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Needs Analysis of Garden City Public Schools

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 & Joftus, 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).

The rationale for this model, called the Learning Network, was 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 five participating districts focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis comprised analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and three-day site visits¹ 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 & Joftus called Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities were designed to both 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 concluded with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Joftus for the district’s leadership that included a presentation of some preliminary findings. This report presents all findings and represents the culmination of the needs assessment for Garden City Public Schools (GCPS).

GCPS has a great deal with which to be proud. Overall achievement in the district for both reading and math is increasing significantly and, in most grades, GCPS students are outperforming their peers from across the state in math. For example, in 2007, 89.4% of GCPS fourth graders and 57.6% of eleventh graders were proficient in math compared to 86.0% and 56.9% respectively in Kansas. In addition, the district earned 32 Standard of Excellence Awards for state assessment scores in 2008—15 for math, 15 for reading, and two for science.

¹ The site visit for Garden City occurred January 7-9, 2009.

Despite these student achievement gains and accomplishments, GCPS is not, and should not be, satisfied. Serving an increasingly poor (60.7% of the students), ethnically and racially diverse (26.6% White, 62.8% Hispanic, and 25.1% ELL) student population of 7,311, GCPS student performance in reading and high school graduation rates remain low relative to the state. For example, in 2007, 77.1% of GCPS fourth graders and 63.3% of eleventh graders were proficient in reading compared to 84.8% and 79.0% respectively in Kansas. Similarly, Garden City's graduation rate decreased from 81.7% in 2006 to 77.6% in 2007, compared to the state's averages of 89.7% and 89.2%. And, as is many other districts, significant achievement gaps remain, most notably for Hispanic, ELL, and low-income students in reading. In 2008, GCPS narrowly missed demonstrating AYP in reading after demonstrating AYP in 2007.

II. Findings

Findings from the needs assessment of GCPS are summarized below in the areas of leadership, empowering culture, human resources and professional development, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Leadership

One of the main findings of the district needs analysis is that the district lacks systemic coherence. Coherence means “the elements of a school district work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy.”²

In focus groups, all district staff agreed that improving student achievement is the overarching goal of the district. The district, however, does not appear to have a clear plan for accomplishing this goal. Moreover, while one of the strengths of the district is a strong, committed leadership team at the district office, there is an inconsistent approach in working with the schools to improve student achievement. There are several examples of this inconsistent approach:

- The Board of Education establishes yearly “Goals and Targets,” which are reviewed annually and adjusted as needed. At every Board meeting there is a report from the administration on progress toward meeting these goals and targets. There is also a district improvement plan that is a requirement of the Kansas Department of Education. While these two plans are in place, there is little evidence of staff and community awareness of them. Moreover, there is a need for a more comprehensive district planning to take place. The planning should involve all segments of the community.
- The employment of literacy and math coaches for the schools is widely acknowledged as an important step in improving achievement. Unfortunately,

² Childress, S., R. Elmore, A. Grossman, and Caroline King (2007). Note on the PELP Coherence Framework. Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University.

there is an insufficient number of coaches assigned for both math and communications. Additionally, there is a growing concern among staff that these coaches are being used increasingly for non-coaching duties, which lessens their availability to help classroom teachers.

- The initiation of walk-throughs is a promising practice in improving teacher performance and student achievement. However, staff reported that the walk-throughs are not relevant and have little if any impact on improving instruction and student performance. Administrators have not received adequate training in performing walk-throughs or in using resulting data to shape professional development.
- There are several promising instructional practices that have been initiated in the last few years. For example, the elementary Reading First program has a well-developed curriculum and teaching strategies that teachers are expected to use. There is no such program or expectations, however, at the secondary level. While the district has a standards-based, preK-12 curriculum, the use of the curriculum varies greatly among teachers and schools, especially at the high school level.
- Several schools in the district have initiated professional learning communities with success. The senior high school has exhibited commitment to the professional learning communities and attributes their gains in mathematics achievement to the work done in their communities. One school began the program but later dropped it. The district has encouraged the use of professional learning communities but has not required it.

The district must strive to foster and sustain a more coherent approach to improving student achievement at all levels. In order to accomplish this, the district needs to provide the professional development for using successful practices, establish district-wide expectations that these practices be used, and hold staff accountable for meeting the expectations.

Other key findings related to leadership in Garden City include the following:

- The district has received significant additional state funding over the past three years. The Board and the district leadership have used these funds to reduce class sizes, increase staff salaries in order to be competitive with other districts, provide all day kindergarten, and employ instructional coaches.
- The Board of Education is greatly admired by people inside and outside the district. The Board is very supportive of the Superintendent and understands the relationship between the Board and the Superintendent, which results in no micromanaging of the district.

- The district has a strong leadership team at all levels led by a superintendent who is respected by the staff and community. Principals, however, indicated a need for stronger professional development focused on instructional leadership.
- There are monthly meetings of the district’s administrative team. These meetings were described by attendees as often having little relevance and consisting mainly of providing information that could be provided by email. Attendees indicated they had no opportunity to have an impact on the agenda.
- The district needs to develop a plan for communicating with staff, parents, and community. Staff reported receiving little information or explanation regarding changes in the district. The switching of positions between the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Director of Learning Services immediately before school began last fall was cited as an example. Also, staff reported receiving mixed messages—such as whether student results on formative assessments were to be used to establish student grades—from district leadership.
- The district leadership is currently and appropriately considering changing the district’s grade-level transition plan.
- Staff reported a strong need for a better system for requesting needed repairs of facilities and tracking those requests. There were reports of work orders being submitted and then little or no communication from the facilities department. There is little feedback to schools regarding when the work will be done. Staff reported instances in which schools and classrooms have been disrupted without notice by workers.

Empowering Culture

GCPS exhibits some clear strengths that help to foster a school and district culture that supports the teaching and learning process:

- Approximately four years ago, the district engaged Ruby Payne as a trainer to help staff gain a better understanding of the culture of poverty. Several paraprofessionals and teachers mentioned how helpful that training had been.
- The district does have a data system, Skyward, which provides parents current information on everything from homework to attendance to grades on individual projects and homework. The system appears to be effective for some parents, but there is no Spanish-language option and many immigrant and low-income families lack computer access, limiting the system’s reach.
- Parent-teacher conferences appear to be a very positive aspect of the school culture with reports that attendance reaches 100% in the elementary schools as teachers call and visit parents at their homes and places of work.

- The district effectively uses Spanish- and Vietnamese-language translators to help teachers and schools reach parents. The district is also hiring a Burmese translator. The rather sudden emergence of a Burmese contingent of families has presented major challenges to district communication.

