

# Needs Analysis of Chanute – USD 413

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

# I. Introduction

In September 2008, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) contracted with Cross & Jofus, LLC to implement a model for working with KSDE and five Kansas districts—Garden City, Kansas City, Topeka, Turner, and Wichita—struggling to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In 2009, this model, the Kansas Learning Network (KLN), was expanded to reach 12 more Kansas districts not making AYP, and subsequently in 2010, to reach 11 more, including Chanute Public Schools, USD 413. Since that time, one district has left the Network because it demonstrated AYP two consecutive years.<sup>1</sup> Seven additional districts demonstrated AYP in the area(s) identified for improvement, and they will continue to remain in the Network for at least one more year.

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

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

One of the first activities in pursuit of this goal is to conduct a needs assessment of KSDE and all participating districts, focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis encompasses an analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and three-day site visits<sup>2</sup> 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 Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities are designed both to produce findings leading to recommendations for technical assistance and to train school and state officials to do their own needs assessments and classroom observations in the future.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Jofus for the district’s leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary findings. This report presents all findings and represents the culmination of the needs assessment for Chanute Public Schools, USD 413 (referred to throughout the report as USD 413 or Chanute).

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> The site visit for Chanute Public Schools occurred October 11-13, 2010.

## USD 413 Student Demographics

Approximately 84.6% of Chanute’s student population of 1,883 students are classified as White, 6.3% as Hispanic, 5.5% as Multi-Racial, 1.6% as African-American, 1.5% as American Indian, and less than 1% as Asian or Hawaiian-Pacific Islander.

A majority of students—almost 63%—are classified as Economically Disadvantaged, reflecting a 17% increase since the 2006-07 school year when only 46% of students were eligible for free and reduced priced meals. Additionally, almost 18% of students are identified as students with disabilities, well above the state average of 13.5%.<sup>3</sup>

## Student Achievement

Overall, Chanute students have demonstrated relatively high levels of student achievement. Students have met or exceeded state achievement benchmarks in most areas, and as a group, all students exceeded state benchmarks in reading and math for the past three years (for additional detail, see Table I below). USD 413 also earned 11 standards of excellence awards in 2009, and 10 in 2010.

**Table I—Chanute Summary Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data**

**Reading**—Met AYP in 2008 and 2009; did not meet in 2010. Not yet on Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2008 - 72%	2009 - 76.7%	2010 - 81.3%
All students	Met (83%)	Met (81.7%)	Met (82.6%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (76.1%)	Met (76.3%) <sup>4</sup>	Met (76.9%) <sup>6</sup>
Students with Disabilities	Met (58.5%) <sup>5</sup>	Met (59.6%) <sup>6</sup>	No (54.2%)
ELL Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
African-American Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hispanic	N/A	Met (82.1%)	Met (77.3%) <sup>4</sup>
White	Met (83%)	Met (82.3%)	Met (83%)
Asian & Pacific*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial*	N/A	N/A	Met (80.7%) <sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> District data.

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

<sup>5</sup> The group made safe harbor.

<sup>6</sup> The group made safe harbor through the hypothesis test at the 75% level of confidence.

**Mathematics**—Met AYP in 2008; did not meet AYP in 2009 or 2010. On Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2008 - 64.6%	2009 - 70.5%	2010 - 76.4%
All students	Met (81.4%)	Met (81.6%)	Met (83.8%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (74.6%)	Met (76%)	Met (78.3%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (53.6%) <sup>5</sup>	No (53.5%)	No (53.3%)
ELL Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
African-American Students	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hispanic	N/A	Met (76.9%)	Met (78.5%)
White	Met (81.1%)	Met (82.6%)	Met (84.8%)
Asian & Pacific*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial*	N/A	N/A	Met (79.2%)

**Graduation Rate:** 2008—88.6%, 2009—84.9%, 2010—86.5%

Notes:

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

That said, USD 413 faces several challenges. Students with disabilities did not meet mathematics benchmarks in 2009 or 2010, placing the district on improvement in mathematics; students with disabilities also failed to meet reading benchmarks in 2010. Further, students eligible for free and reduced priced meals appear to be struggling to meet reading benchmarks as well.

## The Big Picture

Overall, Chanute displays a number of strengths. Leadership at the district and building levels has been stable for many years—the superintendent and nearly all principals have been in the district for 10 years or more.

