

Needs Analysis of Derby Public Schools, USD 260

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 260, Derby 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 uncover 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 Derby Public Schools occurred September 28-29, 2011.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Jofus for the district’s leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary strengths and challenges. This report represents the culmination of the needs analysis for Derby Public Schools, USD 260 (referred to throughout the report as USD 260 or Derby).

Derby Student Demographics

Derby (population 22,500) is located very near to Wichita and is also in close proximity to a large U.S. Air Force base. Derby Public Schools serves the town of Derby, the Air Force base, and a diverse group of surrounding communities.

Derby’s total student population is approximately 6750. The district includes nine elementary schools, a 6th Grade Center, Derby Middle School (grades 7-8), and Derby High School (grades 9-12). To provide a distinctive transitional environment from the elementary to middle grades, the 6th Grade Center exists as a separate school building for all sixth graders. It houses 500 new students each year. The secondary school is also new, with an enrollment of more than 2,000 students. The district employs approximately 1,100 certified and classified staff.

Like many other urban areas, the community and district have seen substantial growth in the number of economically disadvantaged families and children over the last several years. The percentage of students eligible for free and reduced meals has risen at *all* school levels by at least 10 percentage points—and by almost 20 percentage points at some school levels—during the past five years. At the middle school level, for example, the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-priced meals rose from 31.5% in 2007 to 48% in 2011.

Table I—Demographic Shifts in USD 260

Race-Ethnicity	2006-2007	2010-2011
White	77.8%	75.1%
African-American	5.3%	5.0%
Hispanic	7.3%	11.0%
Other	9.6 %	8.9%

Additionally, almost 15% of students are classified as students with disabilities—above the state average of 13.5%.³

Student Achievement

Overall, Derby students have demonstrated relatively high levels of student achievement. The group, “all students,” has exceeded state achievement benchmarks in both reading and math for the past three years (for additional detail, see Table II below). Further,

³ District and KSDE data.

Derby schools at all levels—elementary, middle, and high—received Kansas Standards of Excellence awards in the 2010-11 school year. There are other bright spots as well. Cooper elementary, where more than 90 percent of children are eligible for free and reduced meals, has made AYP proficiency benchmarks every year.

Table II—Derby 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 (87.1%)	Met (87.9%)	Met (88.6%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (77.6%)	Met (81.1%) ⁴	No (83.1%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (72.7%) ⁴	No (71%)	Yes (74.4%) ⁵
ELL Students	Met (74.1%) ⁴	Met (74.8%) ⁶	No (80.2%)
African-American Students	Met (74.8%) ⁴	Met (80.1%) ⁴	No (77.6%)
Hispanic	Met (74%) ⁴	Met (77.4%) ⁴	Met (82.1%) ⁴
White	Met (89.2%)	Met (89.9%)	Met (90.5%)
Asian*	Met (85.6%)	Met (84.1%)	Met (87.6%)
American Indian or Alaskan*	Met (78.9%)	Met (86.5%)	Met (80%) ¹
Multi-Racial*	Met (88.5%)	Met (87.3%)	Met (91.4%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Mathematics – Met AYP in 2009 and 2010; did not in 2011. Not yet on Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2009 - 70.5%	2010 - 76.4%	2011 - 82.3%
All students	Met (83.5%)	Met (84.9%)	Met (84.3%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (76.9%)	Met (80%)	No (79.5%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (66.9%) ⁴	Met (71.6%) ⁵	No (68%)
ELL Students	Met (79.6%)	Met (82.9%)	Met (82.8%)
African-American Students	Met (62.7%) ⁴	Met (76.5%)	No (69.2%)
Hispanic	Met (76.5%)	Met (84.6%)	Met (81%) ⁴
White	Met (85.2%)	Met (85.4%)	Met (85.5%)
Asian*	Met (90.7%)	Met (86%)	Met (90.4%)
American Indian or Alaskan*	Met (81.6%)	Met (80.6%)	Met (85.7%)
Multi-Racial*	Met (81%)	Met (84.9%)	Met (82.7%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Is.*	N/A	N/A	N/A

Overall Graduation Rate: 2009—89.4%, 2010—88.4%, 2011—80.4%[^]

Notes:

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

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

⁵ The group made Safe Harbor.

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

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

N/A indicates that data are not available.