GCPS also must address some challenges relative to an empowering culture:

- Communicating with families—a significant percentage of whom do not speak English as a first language—is a particular challenge for Garden City.
- Currently, there are 190 high-school students taking courses through Garden City Community College. That said, Advanced Placement participation is down, and reports are that few students take AP exams. According to data provided by the district, while 81 students took AP classes in 2004, only 58 did so in 2008, and almost half of these students were taking AP Spanish. The number of students taking AP calculus has decreased from 18 to 5 since 2003. No student has taken AP biology since 2003, and during that time period, there has never been more than one student enrolled in AP Physics. It appears as though students must be recommended by a teacher for entry into honors and AP classes, a factor that likely presents a barrier to entry for many students. Only one of four students participating in a focus group knew that AP classes could help them gain college credit. In addition, the annual tour (Talent Search) to visit college campuses has seen decreased participation with only five students going last year compared to a high of about 50 students a decade ago. Finally, there appears to be little done before students enter high school to create awareness as to what is required for college.
- The very organization of Garden City schools may present a barrier to creating a college-going, success-oriented culture, with students being in intermediate and middle schools for two years each, creating additional transitions for students hardly enough time to create school identity or communications, especially with families.
- District administrators are emphasizing the implementation of MTSS, differentiated instruction, and SIOP. Several teachers and principals, however, indicated that the district needs to focus on full program implementation.
- There appears to be little coordination between the district and social service agencies, with the exception of health services and mental health services for those students who have behavior problems. One area where significant improvements could be made in achieving the conditions for success would be in creating close collaboration among the various public and private social service agencies in service of immigrant and low-income families.
- Approximately, three years ago, the district had a 21st Century After School program grant. Since the end of that grant, the district lost most of its after-school

programming. The district blames the lack of participation by targeted students, lack of busing, and staff burnout. Parents, however, would like to see a solution, and community groups such as the YMCA and the Parks and Recreation department feel that the district did not prepare adequately for the end of the grant.

- The district has set the expectation that the high school be restructured around “smaller learning communities” that emphasize rigor, relationships, and relevance. The community has supported this expectation with the passage of a \$97,500,000 bond to fund the changes.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Human resources and professional development in Garden City has both strengths and evidence of concerning challenges. The Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources is new to the position, starting on September 1, 2008. The previous Director and the Assistant Superintendent agreed upon and changed jobs at that time, with the Director assuming the responsibilities of curriculum and instruction. Garden City’s location in the center of Western Kansas presents geographic challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers, especially those for special education, math, and science that all districts struggle to hire. The district experiences approximately 16% turnover in staff each year.

Key findings related to strengths in *human resources* in Garden City include the following:

- The human-resources department has spread a wide net into as many as 21 states and several countries for recruitment. The district has also hired teachers from Spain, the Philippines, and India.
- Many incentives are in place to support the hiring and retention of staff, including:
 - A \$500 signing bonus;
 - Reimbursement for travel and hotel costs for interviews within the district;
 - Fiscal support for hard-to-hire endorsements (Special Education, ELL, etc.);
 - Support for advanced degrees of up to \$5,000 reimbursement per year for tuition;
 - A longevity incentive of a 403B match.
- Garden City School District’s web site is a potentially rich resource for potential employees and the community at large. Only part of the web site, however, is available in Spanish, and “good news” taking place at the district is difficult to find.
- Efforts are underway to ensure that high-quality student teachers are offered contracts for the following year prior to the end of their student teaching.

- Health Services is a strong support to students, staff, and the community. Health Services promotes a wellness policy that focuses on healthy snacks, dental care, and an after-school health clinic in one of the poorest areas in the community. Healthy Roads and the Healthy Living Challenge are designed to support staff wellness through recommendations on healthy choices for food as well as provision of equipment for physical workouts and referral to employee assistance services as necessary. In addition, there are 14 registered nurses employed by the district. Community relations are highly regarded and include working relationships with healthcare agencies in the community and support for immigrant families for immunizations, health care, and referrals.

Key findings related to challenges in *human resources* in Garden City include the following:

- In spite of extensive efforts and incentives, Garden City experiences a huge turnover of staff—about 16%—each year.
- There is a need for position clarity in job descriptions. The district recently completed the process of having an outside vendor “re-bench” all classified jobs and develop many job descriptions for certificated staff.
- Human-resources processes are currently under development. The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources is aware of the need for clarity, and is working toward development of policies, procedures, and processes for a wide variety of activities including recruitment, hiring, and expectations for employees. One such practice in development, which is to be encouraged, is the development of exit interviews with teachers and other staff leaving the district to improve recruitment and retention of qualified staff. It does not appear, however, that the human-resources work is being done in collaboration with principals and teachers, which would engender much more staff buy-in.
- There is significant lag time between principals recommending the hiring of a teacher and the offering of a job, likely resulting in the loss of teachers to surrounding districts and other fields. There also appears to be a lack of effective screening of job applicants prior to interviews. In addition, principals suggested allowing them to have an offer letter signed during recruiting opportunities or hiring staff prior to knowing the full extent of need for the coming year. Should the district unexpectedly hire too many potential teachers for the following year, they could be deployed as contracted substitutes. (The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources currently does this herself to a limited degree.)
- There is some confusion among staff about how they are to be evaluated. While the district has a well-defined staff evaluation process that includes training, staff expressed uncertainty about changes that may be occurring in the evaluation process and about how evaluation results are used.

- The lack of diversity across the staff may be an impediment to reaching the very diverse student population and the wide community diversity.

Key findings related to strengths in *professional development* in Garden City include the following:

- The four Reading First schools have had excellent on-going staff development in the instruction of reading, which the staff has applied to other curricular areas. The greatly improved results and student outcomes demonstrate a commitment for these four schools to follow up and follow through. The success of these four schools is acknowledged at all levels of the organization and can serve as a model of coherent professional development practices.
- The intermediate schools' Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are demonstrating successful ways of working together based on collaboration and community planning to improve student learning.
- The mentor and coaching opportunities available in the district are both a strength and a challenge. There is a mentorship program funded by the KSDE to support first-year teachers and teachers new to Garden City. This program does not, however, have a teaching and learning focus. It was reported by teachers and principals that there is significant variation in quality from building to building. Similarly, there are 17 literacy coaches and 6.5 mathematics coaches in the district. These individuals are intended to provide instructional support, coaching, and materials to teaching staff across the district. As one principal stated, "Coaches are so important to the improvement of teaching practices and student learning, I will sacrifice a teaching position and have higher class sizes in order to keep my literacy coach." However, there is some indication that they are used in some schools for test coordination and other administrative purposes.

Key findings related to challenges in *professional development* in Garden City include the following:

- There is no coherent, long-term staff development plan in place.
- Current professional development offerings, while they support My Learning Plans for teachers needing points for salary schedule advancement or endorsement requirements, are diffuse and lack systematization and alignment with data analysis of student and instructional needs and goals.
- Teacher mentors lack consistent training to support new teachers.
- Current offerings for professional development lack an evaluation that would inform future offerings and appropriate application and practice opportunities. In

addition, offerings are reported to have a “fuzzy” focus, changing from year to year.

