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

Rome City School District
Final Report

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Submitted to
Rome City School District

Submitted by
Learning Point Associates

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Contents

Introduction

This final report is the result of an audit of the written, taught, and tested English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum of Rome City School District by Learning Point Associates. In 2007, 12 school districts and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) commissioned this audit to fulfill an accountability requirement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act for local education agencies (LEAs) identified as districts in need of corrective action. These LEAs agreed, with the 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). 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

Rome City School District is one of 15 school districts in Oneida County, located in central New York state. The city of Rome is located in the geographical center of New York state at the foothills of the Adirondacks.[1] The estimated population of the city in 2006 was 34,220.[2]

Student Population

Data from the *2005–06 Accountability and Overview Report* indicate that Rome City School District served a total of 5,622 students, with 195 prekindergarten students and 5,427 K–12 students.[3] Of those students enrolled, 86 percent were white; 7 percent were African American; 4 percent were Hispanic; and 2 percent were Asian, Pacific Islander, Alaskan Native, or Native American.

Demographics

Rome City School District consists of 11 schools: eight elementary schools, one upper elementary school, one middle school, and one high school.[4] Data from the 2003–04, 2004–05, and 2005–06 school years indicate a growing number of the student population who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—40 percent, 48 percent, and 50 percent, respectively. District data also indicate that the overall percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs) was small: a steady 1 percent across all three years. In the 2005–06 school year, the percentage of SWDs enrolled was approximately 14.9 percent.[5]

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the district's average spending per student in 2004–05 was $13,047.[6] The total New York state school aid to Rome City School District will increase from $59.5 million in 2007–08 to $63 million in 2008–09—an increase of $3.5 million or 5.9 percent.[7]

Student Academic Performance

As of 2005–06, the state accountability status of Rome City School District has been designated as a *district in need of improvement—Year 3* in the area of ELA. In 2005–06, students categorized as SWDs were the only student accountability group that did not make adequate yearly progress in ELA in elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

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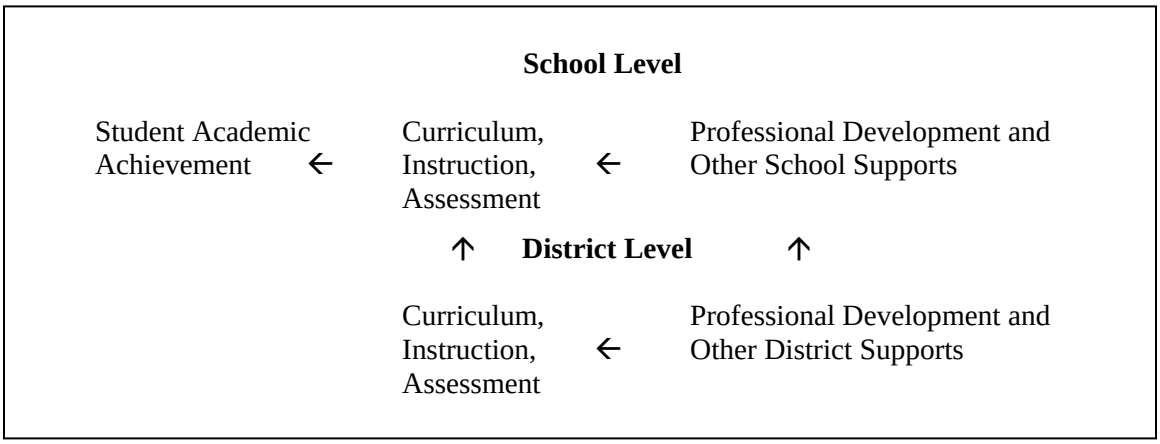
[1] http://romenewyork.com/organization.asp?orgid=73, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[2] http://www.city-data.com/city/Rome-New-York.html, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[3] https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2006/AOR-2006-411800010000.pdf, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[4] http://www.romecsd.org, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[5] http://eservices.nysed.gov/sepubrep/mainservlet?f=report&school=411800010000, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[6] http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/ny/district_profile/541, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[7] http://publications.budget.state.ny.us/eBudget0809/fy0809localities/schoolaid/schoolaid.html, retrieved March 21, 2008.

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-interpretation[SM] meeting indicates that change (i.e., actions needed to improve student achievement) occurs at both the school and 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 by 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 (SEC)*, observations of instruction, interviews of school and district personnel, a review of key district documents, alignment of the district's written ELA curriculum, and reviews of the Special Education program.

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 with the New York state standards and assessments, teachers in the district completed the SEC. Based on two decades of research funded by the National Science Foundation, the SEC are designed to facilitate the comparison of the enacted (taught) curriculum to standards (intended curriculum) and state tests (assessed curriculum) by using teachers' self-assessments. The data for each teacher consist of more than 500 responses. The disciplinary topic by cognitive-level matrix is presented in graphic form, which creates a common language for comparison and a common metric to maintain comparison objectivity.

Observations of Instruction

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

Observation data were collected from four to eight classrooms in each of the sample schools across the district. Observations were conducted on two days, a minimum of two weeks apart, in each school. Each observation lasted approximately 45 minutes. When 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 span 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 principals, coaches, 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. Notes and transcriptions of the interview records 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 English Language Arts Core Curriculum (New York State Education Department, 2005), in terms of levels of knowledge and cognitive demand. Second, using criteria for identifying and describing a cohesive, comprehensive, and clearly articulated curriculum identified in literature cited above, Learning Point Associates examined curriculum alignment documents submitted by the district. In both areas, materials were examined and analyzed at Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.

Special Education Review

The purpose of the Special Education review was to provide information to districts regarding the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and improvement-planning practices related to their Special Education program. Data collection activities that informed the Special Education review included the following: district or regional staff interviews; teacher interviews (including Collaborative Team Teaching [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.

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
1. To what extent is a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned curriculum guiding instruction across the district?			X	X	X	X
2. How does instruction focus on the effective delivery of the curriculum?	X	X	X	X		X
3. What academic interventions are available for students who need additional academic support?			X	X		X
4. What professional learning opportunities that support instruction and student learning are provided to teachers?	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
6. What staffing practices and profiles are utilized to effectively support teaching and learning across the district?			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 identification of district strengths and potential restraining forces that may be brought to bear on the issues facing the district. These steps occurred in 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, and Special Education Report) in a small-group setting. Individual groups were asked first 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 (AIS), professional development, data use, and staffing.

Identification of Key Findings

Participants were then divided into topic-area groups for the purpose of gathering 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 then 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 included in the Key Findings section of this report.

Prioritization of Key Findings

District participants then prioritized the key findings and voted for the ones they thought were the most important leverage points for Rome City School District. The key findings that earned the most votes became the focus of the next co-interpretation activity and are discussed in the Key Findings section of this report.

Identification of Driving and Restraining Forces

Identification of driving and restraining forces occurred next. In this stage, participants brainstormed to create a list of district initiatives, programs, or other dynamics that were positively influencing the top six prioritized key findings. A second round of brainstorming resulted in a list of potential restraining forces that might be impeding progress on the key finding or might serve to maintain the status quo. A graphic of these driving and restraining forces are included in Appendix C.

Phase 4: Action Planning

The 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 prepared to revise their Comprehensive Education Plans or other guiding plans as necessary to reflect the district's plan.

References

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives* (Complete ed.). New York: Longman.

New York State Education Department. (2005). *English language arts core curriculum (prekindergarten–grade 12).* Albany, NY: Author. Retrieved May 31, 2008, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elacore.pdf

Key Findings

As indicated in the description process for Phase 3: Co-Interpretation of Findings, each key finding statement was generated through the co-interpretation process. In a facilitated process, groups of school and district administrators, teachers, parents, and district technical assistance providers identified key findings across multiple data sets. These key findings were prioritized by co-interpretation participants and 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.

Key Finding 1

ELA curriculum documents exist at varying levels and stages of completion, and alignment with the state standards varies throughout the grade levels.

- **Although NYSED and Rome City School District performance indicators in the knowledge domain are in the same order of emphasis in Grades 2, 6, 8, and 10, students in Grades 2, 6, and 8 rarely engage with factual knowledge.**
- **Evidence suggests that ELA curriculum expectations cover a full range of cognitive demands at some grade levels. Additionally, the levels of cognitive demand do not correspond with New York state standards at some grade levels.**

There seems to be a gap between either the New York state standards and the Rome City School District curriculum map or the Rome City School District curriculum map and the delivery of the curriculum.

Co-interpretation participants generated four key findings on the topic of the Rome City School District curriculum maps but decided to combine them into one because they spoke to a single topic. This key finding then received the highest number of votes, which indicated that co-interpretation participants considered it a top priority for the district. Nearly 40 findings from every data set—including the Curriculum Alignment Report, Document Review Report, Interview Report, Observation Report, Special Education Report, and SEC Report—spoke to this key finding.

The development of an aligned ELA curriculum is supported by the district process for selecting and aligning curricular materials and by the curriculum mapping conducted by various grades in the district. Evidence from several documents, however, indicates that the policies guiding curriculum development and selection of instructional materials—including monitoring and oversight at the district level—are incomplete. The Document Review Report found that only informal monitoring, prioritizing, and mapping of curriculum alignment takes place.

Though ELA curriculum mapping has been evident across the district, district interview respondents said curriculum mapping across grade levels varies widely. No curriculum mapping has been accomplished in some grades, whereas complete and accurate curriculum maps have been developed in other grades. School interviews revealed that curriculum maps are used by elementary-level teachers fairly consistently, although the use of curriculum maps at the secondary level is inconsistent, and, for some teachers, expectations are not clearly articulated.

The Curriculum Alignment Report revealed a number of areas where essential components of the curriculum are missing or not articulated in a comprehensive way. For example, the Grade 4 curriculum is missing clearly articulated student expectations; the curriculum for Grades 6, 8, and 10 does not contain information pertaining to instruction; and the Grade 8 curriculum lacks time frames for instruction and links to assessments. For all grades reviewed (Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10), the curriculum does not provide direction for differentiating instruction. Similarly, the SEC Report, which focuses on what teachers teach, revealed that key state standards are not being met. For example, though Grade 9 is aligned overall, it focuses too much on reading and not enough on writing standards. In addition, higher-level thinking skills are not adequately addressed in Grades 9 and 10, and more emphasis should be placed on the writing process and elements of presentation in Grade 4.

Key Finding 2

Although the district has a policy and plans to provide AIS, the effectiveness varies, and there are multiple deficiencies noted in monitoring progress, scheduling, and staffing of AIS instruction.

This key finding is supported by evidence from the Special Education Report, Interview Report, Document Review Report, and—to a lesser extent—the SEC Report and Curriculum Alignment Report.

According to the Special Education Document Review, Rome has an AIS plan to help K–12 general education and special education students generally meet New York state standards in ELA. The plan consists of providing AIS to supplement the general education curriculum as well as needed support services from resource room teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. Each component of this plan has run into problems with delivery.

While the Document Review Report notes that the district has a policy that guides the identification of students who need academic support, a number of district interview respondents said the district has found it difficult to determine the specific needs of these students.

Though the district has emphasized AIS programs recently, interview respondents said the AIS interventions vary in effectiveness. Staffing limitations were cited as a barrier that affects the amount and quality of interventions. Scheduling the delivery of AIS and related services in some schools conflicts with general education instruction, results in too many students scheduled for pull-out sessions, and—in some cases—complicates coverage by teachers of the general education classrooms. Respondents indicated that there was inconsistent monitoring of AIS to assess implementation and determine the effectiveness of services.

Key Finding 3

There is an apparent lack of monitoring of instruction at the district, school, and teacher levels.

This key finding is supported by evidence from the Interview Report, SEC Report, Document Review Report, and Special Education Report.

The Document Review Report shows little evidence of monitoring instruction or the use of curricular materials; the report noted that the district assesses consistent delivery of the curriculum based on assessment data. According to school interview respondents, monitoring of instruction at the school level occurs inconsistently and with varying degrees of effectiveness at all levels. In several schools, teachers said they seldom receive feedback from administrators on their instruction. District respondents offered a similar observation describing lack of accountability at the building level as well as building administrators offering little or no instructional leadership. Respondents who were interviewed for the Special Education Report also said there is no consistent monitoring system aimed at ensuring that SWDs receive appropriate instruction.

Key Finding 4

Across grade levels, opportunities for higher level thinking and student engagement activities—such as experiential learning, individual inquiry, collaborative works, sustained reading and writing, and student self-assessment, were not prevalent.

This key finding is supported by evidence from the Observation Report, Special Education Report, and SEC Report.

Classroom observations revealed a limited range of instructional practices across all grade levels. The most common instructional practice across all levels—elementary, middle, and high schools—was direct instruction. This was the prevalent strategy in 69 percent of the observed elementary school classrooms, 72 percent of the observed high school classrooms, and 100 percent every one of the observed middle school classrooms.

A second prevalent strategy was high-level questioning, which was observed frequently in nearly 60 percent of the high school classrooms, 20 percent of the middle school classrooms, and only 8 percent of the elementary school classrooms.

Some of the least frequently observed practices across all levels included experiential hands-on learning, student self-assessment, and cooperative or collaborative learning. Cooperative or collaborative learning was rarely observed in 14 percent of the high school classrooms but not observed in 100 percent of the middle school classrooms.

The Special Education classroom observations also revealed a limited range of educational experiences because students rarely were engaged in independent seatwork, experimental activities, sustained writing and reading activities, or collaborative work.

Key Finding 5

The effectiveness and impact of professional development is uncertain. There is a lack of measurement, a lack of monitoring, and inconsistent implementation.

This key finding is supported by evidence from the Interview Report, Document Review Report, and Special Education Report.

In several schools, interview respondents acknowledged that professional development is helpful for learning new concepts and strategies and providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate. The effectiveness and influence of professional development on instruction varies among schools. Evidence from both the general education Interview Report and the Special Education Report suggests that low monitoring and follow-up contributes to inconsistent implementation of newly learned practices. According to interview respondents, the district does not have an approach for measuring the impact of professional development on classroom practices, and the Document Review Report said the district focuses more on attendance at professional development sessions than on effectiveness.

Key Finding 6

Although there is a current process and system for collecting and reviewing data—as well as evidence of teachers monitoring student progress with informal assessments and leaders using data for improvement—there is no district policy or all-inclusive plan regarding the regulation and monitoring of all data to include the following:

- **Professional development for data analysis**
- **Connecting data with school and district goals**
- **Using data to guide instruction and evaluate goals**
- **Timeliness of data**
- **Additional data to guide instruction for SWDs**
- **Consistent use**

This key finding is supported by evidence from the Interview Report, Special Education Report, Document Review Report, and SEC Report.

As the finding suggests, data to assess student progress are available in the district and are reviewed. However, the use of these data is limited because data inconsistently guide instruction, inform district planning, or periodically measure district progress in meeting its stated goals. For instruction, teachers use a number of data sources to make instructional decisions; particularly in the elementary schools, teachers who were interviewed said they have adequate data from formal assessments to monitor student progress.

However, data use by teachers is inconsistent overall, possibly because of the lack of professional development regarding how to make data-driven, instructional decisions. Some of

the interviewed teachers indicated that their schools do not have procedures for sharing and discussing student data across the schools. Several district interview respondents noted that the district values using student data to make decisions at all levels and discusses student data, but the skills and processes for interpreting the data are not well developed.

The Special Education Report noted that a majority of teachers reported using student achievement data to identify student needs and group students by instructional level. Teachers and other interview respondents described some barriers to data use. For example, several teachers said some of the assessment results do not provide helpful information for guiding instruction. Some teachers said the district assessments are not sensitive and, therefore, are not useful for teaching SWDs. Interviewed teachers cited the length of time it takes to get assessment results back as a barrier. Many of the teachers and special education leaders expressed concern about using the state ELA assessment to measure performance of SWDs because of the discrepancy between the ability level of the students and the assessments they are required to take. The interviews indicated that teachers rely more on data from informal assessments than from formal assessments.

Key Finding 7

Although teacher interviews indicate that teachers use differentiation instructional strategies, observations indicate otherwise—especially for SWDs.

This key finding is supported by evidence from the Observation Report, Special Education Report, and—to a lesser extent—the Curriculum Alignment Report.

While the respondents interviewed for the Special Education Report acknowledged that they use a wide variety of strategies to differentiate instruction, observations of classes with special education students revealed that differentiation was not evident in three fourths of classrooms. Small group and one-on-one instruction with teachers were rarely seen in nearly one half of the classrooms. Although teachers said they used small-group instruction as a strategy, it was not consistently differentiated.

The Curriculum Alignment Report noted that in the grades reviewed (Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10), curriculum documents do not provide teachers with any information on differentiated instruction. General education observations revealed that work centers—which support differentiation—were observed in only 4 percent of the elementary school classrooms. There was little or no evidence of differentiated instruction in the observed middle and high schools.

Additional Key Findings

Additional findings were identified as key by the district co-interpretation participants but were not prioritized for action planning. These findings include the following:

- **Staffing**
  - Respondents indicate that instructional leadership—such as content coaches, teacher coordinators, and principals—has positive impact. Currently, the availability and/or accessibility of instructional leaders is inconsistent across the district.

- There are inconsistencies in the collaboration between special education teachers, general education teachers, and building-level administrators.