Despite these accomplishments, however, USD 260 faces some significant achievement challenges. Students who qualified for free and reduced priced meals, as well as students identified as English language learners (ELLs) and African-Americans struggled to meet reading benchmarks in 2010 and failed to meet them in 2011, placing the district on improvement in reading. Students with disabilities did not meet reading benchmarks in 2010 and met benchmarks through Safe Harbor in 2011. Further, students who qualified for free and reduced priced meals, African-American students, and students with disabilities did not meet 2011 benchmarks in mathematics as well.

The Big Picture

Derby has received national attention as one of the Top 10 places to raise a family in the United States. *U.S. News and World Report* ranked it highly as a “Top Place to Retire.” *Money Magazine* named Derby one of the “Best Places to Live,” and *Bloomberg Business Week* identified it as one of America’s “Best Affordable Suburbs.” The community takes great pride in its education system.

Overall the district has experienced tremendous success in student learning, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, staff achievement, and community support; but as the AYP bar continues to climb, the student population becomes more diverse, and financial resources decline, the challenges facing the district are becoming more evident.

While the community has experienced recent, very modest population growth, many of the adults do not have school-age children. With state and federal funding cuts, the district’s secondary education budget has lost nearly \$1.9 million over the last few years.

USD 260 possesses a number of important strengths.

- The Derby educational system appears to be widely respected and is viewed as an asset to the community.
- Educators appear committed to working together to boost Derby’s graduation rate, raise achievement, and narrow achievement gaps.
- The district has a strong curriculum system in place. The curriculum is articulated, aligned to state standards, and vertically and horizontally aligned K-12, with online curriculum maps and other resources to guide teaching and learning.
- The district has resources in place to support systematic improvement. Teachers and administrators meet weekly to collaborate and plan together, and the district has also recently purchased a data warehouse to store, organize, and manage data.

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

- Budget cuts, coupled with an increasingly diverse student body facing added language and economic barriers, have created added challenges for the district.
- Many efforts to address achievement challenges appear to be operating simultaneously; the district would benefit from more coordination and coherence across efforts.
- Derby currently lacks a clear process to: 1) identify what data are critical to collect and 2) ensure that student achievement data are being used to inform instruction in the classroom.
- Though USD 260 has devoted substantial time and energy to developing a shared on-line curriculum and a tiered instructional approach based on student learning needs, the district appears to lack effective mechanisms to monitor how well curriculum and instruction are being implemented.
- The district is in the process of developing and beginning to implement a classroom walkthrough observation system. The challenge lies in using this system to monitor instruction, inform professional development, and guide improvement.

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

II. Strengths and Challenges

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

Leadership, Empowering Culture, and Human Capital

The Derby school district displays a substantial array of strengths in the areas of Leadership, Culture, and Human Capital.

- The superintendent and key administrative directors are an impressive leadership team. Their presentations to the needs analysis review team were well informed, relevant, and enthusiastic. Directors in charge of district operations and finance seem to be widely respected both inside and outside the district—their depth of knowledge and experience were mentioned as extremely valuable by others we interviewed.
- A strategic plan guides district operations and programmatic decision-making. Since the current plan is nearing the end of its five-year cycle, a new plan is under development.

- The school board and district leaders are clearly focused on improving student success, and they are working to raise the high school graduation rate.
- Several district staff and civic leaders interviewed were passionate about the level of pride, trust, and mutual support shared between the district and the city. The school board appears to have good working relations with business and civic leaders in Derby, and school board members meet regularly with their political representatives.
- There are several creative partnerships between the district and the city, including a shared communications director position and an active partnership with Derby Recreation Center that affords students a broad array of afterschool activities. Parents and civic leaders interviewed were exceedingly enthusiastic about the quality and progress of the district.
- District leadership pays close attention to the importance of strengthening social capital through regular interactions with and among principals and teachers. Principals, for example, told the review team that they actively seek out one another for advice and support.
- Teachers have a one-hour block each Monday morning to meet in professional learning communities (PLCs). Principals help to set the PLC agendas twice monthly.
- Teachers, staff, and administrators appear to have a strong work ethic and deep commitment to their work, evidenced by comments from both principals and teachers about the amount of extra time they put in, especially on weekends.
- To a person, the student focus group was extremely positive about the overall quality of their schools, teachers, principals, and programs.
- Students have access to and participate in a large variety of co-curricular activities. There is an outstanding band program for middle and high school students.

“I moved my business to Derby because of the quality of the schools.”

—*Civic Leader*

“Drive by our schools Sunday late in the afternoon and you will see our cars in the parking lot. We’re getting ready for the coming week.”

