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

Utica City School District Final Report

May 2008

Submitted to
Utica City School District

Submitted by
Learning Point Associates

22 Cortlandt St., Floor 16
New York, NY 10007-3139
800-356-2735 • 212-419-0415
www.learningpt.org

Copyright © 2008 Learning Point Associates. All rights reserved.

This work was originally produced in whole or in part by Learning Point Associates with funds from the New York State Education Department (NYSED). The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NYSED, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement.

2788_07/08

Contents

Page

Introduction....1

District Background....2
- Overview....2
- Student Academic Performance....2

Theory of Action....3

Guiding Questions for the Audit....4

Audit Process Overview....5
- Phase 1: Planning....5
- Phase 2: Data Collection and Analysis....5
- Phase 3: Co-Interpretation of Findings....8
- Phase 4: Action Planning....9
- References....10

Key Findings....11
- Key Finding 1....11
- Key Finding 2....12
- Key Finding 3....13
- Key Finding 4....14
- Additional Key Findings....14
- Positive Key Findings....15
- Miscellaneous Findings....15

Recommendations for Action Planning....16
- Recommendation 1: Curriculum....16
- Recommendation 2: Professional Development....27
- Recommendation 3: Instruction....38
- Recommendation 4: English Language Learners....45

Appendixes
- Appendix A. Appreciative Interview Posters....56
- Appendix B. Data Map....58
- Appendix C. Force-Field Analysis....80

Introduction

This final report is the result of an audit of the written, taught, and tested English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum of Utica 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) and English Language Learners (ELLs). The audit examined the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as other key areas—such as professional development and school and district supports—through multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. These findings acted as a starting point to facilitate conversations in the district in order to identify areas for improvement, probable causes, and ways to generate plans for improvement.

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

District Background

Overview

Geographic Background

Utica City School District is one of 15 school districts in Oneida County, located in central New York state. The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees is in Utica and serves the fourth largest immigration population in the nation. About 12 percent of the city's residents come from more than 30 foreign countries, and 31 different languages are spoken in the public schools.[1] The estimated total population of the city in 2006 was 59,082.[2]

Student Population

Data from the *2005–06 Accountability and Overview Report* indicate that Utica City School District served a total of 9,041 students, with 8,615 K–12 students and 426 ungraded students.[3] Of those students enrolled, 52 percent were white; 28 percent were African American; 14 percent were Hispanic; and 6 percent were Asian, Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, or Native Americans.

Demographics

In Utica City School District there are 12 schools: nine elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.[4] Data from the 2003–04, 2004–05, and 2005–06 school years indicate that a majority of the student population was eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—72 percent, 72 percent, and 71 percent respectively. District data also indicate that the overall percentage of ELLs was 14 percent, 13 percent, and 14 percent, respectively. In the 2005–06 school year, the percentage of students with disabilities (SWDs) enrolled was approximately 13.5 percent.[5]

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2004–05 the district's average spending per student was $11,412.[6] The total New York state school aid to Utica City School District will increase from $85.2 million in 2007–08 to $95.9 million in 2008–09, an increase of $10.7 million or 12.5 percent.[7]

Student Academic Performance

As of 2005–06, the state accountability status of Utica City School District has been designated as a district *in need of improvement—Year 3* in the area of English Language Arts. In 2005–06, SWDs and ELLs were the two student accountability groups that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for ELA in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. In addition, the two accountability groups of black and Hispanic did not make AYP for ELA at the secondary level.

---

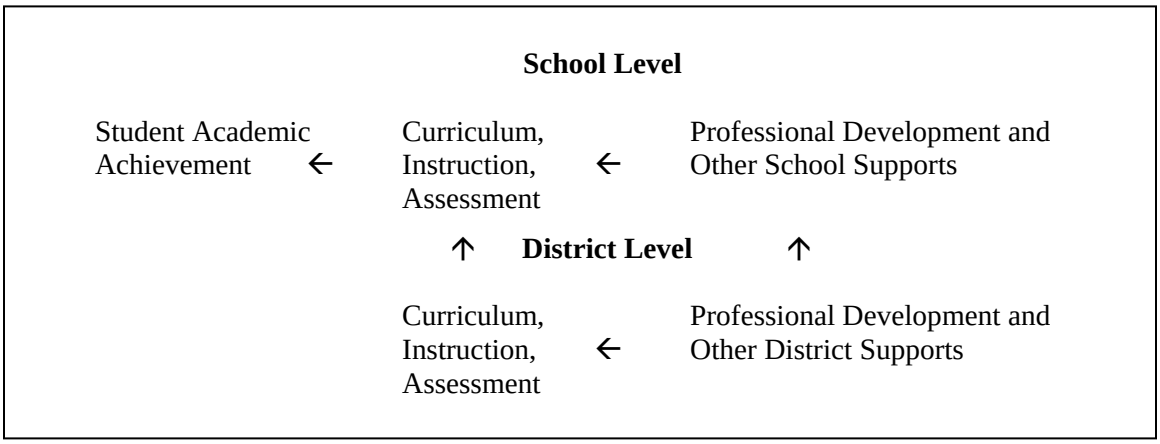
[1] http://www.mvrcr.org, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[2] http://www.city-data.com/city/Utica-New-York.html, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[3] https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2006/AOR-2006-412300010000.pdf, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[4] http://www.uticacsd.org/home.aspx, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[5] http://eservices.nysed.gov/sepubrep/mainservlet?f=report&school=412300010000, retrieved March 21, 2008.
[6] http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/ny/district_profile/640, 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 the district levels. Therefore, the audit gathered information at both levels. A graphic representation of the theory of action dynamic is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theory of Action



Guiding Questions for the Audit

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

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

Audit Process Overview

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

Phase 1: Planning

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

Phase 2: Data Collection and Analysis

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

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

NCLB Accountability Status

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

Surveys of Enacted Curriculum

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

Observations of Instruction

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

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

Interviews

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

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

Key Document Review

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

A document review matrix was developed and used to synthesize document information against a subset of the audit's guiding questions. The matrix was designed to determine whether each submitted group of documents contained clear evidence of district plans and/or policies,

implementation of those plans/policies, and internal monitoring and evaluation of the implementation in support of each identified question. The degree to which each respective document addressed the relevant question was evaluated by three Learning Point Associates analysts to ensure multiple perspectives during the process. After individual reviews were completed, a consensus meeting was held and a report was generated by all reviewers.

Curriculum Alignment

A district's written curriculum demonstrates its program of ELA studies for students. Learning Point Associates focused its attention on two key areas for this curriculum alignment process. First, Learning Point Associates used the Revised Taxonomy Table (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) to code and compare school district learning objectives/expectations and performance indicators from the New York State 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.

English Language Learner Review

The purpose of the ELL review was to provide a districtwide synthesis of data from multiple perspectives on the district's curriculum, instruction, assessment and student supports as they impact ELLs. Data collection activities that informed the ELL review included the following: district or regional staff interviews; principal and teacher interviews (including both ELL program teachers and monolingual general education teachers who serve ELLs); classroom observations; focus groups with parents of ELLs and members of community-based organizations serving ELLs; and a review of formal district documents to provide insight into the policies, plans, and procedures that the district has developed to ensure services to ELLs, as identified under the six guiding questions developed for the audit.

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

Table 1. Alignment of Data Sources With Guiding Questions

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

Phase 3: Co-Interpretation of Findings

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

The co-interpretation process had several steps, starting with the interpretation of the data within individual data sets, followed by the identification of key findings across data sets, and concluding with the 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, curriculum alignment, interview data, SEC data, classroom observations, and special populations), in a small-group setting. Individual groups were asked to first 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 broken into topic-area groups for the purpose of grouping individual findings across data sets, along common themes. From various data sources, the participants used the method of triangulation to provide support for combining and subsuming some of the findings. As the investigative groups presented their findings to the whole group, some natural combining and winnowing of results occurred.

The whole group used a voting process to prioritize the findings. Participants were 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, voting for those key findings they thought were the most important leverage points for Utica City School District. The key findings earning 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 is included in Appendix C.

Phase 4: Action Planning

The New York State Education Department will provide a recommended process and templates to the districts to meet the action planning requirements of the proposal. Submission of the completed action plan is the responsibility of each district.

Implementation of the Process

The recommended process for action planning includes the following steps: goal and strategy setting, action and task planning, integration and alignment of actions, and integration and alignment with the Comprehensive District Education Plan or Consolidated Application.

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

Rollout of the Plan

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

References

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

New York State Education Department. (2005). *English language arts core curriculum (prekindergarten–grade 12)*. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elacore.pdf

Key Findings

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

The Utica City School District does not have a districtwide written and articulated curriculum in ELA K–12 that is aligned with New York state learning standards in the areas of general education, special education, and ELLs. In the absence of this aligned curriculum, instructional planning is approached in multiple ways and lacks consistency.

District participants combined information from nearly 50 findings across all data sets to create this key finding. This key finding then received the highest number of votes from personnel at the co-interpretation, identifying it as a top priority for the district. It is informed by the Curriculum Alignment Report, Document Review, Interview Reports, the SEC Report, Special Education Review, and ELL Review.

Status of Alignment. Curriculum alignment is still in the emergent stage in the district. At this point, according to findings from the Document Review, the district has taken some steps to align the ELA curriculum in the elementary schools, mainly through the selection of a common core reading series, which the district has determined is aligned to the New York state learning standards. District personnel indicated that the elementary ELA is more aligned now than in the past because of the implementation of the new reading series.

The taught curriculum, according to the SEC results, indicates that the taught elementary ELA curriculum is aligned with the New York state standards to a high degree. However, alignment decreases through middle and high school. In the Interview Report, interviewees confirmed that the elementary curriculum is the core reading series and that there is a high level of instructional consistency at the elementary level. District-level respondents were unsure if a districtwide curriculum even exists at the secondary level, however, and respondents were less certain of its alignment with New York state standards.

At the secondary level, the ELA curriculum alignment appears to be less centralized: According to respondents who were interviewed, secondary teachers create their own curriculum maps to guide ELA instruction. District respondents expressed less certainty regarding the alignment of the secondary ELA curriculum than that of the elementary curriculum. A number of curriculum alignment documents on secondary ELA instruction were submitted, but the alignment study indicated gaps. For example, for Grade 8, there was no submitted curriculum. For Grade 10, there were gaps in explanations of instructional tasks. Overall, for all grades, instruction was not linked to assessment tools. Several interviewed respondents noted that the district has yet to align the ELA curriculum vertically, across grades and school levels; district personnel said teachers

are not familiar with the ELA curriculum of previous grades, particularly the curriculum at other school levels.

The district does not have a districtwide written ESL curriculum with well-articulated components for any of the grade levels, according to the ELL Review. Similar to the general education classrooms, ESL instruction in elementary schools is guided by a literacy program. At the secondary level, the ELL Review noted, there is no districtwide written curriculum and instructional planning is approached in different ways. In the secondary schools, observed lessons were described as only moderately aligned with the New York state standards. The district faces great challenges in providing support for newly arrived ELLs with minimal proficiency in English, but it does not have a curriculum describing how to address the learning needs of this population group.

The Special Education Review acknowledged that the district submitted no evidence of policies, implementation, or monitoring of curricular documents for SWDs. At the same time, interviewed teachers expressed confidence that their ELA lessons were aligned with the New York learning standards.

Apart from having an articulated curriculum, there were indications that consistency in delivering the ELA curriculum is not systematically supported. Although there is more articulation of expectations for instruction than in the past, there may not be adequate follow-up on the part of district principals to ensure delivery of the ELA curriculum, according to interviewed district respondents. According to the Document Review, the district did not submit plans, policies, or implementation practices that would ensure consistent delivery of the curriculum within schools.

Key Finding 2

The district does not have a well-articulated, documented plan or policy for implementation of ELA professional development, and it lacks a full-time director for professional development.

This key finding received the second highest number of votes during the co-interpretation. It draws primarily from evidence in the Document Review, Interview Report, and ELL Review.

The district currently is hampered in developing a more systematic approach to professional development because there position of professional development director is not filled. Although the district has plans for professional development (outlines of activities), the Document Review noted that professional development criteria were not always met. Submitted documents did not provide any evidence of district policies, implementation, or monitoring of professional development. Linkages between student expectations, district curriculum, and professional development training were not explicated in the documentation submitted. On the other hand, the ELL Review noted that the district submitted substantial evidence of plans, policies, and monitoring concerning the professional development of ELL teachers.

In the schools, building principals generally described the district as supportive with respect to professional development, but a number of principals acknowledged that they would like a more cohesive professional development system that more directly focuses on their professional needs.

Nearly all of the sample schools provided professional support to teachers through a content coach (or instructional leader). However, in six of the eight schools, respondents said the influence of the content expert is limited, usually because of the content experts' focusing on teachers who have a high number of low-achieving, at-risk students.

Key Finding 3

Differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and higher-level questioning strategies are used with limited frequency.

The information that supports Key Finding 3 comes from the SEC Report, the Classroom Observation Report, the Special Education Review, and the ELL Review. Additional auditor's findings that support this key finding are derived from the Curriculum Alignment Report.

In the general education classrooms, a limited number of classroom factors were observed and/or reported on through the classroom observations and the SEC Report. Across all grade levels, independent seatwork (students working on their own on worksheets, workbooks, assignments) was frequently observed across all grade levels. Also, teachers using higher-level questioning strategies to lead instruction and teachers in a coach/facilitator role were observed frequently, though not as frequently as independent seatwork. Sustained writing was observed infrequently; in the middle schools, for example, where the SEC results indicated that more emphasis should be put on writing, students were observed in sustained writing activities frequently or extensively in only 7 percent of the classrooms. Project-based learning was seldom observed. The Curriculum Alignment Report noted that the curriculum documents presented by the district do not provide information on instructional methods or student activities and experiences. Across the grade levels, differentiated instruction is not addressed in the district curriculum documents.

The Special Education document review noted that the district's IEPs specified the instructional accommodations that SWDs need to help them access the curriculum. Both general and special education teachers have access to IEPs and reported using them to provide appropriate instructional accommodations. While the Special Education Review notes that although teachers reported using a wide range of strategies to differentiate instruction, such strategies were not observed in four fifths of the classrooms.

The ELL Review had similar findings: Instruction in observed classrooms was seldom differentiated, and instruction was provided most often in whole-group settings rather than in small groups.

Key Finding 4

There is a need for targeted services and differentiated instruction for low-performing ELLs.

The fourth key finding is supported by information from the ELL Review and the Document Review. In general, the Document Review report indicated that there is no alignment of the AIS curriculum to student needs.

ELLs have access to academic support services, but these services do not target ELLs: The services are the same as those provided to below-proficiency general education students. Both general education and ESL teachers said the district needs AIS that specifically address ELLs. There are not adequate intervention services for ELLs with a special education classification. A number of administrators who were interviewed for the ELL Review recommended a separate immersion program in which beginners learn English in an intensive environment and how to survive in American culture.

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:

Data Use

- According to multiple sources, there is no cohesive districtwide system for collecting, interpreting, and providing access to all student achievement data.

Professional Development

- There is frequent and consistent professional development provided by the district; however, more training is needed for general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms and for general education teachers in ELL topics.
- All respondents said that new teachers were moderately supported. Data show agreement, at both district and school levels, that additional professional support for new teachers is needed.

Instruction

- Use of technology is limited or not available to students throughout the district.
- There is a lack of or minimal amount of instructional materials and resources for SWDs and ELLs in general education classrooms, according to observations and interviews.
- Observations indicate that student engagement in the classrooms decreases from the elementary to the secondary level.
- Cultural awareness is more frequently found in ESL classrooms than in general education classrooms with ELL students.

- ESL interviews and observations indicate that ESL teachers make more modifications than general education teachers at elementary and secondary levels.
- Observations of ELLs and SWDs in the classrooms found that interactions were predominately respectful and productive with the exception of some ESL students in some secondary classrooms.

Staffing

- Many interviewed respondents indicated that collaboration between general education teachers, between special education and general education teachers, and between ESL and general education teachers occurs frequently but informally.

Curriculum

- Resources, policies, monitoring and implementation of what is taught to ELA students in ELA are inconsistent throughout the district.
- Teachers indicated that they hold ELLs to the same standards and expectations as general education students, although observations at the secondary level have not supported teacher statements.

Academic Interventions

- Documentation was not evident districtwide to indicate monitoring of district programs and policies related to the effectiveness of AIS.

Positive Key Findings

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

- The district has a plan to identify and provide AIS for students in Grades K–12.
- Multiple data sources indicate that all SWDs have access to the general education ELA curriculum.
- Multiple data sources indicate that SWDs experience curricular modifications.

Miscellaneous Findings

Some findings were identified from the data sets by co-interpretation participants but ultimately were not included in the development of the key findings outlined above. 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 later 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 practice in the appropriate areas—are used to make recommendations for the district's efforts during the next three years.

