

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

**Mount Vernon City School District
Final Report**

August 2008

**Submitted to
Mount Vernon City School District**

**Submitted by
Learning Point Associates**



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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 Mount Vernon City School District conducted 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 consent 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) and English Language Learners (ELLs). 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 provides an outline of the process, data, and methods used as well as the key findings from the data collection. Finally, 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 Background

Overview

Geographic Background

Mount Vernon City School District serves the entire city of Mount Vernon and consists of 16 schools: 1 prekindergarten program, 11 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 high schools.

Student Population

Data¹ from 2006 indicate that Mount Vernon City School District served a total of 9,835 students, with 320 prekindergarten students and 38 ungraded students. Of those students enrolled, 7 percent were white, 12 percent were Hispanic or Latino, 76 percent were African American or black, 3 percent were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 2 percent were Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander.

Demographics

Data from the 2003–04, 2004–05, and 2005–06 school years indicate that nearly half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (41 percent, 47 percent, and 46 percent, respectively). The percentage of limited-English-proficient students was 9 percent in 2004–05 and 11 percent for both the 2003–04 and the 2005–06 school years.

Student Academic Performance

As of 2006–07, Mount Vernon City School District has been designated as a *district in need of improvement—Year 3*. The state accountability status has been designated as “in good standing” for all 11 elementary schools. One high school is in the first year of “improvement” and one middle school is in its second “improvement” year; in addition, one middle school and one high school have been placed in “corrective action.”

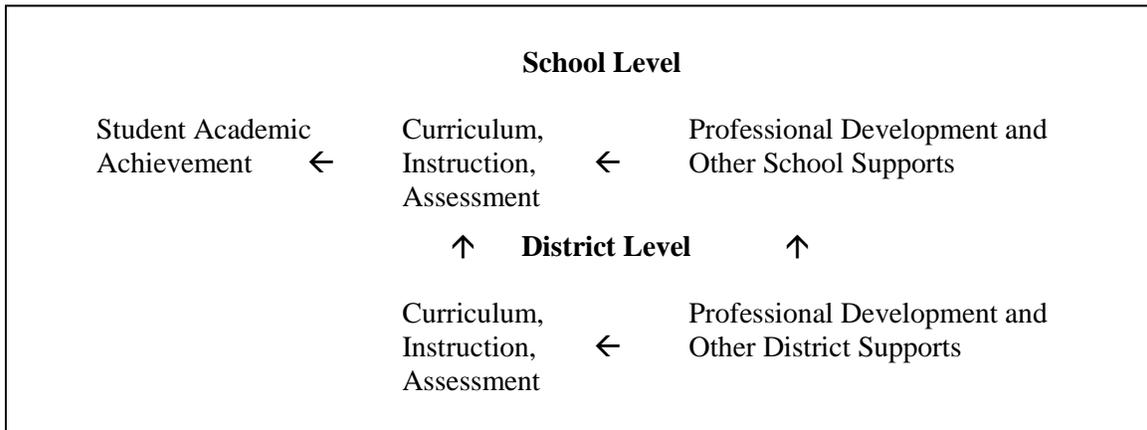
¹ The district data came from the *New York State District Report Card Accountability and Overview Report 2005–06* for Mount Vernon City School District, retrieved July 8, 2008, from <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2006/AOR-2006-660900010000.pdf>

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 the district levels. Therefore, the audit gathered information 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 districts' corrective-action status. Broadly categorized, information sources included NCLB accountability status, the *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum*, observations of instruction, interviews of school and district personnel, review of key district documents, alignment of the district's written ELA curriculum, and reviews of the Special Education and ELL programs.

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 school and one high school.

NCLB Accountability Status

Learning Point Associates compiled NCLB accountability data for the most recent three years available. These data provided 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 *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* (SEC). Based on two decades of research funded by the National Science Foundation, the SEC are designed to facilitate the comparison of the 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 between four and 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 to specifically address the guiding questions of the audit 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 had 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/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 ELA Core Curriculum (NYSED, 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 Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) and NYSED (2005), 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 [CTT], Special Education Teacher Support Services [SETSS], 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.

English Language Learner Review

The purpose of the ELL review was to provide a districtwide synthesis of data from multiple perspectives on the district's curriculum, instruction, assessment and student supports as they

impact ELLs. Data collection activities that informed the ELL review included the following: district or regional staff interviews; principal and teacher interviews (including both ELL program teachers and monolingual general education teachers who serve ELLs); classroom observations; focus groups with parents of ELLs and members of community-based organizations serving ELLs; and a review of formal district documents to provide insight into the policies, plans, and procedures that the district has developed to ensure services to ELLs, as identified under the six guiding questions developed for the audit.

Table 1 lists the key data sources and how they were used to review the district during the co-interpretation process.

Table 1. Alignment of Data Sources With Guiding Questions

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

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 had 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 prioritization of these key findings. 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 here.

Interpretation of the Data

The co-interpretation process began with the study of the individual data reports (e.g., Document Review Report, Curriculum Alignment Report, Interview Report, SEC Report, Observation Report, Special Education Report, and ELL Report), in a small-group setting. Individual groups were asked to select the findings from their data report(s) that they believed were most significant and then to categorize those findings according to one of the six topic areas addressed by the guiding questions: curriculum, instruction, academic intervention services, professional development, data use, and staffing.

Identification of Key Findings

Participants were then broken into topic-area 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. As the investigative groups presented their 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 criteria:

- Is the identified key finding 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, would 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.

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 or Consolidated Application.

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 August 30, 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. During 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 participants during the co-interpretation meeting, and they are included below in priority order. The supporting findings, which can be mapped back to the original data sets, are included in the data map in Appendix B.

During the co-interpretation process, participants identified findings from multiple reports. Learning Point Associates staff members facilitated small groups in which, participants (i.e., district administrators, teachers, community members, and district personnel) identified findings that were supported by data presented in multiple reports. Within these groups, both positive findings and findings pertaining to areas for improvement were identified and presented to the larger group of co-interpretation participants. Participants merged identical or similar findings that were identified in the various small groups. Using a systematic voting process, participants prioritized findings. This process primarily was based on their view of the level of importance of the finding and whether, if acted upon, it would improve district outcomes related to instruction and learning. The positive findings also were prioritized using this voting process.

Key findings are listed below. In addition, all supporting data for each key finding is presented within its related section. The key findings related to areas for improvement are outlined first, followed by positive key findings that identify strengths of the district. These positive findings may be applied toward addressing the areas in need of improvement.

Key Finding 1

Data indicate that there are instructional barriers due to a lack of resources in the following areas:

- **Literacy coaches**
- **ELA curriculum materials**
- **Technology**
- **Flexible pacing schedule**
- **Instructional guidelines**
- **Guidance on differentiated instruction**
- **Policy for the consistent delivery and monitoring of instruction**
- **Funds and resources**
 - **Professional development**
 - **New-teacher support**
 - **Interventions and instructional enhancements**

This complex key finding indicates that the lack of resources and supports in several important areas have impeded effective instruction. The finding mentions instructional guidelines, resources (materials and interventions), professional development and instructional support for teachers (such as literacy coaches), and support for new teachers. The finding is supported by evidence from the following reports: Interview Report, Document Review Report, ELL Report, Special Education Report, and Curriculum Alignment Report.

Instructional Guidelines. District-level instructional guidelines earned mixed reviews, according to the Interview Report and the Curriculum Alignment Report. The district recently developed new theme-based curriculum frameworks focusing on the elementary grades. The frameworks serve as pacing guides. As the Interview Report notes, teachers (particularly elementary teachers) have expressed concern that the pacing guides move too quickly for some students and that teachers are “plowing on like a steam roller” to meet calendar requirements even though they believe their children are not learning. The Curriculum Alignment Report noted that instructional guidance is not addressing several key instructional areas, with omissions including the articulation of instructional strategies, differentiation of instruction, and articulation of student learning expectations for reading and writing in elementary grades.

Resources. Instructional materials were perceived as moderately adequate in all but one of the sample schools and as inadequate in one of the secondary schools, according to the Interview Report. Although new district administrators have focused mainly on providing new materials to the elementary schools, a number of secondary school teachers said they do not have enough books for their students and must make do as best they can. Observations conducted for the ELL Report noted a shortage of basic supplies such as maps, dictionaries, and pencil sharpeners at the secondary level.

Instructional barriers related to the provision of intervention services also were mentioned as a problem. The Interview Report notes that district administrators were concerned about interventions being inconsistent across schools and inadequate particularly at the secondary level. Because this finding is related to Key Finding 2, it will be discussed in more detail at that point.

Professional Development and Instructional Support for Teachers. The Interview Report notes that teachers are provided with instructional support by in-school personnel and less frequent support by appropriate district administrators. In-school support is limited, according to the Interview Report, primarily because it is provided by personnel with other responsibilities, such as lead teachers, principals, assistant principals, and reading specialists. In the Interview Report, a district administrator was cited as saying that the instructional improvements planned by the district “require every school to have at least one ELA coach and ideally on the high school level, I’d say at least two or three ELA coaches.”

The Interview Report also refers to the limited opportunities for teacher professional development. In most schools, professional development received mixed reviews from teachers. Although several teachers noted they attended a good workshop, teachers also reported that professional development topics were not relevant to their needs. “I don’t think we get good staff

development in this district,” said one respondent. According to the Interview Report, some district administrators said the district provided good and influential teacher professional development. Other respondents, however, expressed concerns that professional development did not meet teacher needs, that teachers believed their input was not sought, and that professional development was imposed on them.

The Interview Report notes several topics in which teachers would like additional professional development, including data-driven instruction, data use, differentiated instruction, instructing students with special needs, balanced literacy, small-group instruction, writing, portfolio use, the facilitation method of teaching instead of direct instruction, and research-based best practices.

Support for New Teachers. Although the district has a mentor program for new teachers, the Interview Report notes that new teachers need more support. New-teacher support was described as “minimal,” lacking adequate preservice training and orientation as well as ongoing inservice training. A problem described in the Interview Report is that new teachers frequently are hired after the school year begins. According to district respondents, the late timing of their hire prevents newly licensed teachers from attending orientation sessions offered by the district before school starts. Respondents said steps are being taken to address and reverse what has become a customary practice of hiring new teachers after the school year begins.

Key Finding 2

There are no comprehensive, coordinated Academic Intervention Services (AIS) at all levels. Available AIS are insufficient, inconsistent, and ineffective. In addition, some AIS models interfere with class time.

This key finding is based on evidence from four data sources—Interview Report, Document Review Report, ELL Report, and Special Education Report—and responds to the guiding question 3 of the audit: “What academic interventions are available for students who need additional academic support?” Participants identified 19 findings from these reports, revealing that the district lacks comprehensive, coordinated AIS for struggling students, ELLs, and SWDs.

Intervention Services for Struggling Students. According to both the Interview Report and the Special Education Report, teachers reported that there are no comprehensive, coordinated, consistent intervention services across all grade levels. Among all schools, the perceived effectiveness of the AIS range from low to high for nonproficient students. District respondents indicated that AIS are not adequately meeting the needs of students. There was limited documentation within the Document Review Report regarding how data were used to inform decisions about the progress of intervention services.

Barriers related to AIS vary by school level. In elementary schools, interventions were described as ineffective because students spend so much time out of the classroom, as evidenced within the Interview Report. Most elementary classrooms have “pull-out” sessions for struggling students. According to the Interview Report, the students miss a large amount of regular classroom instruction time when they are pulled out for support services. There is no evidence of the effectiveness of “push-in” sessions.

For middle school students who struggle with reading and literacy skills, the barrier to effective intervention services is somewhat different. A number of afterschool intervention services are available, but they mainly target test preparation and/or credit recovery rather than improving general academic skills.

At the secondary level, there are few opportunities for struggling students to receive additional support. One major barrier is the limited time available to work with students. At the secondary level, class periods are much shorter than at the elementary level. Therefore, it often is difficult to provide students with the appropriate level of support during regular class time. Support services provided after school and on Saturdays are limited. Interviewed respondents said that few students take advantage of the afterschool programs because attendance is optional.

Support for ELLs. There is a discrepancy related to services provided for struggling ELLs. According to the document review within the ELL Report, there is substantial evidence of plans and policies as well as implementation of academic interventions for ELLs *outside* the regular school day. Yet no evidence of intervention supports *during* the school day was available within this document review. Documents also show that support offered for low-performing ELL students consisted of state-mandated ELL instruction time.

Based on interviews with ELL teachers, the ELL Report indicates that a variety of academic support services (i.e., Saturday academy, homework help, tutoring and summer school) are available for struggling ELLs. However, general education teachers and building administrators have limited awareness of intervention services for ELLs other than what is offered during the school regular school day.

Support for SWDs. SWDs are limited in the supplemental intervention services they can receive. Those SWDs who have IEPs are not eligible to utilize the reading specialist in their school. According to the Special Education Report, reading specialists work with individual students (in push-in and pull-out sessions) but generally do not work with any SWDs.

Key Finding 3

There is confusion throughout the district at all levels regarding expectations and roles of building-level administrators, Special Education supervisors, and reading specialists. In addition, school administrators may need additional resources, training, and instructional strategies to become strong instructional leaders.

This key finding outlines critical issues pertaining to instructional leadership within schools. Participants developed this key finding based on evidence from the Interview Report, the Document Review Report, and the Special Education Report. This key finding addresses guiding question 6: “What staffing practices and profiles are utilized to effectively support teaching and learning across the district?”

The three data sources show that there are no clearly defined expectations for instructional leadership roles across all levels. The Special Education Report documents that Special

Education teachers are confused about to whom they should go for instructional programming issues—the principal or the Special Education supervisor. Confusion about leadership roles also is evident for general education teachers. As described in the Interview Report, general education teachers identify reading specialists as the instructional leaders within their schools. However, the reading specialists have other responsibilities that limit the amount of time and energy that can be devoted to coaching teachers and providing instructional leadership.

According to district administrators, the capacity for principals and assistant principals to be instructional leaders must be developed. The Document Review Report provided evidence of a limited amount of principal professional development related to supporting the delivery of the ELA curriculum. The Interview Report confirmed that principals have participated in these monthly professional development sessions with some resistance. There was no evidence within the Document Review Report of a process or protocol used for performance assessment of principals.

Key Finding 4

General education and ELL teachers cite the need for more support staff (resource teachers, reading specialists, and school social workers) at both the elementary and secondary levels.