—*Teacher*

“The large high school campus, diversity and wide variety of course offerings help prepare students for college and the real world.”

—*Parent*

By building on these strengths, the district can address a number of challenges uncovered by the needs analysis team.

- Though the school board, district administrators, teachers, and staff appear committed to working together to improve the district's graduation rate and boost achievement—and the district has an articulated strategic plan with defined results—district efforts do not appear to be operating in a coherent and efficient fashion to improve results.
- The district appears to have strong data-gathering capacity related to student achievement and progress. At the same time, though, it does not appear that most teachers and principals view data as readily useable or essential for helping them make decisions to adapt instruction to different students' learning needs.
- Perhaps due to financial concerns, there appears to be limited strategic attention to the role Pre-K programs could play in helping improve children's early progress.
- The focus group process found very limited attention to strengthening teacher accountability for student success. Moreover, data on student progress and achievement do not appear to be key factors in how teacher performance is evaluated.
- Large classes appear to be an issue in some buildings. While the Cross & Jofus surveys of teachers and principals indicated that respondents believe that the district generally has a positive climate for learning, and focus group conversations affirmed that view, some teachers and students noted the difficulties of trying to improve instruction and learning given crowding in many classrooms.
- The district's human resources group appears to have strong leadership that ensures quality recruiting and orienting of new staff. It's not clear, though, to what extent human resources plays a role in teachers' and principals' ongoing professional growth.
- The topic of the district's site councils came up in two different focus groups. In one, the issue was about the effectiveness of the councils. In the other, there was a question about how to help site councils become a more dynamic part of improving the learning environment. Fortunately, the board plans to address this issue in its new strategic plan.
- Some parents and civic leaders in focus groups suggested that the district should pay more attention to improving communications across all stakeholders, especially families in low-income neighborhoods.
- Classified/support staff members play an integral role in the district's successful operations. In the view of some administrators, however, many classified staff

members don't associate the work they do with the district's ongoing efforts to improve quality.

- Some of the students interviewed noted that too much time elapsed between what they learned in class and state tests. They described having opportunities to learn important academic content, but noted that there is a large time gap between when the bulk of their coursework occurs and when state tests are administered. Several students suggested trying to address this issue through the district's advisory program.
- Regarding students' awareness of career and college preparation, some students interviewed noted that the district's advisory process does not fully meet their needs. They expressed frustration at their own lack of knowledge about key aspects of career and college planning.

Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development

Strengths and challenges 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 Derby educators on surveys of educational practices, and by representatives from all constituent groups during focus groups and interviews; and (3) data collected during classroom visits, which document the extent to which effective teaching/learning practices are being implemented in the classroom.

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

Curriculum and Assessment

Derby has some important curriculum and assessment strengths.

- Derby Public Schools has developed an online curriculum map for all subject areas K-12, through the Rubicon Atlas Curriculum Mapping program. The curriculum for all core classes is aligned to state standards. Benchmarks and indicators are embedded throughout the curriculum.
- The core curricula for reading and math appear to be strong and well developed. This enables all teachers within a subject area or grade level to collaborate and share instructional strategies. The Every Day Math program is implemented K-5. Both the middle school and the high school have math strategies classes for students not meeting proficiency benchmarks on state assessments. The school improvement team (SIT) at the high school provides reading strategies for teachers to use in all classes.

- Special education teachers are proud of the fact that the students they serve are expected to meet the same curriculum standards as all students, with some modifications.
- District administrators believe that the core curriculum for math and reading is substantially aligned to the Common Core and that the transition to the Common Core will be smooth, because of curriculum maps already in place and teachers’ knowledge of the online curriculum process.
- There are eight CTE pathways at Derby High School. The pathways provide students opportunities to experience a wide variety of career possibilities and apply core knowledge in real world settings.
- Students at the middle and high school have a wide variety of electives from which to choose. The electives allow students to pursue their interests and develop individual talents.
- PLCs are in place in all schools and at all levels. A late start has been negotiated every Monday morning, which allows teachers time to collaborate, develop curriculum, analyze data, and plan instruction.
- The district uses a wide range of assessments to measure student progress. Those assessments include: DIBELS NEXT, SRI, SPI Diagnostic, NWEA, benchmark common assessments, and formative assessments. Additional diagnostic tools include PAST, CORE, and Critchlow. In an effort to manage the assessment data, the District has purchased and installed a data warehouse, which will compile the various kinds of data and make it easier for classroom teachers to use in planning instruction.
- A three-tiered intervention model was established in the district in 2002 (prior to the implementation of MTSS—Multi-Tiered System of Supports), which is used to provide students with targeted instructional support.

