

**New York State Education Department
Audit of the Written, Taught, and
Tested Curriculum**

**Dunkirk City School District
Final Report**

May 2008



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Introduction

This final report is the result of an audit of the written, taught, and tested English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum of Dunkirk City School District by Learning Point Associates. In 2007, 12 school districts and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) commissioned this audit to fulfill an accountability requirement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act for local education agencies (LEAs) identified as districts in need of corrective action. These LEAs agreed, with the support of NYSED, to collaborate on the implementation of this audit, which was intended to identify areas of concern and make recommendations to assist districts in their improvement efforts.

The focus of the audit was on the ELA curriculum for all students, including Students with Disabilities (SWDs). The audit examined the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as other key areas, such as professional development and school and district supports, through multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. These findings acted as a starting point to facilitate conversations in the district in order to identify areas for improvement, probable causes, and ways to generate plans for improvement.

This report contains an outline of the process, data, and methods used as well as the key findings from the data collection. The Recommendations for Action Planning section provides suggestions as well as more specific advice to consider in the action planning process. Districts are required to incorporate recommendations from the audit in their Comprehensive District Education Plan or Consolidated Application.

District Overview

This section provides a brief overview of district characteristics for Dunkirk City School District.

Geographic Background

Dunkirk City School District serves the City of Dunkirk, the Town of Dunkirk, and sections of the Town of Sheridan. Dunkirk City School District contains six schools: four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Student Population

Data from 2006 indicate that Dunkirk City School District served a total of 2,103 students, with no prekindergarten or ungraded students. The district data came from the *New York State District Report Card Accountability and Overview Report 2005–06* for Dunkirk City School District (retrieved May 20, 2008, from <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2006/AOR-2006-060800010000.pdf>).

Of those students enrolled, 54 percent were white, 36 percent were Hispanic or Latino, 9 percent were African American or black, 1 percent were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and less than 1 percent were Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.

Demographics

Data from the 2003–04, 2004–05, and 2005–06 school years indicate that the majority of students (61 percent, 58 percent, and 64 percent, respectively) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The percentage of limited-English-proficient students was consistent at 13 percent during these three school years.

Student Academic Performance

As of 2006–07, Dunkirk City School District has been designated as a *district in need of improvement—Year 3*).

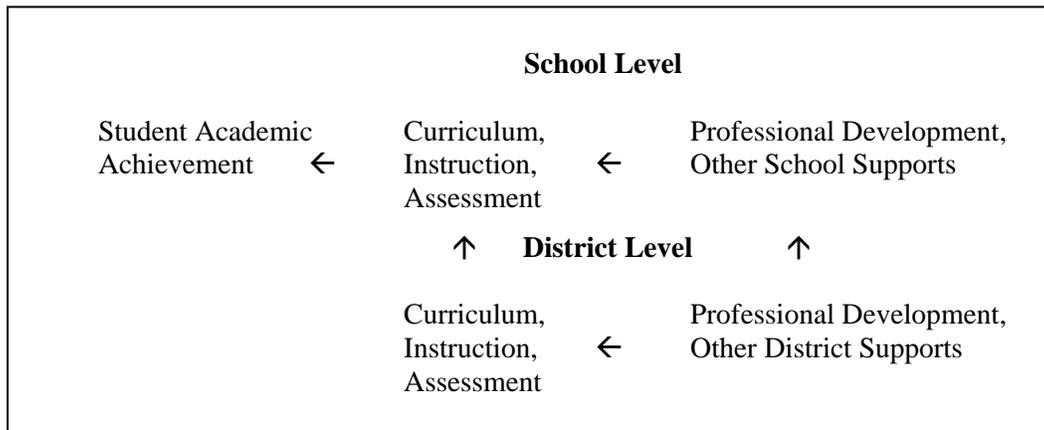
The state accountability status in ELA has been designated as *in good standing* for all four elementary schools, as *corrective action* for the middle school, and as *requiring academic progress—Year 2* for the high school. In 2005–06, the only group that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in elementary- or middle-level ELA was SWDs. The only group that did not make AYP in the secondary level ELA was economically disadvantaged students.

Theory of Action

The theory of action starts from student academic achievement in relation to the New York State Learning Standards of the audited districts and their schools. Specifically, student academic achievement outcomes are related directly to curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities within the classroom. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the school level are supported and influenced by professional development and other supports at the school level and by curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the district level. Finally, school-level professional development and other supports are supported and influenced by their district-level counterparts.

The theory of action reviewed in the co-interpretationSM meeting indicates that change (i.e., actions needed to improve student achievement) occurs at both the school and district levels. Therefore, information for the audit was gathered at both levels. A graphic representation of the theory of action dynamic is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theory of Action



Guiding Questions for the Audit

To address both the needs of individual districts and the requirements of the audit, Learning Point Associates identified the following six essential questions for the focus of the audit:

1. To what extent is a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned curriculum guiding instruction across the district?
2. How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?
3. What academic interventions are available for students who need additional academic support?
4. What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and student learning are provided to teachers?
5. To what extent do student achievement data (formative as well as summative) inform academic programming, planning, and instruction?
6. What staffing practices and profiles are utilized to effectively support teaching and learning across the district?

Audit Process Overview

The audit process follows four phases, as outlined in the Learning Point Associates proposal application: planning, data collection and analysis, co-interpretation of findings, and action planning. This report comes at or near the end of the co-interpretation phase. A description of each phase follows.

Phase 1: Planning

The purpose of planning was to develop a shared understanding of the theory of action and guiding questions for the audit. This phase also included reviewing the project plan, timeline, and expectations; selecting a school sample and teacher samples; and planning and delivering communications about the audit to the district's key stakeholders, including a kickoff meeting involving the larger district community.

Phase 2: Data Collection and Analysis

To conduct this audit, Learning Point Associates examined district issues from multiple angles, gathering a wide range of data and using the guiding questions to focus on factors that affect curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other school supports. All of these data sources work together to bring focus and clarity to the main factors contributing to the district's corrective-action status. Broadly categorized, information sources include NCLB accountability status, *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* (SEC), observations of instruction, interviews of school and district personnel, review of key district documents, and alignment of the district's written ELA curriculum. Parent focus groups also were included in the special education and English Language Learner (ELL) studies.

The sample of schools for this portion of the audit was drawn by Learning Point Associates using a stratified random sampling procedure. This sample was drawn to include district schools with low, moderate, and high levels of student achievement and to ensure the inclusion of at least one intermediate and one high school.

NCLB Accountability Status

Learning Point Associates compiled NCLB accountability data for the most recent three years available to provide the district with an overview of student achievement trends, by level and subgroup.

Surveys of Enacted Curriculum

To examine whether instruction was aligned to the New York state standards and assessments, teachers in the district completed the SEC. Based on two decades of research funded by the National Science Foundation, the SEC are designed to facilitate the comparison of enacted (taught) curriculum to standards (intended) curriculum and state tests (assessed curriculum), using teachers' self-assessments. The data for each teacher consist of more than 500 responses. The disciplinary

topic by cognitive-level matrix is presented in graphic form, which creates a common language for comparison and a common metric to maintain comparison objectivity.

Observations of Instruction

To examine instruction in the general education classrooms, the School Observation Measure (SOM) was used to capture classroom observation data for the district audit. The SOM was developed by the Center for Research in Educational Policy at the University of Memphis. It groups 24 classroom strategies into six categories: instructional orientation, classroom organization, instructional strategies, student activities, technology use, and assessment.

Observation data were collected from four to eight classrooms in each of the sample schools across the district. Observations were conducted on two days, a minimum of two weeks apart, in each school. Each observation lasted approximately 45 minutes. In observing classrooms, observers noted the presence or absence of classroom features per 15-minute instructional segment. Each 45-minute observation session produced a summary, which was based on three 15-minute classroom segments. Observation data were aggregated to the district by school grade levels: elementary, middle, and high schools. For schools that span Grades K–8, observations were conducted in the elementary grade levels and the data were included with other elementary observation data. For schools that spanned middle through high schools, observations focused on Grades 9–12 and the data were included with other high school observation data.

Interviews

To garner additional data concerning the alignment of the written, taught, and tested ELA curriculum, Learning Point Associates engaged school and district personnel in semistructured interviews. These interviews were based on predeveloped protocols that were designed to be approximately 40 minutes in length for teachers and 60 minutes or more for coaches, principals, and district staff. The protocols were developed specifically to address the guiding questions and to be comparable across the different types of interviews. As a result, the protocols covered the same topics; when appropriate, the same questions were asked on teacher, principal, content coach, and district personnel protocols.

The teacher interviews were tightly structured, primarily to elicit short responses that could be readily compared within schools and between schools. Principal and coach interviews contained questions designed to elicit longer, more elaborate responses. District personnel interviews were even more open-ended. When agreed to by the interviewee, interviews were taped and transcribed. Interview records—both notes and transcriptions—were imported into NVivo software, which supports the coding and analysis of interview data.

Key Document Review

A district's formal documents (e.g., district improvement plan, professional development plan) demonstrate its official goals and priorities. To identify the priorities and strategies to which the district has committed, a structured analysis of key district documents was completed.

A document review matrix was developed and used to synthesize document information against a subset of the audit's guiding questions. The matrix was designed to determine whether each submitted group of documents contained clear evidence of district plans and/or policies, implementation of those plans or policies, and internal monitoring and evaluation of the implementation in support of each identified question. The degree to which each respective document addressed the relevant question was evaluated by three Learning Point Associates analysts to ensure multiple perspectives during the process. After individual reviews were completed, a consensus meeting was held and a report was generated by all reviewers.

Curriculum Alignment

A district's written curriculum demonstrates its program of ELA studies for students. Learning Point Associates focused its attention on two key areas for this curriculum alignment process. First, Learning Point Associates used the revised taxonomy table (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) to code and compare school district learning objectives/expectations and performance indicators from the New York State English Language Arts Core Curriculum (New York State Education Department, 2005) in terms of levels of knowledge and cognitive demand. Second, using criteria for identifying and describing a cohesive, comprehensive, and clearly articulated curriculum identified in literature cited above, Learning Point Associates examined curriculum alignment documents submitted by the district. In both areas, materials were examined and analyzed at Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.

Special Education Review

The purpose of the Special Education Review was to provide information to districts regarding the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and improvement-planning practices related to their special education program. Data collection activities that informed the special education review included the following: district or regional staff interviews; teacher interviews, including collaborative team teaching, special education teacher support services, and general education teachers who serve SWDs; school administrator interviews, including principals, assistant principals, and/or individualized education program (IEP) teachers; classroom observations utilizing the Total School Environment Protocol; focus groups with parents of SWDs; a review of approximately 50 redacted IEPs; and a review of formal district documents to provide insight into the policies, plans, and procedures the district has developed to ensure services to SWDs, as identified under the six guiding questions developed for the audit.

Phase 3: Co-Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of co-interpretation was to interpret the data collected in a collaborative group setting.

The co-interpretation process consisted of several steps, starting with the interpretation of the data within individual data sets, followed by the identification of key findings across data sets, and concluding with the identification of district strengths that may be brought to bear on the issues facing the district. These steps occurred during a two-day co-interpretation meeting with

key school and district staff. Because this process was critical in identifying the priority areas for district improvement, the detailed approach is outlined.

Interpretation of the Data

The co-interpretation process began with the study of the individual data reports (i.e., document review, curriculum alignment, interview data, SEC data, classroom observations, and special populations), in small-group settings. Individual groups were asked to select from their data report(s) the findings that they believed were most significant and to categorize those findings according to one of the six topics addressed by the guiding questions: curriculum, instruction, academic intervention services, professional development, use of data, and staffing.

Identification of Key Findings

Participants then were divided into topic groups for the purpose of grouping individual findings across data sets along common themes. From various data sources, the participants used the method of triangulation to provide support for combining and subsuming some of the findings. Because the investigative groups presented their key findings to the whole group, some natural combining and winnowing of results occurred.

The whole group used a voting process to prioritize the findings. Participants were led through a discussion process to rate the prioritized findings based on the following questions:

- Is the key finding identified one of the most critical problems faced by the district and addressed by the audit?
- If resolved, would student achievement improve sufficiently to move the district out of corrective action?
- If resolved, will there be a measurable, positive impact systemwide?

From this process, which required considerable thought and discussion, a set of final key findings emerged. These findings are discussed in the Key Findings section of this report.

Identification of District Strengths

Identification of district strengths occurred next. In this stage, participants created a list of driving forces that will help to support the district's improvement planning. These positive forces will be used, where applicable, in conjunction with recommendations from Learning Point Associates to address the areas of need listed in the form of key findings.

Phase 4: Action Planning

NYSED will provide a recommended process and templates to the districts to meet the action planning requirements of the proposal. Submission of the completed action plan is the responsibility of each district.

Implementation of the Process

The recommended process for action planning includes the following steps: goal and strategy setting, action and task planning, integration and alignment of actions, and integration and alignment with the Comprehensive District Education Plan, Consolidated Application, and any other plans in place at the district level.

In the goal and strategy-setting step, the district team identifies what it wants to achieve during the next three years. For each goal, the team identifies key strategies, along with success indicators for each. Then, the team sets specific objectives, which drive more detailed action development by those who will be assigned to implement the plan. Learning Point Associates will work not only with the larger team but also with the smaller teams and individuals responsible for setting actions and associated costs.