- **Professional Development**
  - Teachers and leaders would like professional development to focus more on special education specific issues—such as test accommodations, IEPs, and disabilities—and issues related to special education within general education settings—such as inclusive classrooms, modifications, and literacy.
  - Teachers and educational leaders requested more professional development sessions in data use.
  - Teachers prefer to have input with professional development planning and sessions that provide materials and resources they can use immediately. They find school-level collaboration with their peers helpful.
  - Various professional development training sessions are offered by the district and viewed as a positive influence; however, several teachers said they are limited in the number of paid opportunities they can attend during the summer.
- **Instruction**
  - Inconsistencies in the use and availability of ELA materials exist across the district.
  - Three main concerns regarding parental involvement in Rome City School District exist:
    - Parental voices not being heard
    - Redistricting having an impact on SWDs
    - Lack of parental involvement in classrooms for general education students and SWDs
  - Technology use was not observed in the classrooms.
- **Academic Interventions**
  - There is a lack of optimism expressed regarding the performance of SWDs.
  - Teachers and parents indicated that students need to receive services earlier.
- **Curriculum**
  - The degree of curricular modifications for SWDs varies across different educational settings. More restrictive settings exhibit greater modifications than less restrictive settings.

Positive Key Findings

A series of positive key findings also emerged from the district co-interpretation process. These findings—which indicate what is being done well in the district—were prioritized by district participants as follows:

- Documents, surveys, and professional staff interviews indicate that a majority of SWDs have access to the general education curriculum.
- Teachers plan and use different methods of instructional delivery and management strategies to maintain positive interactions with students.

Miscellaneous Findings

Some findings from the data sets by co-interpretation participants were identified but not included in the development of the key findings outlined earlier. Some findings were considered outliers if they could not be combined with others to create a significant key finding. In addition, some suggestions were placed in a "parking lot" for future consideration. These 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 practices 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 with Rome City School District led Learning Point Associates to make three recommendations. Recommendation 1 speaks to Key Finding 1 regarding the district's need to develop a fully articulated and aligned curriculum. Recommendation 2 focuses on instruction and addresses the issues presented in Key Findings 3, 4, and 7—with additional guidance for Key Finding 2 regarding AIS and the use of student achievement data as noted in Key Finding 6. Likewise, Recommendation 3 crosses multiple key findings through the discussion of professional development planning and the incorporation of professional learning communities.

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. Further, the order of the listing does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information about specific actions that the district may consider during the action planning process is provided. 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: Curriculum

Develop a comprehensive, clearly articulated K–12 ELA written curriculum for all students that includes the following plans and processes:

- **Revise existing K–12 curriculum maps/documents, ensuring that each:**
  - **Aligns with the district's written curriculum and the NYSED ELA performance indicators and standards in terms of depth and breadth of content**
  - **Shows how all students are expected to meet the same learning objectives and to have access to the general curriculum (i.e., instruction and materials should be modified, but the objectives and curriculum should not be altered)**
  - **Incorporates and/or revises essential components of a comprehensive ELA curriculum, including the following:**
    - **Clearly articulated student learning objectives aligned with the district's written curriculum**
    - **Viable instructional pacing chart and guidelines**
    - **Links to differentiated instructional methods to meet all students' ELA needs**
    - **Links to instructional and curricular materials, including sample lesson plans**
    - **Links to specific formative and summative assessment tools and techniques**
- **Devise and implement a plan to monitor ELA *curriculum development* across the district**

Link to Findings

The results of the co-interpretation and the district's close inspection of the data indicate that Rome City School District presently has a written ELA curriculum that varies across grade levels, stages of completion, and alignment with the NYSED's ELA performance indicators.

Comprehensive, Clearly Articulated, and Aligned ELA Curriculum/Curriculum Maps and Documents. According to the Document Review Report, Curriculum Alignment Report, and Interview Report, along with supporting findings drawn from the SEC Report, Rome City School District presented some ELA curriculum documents for the targeted grade levels (Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10) that vary in degree of completion. For example, curriculum maps exist for each grade level, and these maps do identify student expectations; but these expectations appear to resemble the NYSED ELA performance indicators rather than state-specific content and skills that students will learn, understand, and be able to do as part of a comprehensive, clearly articulated curriculum. In addition, not all curriculum documents include a schedule or time frame for teachers to follow. Furthermore, none of the curriculum documents reviewed in the Curriculum Alignment Report contain information to assist teachers with differentiating their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students. In summary, the curriculum maps for Grades K–12 need to be revised.

Monitoring ELA Curriculum Development. According to the Document Review Report and Interview Report, Rome City School District does not formally monitor the development of its written ELA curriculum to ensure that it is comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned with NYSED standards and performance indicators. For example, some interviewed personnel expressed concern that the ELA curriculum maps exist at different stages of development ranging from nonexistent to complete. Some special educators believe that a consistent system to ensure SWDs receive appropriate instruction does not exist. General educators expressed similar concern by reporting that monitoring was inconsistent across buildings and varied widely in quality and effectiveness. The Document Review Report confirmed that Rome City School District appeared to lack a policy or plan to monitor ELA curriculum implementation and effectiveness. In summary, the district needs to devise and implement a plan to create and maintain a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned ELA curriculum.

Link to Research

Inspired by recent literacy research reports (e.g., Flippo, 2001), Rasinski and Padak (2004) discuss the importance of broadening the view of what constitutes a comprehensive ELA curriculum. Among the many considerations they present, Rasinski and Padak (2004) suggest that a comprehensive ELA curriculum must:

- Provide a wide variety of text types, both print and electronic.
- Place greater emphasis on higher-order thinking and challenging students' beliefs.
- Accommodate the diverse needs of all students, including those with special needs and ELLs.

- Deliberately and thoughtfully emphasize multiple types of reading and writing across the curriculum.
- Explore ways to more effectively maintain student ELA learning and achievement beyond the school day and school year (i.e., summer vacation).

Rasinski and Padak (2004) say this broader view of literacy curriculum provides a means of assisting students in constructing a better understanding of themselves, in addition to acting as a roadmap of specific content and skills to be taught.

Comprehensive, Clearly Articulated, and Aligned ELA Curriculum and Documents. An *aligned* and *fully articulated* curriculum has five qualities (Danielson, 2002; English, 2000):

- Alignment of district and state standards in terms of content breadth
- Alignment of district and state standards in terms of cognitive depth
- Clearly articulated student expectations
- Realistic pacing guidelines for coverage of the district standards
- Other curricular components in addition to district standards and pacing guidelines that may include instructional strategies, connections to district materials, other resources, or assessment options

A well-articulated curriculum also is flexible enough to assist in developmentally meeting the needs of diverse learners in all educational settings. In a comprehensive curriculum, performance indicators, assessments, and instructional strategies provide teachers with a common set of expectations. When the curriculum, materials, programs, instruction, and assessments are aligned with state standards, student progress can be monitored throughout the year (Guskey, 2000; Holcomb, 1999; Porter, 2002).

Research shows that the curriculum is one of the major factors that contributes to student achievement. Standards-based curricular reform offers teachers a guide for their instructional practices by pointing to what knowledge or skills students must demonstrate (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). A comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned ELA curriculum presents a blueprint or plan that often appears as curriculum maps for each grade level and presents content that students should learn and teachers should teach as well as methods and materials that teachers may use to instruct and assess (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Glatthorn, 1994, 1995; Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2005; Glatthorn, Carr, & Harris, 2001). These maps present clear and complete student learning objectives that are aligned with external standards and performance indicators in terms of depth and breadth of content covered (Danielson, 2002; English, 2000; Marzano & Kendall, 2007). These objectives succinctly state *what* students will learn (i.e., knowledge level—noun clause) and *how* they will learn it (i.e., cognitive demand level—verb clause) relative to the specific curricular content (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

When aligning the curriculum, more than curricular topics should correspond to the state standards. Even if both the content of the standards and the content of the curriculum align,

student performance still will lag if the level of cognitive demand required by the standards differs from the level of cognitive demand reflected in classroom instruction and/or assessment (Corallo & McDonald, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to align the district curriculum with the state standards both in the *breadth of content* covered and the *depth of cognitive demand* required (Danielson, 2002; English, 2000). Research supports the need for teaching language arts skills with more depth and breadth. Students typically do well with basic literacy skills, such as decoding and comprehension, but struggle with making inferences, drawing appropriate conclusions, connecting text to their lives, and communicating complex ideas (Carr, Saifer, & Novick, 2002). The written curriculum needs to provide clear information on frequent, ongoing goals and expectations for student learning. Using a standards-based curriculum aligns, integrates, and connects assessments, curriculum, and instruction (Burger, 2002).

In addition to addressing the key four areas of ELA—reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills—developing a comprehensive ELA program may be viewed as embracing a cross-curricular approach to learning. Doing so would involve using the four ELA areas to explore and learn about topics within and across content areas such as mathematics, science, and social studies by incorporating nonfiction and fiction texts, including primary sources (Bintz & Dillard, 2007; Bintz & Moore, 2007; Roe & Ross, 2006; Stevens, 2006; Thames et al., 2008).

New York state school districts are expected to align their ELA curriculum to meet NYSED ELA performance indicators and standards (New York State Education Department, 2005). However, a district that presents state standards/performance indicators as its student expectations does not have an aligned curriculum (Anderson, 2002) because curriculum alignment is more than a correlation between—or a replica of—external standards/performance indicators and local district student expectations. Research explains that the purpose of state academic standards is "to create more intellectually demanding content and pedagogy, thereby improving the quality of education for all students, and to establish uniform goals for schools, thus producing greater equality in students' academic achievement" (Sandholtz, Ogawa, & Scribner, 2004, p. 1178). Research has shown that without aligning the district standards with the state standards, "students cannot achieve the knowledge and skills they need to achieve the standards" (Linn & Herman, 1997, p. 17). Aligning a curriculum with the state standards is a necessary first step to improving student achievement. By using the local standards that are aligned with the state standards, districts must provide guidelines to help teachers to appropriately and realistically pace the coverage of the standards.

Connections to Instruction and Materials. From a practical standpoint of what teachers and schools should provide students, a comprehensive ELA curriculum gives equal attention to multiple forms and means of reading and writing (e.g., guided reading, independent reading; shared writing, independent writing); embraces a variety of text types and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction); and connects to content areas such as social studies and science (Bintz & Moore, 2007; Flippo, 2001; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). This comprehensive curriculum also embraces a variety of means for teaching, learning, and demonstrating literacy (Breaux, Danridge, & Pearson, 2002, Taylor & Pearson, 2004; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002). For example, curriculum maps offer suggestions of instructional methods and materials that teachers may use to differentiate instruction across content, process, and product (Hall, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001; Tomlinson & Strickland,

2005). Teachers may then select and adapt these suggestions when planning and implementing lessons and other learning opportunities for their students. There is no perfect method for teaching; rather, effective teachers know a variety of methods and how to select and adapt appropriate methods based on student need (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). Please see Recommendation 2 for further information regarding selecting and employing effective ELA teaching methods.

How teachers teach is as important as *what* they teach, so simply matching instructional goals and practices to objectives and materials in the written curriculum is not sufficient to implement effective literacy instruction consistently (Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008; Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002). An aligned written curriculum does not guarantee that quality instruction will be provided (Allington, 1994). While written curriculum can and should inform instruction, it is essential to acknowledge that "textbooks and programs are not curriculum delivery; they are curriculum design" (English, 2008, p. 9). Curricular pressures to use and cover certain materials, implement certain methods, and improve student performance on high-stakes assessment, among other concerns, can and do have potential negative impacts on the quality of instruction provided to students (Jackson, Harper, & Jackson, 2002). Curriculum maps should provide teachers with a wide variety of examples and samples of various instructional methods and materials, including suggestions about how to use them to help students actively engage the curricular content and the learning process and, in turn, meet district and state learning objectives and standards (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2002). There is no one "perfect method" for teaching; rather, effective teachers select and differentiate methods and materials according to students' needs (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999).

Realistic Pacing Guidelines. Districts must provide guidelines that help teachers to appropriately and realistically pace the coverage of the standards. A viable curriculum is one in which "the content that teachers are expected to address must be adequately covered in the instructional time teachers have available" (Marzano, 2003, p. 24). Among other reforms and practices, schools that developed and implemented realistic pacing guides realized improvement in teaching effectiveness and student learning (Protheroe, 2008; Redding, 2006). Realistic and clearly articulated pacing guides inform teachers of the content that needs to be covered during the school year and assist them in planning, timing, and delivering effective instruction.

Connection to Assessments. Research indicates that teachers often feel confused, frustrated, and anxious when creating and delivering assessments (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2002). Teachers need to understand the elements of strong assessments when developing, choosing, and/or using them (Stiggins, 2002). These anxieties can be relieved through clear, well-articulated connections with the student expectations presented in the district's ELA curriculum. A comprehensive, well-articulated, and aligned ELA curriculum needs to link the written and taught curricula to the assessed curricula (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Glatthorn et al., 2005). Therefore, a curriculum map should specify what teachers should teach, offer guidance on how they may teach it, and suggest formative and summative means for assessing what students have learned.

When discussing school reform, researchers stress that student assessment is the centerpiece of many educational improvement efforts (Bond, 1995). Research recommends a balance between

formative and summative assessments. Typically, summative assessments are used at the district level. The use of formative assessments at the building level has a great instructional impact on teachers and a great academic and motivational impact on students. A balance between the two assists in providing a clear picture of student achievement levels and progress throughout the year. "High-stakes data gives us only one piece of evidence about student learning. Well-designed classroom data collection and analysis, the everyday information a teacher collects, forms the backbone of student growth" (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2004, p. 10).

Getting frequent and specific feedback on performance benefits the teachers' instruction, but it also is cited as necessary to students' intrinsic motivation (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2004). Assessment data help inform teachers' instruction with regard to what is and is not working in the classroom. Therefore, providing teachers with a central curriculum document that guides them in using formative assessment should translate into more consistent modifications and differentiated instruction for all students to meet desired achievement benchmarks.

Student Access to the General ELA Curriculum. Federal laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) and No Child Left Behind Act (2002), mandate that students with special needs be granted equal access to the general curriculum. Unfortunately, Browder et al. (2007) report that despite the mandated educational policies and compelling research, many educators are not convinced that access is possible or feasible. Many teachers have increased their expectations for what students with special needs can and should accomplish academically. Brower et al. indicate that providing all students—especially those with special needs—equal access to grade-level content and skills, particularly related to reading/literacy, accomplishes the following:

- Prepares students for living in inclusive communities outside of school
- Provides students with the knowledge and opportunities for self-determination
- Helps to realize equal educational opportunity for all students

Research has demonstrated that students who are provided access to the general curriculum not only benefit socially but also demonstrate improved learning when taught alongside peers in general education classroom settings (Browder et al., 2007; King-Sears, 2001; Lee et al., 2006; McDonnell, Johnson, Polychronis, & Risen, 2002); this approach is commonly referred to as *inclusive education* (Fisher & Frey, 2001). To facilitate this access, educators may differentiate three aspects of the curriculum—content, process, and products—while still maintaining the same learning objectives and expectations (Tomlinson, 2001). In other words, a teacher may vary what is taught (content), how it is taught (process), and what students create to demonstrate their learning (products), guided by the same objectives and expectations set forth for all students (Hall, 2002). Curriculum maps and documents should explain *how* and *why* teachers should differentiate curricular content, process, and products, along with suggestions and samples that illustrate how, such as those suggested by Tomlinson and Hall. It is essential, however, that educators maintain the same learning objectives for all students. All students ultimately should achieve the same learning outcomes, although they may follow different paths and receive differentiated high-quality instruction to reach this goal (Clay, 1998).

Monitoring ELA Curriculum Development. Although the curriculum is commonly thought of as discrete parts—such as written, taught, and learned—it might be better viewed as a necessary system comprised of these and other parts that, when functioning well, impact student achievement. Like any other system, curriculum must be thoughtfully developed, implemented, monitored, maintained, and renewed in order to function effectively and efficiently. Stakeholders must share a common vision for reforming this system and working collaboratively to ensure success (Newmann, 2002).

In his review of curriculum renewal research and practices, Brown (2004) suggests that teachers, schools, and districts might best be served by viewing curriculum as "a system for guiding learning and promoting organizational productivity." Building and maintaining this system involves:

- "Establishing a common curriculum language."
- "Building consensus around curriculum nonnegotiables."
- "Establishing alignment to promote accountability."
- "Meeting the needs of all learners."
- "Evaluating curriculum."
- "Finding parallels among current national curriculum models." (Brown, 2004)

It is essential for school districts and schools to continually revisit, update, and improve the ELA curriculum to ensure that it continues to reflect best practices, current content, and appropriate assessment tools and procedures (Hoffman, 1991; Taylor, Pearson, et al., 2002). In addition to ensuring that the content of curriculum maps and related guideline documents are current, effective schools also consider ways to improve teacher access to these materials, including posting revised versions on the Internet for viewing and download (Zavadsky, 2006).

In summary, curriculum development is not a one-time task. As mentioned earlier, while curriculum is commonly thought of as discrete parts, the district should consider curriculum development as a system—a comprehensive product that guides instruction across grade levels. Like any other system, it must be thoughtfully developed, monitored, maintained, and renewed to effectively meet the needs of *all* students (Brown, 2004). Continuously collecting data to monitor whether or not the curriculum is working, as well as making the necessary revisions the district needs, ensures that a fully developed curriculum is always maintained (Redding, 2006).

Implementation Considerations

These proposed changes will result in the creation of a blueprint that does the following:

- Better aligns the specific content and skills the district expects its students to learn and know with the NYSED ELA grade-level standards and performance indicators in terms of content depth and breadth and cognitive demand.
- Offers more targeted and plentiful guidance and resources to aid teachers in planning and delivering more effective instruction and other learning opportunities for all students.

- Identifies specific means for assessing student learning of what they are taught, for the purposes of informing future instruction and accountability to other stakeholders.

Furthermore, the development and implementation of a plan to monitor curriculum development will establish a process for regularly evaluating the success of the instructional reform efforts and facilitate a process for making any needed modifications.