To build on these strengths, USD 260 must also face some significant curriculum and assessment challenges as well, however.

“We are so good in so many ways, it is hard for staff to understand the need to change or improve.”

—Administrator

- The district has established a quality curriculum mapping and assessment program at all levels. How well the curriculum is being implemented and assessment data are being used to drive instruction around the curriculum is in question. The high school, middle school, and Park Hill Elementary are “On Watch” because they did not make AYP last year. District and building level administrators, and

teaching staff, would benefit from identifying the root causes of the achievement challenges they face and addressing them now.

- The district established objectives—as a part of the 2007-2012 Derby Strategic Plan—which state that 100% of students will graduate and 100% of students taking the state assessments will score exemplary. The district’s data indicate that students are not meeting these objectives. Moreover, failure to meet the perhaps unrealistic objectives may be frustrating the district’s efforts to improve.
- Derby currently lacks a clear process to: 1) identify what data are critical to collect and 2) ensure that student achievement data are being used to inform instruction in the classroom. Frequent and consistent monitoring of student achievement data and data-driven instruction from highly qualified teachers is critical for continued improvement.
- Though district leaders note that the current Derby math and reading curricula are generally in line with Common Core objectives, teachers and administrators are just beginning the work necessary to align the curriculum to the Common Core.
- The CTE Pathways program creates a clear opportunity to integrate the Common Core curriculum at the high school. The challenge is to communicate opportunities provided through the Pathways program to students and parents.
- Though Derby has implemented a tiered instructional approach on paper, the district currently lacks full implementation of the approach at all levels. The district would benefit from participating in training provided by a KSDE-approved MTSS facilitator, and from systematically monitoring and evaluating implementation of MTSS.

Instruction and Professional Development

Table III presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 42%) and principals (response rate 67%) administered online by Cross & Joftus. Instructional strategies that principals and teachers *believe* are most strongly evident and are least evident, are highlighted below. Additional instructional strengths and challenges are identified later in this section.

In general, more than 50% of principals surveyed identified a number of sound instructional strategies as strongly evident. The sound instructional strategies that *principals* believe are most *strongly evident* in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 92% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- 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 75% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (cited as strongly evident by 67% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%)
 - fostering collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well-being (cited as strongly evident by 67% of principals and not evident or minimally evident by 0%).

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

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 25% of principals as strongly evident and by 42% as minimally evident or not evident).

Principals were *evenly split* on one item:

- measuring the effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (cited by 25% of principals as strongly evident and by 25% as minimally evident or not evident).

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

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 76% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 1%)
- providing equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners (cited as strongly evident by 58% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 4%)
- using a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections (cited as strongly evident by 53% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 8%)
- 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 53% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 9%).

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

- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (cited by 15% of teachers as strongly evident and by 44% as minimally evident or not evident)
- providing adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions to support student learning (cited by 18% of teachers as strongly evident and by 33% as minimally evident or not evident)

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (cited by 16% of teachers as strongly evident and by 33% as minimally evident or not evident).

Table III—Extent to Which Principals and Teachers Believe that Sound Instructional Strategies Are Present in Their Schools

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	92%	0%	76%	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.	75%	0%	53%	8%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	67%	0%	48%	14%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	67%	0%	43%	14%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	58%	0%	47%	15%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	58%	0%	44%	11%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	50%	0%	58%	4%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	50%	12%	30%	25%
Students participate in research-	42%	0%	53%	9%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.				
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	42%	0%	51%	16%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	42%	8%	32%	24%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	33%	0%	44%	12%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	33%	0%	31%	29%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	33%	8%	18%	33%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	25%	8%	33%	21%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	25%	25%	20%	37%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	25%	42%	16%	33%

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 participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	17%	8%	26%	27%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	17%	8%	15%	44%

Teacher Response Rate = 273/Approximately 650

Principal Response Rate = 12/18

Source: Cross & Joftus surveys of Derby principals and teachers September 2011.

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

^The response option “No Opinion” was deleted from this presentation. Four percent or less of teachers selected this option on any response, and only one principal selected this response on one question.