Rollout of the Plan

The final component of the action planning process is communicating the audit action plan to the larger school community. This process is critical to ensure that schools are aware of the action plan and are prepared to revise their Comprehensive Education Plans or other guiding plans as necessary to reflect the district's plan.

References

- Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives* (Complete ed.). New York: Longman.
- New York State Education Department. (2005). *English language arts core curriculum (prekindergarten–grade 12)*. Albany, NY: Author. Retrieved May 20, 2008, from <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elacore.pdf>

Key Findings

As indicated in the description process for Phase 3: Co-Interpretation of Findings, each key finding statement was generated through the co-interpretation process. In a facilitated process, groups of school and district administrators, teachers, parents, and district technical assistance providers identified key findings across multiple data sets. These key findings were prioritized by the participants at co-interpretation and are included below, in order of priority. The supporting findings, which can be mapped back to the original data sets, are included in the data map in Appendix B.

Key Finding 1

Data-driven, comprehensive districtwide plans do not exist for staffing, academic intervention services, and professional development.

The first key finding combines several findings that were presented under three of the six guiding questions: “What academic interventions are available for students who need additional academic support?” (Question 3); “What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and learning are provided to teachers?” (Question 4); and “What staffing practices and profiles are utilized to effectively support teaching and learning across the district?” (Question 6). The finding is supported by evidence from the following four reports: the Interview Report, the Document Review Report, the SEC Report, and the Special Education Report. In reviewing this evidence, participants agreed to develop a single key finding related to the lack of data-driven, comprehensive districtwide plans in the areas of staffing, academic intervention services, and professional development.

The district supports and provides professional development from various resources. However, the data indicate that professional development opportunities are not consistently provided to or attended by district teachers. Findings suggest that this situation may be due to the district’s lack of a comprehensive district education plan or other planning document that might articulate the coordination and scheduling of district professional development. Implementation of professional development is inconsistent across grade levels. In particular, professional development at the high school level is more limited than at the elementary and middle school levels. There are not enough professional development sessions addressing instructional strategies for general education teachers who teach SWDs. In addition, data are not available to measure the impact of professional development; nor was there evidence of a plan for monitoring professional development.

The district also lacks a comprehensive plan or policy for the provision of, monitoring of, and communication about academic intervention services. Although various interventions are available to students at all levels, reports note teacher concerns about inconsistent attendance by eligible students and the quality of some of the interventions.

Regarding staffing, none of the documents provided by the district indicated that the district has a plan or policy regarding review criteria that articulate district expectations for leaders at all levels in the district. There are no review criteria, for example, related to principal’s performance

assessment. However, this issue was based on one finding from the Document Review Report and was not corroborated (or contradicted) by additional sources.

Key Finding 2

Dunkirk City School District appears to lack a clearly articulated Grade K–12 ELA curriculum in regard to the following components:

- **Curriculum materials**
- **Comprehensive plan for teaching and learning**
- **Scope and sequence**
- **Timing/pacing**
- **Assessment**
- **Student expectations**
- **Differentiated instruction**

This key finding is based on evidence from three data sources and responds to the first guiding question of the audit: “To what extent is a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned curriculum guiding instruction across the district?” Participants identified 16 findings from the Interview Report, the Curriculum Alignment Report, and the Document Review Report that revealed the district lacked a clearly articulated Grades K–12 ELA curriculum. Moreover, the Special Education Report indicated that variations in access to the ELA curriculum existed for SWDs, particularly those in self-contained settings.

The district does not have a recent, articulated ELA curriculum, according to both interviewed district and school staff. The Document Review Report and the Interview Report indicate that the district has materials and resources that guide ELA instruction, such as curriculum maps, reading programs, and grant initiatives. However, evidence from all three reports reveals that the guidance is limited in scope. The materials and resources do not provide guidance for all grade levels, all literacy content areas, or all instructional strategies. Without a clearly articulated curriculum, the district offers little instructional guidance in the areas of articulated student expectations, assessment across all grade levels, instructional pacing, or differentiated instruction for students with different learning needs. Moreover, special education teachers in self-contained settings expressed a need for additional curricular materials and lacked an understanding of what should be covered in an ELA curriculum.

Key Finding 3

Although teachers value collaboration in general, collaboration is not happening enough across all grade levels.

Participants developed this key finding about teacher collaboration based on evidence from the following four reports: the Interview Report, the SEC Report, the Observation Report, and the Special Education Report. Because teacher collaboration provides opportunities for instructional

planning and professional development, this key finding addresses the following two guiding questions: “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” (Question 2) and “What professional learning that support instruction and learning opportunities are provided to teachers?” (Question 4).

Evidence from the four data sources presents two complementary phenomena related to collaboration: one representing teachers’ values and one representing their current practices. Data from the Interview Report indicate that camaraderie and collaboration among staff are highly valued within the district and that teachers have some opportunities (both scheduled and informal) to collaborate with one another. However, the data suggest that more opportunities for collaboration are needed. The Interview Report indicates that teachers do not have enough scheduled opportunities to collaborate on instructional planning and strategies and that current scheduled collaboration opportunities such as common planning periods are not always utilized as intended. The Interview Report and Special Education Report also suggest that there are insufficient opportunities for general education teachers to confer with English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers or special education teachers on the learning needs and progress of ELLs and SWDs in the general education classrooms.

Key Finding 4

There was little to no professional development delivered to help teachers meet the needs of ELLs and SWDs districtwide; there is little to no professional development, support, and teacher collaboration with ESL and special education teachers; there is little to no in-depth professional development for teachers who work with SWDs.

Although the collaboration aspect of this key finding duplicates Key Finding 3, participants decided that it was important to highlight this finding separately in order to emphasize the unique challenges and issues teachers encounter while providing instruction to ELLs and SWDs. This key finding addresses two guiding questions: “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” (Question 2) and “What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and learning are provided to teachers?” (Question 4).

General education teachers and special education teachers do not feel fully prepared to meet the needs of ELLs and SWDs, according to the Interview Report and the Special Education Report. The data suggest that there was insufficient professional development and support for general education teachers and special education teachers for meeting these students’ needs. According to the Special Education Report, special education teachers reported that the ESL program was separate and that there was little coordination or collaboration with special education teachers. The Interview Report indicates that general education teachers believe that additional time for collaborating with ESL teachers also would help them to better meet the needs of ELLs. Teachers believe that this type of collaboration would inform them of what type of instruction is occurring during the ESL program.

Key Finding 5

Dunkirk City School District appears to lack a written plan and policy for implementing and monitoring an ELA curriculum.

This key finding addresses one guiding question: “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” (Question 2). This key finding is similar to Key Findings 1 and 2 in that those findings also address a lack of plans or written documentation in specific areas. The focus on plans for implementing and monitoring instruction is a distinguishing characteristic of this key finding. Participants identified several findings across four reports (the Document Review Report, the Interview Report, SEC Report, and the Special Education Report) that highlighted the absence of plans for monitoring and implementing an ELA curriculum for all students, including those with disabilities. The Special Education Report highlighted that there was particular need to monitor the curriculum of students in self-contained settings.

Monitoring of instruction and instructional consistency among teachers are more prevalent in the elementary schools than in the secondary schools, according to the Document Review Report and the Interview Report. Although instructional consistency may exist in specific contexts, additional findings from the Document Review Report asserted that there is no evidence of written plans for implementation and monitoring to ensure the consistent delivery of the ELA curriculum within or across schools. Administrators at the elementary schools monitor instruction through reviews or lesson plans and observations more often than administrators at the secondary schools, according to the Interview Report.

The Document Review Report pointed to the Reading First program as an avenue for reinforcing guidelines and requirements for instruction at the elementary level. Consistency also was greater in the area of reading instruction compared with writing instruction. SEC data further support that there was consistency or horizontal alignment between elementary school buildings. Although secondary teachers have less guidance than elementary teachers in terms of instructional pacing, teachers in the secondary schools appear to have more discretion than elementary school teachers for adapting instructional materials.

Key Finding 6

With the exception of the “apply” cognitive demand level, across the Dunkirk City School District curriculum and grade levels, higher metacognitive knowledge expectations are not emphasized to the degree required by the New York state learning standards.

Participants identified this key finding pertaining to the level of cognitive demand emphasized in the curriculum. This key finding addresses two guiding questions: “To what extent is a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned curriculum guiding instruction across the district?” (Question 1) and “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” (Question 2). Most evidence for this key finding is supported by the Curriculum Alignment Report; however, participants also identified supporting data within the SEC Report and the Special Education Report.

Participants identified discrepancies between the district’s student expectations and the state education department’s student expectations/performance indicators when comparing these factors on a revised taxonomy table. In particular, the level of cognitive demand in the area of “apply” in this district outpaced the expectations set forth in the New York state ELA standards, according to the Curriculum Alignment Report. Dunkirk City School District appeared to place heavy emphasis on the “apply” cognitive demand area—so much so, however, that it may leave little time for the other five cognitive demand areas (analyze, create, evaluate, remember, and understand) identified in the analysis. Evidence from the SEC bar charts across grade levels reveal that the district places less emphasis on the other five cognitive demand areas when compared to the Learning Point Associates–generated state education department bar charts for the same grade levels.

Furthermore, participants identified disconnects regarding the proportion of knowledge levels across grade levels between the district and the state ELA standards, with Dunkirk City School District not matching the levels described in the standards in several areas, according to the Curriculum Alignment Report. For example, the Dunkirk City School District curriculum did not emphasize factual knowledge. The SEC data provide additional evidence that classroom instruction places more emphasis on lower cognitive expectations and skill acquisition across all grade levels rather than developing higher cognitive expectations.

Key Finding 7

Secondary general education and special education teachers and some elementary general education teachers report nonuse or inconsistent use of student data and/or assessment data because of a lack of understanding, communication, sharing, and training.

This key finding addresses one guiding question: “To what extent do student achievement data (formative as well as summative) inform academic programming, planning, and instruction?” (Question 5). This key finding is supported by five data sources: the Curriculum Alignment Report, the Special Education Report, the Document Review Report, the Interview Report, and the SEC Report .

Data use is inconsistent across the district, according to the Interview Report and the Special Education Report. Notably, no secondary special education teacher reported using data to monitor student progress; teachers at the secondary level have limited formal opportunities for sharing data; and secondary teachers are not trained to use data to drive instruction. The SEC data corroborated this finding, indicating that there are few professional development opportunities that focus on classroom assessments for secondary teachers, though there are somewhat more opportunities for elementary teachers. Use of assessment data across the district varies based on the amount of training teachers received, according to the Special Education Report.

Although these three data sources described current practices in terms of use of data, the document review investigated district plans for use of data. The district does not have a written plan for using data to inform programming, planning, and instruction, according to the Document Review Report. Furthermore, district plans do not specify how student data are made available to

classroom teachers or how student data are used to make decisions regarding placement of ELLs and SWDs.

Key Finding 8

Differentiated instruction is not evident in the elementary self-contained classes as well as in the secondary general education classes and self-contained classes.

This key finding was derived from three data sources within two reports: the Special Education Report and the Curriculum Alignment Report. It addresses one guiding question of the audit: “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” (Question 2). Participants developed this key finding to demonstrate areas where differentiated instruction was not evident. Although differentiated instruction was evident during observations of general education classrooms, differentiated instruction was not evident in elementary self-contained classrooms, secondary general education classrooms, or secondary self-contained classrooms, according to the Special Education Report. Furthermore, the district curriculum provided no evidence of guidance regarding differentiated instruction, according to the Curriculum Alignment Report.

Additional Key Findings

The following findings were developed by the co-interpretation participants but were not given top priority during the voting process:

- Across grade levels, ELA classroom instruction does not align to state standards or assessments.
- More technology use (instructive and assistive) is needed across the district.
- Although teachers and administrators believe that students in self-contained settings have access to the general education ELA curriculum, teachers in those settings at all levels lack general education ELA materials and resources as well as an understanding of what should be covered in ELA.

Positive Key Finding 1

Elementary intervention is targeted through Reading First programming and is perceived to be effective.

Participants developed this positive key finding to address the role of Reading First in supporting interventions for nonproficient students. This positive key finding is supported by data from the Interview Report and the Special Education Report. It addresses one guiding question: “What academic interventions are available for students who need additional academic support?” (Question 3).

Interventions for nonproficient students at the elementary schools are plentiful and are perceived to be effective, according to the Interview Report. Both the Interview Report and the Special

Education Report described the presence of Reading First programming in the elementary schools. Observation data from the Special Education Report outlined the structure of literacy instruction at the elementary level and the ways in which intervention is weaved into the day. Specifically, each class was structured to include 90 minutes of core reading instruction and 30 minutes of targeted, supplemental reading instruction for identified students.

Positive Key Finding 2

Programs used consistently across the district are found to be working for children.

This positive key finding addresses one guiding question of the audit: “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” (Question 2). Participants identified evidence to support this positive key finding from two reports: the Interview Report and the SEC Report . *Step Up to Writing* was used at the elementary and secondary levels to provide instructional consistency in writing instruction, according to the Interview Report. As evidence of the program’s effectiveness, SEC data revealed that writing instruction at the secondary level was aligned to the state assessment.

