

Buffalo City School District Final Report

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Introduction

This final report is the result of an audit of the written, taught, and tested curriculum of the Buffalo City School District by Learning Point Associates. In mid-2005, eight 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 English language arts curriculum for all students, including students with disabilities and English as a second language (ESL) students. The audit examined curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, management, and compliance through multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. These findings acted as a starting point to facilitate conversations in the district to identify areas for improvement, probable causes, and ways to generate plans for improvement.

This report contains an outline of the process, data, and methods used as well as the key findings from the data collection and the associated problem statements generated through the cointerpretation process for Buffalo City District schools.

Finally, a Recommendations for Action Planning section provides advice for the district in planning actions for each critical problem area. Learning Point Associates provides recommendations as well as more specific advice to consider in the action-planning process. While the recommendations may be considered binding, the specific advice under each area should not be considered binding. Through the remaining cointerpretation and action-planning steps, the specific steps for action will be outlined with the district and upon completion can be considered a binding plan.

District Background

Overview

Buffalo is located in the far western corner of New York in Erie County, adjacent to Lake Erie and the Niagara River. It has a population of 292,648 with a year 2000 median income of \$24,536. The city's population is approximately 54 percent white, 37 percent black, 8 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. In 2004–05, the Buffalo City School District served 38,495 students in 66 schools. There are 36 elementary schools: one PK–1; one PK–2; 12 PK–4; two PK–5; and 20 PK–8. There are 11 middle schools: one with Grades 2–8; three with Grades 3–8; one with Grades 4–8; and seven with Grades 5–8. There are two schools with Grades 5–12 and 13 secondary schools (Grades 9–12). Finally, there are two multi-grade schools that serve students with special needs.. The student ethnic composition of the district is about 58 percent black, 26 percent white, 14 percent Hispanic, 2 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. Data from 2005 indicate that 29,952 of the district's students (78 percent) were in poverty with 2002, 2003, and 2004 data indicating a steady rate of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (74 percent, 74 percent, and 79 percent). District data from 2002, 2003, and 2004 also indicate a steady number of limited English proficient (LEP) students (6 percent, 6 percent, and 5 percent). Buffalo is one of the large city school districts (along with Rochester, and Syracuse, and Yonkers) identified as having high students needs relative to district resource capacity.¹

Student Academic Performance

On October 14, 2005, the state of New York designated the accountability status of Buffalo as a district "In Need of Improvement, Year 4" for English language arts (English language arts). Overall, Buffalo's fourth-grade 2003–04 students did not make annual measurable objective/adequate yearly progress (AMO/AYP) for English language arts, including the subgroups: students with disabilities, Black students Hispanic students, limited English proficient students, and economically disadvantaged students. Overall, fourth-grade students made AMO/AYP for mathematics, including all student subgroups. Overall, Grade 8 2003–04 students made AMO/AYP for English language arts and mathematics, with the exception of the limited English Proficient student subgroup for English language arts and the students with disabilities and American Indian/Alaskan Native subgroups for mathematics. Overall, Grade 12 2004–05 students did not make AMO/AYP for English language arts or mathematics, including the subgroups: students with disabilities, American Indian/Alaskan Native students, black students, Hispanic students, white students, LEP students, and economically disadvantaged students.²

¹ This data from this section came from the document, "Request for Proposals Application to Implement the New York State Education Department Sanctioned Audit of the Written, Taught, and Tested Curriculum as Required by No Child Left Behind Regulations" provided to Learning Point Associates; from City-Data.Com, retrieved January 6, 2006, from <http://www.city-data.com/city/Buffalo-New-York.html>, and from *Building Aid Shortchanges the Big Cities: The Distribution of Building Aid to New York State School Districts, 1992-1999*, retrieved January 6, 2006, from <http://www.edpriorities.org/Pubs/Report/Aid.PDF>.