This key finding addresses guiding question 6: “What staffing practices and profiles are utilized to effectively support teaching and learning across the district?” Although evidence of this key finding originated in one data source (the Interview Report), the participants found it compelling enough to stand alone.

Administrators expressed concern related to a lack of resources for students. The resources that frequently were referred to as deficient were English as a Second Language (ESL) personnel and professional development. The administrator comments were consistent with those of both general education and ESL teachers. According to the Interview Report, respondents indicated that more support staff are needed at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Some ELL teachers articulated the importance of having additional bilingual staff members available to students and their families. School psychologist and social workers specifically were mentioned. A few teachers noted that they spend a great deal of their time serving informally in these roles; however, they expressed the desire to have support staff who are trained to formally address the socioemotional needs of students and their families.

Administrators also expressed a need for professional development related to the use of intervention kits for general education and ELL teachers. In some instances, teachers have received intervention material to use in the classroom; however, the data indicated that administrators believe that more training is needed on how to integrate the materials and intervention kits.

Key Finding 5

Teachers would like more of the following professional development opportunities with their colleagues:

- **Opportunities to observe new practices**
- **Hands-on demonstrations**
- **Instruction from a coach, leader, or mentor**
- **Instructional strategies for SWDs and ELLs**
- **Data use to monitor instruction and student performance**

This key finding addresses the guiding question 4: “What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and learning are provided to teachers?” Participants identified several findings across four reports (Special Education Report, Interview Report, ELL Report, and SEC Report) that highlighted the absence of plans for monitoring and implementing an ELA curriculum. These reports suggest that there is a need for professional development on different topics and through different approaches.

Professional Development Approaches. More diverse professional development is needed in the district, according to a number of the reports. Professional learning through a mentor or coach is one approach that might be enhanced. The SEC Report shows that teachers throughout all grade levels rarely received professional development from a coach or mentor. One administrator reported, “I’d like to see a layered type of training that is ongoing development with a coach or specialist.”

The Interview Report provides evidence that teachers also would like professional development conducted in formats in which they can observe instruction and interact with other teachers. Teachers also indicated that they prefer demonstrations and hands-on learning in their training sessions.

Professional Development Topics. Participants identified a need for professional development on how to instruct SWDs and ELLs. As indicated by data found in the ELL Report and Special Education Report, general education teachers do not receive formal training that addresses specific learning needs for ELLs and SWDs. In addition, some teachers in self-contained classrooms reported the need for more curriculum guidance that focuses on expectations and content.

Participants also identified evidence that training on using assessment data would be beneficial to teachers. According to the Special Education Report, few teachers reported having participated in training on how to use data for instructional purposes. The Special Education Report also notes that teachers across all levels are not using data to monitor student performance or guide instruction—in part due to the lack of training. The Interview Report indicates that school-level respondents would like to receive professional development on data use, data-driven instruction, differentiated instruction, balanced literacy, small-group instruction, writing, and research-based best practices.

Additional Key Findings

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

6. The district recently has filled many key district administrative positions due to leadership turnover. Teachers and staff are guarded and cautious about the new organizational direction.
7. The coteaching model faces many implementation barriers for teachers in self-contained and high school settings: a shortage of qualified special education teachers; limited time with general education teachers; lack of information about students; unassigned case management lists; frequently changing classes, teachers, and content areas; lack of instructional materials; lack of appropriate assistive technology; lack of curriculum and implementation support; and classroom space and size constraints.
8. Professional development does not align with teachers' goals or needs. Respondents have mixed opinions regarding the impact of professional development on instruction.
9. Districtwide plans and policies for implementation and monitoring of data are not fully in place.
10. Teachers at all levels indicated that insufficient instructional time is spent on the following compared to the New York state standards: writing processes, vocabulary, comprehension, listening and viewing, speaking and presenting, and critical reasoning
11. General education teachers are not aware of procedures or services for ELLs who are classified or might be classified as SWDs. ESL teachers are frustrated with the process because they cannot get students classified.
12. Direct instruction was the most prevalent strategy observed in all grade levels across the district. Differentiated instruction was rarely observed
13. Assessment tools and uses of data vary between buildings, levels, and programs.
14. Evidence shows an inconsistency in home-school communication.
15. Key documents offered no evidence of implementation or monitoring of professional development aimed at the literacy development of ELLs and SWDs.

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 as follows:

Positive Key Finding 1

Elementary and secondary ELL and general education teachers employ a variety of instructional strategies to effectively address the language, cultural, and academic needs of ELLs.

Participants developed this positive key finding to show the use of various instructional strategies with ELLs. This positive key finding is supported by interview and observation data within the ELL Report, and it addresses the guiding question 3: “What academic interventions are available for students who need additional academic support?”

Elementary and secondary teachers said they employ a variety of modifications to effectively address the academic needs of ELLs. The ELL Report highlighted the following teacher comment, which illustrates that teachers target instructional strategies to the needs of students: “You’re not dealing with one body...one population. You really have to reach out individually to identify weaknesses in students’ ability.” The majority of general education teachers reported modifying the work that students were responsible for producing.

Secondary classrooms usually focus on cultural diversity by relating lessons to the lives and experiences of students. By doing so, teachers are able to build on the strengths of their students rather than the areas in need of improvement. The ELL Report described two classrooms in which little emphasis was placed on diversity and utilizing the background of students to support learning. However, these were considered exceptions, as most other classrooms reported using multimodal and active learning approaches.

According to the ELL Report, minimal differences in instruction for both the elementary and secondary levels were observed between general education and ELL classes. In classrooms across the district, ELLs consistently are held to the same standards as other students. In addition, most of the observed lessons demonstrated effective methods of classroom assessment. Timely and consistent feedback was provided to students related to their performance. As such, the ELLs were given multiple avenues for developing their skills and achieving the standards.

Positive Key Finding 2

The district provides a curriculum document through which teachers utilize frameworks to provide instruction to general education students, ELLs, and SWDs. The frameworks are aligned to the New York state learning standards, and teachers find them useful.

This key finding addresses guiding question 2: “To what extent is a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned curriculum guiding instruction across the district?” Participants identified evidence to support this positive key finding from four reports: the Interview Report, ELL Report, Special Education Report, and Curriculum Alignment Report.

According to the Interview Report, teachers use curriculum frameworks provided by the district. The frameworks are aligned to the New York state learning standards to guide instruction. The currently used curriculum frameworks are new to the district and are based the following criteria: state performance indicators, exit questions, instructional materials, pacing guide, and the district’s written expectation. Evidence of the use of standard curriculum frameworks also is provided within the ELL Report. Building administrators reported that ELA standards are incorporated into both ELL and general education lessons as a matter of standard practice. Data from the Curriculum Alignment Report show that teachers use various instructional and assessment strategies to teach ELA content.

As evidenced by the Special Education Report, these frameworks are utilized by teachers districtwide; teachers and administrators are in agreement that Special Education and ELL students have access to the general ELA curriculum. In the Interview Report, a teacher noted that the curriculum framework is a “big black binder” and is easy to follow. The frameworks include a pacing guide, quarterly themes, recommended novels, and short stories.

Positive Key Finding 3

General education, Special Education, and ELL teachers, teachers have participated in professional learning opportunities on the following topics:

- **Differentiated instruction**
- **Instructional strategies to teach ELA**
- **Common professional development for Special Education and general education teachers**
- **Collaboration and communication between ELL and general education teachers**
- **Grade-level meetings to collaborate on instruction**

This positive key finding addresses guiding question 4: “What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and learning are provided to teachers?” Participants identified supporting evidence from three reports: the Interview Report, ELL Report, and Special Education Report.

Collaboration and communication among teachers is one opportunity for professional learning identified within the reports. As outlined in the Interview Report, most teachers indicated that they regularly meet with other teachers during grade-level meetings and common preparation periods to collaborate on instruction. Most ESL teachers indicated that they maintain regular communication with general education teachers. However, fewer general education teachers agreed with this statement.

Formal professional development opportunities also are available to teachers. Teachers annually are required to attend a four-day district-sponsored professional development session. According to data from the Special Education Report, elementary and secondary teachers reported participating in various professional development sessions, including differentiated instruction and instructional strategies for teaching the ELA curriculum. In addition, Special Education teachers noted that they were able to attend professional development trainings with general education teachers.

Teachers would like the district to offer additional professional development on the following topics: data-driven instruction, balanced literacy, small-group instruction, writing, portfolio use, and research-based best practices.

Positive Key Finding 4

The district’s emphasis on the cognitive demand areas of *apply, understand, and create* across the four knowledge levels (*factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive*) in Grades 6, 8, and 10 is moderately aligned to New York state performance indicators at the same grade levels.

This positive key finding is supported by evidence from the Curriculum Alignment Report. It addresses guiding question 1: “To what extent is a comprehensive, clearly articulated and aligned curriculum guiding instruction across the district?”

An analysis of Mount Vernon City School District’s student learning indicators and NYSED’s ELA performance indicators in Grades 6, 8, and 10 using the revised taxonomy revealed moderate alignment between district and state indicators in several areas. For example, district students in these grades are expected to “create procedural knowledge,” “understand conceptual knowledge,” and “apply procedural knowledge” in comparison to the analysis of NYSED’s ELA performance indicators for these grades. The Curriculum Alignment Report also showed that students in Grades 6 and 8 were required to engage in tasks involving metacognitive knowledge in four of the six cognitive demand areas, in similar proportions to that indicated by an analysis of NYSED ELA performance indicators. As indicated by the Curriculum Alignment Report, student expectations for Grades 8 and 10 were stated clearly and succinctly in terms of what students will learn (i.e., knowledge level) and how they will learn it (i.e., cognitive demand). Collectively, these findings suggest that Mount Vernon City School District students in Grades 6, 8, and 10 are meeting or exceeding several NYSED ELA performance indicators in terms of cognitive demand (i.e., varying types of thinking skills required) and knowledge level (i.e., varying types of information). These students are being expected to use a variety of thinking skills to address different types of knowledge.

Positive Key Finding 5

Teachers and administrators indicated that differentiated instruction and curriculum modifications are implemented in ELL and SWD programs. Elementary general education teachers and a minority of secondary teachers differentiate instruction and modify curriculum.

This positive key finding is supported by evidence from the Interview Report, ELL Report and Special Education Report. It addresses guiding question 2: “How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?” Many teachers reported using curriculum modifications and/or differentiated instruction for their students; this approach is particularly used for the ELLs and SWDs.

Instruction of ELLs. According to the Interview Report, administrators indicated that the ELA curriculum was revised in 2007 to align with the requirements for Grades K–12, including the ELL program. As evidenced in the ELL Report, most administrators acknowledged that the curriculum does not meet the needs of ELLs who have minimal proficiency in English. At the same time, nearly all ELL and general education teachers reported modifying the curriculum to

better address the needs of their students. Teachers cited differentiation of instruction, utilization of visuals, repetition, vocabulary work, audio enhancements, translations and clarification of instruction, and common methods used to modify lessons. This situation is consistent with the classroom observation findings. According to the observation data within the ELL Report, teachers used differentiated instruction and grouping strategies to better address the varying needs of students.

Instruction of SWDs. District administrators reported that the same curriculum was used for both general education students and SWDs. However, as indicated in the Special Education Report, appropriate modifications were made for SWDs when needed. The Special Education Report data also document that SWDs participate in state testing with the benefit of accommodations.

Additional Positive Key Findings

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

6. Elementary and middle schools with coteaching models in place exhibit effective coteaching, and Special Education teachers provide instruction in the classrooms.
7. There is evidence of a variety of professional development opportunities, including workshops and training specific to content in ELL and sheltered instruction.
8. Instructional monitoring is occurring at the school level.

Miscellaneous Findings

Some findings from the data sets were identified by co-interpretation participants but not included in the development of the key findings. These miscellaneous findings are outlined in more detail in the data map (see Appendix B).

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 meeting with Mount Vernon City School District led Learning Point Associates to make three recommendations. These recommendations address the majority of issues raised in the top tier of key findings as prioritized during the co-interpretation process. Specifically, issues regarding supporting effective instruction, providing appropriate academic intervention services, and developing strong professional development are addressed in detail.

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 believed to be the most critical for the district. Furthermore, the order of listing does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided about specific actions that the district may 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: Instruction

Create and implement a Grade K–12 ELA instruction plan to include the following:

- **Written and taught curriculum aligned to state ELA standards in both cognitive demand and knowledge levels**
- **ELA professional development aligned to the written and taught ELA curriculum**

Link to Findings

Reports prepared by Learning Point Associates for the ELA curriculum audit (i.e., Document Review Report, Curriculum Alignment Report, Observation Report, Interview Report, and SEC Report) reveal that Mount Vernon City School District possesses a written ELA curriculum comprising many essential components, but there appear to be several inconsistencies and challenges regarding ELA instruction. During the district co-interpretation session, participants focused on the following matters related to the recommendations presented in this report.

The Document Review Report divulges substantial evidence that the ELA curriculum is being implemented; however, interview and observation data suggest that most teachers are provided with inconsistent guidance necessary to successfully and consistently connect the written and taught curriculum. As a whole, teachers do not fully understand what to teach (i.e., knowing what are the actual or expected content and skills embodied in the stated essential questions and learning objectives; determining what is high-priority versus low-priority content and skills); how to pace their instruction (i.e., knowing how much time to plan and spend on each topic,

subtopic, unit, and lesson) to ensure the expected curriculum is covered; and how to effectively differentiate and deliver instruction (i.e., meeting students' unique instructional needs) so that all students learn effectively. General education teachers were especially wary about how to design and deliver targeted instruction. Furthermore, elementary and secondary classrooms and teachers reported a lack of adequate quantity, quality, and diversity of literacy resources (e.g., visual aids, dictionaries, trade books) to accommodate their students' diverse literacy needs and interests. Many interviewees reported a need for sustained professional development in effective teaching methods and day-to-day assistance provided by teacher colleagues, literacy coaches, instructional leaders and administrators because current funding, policies, and practices are perceived as inefficient and inadequate.

In summary, co-interpretation participants concluded from reports and deliberations that Mount Vernon City School District has a strong written ELA curriculum, but there are several concerns regarding its successful implementation and monitoring (e.g., a lack of clear, consistent guidance on how to link the written and taught curriculum, and inadequate quality and quantity of ELA teaching resources).