- Teacher contract language—which allows only three district wide and three building wide staff development days and prohibits staff development during faculty meetings (only 17 hours of faculty meeting time per school year is allotted) and shortened days for staff development—is prohibitive to a research-based design of high-quality staff development that could be embedded into teacher practice and result in improved student outcomes.
- There is a concern over equity of resources and support in schools that do not receive Reading First. There are also concerns about sustaining momentum in Reading First schools when Reading First funds are no longer available.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The following findings related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment are based upon perceptions identified by Garden City representatives during focus groups, interviews, responses to the Survey of Educational Practices, and data collected during classroom visitations using the K-PALSS protocol (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success). A comprehensive compilation of data collected during K-PALSS visits to representative classrooms in elementary, intermediate, middle and senior high schools is provided in the Appendix of this report.

Curriculum

Garden City Public Schools exhibits some clear strengths related to curriculum:

- The district has a revised written curriculum aligned with the state standards for “Reading First” and all of the required secondary courses. The timeline for completing the curriculum for secondary elective courses is targeted for completion between August and December, 2009.
- The district’s process for discussing curricular alignment occurs during regularly scheduled meetings either every two weeks or in monthly sessions with coaches and between school-based representatives and district staff. Curriculum updates occur every two years.
- Best practices in ESOL and SPED are promoted through the district’s specialists. Interventionists work in the classrooms using the “push-in” versus the “pull-out” process in order to support the integration of these strategies into all teachers’ classrooms.
- The adopted textbooks provide a common frame of reference and terminology in defining the common core of what is to be taught (e.g., for Communication in

grades K-6: Houghton-Mifflin; grade 7-8: Prentice-Hall; and grades 9-12: McDougal-Littell; for mathematics in grades K-6: Harcourt and in grades 7-12: Holt).

- A “District Improvement Plan” and individual “School Improvement Plans” exist to identify practices and resources that are to be implemented to improve achievement district-wide. Discussions with principals indicated that they felt that the district administrators responsible for evaluating principal performance should be responsible for ensuring the explicit extent of alignment between the district and school improvement plans and between identified practices and needed resources.
- K-PALSS observations found *evidence* in 60-100% of the classrooms visited that teachers demonstrated strategies to check student understanding of the curriculum (see summary data provided in the Appendix of this report).

Garden City’s challenges relative to the implementation of the curriculum include the following:

- District staff, coaches, teachers, and administrators agree that the extent of implementation of the district’s curriculum is estimated to be approximately 50% overall, with slightly higher levels of implementation occurring at both the elementary level, due to the “Reading First” program, and at the senior high level in mathematics, due to the work done by PLCs.
- Focus groups identified the need for the reinstatement of both grade-level and inter/intra level meetings on a regular monthly basis in order to facilitate curriculum alignment between and among grade levels. Additionally, there is a need to improve vertical communication as specified in the Garden City Board policy in order to strengthen transition points between grade levels/configurations of schools.
- Focus groups discussed that just as technical education is serving as a model for providing consistent curricular links to “continuing education,” the other subject areas could similarly benefit from making explicit links to “continuing education.”
- ELLs need to be supported during “in class” instruction after they exit the program. This would reinforce learning that students receive during tutoring and Saturday tutorial school sessions for “at-risk” learners. Additionally, high school students are offered credit recovery sessions after school, but only approximately 10% of the students use this time.
- Based on both focus group discussions with staff and school-based representatives as well as K-PALSS classroom observations, there is minimal evidence that effective culturally relevant practices as well as those that accommodate for

ESOL and SPED learning needs are being consistently promoted and integrated into instruction. Academic coaches further validated the need and the urgency to address this challenge.

Instruction

In general, Garden City teachers and principals believe that sound instructional practices are strongly evident in their schools. Table 1 presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 30.5%) and principals (response rate 80.0%) administered online by Cross & Joftus that asked them to rate the extent to which they believe that research-based strategies are implemented.

As shown, vast majorities of both teachers and principals believe that most strategies are at least evident in their schools. The strategies believed by teachers and principals to be ***least evident*** in their schools include the following:

- Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.
- Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.
- Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.
- The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.
- Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.

Table 1. 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	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion
Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	68%	32%	0%	0%	0%	68%	31%	1%	0%	0%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	45%	36%	18%	0%	0%	47%	35%	16%	2%	0%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	45%	50%	5%	0%	0%	45%	39%	13%	3%	1%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	45%	36%	18%	0%	0%	53%	38%	8%	2%	0%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum,	41%	59%	0%	0%	0%	51%	43%	6%	1%	0%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals#					Teachers~				
	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion
meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.										
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	41%	41%	18%	0%	0%	40%	42%	15%	2%	1%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	41%	36%	23%	0%	0%	37%	41%	18%	3%	0%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	41%	55%	5%	0%	0%	53%	43%	5%	0%	0%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school	36%	36%	27%	0%	0%	35%	53%	11%	1%	1%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals#					Teachers~				
	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion
personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.										
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	32%	55%	14%	0%	0%	57%	31%	9%	1%	2%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	27%	50%	23%	0%	0%	34%	54%	10%	1%	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.	23%	64%	14%	0%	0%	49%	46%	5%	1%	0%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals#					Teachers~				
	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	23%	50%	27%	0%	0%	29%	46%	17%	5%	3%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	23%	55%	18%	5%	0%	16%	51%	27%	7%	0%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	23%	45%	27%	5%	0%	19%	47%	25%	8%	0%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	18%	59%	18%	5%	0%	38%	43%	15%	3%	1%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the	18%	64%	18%	0%	0%	35%	47%	15%	3%	0%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals#					Teachers~				
	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion	Strongly Evident	Evident	Minimally Evident	Not Evident	No Opinion
continuous improvement of instruction.										
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	14%	50%	32%	5%	0%	13%	49%	27%	6%	5%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	14%	82%	5%	0%	0%	36%	53%	10%	1%	0%

Source: Cross & Jofus survey of Garden City principals and teachers November 2008.

#Response rate was 80.0%.

~Response rate was 30.5%.

Additional strengths related to Garden City's instructional program include the following:

- Increases in student achievement have been formally recognized by the Kansas State Department of Education and attributed to the implementation of the Reading First program in elementary schools and the PLCs in the high school. The increase in the percentage of senior high school students scoring proficient on the state's summative test increased from 28% to 85% over five years.
- The district has initiated a walk-through classroom observation program to monitor instructional practices in communication and mathematics classes.
- The district funds 17 coaching positions to work with Communication (Literacy/Language Arts) programs to monitor the quality of instruction and provide feedback and support to teachers on a continuous basis. Additionally, 6.5 positions are funded to work with teachers to support the mathematics program.
- The district supports teachers' knowledge of differentiated instruction to address diverse cultural and language needs by providing training in SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Operating Protocol), MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support), and Differentiated Instruction. Additionally, two years ago, secondary teachers were trained in MAX (Motivation, Acquisition, and Extension).