² This data from this section came from the New York Sate Department of Education 2005 District Accountability Status report, retrieved January 6, 2006, from <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/school-accountability/2005/district->

Student Choice Plan Placement Process

One of the biggest initiatives in Buffalo is its “choice plan,” a student placement process. The new elementary schools of choice process allows parents the opportunity to make school selections from citywide lottery-based schools/programs and criteria-based schools/programs. Under this program, the district no longer has feeder schools, district schools, or zone schools; instead beginning in September 2005 for the 2005–06 school year, students apply for the school of their choice. The process includes two preferences for lottery-based schools only: *proximity* (residing within a 1½-mile walking distance) and *sibling* (residing within the same household and currently attending schools that the student has selected). In addition, Buffalo school students who wish to remain at their present school may do so.

Buffalo school students who will be completing the highest grade level at their current school must participate in this process, and new students entering the Buffalo City School District after the deadline date must complete and submit an application through the Student Placement Office. Once enrolled in a school, students will remain there—even if they move residences within the district—although any student may complete a transfer form even after the application process is over. All placements carry a one-year commitment.

The choice plan is particularly important for eighth-grade students who will have to choose their high school. Beginning in September 2005, the assigned school counselors were to begin consultation with each eighth-grade student, all of whom would need to complete the application selecting one to five comprehensive high schools listed in order of preference. Parents must sign the application.

High schools of choice are divided into two groups: *Criteria-Based Schools* (based on academic review and may include an entrance exam or audition) and *Lottery-Based Schools* (determined by computerized lottery). Sibling preference is for lottery-based programs only. Students who do not receive any of their school choices will be assigned to a lottery-based comprehensive high school, and students who submit a late application or do not submit an application will be placed in remaining schools after all other students have been placed.³

Ongoing District Goals and Initiatives

The school district of Buffalo has designated seven high-priority need areas. These include the following:

- Increased student achievement in Grades PK–12 in English language arts and mathematics focusing on Schools Under Registration Review (SURR), potential SURR schools, and Schools in Need of Improvement (SINI). This goal is being addressed by

accountability-masterlist10-14-05_alpha.pdf and from the document, “Request for Proposals Application to Implement the New York State Education Department Sanctioned Audit of the Written, Taught, and Tested Curriculum as Required by No Child Left Behind Regulations” provided to Learning Point Associates.

³ Data from this section came from the document, “Request for Proposals Application to Implement the New York State Education Department Sanctioned Audit of the Written, Taught, and Tested Curriculum as Required by No Child Left Behind Regulations” provided to Learning Point Associates.

many initiatives, which are included in the district’s Three Year Academic Achievement Plan. To improve English language arts, the district is using a PK–12 literacy plan using Harcourt/Trophies Grades K-6, McDougall Little “Language for Literature” Grades 7–12, and the Buffalo Literacy Profile Grades K–8; the Reading First program; the CORE Reading support program; Academic Intervention Services reading program at Grades 7 and 8; and cognitive coach partnership with Regional School Support Centers for English language arts and mathematics support teachers. During fall 2005, the district rolled all programs into a new three-year Academic Achievement Plan, which will be used to drive all literacy improvement efforts.

- Increased accountability for student achievement at all levels of the Buffalo schools. This goal is addressed through documented changes that hold staff accountable for supporting schools in increasing student achievement; structured student achievement focus at all curriculum meetings; performance reviews focused on student achievement; and training for all principals, assistant principals, and central office staff.
- A horizontally realigned organizational structure and the alignment of human and fiscal resources to directly meet student needs.
- Increased parental choice of schools programs. This goal includes a completed plan for a system of school choice; an implementation of student academic transfer plans; and an integrated choice plan with a strategic plan and joint schools construction board projects.
- Improved professional development and teacher recruitment. This goal addresses a complete restructuring of the human resources department; certification partners including NYSED, Board of Cooperative Educational Services, eSchool Solutions, Niagara University, Buffalo State University, University of Buffalo, Canisius College, and Buffalo Teachers Federation; and a new hiring system.
- Improved leadership, organization, and operations. This goal includes revised Board of Education policies and procedures; connected central office evaluations to school growth on performance targets; reorganization of the central office staff to simplify reporting lines; and exempt positions for senior employees.
- Improved financial management, reporting, and budgeting systems and improved facilities. This goal includes such initiatives as an improved finance department (a staffed accounting department; financial reporting; a four-year financial planning model; user-friendly budget documents; school staffing profiles); improved facilities through a four-phase construction renovation project totaling approximately \$1 billion over 10 years (phase one and two complete); and improved information technology (meaningful and accurate reporting; uniform and consistent data; linked financial, human resource, and instructional data; and completion of a technology network infrastructure.⁴