The district is also financially sound. While both general and supplemental funds have decreased over the last two years, the only positions eliminated have been those resulting from natural attrition. Chanute has also maintained significant cash reserves to deal with a declining budget.

Additionally, USD 413 boasts excellent facilities. Chanute High School and Chanute Elementary School were both built in the last three years, and Chanute Middle School underwent major renovation within the last three years as well.

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

- 1) A need to update the district’s long-range educational plan, and to implement supporting initiatives accordingly

- 2) AYP and instructional challenges for students with disabilities
- 3) A lack of systemic consistency in the implementation of curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development, and a need to provide instructional coaching
- 4) A need to empower special education leaders as instructional leaders, enhance professional development, and better integrate special education and general education staff to support student needs.

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

## II. Findings

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

### Leadership

Chanute benefits from a number of leadership strengths.

- Chanute’s superintendent, Steve Parsons, has served as Superintendent of USD 413 for 12 years. He is highly respected and viewed across the community as a dedicated, trusted, and ethical leader.

“We have a great deal of trust in Steve.”  
—*Chanute School Board member*

- Constituents appear to view the Chanute Board of Education as a group of people who are doing what they believe is right for the school district. Board members pride themselves on being able to listen respectfully to opposing viewpoints, openly debate issues, and then vote to make decisions. The relationship between the board and the superintendent is positive and trusting. The board listens to the superintendent and relies on his expertise to run the school district.

- In 2004, the board and superintendent initiated development of a long-range educational plan. One hundred twelve patrons offered input to the board about what they felt was needed in Chanute Public Schools. Guided by the motto of “Students First,” USD 413 established three primary focus areas for the plan, including: 1) improve student achievement; 2) attract and retain quality staff; and 3) improve facilities. The district added a fourth focus area in 2006—improve communication. The board is beginning to review and update the plan.

“When we make decisions, we keep the Students First motto in mind.”  
—*Board member*

- Overall, staff members, students, and parents have a positive view of principals in the district. Building principals maintain safe and orderly learning environments for students and staff. Nearly all of the principals have served the district for more than 10 years. The district leadership team (district administration and principals) meets monthly at the district office. District administrators also visit buildings frequently to meet with building leaders to share information and discuss district and building issues.
- Patrons we interviewed seem pleased with overall communication from the school district. They appreciate district newsletters and view the Chanute web site as a positive communication tool as well.
- Parents, students, and teachers were also positive about PowerSchool—an online grade book that allows parents and students to access students’ real-time academic progress. They see it as a tool that supports increased communication between parents and teachers.

Though Chanute has a number of leadership strengths, the district also faces some clear leadership challenges.

- The long-range educational plan needs to be reviewed and updated to account for current realities. The district is aware of this and has begun the process of updating the plan.
- While principals view themselves as the instructional leaders of their schools, USD 413 does not have a shared understanding of what the role “instructional leader” means for principals. Additionally, the district lacks a focus on implementation and follow-through for professional development for principals in their roles as instructional leaders.
- The Anderson, Neosho, and Woodson (ANW) Special Education Cooperative provides special education services to Chanute Public Schools. Staff members, parents, and administrators we interviewed see cooperative administrators as effective managers. However, interviews indicate that administrators are not serving as effective instructional leaders. For cooperative staff members to provide a consistently high level of instruction that serves the needs of identified students, building leadership and cooperative leadership will need to make instructional leadership a primary focus of their work.
- Parents in focus groups noted that it was difficult for them to tell how decisions were made at the new elementary school. When the district had four neighborhood schools, parents knew who was in charge and who to contact with concerns. Now that students from across the district attend one elementary school, parents are unsure how decisions should be or are made, and who is responsible

for implementing them. There needs to be a clearly articulated process for how decisions are made and implemented in the building, and this process needs to be communicated to parents.

## Empowering Culture and Human Capital

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

- All teachers except one in Chanute are highly qualified and, according to stakeholders, teachers and administrators place a strong value on relationships with students and other staff members.
- The district has a strong focus on the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a mechanism for instructional improvement and staff development. Chanute has invested considerable time and effort into implementing effective PLC's, and most schools appear to place a strong emphasis on teacher collaboration. Teachers and administrators value this commitment and see it as a step in the right direction.