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

- One indicator of effective instructional practice is the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the Kansas State Assessment. The group, “all students,” has met or exceeded state benchmarks in reading and math for the past three years.
- Everyday Math features components in the Common Core curriculum and opportunities for rigor in all schools K-5.
- Literacy First is being used in two elementary schools in grades K-2. It provides a research-based instructional model for staff that could also provide differentiation based upon student achievement data—if the intensive reading component is available. Derby could draw on this model to strengthen reading instruction throughout the district.
- Reading and math textbooks are selected based in part based upon the support they provide to teachers for making instructional decisions. The district also provides online supports and resources that are appreciated by teachers and principals. Current instructional programs/processes are rooted in the Kansas state standards
- Teacher collaboration and teachers’ willingness to work with other teachers across the district are clear strengths. Teachers appear to be heavily invested in

the curriculum mapping process and are proud of their work and collaborative practices, providing a springboard for systematic selection of a district-wide instructional model.

- Weekly Monday late start time provides an important opportunity for instructional improvement. The late start is used twice a month for principal-designed activities, once a month for department-level meetings, and once a month for ELL or specific program meetings.
- Special education teachers noted that the supports offered for students through trainings, IPods, and the ability to call other teachers in the district for help are strengths in the district’s instructional program. Principal attendance at IEP meetings is appreciated, as is follow-up support in classrooms with students with disabilities.
- Some high school teachers are co-teaching—both general and special education teachers are presenting information, sharing responsibility for grading, and using a common lesson-planning framework.
- According to focus group participants, special education and ELL directors collaborate frequently and feel strongly that principals need to be instructional leaders, guiding the co-teaching practices employed in reading and math at the high school and middle school levels.
- Efforts are made to develop instructional strategies that can also be used in the regular education classroom to allow students with disabilities and English language learners to access the core curriculum before receiving additional support. The inclusion process appears to be used frequently to provide core curriculum instruction with licensed teachers.
- Special education staff members are encouraged to implement innovative instructional strategies and not worry about how they are funded. Teachers and principals in focus groups report that the special education director is “on top” of special education issues and support to the schools.
- Classroom observations also revealed several instructional strengths in Derby. During observations of 83 classrooms in Derby, using the Cross & Jofus Focused Classroom Walkthrough process:
 - The majority of classrooms displayed an environment conducive to learning.
 - Classrooms appeared to be orderly, well-managed, and adaptable to the learning task, with clear expectations for student behavior and participation in the learning process.
 - Students demonstrated a willingness to participate in the learning task and were actively engaged in 87% of classrooms visited at all school levels.

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

There are some clear instructional and professional development challenges, as well, however.

- Derby currently lacks a clearly defined instructional model to support further development and implementation of the tiered instructional approach the district is using.
- The district will benefit greatly from fully implementing a systematic classroom observation process and using data to improve teaching and learning. Currently, the district is beginning to implement a classroom observational tool through Southwest Plains Regional Service Center. Quality development then full implementation of this tool can help guide instructional decisions to meet the needs of all student groups.
- The district will also benefit from developing and implementing a professional development program that uses research-based procedures for connecting classroom observation data to systemic improvement practices.
- Teachers of ELL students report that they lack sufficient reading intervention supports. On the plus side, there are 102 ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) endorsed teachers and two endorsed principals in the district. The district can build on this strength to provide additional targeted support to teachers.
- According to focus group participants, early intervention programs could be strengthened. Seventy-five students qualified for early intervention in the 3-4 year-old program, yet only 50 spots are available in the program.
- Professional development is led by district directors who appear to be respected and appreciated. Budget cuts, however, have resulted in fewer professional development days, and interviews with focus group participants indicate that professional development is a challenge. Currently, the district appears to lack clear professional development priorities. Teachers receive pullout training that does not include follow up after the training and little principal input or notice prior to the training. Focus group participants expressed great concern that the district program directors are spread so thin and doing so much that they cannot get back to principals in a timely

“There are too many initiatives.”

—Principal

“When the budget is cut, we do more with less. We should do less and do it better.”

—Principal

manner and that the coordination of professional development between directors, principals, and teachers is challenging.

