are apparent as well, however.

- As Salina continues to diversify, and schools serve a greater number of students qualifying for free and reduced priced meals, the district will need to ensure that it is equipped to meet the needs of *all* students. It is likely that the ELL program will continue to grow as the Hispanic community increases, and this will have implications for the district as well.
- The district is also challenged with the increasing mobility of the district's students, who move from school to school during the year. This trend will increase the need for the district to have a consistent, sequential, rigorous curriculum throughout all of its schools so that students can receive a high-quality education regardless of what school they attend.
- Salina would also benefit from keeping the community informed about changes in the district's demographics. Some of the community leaders with whom we met indicated that they were surprised when Superintendent Hall shared the number of economically disadvantaged students the district is now serving in a presentation he gave earlier this fall. In both community and parent groups, participants noted that some members of the Salina community are "in denial" about the number of students and families living in poverty.
- The district will be challenged to employ a more diversified staff to better reflect the student population. During the 2010-2011 school year, the district had only one minority administrator, out of 44, and it employed only 30 minority certified staff, out of 657 (4.5%). This is a challenge facing an increasing number of districts in Kansas, and it will be important that Salina make this a priority in future recruiting years.

"There are a lot of kids who are really hurting."

—*Community member*

- In all focus groups except the student focus group, participants expressed a need for more parent engagement and more direct parent participation in their children’s education. The district will be challenged to plan and implement initiatives to reach out to parents who have not been traditionally involved or who are new to the community. While ultimately parents must decide whether and how much to participate, everyone benefits when districts do all they can to support parents and promote meaningful parent engagement.
- We heard many comments in focus groups about differences between the two high schools, Central and South. Parents and community members noted that many perceive that the two schools are not of the same quality and do not provide equivalent educational opportunities. Central is a more racially and ethnically diverse school and has more economically disadvantaged students. Its graduation rates and test results are not as high as South’s. The district is challenged to ensure that *all* schools provide high quality educational offerings and opportunities, and that *all* students are educated so that they can succeed after graduation. This perception of differences in the quality of education was also expressed to a lesser extent regarding other schools in the district. It should be noted that the students interviewed from the two schools did not express this concern.
- Focus group participants reported that the school district provides a safe and secure learning environment for students. Students indicated that they feel safe in their schools and that bullying is not an issue. They did note an increase in some troubling behavior by some students, however, with a number of fights occurring at the beginning of the school year. The School Resource Officers made available through cooperation between the district and the Salina Police Department were credited with helping resolve student behavior issues. The district has apparently done a good job of addressing some of this behavior, but this is an area that the district and the community must continue to monitor.

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 Salina 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

The needs analysis uncovered several curriculum and assessment strengths in USD 305.

- Salina has developed a very effective online curriculum for all subject areas; it is vertically aligned K-12 and horizontally aligned by grade and course. The curriculum is also aligned to state and national standards.
- Education professionals at all levels reported that staff members know the curriculum, how to access it, and how to use it to provide effective instruction to students at the proper level.
- USD 305 has developed an effective “Curriculum Design Blueprint and Management Model,” which appears to be used and followed by all those involved in the process. The model includes several elements:
 - District Strategic Plan for Curriculum
 - Curriculum and Instructional Philosophy and Beliefs
 - Curriculum Management Principles
 - Curriculum Expectations
 - Curriculum Development Cycle
 - Curriculum Roles and Responsibilities
- The director of special education and the director of ESL and migrant services expect students receiving services in their respective areas to master the same core curriculum as all other students.
- The Salina Reading Framework basically follows the Literacy First framework, and it is in place in all but one school in the district. Educators use Literacy by Design to provide instructional reading materials to support the implementation of the Literacy First framework at the elementary level.
- Salina secondary students can choose from more than 25 AP or advanced courses, a number of which offer students the opportunity to earn dual-credit from nearby colleges and universities. Currently it appears that a small number of students take advantage of dual-credit opportunities; Salina would benefit by encouraging more students to enroll in advanced and dual-credit courses.

“This is a phenomenal district to work in—we work with phenomenal people!”