The supporting evidence for this positive key finding identified during co-interpretation highlighted only the program used to teach writing in the district, *Step Up to Writing*. However, the Interview Report provided evidence that showed that other instructional programs and initiatives such as Springboard, Read 180, Harcourt *Trophies*, and Reading First also are creating instructional consistency for ELA. Respondents also viewed these programs to be effective.

Positive Key Finding 3

Staff are dedicated and qualified.

This positive key finding addresses one guiding question of the audit: “What staffing practices and profiles are utilized to effectively support teaching and learning across the district?” (Question 6). Participants identified supporting evidence from two reports: the Interview Report and the Special Education Report.

District administrators believe that staff members are dedicated, talented, and receptive, according to the Interview Report. In addition, although not identified during co-interpretation, interviews with school-level respondents showed that “dedicated teachers or staff” were one of the top three most valued characteristics of schools across the district. Furthermore, the Special Education Report stated that all special education teachers are fully certified and meet the requirement for being highly qualified.

Positive Key Finding 4

The district professional development committee includes the use of data in their planning. The professional development committee has a positive impact in supporting teaching and learning in the district.

As discussed, Key Finding 1 indicates that the district does not have a data-driven, comprehensive districtwide plan for professional development currently in place. However, participants identified additional evidence that demonstrated that the district was implementing a data-driven planning process for professional development and that some professional development opportunities had a positive impact in the district. Participants used this evidence to create this positive key finding.

This positive key finding addresses one guiding question of the audit: “What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and learning are provided to teachers?” (Question 4). Evidence was identified from the following reports: the Interview Report and the Special Education Report.

A district professional development committee is responsible for identifying teachers’ professional development needs based on data and for selecting professional development topics and providers, according to the Interview Report. In addition, both the Interview Report and the Special Education Report revealed that the district provided a variety of reportedly useful professional development opportunities, including professional development for Springboard, *Step Up to Writing*, and Read 180.

Positive Key Finding 5

Elementary teachers report use of student performance data to improve their instruction.

This positive key finding is supported by evidence from the Interview Report and the Special Education Report. It addresses one guiding question: “To what extent do student achievement data (formative as well as summative) inform academic programming, planning, and instruction?” (Question 5). Participants identified several pieces of evidence from the Interview Report about the use of data for guiding instruction at the elementary level. The report indicates that elementary teachers use data on a regular basis to monitor student progress and make instructional decisions. There also is evidence that elementary teachers use a variety of assessments, including the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Harcourt *Trophies* reading series unit tests, benchmark tests, worksheets, writing portfolios, and observations.

The Special Education Report also reflects that elementary teachers—both general education teachers and special education teachers—used data to make instructional decisions. This report also shows that data were collected weekly or monthly, depending on the needs of the students. Participants identified additional evidence from this report that elementary teachers are trained on how to use data to make instructional decisions.

Positive Key Finding 6

New teachers receive moderate to high levels of support from mentors and coaches.

This positive key finding is supported by evidence from the Interview Report and the SEC Report . It addresses one guiding question of the audit: “What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and learning are provided to teachers?” (Question 4). The Interview Report indicated that the district hired a mentoring coordinator and that individual mentors are assigned to newly hired teachers. Participants identified additional evidence that, in general, new teachers reportedly receive high levels of support. SEC data corroborated this evidence, showing that teachers often are engaged in coaching or mentoring opportunities.

Additional Positive Key Findings

The following two findings were developed by the co-interpretation participants but were not given top priority during the voting process:

- Special education teachers report that data are used in the prereferral process and to monitor the attainment of IEP goals.
- Direct instruction is prevalent across the district.

Recommendations for Action Planning

In this section, the key findings, along with research and best practice in the appropriate areas, are used to make recommendations for the district's efforts during the next three years.

The key findings that arose out of the co-interpretation process with Dunkirk City School District led Learning Point Associates to make three recommendations:

- Create and implement a data-driven, comprehensive district education plan.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive, clearly articulated K–12 ELA written curriculum for all students.
- Use professional learning communities to improve teacher collaboration and teacher learning regarding topics such as teaching SWDs, data-driven instruction, and meeting the needs of diverse student learners.

We recommend that Dunkirk City School District use the action planning process to develop a data-driven, comprehensive district education plan, including a professional development plan and academic intervention services plan. Creation of a K–12 ELA curriculum would come first, and the plans developed regarding the curriculum would help drive instruction, professional development, and academic interventions. We suggest that this approach be undertaken with collegiality between teachers and administrators at all buildings and levels.

It is important to note that a one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations does not exist. Rather, Learning Point Associates has identified the areas that are the most critical for the district. Furthermore, it should be noted that the order of listing does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. For each recommendation, information is provided about specific actions that the district could consider during the action planning process. The diversity and complexity of each recommendation places limits on the extent to which Learning Point Associates can discern its relative impact on the district's improvement process. For this reason, recommendations are firm but the associated actions or strategies to implement the recommendations should be considered as points of reference for consideration.

Recommendation 1: Comprehensive Planning

Create and implement a data-driven, comprehensive district education plan as an outgrowth of the action planning process, which will lead district improvement efforts. This plan should be monitored at the district and school levels.

Two areas in particular stood out in the audit findings and should be considered focal points for the plan:

- **A separate specific professional development plan should be created and implemented. The plan should be needs-based and data-driven and should include strategies allowing the district to monitor the plan for effectiveness.**

- **The district has no current plan for Academic Intervention Services (AIS). One should be created and implemented, following NYSED guidelines and template.**

Professional Development Plan

Link to Findings. The investigation of five of the six topics addressed by the guiding questions (curriculum, professional development, data use, academic intervention services, and staffing) and many data sets (the Interview Report, the ELA Document Review Report, the SEC Report, and the Special Education Report) revealed planning to be a need. Given the lack of a comprehensive district education plan in conjunction with the findings at co-interpretation, we recommend a focus on planning as one of the three core recommendations to move the district out of corrective action. Because the comprehensive district education plan will be an outcome of the audit of curriculum process, the remainder of this recommendation will address the focal points described above.

Link to Research. Following is information related to various aspects of professional development.

Impact on School Improvement. Educators and researchers know a great deal about the elements of effective professional development (National Staff Development Council, 2001). Numerous case studies of successful schools have documented the role that high-quality professional development can play in school improvement (Hassel, 1999; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999; WestEd, 2000). We encourage a review of these and other resources when designing professional development to assist in crafting the district's definition of high-quality professional development and to set criteria to ensure that all professional development is of high quality.

In addition, large-scale surveys of teachers about their professional development experiences show that well-designed professional development leads to desirable changes in teaching practices (Garet, Berman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman 1999; Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001; Wenglinsky, 2000). A number of studies also have begun to demonstrate that well-designed professional development activities can have a direct, measurable impact on student achievement (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Kennedy, 1998; Wenglinsky, 2000).

Importance of a Comprehensive Plan. Evidence-based professional development is most successful when it is connected to a comprehensive change process. One national survey of teachers found that when teachers report a connection between professional development and other district and school improvement activities, they are much more likely to report that professional development has improved their teaching practice (Parsad et al., 2001). Districts and schools that follow this approach target their professional development toward the highest priority needs and pursue activities with the greatest chance of improving student performance (Geiser & Berman, 2000).

Building a Successful Plan. For several years, the U.S. Department of Education sponsored "Building Bridges," the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development to encourage and reward schools and districts that successfully implemented high-impact

professional development. During interviews with staff members at these schools and districts, researchers discovered that despite their many differences, there were several common steps taken by each of these award winners. These steps included:

- **Seek input from participating educators.** It is crucial to have school-level administrator and teacher participation when designing and executing the plan to ensure that the prioritized needs from the district professional development plan are addressed. Thus, key staff should be engaged in creating it. The district plan should have core focus areas but allow flexibility for individual school needs to be addressed. When teachers help plan their own professional development, they are likely to feel a greater sense of involvement in their own learning. This engagement increases motivation, empowers teachers to take risks, ensures that what is learned is relevant to a particular context, and makes the school culture more collaborative (Corcoran, 1995; Hodges, 1996; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999).
- **Focus planning on what students need to learn.** Research increasingly supports targeted professional development. According to one overview of the literature, professional development that provides teachers with general information about a new instructional practice or about new developments in a particular content field usually does not result in improved teaching (National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999). Instead, effective professional development concentrates on the specific content that students will be asked to master, the challenges they are likely to encounter, and research-based instructional strategies to meet those challenges (Cohen & Hill, 1998; Garet et al., 1999; Kennedy, 1998). The more targeted the professional development is, the better its chance for success. In other words, it is important to design in-depth professional development. To begin, it is helpful to plan backward, beginning with what students need to learn. The following questions (adapted from Guskey, 2000) can help identify student needs:
 - What specific student outcomes do we want to achieve?
 - What evidence-based instructional practices and policies will most effectively and efficiently produce these outcomes?
 - What organizational supports must be in place in order for the instructional practices and policies to be consistently implemented?
 - What knowledge and skills must the participating professionals have to implement instructional change?
 - What professional development experiences will enable participants to acquire the needed knowledge and skills to implement instructional change?
- **Plan for job-embedded learning opportunities.** When professional development is built into the routine practices of teaching, it becomes a more powerful tool for teacher growth. Instead of relegating professional development to specific inservice days, schools with excellent programs make professional development a part of teachers' everyday work lives (Hassel, 1999; Sparks, 1999). By using everyday activities such as lesson planning, staff meetings, and curriculum development as opportunities for professional growth, schools can develop a culture of collaboration and shared inquiry (Fullan & Miles, 1992; WestEd, 2000; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999). When these activities are

focused on meeting agreed-upon goals for student learning, they are especially powerful. Because embedded professional development is relevant to the daily issues teachers face in their work, it allows teachers to see immediate change in the application to classroom practice. Professional learning communities are one way to implement job-embedded professional development. These communities are discussed in Recommendation 3.

- **Plan for longer-term activities, not stand-alone workshops.** National surveys confirm that successful professional development takes place over a long period of time. In one study, the simple duration of an activity predicts its success; when teachers report that their activities extended over a longer period of time, they cite more improvement in teaching practice (Garet et al., 1999). Other studies suggest that it takes months and even years to fully implement new practices (Hodges, 1996). If teachers have the opportunity to try out new practices and then discuss with their colleagues any insights or concerns that develop, they are more likely to persevere in implementing those new practices (National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999). One way that schools ensure follow-up is by tying professional development goals to teachers' ongoing self-assessments (McColskey & Egelson, 1997). Again, professional learning communities are one way to implement job embedded professional development. These communities are discussed in Recommendation 3.
- **Include plans to support, monitor, evaluate, and adjust.** Districts and schools that develop clear goals for professional development are better able to evaluate whether certain professional development activities are having the desired impact on teacher practice and, ultimately, student achievement. Even if current adult learning activities are found to be less than effective, a well-structured evaluation can bolster and refine professional development efforts. Researchers suggest that districts and schools should design evaluation protocols to help educators do the following: reflect on their practice; use multiple sources of information, including teacher portfolios, observations of teachers, peer evaluations, and student performance data; and collect evidence of impact at multiple levels. This evidence of impact can consider educator reaction, learning, and use of new knowledge and skills; organizational support and change; and student learning (Guskey & Sparks, 1991; Hodges, 1996; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999).

Learning Point Associates suggests that the district team spend time developing monitoring processes and evaluation protocols during creation of the professional development plan. Building an effective monitoring and evaluation plan is crucial to the success of the overall professional development plan. Knowing when professional development is working and when to adjust due to spotty implementation or outcome will ensure that time and funds are invested wisely.

- **Devise strategies that reflect the characteristics of high-quality, evidence-based professional development.** According to Rasmussen, Hopkins, and Fitzpatrick (2004), effective professional development does the following:
 - Aligns with broader goals (e.g., school or district improvement goals, professional development plan goals).
 - Focuses on the content students need to know.

- Improves teacher content knowledge.
- Advances teacher use of effective instructional strategies.
- Provides sufficient opportunities and support for building efficacy and mastery of new content knowledge and instructional strategies.
- Involves active learning by participants (e.g., hands-on learning, inquiry-based learning).
- Involves participants working in collaborative groups.
- Brings together educators who already are associated in some manner (e.g., similar grades, subjects, vertical teams, issues, leadership roles).
- Customizes to match participants' needs.
- Is embedded within the school day or school year.
- Is long-term with prolonged contact and initial and follow-up opportunities.
- Monitors and evaluates for effectiveness.
- Archives in order to guide present and future decision making.
- Is actively supported by school or district leadership.
- Is based in scientific research or effective practice.
- Serves as a model of high standards for staff development (i.e., National Staff Development Council Standards).

It also is important that the methods used for professional development are conducive to improving instruction and developing and retaining high-quality teachers. Job-embedded professional development is regarded by experts as a strong approach that offers multiple pathways. Professional learning communities (see Recommendation 3) (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), schoolwide study groups (Taylor, 2004), literacy coaching, the use of specialists (Walpole & McKenna, 2004), lesson study (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998), mentoring and induction programs (Boyer, 1999, as cited in Holloway, 2001), and myriad other systemic initiatives have a strong research base and require similar elements for successful implementation.