The following suggested strategies should be kept in mind as the curriculum plan is developed:

- **Revise Student Learning Objectives.** Rome City School District needs to revise its student learning objectives for all grade levels in order to reflect the content and skills—aligned with NYSED ELA performance indicators and standards—that they want their students to meet. Special attention should be given to devise objectives that engage students in higher order thinking (especially in analyzing, evaluating, and creating) and all four knowledge levels (i.e., factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive). In comparison to the cognitive demand and knowledge level analysis of NYSED performance indicators presented in the Curriculum Alignment Report, Rome City School District's grade-level student expectations do not align. Learning Point Associates used the revised taxonomy table and procedures (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) to identify cognitive demand areas and knowledge levels of NYSED ELA performance indicators and Rome City School District student objectives and to examine the degree of alignment between the two. Rome City School District may wish to consult the tables depicting these comparisons in the Curriculum Alignment Report to assist in revising and aligning its student learning objectives.

  At the co-interpretation, district participants noted that curriculum development was hindered by a lack of training on curriculum writing that promotes alignment with New York state standards and promotes cognitive demands. If the district is going to continue to have teachers develop curriculum, it must train the teachers involved. As noted earlier, because the current curricula are not properly aligned with the NYSED ELA performance indicators, the district must provide time for teachers to revise and adjust the curriculum documents that already have been created—in addition to developing new curriculum documents in areas where they do not exist. Co-interpretation participants noted that curriculum maps are considered a work in progress, so making these revisions would be in line with the district culture.

- **Determine Curriculum Components.** According to the professional literature, a comprehensive, clearly articulated ELA curriculum is a blueprint for what students need to learn and know and what teachers should teach. To create this blueprint, Rome City School District must devise a curriculum that presents the ELA content and skills it wants students to learn and be able to do—expressed as clearly articulated student learning objectives—along with a plan that indicates how teachers will teach and assess. Content and skills must be aligned with—but not replicate—NYSED ELA performance indicators. Textbooks and commercially prepared programs may be included as part of this plan, but Rome City School District needs to explain *how* and *why* these materials will be used and possibly integrated with district- and teacher-created materials in order to meet the stated learning objectives.

In addition, this plan should identify and explain interrelationships between the following:

- Topics, theme, and guiding questions to be addressed
- Learning objectives
- Viable instructional pacing guidelines
- Samples of differentiated instruction materials and methods that teachers may use to meet the learning objectives with a diverse population of students, which may include parts of one or more programs/materials
- Assessment tools and procedures that may be used to assess student learning in order to inform future instruction (see Recommendation 2 for further information regarding ELA instruction)

- **Provide ELA Learning Opportunities for Students.** The district should seek to provide abundant opportunities for students to participate in all four areas of ELA (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in a variety of modes (e.g., read-alouds, guided reading, shared writing, independent writing, and independent reading) and apply literacy skills and strategies to other content areas (e.g., science and social studies). Rome City School District may wish to consider integrating its ELA curriculum to focus on multiple areas—such as reading/writing or ELA workshops—which incorporate a variety of reading and writing modes (e.g., read-alouds, guided reading, shared writing, writing workshop, independent reading and writing, and word work).
- Many science and social studies themes or topics lend themselves to cross-curricular thematic unit study, which not only allow for meaningful application of literacy skills and strategies but also give teachers and students the opportunity to simultaneously address content area and ELA standards and performance indicators. Rome City School District may wish to explore its options regarding how students read, write, speak, and listen to content-area, expository, and informational texts.

  Co-interpretation participants noted that Rome City School District has piloted several reading programs at the elementary school level. The considerations mentioned earlier should be kept in mind if the district decides to implement a new textbook series districtwide at any grade level. Participants also noted the need for a central archive and electronic versions of curriculum documents to facilitate their implementation and revision. Fortunately, the district already has plans for summer curriculum development through the summer Curriculum Alignment Process (CAP) program, as noted in the force-field analysis for Key Finding 1 in Appendix C.
- **Create a Plan for Continuous Improvement.** The plan for monitoring the successful development of the curriculum should explain how the district will ensure that it creates and maintains a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned ELA plan (cross-curricular, whenever possible) with the components discussed earlier. Rome City School District may wish to create new structures and/or charge existing committees or district personnel with providing leadership for developing a plan for revising its curriculum plan as part of its Action Plan as well as continually monitoring and revising this curriculum plan as needed in the future.

Co-interpretation participants noted "supervisory positions in curriculum areas (not enough people, expertise and authority not in the same place)" as a significant restraining force in the area of curriculum monitoring. The inclusion of this in the force-field analysis for Key Finding 1 in Appendix C speaks to the need for Rome City School District to articulate leadership roles and processes in the monitoring, revision, and continuous improvement of the ELA curriculum.

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Recommendation 2: Instruction

Develop and implement a clearly articulated plan for K–12 ELA instruction that includes the following:

- **Align instructional approaches and materials with the district's written curriculum and student benchmarks as well as to NYSED student standards and performance indicators**
- **Differentiate instruction to accommodate students' diverse needs, as guided by a feasible pacing chart**
- **Clearly explain how AIS will complement other instruction provided to targeted students to ensure they have access to the written ELA curriculum and improved academic achievement**
- **Use a variety of student achievement data to inform instruction**
- **Provide sustained professional development opportunities on differentiated instruction and data-driven decision making regarding the ELA curriculum to all instructional staff**
- **Devise and implement a plan to monitor ELA *curriculum implementation* across the district**

Link to Findings

Learning Point Associates conducted a thorough review of the submitted reports and collected data. From the reports generated and shared during co-interpretation, the following key findings emerged:

Aligning ELA Instruction With the District's Written Curriculum and Implementing the Curriculum. The Curriculum Alignment Report, the Document Review Report, and the Interview Report indicate that Rome City School District has curriculum maps for each grade level that vary in terms of completion, depth of description, and inclusion of all components of a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and articulated ELA curriculum. Most elementary school teachers report that they consistently use curriculum maps to plan instruction, while their secondary-level colleagues expressed more confusion regarding an inconsistent use of maps.

Differentiated ELA Instruction. The Curriculum Alignment Report indicates that Rome City School District does not have explicit written guidelines and suggestions for—or samples of—differentiated instructional practices or methods to address the range of student needs. Many teachers reported during interviews, and the SEC Report reveals, that teachers differentiate instruction. However, the Observation Report and Special Education Report reveal that little or no differentiation of instruction was observed.

AIS as a Complement to Other Instruction. The Document Review Report indicates that Rome City School District has a policy for identifying students who need AIS, but there is no formal plan for implementing or monitoring these services. Interviews reveal that the type and

quality of AIS vary across the district (i.e., building to building), and logistical problems exist in scheduling AIS, which include conflicts with general education instruction. Therefore, many interviewees view AIS as one more responsibility in a long list of required events to schedule during already busy and often fragmented school days.

Data-Driven Decisions for ELA Instruction and Improved Student Achievement. The Document Review Report indicates that Rome City School District has a plan for reviewing student assessment data and that ELA data are made available to staff and discussed in the district. During interviews, some principals reported that they expect teachers to use data to drive instruction, and some teachers reported that they have the data and knowledge to make informed instructional decisions. However, other interviews revealed that data-driven instruction is inconsistently emphasized across the district, and many teachers and administrators are uncertain how to analyze and interpret data and use it to make informed instructional decisions. Furthermore, many teachers reported that it often takes too long to receive district- and state-level assessment data. When they receive the data, it often is no longer useful or feasible for guiding instruction. Many teachers expressed frustration over using test results for SWDs and other students who perform poorly on state assessments; they believe these results do not adequately measure what these students can do. Therefore, results often are not useful in planning appropriate instruction.

Professional Development for Differentiated and Data-Driven Instruction. The Document Review Report and Interview Report reveal that Rome City School District currently does not provide professional development related to differentiated and data-driven instruction to school personnel. The district currently does not have policies or plans for providing such professional development or for monitoring its implementation or effectiveness, although teachers and administrators report that differentiated instruction and using data to inform instruction are two key needs and weaknesses within the district.

System for Monitoring ELA Curriculum Implementation. The Document Review Report and Interview Report indicate that Rome City School District has weak evidence of monitoring the use of curricular materials, and no formal policy exists for monitoring instruction across the district—particularly regarding students with special needs and AIS. Monitoring of instruction occurs inconsistently and to varying degrees of effectiveness at the building level. The Curriculum Alignment Report reveals that curriculum maps for Grades 6 and 8, and 10 do not contain written information pertaining to instruction; therefore, there is no written evidence regarding how content may be taught to students with varying needs.

Link to Research

Aligning ELA Instruction With the District's Written Curriculum and Implementing the Curriculum. The presence of and adherence to a high-quality, comprehensive, and clearly articulated curriculum has a high impact on student achievement (Marzano, 2000, 2003). Schools that have revised and realigned their curriculum to state standards generally have seen higher student achievement in areas such as reading and mathematics (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005; Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). As noted earlier in Recommendation 1, one crucial component of a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and aligned

ELA curriculum is a clear link between the written and taught curricula. "Deep alignment" is attained when higher-order district student expectations are aligned with external standards that, in turn, are aligned with instruction and assessment processes (English, 2008). The goal is to establish clear links between what students should learn (i.e., written curriculum) and what teachers should teach (i.e., taught curriculum), which often include the use of ELA curriculum maps to plan and implement instruction and other learning opportunities that target the required student learning objectives and content (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2005; Glatthorn, Carr, & Harris, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

How teachers teach is equally, if not more, important than what they teach, so simply matching instructional goals and practices to objectives and materials in the written curriculum does not guarantee that good teaching will follow (Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002). Possessing a written ELA curriculum is not synonymous with effective teaching, which involves designing and implementing differentiated, student-centered instructional methods that pair students with appropriate materials and approaches so they successfully meet the intended learning objectives (Allington, 1994; English, 2008). In fact, placing undue pressure on teachers and students to teach and learn certain curricular materials and to perform well on high-stakes assessments often has a negative impact on both the quality of instruction provided and student learning (Jackson, Harper, & Jackson, 2002). The best teachers of literacy do not show fidelity to one particular instructional method, but rather these teachers tailor instruction to meet the needs and interests of their students (Duffy, 1994; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Hoffman, 1991). These teachers recognize that needs and interests shift from text to text, topic to topic, and day to day, so they regularly assess their students' learning and understanding and make adjustments in instruction as needed. With effective instruction, all students may be successful literacy learners (Cunningham & Allington, 2007; Hall, 2002; Langer, 2001, 2002).

There is substantial evidence that students with special needs and ELLs will continue to experience difficulties throughout their school years if not provided with appropriate and focused intervention (Allington, 2006; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006; Scanlon, Vellutino, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2005). Fortunately, there is equally compelling evidence indicating that high-quality literacy instruction in elementary and secondary schools improves literacy achievement of all students (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perrin, 2007; Langer, 2002, 2004; Scammacca et al., 2007; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007) and also results in higher graduation rates and college attendance (Joftus, 2002).

A crucial consideration in providing effective instruction for all students is to differentiate this instruction, thereby embracing the idea that students take different paths to reach the same goal or outcome (Clay, 1998) and emphasizing that making a difference means providing different learning opportunities through instruction (International Reading Association, 2000; Opitz, 1998). In other words, all students can read and write (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). Successful schools and teachers devise means for differentiating instruction across instructional settings (i.e., whole class, small group) to address students' individual needs (e.g., King-Shaver & Hunter, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001; Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

Studies of effective ELA instruction (e.g., Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Alvermann, 2002; Langer, 2004; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991; Torgesen et al., 2007) indicate that an effective teacher of literacy does the following:

- Challenges and actively involves students.
- Creates a supportive, encouraging, and friendly classroom environment.
- Asks many inferential questions.
- Explicitly teaches skills (i.e., word-level, text comprehension, and writing skills).
- Frequently engages students in reading and writing-connected texts.
- Sets and maintains high, yet reasonable, achievement expectations.

Effective early childhood and elementary-level literacy instruction supports children's emerging understanding and employment of phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000) as well as other equally important literacy "pillars," such as varied instructional approaches (i.e., balance of teaching in small groups, whole class, and individual); a connection between reading and writing; access to interesting texts, choice of texts, collaboration with peers; and matching children with appropriate texts (Allington, 2006).

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

Differentiated ELA Instruction. Some students in the primary grades find learning to read difficult and unsatisfying for a variety of reasons—lack of motivation, poor instruction, and out-of-school factors such as lack of access to appropriate and enjoyable reading materials at home (Strickland, 2002). General education students, SWDs, and ELLs who struggle with reading in the primary grades will continue to experience difficulties throughout their school years if not provided with appropriate and focused intervention (Allington, 2006; Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Francis et al., 2006; McCormack & Paratore, 2003; Scanlon et al., 2005; Strickland, 2002).

Effective teachers seek to meet students directly at their level, and not at arbitrary grade or age levels (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001). A crucial consideration in providing effective instruction for all students is to differentiate this instruction, thereby embracing the belief that students take different paths to reach the same goal or outcome (Clay, 1998). Because students vary in readiness, interests, and learning styles, appropriately differentiated instruction allows teachers to vary instructional approaches by varying the content, the process, or the product (Tomlinson, 2001; Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005). Choosing to vary the process as a method of differentiation allows schools to choose a variety of instructional strategies while holding all students to the same content standards.

Tomlinson (2004, p. 231) notes:

> "Rooted in research and theory of psychology and education, differentiated instruction asks [the] teacher to do the following:
>
> - Actively work with students to develop learning environments that are positive for each learner.
> - Routinely engage in reflection on learners as individuals as well as on learners as a group.
> - Systematically assess learner knowledge, understanding and skill via pre-assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment in light of desired learning goals.
> - Purposefully modify instruction in response to learner need and to extend learner proficiency from its current point base, as indicated by assessment and reflection.
> - Consistently adapt content (how students get access to what they need to learn), process (activities or how students learn), and/or products (how students show what they know, understand and can do) based on student learner readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001)."

Some teachers use Bloom's taxonomy and metacognitive processes to identify appropriate student expectations, activities, and instructional approaches to prepare and use curriculum maps to guide and differentiate instruction (Langa & Yost, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001).

When addressing the needs of "learners at the initial stages of reading, the focus of literacy instruction should be on improving alphabetics, including phonemic awareness, word analysis, and sight word recognition. Grouping for reading instruction is one of the most effective ways to provide a safe learning environment for adolescents (Curtis, cited in Torgesen et al, 2007, p. 129; see also Curtis & Longo, 1999). This grouping is particularly effective when it is flexible, based on students' specific and ever-changing needs (Langer, 2001, 2002). Research shows that students learn in a variety of ways and that differentiating instruction in terms of content, process, and/or products will improve student understanding and achievement (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001). Based on Tomlinson's three categories for differentiated instruction, for instance, Hall (2002) states the following:

- To differentiate content, teachers should:
  - Use several elements and materials to support instructional content.

    - Align tasks and objectives to learning goals.
    - Make instruction concept-focused and principle-driven.
- To differentiate process, teachers should:
    - Consistently use flexible grouping based on students' needs at a particular time.
    - Adopt and implement effective classroom management strategies.
- To differentiate product, teachers should:
    - Conduct regular assessment of student readiness and growth.
    - Acknowledge that students are active and responsible explorers, so they need interesting, engaging, and accessible opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and skills.
    - Vary expectations and requirements for student responses to match individual students' knowledge, understanding that this approach can provide different ways for students to successfully demonstrate what they know and can do.

Similar to Hall (2002) and Tomlinson (1999, 2001), Lee et al. (2006) explain that student achievement may be improved by modifying the content and/or methods of the implemented or taught curriculum:

- *Curriculum adaptation:* Modify how content is presented and/or how students engage and interact with this content.
- *Curriculum augmentation:* Supplement or expand the curriculum to provide students with additional skills or strategies they need to succeed with the general curriculum.
- *Curriculum alterations:* Supplement or expand the curriculum to provide students with content that is specific to a student's needs—as well as content that is not found in the general curriculum, such as functional and life skills.

AIS as a Complement to Other Instruction. As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), all states have had to develop and implement intervention services for students who do not demonstrate adequate progress on mandated annual assessments. To meet this intervention requirement, NYSED has mandated what it calls academic intervention services (AIS). A recent study found that although NYSED's AIS policy is lauded for focusing attention on students who need additional academic support, school districts across the state have interpreted and implemented AIS differently, resulting in widespread inequity of services from district to district (Killeen & Sipple, 2005). Among other considerations, these results suggest that some school districts do not understand how AIS should be implemented and incorporated into its overall ELA curriculum and instruction policies and plans.

Research indicates that multiple factors cause students to struggle as literacy learners. Many of these factors are due to politics, poor planning, inadequate instruction, and misdirected resources and funding (Allington, 2006). However, researchers also have found that all students can become successful readers and writers when provided with appropriate instruction and intervention (Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Strickland, 2002; McCormack & Paratore, 2003;

Kamil, 2003). Students who receive intensive, focused literacy intervention graduate from high school in greater numbers, attend college, and generally fare better in life (Joftus, 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Small-group settings have been found to improve children's understanding and learning as they interact with peers; however, this type of setting may not necessarily improve students' attitudes about reading or themselves as readers, particularly in the short term (Wanzek, Vaughn, Kim, & Cavanaugh, 2006).

Academic intervention should augment and support—not replace or contradict—quality instruction delivered as part of the "regular" classroom literacy instruction that students receive (Allington, 2006). In fact, to ensure equity and consistency, intervention must be a districtwide or systemwide effort to ensure that all stakeholders (i.e., district and building administrators, instructional staff, parents, and students) work together to realize this goal. One school reform model that embraces this systemwide approach to building more effective schools is the Accelerated School model, which focuses on three guiding principles to reform the organization, curriculum, and instruction in a school system. This model embraces instructional practices such as student-centered instruction; hands-on instruction; active discovery learning; the use of authentic literature and primary sources; and cross-curricular, integrated units (Knight & Stallings, 2007):

- *Unity of purpose:* What do school community members want the organization, curriculum, and instruction to be and accomplish, and how do they plan to realize this vision?
- *Building on strengths:* What parts of the vision, or elements needed to reach it, already exist and may serve as a foundation?
- *Empowerment with responsibility:* Stakeholders assume active roles in building the vision based on their expertise and interest, such as serving on steering and curriculum committees.