⁴ Data from this section came from the document, “Request for Proposals Application to Implement the New York State Education Department Sanctioned Audit of the Written, Taught, and Tested Curriculum as Required by No Child Left Behind Regulations” provided to Learning Point Associates.

District Organization

The Board of Education is comprised of nine members: three at-large and six separate district members. The board appoints the superintendent and sets policy for the district. In addition to the superintendent's office, there are three distinct divisions: Instructional, Finance, and Plant Services/Facilities. The superintendent enters into a contract with a number of exempt employees. All exempt employees report directly to the superintendent or the heads of the various district divisions. The remaining employees are members of nine different collective bargaining units: Buffalo Council of Supervisors and Administrators, Buffalo Federation of Teachers, Professional, Clerical, and Technical Employees Association, Buffalo Educational Support Team, Local 409 AFL-CIO, Local 264 Service Center Employees and Cook Managers, Local 264 Food Service Unit, Transportation Aides, and Substitutes United. In addition to these, tradesmen who are represented by their individual union halls are employed and paid union scale by the district.

District Resources

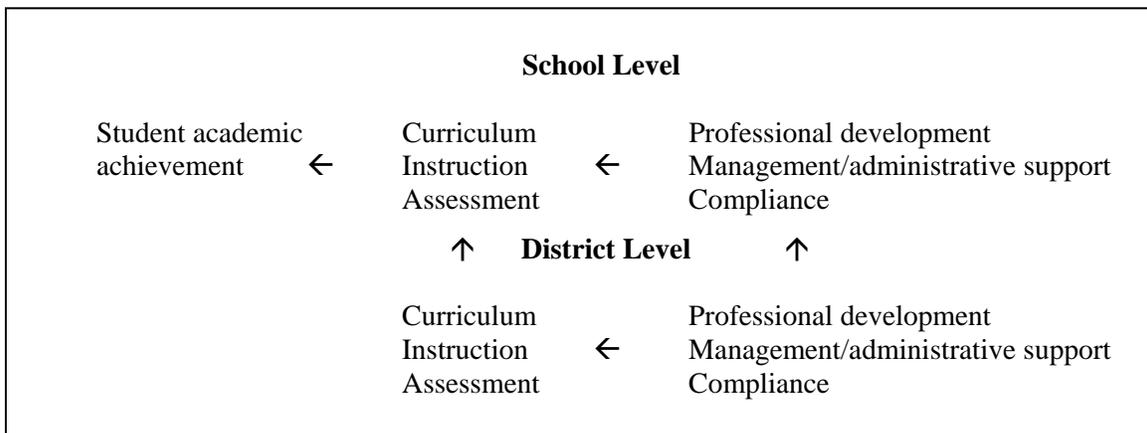
In 2002–03, the general fund district budget was \$447,368,418 with \$56,985,785 allocated as special categorical aid and \$78,761,409 approved as “other” special aid; in 2003–04, the general fund budget was \$460,271,487 with \$62,654,713 allocated in categorical special aid and \$93,067,678 approved as “other” special aid; and in 2004–05, the general fund budget was \$490,850,771 with \$58,490,699 allocated as special aid and \$86,653,151 approved as “other” special aid. Total staffing for 2003–04 indicated a total of 3,066 teachers, 660 other professional staff, and 948 paraprofessionals. Ninety-three percent of 2003–04 core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers while 2 percent of 2003–04 teachers did not hold a valid teaching certificate. About five percent of teachers were indicated as teaching out of certification.