Link to Research

Alignment of the Written and Taught Curriculum. The presence of and adherence to a high-quality, comprehensive, and clearly articulated curriculum has a high impact on student achievement (Marzano, 2003). Clear links between what students should learn (i.e., written curriculum) and what teachers should teach (i.e., taught curriculum) should be established (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2005; Glatthorn, Carr, & Harris, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), including reading instruction (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002). According to English (2008), when district student expectations are aligned to external standards and, in turn, are aligned to instructional processes, “deep alignment” is attained. Deep alignment signifies that external standards, district standards, and instruction are interrelated, suggesting that the instruction received by students will closely reflect the district and external learning expectations. Teachers who use curriculum maps of the written curriculum that also include guidance for instruction of this curriculum may make their instruction more explicit and enhance learning for their students, particularly those with learning disabilities (Langa & Yost, 2007; Lenz, Adams, Bulgren, Pouliot, & Laroux, 2007).

Aligning the written and taught ELA curriculum involves more than matching district and state student learning objectives or performance indicators. Other considerations to improve instructional effectiveness include the following:

- **Providing Teachers With Adequate Quantity, Quality, and Variety of ELA Instructional Resources, Best-Practice Models, and Modeling of Effective ELA Instruction.** Recent requirements for schools and districts to use proven, research-based methods and materials for reading instruction have caused many school systems and teachers to scramble in search of such resources, despite overwhelming evidence indicating that there is no single instructional approach or program that will miraculously teach all children to read (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Guthrie, Gambrell, Morrow, & Pressley, 2007). Some methods and programs have been studied and deemed effective based on evidence of student achievement (Guthrie et al., 2007); however, this research

and other research indicates that the most effective teachers of literacy recognize that methods and materials must be tailored to students' unique and ever-changing needs and interests (Allington, 2006; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hall, 2002; Kamil, 2003; Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002). When instruction is planned and delivered with these factors in mind, all students can be successful literacy learners (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). With respect to reading, teachers who engage their students in using an abundant supply of quality and diverse literature have been found to improve student achievement (Topping, Samuels, & Paul, 2007). Related research findings include the following:

- Taylor, Peterson, et al. (2002) found the following practices to be highly effective at the elementary level: small-group instruction and word-skill work at kindergarten, active responding in first grade, and higher level questioning in Grades 4–6. They noted that one of the most significant findings across elementary grade levels in their studies was that less effective teachers spent more time telling students information while highly effective teachers engaged students in more interactive and engaging forms of learning such as discussions and guiding or scaffolding. Other studies and sources (e.g., Allington, 1994, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2007) embrace these findings and emphasize the need for elementary teachers of literacy to use a variety of methods and materials based on students' needs and interests.
- Guthrie et al. (2007) advocate a comprehensive literacy approach to provide all students with effective instruction, which embodies and is guided by a balanced approach including a diverse array of content, skills, and approaches, as well as evidence of effectiveness in increasing student learning and achievement. In addition, effective instruction builds on students' prior knowledge and embraces the belief and practice that reading and writing are interrelated practices. Comprehension, meaning making, and critical thinking are the ultimate goals of literacy instruction and practice. It is important to engage students in authentic opportunities to apply the literacy skills and knowledge they learn and to provide differentiated instruction that builds on students' strengths.
- Adolescent students are required to develop rigorous academic literacy in which they comprehend and use a variety of texts from multiple content areas and for many purposes; they need to assume a critical stance when reading in order to thoughtfully analyze, evaluate, and respond (Alvermann, 2002; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Kamil, 2003; Koelsch, 2006; Langer, 2001; Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman, 2007; Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, & Decker et al., 2007). These researchers make the following recommendations for teachers: improving teacher awareness that students' self-perceptions of their abilities greatly affect their success; helping students develop specific reading and comprehension skills and strategies for specific texts, content areas, and purposes; assisting with struggling readers and ELLs who need additional support to meet the same demands as their general education and native English-speaking peers; understanding that explicit instruction, teacher modeling, and supportive practice are necessary, but that a transmission model of literacy teaching alone does not result in improved student achievement; accepting that students must actively participate in the learning process;

and understanding that reading fluency, vocabulary, and critical literacy are essential components of literacy instruction and success.

- There is substantial evidence that children who struggle with reading in the primary grades due to reading or learning disabilities such as dyslexia or because they are ELLs, will continue to experience difficulties throughout their school years if not provided with appropriate and focused intervention (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Foorman, Francis, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1997; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006; Kamil, 2003; Scanlon & Vellutino, 1997; Scanlon, Vellutino, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2005; Scammacca et al., 2007; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, & Decker et al., 2007). Torgesen and his colleagues (2007b) found that struggling students need intensive instruction in such areas as vocabulary, comprehension, and critical reading strategies. Kamil (2003) has found some support for the positive effects of bilingual education on the academic success of ELLs, while Francis et al. (2006) call for more intensive instructional interventions that emphasize literacy areas such as vocabulary development and reading comprehension strategies.
- **Using Multiple Forms of Student Data to Inform Instructional Decisions.** Highly effective teachers regularly consult and use multiple sources of student achievement data (e.g., teacher observations, assignment rubrics, teacher-created quizzes and tests; district-created and mandated tests; state-created tests) to inform their instruction (Hayes & Robnolt, 2007; Mokhtari, Rosemary, & Edwards, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2005; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005; Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002). Some teachers are apprehensive about using these data. For example, Edwards, Turner, and Mokhtari (2008) discussed tensions between assessing student learning for accountability purposes and for learning purposes. They concluded that both forms of assessment are necessary and serve a purpose but are implemented and interpreted differently. Assessment for accountability tends to focus on student performance, whereas assessment for learning purposes tends to focus on student learning with implications for improved future instruction. When assessment results are used to determine student learning, instruction designed around students' needs and strengths (i.e., differentiated instruction) may be planned and implemented (Hall, 2002).
- **Developing and Implementing a Plan to Monitor ELA Instruction Effectiveness and Alignment to Written Curriculum.** Alvermann (2002), Cunningham and Allington (2007), Langer (2001, 2002, 2004), Marzano (2003), and Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor & Pearson, 2005; Taylor, Pearson, et al., 2005; Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002) present compelling research evidence and explanations delineating effective literacy teaching practices, policies, and professional development for elementary- and secondary-level students. When instruction is thoughtfully and clearly aligned to written curriculum and external standards (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; English, 2008) and serious attention is given not only to what is taught but also to how teachers teach (Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002), students are more likely to receive effective instruction that teaches them what they need to learn.
 - The International Reading Association (2004a, 2004b, 2007), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2001, 2002, 2003), and the National Staff Development Council (2001) have developed standards and guidelines for teaching

professionals and literacy educators across a variety of topics related to instructional practices and effectiveness. The International Reading Association (2004b) has created a rating system of expected competency depending on a teacher's classification (e.g., teacher's aide, classroom teacher, reading teacher). Other practitioners and researchers have developed checklists as well as reflective tools and accounts for assessing instructional effectiveness (Doherty, Hilberg, Epaloose, & Tharp, 2002; Galus, 2001/2002; Help Teachers, 2006).

Alignment of ELA Professional Development to the Written and Taught ELA Curriculum.

Professional development often is a key component of successful school reform (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2002). Unfortunately, most professional development provided to teachers is based on outdated models and beliefs, is largely ineffective, and is particularly inadequate for new teachers, who often leave the profession out of frustration within five years (Fullan, 2007; Smylie, Bay & Tozer, 1999; The Teaching Commission, 2004, 2006). Generally speaking, one-time workshops, especially those on topics not specifically related to a curricular or instructional issue, do not provide the focused, sustained, and collaborative assistance that teachers need to have a meaningful impact on their teaching or students' learning (Fullan, 2007). Although Fullan (2007) acknowledges the importance of formal workshops and presentations, he asserts that these experiences, at best, contribute about 30 percent of what is needed to bring about positive change in teacher and student performance in schools; the remaining 70 percent is determined by teachers' daily learning and the day-to-day practical changes and improvements they make. The vital question for the district to address is how professional development should be defined and implemented in a school to ensure that it contributes to improved instruction and learning.

Many schools and school districts that have provided targeted ELA professional development have witnessed improved student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999; Pearson, Taylor, & Tam, 2005; Rogers et al., 2006; Taylor, Pearson, et al., 2005). Historically, professional development for teachers has focused on either generalized best practices (i.e., practices that were thought to be applicable to all subject areas) or discipline-specific strategies (i.e., best practices for specific, individual subject areas). There is substantial evidence favoring discipline specific or pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman & Quinlan, as cited in Shulman & Sherin, 2004). Therefore, professional development should be discipline-specific, designed to assist teachers in refining their knowledge and teaching of this subject area. Research embraces this perspective regarding effective ELA professional development (Pearson et al., 2005; Taylor, Frye, Peterson, & Pearson, 2003; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003; Taylor, Pearson, et al., 2005; Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002;). Teachers who receive professional development in evidence-based literacy instruction methods demonstrate more effective teaching practices and implementation of the ELA curriculum, which often results in measurable improvement in student achievement (Center on Instruction, 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Professional standards for teachers provide further evidence of the importance of teachers of literacy participating in discipline-specific professional development. For example, standards presented in documents published by the International Reading Association (2004b, 2007) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2001, 2002, 2003) not only describe the

characteristics of effective teachers of literacy but also emphasize the importance of participating in sustained, targeted ELA professional learning opportunities to improve literacy teaching effectiveness and students' literacy achievement.

Use of Literacy Coaches. Many school systems provide experienced, knowledgeable literacy coaches to help teachers through daily support and resources in the classroom as well as to design and deliver sustained professional development opportunities. Mount Vernon City School District has literacy coaches in place. Reading or literacy teachers traditionally and often informally have been viewed and relied upon by school districts and teacher colleagues as instructional leaders and mentors in literacy as well as teachers providing direct instruction and support to students needing extra help (International Reading Association, 2004a, 2004b, 2007). In addition to the work of the International Reading Association, many other researchers have sought to define specific roles, qualifications, responsibilities, and challenges of the literacy coach as distinguished from a reading or literacy specialist or teacher (Bean, 2004a, 2004b; Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; Dole, 2004; Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003; McKenna & Walpole, 2008; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Sturtevant, 2003; Vogt & Shearer, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

In its description of literacy coach qualifications, the International Reading Association (2004a) suggests that, at a minimum, literacy coaches should have the following qualifications:

- Adequate teaching experience at the grade levels for which they will serve as coaches, preferably with a demonstrated record of promoting student achievement.
- Rich and diverse knowledge of literacy methods and materials, as well as an in-depth knowledge of literacy acquisition and development of students; this knowledge ideally will come from multiple sources such as professional development, graduate-level coursework in literacy, and/or certification as a literacy specialist.
- Experience mentoring teachers and/or serving in leadership roles with other teachers, where instructional improvement was the focus of the interaction.
- Successful and rich experiences as presenters at the district, local, state, and/or national level at professional meetings, trainings, conferences, and college courses.
- Experience and disposition to effectively observe colleagues' classroom practices, develop rapport with these colleagues, and provide candid, informed, and appropriate feedback and support to other teachers.

Therefore, a literacy coach's job involves more than a successful track record of effectively teaching students, although this experience is important. A coach must be a successful mentor and support person who works effectively to assist peers in providing excellent literacy instruction to and support for students. Although many literacy educators may hold a title such as "literacy coach," serve as a mentor to fellow teachers, and honestly believe they are successfully doing their jobs, they may not necessarily have the impact that is needed. This sentiment was expressed by the International Reading Association's director of research in her summary of the International Reading Association's 2005 survey of literacy coaches (Roller, 2006):

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that coaches overwhelmingly reported feeling prepared to conduct the activities required for their positions. And this was despite the

fact that they were required to have only a BA and teaching certificate for the position. However, they also report being required to participate in district and state level professional development to improve coaching skills. This may signal a change in professional training since few of the respondents reported being required to complete an MA in reading/literacy or even to complete substantial graduate hours in reading/literacy. It may also suggest that coaches are receiving specific training in the teaching activities required for particular programs and hence feel prepared to coach those activities. One concern this raises is that while coaches are prepared to coach specific activities, they may not have the depth of knowledge about reading and reading acquisition necessary for fine-tuning programs to meet the needs of specific children. Their confidence in their preparation may in fact mean that not all children are receiving appropriate instruction and that some may be left behind because no particular program can adequately meet the needs of all children. (p. 4)

Beyond the basic qualifications and roles for literacy coaches as listed in standards guidelines and job qualification documents, functioning and performing as an effective literacy coach involves complex knowledge as well as the ability to juggle people, methods, contexts, and content because a work day involves interacting with many adults and students in classrooms with different teaching and learning philosophies, materials, and methods (Rainville & Jones, 2008). Therefore, when selecting individuals to serve in this critical capacity, teachers and school districts alike are cautioned to thoughtfully examine and consider the many challenges inherent to being an experienced, knowledgeable, and effective literacy coach.