Several challenges related to instruction also emerged during the needs analysis:

- K-PALSS observations found *minimal evidence* of the following teaching practices in 50% or less of the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages):
 - Provided instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking (rigor) aligned to state assessment questions that require Bloom's cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (see Appendix, which displays 7-17% above the application level).
 - Designed lessons using inquiry-based or student-led learning.
 - Used small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning practices (except at the intermediate school level, where group work was evident in 67-83% of the classes visited).
 - Used modeling or guided practice (except at the intermediate school level, where it was observed in 67% of the classrooms visited).
 - Provided homework and connected it to instructional practice at the middle school (50%) and senior high school (20%).
 - Demonstrated the following research-based practices that enhance student learning:
 - (a) presented information using dominant visual and auditory learning styles; kinesthetic learning was accommodated in only 41% of the elementary classrooms

- (b) incorporated culturally responsive readings/perspectives (only intermediate schools addressed cultural diversity in 50% of the classes; other levels of schooling ranged between 0-30%)
 - (c) addressed diverse language needs (0% in both the middle and senior high levels and 33% in both elementary and intermediate school levels)
 - (d) identified similarities and differences in 0% of senior high school classes, 17% in intermediate and middle school classes, and 33% of the elementary classes
 - (e) summarized and took notes in 0% of senior high classes, 11% of the elementary classes, 17% of the intermediate classes, and 50% of the middle school classes
 - (f) reinforced efforts and provided immediate and continuous feedback (33% at the middle school, 40% at the senior high level, and 81-100% of the elementary and intermediate school classes)
 - (h) organized learning in groups (20% at the senior high level and 33% at the middle school level)
 - (i) generated and tested hypotheses
 - (j) used cues, questions, and advance organizers (0% at the senior high and 33% at the middle school)
 - (k) increased student engagement (0% at the middle school and 40% at the senior high level)
 - (l) provided students opportunities for self-evaluation and reflection (in less than 17% of the classes visited at all levels).
- Focus groups of principals and district staff suggested that by expanding their current walk-throughs to encompass the attributes of the K-PALSS protocol, the data collected during the visits could be used to inform future professional development needs. Sessions could be designed to address those needs and practice opportunities could be provided for teachers to demonstrate needed skills with peers during the sessions with follow-up support and feedback offered continuously from coaches.
 - Focus groups of teachers expressed concern that although they have been provided “information” on cultural and linguistic diversity, they have not been provided sufficient opportunities to “practice” how to use the strategies and the materials effectively during their training sessions or during follow-up exchanges between teachers, coaches, mentors, and administrators.
 - All focus groups agreed that technological support needs to be increased in order to provide equity and access for all students to benefit from the advantages of technology.
 - Focus groups agreed that homework is being implemented inconsistently despite district policy. They offered as a solution convening a representative group of students, teachers, and administrators to recommend and, perhaps, monitor a plan.

- All focus groups and district staff agreed that communication and mathematics coaches are needed in every school.

Assessment

Garden City exhibited several strengths related to evaluation, assessment, and use of data:

- K-PALSS observations found *significant evidence* (64% of classrooms visited) that the results from classroom assessments were prominently displayed in classrooms. Elementary teachers change “Data Walls” four times a year to formally display learning progress.
- K-PALSS observations found *evidence* (50-69% of classrooms visited) of student learning being demonstrated using verbal-linguistic and visual-spatial skills at the elementary and intermediate school levels.
- The district administers formative assessments to provide feedback on student learning progress aligned with Kansas’ Content Performance Standards in communication and mathematics. Additionally, ATEC (Agriculture, Technology, Engineering and Construction) uses multiple assessments to track and inform learning progress. DIBELS is used for early identification of low-performing students in order to provide timely intervention.
- The district’s data warehouse is being developed to provide the storage of summative test data.
- There is a strong emphasis on data and data usage in the district. All staff reported that the district provides good, useful data for their use. Staff has received training regarding the use of data. There was little evidence, however, of data being used to drive professional develop activities or teaching strategies.

Several challenges were also identified.

- Focus groups acknowledged that just as the state assessment uses a rubric for scoring student work samples with consistency, the district needs to use rubrics accompanied by training of teachers to assess student work on a formative basis.
- Focus groups participants estimated that approximately 30-50% of teachers use student learning data to inform instruction unless they are involved in programs—such as Reading First, Read 180, System 44, or PLCs—that require them to use data systematically. Participants in the focus groups suggested that all coaches and administrators be trained in a systematic process that could be implemented during grade-level meetings for using the data collected from the district’s formative assessments to modify instruction.

- School-based focus groups expressed the need for the district to include in their curricular materials the same vocabulary used on the state tests to support student understanding. They proposed student achievement is being inaccurately measured based on “terminology” versus “content” (e.g., students did not understand that the “main topic” meant the same as “main idea”). Those involved in revising the district’s curriculum need to use the same terms contained in the state standards and on sample state test items.

III. Recommendations for Technical Assistance

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district would 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. Based on this needs assessment, Cross & Joftus, LLC recommend that the technical assistance provided to Garden City address one or more of the following general recommendations:

- 1) Through a committee of community-wide stakeholders, create a plan based on existing school and district improvement plans for increasing student achievement and improving student achievement. The plan should include a clear theory of change for improving instruction and details roles and responsibilities of district and school administrators and academic coaches. It should consider a system for more inclusive district-level leadership opportunities for key decisions and communications to include cabinet and principals as part of the on-going decision-making process. ***Due to its impact on all other recommendations, Cross & Joftus strongly recommends that the district implement this recommendation prior to—or at least at the same time as—any of the following recommendations.***
- 2) Design and implement instructional delivery and support systems—built around MTSS, inclusion, and differentiation—that effectively educates students with disabilities and English language learners.
- 3) Develop and implement a staff development plan that draws on an analysis of student achievement data, high-quality and consistently implemented walk-throughs and professional learning communities, input of stakeholders, and regular evaluation of effectiveness.
- 4) Develop and systematize processes for evaluating all staff that takes student performance and contribution to meeting school and district objectives into consideration.
- 5) Develop and implement a plan with the goal of significantly increasing the percentage of Garden City students who apply, enroll, and graduate with a post-secondary degree/training. The plan should take into consideration support

programs (such as AVID and Gear Up) and AP and/or IB classes and may need to include a public awareness campaign.

- 6) Develop and implement a plan for improving district and school communications with parents and the community at large. Create district wide committees for important initiatives to improve communication and increase buy-in at all levels.
- 7) Develop and implement a plan for decreasing the number of transitions that students have to make.
- 8) Evaluate the specific uses of coaches and ensure that the focus continues to be on instruction and student learning.
- 9) Develop and implement human-resource systems and processes that assist in the ability to quickly sign letters of intent, provide consistent mentor support that has a high-quality set of modules (curriculum, research-based instructional strategies, how to use data to inform instruction, classroom behavior management, etc.).
- 10) Re-negotiate the teachers' contract to allow greater flexibility in providing staff development, creating committees to align the curriculum, etc.
- 11) Develop a plan, apply for a grant, and implement after-school programs that support student learning and enrichment.
- 12) Consider the use of virtual schools for assisting students with credit recovery, providing greater access to high-level courses, and alleviating the pressure for recruiting and retaining certain types of teachers.