The key findings that arose out of the co-interpretation with Utica City School District led Learning Point Associates to make four recommendations. Recommendation 1 speaks to the key finding receiving the most votes during co-interpretation: the need for the district to develop a comprehensive, fully aligned, and articulated curriculum for ELA. Similarly, the other three recommendations correspond directly to the key findings in terms of district needs for professional development, instruction and differentiation, and the special needs of ELL students.

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 listing does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the district may consider during the action planning process. The diversity and complexity of each recommendation places limits on the extent to which Learning Point Associates can discern its relative impact on the district's improvement process. For this reason, recommendations are firm but the associated actions or strategies to implement the recommendations should be considered as points of reference for consideration.

Recommendation 1: Curriculum

Utica City School District should implement a districtwide system of curriculum designed to create a coherence of expectations and experiences within and across schools—including materials, assessments, and outcomes that:

- **Are aligned to the breadth and depth of the state standards.**
- **Have written information for teachers on instructional expectations.**
- **Include explicit performance expectations for students including benchmarks.**
- **Include links to both formative and summative assessments.**

The system as a whole should contain a monitoring component, providing opportunities for data collection, reflection, and improvement as implementation of curriculum progresses.

Link to Findings

The results of the co interpretation and the district's close inspection of the data indicate that Utica City School District does not have a districtwide written and well-articulated, comprehensive ELA K–12 written curriculum that is aligned with the New York state learning standards in the areas of general education, special education, and ELL education. More specifically, the Curriculum Alignment Report revealed that there are no specific written student expectations or a clearly articulated statement indicating what students should know and be able to do with respect to ELA in Grades 2, 4, 6 and 8 and 10. In addition, the Key Document Review revealed no plans, policies, evidence of implementation or monitoring documents submitted to

illustrate that the district ensures consistent delivery of curriculum within *and* across schools in Grades K–12 for general education students, ELLs or SWDs. Although teachers indicated that they use the state standards when determining what to teach in their classrooms, they also indicated that they receive curriculum and standards from different sources. The SEC Report illustrated that although the district's ELA instruction is aligned to state expectations to a certain degree, more emphasis should be placed on higher-order thinking skills.

For students with special needs, the district has no policies regarding, or evidence of implementation of curricular materials used to meet the needs of SWDs, nor was there evidence of monitoring done at the district level regarding such materials. Furthermore, the district provided no evidence of plans or policies to ensure a curriculum that meets the needs of ELLs is effectively delivered in Grades K–6, nor was there any evidence that such a curriculum was implemented at this level. When teachers of ELLs were interviewed, they expressed that the ELA curriculum does not meet the learning needs of ELLs with minimal proficiency in English. The general education teachers said that they modify the ELA curriculum to meet the needs of the ELL students in their classrooms.

Link to Research

A Systems Approach. Fullan (2005) offers the idea that systems thinking is the key to sustainability in change. He suggests that explicit, systems thinkers—who are involved in the work of changing the district, are in the midst of district operations, and are aware of district infrastructure and issues—must be willing to engage with others in the deep thinking that needs to occur for change. This approach will help to guide and lead districts to sustainability. Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy (2002) found four successful high-poverty districts that implemented the following systemic curriculum initiatives:

- Emphasis on achievement, standards, and instruction systemwide
- Implementation of districtwide curriculum and instruction
- Focus on the elementary levels
- Intensive instruction in reading and mathematics for middle and high school students
- Establishment of district support for reform through central office support, including guidance and other efforts
- Implementation of a districtwide professional development plan devised for consistent implementation.

Other researchers have found that organizational elements are useful to implementing districtwide initiatives. Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson (2007) emphasize the importance of closely inspecting the culture, structures, systems, resources, and stakeholders. Knowing the status of each of these elements ensures that accurate strategies can be developed to move the system forward.

Leadership also plays a key role. Researchers have found three leader characteristics associated with effectiveness of school improvement (Redding, 2006): optimism, honesty and consideration. A mixture of personal support for all stakeholders and focused attention to systemic goals, especially improved learning, is a balanced view of leadership (Redding, 2006).

Research advocates for a strong leadership *team* consisting of school and district-level staff who work together on curriculum and instruction initiatives to ensure that various stakeholders' viewpoints are represented in the district's initiatives (Redding, 2006).

A Comprehensive, Articulated Curriculum. The designation of and expected adherence to a high-quality, comprehensive, and clearly articulated curriculum has demonstrated positive impact on student achievement (Earl, Levin, Leithwood, Fullan, & Watson, 2003). When curricula have been revised and realigned to state standards, results have generally been higher student achievement in areas such as reading and mathematics (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005; Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007).

Curriculum alignment is more than simply a correlation between state standards and local district expectations (Anderson, 2002). Although aligning a curriculum to state standards and performance indicators is a necessary first step to improving student achievement, a fully aligned curriculum is intended to ensure closer connections between the written and taught curricula (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

An *aligned* and *fully articulated* curriculum has four 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
- Realistic pacing guidelines for coverage of the district standards
- Other curricular components in addition to district standards and pacing that may include instructional strategies, connections to district materials, other resources, or assessment options

Research supports the notion that curriculum needs to be developed for depth and coverage. Curricular priorities need to be addressed in order to create a "guaranteed and viable curriculum" (Marzano, 2003, p. 22). In order for the curriculum to be both guaranteed and viable, curriculum development must extend beyond the creation of program guides that merely map out topics and materials; it must clearly specify appropriate experiences, assignments instructional practices, and assessments that can be used to bring about the desired learning and objectives (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The New York State Education Department (n.d.) states that the learning standards represent the core of what all students should know, understand, and be able to do as a result of their schooling. Researchers further explain the purpose of state academic standards as "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).

Linn and Hermann (1997) found that without alignment of district and state standards, it is not possible for students to achieve necessary benchmarks. It is essential to align the district curriculum with the state standards both in the *breadth of content* covered and in the *depth of cognitive demand* required (Danielson, 2002; English, 2000). To further this point, Bereiter (2002) discusses the need for depth of learning within the curriculum. He indicates that depth of knowledge, for both students and teachers, is necessary to prepare students for the future. The

written curriculum is intended to guide both the content and process of the instruction. Wiggins and McTighe (2005, p. 66) aptly label the purpose of the curriculum: to become a "roadmap for instruction."

The Breadth and Depth of the ELA Curriculum. Research supports the need for teaching language arts skills with more depth and breadth as students develop their reading and writing abilities. Students do well with basic literacy skills—such as decoding and comprehension—but struggle with higher-level concepts—such as making inferences, drawing conclusions, and communicating complex ideas (Cair, Saifer & Novick, 2002). Research has shown that increasing instruction in any area of reading—such as decoding, phonics, vocabulary or fluency—also increases comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Research further indicates that similar skills are required for writing. Instruction in writing can and will improve reading comprehension (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Tierney & Shananhan, 1991). Furthermore, writing is a means of extending students' knowledge. It acts as a tool for learning subject matter (Graham & Perin, 2007; Shanahan, 2004).

Pacing Guidelines. Systematic change involving written curriculum is aided by additional support materials. Well-articulated pacing guidelines assist teachers in moving through the curriculum rapidly, but in small steps that minimize student frustration and allow continuous progress (Redding, 2006). It is expected that teachers will have slightly different schedules and ways of addressing materials. A lock-step approach is not what is envisioned. However, by providing more-detailed pacing guidelines, which are explicated and aligned to concretely stated student outcomes, the district helps ensure that students are prepared for the next grade and that all grade-level standards are covered during the school year, regardless of which school a student attends or to which teacher a student is assigned. These steps move the district toward a higher trust status (Byrk & Schneider, 2002).

Curricular documents with clearly articulated instructional strategies guide teachers in meeting the needs of all students. By including a wide variety of instructional strategies in curriculum documents, the district is providing a guide for teachers as they aim to meet the diverse needs of their students. Providing specific examples of how to implement the curriculum to serve ELLs at various language proficiency levels or SWDs can impact student achievement (Olsen, 2006; Redding, 2006;). Curriculum maps specifying instructional approaches that may be utilized to differentiate instruction specifically for ELLs and SWDs allows these students to have more access to the general education curriculum (Ansary & Babaii, 2002; Tomlinson, 2001).

Formative and Summative Assessments. Research recommends a balance between formative and summative assessments. This approach also is referred to as "assessment *for* learning with descriptive feedback" and "assessment *of* learning" (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004, pp. 36–37). Traditionally, summative assessments (or assessment *of* learning) are used for external reporting purposes, while formative assessments (or assessment *for* learning with descriptive feedback) assist in informing instructional practices (Stiggins et al., 2004). As the district is building this system, having both types of assessment will greatly enrich the teaching and learning cycle.

Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and William (2003) describe a byproduct of assessment for learning as changed teacher expectations and interactions with students. Although the district is held accountable to summative assessments, the incorporation of formative assessments at the

classroom level helps teachers within the district to use data to inform their instruction. As the district endeavors to build upon its standards-based instruction model, this model will validate the data-driven decision-making process. Stiggins et al. (2004) note: "Our communication is only as good as the assessments on which it is based. If assessment information is not accurate, communication will be meaningless, at best, with the potential to do damage in all other instances. Accuracy, as we have seen, depends on beginning with clear targets" (p. 294). The standards-based instruction model informs the utilization of formative assessments within the classroom as it clarifies the learning targets to be assessed, as articulated by content standards.

As Kellough and Kellough (1999) state, one of the purposes of assessment is to assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum programs. Therefore, as a district develops and evaluates its curriculum, aligning assessments to curricular aims or objectives is vital (Rothman, Slattery, & Vranek, 2002). Utica City School District administers various assessments, but to assist teachers in using them consistently and with the right intention, there must be a clear connection to the district's ELA curriculum.

Implementation Considerations

Co-interpretation participants state that curriculum development is occurring at varying degrees across the district. For instance, some schools have more developed curricula than others. As the Utica City School District focuses on developing a *districtwide* ELA written curriculum, it needs to include the following at the district level: clear student expectations, pacing guidelines, connection to instructional strategies, and a link to assessments.

Knowing that developing a districtwide curriculum is often a daunting task, Utica City School district is encouraged to see this process as a multistep endeavor that requires collaboration between many stakeholders to ensure the completion of a comprehensive curriculum that meets the needs of all students. One of the first steps in this process is focusing on what matters (Childress et al., 2007). Prioritizing efforts, initiatives, and competing demands can be difficult. However, one of the first tasks of a district team is to determine the mission, objectives, and milestones for the district. These points also include specific, explicit priorities and student outcomes. The district team members may consider the following questions (summarized from Childress et al., 2007) to be relevant as they begin to chart their course:

- What is the best way for us to drive increased student achievement?
- Do we have the all the right people at the table?
- Where do we have strong evidence of success?
- What are our leverage points?
- What is our strategy for changing student achievement?
    - How are we going to prioritize our efforts? (What will stay, what will go?)
    - How will we communicate our plans to everyone?
    - How are we going to ensure both vertical (across school and within school) and horizontal (up and down the grade level) alignment and support?

Ensuring that the district team prioritizes and addresses these questions will help team members move them along the continuum. Setting milestones and benchmarks for progress also will ensure that progress is measured.

Following is a suggested sequence of follow-up activities for developing an ELA written curriculum.

- **Ensure that the ELA written curriculum clearly states expectations of what students should know, understand, and be able to do—building from simple to more complex skills and concepts** (Danielson, 2002; English, 2000)

As an initial step, the district needs to ask what concepts, skills, and behaviors must be learned by the student. This task could be articulated through a variety of formats, such as curriculum mapping, benchmarking, and/or a written scope and sequence (English, 2000; Foriska, 2005).

Utica City School District has already made some initial steps toward this goal. While no documentation was submitted for Grade 8, the district's ELA curriculum documents for Grades 2, 4, and 6 explicitly references grade-level ELA performance indicators of the New York State Education Department (2005). However, this document did not present specific student expectations or a clearly articulated statement indicating what students should know and be able to do with respect to ELA. Creating these expectations is one of the steps that needs to be taken. The Grade 10 curriculum map does not present specific expectations of what students should know, understand, or be able to do, expressed as objectives or outcomes (e.g., a statement of what students will do, indicating cognitive demand, knowledge level, and outcome).

- **Ensure that the ELA written curriculum provides more detailed pacing to guide ELA instruction at each grade level** (English, 2000; Foriska, 2005; Redding, 2006; Zavadsky, 2006).

After the ELA student expectations are clearly articulated for all grade levels, attention should turn to pacing to guide the ELA instruction. This task could be accomplished through a variety of formats such as *well-articulated* curriculum map, scope and sequence, or unit plans that define terms and concepts; it should not leave interpretation up to the teacher (English, 2000; Foriska, 2005; Redding, 2006). To achieve instructional consistency, the process used for instruction—as well as the content desired to be taught—should be included in the written curriculum documents.

Utica City School District has some elements of this portion in place. The documents submitted for Grades 2, 4, 6 and 10 provide limited information regarding a schedule for instruction. Grade 8 was not submitted. The district's curriculum document for Grades 2, 4, and 6 does not present a schedule or time frame for instruction. The Grade 10 curriculum map provided a little more detail by indicating four units (i.e., short stories, drama, novel, Shakespeare), one for each marking period. To ensure consistent implementation of the curriculum, the district is encouraged to provide *more* detailed pacing information that is aligned to explicit student expectations.

- **Ensure that the ELA written curriculum clearly connects ELA curriculum content to the district's core instructional strategies** (Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman, 2007; *for additional details, see Recommendation 2 on professional development and Recommendation 3 on instruction*).

As stated in Recommendation 3 (the instruction recommendation), the district's ELA student expectations need to align with the instructional process. Curricular documents with clearly articulated instructional strategies guide teachers in meeting the needs of all students (Olsen, 2006; Redding, 2006). The district curriculum documents submitted for the curriculum alignment for Grades 2, 4, and 6 do not present any information about instructional methods, strategies, examples, or types of experiences to be offered. The Grade 10 curriculum map lists some generic activities, or references to activities, for each unit (e.g., listening or note-taking strategies, graphic organizers for essays that allow for students to work independently, activities that include opportunities for students to speak in groups and/or whole-class presentations). No sample documents were submitted for Grade 8.

In regard to differentiated instruction and the connection made to the district's ELA curriculum: The curriculum documents do not address differentiated instruction with any detail. Data reports revealed that the district has adopted textbook series to assist in meeting the needs of ELLs and SWDs. For instance, there is the Hampton Brown series for ELLs and the *Sidewalks* program for SWDs. As a next step, to ensure the consistent use of these materials across *all* schools in the district, Utica City School District is encouraged to clearly articulate the alignment between these texts and the other components of the ELA curriculum (e.g., student expectations, pacing guidelines, instructional strategies, and assessments).

- **Ensure that the ELA written curriculum further explains how assessments are used to measure student progress in meeting learning objectives (Rothman, Slattery, & Vranek, 2002) through the use of formative and summative assessments.**

After the district has clearly articulated student expectations and includes a time frame to guide teachers in the implementation of a variety of instructional strategies, attention needs to turn to how the district plans to monitor student progress in ELA.

To ensure that the district's ELA assessments are used as intended and consistently across the district, Utica City School District needs to further delineate the administration and purpose of the assessments. As previously mentioned, the district did not submit a curricular document for Grade 8. The curriculum documents for Grades 2, 4, and 6 do not address assessment or present links to any specific assessment tools or types. The Grade 10 curriculum map references tasks for each unit that serve as assessments (e.g., modified Task 3 using two short stories and literary terms), but it does not provide an explanation for what these tasks are, how they are administered, or how they will assess student learning of unit material. Marking Period 4 references a final exam but gives no additional details.

The district currently has an item analysis of the New York state tests. This information will be very informative to the district as it engages in developing and evaluating its local assessment system to align with the ELA curriculum.

- **Ensure that the ELA curricular materials specifically address varying levels of student development and knowledge** (Ansary & Babaii, 2002; Olsen, 2006).

To ensure that the district curriculum is complete, the district is encouraged to align materials and resources to the other curricular components. Utica City School District did not submit a curriculum document for Grade 8. The curriculum document for Grades 2, 4, and 6 implies that the *Reading Street* program materials are used, but it does not provide any specific information about its use in the curriculum. No information about supplemental curriculum expectations or interventions was provided. The Grade 10 curriculum map indicates suggested or required stories and book titles for each unit. It also identifies literary terms that teachers should cover for each unit. Expectations for reading, writing, and listening and speaking in the content areas were not mentioned.

Co-interpretation participants stated several driving forces in this area. For instance, the elementary schools have consistent textbook alignment with the ELA state standards. In addition, the district has a textbook review cycle in place at the secondary level to ensure that district-adopted text supports learning standards. As Utica City School District works to fully develop its ELA curriculum, it is vital that the district clearly articulates how these materials should be used in the classroom.