Implementation Considerations

Learning Point Associates makes the following recommendations for Mount Vernon City School District:

- **Align the written and taught curriculum.** Mount Vernon City School District’s written ELA curriculum should present a blueprint of what teachers should teach and students should learn at each grade level across the district. The instruction provided by teachers represents the taught curriculum—which, ideally, should implement and operationalize the goals and expectations expressed in the written curriculum in terms of cognitive demand (i.e., the cognitive processes students are expected to use) and knowledge level (i.e., the types of knowledge, such as factual and procedural). To examine if and to what extent existing ELA lessons and instruction align to the written ELA curriculum, Mount Vernon City School District should conduct an alignment study using a tool like the revised taxonomy table devised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The district also could use this taxonomy table to develop new lessons to ensure alignment between the written and taught curricula.
- **Provide teaching staff with adequate quantity and variety of ELA instructional resources.** To meet students’ diverse literacy needs and interests, all teachers must be provided with a sufficient quantity of high-quality instructional resources, including the following:
 - Student reading materials from multiple genres for independent and guided reading. The materials should cover a range of student achievement levels (i.e., at, above, and

- below grade level). Having multiple copies of materials is important, especially for guided reading and literature circle groups.
- Core reading program materials covering a range of student achievement levels (i.e., at, above, and below grade level).
 - Instructional resource guides based on written curriculum, including samples of materials and approaches that teachers may use to teach and meet the goals and objectives stated in this curriculum.
 - Computers for teacher and student use, including productivity software (i.e., word processing, drawing, spreadsheet) and Internet access. Other current technologies (e.g., interactive whiteboards, digital cameras/camcorders) should be provided as well to facilitate students' experiences with and knowledge of "new literacies" (e.g., how to locate and comprehend information on the Internet).
- **Provide teaching staff with models and modeling of differentiated instruction.** Mount Vernon City School District has ELA curriculum maps (specifically for Grades 8 and 10) that present many components of a comprehensive ELA curriculum. However, in their current form, these maps do not provide teachers with specific guidance on how to differentiate instruction for the identified content and skills to address students' diverse needs. Therefore, the district should consider the following suggestions to address this matter:
 - Gather representatives from all stakeholder groups to assist the district in prioritizing curricular content, skills, and essential questions as well as identifying best practice instructional models and methods that teachers may use to effectively teach all students. Teachers should be provided with numerous options for teaching the curriculum so that all students have equal access to the general curriculum.
 - Ensure that ELL and SWD educators are at the table and working with general education teachers to modify instructional approaches to meet the needs of all students.
 - Work to create explicit materials that can be modified by teachers and used in classrooms. Ensure that these materials include examples of modifications and student work products that align to student learning objectives or outcomes and performance indicators.
 - Articulate a definition of differentiated instruction and develop samples of differentiated lesson plans and materials that are linked to specific written ELA curriculum objectives and goals. These samples should provide teachers with concrete examples of ways to employ different methods and materials to accomplish the same learning objectives. In turn, teachers may use these samples to differentiate their other lessons.
 - **Instruct teachers to use various forms of student data to inform instructional decisions.** Most teachers know they are expected to use data to inform their instruction, but many are unsure exactly what this approach involves. Therefore, Mount Vernon City School District should establish clear guidelines identifying multiple data sources (including what these sources are and how they are accessed by

and provided to teachers) and explaining how they may be used to plan and modify instruction. Data sources should include standardized-, district-, commercially, and teacher-created checklists; reading inventories and benchmarks; quizzes and tests; teacher observations; checklists; rubrics; and samples of student-generated documents. Formative rather than summative assessments are most useful for guiding daily instructional decisions. The district should provide sustained professional development about making data-based instructional decisions as well as identify district- and school-based teachers and other key staff members to serve as data mentors.

- **Provide instructional monitoring.** The district should develop a plan and tools to monitor the implementation and sustained review and improvement of a viable, clearly articulated, comprehensive, and aligned ELA curriculum. The plan and tools should delineate and address the following questions:
 - **What will be monitored?** More specifically, to what extent are teachers providing ELA instruction that is aligned to the district’s written curriculum and the NYSED ELA Core Curriculum and that effectively meets students’ diverse learning needs and interests?
 - **Who will monitor?** The district should identify opportunities and guidelines for self- and peer-monitoring as well as monitoring by school administrators. The district also should clearly articulate roles and responsibilities for all parties, including how individuals and/or committees will collaborate and report to one another to ensure success.
 - **How, when, and why will monitoring occur?** The district should articulate a schedule that explains when responsible parties will carry out their specified curriculum development monitoring task(s) and how they will proceed. Also, the plan should identify how formative and summative monitoring results will be used to evaluate teacher effectiveness, improve future instruction, and impact student learning. The district should adopt a policy that explains why the comprehensive monitoring process it develops will be an important part of improving ELA teaching and learning in the district.
- **Provide professional development on effective ELA instructional practices.**
 - The district should plan continuous professional development based on the ELA curriculum, considering content (i.e., what students need to learn and teachers need to teach) and process (i.e., how teachers may provide more effective instruction and other learning opportunities to improve student understanding and achievement). Professional development should focus on a few key ELA topics most closely tied to improving ELA teaching and learning, namely those issues in this recommendation. The district should avoid simultaneously covering too many topics, which may frustrate and confuse an otherwise focused, well-trained, and enthusiastic staff.
 - Professional development may be led by out-of-district providers as long as they focus on the key ELA topics and contribute to improving ELA teaching and learning as discussed in this recommendation.
 - The district needs to create and implement a plan for monitoring professional development following similar guidelines for instructional monitoring. The

monitoring plan should articulate a schedule that identifies and explains the following:

- Who will monitor professional development activities.
- How and when professional development monitoring will take place, including documenting what is monitored and what actions will occur based on results.
- How and why monitoring professional development is linked to improving ELA teaching and learning.
- The district should develop and implement a plan to hire and deploy experienced, knowledgeable literacy coaches to support teaching effectiveness and to coordinate and deliver professional development opportunities for all ELA instructional staff. Mount Vernon City School District should create a written literacy coach job description informed by one or more of the sources presented in this report. Special attention should be given to differentiating the qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of the literacy coach from those of a reading or literacy specialist.

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Recommendation 2: Professional Development

Create and implement data-driven, high-quality professional development based on teacher and student needs. This professional development should be monitored for both implementation and impact at the district and school levels.

Link to Findings

Participants at the co-interpretation identified professional development as a need. The Special Education Report, Interview Report, ELL Report, and SEC Report also highlighted the need for professional development on different topics and through different approaches.

In addition, according to a number of reports, more diverse professional development is needed in the district. Professional learning through a mentor or coach is one approach that might be enhanced. The Interview Report indicates that teachers also would like professional development in formats in which they can observe instruction and interact with other teachers. Teachers indicated that they prefer demonstrations and hands-on learning in their training sessions. Participants at the co-interpretation identified a need for professional development on how to instruct SWDs and ELLs. As indicated by data found in the ELL Report and Special Education Report, general education teachers have not received formal training that addresses specific learning needs for ELLs and SWDs. Also, some teachers in self-contained settings reported the need for more curriculum guidance that focuses on expectations and content.

Participants reported that training on how to use assessment data would be beneficial to teachers. According to the Special Education Report, few teachers have participated in training on how to use data for instructional purposes. This report also notes that teachers across all levels are not using data to monitor student performance or guide instruction; this situation is due, in part, to a lack of training. The Interview Report indicates that school-level respondents would like to receive professional development on data use, data-driven instruction, differentiated instruction, balanced literacy, small-group instruction, writing, and research-based best practices.

Professional development is one of the most effective ways to increase student achievement through creating change in teacher behavior. In order for the district to achieve continued student success, professional development in the listed areas is crucial.

Link to Research

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). When designing professional development, the district is encouraged to review these and other resources. Such resources will assist the district in creating a definition of high-quality professional development and setting 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 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).

Connection to a Comprehensive Improvement 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 say that professional development has improved their teaching practice (Parsad et al., 2001; Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000). Districts and schools that follow this approach will target their professional development toward the highest priority needs and pursue activities with the greatest chance of improving student performance (Geiser & Berman, 2000). Furthermore, professional development that focuses on strategies for teaching traditionally disadvantaged groups of students such as ELLs and SWDs is most effective when it is aligned and coherent with district and school improvement efforts (Coady, Harmann, Harrington, Pacheco, Pho, & Yedlin, 2003).

Building a Successful Plan for Professional Development. For several years, the U.S. Department of Education sponsored the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development (see Garet et al., 1999; Hassel, 1999) to encourage and reward schools and districts that successfully implemented high-impact professional development. Common strategies undertaken by these schools and districts include the following:

- **Seek input from participating educators.** It is crucial to have school-level administrator and teacher participation in designing and executing the comprehensive improvement plan, ensuring that the prioritized needs from the district professional development plan are addressed; thus, key staff members should be engaged in creating it. The district professional development 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 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 during a long period of time. One study found that the simple duration of an activity predicts its success; when teachers reported that their activities extended over a longer period of time, they cited 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 new practices and to discuss with their colleagues any insights or concerns that develop, they are more likely to persevere in implementing 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).
 - **Include plans to support, monitor, evaluate, and adjust professional development.** 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).

- **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. Teachers in Mount Vernon City School District wish to learn about effective instructional strategies for low-performing students, including strategies shown to work with SWDs and ELLs
 - 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). Teachers in the district specifically requested opportunities to participate in hands-on professional development.
 - Involves participants who work in collaborative groups. Teachers in the district specifically requested working in groups with instructional coaches, leaders, and/or mentors.
 - Brings together educators who already are associated with one another in some manner (e.g., similar grades, subjects, vertical teams, issues, leadership roles).
 - Is customized 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.
 - Features a documented base 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 delivering professional development are conducive to improving instruction and developing and retaining high-quality teachers. Experts regard job-

embedded professional development as a strong approach to real-world learning. Research shows that initiatives such as professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), schoolwide study groups (Taylor, 2004), literacy coaching (Walpole & McKenna, 2004), lesson study (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998), and mentoring and induction (Boyer, 1999, as cited in Holloway, 2001) require similar elements for successful implementation.

A Focus on Meeting the Needs of SWDs and ELLs. Classroom teachers are the central figures in a child's education. They understand and have access to information about students' achievement in relation to standards, needed accommodations, and specific curricular implications for achievement and instruction (DeStefano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001). With increased numbers of SWDs and ELLs 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). Likewise, teachers and administrators cannot be expected to be fully engaged in the education of SWDs and ELLs if they do not believe they are individually and collectively responsible for these students. By providing training about SWDs and ELLs to all teachers and school leaders, districts benefit from cultivating a shared commitment to all students (August & Calderón, 2006; August & Hakuta, 1997; Reeves, 2006; Valdes, 2001).

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 between general education teachers and special education teachers in professional development is useful for helping all teachers increase their capacity to meet the needs of special populations. Unfortunately, the traditional separation of both diverse students and classroom teachers resulted in creating 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. When teachers learn skills from one another, all students benefit (Beckman, 2001; Hamayan & Freeman, 2006).

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 immediately implement in the classroom. Such professional development provides hands-on skills training, classroom observations and/or videotapes of successfully inclusive classes, and situation-specific problem-solving sessions. When provided during the school year, such strategies are crucial to providing a frame of reference for these teachers (Whitworth, 1999). In order to provide high-quality differentiated instruction for their students, teachers must understand both the theory and related practice of differentiation as well as develop skills for differentiating instruction (Hedrick, 2005). Staff developers who are effective in teaching differentiated instruction will help teachers use differentiation in their classrooms effectively.

Teachers of ELLs, regardless of whether they are responsible for content-area or English language instruction, need to have a thorough understanding of their students' educational needs (Hamayan & Freeman, 2006). This situation involves acquiring working knowledge of the following dimensions:

- Second language and literacy acquisition
- Cross-cultural variations in communication
- Strategies for modifying and differentiating instructions for students with differing English language proficiency levels
- Ability to measure progress in the content-areas and in English language acquisition as well as ability to use formative assessment data to tailor instruction

Research on effective professional development (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005) shows that professional development that positively affects 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), is organized coherently, 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 teacher’s 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 the teacher’s activities that use specific, higher-order teaching strategies.

Implementation Considerations

Given the various planning initiatives that exist, Learning Point Associates makes the following recommendations for Mount Vernon City School District:

- **Converge all planning into revising the Comprehensive District Education Plan. This plan should include a professional development plan that is data-driven, needs-based, collegial, inclusive of ELLs and SWDs, and focused on ELA.**
- **Ensure that the district team spends 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.
- **Ensure that the professional development plan includes a focus on using data.** Teachers in Mount Vernon City School District specifically asked for professional development about using data to inform instructional decisions. The district should consider data use as a major strand in its professional development plan.

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.

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Recommendation 3: Academic Intervention Services

Use response to intervention (RTI) as an approach to support comprehensive Academic Intervention Services (AIS) in Grades K–12 to improve the achievement of underperforming students, including SWDs and ELLs. After these services are developed, monitor the implementation.

Link to Findings

District data point to a need to improve student performance for general education students at the high school level and for ELLs and SWDs across all grade levels. In addition, the Interview Report and Special Education Report noted that teachers want to use data to monitor instruction and student performance.

AIS regulations mandate additional instruction for students who need extra time, support, and skills to meet state learning standards. However, the Interview Report, Special Education Report, ELL Report, and Document Review Report indicate that comprehensive, coordinated AIS does not exist across levels and that available services are considered insufficient, inconsistent, and ineffective for all populations. Moreover, some low-performing SWDs and ELLs in the district received only Special Education or ELL program services but not additional academic support services. Thus, there is a need to develop comprehensive intervention services, and response to intervention (RTI) provides a viable approach for supporting such services.

Link to Research

The RTI Approach. Increasingly, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and researchers consider RTI to be a valuable approach for integrating instruction and assessment into a system of strong prevention. The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006) describes RTI as follows:

RTI is an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data. The following is the fundamental question of RTI procedures: Under what conditions will a student successfully demonstrate a response to the curriculum? Thus, interventions are selected and implemented under rigorous conditions to determine what will work for the student. (p. i.2)

The National Center on Response to Intervention (n.d.) provides further clarification as follows:

Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities.

In summary, RTI helps identify students who are struggling academically and ensures that all students receive the appropriate instruction and intervention required to be successful before they fall behind academically (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

RTI Model of Educational Service Delivery. An RTI framework incorporates a multitiered model of educational service delivery in which instruction is differentiated to meet learner needs at various levels with increasingly intense services as students move through three tiers. *Note:* This multitiered model, titled the “Continuum of Schoolwide Instructional and Positive Behavior Support,” is available online through the website of the Office of Special Education Programs (OESP) Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (n.d.).

The tiered interventions are designed to provide a set of curricular and instructional processes that will improve student response to instruction and student outcomes. Schools can decide to implement more than three tiers; but, regardless of the number, each subsequent tier is associated with increasingly more intense interventions that are targeted to a smaller group of students. The three tiers are as follows:

- **Tier 1.** Tier 1 represents primary supports in the general education classroom through the use of universal screening and research-based curriculum and instructional programs provided to all students. It is expected that this type of service will be sufficient for 80 percent of students.
- **Tier 2.** In the second tier, students who have not been successful in Tier 1 receive targeted interventions and their progress is monitored frequently to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. In this tier, general education teachers typically receive support from other educators to implement the interventions and monitor students’ progress. It is anticipated that this type of service may be needed by approximately 15 percent of students.
- **Tier 3.** Students who have not been successful in Tier 2 move into the third tier and receive more intense and individualized interventions, which would be targeted to approximately 5 percent of students.

Schools using RTI models have seen positive outcomes in student learning (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006). Research supports the use of RTI at the elementary level in the areas of reading (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Johnson et al., 2006), mathematics (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hollenbeck, 2007), and behavior (Fairbanks, Sugai, Gardino, & Lathrop, 2007), and there is emerging use at the secondary level (Duffy, 2007). Hence, the intervention and assessment dimensions of RTI have very strong potential to substantially enhance student achievement; “decrease the number of ‘ false positives,’ or students given a disability label who are low achievers because of poor instruction rather than an inherent disability” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005, p. 57); and reduce the number of behavior problems (Fairbanks et al., 2007). By facilitating earlier identification and treatment of students at-risk, RTI approaches can guide schools to use their resources more effectively.