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Jofus will contact the Garden City superintendent to finalize a technical assistance plan that includes approximately 24 days of external support for the time period February through September of 2009. This plan, developed in collaboration between the senior leadership of the district and Cross & Jofus will describe in detail the goals, objectives, activities, service provider, and timeline of the technical assistance.

APPENDIX
Findings from K-PALSS Classroom Observations
GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) protocol and process, Cross & Jofus staff in collaboration with representatives from the Kansas State Department of Education and 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 below 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.

The graphs following the tables show a summary of the practices that were observed in all classrooms.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (27 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES	TEACHING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS
+		Δ
Learning Environment		
100% Orderly/Clean 100% Safe 67% Displays student work 44% Respects cultural diversity with materials/resources 63% Supports high expectations		-Respect for cultural diversity needs to be more evident in the learning environment.
Instructional Design		
93% Standards-based lesson 22% Inquiry-based lesson 59% Total group 41% Flexible small skill group 22% Cooperative learning group 85% Teacher-led learning 33% Student-led learning 59% Modeling 93% Checking understanding 48% Guided Practice 63% Independent Practice	-Inquiry-based and student-led learning would strengthen active engagement of students. -Use of small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning needs to increase to support personalized instruction at all levels of MTSS. -Systematic procedures for students to have guided practice and feedback prior to being expected to perform instructional tasks independently need to be implemented with greater consistency.	
Strategies Used		
Adjust for multiple learning styles 67% visual 48% auditory 41% kinesthetic 30% Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives 33% Address diverse language needs 33% Identify similarities & differences 11% Summarize & take notes 81% Reinforce efforts & provide recognition 56% Use homework & practice opportunities 59% Represent knowledge in multiple ways 44% Organize learning in groups 63% Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback 7% Generate & test hypotheses 78% Use cues, questions & advance organizers 56% Increase student engagement	-Recognition of the value of addressing a variety of learning styles needs to consistently evident during instruction. -Support for the implementation of a variety of instructional strategies is necessary for educators to use the following practices that were evident in less than 50% of the classes: (1) presentations of information using auditory & kinesthetic experiences (2) incorporation of culturally responsive and diverse language needs (3) identification of similarities & differences in content (4) teaching students to summarize & take notes and generate & test hypotheses	

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (27 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +	LEARNING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ	
Interactive Behaviors			
93% Asks/answers questions 96% Active involvement in classwork 0% Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways: 22% interpersonal 15% intrapersonal 74% verbal-linguistic 41% logistical-mathematical 59% visual-spatial 41% bodily-kinesthetic 19% musical-rhythmic 48% Receives feedback on performance 4% Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)			-Students need to be provided opportunities to demonstrate their learning using a variety of experiences addressing the following multiple intelligences: inter/intrapersonal, logistical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic and musical-rhythmic experiences. -Students need to be provided regular and continuous feedback on their performance and opportunities for self-evaluation/reflection in order to take responsibility for their future learning.
Cognitive Level			
11% Knowledge 44% Comprehension 27% Application 7% Analysis 7% Synthesis 4% Evaluation			-Students need to be provided instruction and opportunities to demonstrate higher-level thinking skills.
Work Produced			
63% Individual Work 44% Group Work 52% Written work 0% Project 44% Presentation/Performance 11% Self-Evaluation/Reflection			-Students need to be provided assignments which require them to work in groups and present their work by projects, presentation and performances, and include opportunities for them to demonstrate self-evaluation/reflection practices.
Resources			
37% Textbooks 78% Supplemental materials 37% Manipulatives 59% Technology 26% Materials reflect diversity 44% Worksheets		-Students need increased opportunities for textbooks, manipulatives, and materials that reflect diversity.	

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOLS (6 classrooms)

<p align="center">OBSERVED PRACTICES</p> <p align="center">+</p>	<p align="center">TEACHING</p>	<p align="center">PD RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p align="center">Δ</p>	
<p align="center">Learning Environment</p>			
<p>100% Orderly/Clean</p> <p>100% Safe</p> <p>100% Displays student work</p> <p>67% Respects cultural diversity with materials/resources</p> <p>50% Supports high expectations</p>			<p>-Support for high expectations for students needs to be more consistently explicit.</p>
<p align="center">Instructional Design</p>			
<p>100% Standards-based lesson</p> <p>17% Inquiry-based lesson</p> <p>83% Total group</p> <p>67% Flexible small skill group</p> <p>17% Cooperative learning group</p> <p>83% Teacher-led learning</p> <p>50% Student-led learning</p> <p>33% Modeling</p> <p>100% Checking understanding</p> <p>33% Guided Practice</p> <p>100% Independent Practice</p>		<p>-Inquiry-based and student-led learning would strengthen active engagement of students in learning.</p> <p>-Use of cooperative learning needs to increase to support personalized instruction at all levels of MTSS.</p> <p>-Systematic procedures for students to have models of expected learning, have guided practice and feedback prior to being expected to perform instructional tasks independently needs to be implemented with greater consistency.</p>	
<p align="center">Strategies Used</p>			
<p>0% Adjust for multiple learning styles</p> <p>50% visual</p> <p>50% auditory</p> <p>0% kinesthetic</p> <p>50% Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives</p> <p>33% Address diverse language needs</p> <p>17% Identify similarities & differences</p> <p>17% Summarize & take notes</p> <p>100% Reinforce efforts & provide recognition</p> <p>83% Use homework & practice opportunities</p> <p>83% Represent knowledge in multiple ways</p> <p>83% Organize learning in groups</p> <p>67% Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback</p> <p>0% Generate & test hypotheses</p> <p>67% Use cues, questions & advance organizers</p> <p>83% Increase student engagement</p>		<p>-Support for the implementation of a variety of instructional strategies is necessary for educators to use the following practices that were evident in 50% or less of the classes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) presentations of information using kinesthetic experiences (2) incorporation of culturally responsive and diverse language needs (3) identification of similarities & differences in content (4) teaching students to summarize & take notes and generate & test hypotheses 	

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (6 classrooms)