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.

Ansary, H., & Babaii, E. (2002). Universal characteristics of EFL/ESL textbooks: A step towards systematic textbook evaluation. *Internet TESL Journal, 8*(2).

Bereiter, C. (2002). *Education and mind in the knowledge age*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2006). *Reading next: A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy* (Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York) (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/ReadingNext.pdf

Billig, S. H., Jaime, I. I., Abrams, A., Fitzpatrick, M., & Kendrick, E. (2005). *Closing the achievement gap: Lessons from successful schools.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED491863). Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/29/de/86.pdf

Black. P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & William, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Byrk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Cair, M. S., Saifer, S., & Novick, R. (2002). *Inquiring minds: Learning and literacy in early adolescence*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Childress, S., Elmore, R., Grossman, A., & Johnson, S. (2007). *Managing school districts for high performance: Cases in public education leadership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Corallo, C., & McDonald, D. (2002). *What works with low-performing schools: A review of research*. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory.

Danielson, C. (2002). *Enhancing student achievement: A framework for school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Earl, L., Levin, B., Leithwood, K., Fullan, M., & Watson, N. (2003). *Watching and learning 3: The final report of the external evaluation of England's national literacy and numeracy strategies*. London: Department for Education and Skills. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 472214). Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/b1/65.pdf

English, F. (2000). *Deciding what to teach and test: Developing, aligning, and auditing the curriculum.* Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.

Foriska, T. J. (2005). *Restructuring around standards: A practitioner's guide to design and implementation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

Fullan, M.(2005). *Leadership & sustainability: Systems thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools* (Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York). Washington, DC. Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/WritingNext.pdf

Irvin, J. L., Meltzer, J., & Dukes, M. S. (2007). *Taking action on adolescent literacy: An implementation guide for school leaders.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kellough, R. D., & Kellough, N. G. (1999). *Secondary school teaching: A guide to methods and resources: Planning for competence*. Upper River Saddle, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Linn, R. L., & Herman, J. L. (1997). *A policymaker's guide to standards-led assessment*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence based assessment on the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*.

Washington, DC. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.cfm

New York State Education Department. (n.d). *New York state learning standards* [Website]. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nysatl/standards.html

New York State Education Department. (2005). *English language arts core curriculum (prekindergarten-grade 12).* Albany, NY: Author. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elacore.htm

Olsen, L. (2006). Ensuring academic success for English learners. *UC Language Minority Research Institute Newsletter, 15*(4).

Redding, S. (2006). *The mega system: A handbook for continuous improvement within a community of the school*. Lincoln. IL: Academic Development Institute.

Rothman, R., Slattery, J. B., Vranek, J. L, & Resnick, L. (2002). *Benchmarking and alignment of standards and testing* (CSE Technical Report 566). Los Angeles: University of California, Center for the Study of Evaluation. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.achieve.org/files/TR566.pdf

Sandholtz, J., Ogawa, R., & Scribner, S. (2004). Standards gaps: Unintended consequences of local standards-based reform. *Teachers College Record, 106*(6), 1177–1202.

Shanahan, T. (2004). Overcoming the dominance of communication: Writing to think and to learn. In T. L. Jetton & J. A. Dole (Eds.). *Adolescent literacy research and practice* (pp. 59–73). New York: Guilford.

Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., & Herlihy, C. (2002). *Foundations for success: Case studies of how urban school systems improve student achievement*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.mdrc.org/publications/47/full.pdf

Stiggins, R. J., Arter, J. A., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis S. (2004). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right—Using it well*. Princeton, NJ: ETS.

Tierney, R. I. & Shanahan, T. (1991). Research on the reading writing relationship: Interactions, transactions and outcomes. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research* (Vol. II, pp. 246–280). New York: Longman.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Torgesen, J., Houston, D., & Rissman, L. (2007). *Improving literacy instruction in middle and high schools: A guide for principals.* Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Principal%20s%20Guide%20Secondary.pdf

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (Expanded 2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Zavadsky, H. (2006). How NCLB drives success in urban schools. *Educational Leadership, 63*(3), 69–73.

Additional Resources

Although the following resources are not cited in the text of this recommendation, Learning Point Associates staff thought the district might find them relevant for curriculum development.

Allington, R. L., & Johnston, P. H. (2002). *Reading to learn: Lessons from exemplary fourth-grade classrooms*. New York: Guilford.

Anderson, L. W. (2002). Curricular realignment: A re-examination. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(4), 255–260.

Drake, S. M., & Burns, R. C. (2004). *Meeting standards through integrated curriculum.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Glatthorn, A. (1994). *Developing a quality curriculum*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Glatthorn, A. (Ed.). (1995). *Content of the curriculum* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Glatthorn, A. A., Boschee, F., & Whitehead, B. M. (2005). *Curriculum leadership: Development and implementation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Glatthorn, A., Carr, J. F., & Harris, D. E. (2001). *Planning and organizing for curriculum renewal*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Corwin Press

Holcomb, E. L. (1999). *Getting excited about data: Combining people, passion and proof.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Koelsch, N. (2006). *Improving literacy outcomes for English language learners in high school: Considerations for states and districts in developing a coherent policy framework* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ImprovingLiteracy_010907.pdf

Marzano, R. J. (2000). *A new era of school reform: Going where the research takes us*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/SchoolImprovementReform/5002RR_NewEraSchoolReform.pdf

Porter, A. (2002). *Measuring the content of instruction: Uses in research and practice*. *Educational Researcher, 31*(7), 3–14.

Recommendation 2: Professional Development

Create and implement a cohesive, systematic, and systemwide three- to five-year professional development plan that is aligned with the district and school comprehensive education plans.

Two areas stood out in the audit findings and should be considered key areas for the professional development plan:

- **Create a systemwide approach to professional development by increasing the focus for professional development from the individual teacher to the school and district levels. This approach may include centralizing professional development into a district-level department.**
- **Additional professional development for general education teachers to better meet the needs of SWDs and ELLs should be included, as well as including increased collaboration with teachers who support these populations.**

The plan should include professional development that is differentiated, ongoing, job-embedded, and designed to address the needs of individual teachers in meeting the district and school objectives. The plan should include a process for monitoring implementation and impact on teaching and learning in ELA, particularly for SWDs and ELLs.

Link to Findings

The audit of the written, taught, and tested ELA curriculum revealed that Utica City school district does not have a well-articulated systemwide plan, policy, or implementation strategy for professional development in the area of ELA. District participants at the co-interpretation prioritized this key finding as one of the areas of greatest need in Utica.

An analysis of the findings reveals two primary areas of focus for the district. The first area of focus is creating a comprehensive plan that targets professional development aligned with the school and district needs. This professional development plan is critical because Utica City School District did not provide evidence of district professional development plans, policies, implementation, or monitoring; the district provided some relevant but incomplete evidence of plans in only two of the nine topic areas addressed by the audit. Although district participants at the co-interpretation noted that some individual schools had plans for professional development, a similar districtwide plan was lacking. Participants noted that there were still too many “flavor of the month” initiatives. Interviewees want a more cohesive professional development system so they do not feel as though their time and the district’s money have been wasted. One interviewee commented that the “lack of a professional development position at the district level is an issue.” Given this lack of a district plan, it is not surprising that interviees also identified the lack of stakeholder buy-in as a barrier to improving this area. Interviewees also mentioned that there was no professional development director at the district level. Currently, according to participants at the co-interpretation, there are two part-time retired teachers serving as facilitators in the professional development office.

The second area of focus is providing professional development to general education teachers to help them meet the needs of SWDs and ELLs. In fact, another key finding prioritized by co-interpretation participants is a need for differentiated instruction for low-performing SWDs and ELLs. Also, in the documents sent to Learning Point Associates, there was no evidence of district professional development concerning the ELA curriculum content, instructional strategies for delivering the curriculum, and instructional strategies to support the delivery of the curriculum to ELLs and SWDs. ELL interviews with teachers revealed frustration that they are not able to focus on basic language acquisition because they feel they need to "teach to the test." It is not surprising that the special education observations showed that the occurrence of differentiated teaching strategies was not obvious in four fifths of the classrooms. In order to meet the instructional needs of the subpopulations of ELLs and SWDs, the district needs to provide professional development to all of its teachers on these subjects.

Link to Research

A systemwide approach to sustained, comprehensive, job-embedded professional development has strong support in current research. In order for professional development to be effective, it is important that it be job embedded. According to Fleming (2004), job-embedded professional development focuses on decision making, discussion, planning, reflection, teacher inquiry, and use of data; it allows teachers to engage in inquiry through data-driven dialogue and reflection throughout the school day.

Research conducted by Togneri and Anderson (2003) found that for professional development to be effective, it must include a new approach—one that involves a coherent and district-organized set of strategies to improve instruction. Further, they recommend that districts adopt new approaches to professional development that involve a coherent and district-organized set of strategies to improve instruction, including connecting professional development to district goals and student needs.

This suggestion concurs with research conducted by David and Shields (2001) in Community District 2 in New York City. Researchers found continuous improvement in classroom practice when district leaders worked with principals and teachers to build professional cultures in the schools, embraced the vision of good literacy instruction, and worked collaboratively to refine and revise this vision. The district used professional development to build and sustain professional learning communities in the schools. This professional development supported the implementation of the desired practice but also generated new knowledge about effective teaching.

Finally, Olson's (2007) research in Long Beach, California, found that student achievement improved when the superintendent revived the district's curriculum office and focused the school system strongly on professional development—including hiring instructional coaches, particularly for low-performing schools, and working with local colleges and universities to redesign the preparation of new teachers. The district also instituted a strong induction program for all novice teachers and summer curriculum institutes for teachers and principals systemwide. Of importance to note was strong collaboration between the district and the teachers association in implementing these changes in Long Beach.

Learning Point Associates recommends that the district and the union take these lessons learned—strong leadership; a coherent, aligned district-level plan; and collaboration between district personnel and union representatives—to design and implement a comprehensive job-embedded professional development plan to meet the ever-changing needs in Utica.

Systemwide Approach to Professional Development. One strategy with proven results for increasing student achievement is through a comprehensive professional development plan that is aligned to the district, school, and teacher's goals (Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). In a meta-analysis conducted by Shannon and Bylsma (2004), four categories emerged that were characteristic of improving school districts, all of which can be addressed in part through professional development: (1) quality teaching and learning, (2) effective leadership, (3) support for systemwide improvement, and (4) clear and collaborative relationships. Each of these categories is an essential piece in a systemwide professional development system.

First, quality teaching and learning focus on high expectations, accountability, aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessments, and *coordinated job-embedded* professional development. Second, effective leadership at the school and district levels enables district and school leaders to create a professional development plan that is systemwide yet addresses the needs of a range of teachers. The plan needs to be accepted by the overall school community so that change in leadership does not create a collapse in the plan; in other words, steps need to be put into place to ensure institutionalization of the plan. Third, support for systemwide improvement can be accomplished by sending a clear, consistent message to potential teachers, new teachers, and veteran teachers—as well as parents, community, and business constituents—that the plan identifies how professional development is conducted in our district. Fourth, when the larger education community works together for the improvement of education, collaborative relationships across stakeholder groups can ensure that professional development is institutionalized professional development.

As Fullan (2005) states, "The system must be efficient, sophisticated, powerful, and amenable to action…. The solution will require us to use complexity and systems theory, but…every abstract concept must be accompanied by a practical strategy that illustrates the concept in action" (p. 13). In other words, the plan needs to originate at the district level but provide differentiation in schools and with teachers, depending on their level of knowledge and skills.

Professional Development to Meet the Needs of Special Populations

Students With Disabilities. General education teachers often struggle to meet the needs of SWDs in an inclusive classroom. The following section provides a variety of resources for designing and implementing professional development for administrators and teachers to better meet the needs of SWDs.

- *Managing Special and Inclusive Education* (Rayner, 2007) provides district and school leaders with strategies for working with teachers who struggle with inclusion. The overall purpose of the book is to help leaders with the management of special and inclusive education. The book is divided into three sections: (1) "Understanding Special Education and Inclusion Policy"; (2) "Inclusive Leadership, Managing Change and Networking";

and (3) "Inclusive Leadership and Managing Change: Enabling the Learning Professional." The third section is particularly useful for school leaders because it provides detailed suggestions on managing support for learning in the school community, including knowing when to include or exclude students, managing learning differences and a differential pedagogy, and managing differences through personalized education.

- *Brain Friendly Strategies for the Inclusion Classroom* (Willis, 2007) is another useful resource for informing professional development in meeting the needs of special populations. The author provides multiple step-by-step strategies to improve student learning in an inclusive classroom as well as the brain-based research that guides her recommendations. All of her strategies are based on brain-research, which acknowledges each student as an individual with unique strengths, challenges, interests, and experiences. District personnel may consider highlighting these strategies in professional development activities.

  As a first step in meeting the needs of special populations, Willis recommends starting slowly, building on a student's knowledge level in the content area. This approach can be accomplished through administering diagnostic tests, discussing student strengths with previous teachers, analyzing state assessments from the previous year, and observing students to determine their ways of thinking. Second, Willis notes the importance of watching students and making adjustments to instructional approaches and curriculum delivery when necessary. Checks for understanding and formative assessments are other concrete strategies that can be used to monitor student understanding. Third, teachers should make any necessary physical accommodations for the students in order to enhance teaching and learning. Each of these steps is based on one of the five core propositions espoused by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2008a) to make learning meaningful and relevant by knowing one's students. These steps ensure that teachers will have more success in providing realistic goals with students. The overall message of the book is for teachers to be proactive in their planning based on a deep knowledge of their students so that they can lower barriers rather than lower the bar.

- *The Classroom Teacher's Inclusion Handbook: Practical Methods for Integrating Students With Special Needs* (Yanoff, 2006) is another useful resource for district and school leaders in the area of inclusion strategies. The author provides readers with strategies for meeting the needs of 14 types of special-needs students (e.g., behavior disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, gifted and talented, and visually or hearing impaired). His book includes a clear definition of each of the identified types, characteristic behaviors, and suggestions for working with that student's specific strengths and weaknesses. Of particular interest is a section devoted to inclusion strategies to help educators set goals for special-needs students, define the roles of other students in the classroom, and work with the administration if mainstream placement is unsuccessful.

Each of these resources provides district personnel and school administrators with a variety of professional development strategies to implement in an effort to improve the teaching and learning of SWDs. It is important to note that many of these strategies also are appropriate for general education students and ELLS.

English Language Learners. A recent report form the Institute of Education Sciences (Gerstein, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, & Scarcella, 2007) provides a review of strategies to better meet the needs of ELLs in language literacy and academic achievement. The report identifies many studies that focused on improving the academic achievement of ELLs in Grades K–6. It ranks programs based on their effectiveness in reading achievement and English language development on a six-point scale: positive effect, potentially positive effect, mixed effects, no discernible effect, potentially negative effect, and negative effect.

Of the programs reviewed in this publication, two may be useful for Utica City School District because they showed a potentially positive effect for reading achievement *and* English language development. The following information includes links to the Institute of Education Sciences in the U. S. Department of Education and the What Works Clearinghouse.

- The *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs* used in combination are helpful in improving students' reading skills and English skills. According to the What Works Clearinghouse (2006a, p.1), "The goal of *Instructional Conversations* is to help English language learners develop reading comprehension ability along with English language proficiency. *Instructional Conversations* are small-group discussions. *Literature Logs* require English language learners to write in a log in response to writing prompts or questions related to sections of stories. These responses are then shared in small groups or with a partner." Additional information is available online (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/english_lang/icll/).
- The *Vocabulary Improvement Program for English Language Learners and Their Classmates (VIP)*, according to the What Works Clearinghouse (2006b, p. 1), is "a vocabulary development curriculum for English language learners and native English speakers (Grades 4–6). The 15-week program includes 30–45 minute whole-class and small-group activities, which aim to increase students' understanding of target vocabulary words included in a weekly reading assignment." Additional information is available online (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/english_lang/vip/)

A number of programs have been developed to help teachers meet the needs of ELLs. Learning Point Associates recommends that the district investigate using these programs to design and deliver professional development to increase reading achievement and English language development in the district.

Implementation Considerations

Admittedly, creating a district professional development plan is a huge undertaking and as such, needs to be completed in steps, with each step supporting the next. The first issue to address is the role of district leadership. In *Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action*, Fullan (2005) outlines eight elements to create, implement, and maintain large-scale sustainable reform through professional development: (1) public service with a moral purpose, (2) commitment to changing context at all levels, (3) lateral capacity-building through networks, (4) intelligent accountability and vertical relationships, (5) deep learning, (6) dual commitment to short-term and long-term results, (7) cyclical energizing, and (8) leadership. He shares lessons learned from practicing principals, superintendents, and educational experts on models to pursue long-term

sustainability while maintaining short-term progress. In addition, Fullan helps to define and connect leadership at various levels (i.e., school, district, and systems).