In addition to the Accelerated School model, Allington and Walmsley (2007) identify and describe other research-based intervention models, processes, and initiatives that successful school systems have implemented to better meet the ELA needs of all their students. These authors acknowledge that improving ELA instruction for all students, including intervention for students who need extra help, is no easy task. Such effort requires systemic change, including the commitment, service, and cooperation of all school stakeholders to realize success.

Data-Driven Decisions for ELA Instruction and Improved Student Achievement. Highly effective teachers—including those who teach literacy—regularly share student achievement data and use these data to inform instruction (Hayes & Robnolt, 2007; Mokhtari, Rosemary, & Edwards, 2007; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2002; Taylor, Peterson, et al, 2002). These teachers review and use formative and summative assessment tools and practices (e.g., teacher observations, assignment rubrics, teacher-created quizzes and tests, district-created and mandated tests, and state-created tests) independently as well as with colleagues in professional learning communities to learn how to analyze data, interpret assessment results, and plan data-driven instruction (Taylor & Pearson, 2005; Taylor et al., 2005). More recently, Edwards et al. (2008) discussed tensions between classroom assessment of student learning for accountability purposes and assessment for learning purposes. Both forms of assessment are necessary and serve a

purpose, but they are implemented and interpreted differently. For example, assessment for accountability tends to focus on student performance compared to goals that have already been set, whereas assessment for learning purposes tends to focus on student learning with implications for improved future instruction.

Professional Development and Implementing the ELA Curriculum. Many schools and school districts that have provided targeted ELA professional development have witnessed improved student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Pearson, Taylor, & Tam, 2005; Rogers et al., 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999; Taylor 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 by Taylor, Pearson, and their colleagues embraces this perspective regarding effective ELA professional development (Pearson et al., 2005; Taylor, Frye, Peterson, & Pearson, 2004; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriquez, 2003; Taylor et al., 2005; Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002).. Teachers who receive professional development in research-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).

Further evidence of the importance of teachers of literacy participating in discipline-specific professional development is evident in professional standards for teachers. For example, professional standards published by the International Reading Association (2007) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2008) not only describe the characteristics of, and standards for, effective teachers of literacy but also emphasize the importance of these teachers participating in sustained, targeted ELA professional learning opportunities to improve their literacy teaching effectiveness and students' literacy achievement.

System for Monitoring ELA Curriculum Implementation. Guidelines offered by Brown (2004), Glatthorn et al. (2001, 2005), and Rasinski and Padak (2004) that may inform curriculum development monitoring—as discussed in Recommendation 1 on curriculum—also may inform curriculum implementation (i.e., instruction) monitoring. For instance, instruction should be aligned with the written curriculum so that what is expected to be taught guides the instruction teachers plan and deliver (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Monitoring would involve, in part, determining the extent to which delivered instruction matches the written curriculum. In addition to ensuring that *what* students are taught is aligned with expectations, it also is essential to examine *how* students are taught (Taylor, Peterson, et al., 2002; The Teaching Commission, 2006). Therefore, the question one must ask is to what extent are teachers employing strategies that foster all students in successfully learning and achieving (Allington, 2006; Cunningham & Allington, 2007; Langer, 2002, 2004)?

In summary, monitoring ELA curriculum implementation involves examining the following two elements:

- The match between content and student learning objectives in the written and taught curricula (i.e., To what degree are teachers teaching what the curriculum says students need to learn?)
- The quality of instruction and other learning opportunities provided to all students

Implementation Considerations

The improvement of ELA instruction (i.e., taught curriculum) plans and processes in Rome City School District will accomplish the following:

- Better align the written and taught curricula (i.e., state and district learning objectives/standards/performance indicators, district content/skills presented in curriculum maps, and the teaching of content/skills to meet these objectives/standards/performance indicators)
- Offer more targeted and plentiful guidance and resources to aid teachers in providing more effective learning opportunities for all students
- Foster the development of higher-order thinking skills among students
- Promote the use of data to make more informed instructional decisions

Furthermore, the development and implementation of a plan to monitor curriculum implementation will establish a process for regularly evaluating the success of the instructional reform efforts and facilitate a process for making any needed modifications.

Following are some suggested strategies to keep in mind during action plan development:

- **Align Instruction to the Written Curriculum.** Rome City School District needs to provide instruction that emphasizes higher-order thinking skills—particularly analyzing, evaluating, and creating—across a variety of knowledge levels (i.e., factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive). For example, "analyzing metacognitive knowledge" might involve examining different students' perspectives on events taking place or characters' actions in a text they read. This instruction should be based on clearly articulated student objectives presented in the written curriculum that are aligned with NYSED ELA performance indicators in term of breadth and depth of content and cognitive demand (see Recommendation 1 on Curriculum). Rome City School District may wish to use Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) taxonomy table as a tool to align the instruction to the written curriculum .

  Rome City School District also must ensure that the district's learning objectives relate to specific content to be taught rather than replicate New York State Education Department (2005) performance indicators. Personnel at the co-interpretation stated that there was a lack of training in teaching higher-level thinking skills and noted that teachers sometimes underestimate students' ability to think at higher levels. Although some teachers are emphasizing higher-order thinking strategies and using student engagement activities, there are few opportunities for modeling, peer discussions, and feedback to extend these effective practices.

- **Provide Differentiated Instruction in ELA .** A number of resources offer practical advice and guidelines to providing effective, research-based ELA instruction for all students (e.g., Allington, 2006; Cunningham & Allington, 2007; Langer, 2002; McCormack & Paratore, 2003). Hall (2002) offers educators the following five suggestions for devising and implementing differentiated instruction:
  - *Clarify key concepts and generalizations* to ensure that all learners gain powerful understandings that serve as the foundation for future learning. Teachers are encouraged to identify essential concepts and instructional foci to ensure that all learners comprehend.
  - *Use assessment as a teaching tool to extend versus merely measure instruction.* Assessment should occur before, during, and after the instructional episode and help to pose questions regarding student needs and optimal learning.
  - *Emphasize critical and creative thinking* as a goal in lesson design. The tasks, activities, and procedures for students should require students to understand and apply meaning. Instruction may require supports, additional motivation, varied tasks, materials, or equipment for different students in the classroom.
  - *Engaging all learners is essential.* Teachers are encouraged to strive for development of lessons that are engaging and motivating for a diverse class of students. Vary tasks within instruction as well as across students. In other words, an entire session for students should not consist of all drill and practice or any single structure or activity.
  - *Provide a balance between teacher-assigned and student-selected tasks.* A balanced working structure is optimal in a differentiated classroom. Based on preassessment information, the balance will vary from class to class as well as lesson to lesson. Teachers should assure that students have choices in their learning (p. 4).

  The research clearly shows that a one-size-fits-all approach to instructional materials and methods does not lead to improved student achievement. Rather, a differentiated instruction approach acknowledges that different students need different types of materials and instruction to meet the same learning goals and objectives. Among other considerations, Rome City School District must ensure that all teachers are provided with an abundant supply of reading materials of varying types (e.g., books, magazines, and electronic/online) of genres (e.g., fiction and nonfiction), topics (e.g., related to curriculum, general interest, and special interest to students), and reading levels (based on the actual range of student reading levels present in the classroom and not on the grade level of the class).

  District participants at the co-interpretation cited two restraining factors preventing effective differentiated instruction across the district. First, there is no mandated training on differentiated instruction. Second, the district lacks an instructional monitoring system that provides feedback on strategies and implementation of training. Both of these topics are also addressed in Recommendation 3.

- **Ensure that Academic Intervention Services Support the ELA Instruction Provided in the Classroom.** AIS are designed to improve all students' access to the general curriculum and to assist them in meeting learning objectives that are taught in the general classroom setting; it is not a separate curriculum. Therefore, Rome City School District needs to ensure that AIS support—not replace—quality ELA instruction that must be provided to students in the general classroom setting by classroom teachers. This instruction may and should include differentiated materials and methods, but these adaptations must lead students to the same ultimate outcomes expected of their peers.

  District participants at the co-interpretation stated that Rome City School District has made AIS an area of emphasis. However, they also highlighted implementation concerns with the AIS program, including scheduling and staffing. They specifically noted that staffing patterns for AIS "reflect a remedial approach as opposed to a preventative approach." Scheduling is a specific issue for SWDs in AIS. Participants also noted a lack of collaboration and communication between AIS and general education teachers.

- **Target Professional Development to ELA Instructional Strategies.** Professional development should be targeted to assist district personnel to effectively develop, implement, and monitor the ELA curriculum (see Recommendation 3 for more specific guidance and suggestions).

  District personnel stated that teachers who develop curriculum are not well trained in this area. They also noted too few instructional leaders at the school because administrators often spend time on issues unrelated to instruction.

- **Use Data and Assessments to Promote Effective Instruction.** Effective assessment and data should drive the development and implementation of effective instruction. Teachers should use these data to plan instruction for their students. Some teachers may be uncertain about how to make such data-driven decisions, so professional development opportunities—discussed in Recommendation 3 on Professional Development—should be provided. In addition, since Rome City School District representatives believe the current district mentoring program works well, teachers may consider consulting more learned colleagues on this matter as well. Co-interpretation participants noted that lack of key people comfortable with data use, interpretation, and understanding prevented data from being used more systematically.

- **Monitor the Implementation of the ELA Curriculum.** Rome City School District must develop a clearly delineated plan for monitoring the implementation of its ELA curriculum. This plan should indicate the following:
  - *Who* will monitor (e.g., administrators; ELA coaches, directors, department chairs; and teacher self-reflections)
  - *What* will be monitored (e.g., small group and whole class ELA instruction; and student products, such as projects, writing samples, demonstrations, and formative and summative assessment data)

- *How* they will monitor (e.g., clearly written checklists, guidelines, expectations, and procedures for tracking, which may include observing lessons taught and reviewing lesson plans and materials)
- *When* monitoring will occur (e.g., schedules and calendars for when formal and informal monitoring will occur and when follow-up with verbal and written feedback will be provided)
- *Where* monitoring will occur (e.g., in-class "live" observations, in- and out-of-classroom reviews of teacher's written instructional plans and materials, and student products/data)
- *Why* monitoring will occur (e.g., explanations indicating why implementation monitoring procedures will improve ELA teaching, learning, and achievement as linked to NYSED ELA standards and performance indicators)

Instructional leaders and teachers at all levels should work together to develop a monitoring process that is supported across the district community.

Co-interpretation participants revealed different views about the availability of timely feedback following observation, which suggests that protocols and procedures are not uniform across the district. They also noted that there are not enough informal "check-ins" into classrooms to get frequent snapshots of instruction, although some schools report using a 5-by-5 walk-through observation protocol. District personnel at the co-interpretation noted that when teachers are observed, instructional leaders can show reluctance in being forthright regarding instructional deficiencies early on and during evaluations.

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Recommendation 3: Professional Development

Create and implement a cohesive, comprehensive, systematic, and systemwide multiyear professional development plan that is well-planned, clearly articulated, and aligned with the district and school comprehensive education plans.

The plan should include professional development that is differentiated, ongoing, job-embedded, and designed to address the needs of individual teachers in meeting district and school objectives. The plan needs to include a process for creating professional learning communities across grade levels, content areas, and the district, *including* a process for monitoring their implementation and effectiveness.

The plan should focus on two areas of need identified through the audit process:

- **Providing strategies for collaboration through the development of professional learning communities**
- **Increasing knowledge on how to implement instructional strategies that promote higher-order thinking skills and differentiation.**

Link to Findings

The audit of the written, taught, and tested ELA curriculum revealed that Rome City School District does not have a long-term, comprehensive, professional development plan in the area of ELA. During the co-interpretation process, district participants identified a key finding about professional development as a top priority. In particular, co-interpretation participants noticed that the effectiveness and impact of professional development is uncertain due to a lack of measurement, lack of monitoring, and inconsistent implementation. It is essential that the district include implementation considerations, implementation monitoring, and monitoring of effectiveness in the long-term professional development plan.

An analysis of the findings suggests two primary areas of focus for the district. First, Rome City School District should provide professional development for collaboration through the development of professional learning communities that are embedded into the daily schedule of teachers. This structure allows groups of teachers to share knowledge, collaborate, model lessons for each other, and provide feedback—all activities that co-interpretation participants identified as lacking in the district. Audit findings also revealed that data use was inconsistent across the district and teachers lacked training in using data to inform instruction. Collaboration in professional learning communities allows teachers to discuss and analyze data together and use it to inform instruction.

Second, Rome City School District should use professional development to increase knowledge on how to implement instructional strategies that promote higher-order thinking skills and differentiation. District participants at the co-interpretation prioritized two other key findings on the lack of higher-order thinking skills and the lack of differentiated instruction across the district. According to audit observations, opportunities for higher level thinking and student activities were not prevalent in classrooms across school levels. District participants at the co-

interpretation noted that the district has not trained teachers in teaching higher-level thinking skills. Although teacher interviews indicated that teachers use differentiated instructional strategies, observations indicate otherwise—especially for SWDs. In fact, direct instruction was the most common instructional practice. This result suggests that perhaps teachers are uncertain about what differentiated instruction means or how to implement it effectively.

Link to Research

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) developed 12 standards to ensure effective professional development. The standards are divided into three sections: context (learning communities, leadership, and resources), process (data-driven, evaluation, research-based, design, learning, and collaboration), and content (equity, quality teaching, and family involvement) (NSDC, 2001). The standards reflect the current literature on professional learning to improve the learning of all students. One standard—learning communities—is of particular interest to Rome Community School District. The standard states:

> The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving. These teams, often called learning communities or communities of practice, operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning. Learning teams may be of various sizes and serve different purposes. (NSDC, 2008b)

NSDC (2008a.) indicates that professional development must be "results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded." Job-embedded professional development provides learning opportunities through individual or collaborative activity and is conducted during the school day. The emphasis in job-embedded options connects strongly with professional learning communities. Here, the focus may be on teacher inquiry, discussion, planning, reflection, decision-making, or use of data. Programs that support these activities include, but are not limited to peer observation, mentoring, teacher portfolios, action research projects, whole faculty or team/department study groups, curriculum planning and development, literature circles, critical friends groups, data analysis, school improvement planning, analyzing student work, lesson study, and teacher self-assessment and goal-setting activities.

Learning Point Associates recommends that the district use the NSDC standards as it creates and implements a cohesive, comprehensive, systematic, and systemwide three- to five-year professional development plan that is well-planned, clearly articulated, and aligned with the district and school comprehensive education plans to meet the ever-changing educational needs in Rome City School District.

Professional Learning Communities. Myriad options exist for faculty, staff, administrators, and students to use to strengthen connections between people and concepts and to address changing issues. One strategy consistently gaining momentum is professional learning communities. In 2003, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) sponsored a summit on "Transforming Schools into Strong Learning Communities." Citing the

work of DuFour and Eaker (1998), NCTAF (2003) constructed many definitions and determined the following set of attributes for professional learning communities:

- "Shared mission, vision, and values"
- "Collective inquiry"
- "Collaborative teams"
- "Action orientation and experimentation"
- "Continuous improvement"
- "Results orientation" (p. 2)

Professional learning communities can occur at multiple levels (e.g., grade level or content area within a school or across the district or with groups of teachers facing similar issues or instructing similar students). For an overview of professional learning communities, see *Professional Learning Communities: What Are They And Why Are They Important?* (www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html), *What Is a 'Professional Learning Community'?* (www.mesd.k12.or.us/si/dufour_PLCs.pdf), and *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* (www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/).

Some options for creating professional learning communities are as follows:

- Using "peer coaching…strategies for educators to consult with one another, to discuss and share teaching practices, to observe one another's classrooms, to promote collegiality and support, and to help ensure quality teaching for all students" (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, n.d.-a). The work of Laster (n.d.) provides additional information.
- Creating lesson study groups, critical friends groups, or study groups of "people interested in collegial study and action. In schools, study groups can meet to study and support one another as they do the following:
  - Design curriculum and instruction innovations.
  - Integrate a school's practices and programs.
  - Study the latest research on teaching and learning.
  - Monitor the impact of new practices on students and staff.
  - Analyze and target a schoolwide need." (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, n.d.-b)
- Analyzing student work, whichi allows groups of teachers to investigate the learning of individual students in a structured yet collaborative way to improve teaching and learning (Allen & Blythe, 2003). The *Looking at Student Work* website (www.lasw.org) provides additional information.
- Participating in literature circles, which that are small, temporary discussion groups of teachers who have chosen to read the same materials based on a current need. Each member agrees to take specific responsibilities during discussion sessions. The *Literature*

Circles website (www.literaturecircles.com) and the *Literature Circles Resource Center* website (www.litcircles.org) provide additional information.

Initially, creating a culture that includes professional learning communities is time consuming. However, research consistently shows that when faculty, staff, administration, and the larger education community come together to work on improving teaching and learning, improvement follows (see Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2007; NCTAF, 2003). In addition, professional learning communities address concerns raised at the Rome co-interpretation that teachers lack opportunities for modeling, peer observations and discussions, and feedback. This approach also addresses a secondary concern that staff development currently focuses on curriculum rather than on teaching strategies. With professional learning communities, these topics can be explored simultaneously. One specific area that may provide a context for the creation of professional learning communities is improving the use of higher-order thinking skills.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills. According to the Lang (1995), higher-order thinking skills replace traditional drill-and-practice activities and content instruction with thinking activities designed to generate gains in basic skills—with the goal of providing students with conceptual skills. Incorporating higher-order thinking skills into instruction follows Bloom's taxonomy of moving from remembering to understanding to applying to analyzing to evaluating to creating (see Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The Center for Development and Learning (n.d.) states the following:

> Higher order thinking involves thinking on a more abstract level than just memorizing facts or repeating something back the way it was said to you. Higher order thinking skills include the ability to understand concepts and ideas, solve problems, draw conclusions, make inferences, understand cause-and-effect, connect new facts to existing knowledge, compare and contrast ideas and concepts, and apply what we learn in practical ways. Creativity is also an aspect of higher order thinking.