Components of RTI. RTI has three important components: schoolwide screening, progress monitoring, and high-quality tiered instruction and intervention. *Note:* For the ELL population in particular, the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST)

recommends an additional component to the RTI framework: nondiscriminatory interpretation of assessment data conducted by those knowledgeable in second-language acquisition and literacy development (Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

- **Schoolwide Screening.** Schools implementing RTI use universal screening to designate students who may need closer monitoring in the general education curriculum or those who need more intensive intervention (Johnson et al; 2006). Screening, an important component of RTI, is used to determine how students are placed into various tiers of interventions. Screening is not conducted only one time, but iteratively during the year and across grades in the school. Tier 1 screening occurs at least three times per year in order to identify students who are at risk and to inform classroom instruction. Because some schools have experienced challenges in distinguishing typical English language development from specific difficulties in reading and writing, Garcia McKoon, and August (2006) suggest that screening tests be administered in both English and the student's primary or home language and that they encompass much more than discrete tasks of receptive language ability, such as vocabulary recognition.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006b) recommend schoolwide screening in combination with at least five weeks of weekly progress monitoring to identify students who require preventative interventions. One-time universal screening at the beginning of the year can overidentify students who require preventative interventions (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs & Bryant, 2006).

- **Progress Monitoring.** Progress monitoring, on the other hand, is a scientifically based assessment practice used to determine the extent to which students are benefiting from classroom instruction and for monitoring effectiveness of curriculum (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). Progress monitoring displays individual student growth over time to determine whether the student is learning as expected in the curriculum. It is used to test specific academic or behavioral targets and is conducted more frequently. These data help educators reliably identify students who need more intensive instruction (Compton et al., 2006).

In RTI, progress-monitoring data are used for several purposes: to keep track of students' academic development, to identify those who are falling behind their peers, and to decide whether further intervention is needed (Hintze, n.d., in press; Speece, n.d.). Progress monitoring requires frequent data collection with technically adequate measures, interpretation of the data at regular intervals, and changes to instruction based on the interpretation of progress (Speece, n.d.). However, how frequently data are collected will depend upon the tier and needs of the student. Thus, progress monitoring is a valuable method to judge students' responsiveness to instruction and intervention.

RTI is designed as a schoolwide framework, in which the majority of students receive research-based instruction in the general education classroom. To accomplish this goal, schools must have evidence-based instructional programs, resources to accompany the core instructional programs, and differentiated instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. This situation implies that teachers will need high-quality professional development focused on research-based curriculum and teaching practices, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making (as discussed in Recommendation 2). Educators who systematically assess students' academic progress to make data-based

instructional decisions improve a school’s collective capacity to provide stronger instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a).

- **High-Quality Tiered Instruction and Intervention.** A multitiered intervention is implemented and monitored when the results from a student’s schoolwide screening or progress monitoring indicate a skill deficit. Interventions are delivered to students for whom Tier 1 instruction is insufficient. Thus, higher tiers of intervention are for those students who are falling behind on benchmark skills and who require additional instruction to achieve grade-level expectations (Johnson et al., 2006). Several specific factors help distinguish the interventions at the various tiers (Johnson et al., 2006):
 - Size of instructional group (e.g., in Tier 2, the group has no more than a 1:5 teacher-to-student ratio)
 - Mastery requirement of content
 - Duration of the intervention
 - Frequency of progress monitoring and delivery of intervention

Implementing multitiered instruction and intervention will necessitate changes in staff roles, responsibilities, and school structures. RTI models are designed to provide a system to support student success and “catch” all students who experience trouble (Johnson et al., 2006). Developing this type of system will require districts to integrate general, ELL, and special education staff to collaborate and discuss students’ needs. Implementing targeted interventions will require staff to devote time to working with a small group of students. All of these changes will require adaptations in how schools use personnel and schedule their time.

In addition to structural changes, schools must have a comprehensive system of data collection and progress monitoring. Schools will need to create data-based decision rules for determining whether students remain or move out of Tier 2 and beyond. Schools also need a data collection system for screening and monitoring students’ progress.

Finally, it is important to monitor the implementation of RTI to ensure that school procedures and classroom instruction are delivered with fidelity. Schools should establish a system to measure the operations and components of the framework. If deficiencies in implementation surface, this situation may point to the need for additional professional development or resources to correct the problem (Johnson et al., 2006).

Implementation Considerations

Learning Point Associates makes the following recommendations for Mount Vernon City School District:

- **Use RTI to ensure that comprehensive, coordinated AIS is available at all levels.**
- **Ensure that data-based decisions are used to determine student placement into each tier.**
- **Provide professional development for implementing an RTI approach in the district.** Existing professional development efforts in Mount Vernon City School District related

to the new elementary reading series, data collection, and differentiated instruction are important building blocks to developing and implementing an RTI approach in the district. Complementing current professional development with planning for the development of an RTI approach may allow the district to establish a more effective, comprehensive intervention system. Thus, using an, RTI approach builds upon current programming efforts in Mount Vernon City School District and addresses the needs expressed in the Interview Report, Special Education Report, and ELL Report for more comprehensive intervention services.

- **Converge all planning into revising the Comprehensive District Education Plan.** Given the various initiatives around planning that exist currently, Learning Point Associates recommends that Mount Vernon City School District collapse all planning into revising the Comprehensive District Education Plan. This plan should include a plan for Academic Intervention Services.
- **Learn more about RTI and its components through the following list of resources:**
 - ***National Center for Response to Intervention: RTI Library***
www.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=448&Itemid=93
This online library contains hundreds of resources and documents related to RTI.
 - ***Responsiveness to Intervention (RtI): How to Do It*** (RTI Manual)
nrcl.org/rti_manual/
This manual provides detailed information about schoolwide screening, progress monitoring, tiered service delivery models, fidelity of implementation, and school examples, with extensive resources related to topic.
 - ***The National Center on Student Progress Monitoring*** (Website)
www.studentprogress.org
This website provides information and resources related to progress monitoring, including a review of tools. Two helpful resources are as follows:
 - ***Webinar on RTI***
www.studentprogress.org/library/Webinars.asp#RtI
 - ***Web Resources for RTI***
<http://www.studentprogress.org/weblibrary.asp#rti>
 - ***The Access Center*** (Website)
www.k8accesscenter.org
The Access Center has professional development modules relevant for the implementation of multitiered instructional service delivery mode, since materials are geared to assist teaching diverse student learners. Module topics include the following:
 - ***Differentiated Instruction***
www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/differentiated-instruction/
 - ***Coteaching***
www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/co-teaching/

- **Reading**
www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/language-arts/reading/
- **Mathematics**
www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/math/

In addition, the Access Center has several resources related to research-based instructional strategies:

- **Strategies to Improve Access to the General Education Curriculum**
www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/strategies_to_improve_access.asp
- **Teaching and Learning**
www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/teaching-learning/

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Additional Reading

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Appendix A. District Strengths

The following strengths were identified during an Appreciative Inquiry activity (Preskill, 2007) at the kickoff meeting on September 25, 2008.

Appreciative Interview 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?

Notes From Discussion

Common Values

- Touching children's and families' lives
- Collaboration
- Shared focus in professional development
- Team building
- Most important work is in the classroom
- Consistency district wide on what instruction looks and feels like

Common Wishes

- Achieve more school and student success. Want district to be viewed as a world-class school district.
- Success for all
- Relationships, collaboration
- Increasing the leadership pool
- Increasing student achievement
- Allocation of resources

Themes

- District administration support of principals. Hope support goes into more resources as well as human resources
- Clear vision and support for the vision
- Great sense of community
- Team building
- Accountability
- Instruction—highlighting this with professional development
- Capacity building—empowering building administrators and teachers within their building
- Data use to increase and inform instruction
- Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration
- Commitment to excellence
- Using data to drive instruction

Reference

Preskill, H. (2007, June). *Using appreciative inquiry in evaluation practice* [PowerPoint]. Presentation made at the AEA/CDC 2007 Summer Evaluation Institute, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved August 30, 2008, from <http://www.eval.org/SummerInstitute07/Handouts/si07.preskillF.pdf>

Appendix B. Data Map of Co-Interpretation Key Findings

June 5–6, 2008

During the co-interpretation process, Mount Vernon City School District participants analyzed seven 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

ELL—English Language Learner 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>Data indicate that there are a number of instructional barriers due to a lack of resources in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy coaches • ELA curriculum materials • Technology • Flexibility for pacing schedules • Instructional guidelines • Guidance on differentiated instruction • Policy for the consistent delivery and monitoring of instruction • Funds and resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional development ▪ New-teacher support ▪ Interventions and instructional enhancements <p>Votes: 11 Red</p>	<p>1. Respondent said, “Unfortunately our literacy coaches, hired prior to me getting here, are not being utilized properly.”</p>	<p>INT (dist), p. 8</p>
	<p>2. Elementary ELL teachers and general education teachers described the provision for materials by the district: “On the second day, teachers stated they had not been given materials.”</p>	<p>ELL (int), p. 26</p>
	<p>3. Respondent said that every elementary school has at least one ELA coach and high schools have at least two to three. Also, ELA administrators have too many tasks.</p>	<p>INT, p. 7</p>
	<p>4. According to respondent, more instructional support—such as school-based literacy coaches, funds, resources, and technology—is needed to enhance instruction.</p>	<p>INT (dist), p. 15</p>
	<p>5. Respondent suggests only one ELA administrator K–12.</p>	<p>INT (dist), p. 7</p>
	<p>6. General classroom resources, such as maps, dictionaries, and pencil sharpeners were accessible at elementary level, but a number of classrooms at the secondary level had limited supplies.</p>	<p>ELL (obs), p. 37</p>
	<p>7. Across the schools, respondents perceived that the adequacy of ELA instructional materials as low to moderate.</p>	<p>INT, p. 20</p>
	<p>8. By far, the lowest ratings that were given to classroom observations were in the area of classroom resources; ELL resources like visual aids and picture dictionaries were particularly low.</p>	<p>ELL (obs), p. 37</p>
	<p>9. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, neither the introduction section nor the individual maps suggest how teachers may use methods or strategies to teach the curriculum.</p>	<p>CA, p. 28</p>
	<p>10. Curriculum maps for Grades K–12 did not explicitly present and explain how to differentiate instruction for any student groups—general education, ELL, SWD, or special education.</p>	<p>CA, p. 27</p>
	<p>11. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that curriculum maps for Grades 2, 4, and 6 do not clearly and consistently identify the source of literacy materials.</p>	<p>CA, p. 28</p>

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	12. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates apparent student expectations regarding ELA areas of reading and writing for Grades 8 and 10 but not for Grades 2, 4, or 6.	CA, p. 27
	13. Elementary teachers are not informed on what they should know, be doing, or their expectations. Curriculum and IEP needs are not communicated.	SE (int), p. 6
	14. Secondary curriculum frameworks, according to respondent, “are not as unified in approach to the curriculum ... we need more uniformity to the existing curriculum before we can determine its effectiveness.”	INT (dist), p. 6
	15. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, curriculum maps for all grade levels do not explicitly address how teachers may plan and implement differentiated instruction for specific content and skills so that all students may meet or exceed expectations.	CA, p. 30
	16. Curriculum Alignment indicates that the curriculum document for Grades 2, 4, and 6 has an informative introduction; it lacks a cohesive or aligned ELA program.	CA, p. 29
	17. Key documents indicate that no written documentation was submitted to illustrate the district’s plans, policies, and monitoring of the ELA curriculum.	DR, p. 6
	18. At the secondary level, grade-level pacing guides were not used appropriately by self-contained classroom teachers.	SE (int), p. 5
	19. Across elementary schools, several teachers said that it is difficult to maintain the pacing schedule and that the pace leaves little opportunity for adapting instruction.	INT, p. 18
	20. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, there was no evidence of a pacing guide for any grade level indicating how instruction may proceed within each unit or theme. (<i>Note:</i> District is possibly working on this.)	CA, p. 28
	21. More support for teachers is needed through school-based literacy coaches, funds and resources for professional development, new-teacher support, interventions, and instruction enhancements, including the use of technology.	INT, p. 15
	22. Key documents indicate that there was limited relevant evidence that the district actively identifies, develops, and supports content coaches and instructional leaders.	DR, p. 19
	23. There was a low level of availability of content coaches and instructional leaders in the secondary schools.	INT, p. 33

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	24. District documents include substantiated evidence of plans and policies regarding curriculum implementation.	ELL (doc rev), p. 12
	25. Key documents indicate that the district did not submit evidence of plans, policies, or documentation of sufficient curriculum materials for ELLs or SWDs.	DR, p. 6-7
	26. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, Grades 2, 4, and 6 needed to provide teachers with more specific and useful guidance regarding what to teach, how to teach, what materials to use, and how to assess.	CA, p. 28
	27. One respondent said there is not enough centralized focus on what effective classroom instruction should look like.	INT (dist), p. 7
	28. Key documents indicate that no relevant evidence was submitted concerning policies for instruction.	DR, pp. 8–9
	29. There was a lack of a centralized instructional focus in the past, and plans are in place to strengthen the centralized vision.	INT (dist), p. 14
	30. The level of instructional consistency in secondary schools ranges from low to high.	INT, p. 19

Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>There are no comprehensive, coordinated AIS at all levels. Available AIS services are insufficient, inconsistent, and ineffective. In addition, some AIS models interfere with class time.</p> <p>Votes: 10 Red</p>	1. Teachers reported no comprehensive or coordinated intervention services at all levels.	SE (int), no page
	2. Students who have an IEP don't have access to reading specialists. "Why not use all of our resources ... to move this child along?"	SE (int), p. 11
	3. No evidence that additional academic support services, such as AIS, are provided for ELLs during the school day. Documents show that academic support offered to low-performing ELLs in the district consist of state-mandated ESL time.	ELL (doc rev), p. 11
	4. According to the Document Review, only limited documentation was submitted to determine how data were used to inform decisions about progress of the AIS.	DR, p. 11
	5. Very few administrators spoke about additional academic support services offered to ELLs in the district.	ELL (int), p. 7
	6. General education teachers indicate no awareness of any services for academic support, other than pull-out from ESL instruction.	ELL (int), p. 27
	7. School respondents in the elementary schools that have support for students not achieving proficiently ranged from moderate to high level. (3 schools = high; 2 schools = moderate)	INT, p. 28
	8. Across the schools, the perceived effectiveness of the supports for nonproficient students ranges from low to high.	INT, p. 29
	9. Elementary-level teachers report that intervention services consisted of supplemental instruction provided by reading specialists. How and to whom services are provided varied across elementary schools (e.g., push-in and pull-out).	SE (int), p. 11
	10. According to respondents at the elementary school level, AIS for struggling students are ineffective. Students miss regular classroom instruction when pulled out to work with resource staff.	INT, p. 30
	11. According to district respondents, AIS for nonproficient students is inconsistent across the district and insufficient in meeting the needs of students.	INT (dist), p. 9, 16
	12. Secondary school respondents report that on most secondary levels, there are fewer opportunities for struggling students.	INT, p. 29

Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	13. According to high school respondents, one barrier to the effectiveness of intervention time is limited student participation (i.e., after school and lack of teachers).	INT, p. 20
	14. At middle and high schools, intervention services are mainly afterschool programs for test prep or credit recovery.	SE (int), p. 12
	15. The majority of teachers state that it is critical to provide additional support and/or resources for improving the performance of ELLs. There also is a lack of afterschool programs and ESL tutoring services.	ELL (int), p. 31
	16. The greatest concern for parents was a lack of afterschool or extra-help programs within their children’s school. Unanimously, parents reiterated a desire for the availability of afterschool programs and supplemental services, specifically mentioning the Saturday program.	ELL (int), p. 41
	17. ELL program teachers list a variety of additional academic support services, such as five-week summer school, Saturday academy for parents and students, and school homework and tutoring programs.	ELL (int), p. 28
	18. District documents demonstrate substantial evidence that indicate that there are plans and policies in place and implementation of academic interventions outside of the regular school day for ELLs who need additional academic support.	ELL (doc rev), p. 15
	19. Administrators who spoke about additional services referenced afterschool, summer, and Saturday programs offered at the school and district levels. Also mentioned was a buddy system in which ELLs with low proficiency in English are paired with higher proficiency students who speak their language.	ELL (int), p. 7

Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>There the is confusion throughout the district at all levels regarding expectations and roles of building-level administrators, Special Education supervisors, and reading specialists. In addition, , school administrators may need additional resources, training, and instructional strategies to become strong instructional leaders.</p> <p>Votes: 8 Red</p>	1. According to district respondents, principals may need additional resources and training in order to become strong instructional leaders.	INT (dist), p. 12
	2. According to district administrators, the capacity of principals and assistant principals to be instructional leaders of their schools needs to be built.	INT (dist), p. 14
	3. According to district respondents, there has been some resistance from building administrators to a number of changes regarding monthly professional development and the development of instructional leadership skills.	INT (dist), p. 12
	4. Key documents indicate that limited evidence that professional development was provided to principals about instructional strategies to support the delivery of the ELA curriculum.	DR, p. 15
	5. Secondary special education teachers who taught ELA were not licensed in content area of ELA, and those assigned to inclusion classrooms did not have ELA content knowledge.	SE (int), p. 17
	6. There are no clearly defined expectations for leadership roles at all levels, according to key documents.	DR, p. 19
	7. Available services varied across elementary schools because a continuum of services was not available in all of them.	SE (int), p. 3
	8. Most special education teachers were unsure of the role of their special education supervisor, and special education teachers reported confusion about to whom they should go to resolve programming issues.	SE (int), p. 20-21
	9. Elementary school respondents report that although ELA instructional leadership was evident, reading specialists have many other responsibilities.	INT, p. 39
	10. Key documents indicate that there was no relevant evidence of how the district assesses the performance of principals relative to the district’s mission.	DR, pp. 18–19

Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
General education and ELL teachers cite the need for more support staff (resource teachers, reading specialists, and school social workers) at both the elementary and secondary levels. Votes: 8 Red	1. The most common challenges stated among administrators were the need for more resources in the form of additional ESL personnel, professional development—for both general education and ESL teachers—as well as planning resources that assist with scheduling and the use of intervention kits in the classroom.	INT, p. 9
	2. Respondents cited that more support staff is needed in both the elementary and secondary levels.	INT, p. 38
	3. A few ELL teachers mentioned the importance of having a bilingual psychologist or social worker available to speak with students, as much of the teacher’s time is spent “listening to the things [students] have to go through in life.”	INT, p. 31

Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers would like more of the following professional development opportunities with their colleagues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to observe new practices • Hands-on demonstrations • Instruction from a coach, leader, or mentor • Instructional strategies for SWDs and ELLs • Data use to monitor instruction and student performance Votes: 7 Red	1. Administrators from the department of international languages are creating a districtwide ESL program guide to provide direction to ESL teachers.	INT, p. 6
	2. Professional development does not necessarily address needs. Some are good ideas that can’t be implemented.	ELL (int), p. 29
	3. General education teachers voiced the need for improvement in collaboration with ELL teachers and more professional development to learn instructional methods that improve performance of ELLs	ELL (int), p. 31
	4. In addition to the mentoring program, administrators mentioned a few professional learning opportunities related to ELL learning—from a year-long institute on sheltered English instruction to local workshops and conferences on teaching practices for ELLs.	ELL (int), p. 7
	5. A handful of administrators identified ELL-specific professional development as a need for general education teachers.	ELL (int), p. 7
	6. General education teachers do not currently receive formal training that addresses specific learning needs for ELLs.	ELL (int), p. 29
	7. The SEC report shows that Grade K–12 teachers rarely to never receive professional development for their instruction from a coach, leader, or mentor.	SEC ad hoc report

Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	8. One administrator said, “I’d like to see a layered type of training that is ongoing development with a coach or specialist that has the kind of training where they push-in and work collaboratively with small groups and coteach.”	ELL (int), p. 9
	9. Administrators discussed an informal system of support among teachers as another form of professional development.	ELL (int), p. 7
	10. Elementary respondents indicated that they would like more examples and demonstrations—i.e., hands-on modeled in professional development sessions.	INT, p. 31
	11. SEC report findings indicate that Grades 9–12 rarely to never have an opportunity to conduct or demonstrate a lesson, unit, and/or skill to their colleagues.	SEC ad hoc report
	12. A number of respondents said they would like more professional development with different instructional topics and more opportunities to observe new practices and interact with other teachers.	INT, p. 32
	13. Because of lack of training and limited available data, teachers across the district at all levels did not use data to monitor student performance and adjust their instruction.	SE (int), p. 15
	14. Few teachers reported having training on use of data for instructional purposes.	SE (int), p. 14
	15. School respondents would like additional professional development on strategies to use instead of direct instruction: data-driven instruction, data use, differentiated instruction, instruction to meet student needs, balanced literacy, small-group instruction, writing, portfolio use, and research best practices.	INT, p. 31
	16. Most school respondents reported the most effective teacher professional development was demonstrating lessons or hands-on instead of lecture.	INT, p. 39
	17. One teacher said, “Whatever I’m using is based on what I learned in college. We don’t know what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s good, what’s bad. We don’t know anything.”	SE (int), p. 13
	18. The topic most frequently requested was educating SWDs. Self-contained elementary teachers frequently report training needed to educate SWDs.	SE (int), p. 13
	19. According to district respondents, there is limited professional learning for teachers of special-needs students throughout the entire school district community.	INT, p. 11
	20. Special education and general education teachers want more information about instructional strategies to teach reading to SWDs.	SE (int), p. 14

Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	21. Teachers in self-contained settings believed that information was not geared to realities of their classrooms. Most special education teachers found training helpful.	SE (int), p. 13
	22. General education teachers wanted more training on differentiated instruction.	SE (int), p. 14
	23. Self-contained teachers report needing more curriculum guidance focusing on expectations and content coverage.	SE (int), p. 6
	24. Teacher professional development has a moderate influence on instruction in the district schools and is not aligned with teacher needs.	INT, p. 31

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p data-bbox="199 618 615 816">The district recently has filled many key district administrative positions due to leadership turnover. Teachers and staff are guarded and cautious about the new organizational direction.</p> <p data-bbox="199 862 363 894">Votes: 4 Red</p>	1. There is less teacher turnover at the elementary level than at the secondary level.	INT (dist), p. 13
	2. According to district respondents, “Leadership turnover has caused many teachers and staff to become guarded and cautious about the districts initiating new organization and instructional direction.”	INT (dist), p. 5
	3. The district has filled new key district administrator positions. A district respondent says, “We have new leadership, new vision, and new goals. We are already seeing the effects in a positive way.”	INT (dist), p. 5

Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>The coteaching model faces many implementation barriers for teachers in self-contained and high school settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shortage of qualified special education teachers • Limited time with general education teachers • Lack of information about students • Unassigned case management lists • Frequently changing classes, teachers, and content areas • Lack of instructional materials • Lack of appropriate assistive technology • Lack of curriculum and implementation support • Classroom space and size constraints <p>Votes: 3 Red</p>	<p>1. High school observations show that special education coteachers had no instructional role in activities. They asked clarifying questions, prompted students, and monitored behavior.</p>	SE (obs), p. 8
	<p>2. Elementary special education and general education teachers report differentiating instruction (e.g., small grouping): reteaching, breakdown information, and preview content.</p>	SE (int), p. 8
	<p>3. Elementary and secondary teachers in self-contained classrooms report lack of instructional materials as a consistent barrier (i.e., textbooks, workbooks, and support materials).</p>	SE (int), p. 7
	<p>4. During interviews with special education and general education teachers, none noted use of assistive technology.</p>	SE (int), p. 7
	<p>5. According to observational data, variations in access to ELA curriculum exist in self-contained classrooms. Teachers did not have general education materials. Teachers borrowed or had a portion of ELA materials.</p>	SE (obs), p. 5
	<p>6. In some elementary schools, self-contained classrooms were placed near general education classrooms that were not age-appropriate (e.g., upper elementary SWDs located near prekindergarten classrooms).</p>	SE (obs), p. 10
	<p>7. About 41% of SWDs were educated outside of the general education environment 21% to 60% of the time. The state average is 12.4%. Also, curriculum in self-contained classroom often was not the same as inclusion classrooms.</p>	SE (int), p. 3
	<p>8. High school special education teachers reported several barriers to being able to establish an effective coteaching relationship.</p>	SE (int), p. 8
	<p>9. Several special education teachers were concerned with location, size, or other aspect of their classroom. High school special education and general education teachers said noisy hallways were a barrier to instruction.</p>	SE (int), p. 9
	<p>10. According to interview data, on the secondary level, variations in access to ELA curriculum exist in self-contained classrooms. No reading program was available for self-contained classes.</p>	SE (int), p. 5

Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	11. Classroom and special education teachers did not have similar schedules, which impacted their planning time and decreased the class periods during which they worked together.	SE (int), p. 18
	12. Collaboration between special education and general education teachers varied across the district.	SE (int), p. 19
	13. Observational and interview data indicated that inclusion classrooms at the high school level were not operating as a coteaching model. These classrooms were assigned two teachers. However, the general education teacher had not seen the special education teacher since September.	SE (obs), p. 18
	14. Consequence of coteach model was that no support was available to classroom teachers who had students receiving resource room: “We basically just have a conversation about the child. I don’t know what goes on up there.”	SE (int), p. 19
	15. Barriers to successful high school coteaching model: Lack of special education teachers lead to reassignment across departments; assigned classrooms would change every marking period resulting in new general education teachers, classes, and content areas; did not have time to develop relationship with general education teacher; lack of planning time; high number of at-risk/repeaters in classroom; lack of information (such as IEPs) on students; case management lists not assigned to teachers.	SE (int), p. 18

Key Finding 8	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p data-bbox="199 284 617 483">Professional development does not align with teachers' goals or needs. Respondents have mixed opinions regarding impact of professional development on instruction.</p> <p data-bbox="199 527 367 560">Votes: 2 Red</p>	1. Most respondents were unable to either comment or report that none of the professional development opportunities has been useful.	INT, p. 32
	2. School respondents have mixed opinions regarding impact of professional development for teachers.	INT, p. 39
	3. All secondary schools received a moderate rating on the usefulness of teacher professional development.	INT, p. 32
	4. Grade K–4 report shows that professional development sometimes is consistent with department or grade-level plan to improve teaching.	SEC ad hoc report
	5. Grade K–4 report shows that professional development infrequently is designed to support school's improvement plan, aligned with personal goals, built on previous professional development, or provide follow-up.	SEC ad hoc report
	6. Grade 9–12 report shows that professional development rarely is designed to support the school improvement plan, consistent with department or grade-level plan to improve teaching aligned with personal goals, built on previous professional development activities, or provide follow-up.	SEC ad hoc report
	7. Grade 5–8 report shows professional development sometimes is consistent with department or grade-level plan to improve teaching, aligned with personal goals, or built on previous professional development.	SEC ad hoc report
	8. According to district interviews, more input is needed directly from teachers to ensure that professional development aligns with teacher needs.	INT (dist), p. 16
	9. Report findings show teacher perceptions in Grades 9–12 are misaligned in the topic areas for conferences attended for ELA, reading, and literature when compared to the state.	SEC, p. 9–12
	10. Key documents indicate that there is limited evidence to determine how professional development is making a difference in teaching and learning.	DR, p. 13–15