—*School administrator*

- USD 305 has acquired the services of a highly skilled math consultant to work with their teachers, administrators, and math curriculum facilitators to align the math curriculum so that students acquire a solid foundation in basic math skills before leaving elementary school and are prepared to handle the rigor of higher-level math in secondary school.
- Salina Public Schools has developed an effective plan to transition to the Common Core standards. All elementary schools have been assigned responsibility for developing a specific strand of the new curriculum, and both high schools are moving forward with the transition at the secondary level. The middle schools will align their curriculum as the elementary schools complete their work. The district is to be commended for proactively implementing the Common Core in grades K-2 this school year.
- The district uses a number of assessment tools to measure student progress and mastery of the curriculum. Those assessments include: the Kansas State Assessments, MAP (measures of academic progress) assessments beginning in grade two, district reading assessments – (using AIMSWeb and reading diagnostic assessments), formative assessments in grades three-high school, and district writing assessments in grades four, seven, and at the high school level. Students are also encouraged to take the ACT; district data show, however, that just over 50% of eligible students are taking the ACT.⁹
- District-developed reading and math screener assessments are given to all students in grades K-9, three times per year. Educators give progress-monitoring assessments in reading and math every week to students in tier 3 instruction and every other week to students participating in tier 2 instruction. Student placement and instructional delivery at the elementary level is monitored and adjusted regularly based on these assessment results.
- The district appears to be data rich. Teachers and administrators report that they have an abundance of data to help them make instructional decisions.

To build on these strengths, however, Salina must address some important curriculum and assessment challenges as well.

- The district does not have a consistent reading framework. Though most schools use the Literacy First framework for reading, one elementary has been allowed to use Success for All. This inconsistency can cause major gaps in student learning for students who transfer from school to school.
- Sustainability and ongoing professional development appears to be an issue with Literacy First. Though all key staff participated in initial Literacy First

⁹ According to the district, 275 students took the ACT last year, which represents approximately 54% of eligible students.

training, that training has not been provided to new staff. Three new inexperienced teachers at one of the high schools, for example, have been assigned to teach intensive reading classes. They have had no Literacy First training, and yet they are being asked to provide a key component of Literacy First to students with the greatest needs.

- District data indicate that a significant number of 5th grade students are not scoring as well as might be expected on elementary math assessments. Additionally, in focus group conversations, teachers and administrators expressed concern about some students leaving elementary schools without the skills necessary to succeed in middle school math and be prepared to take higher-level mathematics coursework at the secondary level.
- Currently approximately 30% of Salina 8th graders are enrolled Algebra 1, and the district only requires three credits of math for high school graduation. Salina would benefit from enhancing student preparation for and boosting 8th grade enrollment in Algebra I. Strengthening high school math requirements would also boost rigor in the district and better prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities.
- Conversations with both general and special education teachers as well as administrators indicate that a considerable number of students with disabilities and English language learners are being served in pullout, resource, or remedial classes.¹⁰ Research has demonstrated that all students benefit from inclusion in the regular classroom and from receiving rigorous instruction from a highly qualified content area teacher who is co-teaching or working with support from special education and resource instructors.
- Related to this and particularly noteworthy are data from the Kansas IDEA State Performance Plan related to “least restrictive environment” (LRE). For two successive years (with the most recent data for FY 2009-10 reported in March 2011), the district has not met the state targets for Indicator 5 for Least Restrictive Environment for student learning—2010 data indicate that slightly more than *10% of students with disabilities spend 40% or less of their school day in the regular classroom, receiving 60% or more of their daily instruction outside the regular classroom*. Ten percent is more than two percentage points above the state target.

Instruction

Table III presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 55%) and principals (response rate 100% plus—see explanatory note at the end of the table)

¹⁰ District data also reinforce this point, though it is clear that pullout rates vary considerably from school to school. The percentages of students receiving pullout or resource room instruction—especially math instruction—climb considerably at the middle and high school levels. These percentages, many above 50%, should be cause for concern for the district.

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.

Generally, respondents—both principals and teachers—are optimistic about the presence of sound instructional strategies in Salina schools. The strategies that *principals* and *teachers* cited as most *strongly evident* include:

- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited as strongly evident by 87% of principals and 69% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 0% of principals and 6% of teachers)
- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 73% of principals and 75% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 0% of principals and 1% of teachers)
- using a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections (cited as strongly evident by 60% of principals and 58% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 0% of principals and 3% of teachers).

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

- providing adequate resources to support teacher and administrator learning (cited as strongly evident by 7% of principals and 22% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 13% of principals and 29% of teachers)
- providing adequate resources to support student learning (cited as strongly evident by 7% of principals and 29% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 13% of principals and 25% of teachers)
- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by as strongly evident by 13% of principals and 19% of teachers and as minimally evident or not evident by 27% of principals and 25% of teachers).