A recent resource that may guide Rome City School District in designing and implementing professional development in this area is the book, *Higher Order Thinking Skills: Challenging All Students to Achieve* (Williams, 2003). In this book, the author provides explicit instruction in increasing thinking skills for all students K–12, including SWDs. It is arranged according to the five R's: relevancy, richness, relatedness, rigor, and recursiveness. Williams also includes strategies for brainstorming and planning lessons, and examples of graphic organizers. One specific strategy that may be stressed to increase higher-order thinking skills, particularly in classrooms with mixed abilities, is differentiated instruction.

Differentiated Instruction. Differentiated instruction, in its most basic form, "consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom," (Tomlinson, 2001a). Tomlinson cites four elements in which teachers can differentiate "based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile":

> (1) content—what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; (2) process—activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content; (3) products—culminating projects that ask the student to

rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and (4) learning environment—the way the classroom works and feels.

Tomlinson's research (1999, 2001a, 2001b), along with the research of others (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Vygotsky, 1986), indicates that using differentiated instruction provides teachers with multiple options for varying instruction to better meet the individual needs of their students. Tomlinson (1999, pp. 9–14) provides the following broad principles for establishing and implementing a differentiated classroom:

- "The teacher focuses on the essentials."
- "The teacher attends to student differences."
- "Assessment and instruction are inseparable."
- "The teacher adjusts content, process, and products."
- "All students participate in respectful work."
- "The teacher and students collaborate in learning."
- "The teacher balances group and individual norms."
- "The teacher and students work together flexibly."

The goals of a differentiated classroom are maximum growth and individual success, with all students participating in respectful work and students and teachers collaborating in learning.

Assessment in a differentiated classroom drives instruction; occurs consistently as the unit begins, throughout the unit and as the unit ends; may be differentiated; is more useful to the teacher than grades; and is more focused on personal growth than on peer competition.

How do we differentiate for students at different levels? Although there is no set recipe, Tomlinson (1999, 2001a, 2001b) proposes the following steps:

- Conduct initial assessment.
- Systemically monitor progress to inform instruction.
- Provide explicit instruction.
- Provide intensive instruction.
- Teach in small groups based on instructional needs.
- Use materials appropriate to student level.
- Provide scaffolded or supported instruction.
- Provide ample practice opportunities.
- Create a collaborative supportive system among school, students, and parents.

It is important to note that these strategies can be used to increase the level of higher-order thinking skills of *all* students.

Implementation Considerations

Admittedly, the creation and implementation of a cohesive, comprehensive, systematic, and systemwide multiyear professional development plan that is well-planned, clearly articulated, and aligned with the district and school comprehensive education plans is a lofty undertaking. We therefore recommend the following steps**:**

- **Begin With a Careful Review and Alignment of the District and School Improvement Plans.** This step ensures that teachers are working to improve instruction in the areas the district and school have identified as having the highest need. (The Aspen Institute, 2008; The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006; National Staff Development Council, 2001; School Communities That Work, 2002).

  At the co-interpretation, district participants noted that there is no defined process to determine what type of professional development is needed. There is a perception that district professional development activities are planned at the last minute. Participants also noted that the district lacks a long-term plan for professional development tied to district and school goals. By using the district and school improvement plans as a guide, professional development will become more intentional and focused.

- **Determine the Needs of Individual Teachers in the Identified Areas.** Administrators can conduct a needs assessment to determine teacher needs regarding the creation and implementation of professional learning communities with the goal of increasing collaboration to infuse new strategies for embedding higher-order thinking skills in lessons. Teachers at different levels of development have different professional needs, and professional development opportunities should take that into account. For example, if most staff members of a school understand basic differentiation strategies, the school should consider higher-level professional development on that topic. In contrast, new teachers might require training in more basic differentiation techniques (The Aspen Institute, 2008; The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006).

  Rome City School District personnel at the co-interpretation stated that the district seeks input from a variety of stakeholders when planning professional development, including school administrators, teachers, coordinators, and special education teaching assistants. A true needs assessment, however, includes a systematic investigation of teacher strengths and knowledge related to a particular school or district goal; it is more than just asking for suggested professional development topics. A formal needs assessment matched with the Rome City School District's school improvement goals can serve as a strong foundation for the district professional development plan.

  Co-interpretation participants also mentioned that there is no process for developing the professional development calendar, and—as noted earlier—there is a perception that professional development days are planned at the last minute. Conducting and using a needs assessment requires advance planning. This type of advance planning for

professional development, by analyzing the district and school improvement plans and conducting a needs assessment, is necessary to ensure long-term professional development plans target the areas of greatest district need.

- **Differentiate Professional Development Offerings.** By understanding that teachers are in different levels of their career development, it makes sense to offer differentiated professional development regardless of the area. Faculty and staff need to have choices around a common topic as determined by the district plan. In other words, the district needs to provide teachers with options that specifically address the need, yet are aligned with the district plan. They should be allowed to select individualized, grade-level, subject-area, or team-based opportunities to meet the identified goal—one that is aligned with areas of improvement defined in the district or school improvement plan and results from the needs assessment (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006; National Staff Development Council, 2001; School Communities That Work, 2002). The goal also should align with the 12 professional development standards created by NSDC (2001): context (learning communities, leadership, and resources), process (data-driven, evaluation, research-based, design, learning, and collaboration), and content (equity, quality teaching, and family involvement.

  Co-interpretation participants noted that there are certain requirements of all staff to participate in training, such as all teachers at Strough Middle School attending professional development on learner-focused strategies, kindergarten teacher professional development in phonemic awareness, and training for all special education teachers in writing an effective IEP. However, participants also observed that there are no tiered options for professional development; therefore, once someone has taken a professional development offering, there are no subsequent offerings to build on that knowledge.

  The district is therefore encouraged to provide choices that need not be mutually exclusive:

  - Appropriate schoolwide training or information sessions when all stakeholders need to receive similar information (e.g., technology, emergency procedures, harassment, and crisis and intervention planning).
  - Grade-level, content-area, or team development, in which teams have the freedom to determine strategies that best fit their needs (e.g., cognitive coaching, literature circles, critical friends groups, mentoring, observation, analyzing student work, and cooperative learning).
  - Individual choice options, such as inquiry and individually guided activities (e.g., action research, graduate coursework, grant writing, workshops/conferences, analyzing student work, and creating portfolios) (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006; National Staff Development Council, 2001; School Communities That Work, 2002).

- **Incorporate Leadership Training into Professional Development Programs.** Teacher leadership can be supported through financial supports (including release time and

guidance for professional learning) and supportive structures (such as scheduling time for collaboration) (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Pankake & Moller, 2007; Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006; Teachers Network Leadership Institute, 2005).

- **Build in Time for Professional Reflection.** In addition to aligning with the identified needs of the district and school, professional development must be ongoing and connected to practice. This approach necessitates building in time for professional reflection. During the past decade, standards for teachers and administrators have been drafted and refined (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium [INTASC], 1992; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2008a, 2008b; National Staff Development Council, 2001). Each set acknowledges the role of reflection as one vehicle through which teachers can revise their practice to improve teaching and learning. Reflections should include an emphasis on the relationship between the professional development provided and the impact on student learning.

  District personnel noted that teachers can use release time to observe peers, which is one good reflective practice that should be continued.

- **Create a Plan for Continuous Improvement.** The district needs to create a system for monitoring and evaluating implementation of professional development. This process involves several steps (Boyd, 1989; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Toch & Rothman, 2008). First, the district can track attendance and participation at professional development meetings. Second, the school and district can monitor the implementation of instructional strategies discussed during professional development during observations or walk-throughs, or as part of a professional learning community. These strategies may or may not use the same protocols as or be tied to the evaluation of teachers. Third, implementation progress and concerns can be discussed at department or grade-level meetings. Fourth, the school or district may require teachers to include instructional strategies and structures introduced during professional development in their lesson plans. There also can be an expectation that student work will take a different form based on techniques and strategies covered during professional development opportunities.

  Rome City School District already monitors teacher attendance at professional development events. According to staff at the co-interpretation, the district is beginning to develop a database of staff who are trained in certain key components. Also, teachers are sought out to attend certain professional development opportunities. However, overall monitoring is lacking. District staff stated that the effectiveness and impact of professional development is uncertain, and there is a lack of measurement, lack of monitoring, and inconsistent implementation. It is essential that the long-term professional development plan include these components in order to allow the district to track what is effective and to engage in continuous improvement over time.

- **Use Formative Assessments to Regularly Check Progress Toward Implementation and Impact on Teaching and Learning.** Administrators can revisit the district and school improvement plans to make necessary changes. In addition to using reflection as a

strategy for improving teaching and learning, the technique also should be used to determine the next steps toward addressing the larger needs of the school. At this point, decisions are made about continuing along the same road, making changes, or terminating the plan and beginning again. Change in direction often is required to increase the probability of achieving the initial objectives of the professional development (Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006).

Concluding Remarks

The development of a comprehensive, job-embedded professional development plan is not the end for the school district. District and school leadership should plan to revisit and revise the district professional development plan every year to check progress and review alignment with upcoming or changing goals identified in the district and school improvement plans.

Although Rome City School District teachers currently engage in professional development, there is neither a system nor monitoring strategies to determine how—or if—the professional development is making a difference in teaching and learning. These recommendations strive to provide a framework for creating a professional development system that works for the diversity of the schools, teachers, and students. Focusing on identifying specific district and schoolwide goals, creating a comprehensive professional development plan that provides choice for teachers and is based on their developmental level across the teaching continuum, including monitoring and evaluation tools, and providing for review, reflection, and revision are critical components of a systematic and systemwide professional development plan that can meet the needs of all of Rome City School District's teachers.

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Appendix A. Appreciative Inquiry Posters

The following graphics represent the reports of seven small groups at the Rome City School District kickoff meeting held in September as the initial event of this process.

Table Group 1

Peak Experiences
- Technology upgrades
- Professional development consistent and pervasive
- District community
- Culture of learning

Value
- All about kids

Wishes
- Consistency (programs and configuration/structure)
- Highlight district positives (rich programs)
- Increase student achievement

Table Group 2

Themes
1. *Affirmation:* Community, administration, parents, kids
2. *Feedback:* Meaningful evaluation, review of test data, peer validation
3. *Professional development:* Sharing best practices, contiguous, long term, never get a chance to finish, pervasive, buy in
4. *Cooperation:* Teacher/student, teacher/administration, whole district/parent
5. *Accountability:* Where am I, where should I be?

Table Group 3a

Peak Experiences
- Collaboration
- Co-teaching, inclusion experiences
- Prevention strategies at early levels

Values
- Relationship/working with the kids
- Relationship with other teachers
- Leadership of Special Education department that drives action/progress
- Professional development
- "Thank yous" from parents and kids

Table Group 3b

Wishes
- Unlimited resources: money, time, staff
- Increased inclusion opportunities and support for inclusion
- Consistency and accessibility for programs/services according to need
- People will *not* be afraid of change
- Follow through before we take on a new initiative

Table Group 4

Themes

- Teamwork (value and wish)
- Continuous growth and improvement (value and wish)
- Student achievement (value)
- High expectations of ourselves and our students (value and wish)
- Celebrating our success
- Leadership at all levels
- Embracing change

Table Group 5a

Peak Experiences

- Collaboration (grade level meetings, building meetings)
- Being involved in curriculum planning (ELA maps, revisiting to make changes)

Values

- High expectations
- Allowing teacher input
- Appreciate teachers executing solutions to problems
- Collaboration
- Consistency
- Relationships (students, teachers, administrators)

Table Group 5b

Wishes

- Continued reevaluation
- No "band-aid" approaches
- Schedules to meet student needs
- Schedule A, B, C, D, E days
- Same time, prep every day

Quotes

- "After eight, it's too late."
- "I don't make widgets."
- "I provide children with what they need—academic, social, emotional, or otherwise."
- "Our biggest resource is our teachers. They are hard-working and professional."

Appendix B. Data Map of Co-Interpretation Key Findings

Rome City School District: April 2–3, 2008

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

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

Key

Report Abbreviations:

CA—Curriculum Alignment Report

DR—Document Review Report

INT—Interview Report

OBS—Observation Report

SE—Special Education Report

SEC—Surveys of Enacted Curriculum Report

Voting Colors:

Red votes = Areas for improvement

Green votes = Positive areas

Key Findings: Areas for Improvement

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
ELA curriculum documents exist at varying levels and stages of completion, and alignment with the state standards varies throughout the grade levels. • **Although NYSED and Rome City School District performance indicators in the knowledge domain are in the same order of emphasis in Grades 2, 6, 8, and 10, students in Grades 2, 6, and 8 rarely engage with factual knowledge** • **Evidence suggests that ELA curriculum expectations cover a full range of cognitive demands at some grade levels. Additionally, the levels of cognitive demand do not correspond with New York state standards at some grade levels.** **There seems to be a gap between either the New**	ELA curriculum mapping exists at different stages of development, ranging from nonexistent to complete and accurate.	INT dist. p29
	The curriculum documents for Grade 8 do not appear to present a schedule or time frame for instruction.	CA p16
	Although Rome City School District does not yet have a comprehensive plan for ELA teaching and learning, the district is moving toward creating such a plan.	CA p23
	Curriculum documents for Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 do not appear to address differentiated instruction.	CA p22
	The district has a process in place for selecting and aligning curricular materials.	DR p4
	Grade 10 curriculum documents reference generic assessment activities but appear not to provide information on how the assessments are used to measure student achievement.	CA p23
	Grade 6 is not in alignment in regard to writing process as determined by state standards. Depth needs to be increased, with more emphasis at create/demonstrate level.	SEC p11
	Grade 6 is aligned—especially in the area of comprehension.	SEC p11
	Only informal monitoring of curriculum aligning, prioritization, and mapping are done.	DR p4
	In comparison to state expectations, Rome City School District is not placing as much emphasis on critical reasoning, author's craft, the writing process, elements of presentation, and writing applications in Grades 9 and 10.	SEC p13,14
	Grade 2 document does not provide expectations for student learning of specific theme-related content and skills.	CA p21
	There is "weak evidence" of monitoring curriculum in the classroom.	DR p4
	Overall, student expectations—expressed as statements of what students will learn, understand, and be able to do—are not presented.	CA p22
	All teachers interviewed believed that their ELA lessons were aligned with New York state ELA learning standards.	SE int. p6

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
York state standards and the Rome City School District curriculum map or the Rome City School District curriculum map and the delivery of the curriculum. **15 red votes** **1 green vote** **(curriculum/instruction)**	Grade 10 students demonstrate knowledge using all six cognitive demand domains.	CA p19
	Grade 8 students are asked to demonstrate knowledge using the full range of cognitive demands.	CA p16
	In Grade 6, the order of emphasis for cognitive demand does not correspond between New York state and Rome City School District.	CA p14
	District documents did not provide indicators that could be coded for cognitive demand in Grade 4.	CA p11
	In Grade 2, order of emphasis for cognitive demand does not correspond between New York state and Rome City School District's curriculum.	CA p9
	Grade 2 students are asked to demonstrate knowledge using all levels of cognitive demand, except create.	CA p7
	NYSED and Rome City School District performance indicators in the knowledge domain are the same in order of emphasis in Grades 2, 6, 8, and 10.	CA p9, 14, 17, 20
	Grade 8 students rarely engage with factual knowledge.	CA p16
	It appears that Grade 6 students rarely engage with factual knowledge.	CA p13
	Overall, it appears that student engagement with factual and metacognitive knowledge is rarely emphasized.	CA p8
	Many samples of assessment materials and tools for Grades 2, 4, and 6 are presented and appear to link directly to the themes or topics presented.	CA p23
	There is a great degree of variance in instructional delivery at the elementary level.	INT p5–6
	Grade 6 is misaligned in regard to the elements of presentation. The state requires create/demonstrate level.	SEC p11
	At the Grade 4 level, more time needs to be spent on the writing process and elements of presentation (verbal and written).	SEC p10
	Teachers are spending more time on phonics at Grade 4 than indicated on state standards. Lost focus on language study, listening, viewing, speaking, and presentation.	SEC p10
	At the elementary level, teachers are using curriculum maps consistently.	INT p5–6

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	At all levels, there is little to no depth for listening and speaking skills, contrary to state standards.	SEC p9–14
	Grade 8 is aligned overall but focuses too much on reading and not enough on writing standards.	SEC p12
	Grades 9 and 10 instruction is similarly misaligned with New York state standards based on charts.	SEC p13–14
	The state emphasizes more higher-level thinking skills than instruction in Rome City School District reflects in Grades 9 and 10 (in all areas of instruction).	SEC p13–14
	A significant discrepancy exists between the state-recorded level of generate/create/demonstrate and the reported Rome teachers' level. The state recommendation is higher in Grades 9 and 10.	SEC p13–14
	In comparison to state expectations, Rome is not placing as much emphasis on listening and viewing and speaking and presenting in Grades 9 and 10.	SEC p13–14
	There is confusion and lack of consistency regarding the utilization of the curriculum map at the secondary level.	INT p5–6
	Grade-level delivery of the curriculum is, in fact, taking place in the district.	DR p5
	Across all grade levels, teachers indicated that state and district curricula framework, standards, and guidelines have positively influenced their instruction.	SEC p22
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	No monitoring of ELA curriculum process.	DR p16
	No policies, implementation, or monitoring regarding sufficient curricular materials.	DR p16
	The Rome City School District curriculum documents for Grades 6, 8, and 10 do not contain written information pertaining to instruction.	CA p21
	The Rome City School District curriculum for each grade reviewed (Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10) contain different curricular components.	CA p21
	Curriculum maps for Grades 2 and 4 do not specifically reference curriculum materials. However, packets of worksheets and related documents for each grade level were submitted as evidence of curriculum materials used.	CA p22
	The Effective Communicator document for Grades 6 and 8 presents some evidence of specific curriculum materials to be used.	CA p22

Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Although the district has a policy and plans to provide AIS, the effectiveness varies, and there are multiple deficiencies noted in monitoring progress, scheduling, and staffing of AIS instruction. **14 red votes** **1 green vote** **(academic interventions)**	Rome City School District has an AIS plan to help all students achieve New York state standards in ELA for K–6, 7–12, general education, and SWDs.	SE doc rev p18
	Rome City School District has made AIS a program of emphasis.	INT dist. p21
	One-on-one services were praised as highly effective at both levels.	INT p17–18
	AIS are available to students with and without disabilities. Although intensive intervention services are available to all students, the document review showed that Rome City School District gives priority to SWDs to receive the academic intervention and related services. For example, a memo from the district on September 18, 2006, to elementary school principals provides guidance on giving IEP students the priority in scheduling for receiving services from resource room teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists.	SE doc rev p18–19
	According to this plan, AIS have two components: additional instruction that supplements general education curriculum and related support services.	SE doc rev p18
	The district has a policy in place to identify students who need academic support.	DR p7
	There is a deficiency in determining the specific needs of individual students.	INT dist. p31
	Several respondents said the delivery of AIS is inconsistent due to scheduling (size of groups vary, teachers are pulled to cover classrooms).	INT p31
	Scheduling AIS and related services often cause conflicts with general education instruction (pull-out program).	SE int. p19
	The availability of academic support varies by schools, with reports that staffing limitations limit effectiveness of the program.	INT p16–17
	AIS interventions are seen as varying in effectiveness throughout the district.	INT dist. p31
	Implementation of AIS monitoring using the AIS progress report is not evident.	DR p7
	The effectiveness of the AIS programs varies greatly among schools. Those who rated it "moderate" felt it was effective. Those who rated it "low" felt it was ineffective.	INT p17–18

Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
There is an apparent lack of monitoring of instruction at the district, school, and teacher levels. **13 red votes** **(instruction)**	Teachers reported that they seldom receive feedback from administrators on their instruction.	INT p11
	District respondents cite instructional leadership and accountability of building leaders as issues affecting districtwide curriculum and professional development efforts.	INT dist. p33
	Our district's measure of consistent delivery is based on assessment.	DR p6
	Grades 1, 2, and 3 are positively influenced by state and district standards and by classroom screening/diagnostic results.	SEC p22–23
	There doesn't appear to be a consistent monitoring system to ensure that SWDs receive appropriate instruction: AIS team, teacher responsibility, observation, and communication were noted by leaders in this area.	SE int. p15
	Monitoring of instruction at the school level occurs inconsistently and with varying degrees of effectiveness at all levels.	INT p10–11
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	Weak evidence of monitoring the use of curricular materials.	DR p14
	No consistent, formal monitoring of instruction across the district.	DR p14
	Conversations are taking place in the district regarding ELA instruction within schools.	DR p14
	The Rome City School District curriculum documents for Grades 6, 8, and 10 do not contain written information pertaining to instruction.	CA p21

Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Across grade levels, opportunities for higher level thinking and student engagement activities—such as experiential learning, individual inquiry, collaborative works, sustained reading and writing, student self-assessment—were not prevalent. **9 red votes** **(instruction)**	"Student self-assessment" including portfolios and individual record books is listed as one of the least frequently observed practices across all levels.	OBS p8
	Least frequently observed practices 80% to 100% of the time: cooperative/collaborative (elementary, middle schools) learning.	OBS p7
	Students observed were rarely engaged in independent seatwork, experimental activities, sustained writing and reading activities, and/or collaborative work.	SE obs. p13
	No student activities (i.e., student-driven learning, as defined on page 1 of the Observation Report) were identified as prevalent at the middle school level.	OBS p5
	Classrooms provided opportunities for discussions but not for independent inquiry or research.	SE obs. p13
	"Experiential, hands-on learning" is listed as one of the least frequently observed practices across all levels.	OBS p7
	Higher-level questioning strategies were prevalent in 8% elementary, 20% middle, and 57% high school classrooms observed.	OBS p3
	The most common instructional practice observed was direct instruction, prevalent in 69% of elementary, 100% of middle, and 72% of high school classrooms observed.	OBS p3
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	Middle school teachers self-reported data indicated that the three activities in which students spent 15% or more of their instructional time were as follows: 25%—Watch the teacher demonstrate/model ELA reading process (reading, writing, speaking) 15%—Engage in writing process 15%—Work individually on assignments 15%—Take quiz or test	SEC
	Middle school teachers reported that the following activities all averaged >10% but <15% of the instructional time: • Practice test-taking strategies • Work in pairs or small groups	SEC

	• Silently read materials of their own choice • Collect, summarize, and/or analyze information from multiple sources	
	Middle school teachers reported that the following activities were engaging less than 10% of the students' instructional time: • Maintain or reflect on a portfolio of their work • Learn to use resources • Use hands-on materials or manipulatives • Engage in an ELA activity outside the classroom (attend a play or performance) • Use computer technology	SEC

Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
The effectiveness and impact of professional development is uncertain. There is a lack of measurement, a lack of monitoring, and inconsistent implementation. **7 red votes** **(professional development)**	Professional development is monitored for attendance more than for effectiveness.	DR p8
	The district does not have a way to measure the impact of professional development on classroom practices.	INT dist. p32
	Special education teachers were fully included in staff development opportunities; however, less than one half (43%) believed it was helpful to their teaching.	SE int. p22
	Special and general education teachers reported that they implemented knowledge/skills learned during professional development opportunities, but the frequency/extent to which skills were implemented was inconsistent across the district.	SE int. p24
	There is no strong evidence that the professional learning opportunities truly impact classroom teaching and students' achievement.	SE int. p26
	Professional development is monitored for teachers, not principals.	DR p9
	Professional development sessions provide opportunities to collaborate; however, the effectiveness or influence on instruction varies among schools.	INT p21
	Respondents said professional development opportunities are helpful in incorporating new concepts and strategies; however, implementation of these development opportunities has been inconsistent.	INT p20

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Although there is a current process and system for collecting and reviewing data—as well as evidence of teachers monitoring student progress with informal assessments and leaders using data for improvement—there is no district policy or all-inclusive plan regarding the regulation and monitoring of all data to include the following: • **Professional development for data analysis** • **Connecting data with school and district goals** • **Using data to guide instruction and evaluate goals** • **Timeliness of data** • **Additional data to guide instruction for SWDs** • **Consistent use** **6 red votes** **5 green votes** **(data use)**	Using student data to inform district and school decisions is valued, but skills and processes for interpreting the data are less well-developed.	INT dist. p32
	Teachers use various sources of data to make instructional decisions.	INT p14–15
	Principals expect teachers to use data to drive instruction.	INT p14–15
	Elementary teachers say they have sufficient data from formal assessments to monitor student progress.	INT p10
	Respondents reported that they follow IEPs and state testing modifications policy in administrating testing accommodations across classroom, district, and state assessments in Rome City School District.	SE int. p29
	The most frequently cited barrier surrounding the use of achievement data is that some assessment results do not provide helpful information to guide instruction. Also, teachers do not believe district assessments are sensitive to student progress and therefore are not useful for teaching SWDs.	SE int. p30
	A source of frustration for SWDs is the inconsistency regarding accommodations on different tests.	SE int. p28
	A large majority of teachers reported using student achievement data to identify the needs of students, group students based on instructional level, and provide instruction, whereas special education leaders usually reported using data for school improvement and to monitor student progress.	SE int. p29
	Teachers use data inconsistently.	INT p14–15
	Teachers cited the length of time it takes to get results back as a barrier for effectively using student achievement data.	SE int. p31
	Within schools rated as “moderate,” the way the data are shared varies.	INT p15
	Many of the teachers and special education leaders are concerned about using the state ELA assessment to measure the performance of SWDs because of the discrepancy between the ability level of the students and the assessments they have to take.	SE int. p27
	~~Teacher reports vary in the degree in which district and state test results influence what they~~	~~SEC p24~~

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	teach (Grades 5–8).	
	The district provides no professional development for ensuring data-driven decision making.	DR p11
	The district has a plan and a process for step-by-step data review of student assessment data.	DR p11
	ELA data are made available and discussed in the district.	DR p10
	Sharing of data is occurring consistently across elementary schools.	INT p15
	Teachers in six of seven schools monitor student progress to a high or moderate degree.	INT p13
	Elementary respondents indicate data-based discussions are not connected to school goals.	INT p15
	Classroom observation data differ from teacher interviews and revealed that only approximately one half of the teachers observed use formative assessments during instruction. Formative assessments were observed more in resource and self-contained classrooms and at the secondary level.	SE obs. p30
	District benchmark results are not positive influences in changing instruction in Grades 9–12.	SEC p22
	The leader interviews did not provide evidence that teachers have been extensively trained on using assessment data in ELA to make instructional decisions.	SE int. p23
	Administrators and teachers use formal and informal assessments to inform and support instruction. However, the types of data used by special education leaders and teachers are different. A slight majority of classroom teachers (special education and general education) reported that they used informal assessments more often than the state and district tests in assessing the performance of SWDs. At the same time, all special education leaders reported using state and/or district assessments.	SE int. p29
	Teacher-directed informal assessment data use is prevalent across schools; the use of district and state assessment data is administratively directed. Teacher-directed state and district data use was not evident.	SE int. p30

Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Although teacher interviews indicate that teachers use differentiation instructional strategies, observations indicate otherwise—especially for SWDs. **5 red votes** **(instruction)**	Work assigned to students extended the learning provided in one half of the classrooms observed. This was more visible in inclusive settings versus resource or self-contained.	OBS p13
	Work centers (for individuals or groups) were observed 4% of the time at the elementary level.	OBS p4
	Small-group and 1:1 instruction with teachers were rarely seen in close of half of the classrooms.	SE obs. p12
	No classroom organization (i.e., ability grouping, multiage groupings, work centers) was identified as prevalent at the high school level.	OBS p4–5
	Teachers reported using two general approaches to support participation and success for SWDs on state and district assessments: half through instruction to master skills and half by teaching test-taking strategies.	SE int. p14
	Teachers implement various instructional strategies in teaching ELA but struggle to meet the needs of SWDs.	SE int. p11
	Although small-group instruction was a strategy listed by teachers for differentiated instruction, it did not always mean differentiated teaching.	SE obs. p12
	Teachers reported using a wide variety of strategies to differentiate instruction.	SE int. p11
	Systematic individual instruction was not observed in the middle school and high school classrooms.	OBS p13,15
	Although teachers reported using various strategies to differentiate instruction, observation data revealed that it was not obvious in three fourths of the classrooms. It was observed more frequently in resource and self-contained classrooms versus inclusion settings.	SE obs. p11
	New York state Grade 4 standards indicate that vocabulary instruction should center on word analysis and evaluation, and not on the memorization and recall that teachers indicated they focused on.	SEC p10
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	The curriculum documents for Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 do not appear to address differentiated instruction.	CA p22

Additional Key Findings: Areas for Improvement

Additional findings were identified as key by the district co-interpretation participants but were not prioritized for action planning.

Key Finding 8	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Respondents indicate that instructional leadership—such as content coaches, teacher coordinators, and principals—has positive impact. Currently, the availability and/or accessibility of instructional leaders is inconsistent across the district. **6 red votes** **(staffing)**	Mentor availability contributed directly to the perceived success and support of the mentor program.	INT p24
	The availability of a content coach or instructional leader varies throughout schools.	INT p22
	Respondents suggested that an effective model would provide an identified, accessible ELA coordinator or instructional representative for each building.	INT p23
	The availability of content coaches and influence of instructional leaders is scattered and inconsistent throughout elementary schools.	INT p23–24
	There is a lack of coordinators at each grade level according to teacher respondents.	INT p23
	Mentor availability contributed directly to the perceived success and support of the mentor program.	INT p24
	The influence of instructional leaders was inconsistent across the district at both the elementary and secondary levels.	INT p24

Key Finding 9	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers and leaders would like professional development to focus more on special education specific issues—such as test accommodations, IEPs, and disabilities—and issues related to special education within general education settings—such as inclusive classrooms, modifications, and literacy.	Professional development topics are limited at the secondary level and may not address their own instructional needs or interests.	INT p20
	Teachers and special education leaders identified a wide range of professional development needs (e.g., training on best teaching practices, training on improving student literacy skills such as reading and writing, and training on how to modify the general education curriculum for SWDs).	SE int. p24
	A majority of instructional leaders and special education leaders see a need for more training for general education teachers on special education including topics such as IEPs, learning strategies to teach literacy, types of disabilities, test accommodations, and teaching in inclusive settings.	SE int. p22,23
	There is a marked difference between elementary and secondary ELA teacher participation in	SE int. p22

Key Finding 9	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
3 red votes **(professional development)**	professional development opportunities offered to help them in the inclusive classroom. A minority of secondary teachers reported that they received professional development, while a majority of elementary teachers reported the same.	

Key Finding 10	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
There are inconsistencies in the collaboration between special education teachers, general education teachers, and building-level administrators. **2 red votes** **(staffing)**	There are few formal opportunities for teachers to plan and collaborate.	INT p12
	Teachers varied in their perception of building-level administrators' involvement and helpfulness in the teaching of SWDs.	SE int. p33
	Teachers cited barriers that affect collaboration including lack of common planning time at the elementary level. General education teachers had concerns with having SWDs and special education teachers in their classroom.	SE int. p31
	A majority of the resource teachers reported resistance or concern from general education teachers with having special education teachers or SWDs in their classrooms.	SE int. p32
	General education teachers who teach SWDs in inclusive settings have positive working relationships with special education teachers and are happy about the support they receive from special education teachers.	SE int. p32
	A majority of the special education teachers working in their self-contained settings reported having more collaboration with other special education teachers than with general education teachers.	SE int. p33

Key Finding 11	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Inconsistencies in the use and availability of ELA materials exist across the district. **2 red votes** **2 green votes** **(instruction)**	A majority of the classrooms visited were arranged to allow for flexible grouping and reading instruction and have a print-rich environment consistently across self-contained and resource. Elementary settings were more likely than secondary regarding both.	SE obs. p9
	Negative influence on instruction due to the lack of textbooks and material.	SEC p22,24
	In all schools, several teachers mentioned the necessity of assembling instructional materials from different sources (e.g., material downloaded, borrowed from the library, purchased with personal funds).	INT p8
	Observation data indicate that most teachers used the core ELA program and/or supplemental materials in their instruction.	SE obs. p6
	Self-contained classrooms and resource rooms were less likely to have well-equipped classroom libraries.	SE obs. p10
	Schools and teachers within schools do not have updated instructional materials and do not use the same instructional materials within and across buildings.	INT dist. p30
	Materials used for instruction vary in availability and use according to K–4, 5–6, 7–8.	INT dist. p30
	Teachers struggle to adapt the available instructional materials to their individual students.	INT p10
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	No information was submitted regarding curricular materials addressing the needs of ELL students.	DR p14
	No policies or implementation of monitoring regarding sufficient curricular materials	DR p14

Key Finding 12	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Three main concerns regarding parental involvement in Rome City School District exist: • **Parental voices not being heard** • **Redistricting having an impact on SWDs** • **Lack of parental involvement in classrooms for general education students and SWDs** **1 red vote** **(instruction)**	Parents noted an inconsistent school environment as a major issue, with a strong focus on redistricting.	SE parent focus p17
	Increased parental involvement is important when facing the challenges of educating SWDs.	SE int. p16
	Parents expressed concerns about their voices not being heard and the lack of district follow-through related to their suggestions. They did not believe their suggestions were taken seriously by the district.	SE parent focus p16
	Parents were very upset about the district's decision to close schools and the configuration plan. Parents believe this will have a significant impact on SWDs because of the consistency needed. They thought grade and school configuration needs to be studied carefully for consistent environment.	SE parent focus p17
	Parent/community involvement in learning activities was not observed in 96.2% of elementary school observations, 100% of middle school observations, and 100% of high school observations.	OBS p12,14
	Teachers and special education leaders identified a lack of parent involvement and a supportive home environment as significant challenges in educating SWDs.	SE int. p16

Key Finding 13	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Technology use was not observed in the classrooms. **1 red vote** **1 green vote** **(instruction)**	Although students and teachers have the materials needed for lessons, computer technology was not utilized.	SE obs. p9
	Technology use (i.e., computers for instructional delivery, technology as a learning tool or resource) was a least frequently observed practice (100% K–12 classrooms).	OBS p8

Key Finding 14	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
There is a lack of optimism expressed regarding the performance of SWDs. **0 votes** **(academic interventions)**	Special education leaders and principals who commented (7 out of 9) were not optimistic about students' performance for SWDs.	SE int. p27
	Perceptions about how SWDs in Rome City School District are performing differed among respondent groups: general education and special education teachers working in resource settings gave a more positive response than special education teachers in self-contained settings did, while special education leaders were not optimistic about the trajectory of student performance.	SE int. p26
	Teachers indicated that student's special needs have a strong positive influence on what they teach in Grades 9–12.	SEC p25