Key Finding 9	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p data-bbox="199 280 600 410">Districtwide plans and policies for implementation and monitoring of data are not fully in place.</p> <p data-bbox="199 459 365 488">Votes: 2 Red</p>	<p data-bbox="661 280 1654 410">1. There is a difference in the order of cognitive demand emphasis for Grade 4 between NYSED and Mount Vernon City School District: NYSED: <i>understand, apply, remember, create, analyze, evaluate</i>; Mount Vernon City School District: <i>apply, understand, create, remember, analyze, evaluate</i>.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 280 1829 310">CA, p. 13</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 430 1661 527">2. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, Grade 2 students are most frequently requested to demonstrate knowledge at the cognitive demand levels of <i>remember, create, and apply</i>.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 430 1808 459">CA, p. 7</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 544 1619 673">3. There is a difference in the order of cognitive demand emphasis for Grade 2 between NYSED and Mount Vernon City School District: NYSED: <i>apply, understand, remember, evaluate, analyze, create</i>; Mount Vernon City School District: <i>remember, create, apply, understand, evaluate, analyze</i>.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 544 1808 573">CA, p. 9</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 690 1671 787">4. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report for Grade 6 NYSED ELA performance indicators, students are asked to create procedural knowledge but are not expected to create knowledge in other domains.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 690 1822 719">CA, p. 14</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 803 1598 901">5. Grade 8 students occasionally are required to <i>understand, apply, analyze, and remember</i> metacognitive knowledge, as reflected in the Curriculum Alignment Report.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 803 1871 833">CA, p. 18–19</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 917 1671 982">6. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates no evidence of metacognitive knowledge in the cognitive demands of <i>understand, analyze, and evaluate</i> for Grade 10 students.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 917 1822 946">CA, p. 24</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 998 1629 1063">7. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates a lack of evidence of demand for procedural knowledge in the categories of <i>remember</i> and <i>evaluate</i> for Grade 6.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 998 1822 1027">CA, p. 16</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 1079 1671 1144">8. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates there was little or no evidence of student engagement in metacognitive knowledge and actual knowledge at the Grade 4 level.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 1079 1822 1109">CA, p. 11</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 1161 1671 1226">9. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates there is great emphasis on applying procedural knowledge and occasionally conceptual knowledge on the Grade 4 level.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 1161 1822 1190">CA, p. 11</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 1242 1493 1271">10. Using data was not part of the culture of any of the schools visited.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 1242 1843 1271">OBS, p. 16</p>
	<p data-bbox="661 1282 1587 1375">11. Key documents indicate there were no plans, policies, implementation, or monitoring to adjust curricular programming based on monitoring of student progress.</p>	<p data-bbox="1705 1282 1822 1312">DR, p. 17</p>

Key Finding 9	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	12. No documents were submitted that illustrate districtwide use of assessment data to inform instruction.	DR, p. 18
	13. There is evidence that teachers have access to assessment data for lesson planning purposes.	DR, p. 18
	14. Documents show that plans, policies, implementation, and monitoring are in place to some degree to inform academic planning and decisions regarding placement of students and amount of time allotted for ELL services.	DR, p. 19
	15. Key documents indicate the district has plans to deliver professional development about using assessments and a toolkit for using data to drive differentiated instruction for school improvement.	DR, p. 16

Key Finding 10	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Teachers at all levels indicate that insufficient instructional time is spent on the following compared to the New York state standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing processes • Vocabulary • Comprehension • Listening and viewing • Speaking and presenting • Critical reasoning <p>Votes: 2 Red</p>	1. Report shows that teachers’ ELA instructional emphasis does not meet the state’s expectations in the topic area of writing processes at the cognitive demand levels of <i>generate/create</i> and <i>demonstrate</i> for Grade 8.	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	2. Report shows that teachers exhibited considerably more ELA instructional time in the topic area of author’s craft than the state standards require for Grade 8.	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	3. Report shows that teachers’ instructional emphasis does not meet the state’s expectations in the topic area of text and print features for the cognitive demand level of <i>recall</i> and <i>memorize</i> .	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	4. Report shows that teachers exhibited considerably more ELA instructional time in the topic area of language study than the state standards require for Grade 8.	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	5. In Grade 9 New York State standards require more instructional time in the cognitive demand levels of <i>generate/create</i> and <i>analyze/investigate</i> in the topic areas of comprehension, critical reasoning, author’s craft, writing process, listening and viewing, and speaking and presenting than teachers reported.	SEC Gr. 9 Map
	6. Elementary lessons focused more on skill-based (phonics and grammar). Secondary lessons centered on core conceptual work like making inferences and predictions.	OBS, p. 35

Key Finding 10	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	7. Report findings show that New York state requires more instructional time in cognitive demand level of evaluate/integrate and analyze/investigate in the topic areas of vocabulary than the amount instructional time reported in these areas by Grade 2 teachers.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	8. Report shows that Grade 2 teachers spend more instructional time on the cognitive demand levels of perform procedures/explain, generate/create/demonstrate, and analyze/investigate in the topic areas of text and print features than is required by New York state.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	9. Report findings show the state requires more instructional emphasis in the cognitive demand levels of evaluate/integrate and analyze/investigate in the topic areas of listening/viewing and speaking/presenting than is reported by Grade 2 teachers.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	10. Report shows that in Grade 8, teacher instructional emphasis is aligned with state standards in the topic area of vocabulary.	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	11. Elementary ELL and general education, and secondary general education teachers focused more on synthesis of language and content—i.e., the area of integration was somewhat less than in secondary ELL classes.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	12. In Grade 4, findings show that the state requires more instructional emphasis in the cognitive demand levels of <i>analyze/investigate</i> in the topic areas of vocabulary than teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 4 Map
	13. Findings show that Grade 6 teachers are spending more instructional time on the cognitive demand levels of <i>analyze/investigate</i> in the topic areas of comprehension than is required by New York state standards.	Sec Gr. 6 Map
	14. In Grade 4, the findings show that the state requires more instructional time in the cognitive demand levels of <i>generate/create/demonstrate</i> in the topic areas of speaking/demonstrate than is being emphasized by teachers.	SEC Gr. 4 Map
	15. In Grade 4, the findings show that the state requires more instructional emphasis on the cognitive demand levels of <i>analyze/investigate</i> in the topic area of comprehension than is being emphasized by teachers.	SEC Gr. 4 Map
	16. In Grade 6, the findings show that the New York State standards require more instructional emphasis on the cognitive demand levels of <i>generate/create/demonstrate</i> in the topic area of the writing process than teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 6 Map

Key Finding 10	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	17. Report shows that Grade 2 teachers emphasize more instructional emphasis in the area of language study at the cognitive demand levels of <i>evaluate/integrate</i> and <i>analyze/investigate</i> than is required by the state.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	18. Report shows that the state requires more instructional emphasis on the cognitive demand levels of <i>evaluate/integrate</i> and <i>analyze/investigate</i> for the topic areas of writing process and written/verbal elements of presentation than Grade 2 teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	19. Report shows that the state requires more instructional emphasis on the cognitive demand levels of <i>perform procedures</i> and <i>memorize/recall</i> in the topic areas of writing process and elements of presentation/verbal and written than Grade 2 teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	20. In Grade 6, the findings show that the state requires more instructional emphasis on the cognitive demand levels of <i>generate/create/demonstrate</i> in the topic areas of speaking/presenting than teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 6 Map
	21. Report shows that the state requires more instructional emphasis on the cognitive demand areas of <i>memorize/recall</i> at the topic area of vocabulary than teachers are emphasizing in their instruction.	SEC Gr. 2 Map
	22. Report finds that the state requires more emphasis in the topic areas of listening, viewing, speaking, and presenting at the cognitive demand levels of <i>memorize/recall</i> , <i>perform procedures</i> , <i>explain</i> , <i>generate</i> , <i>create</i> , <i>demonstrate</i> , <i>analyze</i> , and <i>investigate</i> for the Grade 8 than teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	23. Report shows that the state requires more emphasis in the topic area of elements of presentations (verbal and written) at the cognitive demand level of <i>analyze</i> and <i>investigate</i> than teachers are emphasizing.	SEC Gr. 8 Map
	24. Report shows that teachers applied more instructional emphasis on the topic area of comprehension at the cognitive demand levels of <i>analyze</i> , <i>investigate</i> , <i>perform procedures</i> , <i>explain</i> , <i>memorize</i> , <i>generate</i> , <i>create</i> , and <i>demonstrate</i> than is required by the New York state standards.	SEC Gr. 8 Map

Key Finding 11	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>General education teachers are not aware of procedures or services for ELLs who are classified or might be classified as SWDs. ESL teachers are frustrated with the process because they cannot get students classified.</p> <p>Votes: 2 Red</p>	1. ELL teachers state the district does not provide services for testing, and parents cannot afford to go outside the community for testing ELLs to receive special education services.	ELL (int), p. 29
	2. On the whole, general education teachers were not aware of procedures or services for ELLs who are identified as SWDs or who potentially may be identified. ELL teachers, on the other hand, expressed mixed opinions. Some found the process arduous and frustrating.	ELL (int), p. 28
	3. ESL teachers are frustrated. They are not able to get students classified for special education. The suggestion is to leave the child behind when the teachers feel the students would be more successful if provided services.	ELL (int), p. 28

Key Finding 12	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Direct instruction was the most prevalent strategy observed in all grade levels across the district. Differentiated instruction was rarely observed.</p> <p>Votes: 1 Red</p>	1. “Work Centers,” though noted as prevalent, were coded as frequently or extensively in use in 8% of classrooms observed.	OBS, pp. 5–6
	2. No sustained reading was observed at any level.	SE (obs), p. 9
	3. The use ability groups were noted as frequent or extensive in 13% of elementary classrooms.	OBS, p. 5-6
	4. Small-group instruction observed in elementary inclusion classes. Large-group instruction observed in elementary self-contained classes and secondary classes. Large-group instruction was most prevalent strategy utilized by all teachers in the district.	ELL (obs), p. 8
	5. In the middle school, the most observed strategy for instruction (coach/facilitation) was observed in only 17% of classrooms.	OBS, p. 7
	6. Direct instruction provided in 75% elementary schools, 42% middle schools, and 60% of high schools.	OBS, p. 5
	7. Based on observations, the two most prevalent instructional strategies (coach/facilitator, higher level questioning) occur frequently or extensively in only 17% of classes.	OBS, p. 6

Key Finding 12	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	8. The majority of class time, both ESL and general education, was spent in a whole-class format with very little time spent in small group or pair work.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	9. Work centers were not observed in middle and high school classes.	OBS, p. 12
	10. Direct instruction was prevalent in all grade levels; elementary, middle, and high school classes were observed.	OBS, p. 5
	11. Differential assignments were not observed in 90% to 100% of elementary, middle, or high school classes.	OBS, pp. 11–14

Key Finding 13	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Assessment tools and uses of data vary between buildings, levels, and programs. Votes: 1 Red	1. Administrators and teachers differed in their reports in how data were used by teachers.	SE (int), p. 15
	2. The use of data was related to preparation for the state assessment rather than a tool to monitor student performance or adjust instruction.	SE (int), p. 15
	3. A high level of data are available and used for formative assessments, instructional decisions, sharing student data, and administrative use.	INT, p. 24
	4. Benchmark assessments are administered to elementary school students every six weeks.	INT, p. 8
	5. Benchmark exams were the most commonly mentioned assessment used to track student achievement. Informal observations of students by classroom teachers, ELA state tests, and the NYSESLAT also were discussed.	ELL (int), p. 8
	6. Assessment/formal testing used by ELL teachers include: standardized language acquisition tests such as ELA assessment reports, exams, New York State English as a Second Language Test (NYSELAT), Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R) (initial placement) and teacher-created tests and quizzes.	ELL (int), pp. 29–30
	7. There was more variation among secondary schools than elementary to the extent that data are shared: two schools = high; two schools = moderate	INT, 26
	8. At the secondary level, the system of assessments is not as structured.	INT (dist), p. 8
	9. At the secondary level, assessments were primarily practice tests from previous state assessments and quarterly exams.	SE (int), p. 15

Key Finding 13	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	10. Formative assessments are administered regularly at the elementary level. On the secondary level, a “test bank” of items will be implemented next year.	INT (dist), p. 16
	11. According to district respondents, elementary school teachers use data to drive instruction.	INT, p. 9
	12. All five elementary schools received moderate ratings regarding building administrators’ use of data to make decisions.	INT, p. 27
	13. “All five elementary schools received high rating” on the extent to which data are shared within the schools.	INT, p. 26
	14. As a whole, teachers found their own classroom assessments more useful than the state assessment because the state data are not available in a timely manner.	ELL (int), p. 30

Key Finding 14	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Evidence shows an inconsistency in home-school communication. Votes: 1 Red	1. Parent/community involvement is extremely limited in learning activities throughout the entire school district community.	Obs. p. 9
	2. Administrators mentioned two main modes of parent outreach: multilingual written and oral communication efforts, and in-person activities conducted by school and community groups designed to involve parents of ELL students.	ELL (int), p. 8
	3. Parent participants uniformly reported feeling welcome at their children’s school and spoke positively about interactions with classroom teachers.	ELL (int), p. 41
	4. All parents confirmed their children were either in bilingual or ESL programs within district schools. However, some parents expressed confusion about the difference between ESL and bilingual classes.	ELL (int), p. 41

Key Finding 15	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Key documents offered no evidence of implementation or monitoring of professional development aimed at the literacy development of ELLs and SWDs.</p> <p>Votes: 1 Red</p>	<p>1. The district has comprehensive professional development plan for all teachers and plans to address literacy development for ELLs and SWDs but lacks monitoring of same.</p>	<p>DR, pp. 13–15</p>
	<p>2. Evidence of district policy on professional development is lacking.</p>	<p>DR, p. 15</p>

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
<p>Elementary and secondary ELL and general education classrooms employ a variety of instructional strategies to effectively address the language, cultural, and academic needs of ELLs.</p> <p>Votes: 13 Green</p>	1. Teacher stated: “You’re not dealing with one body—one population. You really have to reach out individually to identify weakness in students’ ability.”	ELL (int), p. 31
	2. Elementary and secondary ELL and general education teachers all employed a wide variety and high number of modifications: pacing, grouping, differential delivery.	ELL (obs), p. 33
	3. Despite the lack of resources in classrooms, the classroom culture was characterized by respect by teachers/student, and peer interaction.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	4. Administrators spoke positively about the collaboration of staff to identify student needs. Administrators whose schools currently use the Reading Streets program commented that materials in place adequately meet the needs of ELL students.	ELL (int), no page
	5. Focus group parent participants expressed positive opinions of the ELL program available for their children in the district schools. On a verbal scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, all parents rated the program as 5!	ELL (int), p. 41
	6. In more than half of the secondary schools, in general education classrooms, attempts to relate to student background were infrequent, ineffective, or no attempts were made at all. In two extreme cases, no value was placed on diversity or actively discouraged.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	7. Nearly all of the ESL and bilingual teachers utilized learning environment modifications, such as native language support and visual aids. Half of the general education teachers did also.	ELL (obs), p. 33
	8. Secondary ELL lessons generally incorporated language elements that were relevant and complementary with content area learning and provided fluid transitions between the two.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	9. The majority of general education teachers modified the work students were expected to produce.	ELL (obs), p. 33