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^ |
| Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to | 87% | 0% | 69% | 6% |

| 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^ |
| determine results-based staff development. | | | | |
| Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments. | 73% | 0% | 75% | 1% |
| 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. | 60% | 0% | 58% | 3% |
| Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments. | 60% | 0% | 50% | 7% |
| Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment. | 60% | 7% | 56% | 14% |
| Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers. | 53% | 0% | 47% | 11% |
| The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning. | 53% | 0% | 29% | 17% |
| Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well-being. | 53% | 7% | 41% | 11% |
| Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction. | 53% | 13% | 57% | 10% |
| Educators provide equitable | 47% | 0% | 59% | 3% |

| 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^ |
| opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners. | | | | |
| School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction. | 47% | 7% | 46% | 14% |
| Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation. | 47% | 7% | 39% | 15% |
| Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities. | 40% | 13% | 39% | 21% |
| Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources. | 33% | 7% | 47% | 11% |
| Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students. | 33% | 7% | 39% | 8% |
| Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level. | 27% | 7% | 44% | 8% |
| Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress. | 13% | 27% | 19% | 25% |
| Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning. | 7% | 13% | 29% | 25% |
| Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and | 7% | 13% | 22% | 29% |

| 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^ |
| administrator learning. | | | | |

Teacher Response Rate = 343/627

Principal Response Rate = 15/12 (includes three assistant principals)

Source: Cross & Joftus survey of Salina principals and teachers October-November 2011.

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

^The response option "No Opinion" was deleted from this presentation. Six percent or less of teachers selected this option on any response, and one principal selected this response one time.

In addition to survey responses, classroom observations, reviews of district and state assessment data, and conversations with focus group participants point toward some valuable instructional strengths in Salina.

- 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 exceeded state benchmarks in reading and math for the past three years.
- During observations of 235 classrooms using the Cross & Joftus' Focused Classroom Walkthrough observation protocol, the following effective *teaching* and *learning* practices were evident in classrooms visited.
 - Classrooms were orderly, well-managed, and adaptable to the learning task, with clear expectations for student behavior and participation in the learning process.
 - The vast majority of students were actively engaged 85%-100% of the time at all school levels.
 - Positive "student to teacher" and "teacher to student" interactions were consistently observed.
 - Teachers embedded technology in their teaching and checked for understanding to assess and inform instruction.
 - Teachers also used instructional strategies to promote student participation and address learning styles, and they used the following strategies that research has shown to accelerate learning: 1) reinforcing efforts and providing recognition, and 2) using homework and practice opportunities (See Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies).
- Salina has embraced an instructional model based on the Levels of Teaching Innovation (LoTi) approach¹¹. This approach combines learner-centered

¹¹ To learn more about the LoTi approach, see <http://loticonnection.com/index.php/resources/publications/20-loti-framework> and <http://loticonnection.com/index.php/resources/publications/5-cip-framework>.

instructional frameworks—the LoTi framework and the CIP (Current Instructional Practices) framework—to guide instruction, inform professional development, and plan the teaching process. The district has a lesson plan template, built on these priorities, which provides teachers with a constant reminder of what should be included in effective lessons, and administrators use the H.E.A.R.T. (Higher-order thinking, Engaged learning, Authenticity, Relationships, and Technology use) classroom walkthrough form to collect data on classroom instruction. This walkthrough process is consistent with the planning priorities of LoTi and CIP, and these connected frameworks provide a strong process for planning and assessing instruction throughout the district.

- Classroom observations reveal that there is a high level of engagement in most classes and that students are attending to instruction. This is supported by many years of work with Kagan cooperative learning strategies. Classrooms visited consistently had students organized in groups.
- Building principals and teachers interviewed report that instruction is a priority for the district; it is supported throughout the leadership structure, starting with the superintendent. Principals are viewed as effective instructional leaders in their buildings. They are actively involved in the instructional process.
- All but three schools are implementing the MTSS framework in reading, and the remaining three schools are using a tiered instructional approach. Most elementary schools have completed MTSS implementation training (see p. 22 for additional information), and generally educators at all levels are expected to meet students’ instructional needs by providing tiered instruction.
- The district has consistently focused on reading instruction over the last several years, resulting in steady achievement gains for students.¹² The district’s reading framework focuses on the researched-based components of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Despite a very intentional focus on instruction, however, Salina does have some instructional challenges.

- Interviews with both special education and general education teachers and paraprofessionals suggest that adults who work with students that have the greatest learning needs seem to have little or no time to

“I don’t have time to talk to the teacher that I am supporting in the regular classroom.”

—*Paraprofessional*

¹² Annual AYP Reports for Salina show steady increases in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the annual Kansas State Assessment in reading. Some groups of students—most notably African American students and students with disabilities—have seen percentage increases of almost 30 points between 2004 and 2011.

collaborate effectively or plan together to meet the needs of these students. At best planning and collaboration appear to happen on the fly, as teachers and paraprofessionals walk into the classroom together.