Focus on Meeting the Needs of SWDs. Classroom teachers are the central figure in a child's education. They have ongoing knowledge and access to information regarding each student's achievement in relation to standards, needed accommodations, and specific curricular implications for achievement and instruction (DeStefano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001). With increases in the number of SWDs included in regular classrooms, professional development related to these topics is imperative for all teachers as well as for the administrators who support them: Teachers, administrators, and staff cannot be expected to do what they have not been trained to do (Whitworth, 1999).

Research indicates that the most successful professional development efforts are those that provide regular opportunities for participants to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems in an atmosphere of collegiality and professional respect (Little, 1982). Collaboration in professional development is especially useful for increasing the capacity to meet the needs of

special populations, given that a history of sorting and separating diverse students and classroom teachers has resulted in very little common ground (Ferguson, 2005). Classroom teachers are specialists in curriculum; special education teachers are specialists in the unique learning and behavior needs of students. Each specialist learns skills from the others, with all students being the ultimate beneficiaries (Beckman, 2001).

General education teachers learning to support the needs of SWDs in their classrooms report that the most useful professional development provides them with specific skills they can implement immediately in the classroom. In addition to hands-on skills training, classroom observations or videotapes of successfully inclusive classes and situation-specific problem-solving sessions during the course of the school year were key to providing a frame of reference for these teachers (Whitworth, 1999). In order for teachers to provide high-quality differentiation to their students, they must understand both the theory and related practice as well as develop those skills (Hedrick, 2005). Staff developers who are effective in teaching differentiation will help instructors effectively use differentiation in their classroom.

Research on effective professional development (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005) shows that professional development that has a positive impact on teacher instruction is of considerable duration, concentrates on specific content areas and/or instructional strategies, requires a collective participation of educators (grade-level or school-level teams), has coherent organization, and is infused with active learning rather than the “stand-and-deliver” model.

Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, and Birman (2000) identify the following characteristics of effective professional development experiences:

- Active learning and coherence in professional development will significantly increase the use of active, project-centered activities in classroom instruction.
- Professional development that includes specific, higher-order teaching strategies will increase the teacher’s use of those strategies in classroom instruction.
- The use of collective participation, active learning, and coherence in professional development will increase the impact of activities that focus on specific, higher-order teaching strategies.

Using Data. To systemically use data to drive decisions, the district will need to consider how to do the following:

- Determine the essential data elements that are needed at the district, school, and classroom levels.
- Develop operational processes and procedures that ensure data are collected, analyzed, and disseminated or reported and that programmatic and instructional decisions are made at all levels in the district in an efficient and timely manner.
- Ensure that schools and staff have equitable access to the technology needed to collect and report data.

- Provide the support (i.e., technology assistance, development of “user-friendly” reporting mechanisms, and professional development at multiple levels) needed to make the systemic use of data possible, understood, and valued.
- Develop the requisite organizational and staffing structures needed at the district and school levels to carry out the actions necessary for the systemic use of data.

Implementation Considerations. Dunkirk City School District will undertake an action-planning process that will result in a comprehensive plan. Learning Point Associates recommends that one of the outcomes of this planning process be a professional development plan that is data-driven, needs-based, collegial, and focused on ELA. (In conjunction with this recommendation, Recommendation 3 on professional learning communities provides research to strengthen the formation of this plan.)

Academic Intervention Services Planning

Link to Findings. Findings from co-interpretation showed that although Dunkirk City School District is running an afterschool program, it does not have a formalized academic intervention services plan that has been approved by NYSED. Document review and interviews supported this finding.

Link to Research. Wright (2005), in an article for the National Association of Elementary School Principals, presents following “intervention ideas that can help instructional leaders remove barriers to learning for at-risk students”:

- “Find the root cause.”
- “Identify the student’s learning stage.”
- “Match students to appropriate levels of instruction.”
- “Adopt evidence-based intervention strategies.”
- “Require active student response.”
- “Be explicit in teaching strategies.”
- “Review, review, review.”
- “Give students opportunities for choice.”
- “Monitor student progress frequently.”
- “Develop schoolwide programs for common academic problems.”
- “Create an intervention team.”

In their *Guide to Academic Intervention Services*, the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers and the New York State United Teachers (2008) make the following recommendations:

“Academic intervention services help students who are struggling to achieve the learning standards in English language arts and mathematics in grades K–12 and social studies and science in grades 4–12. These additional general education services include:

- “Extra instructional time to help students achieve the learning standards in the subject areas requiring AIS, and
- “Support services to help students overcome barriers that are affecting their ability to learn, such as attendance problems, family related issues, discipline problems and health-related issues. Support services could include school guidance and counseling services to improve attendance and coordination of services provided by other agencies.” (p. 1)

“Students should not be taken out of regular instruction. Schools should include as many options as are necessary to meet the range of student needs including:

- “Extra time during the regular school day;
- “Within-class staffing that reduces student-teacher ratios (e.g. co-teaching, team-teaching);
- “Extended school day;
- “Before and after school sessions;
- “Evening and weekend sessions;
- “Summer school.

“Individual academic intervention service plans are not required for students. Students should receive services based on the intensity of services needed.” (p. 4)

Implementation Considerations. Dunkirk City School District should review the research cited, as well as the requirements of NYSED regarding academic intervention services plans to create, implement, and monitor its academic intervention services plan. Additional guidance on academic intervention services in New York is available through *Academic Intervention Services: Questions and Answers* (New York State Education Department, 2000).

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Recommendation 2: Curriculum

Develop and implement a comprehensive, clearly articulated K–12 ELA written curriculum for all students. This curriculum should encompass the following plans and processes:

- **Grade-level curriculum maps that align to NYSED ELA grade-level performance indicators in terms of breadth and depth.**
- **A system for monitoring the implementation of the curriculum.**
- **A plan for the use of monitoring data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.**

Link to Findings

Dunkirk City School District’s ELA curriculum and instruction were addressed in several Learning Point Associates reports: Document Review, Curriculum Alignment Report, and Interview Report. Three key findings regarding these topics emerged from the co-interpretation process.

The Document Review and Curriculum Alignment reports found that Dunkirk City School District does not have a clearly articulated, comprehensive, written ELA curriculum for Grades K–12. It also was determined that the district lacks written policies or plans for implementing and monitoring the written and taught ELA curriculum. Interview results revealed that many respondents believe that district-adopted programs and initiatives such as Reading First and *Step Up to Writing* are working well with targeted student groups. Most general education teachers believe they have access to ELA instructional materials, but their colleagues who teach ELLs and SWDs report that they do not have such access.

Link to Research

Comprehensive, Articulated, and Aligned Curriculum. A comprehensive, clearly articulated ELA curriculum presents a plan that delineates student learning objectives that are aligned to standards and performance indicators in terms of depth and breadth of content covered; provides links to curricular materials; suggests instructional methods and strategies to target diverse student needs and interests, and offers samples of lesson plans; and identifies specific assessment tools and techniques to measure student achievement and plan future instruction (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Danielson, 2002; English, 2000).

The presence of and adherence to a high-quality, comprehensive, and clearly articulated curriculum has a high impact on student achievement (Marzano, 2000, 2003). Schools that have revised and realigned their curriculum to state standards generally have seen higher student achievement in areas such as reading and mathematics (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005; Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007). NYSED (2005) describes an ELA curriculum as key content, skills, and knowledge that all students at each grade level need to know.

Curriculum alignment is more than simply a correlation between state standards and local district expectations (Anderson, 2002), which is why a district may not present NYSED ELA performance indicators alone as evidence of an ELA curriculum. Rather, curriculum alignment is intended to ensure closer connections between the written and taught curricula (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Aligning a curriculum to state standards and performance indicators is a necessary first step to improving student achievement.

An aligned and fully articulated curriculum aligns district and state standards and performance indicators in terms of content covered and cognitive demand employed; presents realistic pacing guidelines for coverage of the content and meeting standards and indicators; and provides suggestions, samples, and links to instructional materials, strategies, and assessments (Danielson, 2002; English, 2000). This curriculum information often is presented on curriculum maps, which are provided to teachers to use in preparing and delivering their instruction (Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Zavadsky, 2006).

New York State school districts are expected to align their ELA curriculum to meet NYSED ELA performance indicators and standards (New York State Education Department, 2005). In addition to ensuring external alignment of district and state standards, Drake and Burns (2004) also recommend internal alignment—that districts confirm that their instructional methods and strategies also align to these indicators or standards.

Implementing the Curriculum (Instruction). The best literacy teachers do not show fidelity to one particular instructional method; rather, these teachers tailor instruction to meet the needs and interests of their students (Duffy, 1993; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Hoffman, 1991). These teachers recognize that needs and interests shift from text to text, topic to topic, and day to day, and so they regularly assess their students' learning and understanding and make adjustments in instruction as needed. In other words, having a written ELA curriculum does not ensure that quality literacy instruction is occurring (Allington, 1994).

Studies of effective ELA instruction have yielded many informative and practical findings (Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Langer, 2004; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991; Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, Decker et al., 2007). For example, effective teachers of literacy challenge and actively involve students; create a supportive, encouraging, and friendly classroom environment; ask many inferential questions; explicitly teach skills (i.e., word-level, text comprehension, and writing skills); frequently engage students in reading and writing connected texts; and set and maintain high yet reasonable achievement expectations.

Effective early childhood and elementary-level literacy instruction supports children's emerging understanding and usage of phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000) as well as other equally important literacy "pillars," such as varied instructional approaches (i.e., balance of teaching in small groups, whole class, and individual), connection between reading and writing, access to interesting texts, choice of texts, collaboration with peers, and matching children with appropriate texts (Allington, 2005).

Effective adolescent literacy instruction is crucial to the academic success of all students; it must be viewed as serving the unique and specific academic needs of middle and high school students, not simply as an extension or remediation of elementary level instruction (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Kamil, 2003). Such high-quality instruction must be incorporated across the curriculum and content areas (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Langer (2001, 2002, 2004) emphasizes a focus on “high literacy,” rather than simply acquiring basic literacy skills, where students engage in more cognitively demanding activities, learn when and how to apply various strategies and skills, and participate in thoughtful debates. Research has found that struggling students need intensive instruction in such areas as vocabulary, comprehension, and critical reading strategies (Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman, 2007; Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, Decker et al., 2007). In his review of research, Kamil (2003) found some support for the positive effects of bilingual education on the academic success of ELLs, while Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, and Rivera (2006) call for more intensive instructional interventions that emphasize literacy areas such as vocabulary development and reading comprehension strategies. In short, the research clearly supports the belief that students who struggle with reading can and should be academically successful if provided with appropriate intervention that targets their needs.

Instructional Considerations for Students With Special Needs. There is substantial evidence that children who struggle with reading in the primary grades due to reading or learning disabilities or because they are ELLs will continue to experience difficulties throughout their school years if not provided with appropriate and focused intervention (Francis et al., 2006; Scanlon, Vellutino, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2005). Fortunately, there is equally compelling evidence indicating that high-quality literacy instruction in elementary and secondary school improves literacy achievement of all students (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perrin, 2007; Scammacca et al., 2007; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007) and results in higher graduation rates and college attendance (Joftus, 2002).

A crucial consideration in providing effective instruction for all students is to differentiate instruction, thereby embracing the belief that students take different paths to reach the same goal or outcome (Clay, 1998) and that making a difference means making instruction and other learning opportunities different (International Reading Association, 2000; Optiz, 1998). In other words, instruction is differentiated to help all students read and write (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). Successful schools and teachers devise means for differentiating instruction across instructional settings (i.e., whole class, small group) to address the individual needs of students (King-Shaver & Hunter, 2003; Tomlinson, 2001; Walpole & McKenna, 2007). Some teachers use Bloom’s taxonomy and metacognitive processes to identify appropriate student expectations, activities, and instructional approaches to prepare and use curriculum maps to guide and differentiate instruction (Langa & Yost, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001).

Devising a System for Implementing and Monitoring an Effective ELA Curriculum.

Although curriculum is commonly thought of as discrete parts—such as the written, taught, and learned curriculum—it might be better viewed as a system comprised of these and other parts that when functioning well are synergistically intertwined. Like any other system, it must be thoughtfully developed, implemented, monitored, maintained, and renewed to function effectively and efficiently.

In his review of research and practices, Brown (2004) suggests that teachers, schools, and districts might best be served by viewing curriculum as “a system for guiding learning and promoting organizational productivity” (p. 1). Building and maintaining this system involves (1) establishing a common curriculum language; (2) building consensus around curriculum nonnegotiables; (3) establishing alignment to promote accountability; (4) meeting the needs of all learners; (5) evaluating curriculum; and (6) finding parallels among current national curriculum models to compare with other school systems. Collectively, school districts may view these points as important considerations on which to construct their more detailed curriculum plans.