“It has taken a while, but our PLC's are getting better each year.”

—*Teacher*
- There seems to be a great deal of community support for extra curricular activities in the Chanute Public Schools. Patrons are proud of the strength of speech, debate, drama, music, athletics, and after-school programs.
- Staff, students, parents, and community members we interviewed expressed the belief that Chanute schools provide students with a safe and orderly learning environment. A School Resource Officer—a member of the Chanute Police Department—provides services to the district. During recent construction and remodeling of facilities, safety was a high priority.
- The elementary schools have relatively small class sizes—with an average of 18 to 22 students per class—plus significant support from paraprofessionals and teacher aides.
- Neosho County Community College provides opportunities for students to enroll concurrently in college courses at the high school campus. In addition, the college is seen as a valuable post-secondary option, allowing many Chanute students to continue their education beyond high school. The district also offers a number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- There seems to be a great deal of cooperation between Chanute City Government, Neosho County Community College, and USD 413. Focus group participants highlighted a number of cooperative projects, including construction of the

Chanute Community Sports Complex and use of vacated school buildings, following construction of the new elementary and the high school.

“It is great the way the city, college, and schools work together.”

—Community member

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

- One-fourth of Chanute’s certified staff is over 55. Within the next few years, a significant number of teachers and administrators are expected to retire, requiring the district to develop a strategy for identifying, recruiting, and training new staff in many areas. The superintendent is also expected to retire soon, and the district needs to begin to develop a transition plan to replace him.
- Challenges related to special education do not appear to be well understood by the district. Special education teachers see the district and regular teachers as supportive of special education and say that many regular education teachers have taken ownership of the education of the students with disabilities in their classes. That said, however, special education teachers in focus groups expressed concern that their time is not being used to do what is best for the students they serve. Special education teachers noted that too often they spend time working with students to complete homework, not to improve skills. They believe that their time could be used much more effectively.

- Parents and civic leaders expressed concerns about the use of illegal drugs in the Chanute community. Parents we met with believe that earlier education on drug abuse is necessary, and they expressed support for the random drug testing currently taking place at the high school.

“If you are ever going to stop drug abuse, you must have strong policies.”

—Patron

- Parents also expressed concerns about how counselors at the high school communicate with students and parents. Parents noted, for example, that they were uncertain about submission deadlines for college entrance materials and scholarship applications.

“I receive more information from other parents than the counselors.”

—Parent

## Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development

Findings related to the areas of Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development are based upon a comparative analysis of information from the following three sources: (1) student achievement data; (2) perceptions identified by Chanute educators on surveys of educational practices, and by representatives from all constituent groups during focus groups and interviews; and (3) data collected during classroom

visits, which document to what extent effective teaching/learning practices are being implemented.

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

## ***Curriculum and Assessment***

Overall, Chanute displays a number of curriculum and assessment strengths.

- The district has a well-articulated curriculum. Chanute has devoted significant time, energy, and resources to developing the curriculum and supporting documents. We saw evidence of vertical and horizontal alignment, along with alignment to state standards. The district has also instituted a curriculum review and materials adoption cycle that keeps the local curriculum current with state standards. Curriculum is revised on a seven-year cycle. This process typically occurs during the “Summer Institute,” which staff members are paid stipends to attend.
- The curriculum includes the use of research-based strategies such as: Bloom’s Taxonomy, Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, and Marzano’s instructional strategies, as well as comprehensive research-based programs such as Success for All and Everyday Math.
- USD 413 has made a concerted effort to provide teaching staff with the materials they need to successfully implement the curriculum. The district provides teachers with curriculum maps, pacing guides, curricular materials, and PLC time to help teachers pace their instruction.
- Students with disabilities have access to and are held to the same rigorous and aligned curriculum as all other students. Efforts are made to provide ALL students with core curricular opportunities.
- Curricular choices such as construction technology, welding, and certified nurse assistant (CNA) programs, offered in conjunction with Neosho County Community College, expand learning and career opportunities for all students.
- 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), and locally developed common assessments.
- The district has devoted PLC time to looking at data from the common assessments.

Despite a generally strong curriculum and assessment system, there are some significant challenges as well, however.