Theory of Action

The theory of action starts from student academic achievement in relation to the New York 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 of each study school. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the school level are supported and influenced by professional development, management and administrative support, and compliance at the school level; and by curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the district level. Finally, school-level professional development, management and administrative support, and compliance are supported and influenced by their district-level counterparts.

The theory of action reviewed in the cointerpretation meeting identified 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. A more detailed explanation is provided in the Preliminary Report in the accompanying Addendum.

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 seven essential questions for the focus of the audit:

1. Are the written, taught, and tested curriculum aligned with one another and with state standards?
2. What supports exist for struggling students, and what evidence is there of the success of these opportunities?
3. Are assessment data used to determine program effectiveness and drive instruction?
4. Does classroom instruction maximize the use of research-based strategies?
5. Is the district professional development focused on the appropriate content areas, and are there strategies in place to translate it into effective classroom practice?
6. Do management and administrative structures and processes support student achievement?
7. Is the district in compliance with local, state, and federal mandates and requirements?

Audit Process Overview

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

Phase 1: Covisioning

The purpose of covisioning is to develop a shared understanding of the theory of action and guiding questions for the audit. Outcomes included agreement on the theory of action and guiding questions, which were included in the Preliminary Report to the district. This phase also included the planning and delivering of communications about the audit to the district's key stakeholders.

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, professional development, management, and compliance. Like the lens of a microscope clicking into place, 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 include student achievement data, *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* (SEC), observations of instruction, semistructured individual interviews and focus groups, and analysis of key district documents.

Student Achievement Data

To provide a broad overview of district performance, student achievement data from the New York State Testing Program assessments were analyzed for Grades 4, 8, and 12 for the past three years. This analysis shows aggregate trends in performance and with NCLB subgroups.

SEC

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

A sample of classrooms in the district was observed using a structured observation system. This observation system was not designed to serve as an evaluation of instruction in the classroom or a comparison of instruction within and across classrooms, but to record exactly what occurs

in the classroom. Observations lasted approximately 45–60 minutes in each classroom during which the observer collected data in 10-minute segments. Observations focused on both student and teacher behaviors as well as particular instructional components.

The data then were analyzed using descriptive statistics in several areas, including classroom demographics, environment, instructional materials, lesson content, purpose, and activities conducted.

Semistructured Individual Interviews and Focus Groups

People who are involved integrally in a district (e.g., students, teachers, district staff) have unique insights into a school system, including its strengths and operational challenges. While data of this type are necessarily subjective—representing the views of the speakers—they are nonetheless highly informative. Rigorously analyzed, these data provide various viewpoints. When this information aligns with more objective information, it can provide rich insights into issues and possible solutions. When this information does not align with more objective information, it can lead to fruitful discussions to identify the cause of the discrepancy.

To tap into stakeholders’ perceptions of issues concerning curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, management, and compliance, the views of teachers, students, principals, district administrators, service providers, and community leaders were gathered through semistructured interviews and focus groups.

In the data interpretation and reporting process (interview and focus-group datasets in the accompanying Addendum), the emphasis is on common themes and divergent cases to exemplify commonly reported characteristics and challenges occurring in the sampled schools. This process encourages sensitivity to emergent patterns, along with irregularities within and across school sites (Delamont, 1992). This process also supports a report that included descriptions rich in context and interpretations, which connected with and extended the district’s contextual knowledge about what they perceive as working and not working across their schools.

Analysis of Key District Documents

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 scoring rubric was developed and used to synthesize document information within each of the six strands of the audit (i.e., curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development [this area had lesser focus in Rochester], management, compliance). The rubric was designed to measure whether each district document contained sufficient information across each strand. The degree to which each respective document addressed the strand was evaluated by two to three content experts to ensure multiple perspectives during the process. Components of each strand were given a 0–3 rating based on its level of coverage within the document. Once ratings were completed, a consensus meeting was held and a report was generated by all reviewers.

Table 1 lists the key data sources and how they were used by the Buffalo City District schools to review the district during the cointerpretation process.