Nine research-based guidelines for developing and implementing a high-quality, comprehensive curriculum have been identified (Glatthorn, Carr, & Harris, 2001; Glatthorn et al., 2005):

- Emphasize depth over breadth on the most important topics.
- Require students to apply a variety of learning strategies to solve authentic problems.
- Process and content are important in order for students to acquire essential skills and subject knowledge.
- Respond to individual student needs.
- Develop a spiraling curriculum that spans and connects across multiple school years.
- Link academic and applied knowledge.
- Selectively and thoughtfully integrate curriculum across content areas.
- Focus on achieving a limited and reasonable number of essential curriculum objectives.
- Aim for the goal of high-quality learning for all students, using the written curriculum as a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

Brown (2004) and Glatthorn (Glatthorn, 1994, 1995; Glatthorn et al., 2001, 2005) present research-based recommendations for developing and implementing a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned curriculum system that may inform the Dunkirk City School District’s efforts to revise its Grades K–12 ELA curriculum. Although short-term goals can and should be developed, many needed changes will take time to design, implement, realize, and revise (Fullan, 2007). Dunkirk City School District is cautioned to identify and follow a reasonable blend of both short-term and long-term curriculum reform tasks.

Implementation Considerations

Although curriculum and instruction are linked, to assist the district in developing and operationalizing successful curriculum and instruction policies and procedures, each is discussed separately. Key findings from the district co-interpretation along with research-based recommendations for addressing them are discussed as follows.

Curriculum. According to the Document Review Report, Curriculum Alignment Report, and Interview Report, Dunkirk City School District possesses curriculum maps for Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. However, the district needs to develop a clearly articulated and comprehensive ELA

curriculum, including revised curriculum maps. These maps should include at least the following components: clearly articulated student expectations that are aligned to NYSED ELA standards and performance indicators in terms of breadth and depth of content covered; links to instruction, including sample lesson plans and procedures for differentiating instruction to meet all students' needs; links to curricular materials; and links to specific formative and summative assessments to assess student learning and to plan future instruction.

Dunkirk City School District should consider the following compilation of research-based perspectives (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Brown, 2004; Drake & Burns, 2004; Glatthorn et al., 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Zavadsky, 2006) to address ELA curriculum in its Action Plan:

- **Build consensus around curriculum nonnegotiables.** The district is advised to determine and clearly present what are agreed to be “must-have” components of the written and taught curriculum that will appear in all written curriculum documents and will be included in the taught curriculum in all classrooms. Teachers need to know what they need to do and where and when they may make individual choices. More specifically, Dunkirk City School District should develop an ELA curriculum map for each grade level that presents a blueprint for the district’s comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned ELA curriculum. This blueprint should include at least the following: student learning objectives/expectations; links to specific curricular materials/resources; sample lesson plans, methods, and materials; suggestions for differentiating instruction to meet students’ diverse needs; realistic instructional pacing guide to assist teachers in developing and teaching units/lesson; and links to specific assessments to track student learning and achievement and to guide future instruction.
- **Establish a common curriculum language.** It is crucial to ensure that all stakeholders have the same definition and understanding of the curriculum document content, format, and terminology. It might be helpful to develop and include a preface to the curriculum maps where terminology, philosophy, relevant research, and the like are delineated.
- **Establish alignment to promote accountability.** Dunkirk City School District should compose grade-level student learning objectives/expectations that comprise a verb phrase (i.e., cognitive demand level) and a noun phrase (i.e., knowledge level) that are specifically related to the content, topic, or theme being addressed and that align to NYSED ELA performance indicators. In turn, ELA instruction should be aligned to the district’s student expectations and NYSED ELA performance indicators.
- **Meet the needs of all learners.** The district is advised to develop sample lesson plans and instructional methods, strategies, materials, and other resources to serve as practical and informative guides to teachers so they may devise and deliver effective instruction that meets students’ diverse ELA needs. It is important to cite specific materials or resources (e.g., anthology title, text title, articles, commercially prepared and district- or teacher-created items). Methods and materials should be differentiated, but students should have the same learning objectives, so that all students gain equal access to the curriculum and experience success. Assessments should be linked to student learning objectives or expectations and instruction provided and should be used to examine student achievement and to guide future instruction.

- **Evaluate curriculum and find parallels among current national curriculum models.** This plan must delineate how Dunkirk City School District will monitor the effectiveness and appropriateness of and alignment between the written, taught, learned, and tested curriculum. This approach should include procedures for regularly reviewing these curricula as well as maintaining external and internal alignment (Drake & Burns, 2004). It is important to explain how and why the district will make warranted adjustments or changes.

Instruction. According to the Document Review Report, Curriculum Alignment Report, and Interview Report, Dunkirk City School District teachers generally do not use ELA curriculum maps to inform their instruction, and there is concern that instruction does not consistently and adequately meet the diverse needs of its student population.

Dunkirk City School District should consider the following compilation of research-based perspectives (Allington, 1994; Allington & Johnston, 2002; Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Cunningham & Allington, 2007; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Gambrell, Morrow & Pressley, 2007; Goe, 2007; Langer, 2001, 2002, 2004; Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman, 2007; and Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, Decker et al., 2007) to address ELA instruction in its Action Plan:

- **Reframe instructional approach to think “How can I enable students?” Focus instruction on building from and upon students’ experiences rather than approaching students by the more pejorative and limiting notion of “ability.”** Because teachers often confuse experience and ability, they often hold lower expectations for students who are perceived as “low achieving” and provide instruction that focuses on lower level thinking, mastering skills, and overall less engaging lessons. Instead, the district is urged to reframe instructional directives to make all lessons engaging, embrace all levels of thinking, integrate content and skills, and focus on building students’ strengths rather than addressing one or more “deficits” due to a perceived lack of ability.
- **Implement flexible grouping as needed for instructional cohesion.** Effective instruction is provided to students who need it for specific tasks, and thoughtful teachers understand that needs vary from student to student and task to task. Therefore, the district is advised to group students for small-group instruction based on “needs of the moment” and regroup as needs and tasks dictate rather than assigning students to static “ability groups” based on test scores or the like.
- **Adopt a districtwide commitment to and plans for engaging all students in frequent and purposeful reading of connected texts that they are able to read (i.e., instructional and independent reading levels) and want to read (i.e., choice).** Students will improve as readers by engaging in a lot of reading of a variety of materials that are easy or slightly challenging in terms of text difficulty about topics and by authors that are of particular interest to students. Reading materials should represent a range of genres and formats (e.g., print, electronic).
- **Embrace differentiated instruction as a means for meeting students’ diverse and ever-changing ELA needs.** Effective instruction requires teachers to design and implement lessons that improve students’ understanding. All students will demonstrate specific needs depending on the circumstances, so differentiating instruction is more than

targeting a static group of identified students but committing to ensuring that all students are provided with quality instruction that targets their needs. Depending on the lesson goals and student background knowledge, this teaching may involve varying modeling, guided and independent practice, assessment, and enrichment and/or reteaching as needed. Teachers need to provide explicit instruction to teach new skills and content and to follow up with more scaffolded and guided practice to ensure that students learn and understand. In contrast, assigning tasks where students are expected to complete tasks on their own (e.g., homework) may result in student failure if they do not know what to do.

- **Attain consensus among district stakeholders that possessing a written curriculum is only part of implementing effective instruction.** Effective teachers consider the written curriculum, and they design appropriate and differentiated instruction that will help all students learn and meet instructional objectives and goals. Instruction time is finite, so the district and teachers must prioritize essential content and ensure that this content is not only taught but learned—i.e., that the taught and learned curriculum match each other.
- **Focus on learning depth of content as opposed to covering all possible topics.** Teaching and other learning opportunities should result in students developing a deep and internal understanding of the desired content and skills. In many cases, students develop and demonstrate understanding when they employ higher-level thinking skills—i.e., cognitive demand (create, evaluate, analyze)—that require them to manipulate, judge, and generate information. It is important to ensure that instruction is aligned to the district curriculum and student learning expectations/objectives and the NYSED ELA performance indicators.
- **Define and treat teachers as professionals who use a variety of methods and materials to meet students’ needs. Demonstrate fidelity to students and student achievement, not to any single method or program.** Teachers showcase their professional knowledge by describing themselves in terms of their teaching skills, not in terms of a program they use. Instead of saying, “I’m a whole language teacher” or “I’m a Success for All teacher,” teachers should say, “I’m a teacher of children, and although I use a particular program or set of materials much of the time, I do not hesitate to modify instruction or to even change methods entirely if that is what needs to be done to be effective with a child at a given point in time.”
- **Use a variety of instructional methods and settings, based on student needs, lesson content, and purpose of lesson.** Although there are times for whole-class direct instruction, effective teachers also teach in small-group settings and have students learn from each other in various groupings, with the teacher serving in a facilitator role.

Drawing on District Strengths to Implement Recommendations. At the audit kick-off held in fall 2007, session participants identified numerous strengths that exist within the district (see Appendix A). In February 2008, participants reexamined these strengths in light of the key findings identified during the co-interpretation and considered which strengths likely would be “driving forces” that would guide them in addressing these key findings. In undertaking the challenging task of designing and implementing an action plan for revising the ELA curriculum and instruction, Learning Point Associates recommends that Dunkirk City School District draw

upon these driving forces (e.g., cooperative and eager staff; commitment to improving literacy achievement of all students; data-driven instruction) to devise a feasible action plan to address the recommendations. For example, if the district sees and values the role of collaboration among colleagues, Dunkirk City School District should consider how to capitalize on collaboration in designing clearly articulated, aligned, comprehensive, and teacher-friendly curriculum maps and instructional guidelines and resources.

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Additional Resources

Following are some additional background resources that may be useful as you work toward the development of a districtwide ELA curriculum.

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Recommendation 3: Professional Learning Communities

Use professional learning communities to improve teacher collaboration and teacher learning regarding topics such as teaching SWDs, data-driven instruction, and meeting the needs of diverse student learners. After the professional learning communities are established, monitor their implementation.

Link to Findings

District data point to a need to improve student performance, especially at the high school level and for SWDs across the district. The Interview Report and Special Education Report noted teachers' desire to have more collaborative opportunities with their colleagues as well as a need for professional learning opportunities that address instructing SWDs and using data to inform instruction and monitor student performance.

Professional learning communities that are focused on teaching practices, student performance, and analysis of student work are effective mechanisms for developing collaborative working relationships between teachers (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Hord, 1997; Zorfass, Shaffer, & Keefe-Rivero, 2003). Professional learning communities have been used to develop a common understanding of what each student should learn and how teachers can respond when students experience difficulties in learning. Thus, professional learning communities are an effective method for providing professional development. This recommendation relates to two of the key findings:

- Although teachers value collaboration in general, collaboration is not happening enough across all grade levels (between and within special education, ESL, reading specialists, Encore teachers) (see Key Finding 3).
- To better meet the needs of ELLs and SWDs districtwide, additional professional development, support, and teacher collaboration with ESL and SWD teachers is needed. More in-depth professional development also is needed for teachers who work with SWDs (see Key Finding 4).

Moreover, the use of professional learning communities can be an effective method to develop teacher knowledge of data-driven instruction, which was another key finding:

- Secondary general education and special education teachers and some elementary teachers report nonuse or inconsistent use of student data and/or assessment data because of a lack of understanding, communication, sharing, and training (Key Finding 7).

Link to Research

Professional learning communities have been associated with positive outcomes such as instructional improvement, school climate changes, and improved student learning (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005; Bolam et al., 2005; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003; Supovitz, 2002; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2006). Eight studies that examined the impact that professional learning communities had upon student achievement reported improvement at both the elementary and secondary levels (Vescio et al., 2006). In one study, the professional learning

communities accounted for 85 percent of the variance in student achievement (Louis & Mark, 1998). Several studies also have found that the number of students scoring at the proficient level on standardized tests increased by 25 percent to 40 percent during a three- to four-year period in schools with professional learning communities (Berry et al., 2005; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003).

Professional learning communities are associated with changes in teaching practices and school culture. For example, schools that had strong professional learning communities used more authentic pedagogy that included higher level thinking, construction of meaning through conversation, and development of knowledge for use beyond the classroom (Louis & Marks, 1998). Teachers who participated in professional learning communities made substantive changes in their instruction by using more student-centered techniques and less individual skill sheets and isolated instructional activities (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; Englert & Tarrant, 1995). In addition, as teachers participated in professional learning communities, the discussion changed from focusing on the challenges of teaching low-achieving students to designing and using a variety of instructional processes and products (Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollings, & Towner, 2004). Professional learning communities contribute to changes in professional culture in schools because they promote collaboration and reflection (Vescio et al., 2006). These communities also enable teachers to address personally meaningful, classroom-based concerns and to solve problems (Zorfass et al., 2003).

Implementation Considerations

Five important considerations for implementing professional learning communities are membership, schedule, focus, data, and culture.

- **Membership.** Membership in professional learning communities should be inclusive; they can be composed of teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other staff. Professional learning communities also can span grade level, role, and curricular areas. The number of members can vary, but some researchers have suggested there should be approximately seven (Zorfass et al., 2003).
- **Schedule.** Another important consideration regarding professional learning communities is the schedule. Communities typically meet during the school day. Schools create time for members to meet monthly or bimonthly.
- **Focus.** Professional learning communities consistently must be focused on student learning (DuFour, 2004). Three questions to guide this focus are as follows:
 - “What do we want each student to learn?”
 - “How will we know when each student has learned it?”
 - “How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?” (DuFour, 2004).
- **Data.** It is essential for professional learning communities to focus on data because ongoing assessment is tied to powerful instructional practices (Marzano, Pickering, & McTigue, 1993). Communities that engage in structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions and investigate the relationships between instructional practices

and student work produce more gains in student learning (Supovitz, 2002). There is considerable research regarding positive outcomes that occur when teachers use data to inform instruction and monitor student performance for students with disabilities (Fuchs et al., 1994; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Hosp & Fuchs, 2005; Stecker & Fuchs, 2000). Thus, embedding data-based instruction within professional learning communities may help to improve the outcomes of all students.