- While the curriculum development process and supporting materials for teachers appear to be very sound, Chanute has not fully implemented a process to monitor curriculum implementation. According to participants in focus groups, the curriculum is not being delivered consistently at some grade levels.
- There are also some problems with transition points in curriculum materials. For example, the elementary uses Every Day Math. This program uses a different approach than the approach used at the middle school, and the transition between approaches is difficult for staff, students, and parents.
- The district appears to rely heavily on “programs” to meet students’ learning needs. Students in need of support are offered a program such as EIR (early reading intervention) or Scholastic’s Read 180 (also a reading intervention program), and in some instances, programs are administered by aides or paraprofessionals. Comprehensive programs may give students more (or less) than what they need to improve skills. For example, a student may be in a program that focuses on decoding skills and comprehension when that student may only need work on comprehension strategies. Intervention materials and strategies should be targeted to specific learning challenges students face.
- Additionally, there is some concern that students with disabilities may be missing “core” instruction due to behavior issues. Special education teachers and paraprofessionals we spoke with noted that students who are sent out of class are not given an opportunity to work with the core teacher on the content that was missed.
- Chanute is not consistently using data in a systemic way to drive instruction and professional development. Chanute’s use of a variety of assessments has made the district rich with data. However, there is little evidence that educators are using assessment data deeply enough to identify specific areas of strength and weaknesses at the individual student level.

“At the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, it is reading class or Reading 180, not both. Reading 180 is a core replacement.”

—*Teacher*

## ***Instruction***

Table II presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 77%) and principals (response rate 100%) administered online by Cross & Joftus. Instructional strategies that principals and teachers *believe* are most strongly evident and those that are least evident

are highlighted below. Additional instructional strengths and challenges are identified later in this section.

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

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited by 82% of principals as strongly evident and 0% as not evident or minimally evident)
- identifying students who are struggling to master content and providing them with support individually or in small flexible groups (cited as strongly evident by 64% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 9%)
- delivering subject matter to students at an appropriately rigorous level (cited as strongly evident by 55% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 18%)
- 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 55% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 18%).

The sound instructional strategies that *principals* indicated were ***least evident*** include:

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 0% of principals as strongly evident and by 73% as minimally evident or not evident)
- fostering collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being (cited by 9% of principals as strongly evident and by 36% as minimally evident or not evident)
- measuring the effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (cited by 9% of principals as strongly evident and by 36% as minimally evident or not evident).

Principals were ***evenly divided*** on one strategy:

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities (cited by 36% of principals as strongly evident and by 36% as minimally evident or not evident).

In general, teachers' views are not significantly different from principals'. On the whole, however, teachers are more optimistic about the use of sound instructional practices. The sound instructional strategies that *teachers* believe are most ***strongly evident*** in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 75% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited by 70% of teachers as strongly evident and by 6% as minimally evident or not evident)
- identifying students who are struggling to master content and providing them with support individually or in small flexible groups (cited as strongly evident by 63% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 10%)
- empowering students to participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments (cited as strongly evident by 57% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 2%)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities (cited by 55% of teachers as strongly evident and by 18% as minimally evident or not evident).

Interestingly, teachers rated very few sound instructional strategies as not evident at all. The sound instructional strategy that *teachers* indicated was *least evident* was:

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 22% of teachers as strongly evident and by 32% as minimally evident or not evident).

**Table II—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.	82%	0%	75%	0%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	64%	9%	63%	10%
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.	55%	18%	55%	6%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately	55%	18%	41%	7%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
rigorous level.				
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	45%	18%	70%	6%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	36%	9%	57%	2%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	36%	18%	53%	5%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	36%	18%	35%	24%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	36%	36%	55%	18%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	36%	36%	34%	18%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	27%	18%	54%	12%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	18%	0%	39%	19%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to	18%	18%	23%	26%

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^
support student learning.				
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	18%	18%	22%	29%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	18%	27%	57%	7%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	18%	45%	33%	11%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	9%	36%	34%	15%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	9%	36%	19%	24%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	0%	73%	22%	32%

Teacher Response Rate = approximately 129/167  
Principal Response Rate = 11/8

Source: Cross & Joftus survey of Chanute principals and teachers October 2010.

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

^The response option "No Opinion" was deleted from this presentation. Four percent or less of teachers and 0% of principals selected this option on any response.