Positive Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	10. All secondary ELL classrooms included an explicit focus on cultural diversity where the teacher made efforts to relate the lesson to students' real life experiences and built on their strengths rather than focusing on their deficits.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	11. Minimal differences were observed between ELL and general education progress and between elementary and secondary classrooms.	ELL (obs), p. 32
	12. Classroom observations across the district revealed that students are consistently held accountable to the same standards and that lesson activities provided multiple avenues for students to reach standards.	ELL (obs), p. 32
	13. Nearly all of the lessons observed demonstrated effective and frequent methods of classroom assessment and concrete timely and accessible feedback was offered to students on their performance.	ELL (obs), p. 36
	14. Although ELL teachers at the elementary levels reported using multimodal and active learning approaches, less than a quarter of the secondary teachers reported using active learning techniques.	ELL (int), p. 27

Positive Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p data-bbox="199 901 619 1201">The district provides a curriculum document through which teachers utilize frameworks to provide instruction to general education, ELL, and SWD students. The frameworks are aligned to New York state learning standards, and teachers find them useful.</p> <p data-bbox="199 1242 409 1274">Votes: 11 Green</p>	1. According to the interviews, all district and building administrators interviewed responded that ELA standards are incorporated into ESL and general education lessons as a matter of standard practice.	ELL (int), no page
	2. Grades 8 and 10 curriculum documents appear to be related to and aligned with the theme, essential questions, content/strategies, and resources, as well as NYSED performance indicators and district outcomes.	CA, p. 29
	3. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that the Grade 9–12 curriculum document explains how teachers may use various instructional and assessment strategies; as a whole, the Grade 9–12 document presents an aligned and nearly cohesive ELA program.	CA, p. 29
	4. According to school respondents, teachers utilize curriculum frameworks provided by the district office to guide instruction and to ensure that lessons are aligned to state standards.	INT, p. 27

Positive Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	5. Every individual (general education teachers and administrators) believe that SWDs have access to general education ELA curriculum. Lessons aligned to New York state standards.	SE (int), p. 4
	6. The Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that the Grades 9–12 curriculum document appears closely aligned to support a multicultural body of work and cover a range of themes.	CA, p. 28
	7. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, Grades 8 and 10 documents provide teachers with specific and useful guidance regarding what to teach, how to teach, what materials to use, and how to assess.	CA, p. 28
	8. The majority of ELL and general education program teachers confirmed that instruction planning was guided by: ELA, ESL standards, ESL performance indicators, text series, colleagues, state ELA exam, and ELA curriculum	ELL (int), p. 25
	9. At the secondary level, teachers said they follow the curriculum map.	INT, p. 18
	10. Teachers utilize curriculum frameworks provided by the district office to guide instruction which are aligned to the state standards.	INT, p. 17
	11. New curriculum frameworks are based on state performance indicators, articulation committee, exit questions, identified instructional materials, pacing guide, and district’s written expectations.	INT (dist), p. 6

Positive Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>General education, special education, and ELL teachers have participated in professional learning opportunities on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated instruction • Instructional strategies to teach ELA • Common professional development for special education and general education teachers • Collaboration and communication between ELL and general education teachers • Grade-level meetings to collaborate on instruction <p>Votes: 11 Green</p>	<p>1. Most teachers at district schools indicated that they meet with other teachers regularly during grade-level meetings and common preparation periods to collaborate on instruction.</p>	<p>INT, p. 23</p>
	<p>2. ELL teachers reported maintaining regular communication with general education teachers. General education teachers had mixed reviews.</p>	<p>ELL (int), p. 26</p>
	<p>3. Special education teachers were able to participate in the general education professional development opportunities offered.</p>	<p>SE (int), p. 13</p>
	<p>4. Elementary and secondary teachers reported that they participated in professional development related to differentiated instruction and strategies to teach the ELA curriculum.</p>	<p>SE (int), p. 13</p>

Positive Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>The district’s emphasis on the cognitive demand areas of <i>apply</i>, <i>understand</i>, and <i>create</i> across the four knowledge levels (<i>factual</i>, <i>conceptual</i>, <i>procedural</i>, and <i>metacognitive</i>) in Grades 6, 8, and 10 is in moderately aligned with the New York state performance indicators at the same grade levels.</p> <p>Votes: 9 Green</p>	1. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates the district’s order of emphasis of knowledge domains in Grade 6 mirrors those of New York state.	CA, p. 17
	2. According to the evidence in the Curriculum Alignment Report, Grade 6 students rarely engage with factual knowledge.	CA, p. 15
	3. According to Curriculum Alignment Report, the district demonstrated metacognitive knowledge in four of the six cognitive demands at the Grade 6 level: <i>understand</i> , <i>apply</i> , <i>evaluate</i> , and <i>create</i> .	CA, p. 16
	4. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates minimal or no evidence of student expectations for conceptual knowledge in the cognitive demands of <i>apply</i> , <i>analyze</i> , and <i>evaluate</i> for Grade 10.	CA, p. 24
	5. Student expectations for Grades 8 and 10 are more clearly presented and more detailed in terms of knowledge levels and cognitive process.	CA, p. 27
	6. Grade 8 students are asked to demonstrate knowledge using the full range of cognitive demands.	CA, pp. 18–19
	7. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that the district’s emphasis on the order of cognitive demands focuses on <i>apply</i> , <i>understand</i> , and <i>create</i> for Grade 8.	CA, p. 21, 25
	8. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that the district’s emphasis of knowledge domains are closely aligned to that of New York state for Grades 8 and 10.	CA, p. 21, 25
	9. Grade 8 students are expected to perform in the knowledge domains of conceptual and procedural.	CA, p. 18
	10. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates Grade 2 students rarely are required to <i>analyze</i> and <i>evaluate</i> (higher-order thinking)	CA, p. 7

Positive Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p data-bbox="199 284 609 613">Teachers and administrators indicated that differentiated instruction and curriculum modifications are implemented in ELL and SWD programs. Elementary general education teachers and a minority of secondary teachers differentiate instruction and modify curriculum.</p> <p data-bbox="199 662 394 695">Votes: 7 Green</p>	1. Elementary general education teachers reported modifying their curriculum for ELL students in their class, while the majority of secondary general education teachers do not.	INT, p. 25
	2. District administrators and all teachers report that SWDs educated in general education classes were taught same curriculum as nondisabled peers. Appropriate accommodations or instructional approaches used to access curriculum.	SE (int), p. 4
	3. Most administrators noted that the curriculum does not meet the needs of ELLs with minimal proficiency in English.	ELL (int), p. 6
	4. On average, classrooms received high ratings on instructional strategies. Only one area did not: cultural awareness.	ELL (obs), p. 35
	5. Teachers and administrators report that SWDs participate in state testing and receive accommodations during classroom and standardized testing.	SE (int), p. 4
	6. Observation data support that SWDs were taught the same curriculum as general education students. Teachers used appropriate accommodations or instructional approaches.	SE (obs), p. 4
	7. According to administrators, the district provides both an ESL and a bilingual program designed to help ELLs acquire proficiency in English and across the ELA curriculum.	ELL (int), p. 4
	8. Nearly all ELL program teachers and most of the elementary general education teachers reported modifying curriculum in some manner. The most commonly mentioned modifications were differentiating instruction, visuals, repetition, vocabulary work, audio, translations, and simplifying or clarifying instruction	ELL (int), p. 35, 36
	9. According to administrators' interviews, a team of administrators from the office of curriculum and instruction revised the ELA curriculum in 2007 to align requirements for Grades K–12, inclusive of ELL program instruction.	ELL (int), p. 6

Positive Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Elementary and middle schools with coteaching models in place exhibit effective coteaching, and special education teachers provide instruction in the classrooms.</p> <p>Votes: 4 Green</p>	1. Observation data showed the existence of effective coteaching at the elementary and middle school because special education teachers were used instructionally in the classroom	SE (obs), p. 17
	2. Based on an interview, not all elementary schools had a coteaching model.	SE (int), p. 17
	3. According to interview data, variations in access to ELA curriculum exist in self-contained classrooms. Teachers did not have general education materials, such as the Internet or a reading program. Teachers borrowed or acquired parts of programs at the elementary level.	SE (int), p. 5
	4. Coteaching teams were evident at every level in the district. Most elementary and middle school special education coteachers had instructional roles in the lesson allowing for small-group instruction.	SE (int), p. 8

Positive Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>There is evidence of a variety of professional development opportunities, including workshops and training specific to content in ELL and sheltered instruction.</p> <p>Votes: 3 Green</p>	1. There is substantial evidence that opportunities that support ELL instruction and learning for professional exists in the district.	DR, p. 17
	2. ELL program teachers reported receiving a variety of professional development including workshops and training specific to content.	ELL (int), p. 29

Positive Key Finding 8	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Instructional monitoring is occurring at the school level. Votes: 2 Green	1. According to school respondents, all five elementary schools interviewed received a high rating on monitoring instruction. Multiple approaches are used and there is evidence of team effort in every one.	INT, p. 21
	2. Instructional monitoring is evident across the school district on a regular basis.	INT, p. 19
	3. There is moderate evidence that plans and policies, implementation, and monitoring are in place to address instruction focused on effective delivery of the curriculum.	ELL (doc rev), p. 12
	4. Key documents indicate the district has plans in place to ensure the consistent delivery of the ELA curriculum within and across schools.	DR, p. 9
	5. All five elementary schools received high ratings on instructional consistency.	INT, p. 19

Neutral Key Findings

A series of neutral key findings also emerged from the district co-interpretation process. These findings received zero votes.

Neutral Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Improvement is needed in effectively matching new teachers and mentors in the district new-teacher mentor program. Votes: 0	1. According to the district respondents, support for new teachers is minimal.	INT, p. 16
	2. Accord to district respondents, there is a mentor program for new teachers.	INT, p. 13
	3. Some school level respondents felt improvement was needed in matching new teachers and mentors in the district’s new-teacher mentor program.	INT, p. 39

Neutral Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Administrators and teachers are not clear on how data are articulated and monitored for ELLs and SWDs. Votes: 0	1. Not all of the administrators were aware of the screening and placement procedures at their schools for ELLs.	ELL (int), p. 6
	2. Many general education teachers assume that ELL program teachers are monitoring their students. General education teachers tend to rely on the ELL program to monitor ELLs.	ELL (int), p. 30
	3. Elementary special education and general education teachers seemed unaware of how to collect, analyze, and interpret data because few training opportunities had been provided.	SE (int), p. 15
	4. Other administrators said that they either are not aware of how the ELL progress is tracked or that the ESL teacher is in charge of analyzing and applying test data.	ELL (int), p. 8
	5. When asked how ELL programs are monitored for effectiveness, most administrators believed that the ELL program teachers are responsible for this.	ELL (int), p. 8
	6. Key documents indicate there was no evidence provided that specifically addressed the issue of data-driven decision making and ELLs or SWDs.	DR, p. 16

Neutral Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>The Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that the district’s student expectations (Grades 2–10) for <i>remember</i>, <i>analyze</i>, and <i>evaluate</i> do not consistently reflect the NYSED grade-level performance indicators.</p> <p>Votes: 0</p>	<p>(no self-sticking notes found)</p>	

Neutral Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
<p>Technology use (i.e., computers for ELA instruction and assistive technology) was not evident in 90 percent to 100 percent of elementary, middle, and high schools.</p> <p>Votes: 0</p>	<p>1. No assistive technology devices were evident during observations.</p>	<p>SE (obs), p. 7</p>
	<p>2. Respondents cite that technology needs to be improved in both the elementary and secondary schools</p>	<p>INT, p. 38</p>
	<p>3. Technology was generally available and working at the elementary level, while secondary—especially ELL technology resources were limited, out of date, or nonfunctioning.</p>	<p>ELL (Obs), p. 37</p>
	<p>4. Technology use (i.e., computer for instructional delivery) was not observed in 90% to 100% of elementary, middle, and high school classes.</p>	<p>OBS, pp. 11–14</p>

Miscellaneous Findings

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

Miscellaneous Finding	Source/Page
1. According to district respondents, elementary schools in the district are strong, all made adequate yearly progress, and most students do well on state exams.	INT (dist), p. 13
2. There was a high level (92%) of academic and student engagement (88%) observed in elementary schools.	OBS, p. 8
3. Secondary teachers report a large number of at-risk/repeating students assigned to inclusion classes—impacting on scheduling and coverage of content.	SE (int), p. 4
4. Of the five areas reviewed, three were substantial and two were moderate according to the rating formula.	DR no page indicated
5. Districts changed in 2007–08 from skills-based curricula to theme-based curricula.	INT (dist), p. 6
6. The need to align ELA and ESL curriculum also was of high priority for some administrators.	ELL (int), p. 9
7. Student self-assessment was not observed in elementary, middle, or high school classes.	OBS, p. 11–14
8. Comparing the classroom space, secondary was limited; elementary general education had space for multiple arrangements.	OBS, p. 37
9. Two general education high school teachers said they had not received IEPs of all SWDs in their classes.	SE (int), p. 19
10. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates curriculum documents define why teachers should assess and document student reading/writing progress and stress that teachers continually document student performance.	CA, p. 29
11. The district’s written ELA curriculum appears to contain most components of a comprehensive plan for ELA teaching and learning. In addition, the district is commended for the detailed introduction section to each of its curriculum documents.	CA, p. 29
12. According to the Curriculum Alignment Report, Grades 2, 4, and 6 have theme-based questions to drive instruction. However, it is not clear if and how these questions are linked to instructional materials. For example, how may or should those materials address these questions and in turn the specific theme/unit topic?	CA, p. 29
13. According to the key documents, there is no documentation that specifically addresses the needs of ELLs and SWDs.	DR, p. 11

Miscellaneous Finding	Source/Page
14. Report findings indicate that all grades are in alignment with the rest of New York state in the area of professional development that focus on engaged activities in ELA, reading, and literature through attending workshops or inservice course work.	SEC ad hoc report
15. “High level of student engagement was frequently or extensively prevalent in any of the observed high school classrooms” (high school: high academically focused class time = 70%; high level of student engagement = 40%; middle school: high academically focused class time = 50%, high level of student engagement = 42%).	OBS, p. 6
16. Report findings show teacher perceptions regarding professional development involving committee work or task force focused on curriculum and instruction are aligned with state data.	SEC ad hoc report
17. Report findings show in Grades 5–8, teachers’ perceptions exceeded state data on the development of assessments or tests.	SEC ad hoc report
18. High academic focused time was prevalent in 92% of elementary and 70% of high school classes.	OBS, p. 6
19. New teachers routinely are hired after the school year begins.	INT, p. 13
20. Curriculum Alignment Report indicates minimal or no evidence of student expectations for conceptual knowledge in the cognitive demands if apply and create in Grade 8.	CA, pp. 9–10