- **Culture.** School culture is the final implementation consideration of professional learning communities because they depart from the typical norms of teacher isolation. Instead, professional learning communities encourage reflective dialogue and collaboration among teachers. Thus, schools must move teachers away from individual to collective processes to analyze student work, instructional strategies, or curriculum. To accomplish this goal, the professional learning community must build mutual trust and respect among its members (Bolam et al., 2005).

Through the efforts of the Reading First program, the Dunkirk City School District has initiated the use of data-driven instructional practices. Elementary teachers have been trained in the collection, interpretation, and use of data. Administrators in the district are supportive of the use of data to monitor student performance and adjust instruction. The district has plans to expand the collection of data in the secondary level. Thus, using data within the context of professional learning communities builds upon current programming efforts in the Dunkirk City School District and addresses the needs expressed in the Interview Report and Special Education Report.

However, the Dunkirk City School District likely will need support to assist with the specific actions necessary to implement and monitor professional learning communities. The district most likely will need technical assistance from consultants and may benefit by visiting schools that have successfully established effective professional learning communities.

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Appendix A. District Strengths

The following strengths were identified through an appreciative inquiry activity at the kick-off meeting on September, 27, 2007.

Appreciative Inquiry Guide

Peak Experience

In your work here, you have probably experienced ups and downs, some high points and low points. Think about a time that stands out to you as a high point—a time when you felt most involved, most engaged, most effective. It might have been recently or some time ago.

(Prompts: Where did this happen? Who was there? What was the situation? What did you do that made this experience so successful? What did your colleagues do to make you feel this way? What was the core factor that made this a high-point experience?)

Values

- What aspect of your work in this district do you value most?
- What organizational factors help you to create or support high achievement? (leadership, relationships, culture, structure, rewards, etc.)

Wishes

- What are three things this district does best that you would like to see the district keep or continue doing—even as things change in the future?
- What three wishes would you make to heighten the vitality and effectiveness of the district?

Adapted from H. Preskill, Ph.D. , Claremont Graduate University – AEA/CDC 2007 Summer Evaluation Institute

Notes From Discussion

Peak Experience Commonalities

- Positive movement with Reading First
- Collaboration and cooperation regarding curriculum
 - ESL
 - Reading First
- Data use for instruction
- Embracing data
- Collaboration
- Valuing everyone's input

- Teachers believe in all their kids
- Refocusing on academics
- People working together (collaboratively)

Values

- Communication
- Student success
- Family education
- Seeing all kids as our kids
- Daily interaction with students
- Professional development
- Teaming
- Respecting each others as professionals
- Working with others and supporting each other

Wishes

- 100 percent parent involvement
- Centralized elementary building—space
- Communication throughout school family
- Smaller class size
- Parental involvement
- Valuing students, empathy, cultural understanding
- Teaming across grade levels (vertical)
- Space
- Keep the good things we've done
- Continue to progress, but don't throw out good things
- Treat all individuals with dignity and equity

Large-Group Discussion

Common Themes

- Collaboration and people working together
- Happiness in positive direction of district

Initiatives Include

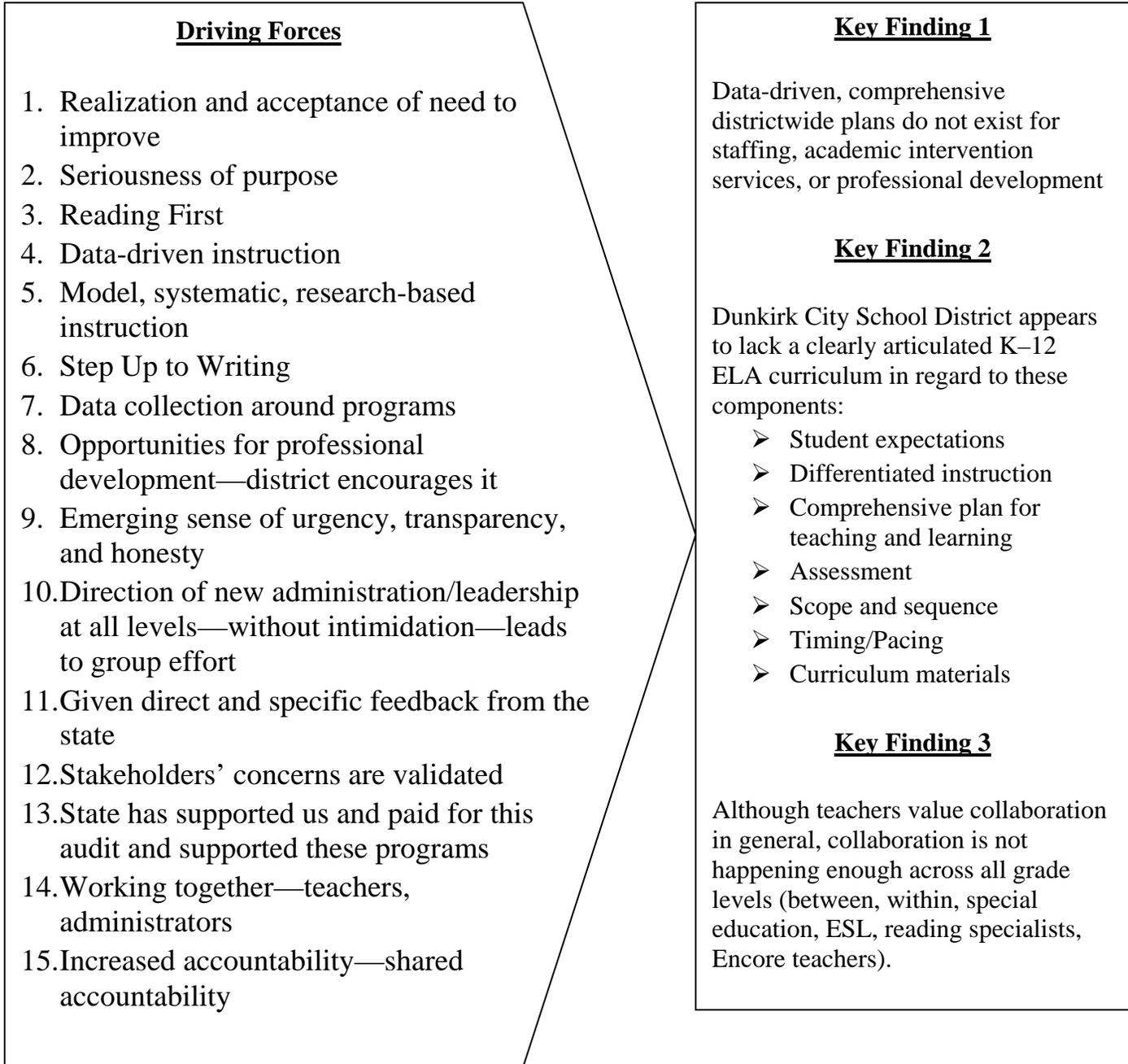
- Advanced Placement initiative
- Relationships with College Board, Reading First, Contract for Excellence
- Afterschool program
- E-assessments

Comments

- “All schools are impacted. Now the district is less fragmented and more centralized so all kids get good initiatives.”
- Reading First has moved people in common direction, new management in terms of new superintendent has shaped where they’re going.”
- Lots of initiatives have been in the works for years and now key pieces are in place that let things move forward.”
- District is at crossroads—know where they were and where they are now and have clearer direction in ways to go.”
- Are looking at consolidated application and Contract for Excellence (over \$2 million) as value add.”
- Have high expectations for Dunkirk.”
- Good people at state, regional and local level with outside support from Learning Point Associates.”
- There is concern over Dunkirk’s use of funds—grant driven. How do we better coordinate and utilize the funds available?”
- Liked appreciative inquiry exercise—assesses strengths and needs. See the values of the district come out.”

Figure 2 illustrates the driving forces identified by the Dunkirk City School District during their co-interpretation meeting in February 2008. These positive forces will be used where applicable in conjunction with recommendations from Learning Point Associates to address the areas of need listed in the form of key findings. These key findings also were identified by the district during co-interpretation.

Figure 2. Driving Forces for Dunkirk City School District



Driving Forces

16. Effectiveness of new initiatives
17. New faculty—infusion of energy
18. We truly care about kids and education
19. Strength of building level leadership
20. Mentoring program is critical
21. Unifying cord that runs through and ties everything together. Things are no longer fragmented
22. Contract for excellence
23. Blessed with resources (financial, partnerships, support)
24. Great change in community support that we now enjoy, including the newspaper
25. Have students in educational programs at local colleges volunteer in the schools
26. Fredonia does data collection for us
27. Made great changes quickly—number of applicants we get for open positions—was 3:1, now 25:1
28. Instructional resources—categorizing things as intervention—using intervention terminology
29. Technology is coming together
30. Can do, will do

Key Finding 4

To better meet the needs of ELLs and SWDs districtwide, additional professional development, support, and teacher collaboration with ESL and SWD teachers is needed. More in-depth professional development is needed for teachers who work with SWDs.

Key Finding 5

Dunkirk City School District appears to lack a written plan and policy for monitoring and implementing an ELA curriculum.

Key Finding 6

With the exception of “Apply”—across the Dunkirk City School District curriculum and grade levels, higher metacognitive knowledge expectations are not emphasized to the degree required by the New York state learning standards.

Key Finding 7

Secondary general education and special education teachers and some elementary teachers report nonuse or inconsistent use of data and/or assessment data, because of a lack of understanding, communication, sharing, and training.

Driving Forces

31. Staff is dedicated and qualified
32. BOE has shifted toward support—less micromanagement
33. Staff has a great appreciation for what students deal with in their outside lives—we embrace the whole child
34. Willingness to try new things—lack of fear of failure—not questioning any more
35. Progressive things in special education/general education in terms of collaboration—becoming one world
36. Renewed sense of hope
37. Middle school made AYP
38. Pride in our final product/students and ourselves
39. ESL program has changed—doing things the correct way—giving them what they need and deserve
40. Belief that all kids can learn

Key Finding 8

Differentiated instruction is not evident in the elementary self-contained classes as well as in the secondary general education classes and self-contained classes.

Key Finding 9

Across grade levels, Dunkirk City School District ELA classroom instruction does not align to state standards or assessments.

Key Finding 10

More technology use (instructive and assistive) is needed across the district.

Key Finding 11

Although teachers and administrators believe that students in self-contained settings have access to the general education ELA curriculum, teachers in those settings at all levels lack general education ELA materials and resources and an understanding of what is to be covered in ELA.

Driving Forces

- 41. Staff is dedicated and qualified
- 42. Board of Education has shifted toward support—less micromanagement
- 43. Staff has a great appreciation for what students deal with in their outside lives—we embrace the whole child
- 44. Willingness to try new things—lack of fear of failure—not questioning any more
- 45. Progressive things in special education/general education in terms of collaboration—becoming one world
- 46. Renewed sense of hope
- 47. Middle school made AYP
- 48. Pride in our final product/students and ourselves
- 49. ESL program has changed—doing things the correct way—giving them what they need and deserve
- 50. Belief that all kids can learn

Key Finding 8

Differentiated instruction is not evident in the elementary self-contained classes as well as in the secondary general education classes and self-contained classes.

Key Finding 9

Across grade levels, Dunkirk City School District ELA classroom instruction does not align to state standards or assessments.

Key Finding 10

More technology use (instructive and assistive) is needed across the district.

Key Finding 11

Although teachers and administrators believe that students in self-contained settings have access to the general education ELA curriculum, teachers in those settings at all levels lack general education ELA materials and resources and an understanding of what is to be covered in ELA.

Appendix B. Data Map of Co-Interpretation Key Findings

Dunkirk City School District: February 27–28, 2008

During the co-interpretation process, Dunkirk City School District participants analyzed six individual reports (data sets) and identified findings. Participants then grouped the individual findings from across the data sets under each of the six topic areas examined through the audit: curriculum, instruction, academic intervention services, professional development, data use, and staffing. Participants worked together to identify which of the resulting key findings were most significant.

The following tables document the results of the co-interpretation process. Each table lists a key finding identified by co-interpretation participants, together with the individual supporting findings from various data sources.