- During classroom walkthroughs, differentiation to match students' various learning needs and strengths was evident in less than 30% of classrooms visited at all school levels, and, strategies to meet diverse language and cultural needs were evident in less than 15% of classrooms observed at all school levels.
- Focused Classroom Walkthrough observations identified other instructional challenges. There is a need to increase the following *teaching practices*, which were observed in less than 50% of the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies):
 - Using metacognitive strategies: teacher modeling of the thinking process
 - Identifying similarities and differences
 - Generating and testing hypotheses
 - Summarizing and taking notes.
- The district should provide instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking that require cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Classroom walkthrough data indicate that thinking levels were below the level of application in 66% of classrooms observed.
- Observations revealed that *student learning strategies* designed to bring about high levels of cognitive engagement were visible in less than 50% of classrooms observed across all levels. Those strategies include:
 - Asks/answers higher level questions
 - Engages in active reading (e.g., note taking and constructed response tasks)
 - Investigates and solves problems
 - Participates in group work and dialogue about the learning task
 - Participates in individual reflection.
- Moreover, the following strategies used to illustrate how students demonstrate physical and cognitive engagement and learning at high levels were minimally evident (observed in less than 50% of classrooms visited) at all school levels.
 - Demonstrates responsibility for learning and explains why it is important
 - Differentiation is evident in activities/materials and products/assignments
 - Displays a real world connection
 - Engages in peer and self-assessment of the learning.

III. Recommendations

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

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

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

- Budget cuts, coupled with an increasingly diverse student body facing added language and economic barriers, have created added challenges for the district.
- Many efforts to address achievement challenges appear to be operating simultaneously; the district would benefit from more coordination and coherence across efforts.
- Derby currently lacks a clear process to: 1) identify what data are critical to collect and 2) ensure that student achievement data are being used to inform instruction in the classroom.
- Though USD 260 has devoted substantial time and energy to developing a shared on-line curriculum and a tiered instructional approach based on student learning needs, the district appears to lack effective mechanisms to monitor how well curriculum and instruction are being implemented.
- The district is in the process of developing and beginning to implement a classroom walkthrough observation system. The challenge lies in using this system to monitor instruction, inform professional development, and guide improvement.

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

1. Develop and implement a coherent approach to improvement. Align strategies, timelines, and metrics and connect them to the new strategic plan. Implement a process for monitoring implementation of goals and strategies. A key focus of this work should be to align the capacity of the central office with schools' efforts to increase student achievement.
2. Articulate, align, and fully implement curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development, with the goal of continually improving student learning and achievement. This process should include a framework for monitoring accountability and address the following:
 - a. Refinement of the curriculum and student assessment system across the district. Implement a process to ensure that curricula are aligned with the Common Core.
 - b. Development and implementation of a comprehensive data system to link assessment data and track student performance over time; this system should identify priorities for data use and include procedures to ensure data based decision-making on all district initiatives.
 - c. Implementation of a system-wide instructional model tied to rigorous standards. This model should draw on an analysis of student achievement data and prioritize research-based instructional practices that will have the greatest

- impact on increasing achievement for ALL students, especially students with disabilities, English language learners and other groups of students struggling to meet achievement benchmarks.
- d. Systematization of PLCs and classroom observations as catalysts for implementing research-based effective educational practices, by:
 - o conducting classroom visits using common criteria and providing feedback to educators
 - o analyzing data using a consistent protocol to determine the extent of implementation of effective teaching/learning practices
 - o determining future professional development practices using observation data.
 - e. MTSS training and support—provided by a KSDE-approved MTSS facilitator—for consistent implementation of MTSS across the district.
 - f. Development of a monitoring system to measure the implementation and impact of professional development on changes in teacher behaviors.⁷ In addition to classroom walkthroughs, the district may consider the use of tools such as the Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM).⁸ The ICM was designed to ensure that strategies are implemented correctly and with fidelity; it includes teacher self-assessment of the use of best-practice strategies.
3. Incorporate an assessment of student achievement and instructional practices observed using the new Southwest Plains observation tool into the teacher evaluation process, and incorporate consideration of student achievement and implementation of PLCs into the principal evaluation process.
 4. Review functioning and capacity of Site Councils to provide support for academic improvement.
 5. Review options for greater engagement of classified staff as team members to support district improvement and success.
 6. Explore opportunities to improve the Advisory Program for all students.

Next Steps

1. Based on the strengths, challenges, and recommendations in this needs appraisal, Cross & Jofthus *recommends* that the district participate in the following KLN Communities of Practice (CoPs):
 - o Instructional Change (including transitioning to the Common Core), Stage II
 - o Tiered Intervention, Stage II

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

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

2. Your district facilitator will be in touch with the superintendent within the next couple weeks to discuss the CoP recommendations, answer questions, and begin planning for the drafting of the district's Integrated Improvement Plan.

Process for Analyzing Classroom Walkthrough Data

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

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

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.

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

- Mark as a fourth priority those effective practices that are “*consistently evident*” in 70-100% of the classes visited.