- Sustainability of Literacy First is a concern for the district, because of the cost and intensity of the training. Without a plan for ongoing professional development, however, teachers lose support and it becomes very difficult to implement the instructional model with fidelity.
- Despite (or perhaps because of) the existence of several instructional frameworks and approaches (e.g. LoTi, CIP, Literacy First) there is limited coherence and consistency from the elementary to the middle school level, and from the middle school to the high school level, in terms of guidance around how instruction should be delivered in the various subjects.
- At some grade levels, special education instructional approaches appear to vary from school to school. According to focus group conversations with administrators, for example, at least two of the secondary schools (one middle school and one high school) are trying to enable more co-teaching in the regular classroom. In the other two secondary schools, educators are planning more modified classes (classes especially for students with disabilities). Though there could be a variety of reasons why schools seem to be taking different approaches, focus group participants noted that school leadership has played an important role in those schools planning to integrate more co-teaching.
- Focus group conversations with teachers and administrators indicate that science and social studies instruction have received less attention, due, in part, to the district's intensive focus on communication arts/reading and mathematics.
- Focused Classroom Walkthroughs identified other instructional challenges. There is a need to increase the following *teaching practices*, which were observed in less than 30% of the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies):
 - Differentiation to match student learning needs and strengths.
 - Employment of metacognitive strategies—teacher modeling of the thinking process.
 - Use of strategies to meet diverse language and cultural needs.
 - Use of strategies that accelerate learning, including: identifying similarities and differences; summarizing and taking notes; generating and testing hypotheses; and summarizing and taking notes.
- Observations revealed that the following *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.
 - Investigates and solves problems.
 - Engages in active reading, note taking, and constructed response tasks.
 - Participates in individual reflection.
 - Participates in group work and dialogue about the learning task.
 - 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 minimally evident (observed in less than 50% of classrooms visited) at all school levels:
 - Differentiation is evident in activities/materials and in products/assignments.
 - Answers questions and/or engages in conversations that demonstrate learning.
 - Displays a real world connection.
 - Demonstrates responsibility for learning and explains why it is important.
 - Engages in peer and self-assessment of the learning.

Professional Development

Salina has a number of professional development (PD) strengths.

- The professional development function is aligned closely with the district’s strategic plan and supports the initiatives that have been identified by the board and administration. The professional development office operates, as it should, as a service provider to the rest of the district.
 - The PD office is responsive to the needs of individual schools and supports training that is needed/requested.
 - The strategic plan guides the work of PD in the district.
 - The district sends an annual PD survey to professional staff to collect data on training needs across the district.
 - Schools are supported and have options as to where they put their PD emphasis.
- The professional development office has been a leader in providing training for the district about the Common Core standards, and the district appears to be on track in terms of transitioning to the Common Core. This is most evident at the elementary level.

“I am well supported when it comes to PD needs in my school.”

—*Principal*

- Salina has a well-articulated plan for MTSS Reading. All schools have had some MTSS training. Some are at the structuring stage; others are at the implementation stage. Three of the secondary schools are providing tiered support, but have not participated in the official MTSS implementation training.¹³
- The district has provided ongoing PD for teachers to implement Kagan structures in classroom instruction for the past six years. Each building, for example, has a teacher who serves as a “Kagan Trainer” to help staff members stay current, to introduce new staff to Kagan, and to provide training focused on the Kagan strategies.
- Salina has also prioritized the use of technology in instruction, and educators have participated in significant professional development focused on using technology to enhance the classroom experience for students.

To fully capitalize on these strengths, USD 305 can also address a number of challenges related to professional development.

- Though professional development is clearly a priority throughout the district, in some instances it appears that there may be a lot of training on the front end, but limited follow-through. A key example of this concerns the district’s work around data usage. Educators note that they have taken part in data training, but staff members at the building and district levels agree that conversations about data and data-based decision-making are limited, and in fact may not be taking place much if at all in some buildings. There are exceptions—clearly Salina has provided ongoing, job-embedded support for Kagan strategies, for example—but this challenge was highlighted in conversations, and it’s something the district can work to address.
- According to both special education and general education teachers and paraprofessionals, educators would benefit from professional development around how to collaboratively plan together, co-teach, and effectively support students with disabilities in the

“Teachers are given no training on how to use paraprofessionals in the classroom to support instruction for students.”