This resource in conjunction with the following steps can be useful to implement high-quality, job-embedded professional development.

- **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 identified by the district and school 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). It is important to note that many of these resources have been provided and can be used to further guide the design and implementation of the district's professional development plan.

Utica City School District used The Thoughtful Classroom program as the basis for its professional development on instructional strategies. Although districtwide professional development is valuable, by targeting areas identified in the district and school improvement plans during professional development, the district will ensure that it is meeting the needs of its students. District participants at the co-interpretation noted that there is a districtwide professional development plan in development. As this plan is further developed, the goals in the district and school improvement plans are excellent areas to consider.

- **Determine the needs of individual teachers in the identified areas.**

Conducting a needs assessment will help determine teacher needs concerning ELA professional development topics identified from the audit. Teachers at different levels of development have different professional needs, and professional development opportunities should take that fact into account. For example, if most staff members of a school understand basic inclusion strategies, the school should consider higher level professional development on that topic. In contrast, new teachers might require training in more basic inclusion techniques (The Aspen Institute, 2008; The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006).

Co-interpretation participants identified that a lack of stakeholder buy-in prevents the professional development from being as effective as possible. Teacher investment will increase as teachers find their needs are being met.

- **Provide differentiated professional development regardless of the area because teachers are in different levels of their career development.**

Faculty and staff need to have choices relating 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. Teachers 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 the results from the needs assessment (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2008; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006; School Communities That Work, 2002). In addition, the professional development should meet the 12 professional development standards created by the National Staff Development Council (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).

- **Provide choices that need not be mutually exclusive:**
  - Schoolwide training or information sessions, which are appropriate when all stakeholders need to receive similar information (e.g., technology, emergency procedures, harassment, crisis and intervention planning)
  - Grade-level, content-area, or team development sessions, 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, 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, creating portfolios) (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2007; 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).

Participants at the co-interpretation noted that the lack of district priority in building and growing leaders was a problem. Differentiated professional development is one way to meet the graduated needs of all educators, cultivating leadership.

- **Provide professional development that is ongoing and connected to practice in addition to aligning with the identified needs of the district and school.**

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.

- **Create a system for monitoring the 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. These observations or walk-throughs 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.

Utica City School District co-interpretation participants saw the lack of a district professional development director as a factor that greatly limits the cohesiveness of professional development in the district. As the district considers implementing and monitoring a professional development plan, administrators should determine who will be responsible for monitoring its implementation and whether a district leader in this area is necessary.

- **Use formative assessments to regularly check in with teachers regarding their 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).

The development of a comprehensive, job-embedded professional development plan is not the end of the process for the school district. District leadership should plan to revisit and revise the district professional development plan every year, as progress is made toward the goals of the district and school improvement plans.

Although teachers are engaging in professional development, there is neither a system nor monitoring strategies to determine how or if it is making a difference in teaching and learning. These recommendations strive to provide a framework for strengthening leadership objectives in designing, implementing, and monitoring districtwide professional development. Critical components of a systematic and systemwide professional development plan—focusing in on the role of leadership in 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 tools; and providing for review, reflection, and revision—can meet the needs of all Utica's teachers.

References

The Aspen Institute. (2008, January). *Human capital framework for K–12 urban education: Organizing for success*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7Bdeb6f227-659b-4ec8-8f84-8df23ca704f5%7D/ED_HCFRAMEWORK_2.PDF

Boyd, R. T. C. (1989). Improving teacher evaluations. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 1*(7). Retrieved May 30, 2008 from http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=1&n=7

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2006, February). *Redefining professional development* (Newsletter). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/Feb06newsletter.pdf

Danielson, C., & McGreal, T.L. (2000). *Teacher evaluation to enhance professional practice*. Alexandra, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

David, J. L., & Shields, P. M. (2001). *When theory hits reality: Standards-based reform in urban districts*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Fleming, D. S. (2004). *Job-embedded professional development* [Website]. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://teacherretention.edreform.net/download/139/A:/jobembedded.htm

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Gerstein, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/20074011.pdf

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium. (1992). *Model standards for beginning teacher licensing, assessment and development: A resource for state dialogue*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/corestrd.pdf

Johnson, S. M., & Donaldson, M. L. (2007). Overcoming the obstacles of leadership. *Educational Leadership, 65*(1).

Leithwood, K.A., & Poplin, M.S. (1992, February). The move toward transformational leadership. *Educational Leadership, 49*(5), 8–12.

Lieberman, J., & Wilkins, E. (2006, Spring). The professional development pathways model: From policy to practice. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 42*(3), 124–128. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.kdp.org/pdf/publications/record/Rsp06LibermanandWilkins.pdf

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (2008a). *The five core propositions* [Website]. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nbpts.org/the_standards/the_five_core_propositio

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (2008b). *Standards by certificate* [Website]. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nbpts.org/the_standards/standards_by_cert

National Staff Development Council. (2001). *Standards for staff development* (Rev. ed.). Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm

Olson, L. (2007, September 5). Inside the "Long Beach way." *Education Week, 27*(2), 22–25. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007//09/05/021longbeach.h27.html?print=1

Pankake, A., & Moller, G. (2007). What the teacher leader needs from the principal. *Journal of Staff Development, 28*(1).

Portin, B., Alejano, C., Knapp, M., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Redefining roles responsibilities and authority of school leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Retrieved May, 30, 2008, from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Roles-Oct16.pdf

Rayner, S. G. (2007). *Managing special and inclusive education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

School Communities That Work. (2002). *Find, deploy, support, and keep the best teachers and school leaders*. New York: Author. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.schoolcommunities.org/Archive/images/FindDeploy.pdf

Shannon, G. S., & Bylsma, P. (2004). *Characteristics of improved school districts: Themes from research*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/DistrictImprovementReport.pdf

Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., & Herlihy, P. (2002). *Foundations for success*. Washington, DC: MDRC. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.mdrc.org/publications/47/full.pdf

Teachers Network Leadership Institute. (2005). *Successful school leadership: A view from the classroom*. New York: Author.

Toch, T., & Rothman, R. (2008, January). *Rush to judgment: Teacher evaluation in public education*. Washington, DC: Education Sector. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/RushToJudgment_ES_Jan08.pdf

Togneri, W., & Anderson, S. E., (2003). *Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools*. Washington, DC: Learning First Alliance. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/Beyond%20Islands%20of%20Excellence.pdf

What Works Clearinghouse. (2006a). *Instructional conversations and literature logs* (WWC Intervention Report). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/WWC_ICLL_102606.pdf

What Works Clearinghouse. (2006b). *Vocabulary improvement program for English language learners and their classmates* (WWC Intervention Report). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/WWC_VIP_101906.pdf

Willis, J. (2007). *Brain friendly strategies for the inclusion classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Yanoff, J. C. (2006). *The classroom teachers' inclusion handbook: Practical methods for integrating students with special needs* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Coyle Press.

Recommendation 3: Instruction

Create, implement, and monitor an ELA classroom instruction process that:

- **Aligns with the student expectations presented in the districtwide ELA written curriculum.**
- **Incorporates a *variety* of research-based instructional strategies to engage *all* students in learning and improving student achievement in literacy.**
- **Monitors the implementation of the ELA instructional strategies throughout the district.**

Link to Findings

The results of the co-interpretation and the district's close inspection of the data indicate that the intensity of instruction is focused on lower order thinking. Although site visitors observed high levels of academic focus in most elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, the use of higher-level instructional strategies was one of the least frequently observed practices across grade levels. In fact, site visitors primarily observed students engaged in independent seatwork.

Along with collecting data on ELA instruction in general education classrooms, the curriculum audit also collected data regarding the ELA instruction for SWDs and ELLs. In regard to instruction of students in special education, both special and general education teachers reported relying on information in students' IEPs to plan their instruction in order to provide appropriate instructional accommodations. Teachers reported using a wide range of differentiated instruction. However, differentiated instruction was seldom observed in classrooms. More specifically, data showed that the occurrence of differentiated teaching strategies was not obvious in four out of five classrooms. In Utica City School District, site visitors observed that ELLs were most engaged in whole-class activities. In general, ESL classes tended to focus more on skill-based rather than conceptual lessons. Teachers expressed frustration that they are not able to focus more extensively on basic language acquisition, as reflected in the following quote: "I get upset that we have to teach to the test."

Link to Research

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

Research on literacy instruction (e.g., Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Langer, 2004; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991; Torgesen et al., 2007) has found that a teacher using effective instructional strategies 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, writing skills).
- Frequently engages students in reading and writing-connected texts.
- Sets and maintains high yet reasonable achievement expectations.

While direct instruction and independent seatwork can be effective practices in some circumstances, using a variety of instructional strategies—including those that encourage higher level thinking and discussion that students may use in multiple situations over time—are likely to be more effective for various students (Torgesen et al., 2007). Research has shown that the most effective instructional model includes teacher modeling and practice with discussion and feedback during the process. The implementation of a didactic approach to instruction often does not meet the needs of all students. Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn (2007, p. 53) offer the following description of an effective instructional approach:

- "**Direct explanation:** The teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy."
- "**Modeling:** The teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, usually by 'thinking aloud' while reading the text that the students are using."
- "**Guided practice:** The teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy."
- "**Application:** The teacher helps students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently."

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

Effective adolescent literacy instruction is crucial to all students' academic success and must be viewed as serving the unique and specific academic needs of middle and high school students, not simply an extension or remediation of elementary-level instruction (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003; Graham & Perin, 2007; Kamil, 2003). Such high-quality instruction must be incorporated across the curriculum and content areas (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Rather than having students simply acquire basic literacy skills, Langer (2001, 2002) emphasizes a focus on "high literacy," 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.

Modifying Instruction for Students With Special Needs. Data reports indicate challenges facing teachers of SWDs and ELLs. Effective teachers seek to meet students directly at their

level, not at arbitrary grade or age levels (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers are urged to provide intensive instruction for students who are significantly behind their peers (Torgesen et al., 2007). Varied instructional strategies increase the opportunities for student success. District data reports indicate that differentiated instruction was observed rather infrequently in ELA classes across the district. Utica City School District is urged to revisit this instructional practice and see how it can be implemented consistently across classrooms in the district. 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 & 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)."

There are several ways a teacher may choose to differentiate ELA instruction. For instance, at the elementary level, 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. For adolescents, grouping for reading instruction is one of the most effective ways to provide a safe learning environment for adolescents (Curtis & Longo, 1999). Once benchmarks are established, however, teachers have a wide range of choices in methods, strategies, and materials when designing lessons. Research shows that students learn in a variety of ways and need multiple exposures to the same content (Tomlinson, 1999). Differentiation is one way that teachers can meet the diverse needs of all students, and this approach can be accomplished by varying content, process, or product (Tomlinson, 1999).

Monitoring ELA Instruction. After the district has identified core instructional strategies and teachers have received training on these strategies, literacy leaders should regularly monitor classroom instruction to observe and support the implementation of explicit literacy strategies (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2005). This observation provides administrators with critical knowledge related to student learning, as well as insight into the

professional development needs of teachers. One way to assess the implementation of literacy strategies is by conducting literacy walks (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2005). Another method of monitoring the implementation of instructional strategies is by collecting lesson plans that document the instructional strategies utilized in the lesson. This documentation may act as formative data, allowing for teachers to monitor if a strategy is successful or not.

Implementation Considerations

- **Expand the instructional strategies used in ELA instruction.**

Teachers need to implement instructional strategies other than direct, didactic instruction and independent seatwork with more frequency to ensure they are meeting the diverse needs of their students (Torgesen et al., 2007; *see Recommendation 2 on professional development for further details*). Co-interpretation participants and data reports both indicate that "there is too much busy work" taking place in the classrooms across the district. By expanding the repertoire of instructional strategies that are utilized to teach ELA, the district will be taking positive steps toward effectively meeting the diverse needs of students.

- **Provide professional development activities that allow staff to acquire the needed literacy knowledge of skills and strategies, with activities that are interactive and collaborative and that provide multiple opportunities for practice** (Jetton & Dole, 2004; *see Recommendation 2* on *professional development for further details*).

Data reports and co-interpretation participants shared that staff development concerning instruction has taken place (e.g., Thoughtful Classroom approach). Therefore, the district is urged to build on these professional development opportunities by adding more ELA-specific information as well as information regarding the specific ELA needs of ELLs and SWDs to this instructional approach. In addition, Utica City School District is encouraged to offer professional development on differentiated instruction methods to meet the needs of SWDs and ELLs in the district.

- **Monitor the implementation of the literacy instructional strategies across the district** (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2005).

ELA teaching, learning, and student performance can be improved by clearly articulating the following: *who* will monitor (e.g., administrators; ELA coaches, directors, department chairs; teacher self-reflections); *what* will be monitored (e.g., small-group and whole-class ELA instruction; student products, such as projects, writing samples, demonstrations, formative and summative assessment data); *how* they will monitor (e.g., clearly written checklists, guidelines, expectations, 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 a teacher's written instructional plans and materials and student products or data); and *why* monitoring will occur (e.g., explanations indicating why implementation monitoring procedures).

Co-interpretation participants shared that one restraining force making the use of various instructional strategies a challenge is the current teacher evaluation form. This form emphasizes the direct instruction approach. Utica City School District is encouraged to revise this form of monitoring classroom instruction to ensure that it the district is emphasizing the importance of using a variety of instructional strategies in ELA instruction.

References

Allington, R. L. (2005). The other five "pillars" of effective reading instruction. *Reading Today, 22*(6), 3.

Allington, R. L. (1994). The schools we have. The schools we need. *The Reading Teacher, 48*(1), 14-29.

Allington, R. L., & Walmsley, S. A. (Eds.). (2007). *No quick fix, the RTI edition: Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary programs*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2003). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read: Kindergarten through grade 3* (2nd ed.). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/PFRbooklet.pdf

Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2006). *Reading next: A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy* (Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York) (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/ReadingNext.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Denton, C. A., Vaughn, S., & Fletcher, J. M. (2003). Bringing research-based practice in reading intervention to scale. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 18*, 201–211.

Duffy, G. (1994). Teachers' progress toward becoming expert strategy teachers. *Elementary School Journal, 94*, 109–120.

Duffy, G., & Hoffman, (1999). In pursuit of an illusion: The flawed search for a perfect method. *The Reading Teacher, 53*(1), 10–16.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools* (Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York). Washington, DC. Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/WritingNext.pdf

Heller, R., & Greenleaf, C. (2007). *Literacy instruction in the content areas: Getting to the core of middle and school improvement.* Washington, D. C.: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/LitCon.pdf

Hoffman, J. V. (1991). Teacher and school effects in learning to read. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research, Vol. II* (pp. 911–950). New York: Longman.

Kamil, M. (2003). *Adolescents and literacy: Reading for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/AdolescentsAndLiteracy.pdf

Langer, J. A. (2001). Beating the odds: Teaching middle and high school students to read and write well. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*, 837–880.

Langer, J. A. (2002). *Effective literacy instruction: Building successful reading and writing programs*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Langer, J. A. (2004). *Getting to excellent: How to create better schools.* New York: Teachers College Press.

National Association of Secondary School Principals, (2005). *Creating a culture of literacy: A guide for middle and high school principals.* Reston, VA: Author.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.cfm

Snow, C., Barnes, W., Chandler, J., Goodman, I. F., & Hemphill, L. (1991). *Unfulfilled expectations: Home and school influences on literacy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C.A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed ability classrooms* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2004). Differentiating instruction: A synthesis of key research and guidelines. In T. L. Jetton & J. A. Dole (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy research and practice* (pp. 228–248). New York: The Guilford Press.

Tomlinson, C. A., & Strickland, D. (2005). *Differentiation in practice: A resource guide for differentiating curriculum—Grades 9–12*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Torgesen, J. K., Houston, D. D., Rissman, L. M., Decker, S. M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., et al. (2007). *Academic literacy instruction for adolescents: A guidance document from the Center on Instruction.* Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Academic%20Literacy.pdf

Additional Resources

Although the following resources are not cited in the text of this recommendation, Learning Point Associates staff thought the district might find the following references regarding curriculum development informative.

Barr, R. (1984). Beginning reading instruction: From debate to reformation. In P. D. Pearson, R. Barr, M. Kamil, & P. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 545–582). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Bond, G., & Dykstra, R. (1967). The cooperative research program in first-grade reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 2*, 1–142.

Bushman, J. (2006). Teachers as walk-through partners. *Educational Leadership, 63*(6), 58–61.

Cunningham, P. M., & Allington, R. L. (2007). *Classrooms that work: They can all read and write* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). *Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for instruction and academic interventions*. Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL1-Interventions.pdf

Gambrell, L. B., Morrow, L. M., & Pressley, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Best practices in literacy instruction* (3rd ed.) New York: Guilford.

Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades: A practice guide* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/20074011.pdf

King-Shaver, B., & Hunter, A. (2003). *Differentiated instruction in the English classroom: Content, process, product and assessment.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Koelsch, N. (2006). *Improving literacy outcomes for English language learners in high school: Considerations for states and districts in developing a coherent policy framework.* Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_AdolescentS_110806.pdf

Short, D., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners* (Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/DoubleWork.pdf

Strickland, D. S., & Alvermann, D. E. (2004). (Eds.). *Bridging the literacy achievement gap: Grades 4–12*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Recommendation 4: English Language Learners

Develop and implement a districtwide system for planning, delivering, and monitoring targeted academic services for low-performing ELLs by:

- **Identifying and providing interventions that meet individual student needs.**
- **Enabling staff access to student assessment data to inform curricular and instructional decisions.**
- **Developing a districtwide system of using and sharing formative assessments to track individual student growth in language and literacy development.**
- **Providing ongoing and embedded professional development on ELLs to all staff members who provide services to ELLs, particularly general education teachers, AIS coordinators, and administrators.**
- **Devising and further developing alternative methods of providing intensive academic support services during and outside of the school day.**

Link to Findings

According to the ELL Report, Utica City School District offers a range of academic support services that ELLs can access to improve their proficiency in ELA. In-school services consist primarily of state-mandated AIS, which interviewees say most ELLs qualify for, and various interventions such as *Fast-ForWord*, the *Jamestown Reading Navigator*, and *Sidewalks*. Out-of-school support services, including afterschool tutorials and summer school, also were mentioned. Data from the ELL Report reveals that the majority of the in-school and many of the out-of-school interventions provided to ELLs are generally the same as what their monolingual peers receive. General education and ELL program teachers, administrator interviewees, and co-interpretation participants across the district saw this situation as a challenge and highlighted a need for more targeted and differentiated services during the school day, specifically designed to address ELL learning needs. Parents also desired more learning opportunities for their children, although they were referring more to afterschool and extracurricular programs than to in-school support.

Link to Research

Differences Between ELLs and Native Speakers of English. Learning to read, write, and communicate in a second language is a complex endeavor. Determining which instructional and intervention approaches are most appropriate for individual students can be even more complex. Compared to the wealth of literature on first-language literacy development, the field of second-language literacy development is relatively sparse and many questions have yet to be answered. However, even with the limited research available, there is now a better sense of what types of interventions are most effective for ELLs and how they should be delivered. Much of the current research indicates that curricular and instructional elements that are effective for low-performing ELLs also are effective for native English speakers. A recent commissioned report of the

National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006a) reviewed 293 current research studies on literacy development in second-language learners. Within this report, Lesaux and Geva (2006) synthesized the most current and relevant research on differences between first- and second-language literacy development. Their meta-analysis reflects a growing consensus that the development of precursor literacy skills—such as phonemic awareness, letter naming, and knowledge of print conventions—as well as many word-level skills—such as word mapping, decoding, and pseudoword spelling—follow the same developmental trajectory in all emergent readers and writers, no matter if they are native or nonnative speakers (Dressler, 2006; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006a). Research on instructional strategies, in both whole-class and small-group remedial settings, repeats this theme. Specific instructional practices such as explicit and systematic instruction in phonological awareness, modeling and demonstrating, scaffolding, repeated readings, and peer-learning opportunities work well with both ELLs and their monolingual peers (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Francis et al., 2006a; Genesee et al., 2006; Leafstedt, Richards, & Gerber, 2004; Shanahan & Beck, 2006).

Yet some key differences should be noted between learning to read and write in one's native language and learning to do so in a second language, which suggest that academic support services for ELLs should be differentiated. Multiple studies have shown that ELLs struggle with text-level comprehension and writing skills, primarily due to a lack of familiarity with academic language forms and a limited range and depth of vocabulary knowledge (Lesaux & Geva, 2006; Francis et al., 2006a; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006b; Nagy & Scott, 2000; Scarcella, 2003; Carlo et al., 2005, Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). Particularly at the secondary level, where students are not just learning to read but also reading to learn across the content areas, teachers should increase the percentage of instructional time spent on word learning. This approach means changing the traditional method of vocabulary instruction where students are tasked with looking up and using uncommon and genre-specific words in a sentence. Teachers and intervention staff must go beyond this superficial coverage of vocabulary with their ELLs by dissecting word parts, analyzing word families, and giving students the opportunity to practice hearing and using new words in multiple ways and in multiple contexts (peer dialog, writing assignments, reading activities, and classroom discussions). Moreover, teachers and intervention staff should exercise caution in selecting vocabulary words, carefully choosing high-frequency words that students will encounter in multiple academic contexts.

Though the research is scarce and inconclusive on the effect of oral language proficiency on specific indicators of reading proficiency such as fluency and decoding, it is clear that ELLs benefit from an instructional approach that integrates oral and written language, particularly with larger units of text (Genesee et al., 2006; Geva, 2006; Shanahan & Beck, 2006). Several studies show that increased opportunities to practice producing academic language in multiple modalities are beneficial. This situation is not surprising, given that reading, writing, and spoken dialog are interrelated processes. Text-focused classroom conversations and peer dialog where ELLs are paired with students with native English speakers or ELLs with slightly higher proficiency levels are particularly effective (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2004; Cazden, 1986; Francis et al., 2006a; Saunders & Goldenburg, 1999; Spivey, 1997). When planning instruction and intervention activities, teachers should be cognizant that participatory and hands-on learning environments where students have access to authentic and meaningful literacy activities lead to increases in reading achievement (August & Erickson, 2006; Francis et al., 2006b).

In summary, the development of word-level skills for ELLs follows a similar pattern as with monolinguals; similar instructional strategies should apply to both groups. However, the development of text-level comprehension skills and strategies in a second language requires a more intense focus on academic language, vocabulary development, and spoken language than what native speakers need. Based on the most current literature, decisions about differentiating academic support services between native and nonnative English speakers should reflect the specific area of difficulty each student is encountering (word-level versus text-level skills).

Individual Differences Within the ELL Population. The ELL population is incredibly diverse. Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) detailed the many facets of ELLs in their recent publication, *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners*. The ELL population in Utica City School District is certainly reflective of the literature. During the 2007–08 school year, more than 23 language groups were represented in the district, and within these language groups, many distinct cultures. Research has shown that prior academic experience and literacy development in the native language, in particular, have an impact on student readiness to actively participate in content-area classes. In Utica, interview findings from administrators as well as ELL and general education program teachers showed that ELLs in the district have varied prior schooling experience and native language literacy levels. ELLs range from some who are fully literate in their native language and exposed to similar educational experiences in the past to some with no formal school experience and limited to no exposure to print in any language.

Due to the diversity of the ELL population and their varied needs, it is crucial for the district to identify and provide services that suit the needs of each individual student. Current research from Dressler (2006), Genesee et al.(2006), and Genesee and Geva (2006) shows that literacy and language development, in particular, differs among ELLs as a group based on two primary considerations: typological similarities (i.e., overlaps between English and the native language) and markedness constraints (i.e., some language forms are universally difficult to acquire regardless of the similarity between the English and the native language). For example, many Spanish and English words originate from Latin. These words have similar meanings and have recognizable spellings and pronunciations (typological similarities). In this case, teachers can make direct reference to the Spanish cognates when providing vocabulary instruction for similar words in English. Regarding markedness constraints, the passive construction (e.g., “mistakes were made”), is universally difficult and may need intensive instruction regardless of language background.

In addition, certain core reading and writing abilities in the first language have been shown to accelerate literacy development in a second language. These core abilities include metacognitive awareness, and text-level comprehension skills (Cummins, 1979; Dressler, 2006; Lesaux & Geva, 2006). After being developed in one language, reading strategies such as making predictions and monitoring comprehension become an integral part of the reader/writer’s toolkit and can be applied regardless of which language is used. This situation indicates that on one hand, students with a firm foundation with literacy in the native language may have an easier time acquiring higher-order cognitive skills related to literacy in the second language, and thus teachers and staff can draw on the linguistic and cognitive resources the student has developed in the native language. On the other hand, students with a limited reservoir of literacy skills in native language will need to start at the beginning, developing literacy much the same as native English speakers do. It follows that the needs of one ELL may vary significantly from the needs

of another ELL. These differences should be taken into account when planning instruction for each student.

The school environment or culture also may play a role in students' academic success. Research shows that students learn best when they are placed in a safe and supportive environment where they feel empowered to take the risks required to develop proficiency in another language (Coelho, 1994; Cummins, 1994; Francis et al., 2006a; McKeon, 1994; Wong-Filmore & Snow, 2000). Utica City School District classroom observation data from both ELL and general education program classrooms were mixed in this regard; while some classes did create a productive and respectful classroom environment where student diversity was valued, other classes did not recognize and, in some cases, blatantly disregarded this diversity. Further, both teachers and administrators voiced concern about what they perceived as the district's insensitivity and lack of responsiveness to certain ethnic groups—the Somali-Bantu in particular. Encouraging and providing incentives for all district and school staff to learn about students' cultures and values is a crucial first step toward cultural inclusion.

In addition to creating a warm and safe school environment, the district should provide a systematic orientation to the school culture for ELLs and elucidate the various purposes and functions of literacy practices and activities required in class. For example, students who have limited experience with school may need explicit instruction and modeling on aspects of the U.S. educational system that are taken for granted (e.g., holding a pencil, sitting still and raising one's hand to ask a question, synthesizing ideas from several texts and presenting an analysis in a research paper). Staff members in contact with ELLs should be aware that the tasks and roles that students are expected to take on in school may differ significantly from the tasks and roles they have been exposed to in prior school settings or at home. Time is needed to help ELLs from different cultural backgrounds understand the functions of literacy and oral discourse for various learning tasks and to learn how to navigate the school system.

According to the research base cited above and the consensus among co-interpretation participants, staff responsible for designing intervention strategies should be aware not only of how ELL learning and social needs differ from those of their monolingual counterparts but also how the needs of students differ within the ELL population itself. In order to accomplish this goal, staff must (1) have access to accurate and detailed student achievement data as well as information about students' prior academic experiences and linguistic/cultural background to inform instructional and programmatic decisions, and (2) have a thorough understanding of how students learn to read and write in a second language.

Access to and Use of Accurate and Detailed Assessment Data. In order to provide targeted services that meet the needs of limited-English-proficient students, it is important to have screening and diagnosis procedures that can detect both areas of difficulty and areas of strength. (Francis et al., 2006b). To the extent that standardized tests can isolate specific language and literacy domains as a source of reading and writing difficulty, state-mandated diagnostic tests such as the Language Assessment Battery–Revised (LAB-R), the ELA state tests, and the New York State English as a Second Language Test (NYSESLAT) can be used for this purpose. However, these assessment data may not be sensitive enough or may not be provided by the state in a timely manner for district and school staff to design intervention strategies for individual students. In this case, informal classroom assessments such as teacher/learner conferences and read-alouds are more practical and can be used to determine baseline language and literacy

abilities. Further, since language and literacy development is a dynamic process that changes over time, tracking and monitoring student growth, for both limited-English-proficient and former limited-English-proficient students, should be an integral part of designing and delivering instructional and academic support services. Students learn at different rates and sometimes make more progress in one area than another (National Reading Panel, 2000). Ongoing, formative assessments should be developed and used consistently across the district to chronicle/document changes in student performance. Again, state-mandated standardized tests can be used, but they should be applied to a classroom or intervention setting only when data are current and capable of pinpointing specific domains where students are struggling. In many cases, these data will be insufficient for those designing intervention services and providing instruction to students day-to-day. The district should seriously consider the wide scale use of ongoing formative assessments across schools and intervention programs.

All staff who serve ELLs and make decisions about program design and scheduling should have access to accurate and detailed assessment data (described in the previous paragraph). In the ELL Report, many general education teachers indicated that they either do not have access to student achievement data or they receive it too late to disaggregate the data and use it to inform instruction. Further, several general education teachers at the secondary level admitted that they do not know who the ELLs in their classes are. Research shows that interventions are most effective when targeted remediation of specific areas of reading difficulty is integrated with the instruction that students are receiving throughout the school day (Francis et al., 2006a). If Utica City School District is going to provide a coherent set of comprehensive and targeted services to low-performing ELLs, the intervention services planned and delivered must be reinforced throughout the school day in ESL and in general education classes alike. In order for this step to happen, staff members need to (1) know who their ELLs are, along with their specific areas of need; (2) know how to make sense of the assessment data available to them; and (3) be in regular communication with other staff members about the interventions and instruction they are delivering.

Professional Learning. To design intervention strategies and make decisions regarding scheduling, staffing, and grouping of students, all staff involved should have a comprehensive understanding of ELL learning needs and methods of facilitating language development (August & Calderon, 2006; August & Shanahan, 2006b). Many mechanisms exist for providing training and support related to ELL issues (workshops, school-embedded coaching, study groups, collective planning and collaboration time). School-embedded coaching and turnkey training (in which one person receives training and then trains others) has been shown to be most effective in providing comprehensive training and support for educators and should be utilized before other types of professional development (Francis et al., 2006a).

Teachers of ELLs should not be the only staff members who receive this type of training. AIS facilitators and instructional leaders, including school administrators, would also benefit from this type of professional learning opportunity. Since AIS facilitators and administrators are typically responsible for scheduling academic support services into the school day and assigning students to the appropriate class, it is crucial that these staff members have a thorough understanding of the characteristics of the ELL population, what their needs are, and what organizational structures at the school level will be most effective in helping students gain proficiency in English while meeting state standards.

Alternative Programs and Services. It may be beneficial for the district to consider alternative programs and services for ELLs in addition to the more typical AIS and afterschool support services already provided. ELLs, particularly adolescent newcomers and students with interrupted or no formal educational experience, face a significant challenge in three areas (1) acquiring proficiency in English, (2) developing grade-level competency in reading and writing, and (3) gaining content-area knowledge across disciplines (Crandall, Bernache, & Prager, 1998; Francis et al., 2006a; Francis et al., 2006b; Garcia & Godina, 2004; Genesee et al., 2006; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Moreover, in order to attain grade-level benchmarks and, for older newcomers, pass high-stakes tests as a graduation requirement, ELLs must develop capacity in all three areas quickly and efficiently, regardless of whether services are provided within or outside of the regular school day. The challenge for districts is to fit in intensive support in all three areas given budgetary, time, and staffing constraints. Another challenge is that Utica City School District is a refugee hub whose population of ELLs is constantly in flux. The school system must be able to accommodate waves of newcomers throughout the year.

Promising solutions that circumvent many of the scheduling and funding restraints have been recommended in other school districts and have been implemented with success (Boyson & Short, 2003; Short & Boyson, 2004; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Some of these options include sheltered classes in the core content areas (such as science and social studies) and newcomer programs that provide intensive English language immersion as well as cultural orientation. Another strategy is the possibility of receiving alternative or double credits. For example, a student could receive both ESL and social studies credits in one sheltered American History class. The International Academy-LEAP in the St. Paul, Minnesota school district provides alternative academic supports to newcomers and students with low English-proficiency levels who began schooling in the United States at the age of 15 or older. This program offers ESL classes, sheltered content classes, cultural orientation, career counseling, and native language support for multiple ethnic groups such as the Hmong, Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Somali-Bantu. More generally, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model is a well-recognized method of integrating content-area instruction with language learning goals (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). This approach is a practical and powerful way to target the specific needs of ELLs, whether in general education classroom, in small-group intervention services, or in alternative programs such as Saturday academies. The Utica City School District has been developing program alternatives for newcomer and low-performing ELLs on a small, experimental scale. In the fall, the district will be offering sheltered ESL classes in the content areas at some secondary schools. The district also offers an alternative high school program for newcomers older than age 17. Innovative program ideas such as these should be investigated and scaled up by the district. These program alternatives may be the quickest and most efficient way of delivering content-area instruction along with language and literacy goals.

Implementation Considerations

- **Develop individualized learning plans that meet the needs of each student, tapping into prior academic experience and skills developed in the native language to build on each student's unique strengths and providing intensive instruction and support on specific areas of weakness.**

Co-interpretation participants mentioned a number of driving forces related to *the delivery* of targeted academic support services for low-performing ELLs and SWDs: text- and computer-based resources that help teachers differentiate instruction, and extended-day and summer programs that address the needs of particular students. While recognizing that these programs and resources are certainly instrumental in providing targeted services to students, more attention should be spent on *the development* of specific interventions as each student progresses through school. Please note that recommendations apply whether interventions are delivered during the regular school day as whole-classroom instruction or remedial support, or outside of the school day as afterschool, weekend, or summer programs.