Key

Report Abbreviations:

CA—Curriculum Alignment Report

DR—Document Review Report

INT—Interview Report

OBS—Observation Report

SE—Special Education Report

SEC—Surveys of Enacted Curriculum Report

Voting Colors:

Red votes = areas for improvement

Green votes = positive areas

Key Findings: Areas for Improvement

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 22 red</p> <p>Data-driven, comprehensive districtwide plans do not exist for staffing, academic intervention services, and professional development.</p>	1. There was no evidence of the measure of impact of ELA professional development on classroom instruction in policies, plans, implementation, and monitoring.	DR p13
	2. There is no evidence of professional development opportunities for Grades 4–5 (under sustainability, the coaches do provide professional development to Grades 4 and 5).	DR p 11
	3. There was no evidence presented of a policy, plan, or implementation and monitoring of professional development for SWD strategies to general education teachers.	DR p 13
	4. Teachers report moderate emphasis of professional development compared to state standards.	SEC ad hoc report
	5. Teachers report that their professional development sometimes builds on previously received professional development.	SEC ad hoc report
	6. Professional development is designed to support the improvement plans.	SEC ad hoc report
	7. There is no evidence of centralized professional development coordination (PDC).	DR p13
	8. The district does not have a current Comprehensive District Education Plan to drive the professional development.	INT p 8
	9. Transportation issues hinder afterschool programming and other services.	INT p 8
	10. Several teachers expressed concern that some students were pulled from ELA instruction for related services (e.g., speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy).	SE int. p 13 & 14
	11. Limited availability of time during school day for other subjects.	SE int. p 14
	12. Barriers identified to interfere with the success of interventions were (1) limited time during school day, (2) limited support staff in classroom, (3) large class size, and (4) limited home support.	INT p 27
	13. Teachers noted that although supports for nonproficient students are plentiful, student participation is inconsistent and behavior in the reading classes is a problem.	INT p 26
	14. High school resource room emphasizes homework help more than remediation.	INT p 7
	15. There does not seem to be one centralized source for AIS information to be collected that provides evidence of implementation and monitoring.	INT p 8

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	<p>16. Expected evidence when referencing Dunkirk’s AIS program was missing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Letter to parents informing them of AIS services. b. Teacher schedules and focus for providing AIS. c. Document review of ELA assessment results. d. District policy for the provision of AIS. e. Board authorization for AIS services. f. Required meeting with parents for provision of AIS for identified students. g. Grant final report of provided services for 21st Century grant (missed opportunity to provide these documents as evidence). 	DR p 8
	17. There appears to be no policy or plan of review criteria for principals’ performance assessment in the DCSD.	DR p 16
	18. AIRS at the secondary level is an extension of ELA class and assignments rather than intensive/focus instruction.	SE obs p 13
	19. Academic Intervention Services in high schools do not target students’ needs.	INT p 7
	20. At secondary level, respondents mentioned they are not sure how effectiveness is measured.	INT p 26
	21. Both secondary schools have high levels of supports for nonproficient students, and they provide multiple types of supports for students who are performing below proficiency in ELA.	INT p 26
	22. K–8 teachers report a higher degree of exposure to professional development activities than 9–12 teachers.	SEC ad hoc report
	23. Professional development is meeting the needs of Special Education and ELL teachers at a moderate level.	SEC ad hoc report

Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 21 red</p> <p>Dunkirk City School District appears to lack a clearly articulated Grades K–12 ELA curriculum in regard to the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum materials • Comprehensive plan for teaching and learning • Scope and sequence • Timing/pacing • Assessment • Student expectations • Differentiated instruction 	1. Consistency is greater in the area of reading compared with writing at the elementary level.	INT p 14
	2. It appears that Reading First provides a scope and sequence for assessing. It does not provide actual guidance on pacing.	DR p 6
	3. Dunkirk does not appear to have scheduling/time frames for instruction for Grades 2 and 4.	CA p 25
	4. DCSD curriculum appears to lack clearly articulated student expectations across all grade levels.	CA p 25
	5. DCSD curriculum maps for Grades 2–4 cover reading and writing. Grade 6 covers only speaking and listening, while Grade 8 covers reading, writing, speaking, and listening.	DR p 6
	6. Curriculum maps for Grades 2–8 are inconsistent.	DR p 6
	7. Middle school now has a curriculum map.	INT p 5
	8. Elementary schools use Harcourt <i>Trophies</i> Reading Series and Reading First requirement.	INT p 14
	9. It appears the DCSD curriculum does not provide information with regard to differentiation of instruction across grade levels.	CA p 25
	10. DCSD curriculum appears to lack specified curriculum materials or do assessments in Grade 10.	CA p 25
	11. With the lack of an ELA curriculum, we have tools/resources for guiding instruction.	INT p 11
	12. District resources/tools are defined for secondary schools.	INT p 12
	13. The report illustrates that materials/resources are available, but no information on funding, distribution, and availability of said resources across the district—in particular Special Education.	DR p 4
	14. There does not appear to be a districtwide comprehensive curriculum or plan for ELA teaching and learning at the targeted grade levels.	CA p 27
	15. Dunkirk City School District does not have an articulated K–12 curriculum.	INT p 5
	16. Teachers indicate there is no districtwide ELA curriculum.	INT p 11

Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 15 red</p> <p>Although teachers value collaboration in general, collaboration is not happening enough across all grade levels.</p>	1. Teachers are participating in collaboratives.	SEC ad hoc report
	2. Camaraderie and collaboration among staff are most valued in district schools.	INT p 39
	3. Respondents cite more opportunities to collaborate with other teachers as an area needing improvement.	INT p 38
	4. 56% of observations reported frequent/extensive team teaching at the elementary level.	OBS p 2
	5. Consultant teachers have an instructional role in the classroom.	SE obs p 12
	6. At the high school, team teaching was prevalent during 83% of observations in classrooms.	OBS p 3
	7. During the half the observations, the consultant teachers in the secondary classrooms did not have an instructional role.	SE obs p 11
	8. Common planning periods are not consistently used for collaborating.	INT p 18
	9. There is a lack of collaborative planning.	INT p 14
	10. Collaboration is informal.	INT p 18
	11. People want more time to collaborate with ESL teachers.	INT p 18

Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p data-bbox="184 326 359 354">Votes: 14 red</p> <p data-bbox="184 402 533 797">To better meet the needs of ELLs and SWDs districtwide, additional professional development, support, and teacher collaboration with ESL and Special Education teachers is needed; also, more in-depth professional development is needed for teachers who work with SWDs.</p>	<p data-bbox="621 289 1682 380">1. Elementary and secondary teachers indicated that additional professional development and additional time to collaborate with ESL teachers would help them better meet the needs of ELLs.</p>	<p data-bbox="1717 289 1835 316">INT p 29</p>
	<p data-bbox="621 456 1696 516">2. Special Education teachers do not feel fully prepared to deal with the language needs of ESL children.</p>	<p data-bbox="1717 456 1864 483">SE int. p 12</p>
	<p data-bbox="621 623 1619 651">3. More in-depth professional development related to specific disabilities is needed.</p>	<p data-bbox="1717 623 1864 651">SE int. p 16</p>
	<p data-bbox="621 790 1598 818">4. Teachers stated wanting more training regarding SWD in inclusive classrooms.</p>	<p data-bbox="1717 790 1835 818">INT p 15</p>

Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 9 red</p> <p>Dunkirk City School District appears to lack a written plan and policy for monitoring and implementing an ELA curriculum.</p>	1. There appears to be is no evidence of any type of policy, plans, implementation, and monitoring to ensure consistent delivery of the curriculum within or across schools.	DR p 7
	2. More monitoring of instruction, lesson plans, and observation occurs at most elementary rather than the secondary level.	INT p 17
	3. The district appears not to have a plan to use data consistently to inform programming, planning, and instruction, K–12.	DR p 14
	4. There is less consistency with respect to writing instruction than reading instruction.	INT p 14
	5. Elementary school instruction is very highly aligned between buildings.	SEC ad hoc report
	6. Secondary-level respondents indicated that they have discretion regarding using instructional strategies, differentiating their instruction, pacing, and supplemental materials.	INT p 16
	7. Elementary teachers have limited discretion for adapting materials.	INT p 16
	8. After review of chart detailing types of curriculum evidence, there is no defined course of action written by DCSD to guide planning, implementation, and monitoring.	DR p 5
	9. Though findings state there is evidence of plans, there is lack of detail in regards to responsibilities, timelines, and/or outcomes to guide program.	DR p 4
	10. The findings in regards to instruction for DCSD describe essential knowledge and skills, activities, and assessments; there is no way to ascertain whether the curriculum is consistently delivered.	DR p 6
	11. Though the findings of evidence of implementing and monitoring are not shown in the report for Grades K–12, parenthetically we know through Reading First, K–5 implementation and monitoring are taking place.	DR p 5

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 8 red</p> <p>With the exception of “Apply”—across the DCSD curriculum and grade levels, higher metacognitive knowledge expectations are not emphasized to the degree required by the New York state learning standards.</p>	1. Though procedural knowledge is above state indicators in the subcategory of Apply, students do not appear to carry this over into Analyze, Evaluate, and Create based on NYSED benchmarks.	CA p 23
	2. The level of cognitive demand in the area of Apply outpaces the state significantly. 46% for Dunkirk compared to 20% for the state in the 6th grade at the expense of other areas.	CA p 15
	3. Apply knowledge seems to be highly emphasized by both NYSED and Dunkirk across grade levels.	CA p 15, 19, 23
	4. In terms of cognitive demand, Grade 6 places the most emphasis on “Apply,” whereas the state emphasizes “Remember”.	CA p 16
	5. In Grade 8, “Apply” is recognized as the No.1 emphasis of cognitive demand for both the district and the state.	CA p 20
	6. Dunkirk appears not to emphasize factual knowledge, while NYSED does.	CA p 16
	7. At Grade 4, factual knowledge is minimally present in two cognitive demand domains in the DCSD curriculum.	CA p 10
	8. Grade 2 ELA curriculum, based on findings, lacks factual knowledge instruction as compared to New York state performance indicators.	CA p 7
	9. In Grade 8, factual knowledge appears not to be elemental in any expectations/objectives in DCSD compared to the state expectations.	CA p 18
	10. In DCSD and NYSED, factual knowledge does not appear to be an area of importance—across grade levels.	CA p 18
	11. Factual knowledge in the Dunkirk curriculum is not balanced with NYSED requirements across all grade levels.	CA p 25
	12. In Grade 8, factual knowledge appears not present in DCSD curriculum as required by the state.	CA p 26
	13. With the exception of “Apply,” all other identified levels of cognitive demand were below those identified by the required performance indicators expected by NYSED in Grade 2.	CA p 7
	14. In the 4th grade, the level of cognitive demand in the area of “Remember” closely matches that of the NYSED.	CA p 11
	15. In terms of placing emphasis on cognitive demand, we tend to use Evaluate and Create in the same context.	CA p 8

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	16. Dunkirk Grade 2 subcategory, “Apply,” is above the state performance indicator with regards to procedural knowledge.	CA p 7
	17. In Grade 10, NYSED appears to place greater emphasis than DCSD on procedural knowledge within the cognitive demand levels of Analyze, Evaluate, and Create.	CA p 23
	18. When comparing NYSED standards for Grades 2–10 ELA to what is actually occurring in the classroom, in class more emphasis is placed on lower cognitive expectations and skill acquisition rather than developing higher cognitive expectations.	SEC p 8-12
	19. Grade 6 NYSED utilizes procedural knowledge in the cognitive demand areas of Remembering and Understand, while Dunkirk does not appear to.	CA p 15
	20. Most district expectations/indicators at Grade 4 require students to acquire conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge, which reflects the state’s expectations.	CA p 10
	21. The level of cognitive demand for Understand is similar for Dunkirk and the NYSED, but Dunkirk curriculum does not appear balanced in the expectation for cognitive domain and missing procedural knowledge.	CA p 15
	22. Teachers interviewed believed that their ELA lessons were aligned to the New York state learning standards.	SE int. p 7
	23. In all grade levels, it appears that NYSED places far more emphasis on Create than does DCSD.	CA p 19
	24. Procedural knowledge was not evidenced in the Dunkirk curriculum in the level of cognitive demand under Understand and Create (based on NYSED standards).	CA p 11
	25. Grade 2 procedural knowledge is significantly lacking as compared to NYSED performance indicators in the sub category of Understanding.	CA p 7
	26. NYSED emphasizes in Grade 2 procedural knowledge to understand, while Dunkirk does not appear to emphasize this.	CA p 7
	27. In Grade 4, NYSED emphasizes understanding of procedural knowledge, while Dunkirk does not appear to at all.	CA p 11
	28. NYSED and DCSD appear to place similar emphasis on Remember conceptual knowledge and Understand conceptual knowledge.	CA p 23
	29. Dunkirk curriculum seems to ask students to apply their knowledge at the expense of Remember and Understand.	CA group reflection

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	30. In Grade 10, NYSED and DCSD place some emphasis on metacognitive knowledge within the cognitive demand levels of Remember, Apply, Analyze, and Evaluate.	CA p 23
	31. In Grade 10, it appears that NYSED requires students to understand and create metacognitive knowledge, but these requirements do not appear to be reflected in DCSD curriculum documents.	CA p 23
	32. In Grade 8, NYSED appears to place greater emphasis than DCSD on metacognitive and procedural knowledge within the cognitive demand levels of Analyze, Evaluate, and Create.	CA p 19
	33. At Grade 4, metacognitive knowledge is emphasized by the DCSD, but to a smaller degree than NYSED.	CA p 10
	34. In the area of cognitive demand at Grade 2, the order of emphasis does not match the NYSED.	CA p 8
	35. Students are expected to Remember, Apply, and Analyze conceptual knowledge substantially less than the other cognitive demands at Grade 2.	CA p 6
	36. NYSED and Dunkirk’s order of emphasis of cognitive demand does not correlate (Grade 6).	CA p 16
	37. Dunkirk’s order of emphasis in cognitive demand does not correlate with the state’s for Grade 4.	CA p 12
	38. In a review of the data for Grades 2, 4, and 6, the overall Dunkirk curriculum does not appear balanced with the state requirements in cognitive demand and knowledge domain.	CA p 15
	39. In Grade 6, students are most often expected to engage in lower level thinking across knowledge domains and only occasionally in higher level tasks.	CA p 14
	40. Grade 8 students appear to rarely Analyze, Evaluate, or Create in DCSD in comparison to the state expectations.	CA p 18
	41. NYSED appears to emphasize Analyze, Evaluate, and Create at Grades 6, 8, and 10, while DCSD places less emphasis in these areas.	CA p 15, 19, 23
	42. In Grades 6, 8, and 10, NYSED places a greater emphasis on asking students to create work than the DCSD ELA curriculum appears to.	CA p 15, 19, 23
	43. Grade 4’s cognitive demand emphasis differs from the state’s, in that we (Dunkirk) placed the least amount of importance on Create.	CA p 12

Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 8 red Secondary general education and special education teachers and some elementary teachers report nonuse or inconsistent use of student data and/or assessment data because of a lack of understanding, communication, sharing, and training.	1. The district appears not to have a plan to use data consistently to inform programming, planning, and instruction for K–12.	DR p 14
	2. Intervention materials that focus on data to identify student needs are more limited in Grades 4–5.	INT p 7
	3. At one secondary school, there is limited availability of formal standardized assessment data at the school.	INT p 21
	4. Data use is inconsistent across the district varying among teachers and across schools.	INT p 6
	5. The other two elementary schools were rating as having moderate levels of data, sharing, and using at grade-level meetings or faculty meetings.	INT p 23
	6. District plans do not specify how or whether student data will be made available to classroom teachers.	DR p 14
	7. Formal opportunities for sharing data were described as infrequent in the secondary schools.	INT p 23
	8. Secondary teachers were not trained in using data to drive instruction.	SE int. p 17
	9. Data use varies based on the amount of training they had received.	SE int. p 17
	10. Half of special education teachers interviewed were not aware how their students performed on state assessments.	SE int. p 18
	11. No secondary special education teacher reported using data to monitor student progress.	SE int. p17
	12. The DCSD curriculum does not provide information relative to use of assessments in Grade 10 ELA.	CA p 25
	13. District plans do not specify how or whether data are to be used regarding SWD placement in general education settings.	DR p 14
	14. In DCSD, there is no explicit mention of the use of data in making decisions regarding placement of ELL and SWDs in general education settings.	DR p 14
	15. The district appears not to have a plan to use data consistently to inform programming, planning, and instruction for K–12.	DR p 14
	16. There is little professional development provided to high school teachers on classroom assessments, and moderate professional development provided to elementary teachers on classroom assessments.	SEC ad hoc report

Key Finding 8	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 7 red Differentiated instruction is not evident in the elementary self-contained classes as well as the secondary general education classes and self-contained classes.	1. Differentiated instruction is not evident in all secondary classrooms.	SE obs. p 10
	2. Differentiated instruction is NOT evident in self-contained in elementary classrooms.	SE obs. p 10
	3. Differentiated instruction is not present in secondary and elementary self-contained classrooms.	SE int. p 10
	4. Differentiated instruction is evident in elementary general education classrooms.	SE obs. p 9
	5. Almost half of the observation students were grouped by ability levels, 44% (differentiated instruction prevalent practice frequently and/or extensively) in elementary.	SE obs. p 2
	6. Small group instruction and differentiated instruction utilize the consultant teacher in elementary classrooms.	SE obs p 12
	7. There appears to be no evidence in the Dunkirk curriculum of differentiated instruction in Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.	CA p 25

Key Finding 9	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 4 red</p> <p>Across grade levels, ELA classroom instruction does not align to state standards or assessments.</p>	1. Sixth grade assess heavily focused on listening and viewing while teachers report not spending time on it.	SEC p 6
	2. According to our third-grade teachers, 50% of what is taught does not appear on the state assessment.	SEC ad hoc report
	3. Eighth grade assessments: Alignment .09 critical reasoning—inductive-deductive reasoning.	SEC ad hoc report
	4. Teachers in 9th grade are spending time on sentences and paragraphs while the state does not have standards and assessments in these areas.	SEC ad hoc report
	5. Teachers do not report reading aloud for comprehension—state does test listening on state exams.	SEC ad hoc report
	6. A finding from our fourth-grade teacher data—emphasis on vocabulary is aligned with NYSED learning standards.	SEC p 9
	7. In looking at the data across Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, there is close alignment with vocabulary and comprehension.	SEC p 8, 9, 10, 11
	8. A finding from our second grade data comprehension is aligned with NYSED standards.	SEC p 8
	9. Sixth-grade comprehension is aligned to state standards.	SEC ad hoc report
	10. Grades 9 and 10 teachers’ instruction is highly aligned with other NYSED 9th (0.8) and 10th (0.9) in corrective action.	SEC ad hoc report
	11. According to teacher reports and findings, Grade 8 teachers spend less time having students demonstrate speaking and presenting skills than NYSED standards require.	SEC p 11
	12. According to teacher reports, Grade 6 teachers place more time on language study skills than NYSED learning standards require.	SEC p 10
	13. NYSED standards emphasize speaking and presenting—teachers report not spending time in these areas in Grades 2, 4, 6, and 8.	SEC p 8, 9, 10, 11
	14. Need to do more reading, writing, speaking, and listening across the grades.	SEC ad hoc report
	15. A finding from teacher reports: second-grade teachers spend less time on skills such as “speaking and presenting” than NYSED standards require.	SEC p 8

Key Finding 10	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 2 red More technology use (instructive and assistive) is needed across the district.	1. In the area of hands-on and technology activities, Grades 9–12 are not closely aligned with the rest of the state participants.	SEC ad hoc report
	2. Instructional technology is not used as well as assistive technology.	SE int. p 7
	3. Technological resources are limited across the district.	INT p 15
	4. No assistive technology devices and computer technology to support the teaching of ELA curriculum.	OBS p 9

Key Finding 11	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 1 red Although teachers and administrators believe that students in self-contained settings have access to the general education ELA curriculum, teachers in those settings at all levels lack general education ELA materials and resources as well as an understanding of what should be covered in ELA.	1. Interview and observational data reveal that students educated in general education classrooms access the general ELA curriculum, but that variations in access exist for students with disabilities, especially those who are educated in self-contained classrooms.	SE int. p 5
	2. Variations in access exist for SWDs.	SE obs. p 5
	3. Every individual interviewed believed that students with disabilities access the general education ELA curriculum.	SE int. p 5
	4. All Special Education students have access to grade-level assessments.	SE int. p 7
	5. Self-contained teachers reported the lack of curricular materials.	SE int. p 7

Positive Key Findings

A series of positive key findings also emerged from the district co-interpretation process. These findings, indicating what is being done well in the district, were prioritized by district participants.

Positive Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 25 green Elementary intervention is targeted through Reading First programming and is perceived to be effective.	1. Elementary schools adopted Reading First Model, 90-minute core reading, 30-minute targeted/supplemental, and 45 minutes of ELLA.	SE obs. p 13
	2. All elementary schools have a lot of support for nonproficient students.	INT p 25
	3. Support is perceived as effective at the elementary level.	INT p 26

Positive Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 22 green Programs used consistently across the district are found to be working for children.	1. <i>Step Up to Writing</i> is used K–8 and occasionally at high school as a tool for universal format.	INT p 14
	2. At high school level, writing processes are closely aligned to assessment.	SEC ad hoc report
	3. Eighth-grade writing aligned 0.12 to state assessment (low).	SEC ad hoc report
	4. Elementary school instruction is very highly aligned between buildings.	SEC ad hoc report

Positive Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 17 green Staff are dedicated and qualified.	1. Staff are dedicated, talented, and receptive to new initiatives committed to the students.	INT p 9
	2. All Special Education teachers are full certified and meet the CLUB requirement for being highly qualified.	SE int. p 19
	3. A full continuum of special education services is provided at each level, and staffing is used flexible to meet the needs of students.	SE int. p 19

Positive Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: 16 green The district professional development committee includes the use of data in its planning. This committee has a positive impact in supporting teaching and learning in the district.	1. Most teachers in the secondary schools identified professional development sessions within the last year that had an impact on instruction—Springboard <i>Step Up to Writing</i> and Read 180—as the most useful professional development sessions.	INT p 33
	2. District professional development committee uses data to identify where teachers need additional support and select providers and topics.	INT p 9
	3. Teachers describe a rich array of professional learning opportunities in the district.	SE int. p 15
	4. All teachers reported being trained in <i>Step Up to Writing</i> .	SE int. p 15
	5. Two elementary schools rated as high, most respondents identified professional development sessions within the last year that had an impact on instruction.	INT p 32
	6. All administrators reported using standardized test data.	SE int. p 18
	7. The district providing support aimed at increasing understanding benefits using of formative assessment data.	INT p 7

Positive Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 16 green</p> <p>Elementary teachers report use of student performance data to improve their instruction.</p>	1. Elementary teachers' data are collected weekly or monthly (depending on the needs of students).	SE int. p 17
	2. Elementary level uses data on a regular basis through administering and reviewing DIBELS	INT p 6
	3. Two out of four elementary schools rated as high levels of sharing indicated that student achievement data are discussed throughout the school.	INT p 23
	4. Special Ed teachers review trends in past tests and use to better prepare students for the test.	SE int. p 18
	5. Data are used to make instructional decisions to a high degree in the elementary schools.	INT p 22
	6. Elementary teachers were trained on how to use data to make instructional decisions.	SE int. p 17
	7. All elementary schools use the DIBELS assessment and Harcourt unit tests. Teachers also use benchmark testing, worksheets, writing portfolios, and observations to monitor student progress.	INT p 20
	8. Assessment data appear to be readily accessible.	INT p 21
	9. Data use process is in place in the elementary buildings.	SE int. p 17, 18
	10. All of the elementary special and general education teachers and administrators are meeting about data to monitor students' progress and inform their instruction.	SE int. p 16

Positive Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Votes: 11 green</p> <p>New teachers receive moderate to high levels of support from mentors and coaches.</p>	1. Dunkirk has hired a mentoring coordinator and individual mentors are assigned to newly hired teachers.	INT p 9
	2. Nearly all respondents in three elementary schools and one secondary school indicated that new teachers receive a high level of support.	INT p 36
	3. Teachers report often engaged in coaching/mentoring.	SEC ad hoc report

Positive Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: Zero Special education teachers report that data are used in the prereferral process and to monitor the attainment of individualized education program goals.	1. Data are collected to monitor the attainment of the IEP goals.	SE int. p 17
	2. Data are used in the prereferral process.	INT p 18
	3. Data are used in the prereferral process.	SE int. p 18

Positive Key Finding 8	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Votes: Zero Direct instruction is prevalent across the district.	1. Overall, most common instructional practice observed across district elem., middle, and high school classrooms was direct instruction.	OBS p 2
	2. In the middle school, direct instruction was the most prevalent instructional orientation (observed in 67% of visits)—frequently and/or extensively.	OBS p 3
	3. Large-group instruction is being used in the secondary classroom.	OBS p 10

Miscellaneous Findings

These findings were identified from the data sets by co-interpretation participants but ultimately were not included in the development of the key findings.

Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
1. Secondary schools have limited instructional support from principals and assistant principals as needed.	INT 34
2. High Academic Focus was observed to an extensive or frequent degree in 67% of class visits in secondary schools.	OBS p 4
3. High Academic Focus was observed to an extensive or frequent degree in 94% of class visits in elementary schools.	OBS p 4
4. Multiage grouping was prevalent in 50% of classrooms observed at the high school.	OBS p 3
5. The use of higher level questioning was prevalent during 38% of elementary observations.	OBS p 2
6. Several teachers across all schools indicated they do not know how proficient ELL students are in their native languages.	INT p 28
7. Nearly all teachers in the three elementary schools and one secondary school that were rated as having high levels of teacher knowledge of ELL needs know who the ELL students in the classroom are and can identify their strengths and needs.	INT p 28
8. The Read 180 Program allows frequent formative assessments that guide instruction in one secondary school.	INT p 2
9. In most schools (3 elementary and 1 secondary) principals receive professional development that is relevant and useful.	INT p 38
10. In all special education self contained classrooms observed (all levels), there was a lack of hands-on activities.	SE obs. p 11
11. Parent/community involvement in learning activities was least frequently observed in practices (elementary, middle, high).	OBS p 5
12. 30% of teachers surveyed engage in informal, self-directed learning.	SEC ad hoc report
13. One secondary (teacher) relies heavily on informal assessments.	INT p 21
14. The most prevalent instructional strategy observed in elementary classrooms was coaching, reported in 63% of classrooms.	OBS p 2
15. Dunkirk HS teacher's homework expectations are very highly aligned with other New York High Schools.	SEC ad hoc report

Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
16. In two of the four elementary buildings, the coaches provide support and guidance to teachers for instruction and use of materials.	INT p 35
17. Students with disabilities have a graduation rate of 5% and dropout rate of 48%.	SE int. p 4
18. Self contained special education teachers need more curricular resources and more guidance regarding curricular and NYSED standards.	SE int. p 7