Positive Key Findings

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

Positive Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers plan and use different methods of instructional delivery and management strategies to maintain positive interactions with students. **10 green votes** **(instruction)**	Teachers' lessons were well planned and organized.	SE obs. p13
	Teachers report a high level of autonomy regarding the delivery of instruction.	INT p8
	Teachers are covering the same topics and skills but are using different instructional strategies at the elementary and secondary levels.	INT p7–8
	Special education teachers reported reviewing goals often, using IEPs to guide instruction and monitor student progress toward IEP goals.	SE int. p15
	The interactions between teachers and students were usually positive and reflected teachers' respect for student contributions. Teachers frequently provided students with immediate and appropriate feedback. No differences between elementary and secondary.	SE obs. p10
	Classroom management strategies allowed for maximum instructional time and rapid transition between activities.	SE obs. p10

Positive Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Documents, surveys, and professional staff interviews indicate that a majority of SWDs have access to the general education curriculum. **8 green votes** **(curriculum)**	Students in self-contained classrooms who are eligible for the regular state assessments have access to what is called the prioritized curriculum.	SE int. p5,7
	Parents generally believed that SWDs have access to the general education ELA curriculum.	SE parent focus p5
	Special education leaders cited various ways that schools ensured SWDs have access to the general education ELA curriculum (i.e., teaching assistants, resources, reading staff supports, professional development, AIS, and curriculum support).	SE int. p6
	According to special education leaders, a large majority of SWDs have access to the general ELA curriculum. Such access varies by the settings and type of disabilities.	SE int. p4

Positive Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	Document review data indicates that a large majority of students have access to the general education curriculum, and the district provides various supports to ensure their access.	SE doc rev p4

Positive Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers and educational leaders requested more professional development sessions in data use. **4 green votes** **(professional development)**	Teachers did not appear to have been trained on how to use data to inform instruction: 90% reported having not been trained on how to use data to make decisions about instruction.	SE int. p23
	The leader interviews did not provide evidence that teachers have been extensively trained on using assessment data in ELA to make instructional decisions.	SE int. p23
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	No submitted documentation indicates that the district provides professional development to administrators and teachers in data analysis and use.	DR p15

Positive Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers prefer to have input with professional development planning and sessions that provide materials and resources they can use immediately. They find school-level collaboration with their peers helpful. **4 green votes** **(professional development)**	Teachers prefer sessions that provide materials and resources they can use immediately.	INT p21
	Having teachers' input in professional development was the most frequently noted area of improvement.	SE int. p25
	Some teachers noted that time provided for teachers to collaborate on the curriculum has been most helpful and influential in comparison to content/strategy based training.	INT p21
	Respondents in these schools said they attend regular grade-level meetings, which are perceived to be helpful.	INT p20
	Teachers and special education leaders reported that the professional development provided by the district focuses more on general education than on special education.	SE int. p21

Positive Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
The degree of curricular modifications for SWDs varies across different educational settings. More restrictive settings exhibit greater modifications than less restrictive ones. **3 green votes** **(curriculum)**	The degree of curricular modifications varies across different educational settings. Self-contained settings modify to a greater degree than inclusive ones.	SE int. p7
	Although special education teachers follow the ELA curriculum, varying degrees of modifications are made to materials and assignments for SWDs.	SE int. p7
	Teachers reported that it is challenging to modify the curriculum, and they want to see a districtwide modified curriculum in ELA.	SE obs. p8
	A majority of the general education (four out of six) and resource (three out of five) teachers believed that they do not typically modify the content of the curriculum but rather provide instructional accommodations to support student access to general education ELA.	SE int. p7
	Teachers and special education leaders identified a wide range of professional development needs (e.g., training on best teaching practices, training on improving student literacy skills such as reading and writing, and training on how to modify general education curriculum for SWDs).	SE int. p24

Positive Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Various professional development training sessions are offered by the district and viewed as a positive influence; however, several teachers said they are limited in the number of paid opportunities they can attend during the summer. **1 green vote** **(professional development)**	Teachers are limited in the number of summer professional development opportunities they can attend from the variety offered.	INT p20
	It is not clear if districtwide professional development requirements are in existence.	DR p8
	There is a wide range of opportunities offered by the district and various outside agencies for professional development.	SE int. p21
	Teachers say they attend mandatory districtwide professional development during the school year.	INT p20
	Professional development is viewed as a positive influence in the targeting of ELA instruction.	SEC p23

Positive Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers and parents indicated that students need to receive services earlier. **1 green vote** **(academic interventions)**	SWDs are not identified early enough to receive services, and interventions should begin early. Parents expressed frustration about getting help when they knew their child was struggling.	SE int. p19
	Students need to receive interventions—be identified and receive appropriate services—earlier instead of waiting to fail or moving forward unprepared.	SE int. p19

Miscellaneous Findings

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

Miscellaneous Findings		Source/Page
1.	Teachers say they are more influenced by other teachers than by instructional leaders.	INT p23–24
2.	There is an inconsistency in instructional leaders and their influence across the district.	INT p23–24
3.	Nearly all district respondents said a high level of support is provided to new teachers.	INT dist. p33
4.	Rome City School District is in transition from a school-driven system to one that is more centralized.	INT p33
5.	Instructional practice of integration of subject area was prevalent in 8% of elementary classrooms.	OBS p4
6.	SWDs positively influence what is taught in Grades 9–12.	SEC p23
7.	SWD participation in the general education environment was lower than the state target for 2005–06.	SE doc rev p3–4
8.	The district has not implemented or monitored the performance of teachers and principals.	DR p12
9.	Teacher reports vary in the degree in which district tests influence what is taught in Grades 9–12.	SEC p24
10.	Program curriculum guidance maps were evident for SWDs but not for general education students.	DR p5
11.	There is a variance of opinions regarding the need to adopt a consistent reading program across grade levels.	INT p8–9
12.	At the middle school level, high levels of student engagement were prevalent 20% of the time.	OBS p6
13.	High levels of academic engagement were reported in 100% of high school classrooms and 69% of elementary classrooms.	OBS p6
14.	Observers reported that high academically focused class time was prevalent in every high school classroom observed and in a large majority of middle (80%) and elementary (89%) school classrooms observed.	OBS p6

Appendix C. Force-Field Analysis

Driving Forces

- Department meetings to prioritize and establish the 50% essential, 30%, 20%
- K–6 math curriculum for SWDs in special class has been prioritized
- District supports mapping activities*
- Secondary implemented SWD writing classes
- K–4 ELA curriculum has been prioritized for SWDs in special class + is in process of being prioritized for 5/6 (complete it for all levels) *
- ELA curriculum has been completed, prioritized at secondary level
- K–4 reading pilot is drawing ELA curriculum together
- Special Ed close to adopting reading program K–12
- Curriculum mapping (map of 50% essential for Special Ed, phonemic awareness map for K–1, outside consultants being utilized)
- Binders of curriculum for all levels exist (varied in degree of completion)*
- Binders for Special Ed self-contained classes
- Effective Communicator writing matrix document is a structure to guide instruction and monitor student progress
- Teacher ownership and input has increased
- District provides the time needed for mapping
- Positive collaborative process for writing curr.
- Maps are always "works in progress," monitored and adjusted during CAP (summer)*
- Continued efficient use of district office personnel and time provided to work with staff
- Increase in awareness of imp. of alignment

Key Finding 1

ELA curriculum documents exist at varying levels and stages of completion, and alignment with the state standards varies throughout the grade levels.

- **Although NYSED and RCSD performance indicators in the knowledge domain are in the same order of emphasis in Grades 2, 6, 8, and 10, students in Grades 2, 6, and 8 rarely engage with factual knowledge.**
- **Evidence suggests that ELA curriculum expectations cover a full range of cognitive demands at some grade levels. Additionally, the levels of cognitive demand do not correspond with New York state standards at some grade levels.**

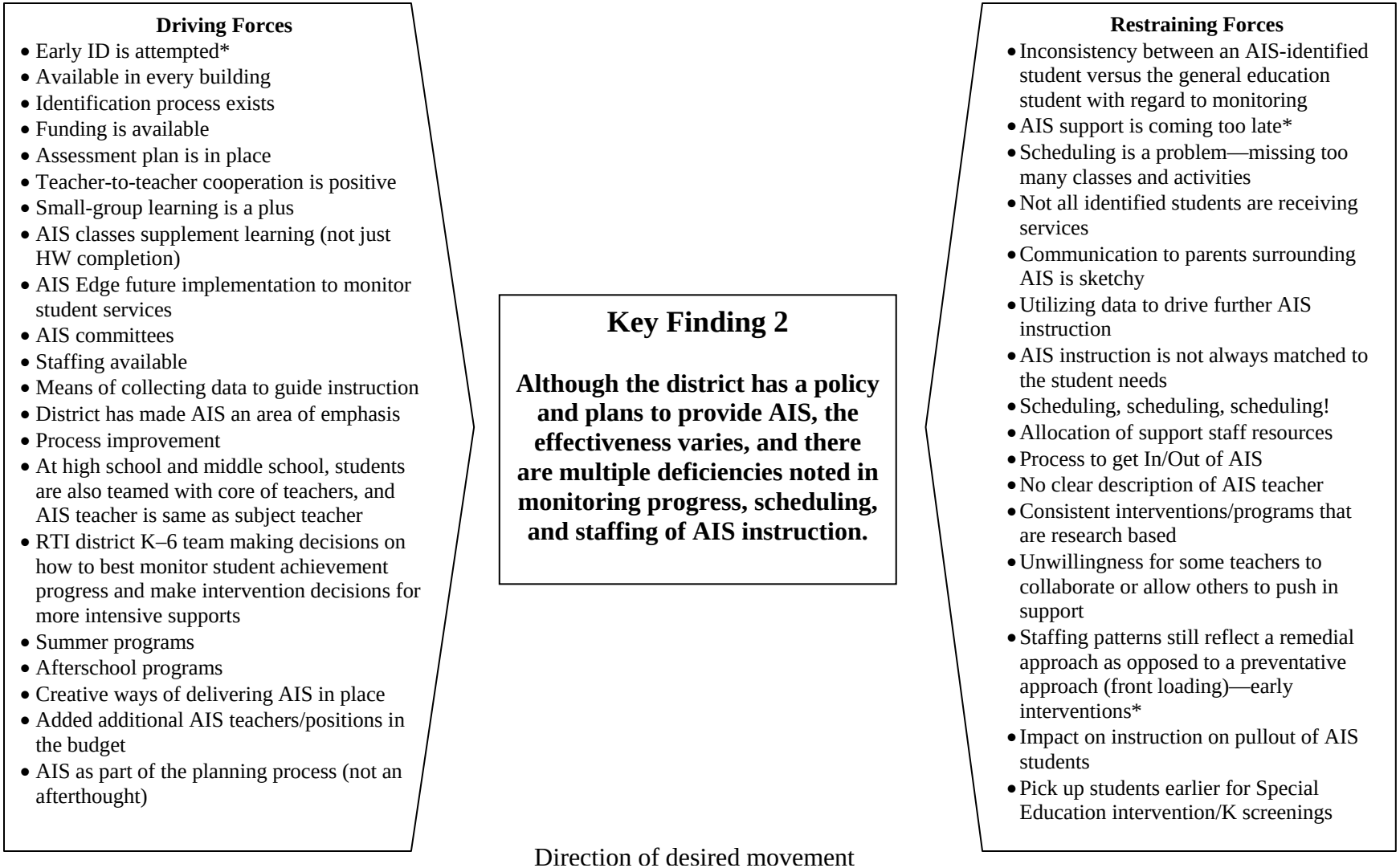
There seems to be a gap between either the New York state standards and the RCSD curriculum map or the RCSD curriculum map and the delivery of the curriculum.

Restraining Forces

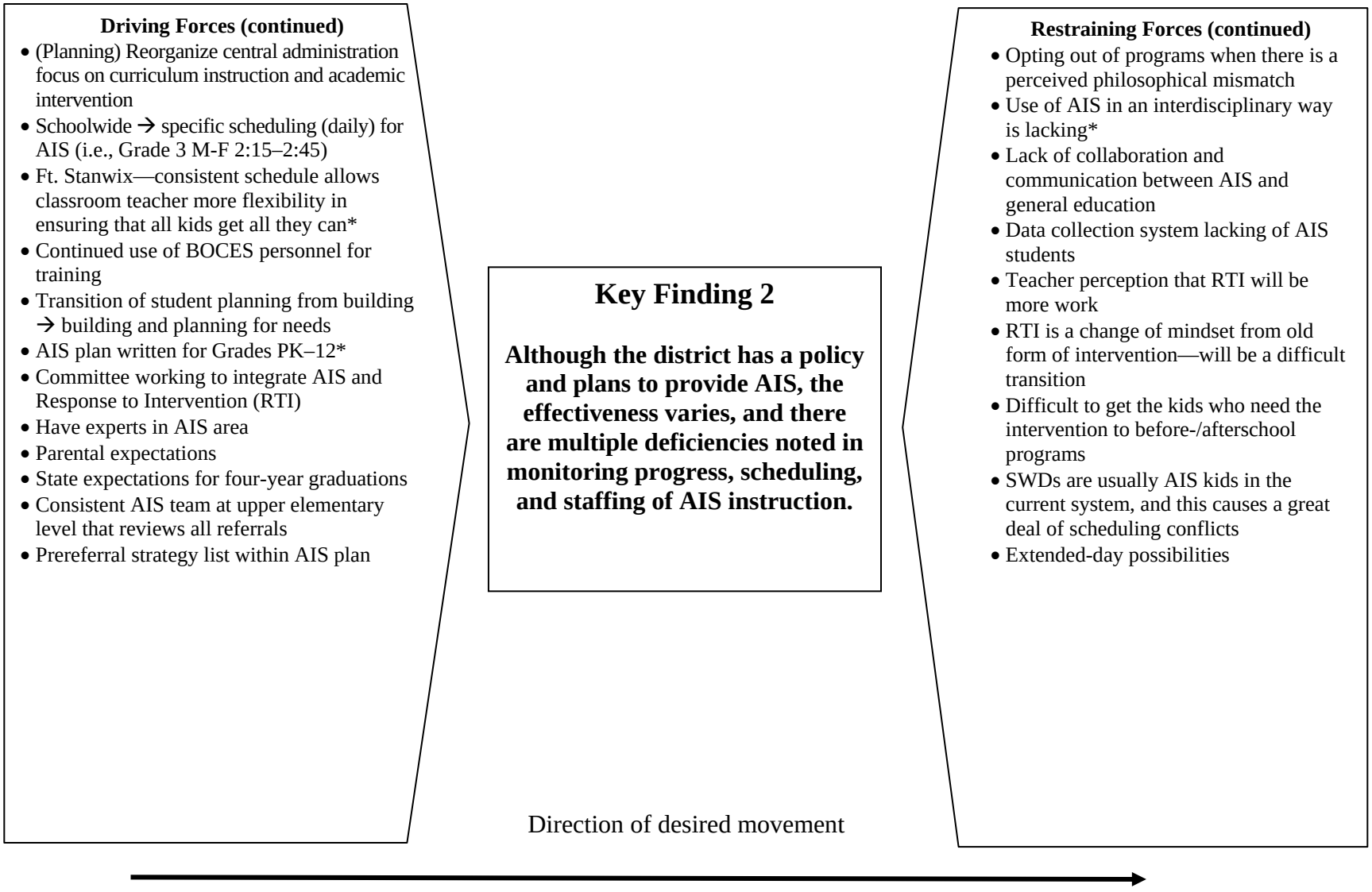
- Once 50% of essential is mapped, little room for enrichment
- Is there someone who is coordinating/ overseeing it across the district?
- A lot of people don't have expertise in writing curriculum—varying levels of expertise
- Having curriculum documents all available on the website
- Lack of training on curriculum writing that promotes alignment with NY standards and promotes cognitive demands*
- Certain strong personalities can shift the curriculum process and resist moving forward
- Curriculum is identical between regular ed. and honors classes at middle school
- Lack of gifted programs and services
- Fear of loss of academic freedom
- Lack of collaboration and pooling of resources across the district
- Teachers are not encouraged to take risks in changing the curriculum
- Students often not on grade level in a certain subject area
- Supervisory positions in curriculum areas (not enough people or expertise and authority not in the same place)*
- Need central archive of curriculum documents (electronic and paper)*