- **Use appropriate diagnostic instruments to identify specific areas of strength and weakness. Track growth over time and alter academic services accordingly. If existing instruments are not sensitive enough to detect these specific areas of need, the district should create a districtwide system of ongoing classroom assessments.**

During co-interpretation, participants cited a lack of formative assessments as a restraining force in providing differentiated instruction. Also mentioned as a restraining force was the number of standardized tests that teachers must accommodate in their class time. To maximize instructional time while reserving the time required for test-taking, formative assessments should serve as a learning activity in and of themselves. For example, low-performing ELLs can learn to monitor their own progress in writing with portfolios and writers' workshops. Meanwhile, the teacher is also gathering information about how each student progressed in specific areas of writing development.

- **Provide disaggregated assessment data to teachers in a timely manner so that skills are developed not only during interventions but also during regular classroom instruction. Enable a network of communication among all staff members working with low-performing ELLs so that instruction and intervention services are integrated and cohesive**.

Co-interpretation participants highlighted a lack of teacher access to data and a lack of student records as challenges to identifying and providing AIS for students. A simple and practical series of formative assessments that is systematically shared at grade-level and/or department meetings can be instrumental in addressing participants' concerns. At the school-level, a record of these formative assessments could take the form of a checklist or portfolio documenting the specific areas of need for each student. This portfolio could be as comprehensive as an IEP or a more abbreviated version such as the student audit form used at one middle school in the district.

- **Mandate ELL-related professional learning opportunities for staff members providing and/or making decisions about intensive services for low-performing ELLs, including general education teachers, AIS coordinators, and administrators.**

As a driving force for multiple key findings (Key Findings 4, 2, 3, and all positive findings), the co-interpretation participants referenced the expertise and dedication of school- and district-based staff members. ESL teachers, AIS facilitators, gap facilitators, reading specialists, instructional leaders, and administrators were all cited as valuable resources. The district should build on this local expertise to provide embedded coaching on ELL-related issues.

- **Further develop alternative programs and services for ELLs with additional academic needs, particularly adolescents, SWDs, and Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFEs).**

During co-interpretation, several innovative program alternatives that support the specific needs of low-performing ELLs were listed, such as a cultural orientation program, a newcomer program for adolescent new arrivals, and sheltered instruction. The district should scale-up its efforts in these areas and search for other methods of meeting the individual needs of ELLs.

References

August, D., & Calderon, M. (2006). Teacher beliefs and professional development. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 555–564). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

August, D., & Erickson, F. (2006). Qualitative studies of classroom and school practices. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 489–522). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006a). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

August, D. L., & Shanahan, T. (2006b). Synthesis: Instruction and professional development. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 351–364). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Blum-Kulka, S., & Snow, C. E. (2004). Introduction: The potential of peer talk. *Discourse Studies, 6*(3), 291–306.

Boyson, B., & Short, D. (2003). *Secondary school newcomer programs in the United States* (Research Report No. 12). Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence.

Carlo, M. S., August, D., & Snow, C. E. (2005). Sustained vocabulary-learning strategies for English language learners. In E. H. Hiebert & M. Kamil (Eds.), *Teaching and learning vocabulary: Bringing research to practice* (pp. 137–153). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cazden, C. (1986). Classroom discourse. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.) (pp. 432–463). New York: MacMillan.

Coelho, E. (1994). Social integration of immigrant and refugee children. In F. Genesee (Ed.), *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community* (pp. 301–328). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Crandall, J., Bernache, C., & Prager, S. (1998). New frontiers in educational policy and program development: The challenge of the underschooled immigrant secondary school student. *Educational Policy, 12*(6), 719–734.

Cummins, J. (1979). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research, 65*(2), 145–190.

Cummins, J. (1994). Knowledge, power, and identity in teaching English as a second language. In F. Genesee (Ed.), *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community* (pp. 33–58). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dressler, C. (with Kamil, M.) (2006). First- and second-language literacy. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (pp.197–238). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Droop, M., & Verhoeven, L. (2003). Language proficiency and reading ability in first- and second-language learners. *Reading Research Quarterly, 38*(1), 78–103.

Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2004). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson, Allyn and Bacon.

Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006a). *Research-based recommendations for instruction and academic interventions*. Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL1-interventions.pdf

Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006b). *Research-based recommendations for serving adolescent newcomers*. Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL2-Newcomers.pdf

Garcia, G. E., & Godina, H. (2004). Addressing the literacy needs of adolescent English language learners. In T. Jetton and J. Dole (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy: Research and practice* (pp. 304–320). New York: The Guildford Press.

Geva, E. (2006). Second-language oral proficiency and second-language literacy. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 185–196). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Genesee, F., & Geva, E. (2006). Cross-linguistic relationships in working memory, phonological processes, and oral language. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy*

in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (pp. 175–184). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Sauders, W. M., & Christian, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of research evidence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Leafstedt, J. M., Richards, C. R., & Gerber, M. M. (2004). Effectiveness of explicit phonological-awareness instruction for at-risk English learners. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 19*(4), 252–261.

Lesaux, N. K., & Geva, E. (2006). Synthesis: Development of literacy in language minority students. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 53–74). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

McKeon, D. (1994). Language, culture, and schooling. In F. Genesee (Ed.), *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community* (pp. 15–32). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Nagy, W. E., & Scott, J. A. (2000). Vocabulary processes. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research: Vol. 3* (pp. 269–284). New York: Longman.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence based assessment on the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.cfm

Saunders, W. M., & Goldenburg, C. (1999). Effects of instructional conversations and literature logs on limited- and fluent-English-proficient students' story comprehension and thematic understanding. *Elementary School Journal, 99*(4), 277–301.

Scarcella, R. (2003). *Academic English: A conceptual framework*. Los Angeles: Language Minority Research Institute.

Schmitt, N., & McCarthy, M. (Eds.). (1997). *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Shanahan, T., & Beck, I. L. (2006). Effective literacy teaching for English-language learners. In D. L. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 415–488). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Short, D., & Boyson, B.A. (2004). *Creating access: Language and academic programs for secondary school newcomers*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Short, D., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/DoubleWork/DoubleWork.pdf

Spivey, N. N. (1997). *The construction metaphor: Reading, writing, and the making of meaning*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Wong-Filmore, L., & Snow, C. (2000). *What teachers need to know about language*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 444379). Retrieved May 30, 2008, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/67/32.pdf

Appendix A. Appreciative Inquiry Posters

The following graphics represent the reports of seven small groups at the Utica School District kick-off meeting held in September 2007 as the initial event of this process.

Table Group 1

Peaks
- Working collaboratively with all!
- Accomplish common goals

Values
- Having impact

Wishes
- Time
- Celebration of successes
- Alignment

Table Group 2A

What aspects do you most value?
- Collaboration with staff
- Student success
- Professionalism of staff

Do best
- Embrace diversity
- Focus on high expectations
- Seek opportunities to improve

Peak experiences
- Co-teaching and creating active learning experiences for students
- Collaborative – faculty is focused on common goal
- Creating an environment where students are self-motivated

Table Group 2B

Wishes
- Positive media exposure
- Unified professional development
- Vertical (and horizontal) curriculum alignment
- Recruit and retain highly qualified staff – including candidates to increase diversity

Table Group 3

Peak Experiences
- Group experience to achieve common goal to improve/achieve student success. (Group members enthused in accepting—welcoming—personal responsibility)

Values
- Positive relationships on all levels—parent, student, teachers, administrators, building support staff, central office, community—lead to success

Wishes
- Continued successful programs
- $ - more resources (NYS) and equitable distribution
- Enhance communication: parents, students, teachers, administrators, central office, community

Table Group 4

Peak Experiences

- Collaboration through effective programs and professional development which enhances student growth.

Values

- School/District community
- Staff relationships and diversity
- Colleague and peer relationships

Wishes

- Consistent, pervasive practices for continued student growth and success with supportive resources.

Table Group 5

Common Themes

1. Being part of student success.
2. We value the diversity of students and staff, and their contributions to the educational experience.
3. Moving forward in the areas of:
   -Positive public relations
   -PD that work together (in process)
   -Increasing staff morale
   -Adequate space/supplies/materials
   -Student achievement in all subgroups

Table Group 6

Wishes/Values

- Student Achievements - AYP
- Continued professional development at a high-quality level
- Common vision for students
- Appreciation of individuality

Table Group 7

Best time: in the classroom
Like to see the 'light' bulb come on
District puts students first

Values:

- Camaraderie
- Culture of integrity
- Strong focus on students
- Work ethic

Wishes:

- Positive image of district
- Better communication

Quote: "the moment the light bulb goes on"

Appendix B. Data Map of Co-Interpretation Key Findings
Utica City School District: March 12–13, 2008

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

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

Key

Report Abbreviations:

CA—Curriculum Alignment Report

DR—Document Review Report

ELL—English Language Learner Report

INT—Interview Report

OBS—Observation Report

SE—Special Education Report

SEC—Surveys of Enacted Curriculum Report

Voting Colors:

Red votes = areas for improvement

Green votes = positive areas

Key Findings: Areas for Improvement

Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
The district does not have a districtwide written and articulated curriculum in ELA K–12 that is aligned with New York state learning standards in the areas of general education, special education, and ELLs. In the absence of this aligned curriculum, instructional planning is approached in a multiple of ways and lacks consistency. **(curriculum/instruction)** **(26 red votes)**	District respondents said there has been more accountability and follow-up with respect to clarifying expectations for classroom instructions, but they would like more follow-up from principals to check on the consistency of the instruction within the classrooms.	INT p29
	No plans, policies, implementation or monitoring documents were submitted to ensure consistent delivery of curriculum within schools for Grades K–12.	DR p5-6
	USDC provided no evidence that plans, policies, or implementation of ELL curriculum is effectively delivered in Grades K–6	ELL doc review p108
	No plans, policies, implementation or monitoring documents were submitted to ensure consistent delivery of curriculum K-12 across schools.	DR p5-6
	All secondary schools received a moderate rating on monitoring instruction; 3 out of 5 elementary schools received a moderate rating.	INT p9
	Instructional consistency was rated high at all elementary schools. Teachers at elementary schools say core reading series drives instructional consistency within building.	INT p8
	Respondents expressed less certainty about alignment of the secondary-level ELA curriculum.	INT p29
	All teachers receive curriculum and standards from different sources.	INT p64
	Several district respondents indicated that there is a problem with vertical alignment, particularly among different school levels.	INT p29
	Teachers use state standards when determining what to teach.	INT p63
	District personnel noted that teachers are not familiar with the curriculum of the previous grades, especially from elementary to middle and middle to high school.	INT p29
	The district has no policies, implementation, or monitoring for SWD curricular materials.	SE doc review p5
	District personnel stated that there does not appear to be a standardized ELA curriculum for all secondary schools.	INT p29
	There is no districtwide curriculum at the secondary level.	ELL int. p57
	In Grade 9, we are still dealing with instructing students in vocabulary and basic phonemic awareness.	SEC p14
	In all secondary schools, teachers claimed to have a high level of discretion and flexibility in adapting curricular materials to meet the needs of their students; they value this freedom.	INT p9
	In 1/3 of general education secondary and more than ½ of the ESL classes, standards were not applied consistently for all students.	ELL obs. p94
	Curriculum does not meet learning needs of ELLs with minimal proficiency in English.	ELL int. p57

Key Finding 1 (cont.)	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	A critical challenge is in providing support for newly arrived ELLs with limited English.	ELL int. p73
	Curriculum does not address the learning needs of ELLs with minimal proficiency in English.	ELL int. p57
	General education teachers said they modify the curriculum.	ELL int. p65
	Grade 10 NYSED performance indicators emphasize application of procedural knowledge (26 percent)—more than in any other cognitive demand.	CA p15
	The majority of NYSED performance indicators require students to apply conceptual knowledge in Grade 8.	CA p12-13
	About 24 percent of NYSED performance indicators require students to apply procedural knowledge in Grade 8.	CA p12-13
	The major emphasis on cognitive demand in the NYSED performance indicators is on application, creation, and remembering in Grade 8.	CA p12-13
	The Grade 10 curriculum map (as written) does not address student expectation, differentiated instruction, or teaching/learning plan.	CA p17
	Findings indicate that according to NYSED performance indicators for Grade 6, approximately 60 percent emphasis is placed on conceptual knowledge.	CA p10-11
	Only 2 percent of NYSED performance indicators require students to remember factual knowledge in Grade 8.	CA p12-13
	There is no districtwide written ELA curriculum for Grades K–8 with well-articulated components.	CA p4-5
	There is no written curriculum to follow, so instructional planning is approached in several ways.	ELL int. p83
	There is no districtwide curriculum at the secondary level.	ELL int. p57
	The district did not submit evidence for a comprehensive, clearly articulated. and aligned curriculum for ELL Grades 7–12.	ELL doc review p107-8
	All elementary schools' curriculum is guided by core reading series. All secondary school teachers create own curriculum maps that support instruction to state standards and state exams.	INT p5
	The NYSED performance indicators stress early application of procedural knowledge (40 percent) and this application decreases until Grade 8.	CA p7-12
	Grade 10 NYSED performance indicators emphasize little to no factual knowledge across all six cognitive demands (only 3 percent of remembering).	CA p15
	Less than 10 percent of NYSED performance indicators require students to understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create metacognitive knowledge in Grade 8	CA p12-13
	16 out of 17 general education and ESL elementary classroom lessons were aligned with NY state ELA standards.	ELL obs. p74
	Reading comprehension is consistently aligned with NY state standards across all grade levels.	SEC p10-14

Key Finding 1 (cont.)	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	District personnel indicated that teachers are involved in aligning the curriculum for their grades.	INT p28
	Differentiated instruction is not addressed across the grade levels in the curriculum.	CA p17
	In both regular education and ESL secondary classrooms, the lessons were only moderately aligned with NY state standards.	ELL obs. p93
	In Grade 9, there is alignment but no intensity. More emphasis should be on higher-order thinking skills.	SEC p14
	All general education teachers follow curriculum maps that staff developed collaboratively.	ELL int. p84
	All the teachers that interviewed believed that their ELA lessons were well aligned with New York learning standards.	SE int. p6
	Few general education teachers modify the ELA curriculum.	ELL int. p84
	31 percent of NYS performance indicators require students to apply procedural knowledge at Grade 2.	CA p6-7
	In Grade 4 NYSED performance indicators, more than 50 percent of the emphasis is on conceptual and procedural knowledge.	CA p8-9
	Grade 2 ELA NYSED findings indicate that less than 3 percent of the curriculum emphasizes factual knowledge in Grade 2	CA p6-7
	All district respondents indicated that the elementary ELA is more aligned now than in the past because the schools are using a new reading series.	INT p28
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	No documents were submitted as evidence that the district has a process of aligning curricular materials to the NY state standards.	DR p6
	The district did submit publisher-created alignment documents. However, no policies, plans, or documented evidence indicated that the district had verified this alignment or conducted its own alignment process.	DR p6
	No documentation or evidence of a districtwide written curriculum was submitted for Grade 8.	CA p17
	There are no specific student expectations or a clearly articulated statement indicating what students should know and be able to do with respect to ELA in Grades 2, 4, 6, and 10.	CA p17
	The Grade 10 curricular document indicates four units, one for each marking period. Otherwise, no pacing information is given to teachers in that grade or in Grades 2, 4, and 6.	CA p18
	The Grade 10 curriculum map references tasks for each unit that serve as assessments (e.g., modified Task 3 using two short stories and literary terms), but does not provide an explanation for what these tasks are, how they are administered, or how they will assess student learning of unit material. No other grade levels address assessment or present links to any specific assessment tools or types.	CA p18

Key Finding 1 (cont.)	Auditor's Findings	Source/Page
	In Grades K–6, the district curriculum consists solely of the *Reading Street* reading program.	CA p4
	Curriculum documents about Grades 7 and 8 were not provided for the purposes of this audit	CA p5
	The SEC report shows that at the elementary level, the taught curriculum that students experience is aligned with the New York state standards to a high degree. However, that alignment decreases through middle and high school	SEC p10-14
	At the elementary level, district and school staff rely on two core text series to guide teachers in using the standards: Hampton Brown Avenues for ESL and Scott Foresman Reading Streets for general education	ELL int. p56

Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
The district does not have a well-articulated, documented plan or policy for implementation of ELA professional development, and it lacks a full-time director for professional development. **(professional learning)** **(23 red votes)**	The district provided only limited evidence of plans (i.e., explicit outlines of activities) for two of nine professional development criteria.	DR p8-9
	The district did not provide any evidence of monitoring (i.e., collection of data for evaluation) of any professional development criteria.	DR p8-9
	The majority of respondents reported that overall administrators receive high support from the district and thorough professional development, but some expressed a desire for a more cohesive professional development system so they don't feel as though their time and money had been wasted.	INT p26
	In seven of eight sample schools, respondents said they have an available instructional leader who supports instruction.	INT p23
	In six of the eight schools, respondents said the coaches or instructional leaders have exerted a limited influence on their instruction, usually because the coach or instructional leader focuses on teachers of low-achieving at-risk students.	INT p23
	The district did not provide any evidence of policies (i.e., course of activities or guide) for any of the professional development criteria.	DR p8-9
	The district has only some (mostly incomplete) professional development plans (explicit, outlined activities) that support ELA curriculum delivery in a variety of settings and venues (schools, programs, disciplines). There is no proof of policy, implementation, and monitoring.	DR p8-9
	The district did not provide any evidence of implementation (i.e., activities conducted using) of any professional development criteria.	DR p8-9
	The district submitted substantial evidence of plans, policies, and monitoring of professional development for ELL.	ELL doc review p109-10
	Lack of professional development position at district level is an issue.	INT p34
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	Linkages between student expectations, district curriculum, and this training were not explicated in the documentation submitted.	DR p11
	The documentation suggests that the district measure the impact of ELA professional development on classroom instruction.	DR p11

Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and higher-level questioning strategies are used with limited frequency. **(instruction)** **(20 red votes)**	Students were less engaged in independent seat work using worksheets, sustained reading, writing, and hands-on activities.	SE obs. p14
	In Grade 8, there needs to be more emphasis on the writing process.	SEC p13
	In Grades 2 and 6, the curriculum is aligned with the standards. However, the intensity of instruction is focused on lower-order thinking skills.	SEC p10, 12
	The Grade 4 curriculum covers everything but in very little depth.	SEC p11
	There is relatively little focus on listening and viewing and speaking and presenting across all grade levels.	SEC p10-14
	Teachers reported using two general approaches used by teachers to support participation and success of students: ELA skills and test-taking strategies.	SE int. p14
	Both types (regular ed and ESL) classrooms were most engaged in whole-class activities.	ELL obs. p95
	Integration of subject areas and project-based learning were least frequently observed in elementary and middle school.	OBS. p7
	Phonics and comprehension are a main focus of instruction in Grade 2.	SEC p10
	In Grade 9, we are still dealing with instructing students in vocabulary and basic phonemic awareness.	SEC p14
	Independent seatwork is the primary student activity across the grade levels.	OBS. p5
	In general, ESL classes tended to focus more on skill-based rather than conceptual lessons.	ELL obs. p98
	Both the instruction strategy of using higher-level questioning and of teacher acting as coach/facilitator were coded as frequent or extensive in 17 percent of the elementary classroom observations.	OBS. p4
	The instructional strategy of a teacher acting as a coach/facilitator was prevalent in 14 percent of middle school classrooms across the district.	OBS. p3
	Teacher reported using a wide range of differentiated instruction strategies, but there also were barriers.	SE int. p10
	Teachers reported using a wide range of differentiated instruction. However, differentiated instruction was seldom observed in classrooms. Additionally, there was a noted difference across educational settings.	SE obs. p10
	Cooperative/collaborative learning was one of the least frequently observed practices in the middle and high schools.	OBS. p7
	Sustained writing/composition was coded as frequent or extensive in 7 percent of observed middle school classrooms.	OBS. p5

Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
	Although teachers reported using various teaching strategies to differentiate instruction, data showed that the occurrence of differentiated teaching strategies was not obvious in 80 percent of the classrooms.	SE obs. p11
	Least frequently observed practices (high school) were as follows: (1) integration of subject areas (interdisciplinary activities), and (2) higher-level instructional feedback to enhance student learning.	OBS. p7, 14
	Site visitors observed relatively high levels of academic focus in most elementary, middle, and high school classrooms.	OBS. p6
	Teachers have access to IEPs via IEP direct and hard copy. Both special and general education teachers reported relying on information in students' IEP in planning their instruction in order to provide appropriate instructional accommodations.	SE int. p15-16
	Frustration was expressed that teachers are not able to focus more extensively on basic language acquisition reflected in the quote "I get upset that we have to teach to the test."	ELL int. p87
	IEP review specified the instructional accommodations needed by SWDs to help them access the curriculum.	SE doc review p15
	The use of higher level instructional strategies was one of the least frequently observed practices.	OBS. p7
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	Differentiated instruction is not addressed across the grade levels in the curriculum.	CA p17
	The curriculum document for Grades 2, 4, and 6 does not present any information about instructional methods, strategies, examples, or types of experiences to be offered.	CA p18
	The Grade 10 curriculum map lists some generic activities, or references to activities, for each unit (e.g., listening/note-taking strategies, graphic organizers for essays that allow for students to work independently, activities that include opportunities for students to speak in groups and/or whole-class presentations).	CA p18

Key Finding 4	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
There is a need for targeted services and differentiated instruction for low-performing ELLs. **(academic intervention)** **(11 red votes)**	Academic services exist and ELL students have access, but services are the same as what general education students receive.	ELL int. p9, 21, 57
	There is a need for AIS, specifically for low-performing ELLs.	ELL int. p48, 88
	ELLs who are special education are a challenge for providing services.	ELL int. p73
	Parents of ELL students expressed more consistent dissatisfaction with the availability of afterschool programs and extracurricular opportunities.	ELL parent focus group p106
	Document review findings indicate that there is no alignment of AIS curriculum to student needs.	DR p7
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	"To address [basic survival needs], some administrators recommended a separate program altogether for beginners [as opposed to pull-out ESL instruction and inclusion in general education classes]—an immersion program where beginners can learn English in an intensive environment and also learn how to survive in American culture."	ELL int. p8

Key Finding 5	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
According to multiple sources, there is no cohesive districtwide system for collecting, interpreting, and having access to all student achievement data. **(data use)** **(8 red votes)**	30 percent of teachers used formative assessments during instruction.	SE obs. p31
	4 out of 5 elementary schools said sharing data has a strong presence in their school.	INT p14
	4 out of 5 elementary schools were rated as having a high level of data availability, assessments, and monitoring of student progress.	INT p12
	ESL teachers consider the test data and also consider the needs of individual students in determining what to teach.	ELL int. p64
	Teachers reported using classroom, direct, and state assessment data to identify the needs of the students, provide instruction accordingly, and monitor student progress, for meeting IEP goals.	SE int. p31
	ELL teachers do not get relevant student data to inform their teaching.	ELL int. p73
	All schools moderately use data to make instructional decisions (formal, informal, and/or both); most schools share data on student performance with teachers and administrators.	INT p13
	District respondents stated that a cohesive system for collecting, interpreting, and using formative assessments is needed for all schools.	INT p30
	Schools also implement their own measures of student achievement.	ELL int. p58
	The type of assessments used in schools is not consistent within the district.	INT p30
	Therefore, teacher-directed state and district data use was not evident in the interview responses.	SE int. p32
	Assessment data is not well circulated to general education teachers and is not useful.	ELL int. p92
	All secondary schools received a moderate rating for use of assessment data to drive instruction.	INT p14
	Teachers do not appear to have been trained extensively on how to use various types of student achievement data to make decisions.	SE int. p25
	Half of the secondary ESL classes showed infrequent or inappropriate assessments.	ELL obs. p98
	District personnel said they expect teachers and schools to use assessment data to make decisions about instruction and learning and to identify strengths and weaknesses in their students.	INT p30
	Findings indicate that no documentation was submitted to illustrate that district staff have access to formative data, especially in the areas of ELL and SWD.	DR p9-10
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	The majority of the documents submitted in the area of data-driven instruction are school-level, and not district-level information.	DR p13
	No documentation was submitted to illustrate that the district adjusts curricular programming based on the monitoring of student progress.	DR p13

Key Finding 6	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Frequent and consistent professional development is provided by the district; however, more training is needed for general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms and for general education teachers in ELL topics. **(professional development)** **(7 red votes)**	Special education teachers are freely included in the same professional development offered for general education teachers.	SE int. p23
	In three of the eight schools, respondents said professional development provided them with useful knowledge and skills that could be applied in their classrooms.	INT p21
	In seven of the eight schools, all or nearly all respondents said there are frequent and consistent professional development opportunities available to teachers.	INT p21
	Teachers do not appear to have been trained extensively in how to use various types of student achievement data to make decisions.	SE int. p25
	Respondents indicated multiple opportunities for professional development, including the district initiative Thoughtful Classroom and GAP facilitation.	SE int. p22-23
	There is a need for more training for general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms.	SE int. p24
	General education and ESL teachers said that district does not provide professional development specifically toward ELL instructional needs.	ELL int. p92
	Professional development does not specifically focus on issues of ELLs.	ELL int. p73
	There is no connection to the needs of ELLs in the districtwide professional learning opportunities.	ELL int. p58
	District respondents described staff development on ESL topics as moderate and said more is needed for all teachers.	INT p32
	The district provided no evidence for implementation of policies and plans for ELL professional development.	ELL doc review p104
	More focus on ELLs is necessary, especially for general education teachers.	ELL int. p58

Key Finding 7	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Use of technology is limited or not available to students throughout the district. **(instruction)** **(6 red votes)**	Technology use and assessments are not represented because they were not noted as being frequent or extensive practices.	OBS. p3
	Elementary ESL classrooms do not have as much access to technological resources as general education classrooms.	ELL obs. p80
	Only 8 percent (of teachers are) using integrative technology to assist students.	SE obs. p8

Key Finding 8	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Many sources indicate that collaboration between general education teachers, between special education and general education teachers, and between ESL and general education teachers occurs frequently but informally. **(staffing)** **(3 red votes)**	Half of the teachers reported having a positive and collaborative relationship between special education and regular education teachers.	SE int. p33
	Elementary teachers communicate with each other frequently and informally.	ELL int. p67
	Collaboration among teachers occurs informally and frequently.	ELL int. p57
	Secondary ESL and general education teachers communicate on a regular informal basis.	ELL int. p86
	A lack of planning time was cited as a significant barrier in teacher collaboration with disabilities. Another obstacle was resistance from general education teachers.	SE int. p34
	Collaboration among teachers was reported to be moderate in 7 of the 8 schools.	INT p11
	All secondary schools noted a majority of teachers don't have common planning times (scheduled)	INT p10
	Paraprofessionals were observed assisting teachers and students as follows: frequently to always—0 percent; one-half of a class period—20 percent; and never to rarely—80 percent of the time.	SE obs. p38

Key Finding 9	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Observations and interview findings show that there is a lack or minimal amount of instructional materials and resources for SWDs and ELLs in general education classrooms. **(instruction)** **(2 red votes)**	Teachers and special education leaders reported that the lack of instructional materials has been an obstacle.	SE int. p9
	All of the 7 secondary general education classrooms had limited or no ELL resources.	ELL int. p100
	Elementary general education classrooms lacked ELL resources.	ELL obs. p80, 82
	Overall, only 4 percent of the classrooms had a well-equipped classroom library across classrooms observed.	OBS. p8
	Observation data showed that students and teachers had the basic instructional materials needed for lessons.	OBS. p8
	According to special education leaders, schools and the district ensure that students receive instructional accommodations and that teachers use appropriate instructional materials.	SE int. p16

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 10	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Resources, policies, monitoring, and implementation of what is taught to ELA students in ELA is inconsistent throughout the district. **(curriculum)** **(0 votes)**	The district has no plans, policies, implementation, or monitoring in place for ELL curricular materials.	ELL doc review p4-5
	District policy or plans do not ensure that district-adopted curricular materials are utilized consistently.	DR p4
	Secondary levels said materials are outdated and often inadequate to meet the needs of all students.	INT p11
	Teachers are not aware of districtwide plans and policies to support the learning needs of ELLs.	ELL int. p66
	The district has submitted limited evidence of plans and policies related to ELL curriculum in Grades K–6. However, submitted documents is outdated and may no longer apply.	ELL doc review p108
	Elementary general education teacher materials are limited to Scott-Foresman.	ELL int. p65
	Elementary teachers report the text series does not address basic needs of beginning ESL students.	ELL int. p64
	Most secondary ESL teachers receive only $300 yearly to purchase instructional resources.	ELL int. p85
	All of 7 secondary general education classrooms had limited or no ELL resources.	ELL obs. p100

Key Finding 11	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Observations indicate that as you move from elementary to secondary level, student engagement decreases. **(instruction)** **(0 votes)**	Student engagement significantly decreases from elementary school to middle school to high school (92 percent to 71 percent to 67 percent)	OBS. p6
	Observers reported seeing direct instruction during 58 percent of elementary school visits and half of all high school and middle school classroom observations.	OBS. p3
	Secondary ESL lessons had more time devoted to discipline than did general education lessons.	ELL obs. p45
	Classrooms visits showed classroom management strategies in which routines were established to make transitions smooth.	OBS. p9
	A high level of student engagement was not prevalent at the high school level.	OBS. p6
	A high level of student attention/interest/engagement was one of least frequently observed practices in the high school.	OBS. p8

Key Finding 12	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Documentation was not evident districtwide to indicate monitoring of district programs and policies related to the effectiveness of AIS. **(academic intervention)** **(0 votes)**	Respondents said there is not a plan or system in place to track the effectiveness of academic support throughout the district.	INT p3
	Document review findings indicate that documentation was not submitted for achievement data used to inform AIS decisions.	DR p7
	Document review findings indicate that no documentation was submitted to indicate that AIS is monitored to determine formative student progress.	DR p7
	Document review findings indicate that no documentation was submitted to illustrate that the district has either plans and policies implementation or monitoring in place for academic support.	ELL doc review p109
	There does not appear to be a clear monitoring process in place to ensure that SWDs receive interventions and services specified on IEPs.	SE parent focus group p21

Key Finding 13	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Teachers believe they held ELL students to the same standards and expectations as general education students, although observations do not support this statement at the secondary level. **(curriculum)** **(0 votes)**	Secondary ESL and general education teachers affirm that ELLs are held to the same learning standards as general education peers.	ELL int. p85
	All elementary teachers employ state and district standards when teaching their students.	ELL int. p63
	Secondary expectations for ELLs who take tests after one year do not allow for differences among individual students in their adjustments.	ELL int. p85
	Secondary ESL classes also received slightly lower ratings on whether students were held to the same high standards. In one third of the general education classes and in more than one half of the ESL classes, standards were not applied consistently for all students.	ELL obs. p94
	There are different expectations. In ESL classes, ELL students held to same standard. In general education classes, ELL students not expected to keep up with English peers.	ELL int. p65
	The majority of the general education teachers interviewed said they believe that ELLs are held to the same standards as general education students. Although state tests hold ELLs to the same standards as general education students, some ELA classroom teachers stated that they hold different expectations based on the student's language proficiency.	ELL int. p66

Key Finding 14	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Cultural awareness is more frequently found in ESL classrooms than in general education classrooms with ELL students. **(instruction)** **(0 votes)**	There is a gap between secondary ESL and general education classrooms in developing cultural awareness.	ELL obs. p97
	Secondary ESL teachers have expressed that they try to make the classroom culturally and educationally inviting.	ELL int. p87
	There is a big gap in developing cultural awareness within the secondary ESL classrooms.	ELL obs. p97
	Cultural awareness is higher in elementary ESL classes than in general education classes.	ELL obs. p77

Key Finding 15	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
ELL interviews and observations indicate that ESL teachers make more modifications than general education teachers at elementary and secondary levels. Some general education teachers do not differentiate for ELL language instruction. Both types of classes rely basically on whole-group instruction. **(instruction)** **(0 votes)**	Secondary general education teachers do not differentiate between language instruction for ELLs and for general education students.	ELL int. p87
	Secondary general education teachers use the same strategies for all the students in their classes and generally did not mention instructional practices they employs specifically for ELLs.	ELL int. p88
	By far, secondary ESL teachers made more modifications than general education teachers did.	ELL obs. p94
	Elementary ESL teachers made many more modifications to their lessons than general education teachers did.	ELL obs. p75, 82
	Most elementary ESL lessons included effective and frequent use of scaffolding and sheltering techniques.	ELL obs. p77
	Both types of elementary classrooms were most engaged in whole-class activities.	ELL obs. p76

Key Finding 16	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Observations of ELL and special education students within classrooms show interactions were predominately respectful and productive, with the exception of some ESL students in some secondary classrooms. **(instruction)** **(0 votes)**	Interactions between teachers and students were positive and reflected teachers' respect for students' contributions.	SE obs. p10
	Mutually respectful interactions were consistently observed in both types of elementary classrooms.	ELL obs. p81
	Some secondary ESL classrooms showed mutually respectful interactions between teachers and students; others showed disrespectful and unproductive interactions.	ELL obs. p102

Key Finding 17	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
All respondents said that new teachers were moderately supported, but data show agreement—at both district and school levels—that additional professional support for new teachers is needed. **(professional learning)** **(0 votes)**	District respondents praised the mentoring program for new teachers and new-teacher orientation.	INT p37
	All respondents said that new teachers are moderately supported, but several respondents believe that the support for new teachers still needs to be improved at both the district and school levels.	INT p25
	The district has a large number of new teachers, and more professional development opportunities may be needed to meet the needs of new teachers.	INT p39
	The district has a mentoring program for new teachers.	DR p11
	Auditor's Findings	**Source/Page**
	Although the district is establishing a mentoring program, mentoring is to occur on teachers' own time.	DR p15

Positive Key Findings

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

Positive Key Finding 1	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
There is a plan in place to identify and provide AIS for students in Grades K–12. **(academic intervention)** **(20 green votes)**	All elementary schools – high rating of support for nonproficient students with a variety of interventions before/during/after the school day.	INT p16
	Intensive intervention services were available to all students with and without disabilities.	SE int. p20
	There is a plan in place for AIS, including criteria for determining students' need and outlining services required.	DR p20
	The district has a prereferral plan to identify students who struggle academically.	SE int. and doc review p19
	Document review findings indicate that the Utica City School District has plans for providing services to struggling students (including ELL and SWDs) both during and outside the regular school day.	DR p6
	Document review findings indicate that no documentation was submitted to show that AIS is provided specifically for ELLs and SWDs.	DR p7

Positive Key Finding 2	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Multiple data sources indicate that all SWDs have access to the general education ELA curriculum. **(curriculum/instruction)** **(14 green votes)**	Special education leaders cited various ways that schools ensure that SWDs have access to the general education ELA curriculum.	SE int. p6
	All SWDs have access to the same general education ELA curriculum as their nondisabled peers.	DR p5
	All SWDs have access to the same general education ELA curriculum as their nondisabled peers.	SE obs. p5
	All SWDs have access to the same general education ELA curriculum as their nondisabled peers.	SE int. p4-5

Positive Key Finding 3	Supporting Findings	Source/Page
Multiple data sources indicate that SWDs experience curricular modifications. **(curriculum)** **(12 green votes)**	Parents of SWDs also reported similar curriculum modifications for their children with disabilities.	SE int. p7
	Teachers modified curriculum to various degrees.	SE int. p6
	Some of the modifications reported by teachers were also reflected in the IEPs reviewed.	SE doc review p7

Miscellaneous Findings

These findings were identified from the data sets by co-interpretation participants but ultimately were not included in the development of the key findings. Some miscellaneous findings were considered outliers if the observations seemed outside the intended focus of the audit. In addition, other miscellaneous findings indicated strengths, challenges, or positive observations.