<p align="center">OBSERVED PRACTICES</p> <p align="center">+</p>	<p align="center">TEACHING</p>	<p align="center">PD RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p align="center">Δ</p>
<p align="center">Learning Environment</p> <p>100% Orderly/Clean</p> <p>100% Safe</p> <p>50% Displays student work</p> <p>50% Respects cultural diversity with materials resources</p> <p>50% Supports high expectations</p>		<p>-Respect for cultural diversity needs to be more evident in the learning environment.</p>
<p align="center">Instructional Design</p> <p>100% Standards-based lesson</p> <p>0% Inquiry-based lesson</p> <p>83% Total group</p> <p>33% Flexible small skill group</p> <p>0% Cooperative learning group</p> <p>83% Teacher-led learning</p> <p>0% Student-led learning</p> <p>33% Modeling</p> <p>67% Checking understanding</p> <p>33% Guided Practice</p> <p>33% Independent Practice</p>		<p>-Inquiry-based and student-led learning needs to be strengthened to promote active engagement of students in the learning process.</p> <p>-Use of modeling and small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning needs to increase to support instruction at all levels of MTSS.</p> <p>-Systematic procedures for students to have guided practice and feedback prior to being expected to perform instructional tasks independently needs to be implemented with greater consistency.</p>
<p align="center">Strategies Used</p> <p>0% Adjust for multiple learning styles</p> <p>17% visual</p> <p>83% auditory</p> <p>0% kinesthetic</p> <p>17% Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives</p> <p>0% Address diverse language needs</p> <p>17% Identify similarities & differences</p> <p>50% Summarize & take notes</p> <p>33% Reinforce efforts & provide recognition</p> <p>50% Use homework & practice opportunities</p> <p>0% Represent knowledge in multiple ways</p> <p>33% Organize learning in groups</p> <p>17% Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback</p> <p>0% Generate & test hypotheses</p> <p>33% Use cues, questions & advance organizers</p> <p>0% Increase student engagement</p>		<p>-Adjustments for presenting information using a variety of learning styles needs to be consistently evident during instruction.</p> <p>Support for the implementation of a variety of instructional strategies is necessary for educators to use the following practices that were evident in less than 50% of the classes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) presentations of information using kinesthetic experiences. (2) incorporation of strategies to address culturally responsive and diverse language needs, (3) identification of similarities & differences in content, (4) reinforcement of student work by providing recognition for efforts (5) teaching students to generate & test hypotheses (6) organizing students in small learning groups (7) clearly communicating objectives & providing immediate/continuous feedback (8) using cues, questions & advance organizers to present information

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (6 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +	LEARNING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Interactive Behaviors		
33% Asks/answers questions 50% Active involvement in classwork 0% Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways: 0% interpersonal 0% intrapersonal 67% verbal-linguistic 17% logistical-mathematical 17% visual-spatial 0% bodily-kinesthetic 0% musical-rhythmic 33% Receives feedback on performance 0% Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		-Students need to be provided regular and continuous feedback on their performance and opportunities for self-evaluation/reflection in order to take responsibility for their future learning. -Students need to be provided opportunities to demonstrate their learning using a variety of experiences that address the following multiple intelligences: inter/intrapersonal, logistical-mathematical, visual-spatial, and musical-rhythmic experiences.
Cognitive Level		
17% Knowledge 33% Comprehension 50% Application 0% Analysis 0% Synthesis 0% Evaluation		-Students need to be provided instruction and opportunities to demonstrate higher-level thinking skills.
Work Produced		
67% Individual Work 33% Group Work 50% Written work 17% Project 0% Presentation/Performance 0% Self-Evaluation/Reflection		-Students need to be provided assignments that require them to work in groups and present their work with projects, presentations, performances with opportunities for them to demonstrate self-evaluation/reflection practices.
Resources		
33% Textbooks 50% Supplemental materials 0% Manipulatives 17% Technology 17% Materials reflect diversity 50% Worksheets	-Students need increased opportunities for using textbooks, manipulatives, technology, and materials that reflect diversity.	

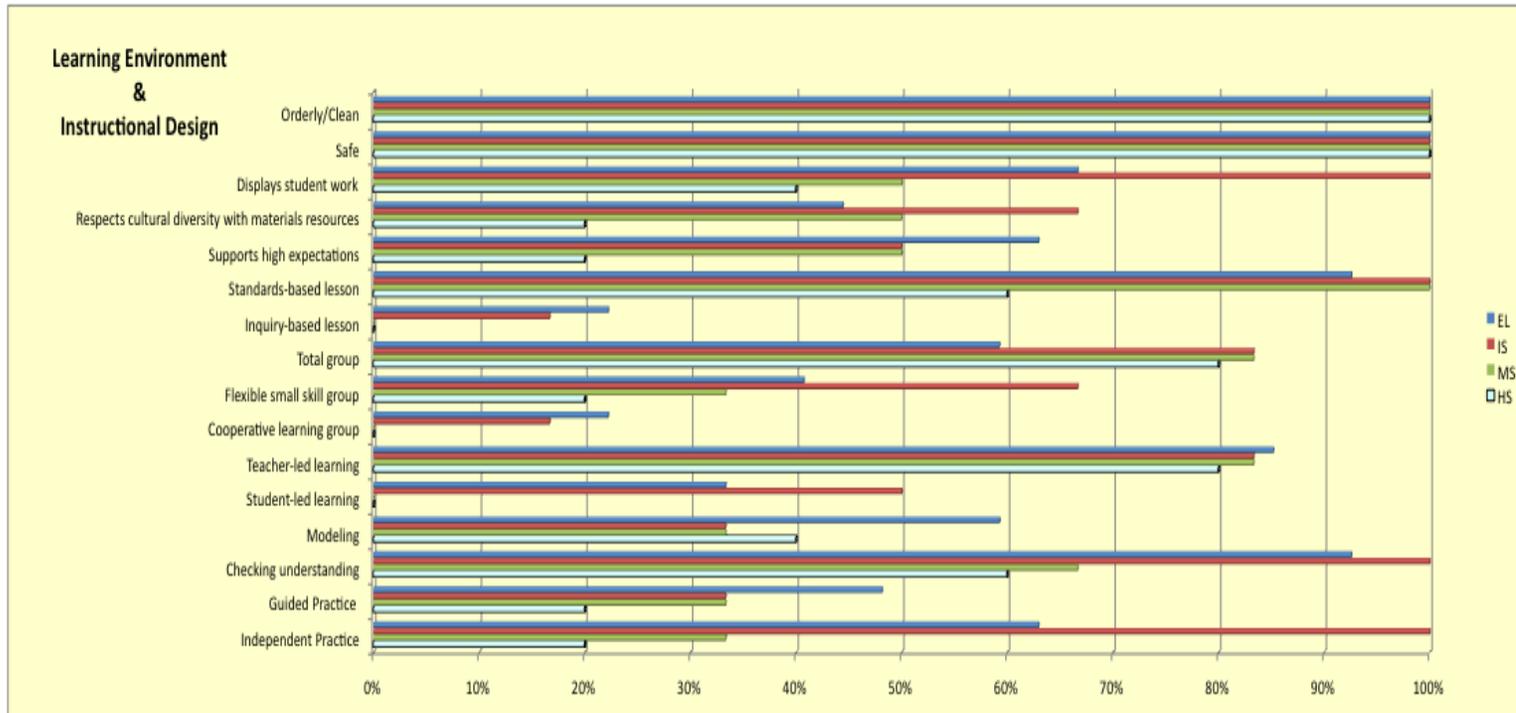
HIGH SCHOOLS (5 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +	TEACHING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ	
Learning Environment			
100% Orderly/Clean 100% Safe 40% Displays student work 20% Respects cultural diversity with materials resources 20% Supports high expectations			-Respect for cultural diversity and support for high expectations needs to be more evident in the learning environment.
Instructional Design			
60% Standards-based lesson 0% Inquiry-based lesson 80% Total group 20% Flexible small skill group 0% Cooperative learning group 80% Teacher-led learning 0% Student-led learning 40% Modeling 60% Checking understanding 20% Guided Practice 20% Independent Practice		-Inquiry-based and student-led learning needs to be strengthened to promote active engagement of students in the learning process. -Use of modeling and small flexible learning groups/cooperative learning needs to increase to support instruction at all levels of MTSS. -Systematic procedures for students to have guided practice and feedback prior to being expected to perform instructional tasks independently needs to be implemented with greater consistency.	
Strategies Used			
0% Adjust for multiple learning styles 60% visual 60% auditory 0% kinesthetic 0% Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives 0% Address diverse language needs 0% Identify similarities & differences 0% Summarize & take notes 40% Reinforce efforts & provide recognition 20% Use homework & practice opportunities 0% Represent knowledge in multiple ways 20% Organize learning in groups 20% Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback 0% Generate & test hypotheses 0% Use cues, questions & advance organizers 40% Increase student engagement		-Adjustments for presenting information using a variety of learning styles needs to be consistently evident during instruction. -Support for the implementation of a variety of instructional strategies is necessary for educators to use the following practices that were evident in less than 50% of the classes: (1) presentations of information using kinesthetic experiences (2) incorporation of strategies to address culturally responsive and diverse language needs (3) identification of similarities & differences in content; summarization and note-taking (4) reinforcement of student work by providing recognition for efforts and use of homework to extend practice of learning (5) teaching students to generate & test hypotheses (6) organizing students in small learning groups (7) clearly communicating objectives & providing immediate/continuous feedback (8) using cues, questions & advance organizers to present information	