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

- One indicator of effective instructional practice is the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the Kansas State Assessment. Spring 2010 data indicate that 82.6% of all students met proficiency benchmarks in reading and 83.8% demonstrated proficiency in math. Generally, this represents a small

increase from 2009, when 81.7% met proficiency benchmarks in reading and 81.6% met benchmarks in math.

- During observations of 65 classrooms in Chanute using PALSS (Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success), the majority of classrooms at all levels of schooling demonstrated orderly, well-managed environments that were conducive to learning. Additionally, at all levels, the majority of students were actively involved in learning, and teachers were regularly checking student understanding throughout the lesson and providing reinforcements for student efforts. (See Appendix for specific percentages of these and other practices that contribute to accelerating student learning).
- There are processes in place for the early identification and determination of support for under-performing students. Ample numbers of aides and paraprofessionals are available at all levels to help meet the needs of students. Additionally, each school has a specific time set aside each day where students report to classes/teachers to receive extra support. At the high school, this is “Comet Time,” at the middle school “Rocket Time,” and at the elementary school “Star Time.”
- Instruction is guided by a planned curriculum, which is generally consistent from classroom to classroom at each level. Teachers play an important part in the curriculum planning process, and they participate in the curriculum review cycle.
- Inclusion of students with disabilities is the norm throughout the system at all levels. It is evident that the district is working to break down the separation between general education students and students with disabilities. Related to this and particularly noteworthy are the 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 2008-09 reported on March 15, 2010), the district has met the state targets for Indicator 5 for Least Restrictive Environment for student learning—2009 data indicate that 67.7% of students with disabilities were included in the regular classroom for 80% or more of their school day, a figure almost 10 percentage points above the state target, and only 2.2% 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; this is 6.5 percentage points below the allowable state target.
- Principals do walkthroughs and follow the district’s evaluation plan in assessing teachers’ effectiveness. Walkthroughs, however, are not as effective as they could be.

“When it comes to instruction we are more of a whole system than we used to be.”  
—Principal

As this last strength suggests, Chanute also has some significant instructional challenges.

- All focus groups agreed that Chanute would benefit from fully implementing systematic procedures to conduct classroom observations, provide substantive feedback to teachers, and use observation data to inform a professional development program that identifies research-based instructional practices needed to accelerate student learning. This would bring clarity and purpose to the walkthrough process described in focus groups.

“Our evaluation process and walkthroughs are weak. They lack clarity.”

—Principal

- PALSS identified the need to increase the following teaching practices, which were “minimally evident” in the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies):
  - Providing instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking aligned to state assessment questions that require cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation
  - Displaying student work in the students’ work area as a way of highlighting good models and reinforcing strong effort
  - Incorporating effective learning strategies, including: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and taking notes, representing knowledge in various forms, cooperative learning, and generating hypotheses
  - Providing instruction that takes into account students’ varying learning styles.
- The district places high value on differentiated instruction. In classrooms, however, we saw limited usage of differentiated instruction as a strategy to meet the needs of all students (see Appendix for specific classroom observation data). Currently, educators differentiate instruction by assigning students to specific teachers and content during “Comet,” “Rocket,” and “Star Time.”
- Even though co-teaching is taking place, regular teachers and special education teachers plan together on a very limited basis. This means that many activities are not well planned or integrated.
- Classroom observations and focus group conversations indicate that significant numbers of adults providing instruction to students with the greatest learning needs have little or no training on how to do this effectively. Many of the lowest performing students, and students with disabilities, receive instruction from aides and paraprofessionals who are the least instructionally trained of all those who have instructional responsibilities.
- Currently, everyone teaching students—general education and special education teachers, aides, and paraprofessionals—is receiving very little, if any, feedback and

coaching on her or his performance. There are no instructional coaches and there appears to be limited instructional support.

## ***Professional Development***

The needs assessment uncovered several professional development strengths.

- Professional development is an integral part of improving the work of the district and supporting new initiatives. One example of this is the one week Summer Institute, which this past year had 110 teachers in attendance. Now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year, and taught primarily by Chanute faculty, the Summer Institute is a demonstration that the district views internal capacity for professional development as a priority.
- PLCs are a key piece of the district's approach to professional learning. Over the past five years, the district has deepened its approach to PLCs. PLC's are now functioning in all schools, and the district provides time for the PLC's to meet at least once each week. Chanute has designated PLC teacher leaders that help lead the professional development initiative in the district and have input into deciding what professional development is brought into the system.
- Professional development in curriculum alignment is ongoing and tightly connected with work on developing assessments in each of the content areas. It is a tribute to the district that this work extends beyond the core curricular areas and includes all content areas.
- Special education teachers are included in district's ongoing professional development, and some special education teachers serve as PLC teacher leaders.