Outliers

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Instruction Outliers	Barriers for SWDs include low priority for students, large class size, and job performance.	SE int. p17-18
	Teachers observed appeared to have well-planned lessons and were organized, but marked differences were noted across educational settings.	SE obs. p13
	In half of the elementary ESL classrooms, the space provided is not ideal.	ELL obs. p80, 82
	Parent/community involvement in learning activities is one of the least frequently observed practices across all grades.	OBS. p7
	Documents provided some evidence that the district monitors ELL curriculum Grades K–6.	ELL doc review p108

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Academic Intervention Outliers	Special education leaders believed that the IEPs determine the services that SWDs receive. It's an individualized process.	SE int. p20
	Secondary ELL students who are SWDs get services according to IEPs first.	ELL int. p88
	There is a lack of a well-coordinated schedule for SWDs to receive services without missing regular instruction in classrooms.	INT p21
	District respondents said the interventions provided by the schools are effective, but success depends on the dedication of the teachers and instructional leaders within each school building.	INT p31

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Professional Learning Outliers	Parent-community involvement in learning activities across all grades was one of the least frequently observed practices.	OBS. p7

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Data Outliers	ELLs must take required state tests for general education after one year of enrollment.	INT p32
	Special education teachers and leaders believe that NY state assessments are beyond the ability of their students.	SE int. p29

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Staffing Outliers	Teaching assistants: not trained, provide major form of support.	SE int. p37
	Teachers generally perceived that the building-level administrators are supportive of their teaching of SWDs.	SE int. p38
	Finding indicates that the distribution of teachers and administration across schools is limited (transferring).	DR p11

Other Findings

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Other – District Challenges	Most of the district personnel interviewed said that the community context has had an enormous impact on the district schools (e.g., influx of new immigrants and increase of poverty rate).	INT p28
	According to district personnel, state funding has not kept pace with the student population and increasing the budget for schools is a top priority.	INT p28
	District respondents said that personnel turnover throughout the entire school system has been high in the past three years.	INT p28
	Appropriate space for optimal teaching and funding impact class size.	ELL int. p60
	The challenges cited by district respondents were improved communication, overcrowding, more resources, staffing concerns, NCLB requirements, and improvement of professional development.	INT p35
	The top challenges cited by school respondents were overcrowded classrooms and buildings, more teachers and support staff needed at all levels, more curricular materials (elementary), consistent and enforced behavior, and attendance plan (secondary).	INT p27
	A number of district respondents said they would like to hire more diverse teaching staff members to reflect the diversity of the student population.	INT p35
	Several respondents expressed concern that because of the lack of stability (in Special Education department), general education teachers have little guidance and are struggling with providing the right materials.	INT p33
	District respondents said that personnel turnover throughout the entire school system has been high in the past three years.	INT p28

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Other – District Strengths	The top three strengths cited by school respondents were as follows: community of teachers supporting each other, dedicated staff, diversity of population	INT p26
	The two strengths cited by district respondents were dedicated staff and diverse population.	INT p35
	District respondents are hopeful that the new superintendent will bring better structure to the district.	INT p28
	The district has a plan for selecting textbooks.	DR p4

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Other – ELL/ESL Challenges	ESL programs are not monitored for effectiveness.	ELL int. p59
	Students are not monitored when they exit ESL.	ELL int. p59
	District respondents said that the level of support for ELL students provided by the ESL teachers was high, but additional certified ESL teachers are needed.	INT p32
	There are unrealistic expectations for ELLs.	ELL int. p60
	In half of the elementary ESL classrooms, the space provided is not ideal.	ELL obs. p80, 82
	Both elementary ESL and regular education classrooms had high ratings for general classroom resources such as maps, word walls.	ELL obs. p81
	Elementary ESL classrooms do not have as much access to technological resources as general education classrooms.	ELL obs. p80
	Regarding the content of their children's education, parent satisfaction varied according to their countries of origin.	ELL parent focus p104
	Parents also expressed a need for more support for playing a role in the children's education.	ELL parent focus p106
	Communication was inconsistent. It was best for parents who are more proficient in English.	ELL parent focus p106
	Difficulties in communicating with ELL parents face-to-face.	ELL int. p59

	Miscellaneous Findings	Source/Page
Other – ELL/ESL Positive Findings	Parents were very pleased with the availability of school staff and teachers' willingness to help students.	ELL parent focus p104
	The ELL parents in the focus group indicated that they are very satisfied with the ELL programs and services.	ELL parent focus p104
	Secondary general education classrooms also had access to fewer technological or computer resources than ESL classrooms.	ELL obs. p100
	ESL settings also tended to have more optimal classroom space and classroom facilities than general education settings.	ELL obs. p100
	Elementary ESL teachers consider both test data and the needs of students to determine what to teach.	ELL int. p64

Appendix C. Force Field Analysis

Driving Forces

- *Time allowed for summer curriculum writing
- *Written and articulated (secondary) (ELA and ESL) curriculum at least one school
- *Elementary: consistent textbook aligned with standards (ELA)
- Process to review/cycle texts at secondary level to support learning standards
- ELL has Hampton Brown
- Sidewalks program used by special education students
- *Textbook curriculum for ESL (at one school – across district?)
- Jamestown navigator/Fast Forward
- Some schools (1 middle school and partial high school) have aligned ELA curriculum
- Some schools developed supplementary instructional materials*
- 90% of high school students passed Regents exam in January
- Staff dedication – AIS facilitators, English team leaders, administrators
- NCLB – aligning curriculum
- NYSED website
- Data analysis from NY state test
- Item analysis and student scores
- GOGNOS and NYStart and SRA
- Team building*
- $ from CSRD grant

Key Finding 1

The district does not have a districtwide written and articulated curriculum in ELA K–12 that is aligned with New York state learning standards in the areas of general education, special education, and ELLs. In the absence of this aligned curriculum, instructional planning is approached in a multiple of ways and lacks consistency.

Restraining Forces

- Time
- Money
- NCLB
- Lacks a system for monitoring teaching practices to ensure that curriculum is being taught*
- Lack of staff development for curriculum writing*
- Lack of a written document for planning curriculum development*
- Culture of independent contractors
- Lack of commitment
- Lack of common vision/mission*
- Never made to work with other middle schools in years*
- Little vertical communication*
- Old habits die hard
- New teachers don't understand accountability
- Decreased communication between teachers in various buildings*
- Stakeholder – it will never happen or change
- Who will write K–12 (all areas – ELA, ELL, Special Education) curriculum?*

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement

Driving Forces

- *There is a plan in development
- SINI schools have individual plans*
- Watson-Williams has an established ELA professional development (PD) plan*
- Secondary schools have universal staff development plan (silver)
- BETAC
- Salary incentives
- Watson-Williams mathematics PD plan
- New teacher mentoring
- Utica Teacher Center
- Gap facilitators
- AIS specialists
- Reading teachers
- NYSED website
- BOCES
- ELA scoring model
- PDP committee
- Summer PD opportunities
- 2 part-time retired teachers serve as facilitators in PD office
- English department meetings
- Superintendent conference
- ½ day inservice (per building)

Key Finding 2

The district does not have a well-articulated, documented plan or policy for implementation of ELA professional development, and it lacks a full-time director for professional development.

Restraining Forces

- Time
- Money
- Lack of PD director*
- Scheduling
- Lack of well laid out plan
- More flexibility
- Lack of teacher leaders/ facilitators in ELA curriculum*
- Change → getting people to accept change (willingness of teachers)
- Can't keep it simple
- Resistance to change
- Activity does not equal achievement
- Staffing practices
- Too much "flavor of the month" initiatives → turns people off → can't buy in
- No focus/goal, everyone needs to be a stakeholder*
- Survey teachers for input on how to address concerns
- Lack of district priority in building/growing leaders*

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement

Driving Forces

- Thoughtful classroom*
- Questioning strategies*
- Watson-Williams master schedule allows tutor blocks
- Paraphrasing questions "list of 44" professional development
- Some schools give common planning time/grade level*
- 405 initiative includes differentiated instruction
- Select schools are addressing differentiated instruction
- Several schools have addressed Bloom's taxonomy
- In-house teacher experts have collaborated
- Fast Forward program at high school/ Donovan Middle School*
- Jamestown Reading Navigator – SME
- Special Education AIS classes
- AIS plan
- Increased funding*
- Staff development has occurred*
- Gap facilitator and ESL facilitator*
- Peer coaching
- Sidewalks program
- Hampton Brown program
- Peaceful People program

Key Finding 3

Differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and higher-level questioning strategies are used with limited frequency.

Restraining Forces

- Preservice training
- Time and money
- Limited extended day (b/c bussing?)
- Teachers are spread too thin
- Not enough room (facilities not sufficient)
- Integrated technology
- Teachers' general knowledge
- Teachers' prior practices
- PD (pervasive and consistent
- Monitoring by admin. (APPR)*
- Lack of formative assessments*
- Less STD and RDG in classroom (<30%)
- All teachers do not understand they are reading and writing teachers*
- Not enough writing*
- Teachers' "been there done that" attitude
- Complacency /lack of imagination
- District required assessments ELA/mathematics
- Low expectations for students
- Lack of accountability*
- Too much direct instruction (revise APPR)*
- Too much "busy work" for students without guidance
- Some instructional materials do not support this
- Test constraints – teaching to the test
- Pressure on teachers to achieve test scores

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement

Driving Forces

- Afterschool tutorials
- Lunch buddies
- Morning library club
- Computer labs – software
- Refugee academy/community involvement
- International night
- Sheltered classes (ELLs)*
- Director of ESL!
- Before-school summer programs
- Sidewalks
- Hampton Brown
- Fast-Forward
- Jamestown Reading Navigator
- SME
- Wiggleworks
- Assistive technology
- Level 1 AIS (9th grade)
- Refugee school impact grant
- AIS facilitator for Special Education
- Gap facilitators
- Summer school for identified SWDs
- ESL summer school*
- SINI $ for planning
- AIS/ Math AIS with certified content area teachers at secondary level (SWD)
- Thoughtful Classroom strategies for ESL*
- Scaffolding services
- Formative assessments
- Good ELL-ELA collaboration*

Key Finding 4

There is a need for targeted services and differentiated instruction for low-performing ELLs.

Restraining Forces

- Time
- Money
- Lack of professional development (relevant to ELL and SWD)*
- Lack of materials/resources and textbooks*
- Number of ELL teachers / class size
- Scheduling*
- No newcomer classes*
- Certified staff
- Teacher assistants – need more*
- NCLB
- Random influx of students
- Teacher access to data*
- Availability for tutoring for SWDs by staff other than ELA teacher
- Transportation*
- Use of staff
- Elementary programming and scheduling
- Lack of curriculum leaders in ELL and Special Education*
- Lack of understanding of AIS plan and mission*

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement

Driving Forces

- AIMS
- Plan is revised every two years
- In compliance
- Knowledgeable and competent staff in AIS
- There's movement within the program (in and out)
- Analyzing and revising plans at program and student level*
- AIS facilitators for NY state assessments: ELA/mathematics secondary/elementary/Special Education
- Math assistance: software: Successmaker: also for ELA
- FastForward: secondary*
- Jamestown Reading Navigator
- Students schedule alternate days for AIS
- Flexible grouping
- Grade-level meetings
- Sidewalks/SRA
- Before school and after school, and summer programs*
- Extended-day tutorials*
- SME
- Schoolwide Title I status
- UC tutors – ELA and mathematics
- YSLLP
- IID computer technology

Positive Finding 1

There is a plan in place to identify and provide AIS for students in Grades K–12.

Restraining Forces

- Number of students who qualify for AIS
- Time
- Space
- Money
- Additional staff*
- Scheduling*
- Lack of technology*
- Lack of 10th period (students leave)*
- Attendance
- Building overcrowded
- Discipline/behavior of students
- Non-credit-bearing class at secondary level
- Record keeping*
- Student mobility
- Lack of student records*
- Transportation
- Influx of students
- Population (i.e., SWDs)
- NCLB (lack of teacher opinion)
- Teacher access to data*
- Lack of consistent materials*
- Lack of consistent curriculum
- Lack of targeted reading instruction*
- Lack of understanding of AIS*
- Lack of differentiation*

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement

Driving Forces

- Gap facilitators and new AIS facilitators*
- Resources (equal)
- Highly qualified teachers*
- Assistive technology*
- Individualized education programs (IEPs) (specifically designed for SWDs)
- Resource teachers
- AIS for SWDs*
- FastForward software/technology
- Modification of curriculum*
- Leadership – administration, department heads, team leads, AIS*
- SINI $ to do curriculum work in this area
- Accountability is all-inclusive
- Collaboration*
- SME
- Inclusion classes with support
- Transitional classes
- Extended-day program

Positive Finding 2

Multiple data sources indicate that all SWDs have access to the general education ELA curriculum.

Restraining Forces

- Time
- Money
- Space
- NCLB
- Individual teacher bias
- Lack of materials/resources
- Lack of staff
- Effective delivery of curriculum*
- Staff development (more!)*
- Extended mentoring program for new teachers*
- Fear that kids can't do it
- Presupposition of failure
- Ownership of students lacking
- Classroom management*
- Teacher assistants and substitutes*
- Teacher commitment
- Lack of collaboration*
- Low expectations*
- Lack of accountability*

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement

Driving Forces

- IEPs
- RTI
- Building ISTs*
- Project 405 – TAC – D*
- Psychologists, social workers, and guidance counselors
- Textbook contains differentiated instruction
- Supplemental materials
- Gap facilitators
- Mathematics facilitators
- Reading specialists
- Collaboration general education and Special Education teachers*
- SETRC support
- An inclusion facilitator
- COPS program
- Modified tests
- Aides in classroom*
- 12-1-1 alternative education program – secondary
- Thoughtful Classroom
- Sidewalks
- SME
- AIS special education facilitator
- Parent involvement
- FastForward
- SRA
- CSE
- IEP Direct
- Smartboard

Positive Finding 3

Multiple data sources indicate that SWDs experience curricular modifications.

Restraining Forces

- Are regular education teachers always aware of student modifications?*
- Discrepancy between IEP modification and state accommodations for assessments
- Not all teachers know how to read and apply an IEP*
- Attitude – some teachers don't think students should be given modifications*
- Some teachers take modifications too far*
- CSE meetings – dates, time, place*
- Staff knowledge of disabilities*
- Class size*
- Materials*
- Untrained paraprofessionals*
- Misplaced students*
- Lack of or changes/turnover/ mobility of staff*
- Lack of parent support and interest
- No/little common planning time*
- Traveling resource teachers*
- Mobility of students
- Lack of computer resources*
- No continuity
- Number of classified students

Direction of desired movement

*District-identified leverage points for improvement