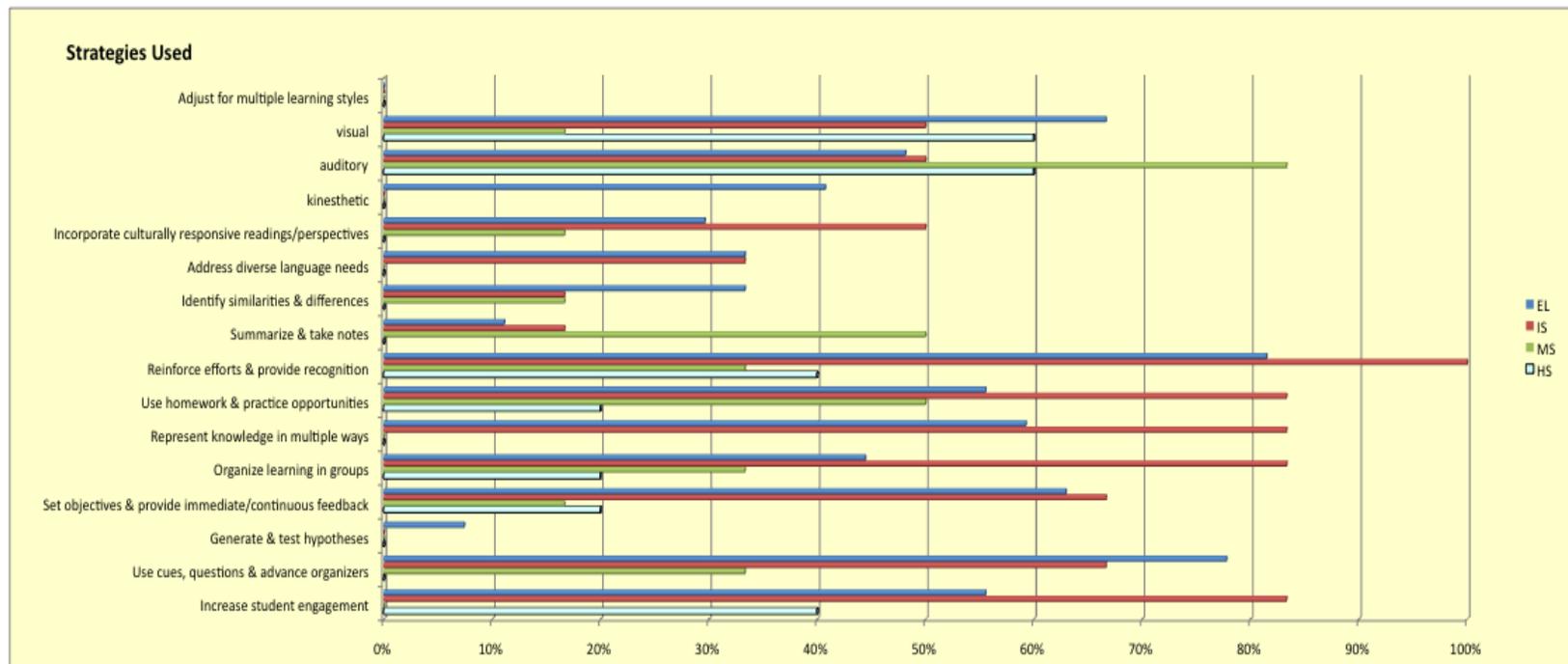
HIGH SCHOOLS (5classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +	LEARNING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ	
Interactive Behaviors			
80% Asks/answers questions 40% Active involvement in classwork 0% Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways: 20% interpersonal 0% intrapersonal 60% verbal-linguistic 0% logistical-mathematical 40% visual-spatial 20% bodily-kinesthetic 0% musical-rhythmic 40% Receives feedback on performance 0% Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)			-Students need to be provided opportunities to demonstrate using the following multiples intelligences: inter/intrapersonal, logistical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily kinesthetic, and musical-rhythmic. -Students need to be provided regular and continuous feedback on their performance and opportunities for self-evaluation/reflection in order to take responsibility for their future learning.
Cognitive Level			
20% Knowledge 40% Comprehension 40% Application 0% Analysis 0% Synthesis 0% Evaluation			-Students need to be provided instruction and opportunities to demonstrate higher-level thinking skills.
Work Produced			
40% Individual Work 20% Group Work 40% Written work 0% Project 40% Presentation/Performance 0% Self-Evaluation/Reflection			-Students need to be provided assignments that require them to work in groups and present their work with projects, presentations, performances which include opportunities for them to demonstrate self-evaluation/reflection practices.
Resources			
20% Textbooks 20% Supplemental materials 0% Manipulatives 20% Technology 0% Materials reflect diversity 20% Worksheets		-Students need increased opportunities for using textbooks, supplemental resources, manipulatives, technology, and materials that reflect diversity.	