Table 1. Alignment of Data Sources With Key Questions

Guiding Questions	Student Achievement Data	<i>Surveys of Enacted Curriculum</i>	Observations of Instruction	Semistructured Individual Interviews and Focus Groups	Analysis of Key District Documents
1. Are the written, taught, and tested curriculum aligned with one another and with state standards?	X	X	X	X	X
2. What supports exist for struggling students, and what evidence is there of the success of these opportunities?	X		X	X	X
3. Are assessment data used to determine program effectiveness and drive instruction?	X	X		X	X
4. Does classroom instruction maximize the use of research-based strategies?		X	X	X	X
5. Is the district professional development focused on the appropriate content areas, and are there strategies in place to translate it into effective classroom practice?	X	X	X	X	X
6. Do management and administrative structures and processes support student achievement?	X			X	X
7. Is the district in compliance with local, state, and federal mandates and requirements?	X			X	X

Phase 3: Cointerpretation of Findings

The purpose of cointerpretation is to interpret the data collected, which were grouped into three priority areas: professional development; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and management and compliance. This guided the action-planning process for the system.

The initial cointerpretation had several steps, starting with the interpretation of the data, followed by the development of problem statements, and concluding with the identification and prioritization of hypotheses specific to each problem statement. These steps occurred in a two-day meeting with key school and district staff. After the meeting, district staff edited and agreed on the problem statements and hypotheses. The synthesized information will be developed into a presentation for a broader school and community audience. Because this process was critical in identifying the priority areas for district improvement, the detailed approach is outlined here.

Interpret Data

The cointerpretation process began with the study of the individual audit reports (i.e., school analysis report, documentation report, achievement report, district interview data, SEC data, compliance and management report [interview, focus groups, and document], classroom observation report) to do the following:

- Identify data and information related to the assigned team priority area (i.e., professional development; curriculum, instruction, assessment; management and compliance).
- Select key data points or messages.
- Categorize or cluster and agree upon the critical data points or messages.
- Identify patterns and trends across reports.
- Present and defend critical data points or messages.
- Respond to clarifying questions.
- Refine and reach consensus on key findings.

In the cointerpretation meeting in Buffalo, as the three investigative groups (i.e., professional development; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; management and compliance) presented their findings to the whole group, some natural combining and winnowing of results occurred. From various data sources, the participants utilized the method of triangulation to provide support for combining and subsuming some of the findings. The following set of three criteria enabled the participants to examine the prioritized list of findings:

- Does the list respond to the essential questions?
- Does the list respond to the subgroup and content areas identified as not meeting AYP?
- Does the list capture the most important findings?

From this process, which required considerable thought and discussion, key findings emerged. All participants agreed to support key findings in the action-planning meetings with the community, parents, teachers, and students.

Develop Problem Statements

The cointerpretation process continued with the development of problem statements. Teams reviewed the key findings to accomplish the following:

- Generate problem statements by taking the critical data points or messages and identifying problems supported by evidence.
- Prioritize problems using specific criteria, such as those that have the greatest likelihood of increasing student achievement if resolved.
- Reach consensus on the top problems facing the district.

Identify and Prioritize Hypotheses

Identification and prioritization of hypotheses occurred next. In this stage, participants performed the following steps:

- Identify a set of hypotheses supported by evidence in the three priority areas for each identified problem.
- Prioritize hypotheses using specific criteria—such as those over which the district has control—and determine which hypotheses, if addressed, can leverage the most change.
- Reach consensus on a set of hypotheses for each problem statement.

A subset of participants met again after the initial cointerpretation meeting to further define these statements and hypotheses.

Align and Synthesize Cointerpretation Results

The final steps of cointerpretation included refining the problem statements and hypotheses and developing a synthesis of the cointerpretation information (i.e., a district profile that will be presented to a broader group of school and community representatives during action planning).

Phase 4: Action Planning

The last step in the audit process is action planning. This process will result in an action plan focused on the areas identified in the audit. The key actions in the plan will be considered binding recommendations. In Buffalo, the district plans to integrate audit recommendations and subsequent action planning documents into the Buffalo Three-Year Academic Achievement Plan.