A number of challenges are also clear, however.

- Currently, the observation of classroom instruction is sporadic and does not appear to be guided by a comprehensive plan. The district needs to develop a system to collect classroom observation data regularly, and use data to support the implementation of systematic research-based instructional practices that are linked to increased student achievement.
- Current PLC work has been focused on PLC processes and assessments and should now focus on conversations about instructional strategies that could be used to improve student achievement.
- Professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities is lacking. According to special education teachers in focus groups, the special education cooperative provides training for both paraprofessionals and teachers at a very minimal level. While special education teachers participate in district professional development, they are not receiving

the specialized training they need to meet the unique needs of the students they serve.

- As a group, principals felt that because the district no longer has an administrative retreat to start the year, that there has been some breakdown in the collaborative focus of the administrative team.

### **III. Recommendations for Technical Assistance**

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district could most benefit from technical assistance and to design that technical assistance in a way that will have the greatest impact on the district's school quality and student achievement.

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

- 1) A need to update the district's long-range educational plan, and to implement supporting initiatives accordingly
- 2) AYP and instructional challenges for students with disabilities
- 3) A lack of systemic consistency in the implementation of curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development, and a need to provide instructional coaching
- 4) A need to empower special education leaders as instructional leaders, to enhance professional development, and to better integrate special education and general education staff to support student needs.

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

- 1) Review, revise, and fully implement the next iteration of the district's long-range educational plan.
- 2) Provide focused implementation and follow-through to support principals in their roles as "instructional leaders." Determine what this role entails and provide support and ongoing professional development.
- 3) Develop, implement, and align curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development systems. This process should address the following:
  - a. Monitoring of curriculum implementation, especially at key transition points
  - b. Development and implementation of a classroom observation protocol that can be used to support instruction and professional development. Minimally, this process should include: 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; and determining future professional development practices using observation data in collaboration with other data

- c. Continued refinement of the PLC process, so that educators use observation and assessment data to inform instruction
  - d. Refined professional development on differentiated instruction, focused on ensuring that all students are getting a high-quality core experience, as well as high-quality instruction at tiers 2 and 3
  - e. A process to provide instructional coaching support for both general and special education staff members to improve instruction
  - f. The creation of collaborative planning time for teachers who co-teach, and/or paraprofessionals and teachers who provide instruction to the same student(s).
- 4) In collaboration with KSDE's Special Education Technical Assistance Support Network, and external consultants if appropriate, conduct an in-depth special education needs assessment to determine how to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and to ensure that students have access to, and make satisfactory progress in the general curriculum. The review needs to look specifically at the issue of instructional leadership in the area of special education, the process of how students are identified for services, the professional development provided for coop teachers and paraprofessionals, and how planning time is scheduled and co-teaching is supported to ensure a common instructional focus for students who experience instruction from general education and special education teachers, as well as paraprofessionals and classroom aides.
- 5) The district should also look carefully at the issue of student drug use, and work with community groups and parent representatives to ensure that Chanute has a policy and appropriate student services in place to address this issue.

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

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**NOTES ON APPENDIX (See attached PDF)  
Findings from Classroom Observations  
CHANUTE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process, Cross & Joftus staff in collaboration with representatives from the Kansas State Department of Education and other district staff visited classrooms and recorded

observations of effective “teaching” demonstrated by the teacher and “learning” demonstrated by the students.

The entries under the “plus” column on the left side of the charts attached show the percentage of classrooms visited in which research-based practices that consistently contribute to enhanced learning were observed. The entries under the “delta” column on the right side highlight areas that the district should address to improve the teaching and learning process.

Data were aggregated in school-level alike (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) groupings to determine the percentage of classrooms in which evidence of the specified practices were observed. For reporting purposes in the narrative, we describe practices as having ***strong evidence*** if they were observed in 70% or more of the classrooms visited, ***evidence*** if they were observed in 50-69% of classrooms visited, and ***minimal evidence*** if they were observed in less than 50% of classrooms visited.