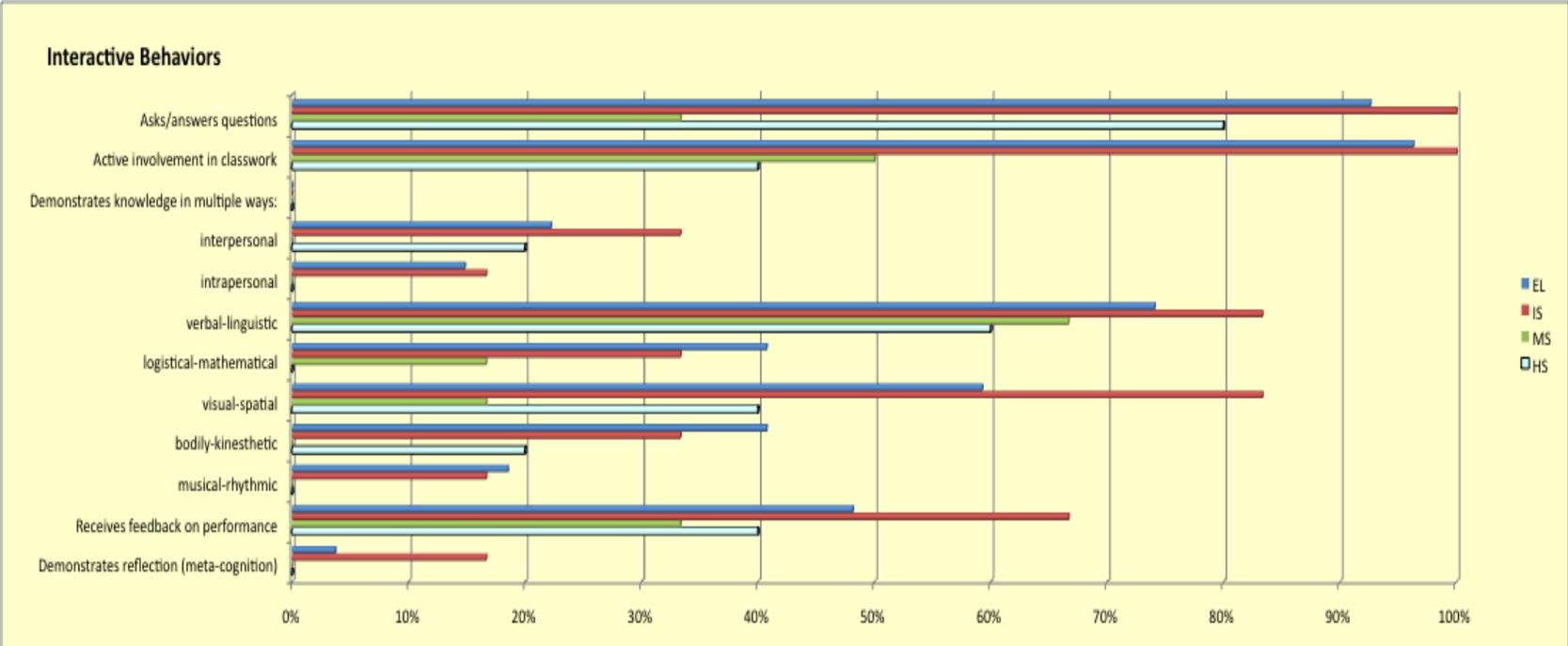
TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



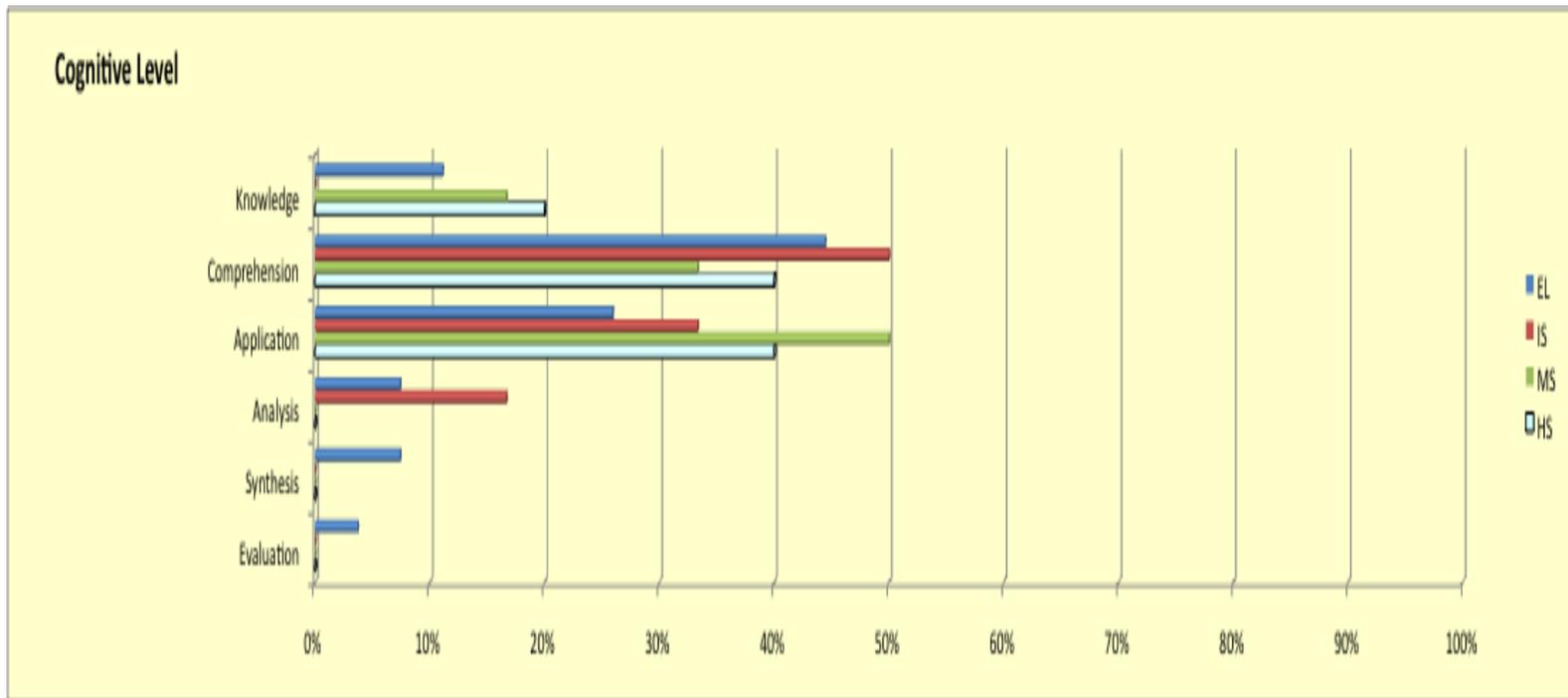
TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (continued)



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (continued)



LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN GARDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (continued)