Direction of desired movement

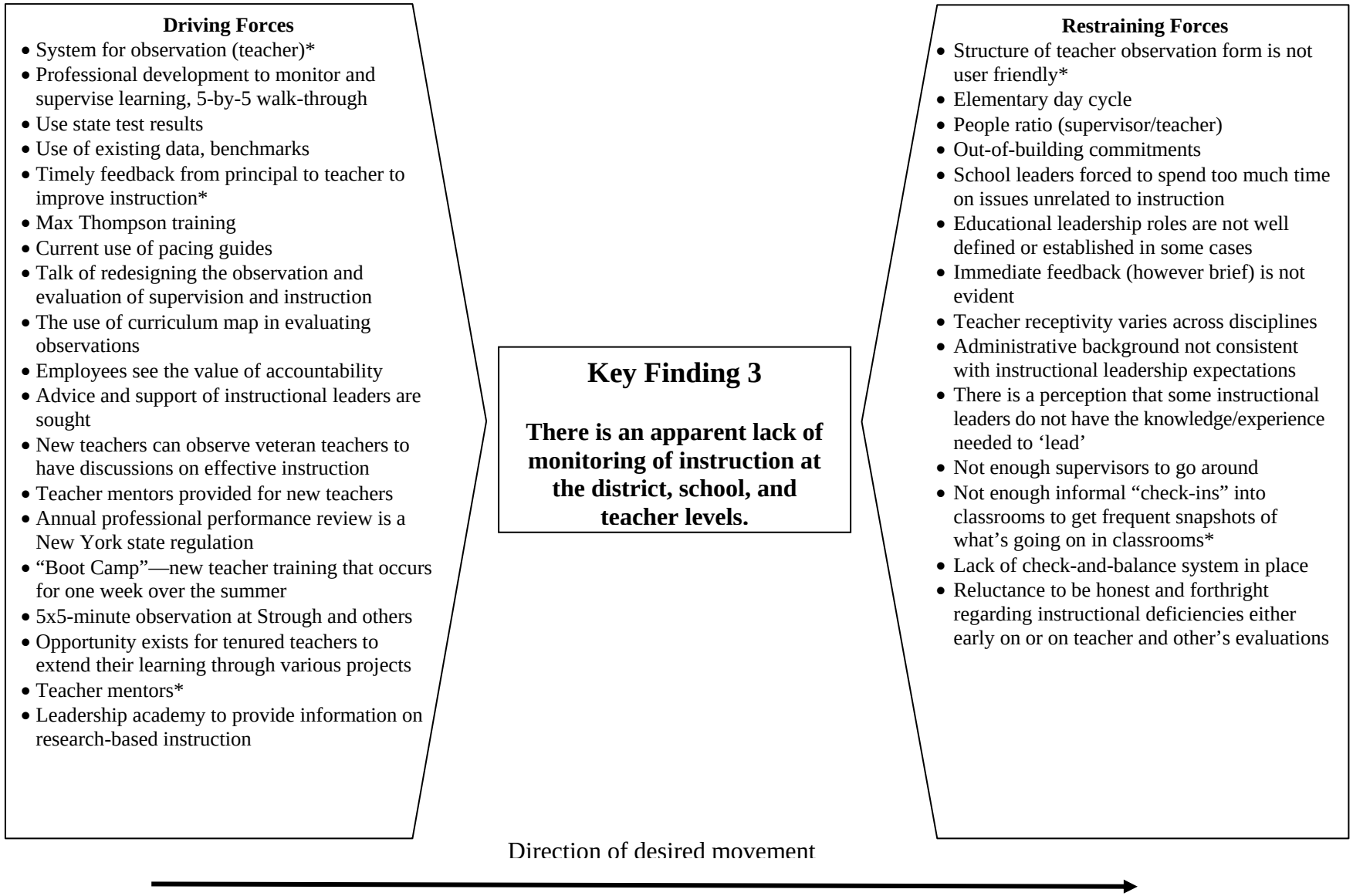
*District-identified leverage points for improvement



*District-identified leverage points for improvement



*District-identified leverage points for improvement



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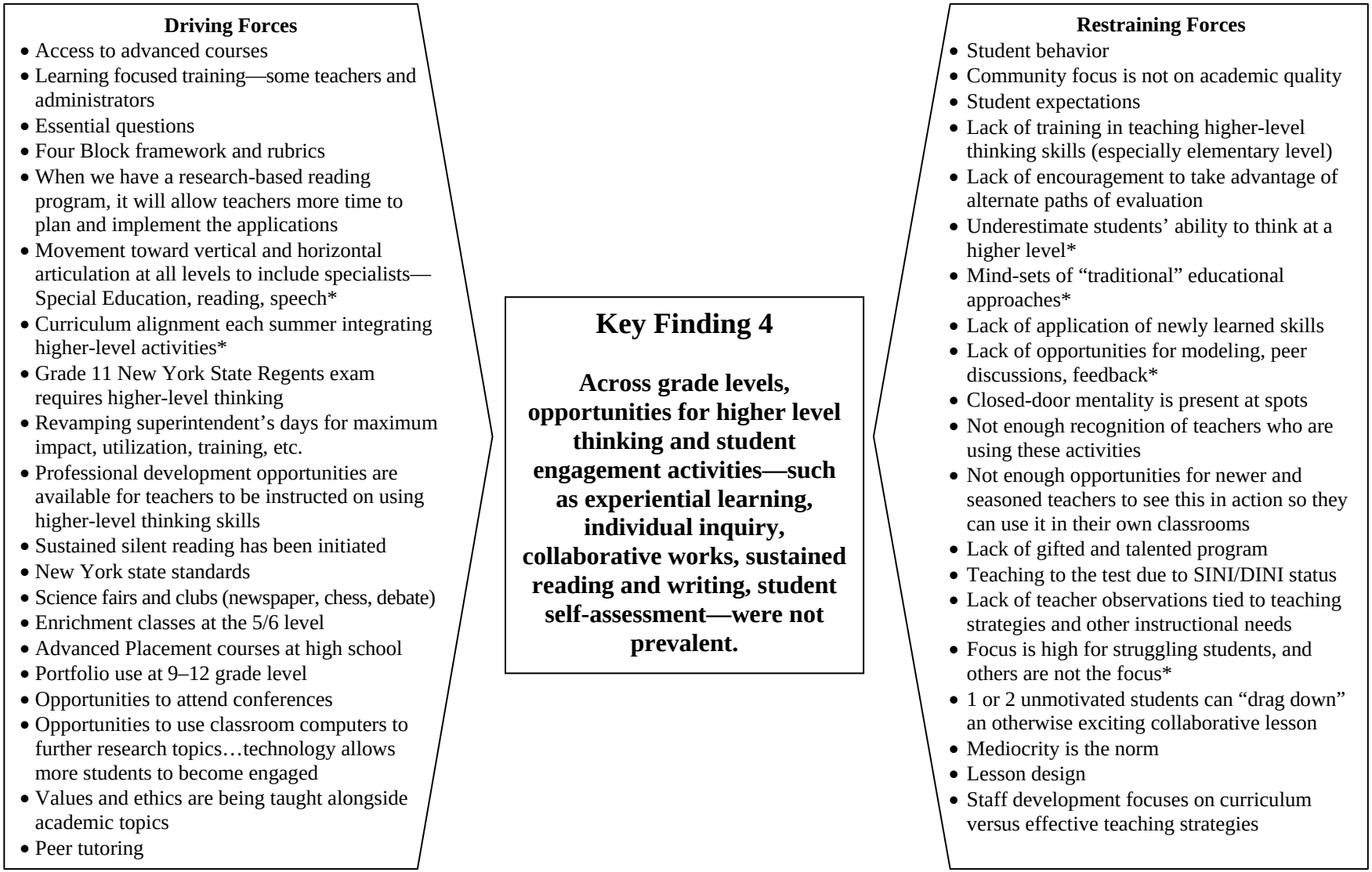

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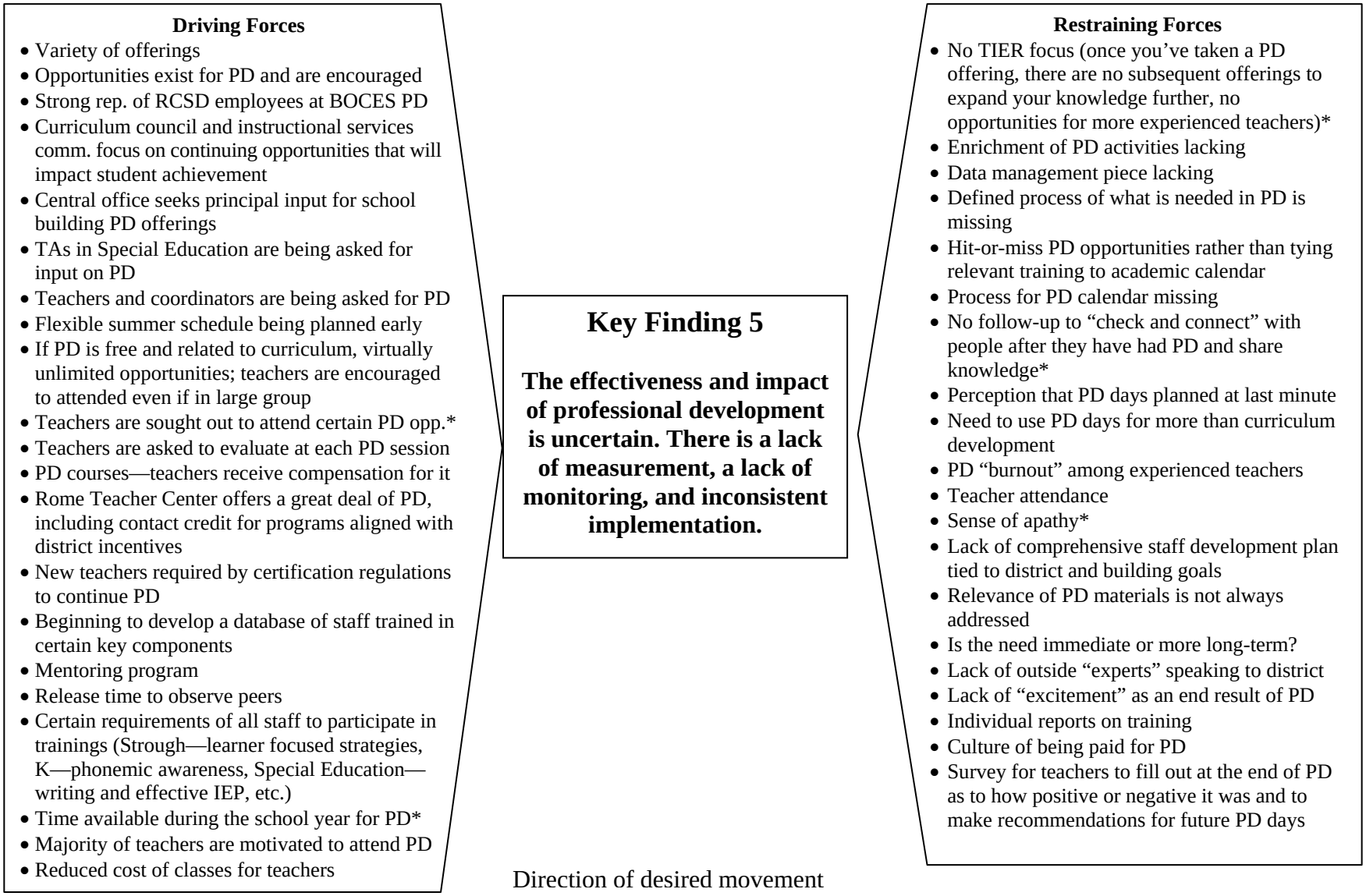

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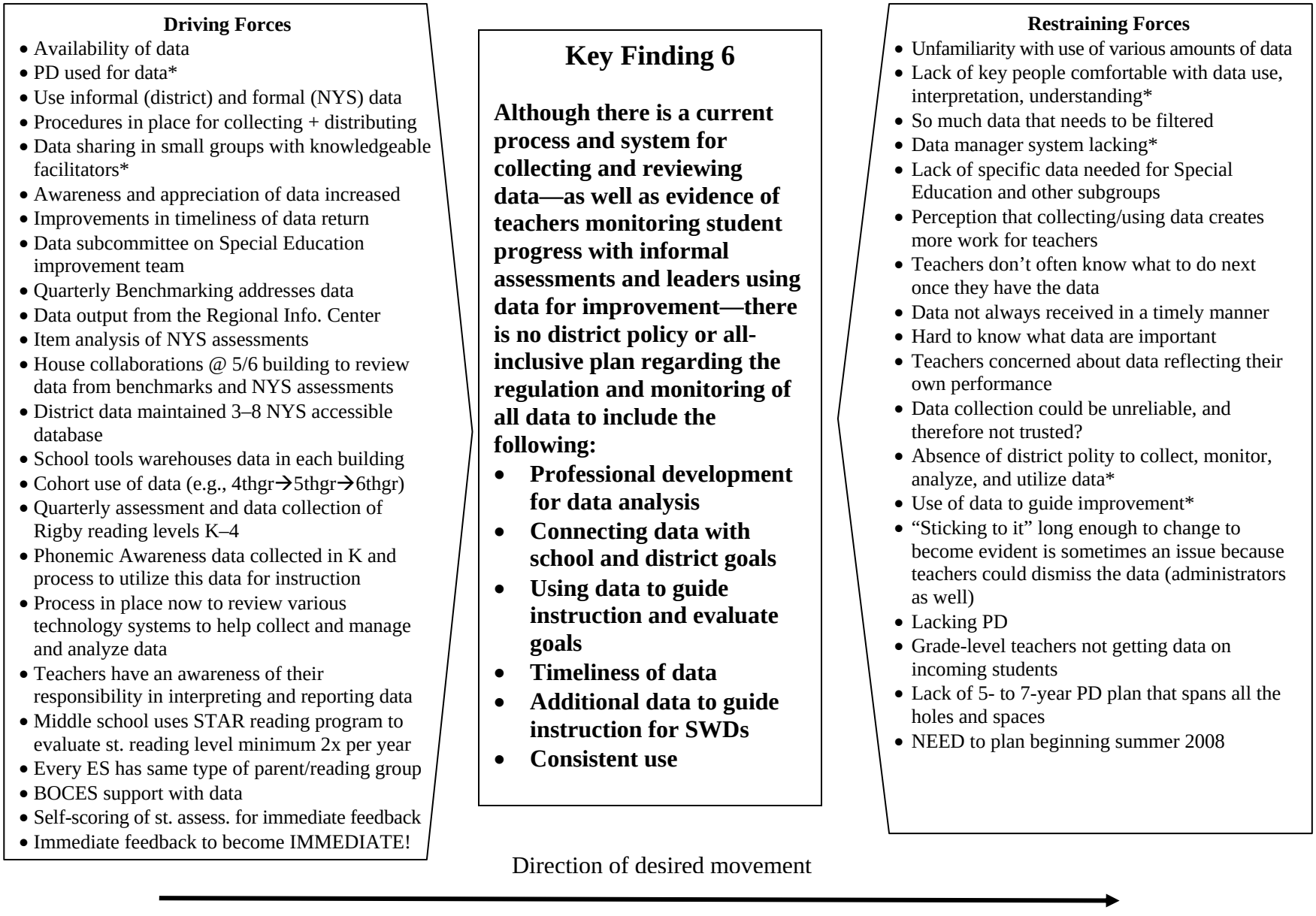

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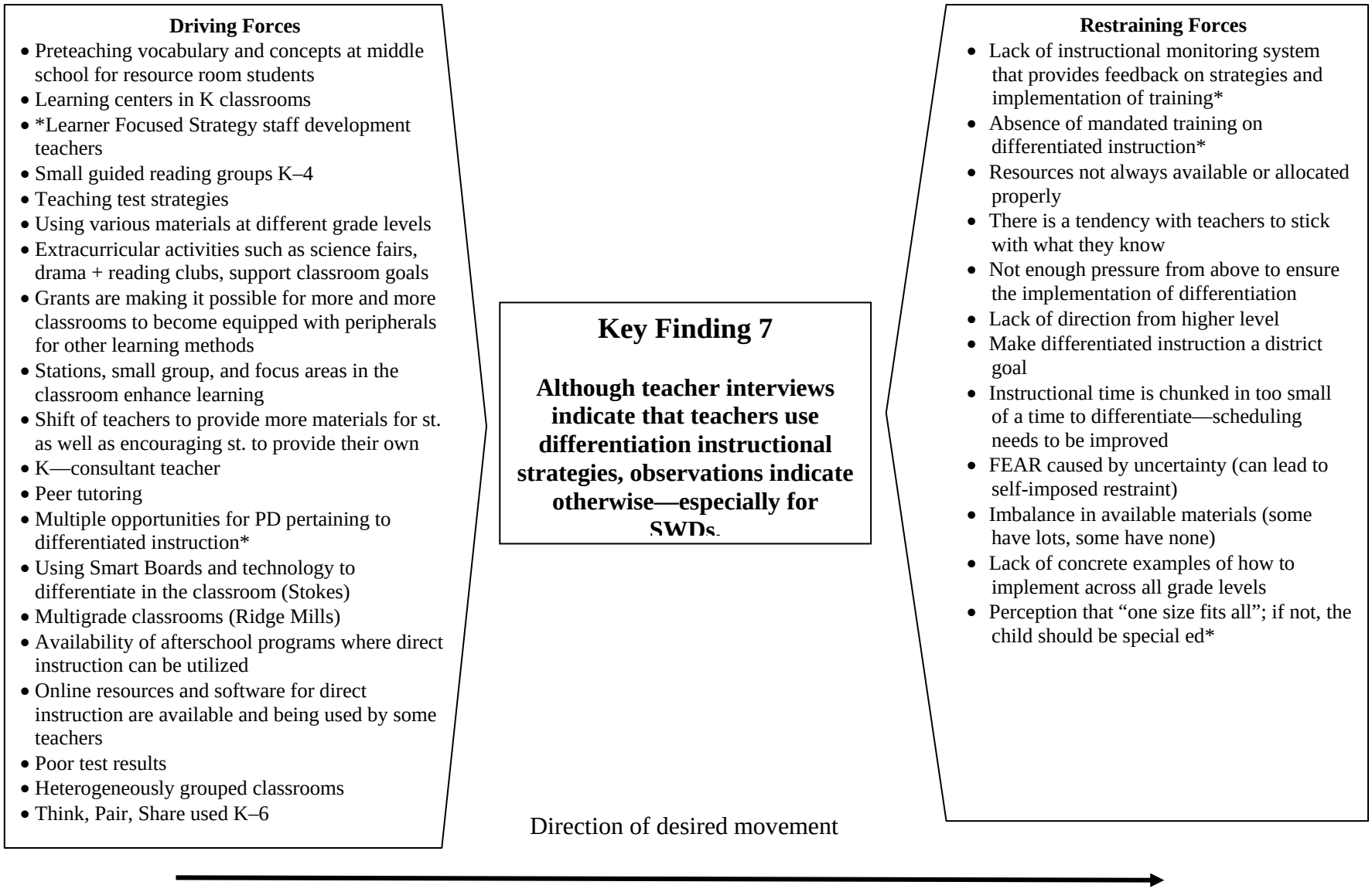

*District-identified leverage points for improvement