–Teacher

¹³ According to the district, “All school buildings went through MTSS structuring training three years ago, with Heusner and Schilling beginning implementation training that year, finishing the following year. Stewart, Coronado, Meadowlark, and Sunset completed all six days of training last year. Lakewood also started implementation last year as well, but only completed the mid-year data training; Lakewood will have two days in April, and the final two days in August/September. All elementary buildings have completed implementation, except for Cottonwood and Oakdale. The other three secondary buildings are providing tiered support but have not participated in the ‘official’ implementation training, instead making the process work for them.”

regular classroom. Neither teachers nor paraprofessionals have received training on strategies and best practices for planning and working together in the classroom.

- Conversations with teachers and administrators indicate that Salina has provided very limited professional development on professional learning communities (PLCs). If there are PLCs, they function differently from school to school. With the many initiatives that the district is embracing, PLCs could provide a much-needed process for educators to manage and prioritize curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development needs.
- With buildings at various stages of implementation around MTSS, and with other priorities on the horizon (e.g. the transition to the Common Core) the district will need to remain focused on ensuring that the MTSS framework is implemented effectively, and that it guides the district’s work in reading.
- Focus groups report that professional development is needed in the area of mathematics instruction. The district has focused a great deal of attention on reading instruction, and teachers report that math has fallen somewhat behind. To address this challenge, Salina has initiated conversations with two math specialists: Kim Sutton at the elementary level and Paul Riccomini at both the elementary and the high school levels.

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, four key systemic challenges were identified.

- As the student population diversifies, and as the number of students identified as economically challenged increases, the district will need to ensure that it can serve *all* students well and that *all* students receive a high quality education.
- Currently, the district’s four-year graduation rate is 79%, and graduation rates for some groups of students are significantly lower. The district is challenged to improve graduation rates and prepare all students for success in life after high school.
- Salina has successfully developed and implemented a number of initiatives to improve curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development. The district is challenged, however, to ensure that initiatives are fully implemented and integrated effectively, and to provide meaningful and ongoing support for all of these efforts. Salina risks “initiative fatigue.” This

challenge will likely be compounded by the district's transition to the Common Core.

- Despite a strong emphasis on effective instruction and professional development to support instruction, it appears that instructional approaches in special education may be uneven from school to school, and that both general and special educators would benefit from structures and support to communicate, plan, and co-teach.

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

1. District leadership should build on the strategic plan that has been developed and finalize planning for implementation. Leaders should implement a process for sharing the plan with stakeholders and providing periodic updates to district and community. The balanced scorecard should also be finalized.
2. The district should undertake a process to review curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development initiatives to ensure that they are integrated and implemented with fidelity, with the goal of continually improving student learning and achievement to support high expectations for *all* students. This process should include:
 - a. A review of supports needed for effective establishment of PLCs as a mechanism for decision-making and prioritization of work in schools.
 - b. An examination of ongoing support needed for full implementation of Literacy First across the district. This review should also look at how Literacy First and MTSS are integrated with the LoTi and CIP frameworks the district has put into place, and at what supports are needed for effective and ongoing implementation of MTSS in reading, including the possibility of establishing an MTSS Leadership Team.
 - c. Review of data management and usage, and discussion of how PLCs can be used to regularly review and act on student assessment and other data. This process should include:
 - Ensuring that there is sufficient time for educators to collaborate and plan together; developing and implementing common PLC protocols; monitoring the effectiveness of PLCs.
 - Using classroom observation data systematically to provide regular and helpful feedback to educators.
 - Identifying priority data and analyzing data to determine the extent of implementation of effective teaching/learning practices.
 - Determining future professional development practices using observation data.

- d. Development of a monitoring system to measure the implementation and impact of professional development on changes in teacher behaviors.¹⁴ In addition to classroom walkthroughs, the district may consider the use of tools such as the Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM).¹⁵ 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.
3. Based on the recommendations above, the district should assess special education and ESL services, and implement mechanisms to ensure that students with disabilities, English language learners, and other students at risk are educated in the general education setting to the extent possible, that there are high expectations for these students, and that educators working with students have professional development, time, and structural support to communicate, plan together, and co-teach effectively.
4. As it works to improve graduation rates and ensure that students are college and career ready, the district should look at counseling efforts and work to strengthen relationships with parents who are not active in their children's education. Salina should also address the perception of differences among district schools, particularly the two high schools, to ensure that all schools are offering high quality educational experiences for their students. This is also important for addressing student mobility issues.
5. The district should make initiating an all day kindergarten program a priority.
6. The diversification of administrators and certified staff should also be a priority.

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):
 - Instruction, Stage 2
 - Tiered Intervention, Stage 2
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.

¹⁴ Reeves, D.B. *Transforming Professional Development Into Student Learning Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010.

¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.

¹⁶ 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.