The process entails initial goal and strategy setting by a core district team, followed by engaging with a carefully selected stakeholder group that includes district staff, parents, and community

leaders. This group will provide input into the success indicators and potential barriers to success and will serve as champions for the district. Finally, action planning requires detailed planning meetings with groups or departments in the district to determine action steps and associated financial implications and timelines for implementation. Once this process is complete, the audit action plan should be aligned with other district plans.

Reference

Delamont, S. (1992). *Fieldwork in educational settings: Methods, pitfalls, and perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.

Key Findings and Problem Statements

As the three investigative groups (professional development; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; management and compliance) presented their findings to the whole group, some natural combining and winnowing of results occurred. From various data sources, the participants utilized the method of triangulation to provide support for combining and subsuming some of the findings.

A set of three criteria enabled the participants to reexamine the findings and to rate them. The participants carefully reconsidered each one in terms of the following three criteria:

- The degree to which the finding corresponded to the Essential Questions.
- The degree to which the district and community had the control and power to take action upon the finding.
- The likelihood that the action would positively affect student achievement in English language arts.

From this process, which required considerable thought and discussion, 18 key findings emerged. All participants agreed to support the key findings in the action-planning meetings with the community, parents, teachers, and students.

The following section begins with a presentation of district strengths, which emerged from several data sources during the summer and fall of 2005. The district plans to build upon these strengths during the action planning phase and eventual integration of ongoing improvement efforts, which will be reflected in the Three Year Academic Achievement Plan. Following this section, the key problem statements developed during the co-interpretation process are presented. With each of the following problem statements, a description is provided of the context and/or the interpretation of the finding or findings to which the problem statement corresponds. The descriptions are crucial to understanding the intent of the participants and their thinking underlying the finding. A short review of research follows each problem statement and provides support and/or additional information. This research review additionally will serve to begin to inform the action-planning process with additional research also necessitated.

District Strengths

Findings point to several strengths upon which the district can build through the action planning process.

Curriculum and Instruction

- While a large number of core reading programs are currently being implemented in the district, findings suggest that district-adopted programs are research-based, provide instructional content that aligns to state standards, and provide a prescriptive approach that allows them to reach most students.

- While the data indicates that a more specific curriculum with clearer guidelines for implementation are needed to enhance alignment of summer school and regular school curriculum to standards, findings showed that the district provides a number of helpful resources to teachers to support summer school English/Language Arts programs. These resources include a summer school curriculum handbook, a teacher’s guide on how to reduce the curriculum into critical elements and cover these elements in the four-week program, a curriculum folder with handouts, copies of old exams, a weekly course planner, and other materials.
- The district has initiated actions to strategically focus efforts on improving 22 schools that rank highest in terms of district expenditures, and which serve students living in the city’s highest poverty areas. Plans are being developed to ensure that these schools have a strong literacy curriculum, high-quality teachers, and strong school leaders. Actions to achieve these goals include a new, highly scripted and standards- aligned reading program for pre-K through grade 12, the development of learning communities for staff development, and consideration of an extended school day.

Assessment

- According to district interviews and district planning documents (Comprehensive District Plan; Updated District SURR Plan), assessments are used at the district-level to guide district decisions about professional development. In addition, a variety of assessment data is currently available to inform programmatic decisions.

Leadership

- The district superintendent has stated his committed to using audit findings and recommendations to drive improvements through the development and implementation of a comprehensive district plan.
- Efforts are underway in the district to encourage principals to take a larger role in instructional leadership. According to district and school interviews, the district recently instituted a district-wide walk through process to support principals’ instructional leadership processes. Principals reported that these supports, combined with content area professional development and reinstated support from assistant principals, will go a long way toward improving principals’ instructional leadership capabilities.

Management and Compliance

- Despite major financial difficulties, the district has been able to continue funding a major initiative to renovate its school buildings. The ten-year initiative is currently in its third year, with approximately a billion dollars set aside to update and improve facilities, while maintaining their historical structure.
- District and school report cards provided substantial evidence that the district has taken action to meet requirements in (1) Title I, (2) SINI and DINI Year 1-3, (3) professional

development, (4) ensuring that teachers are highly qualified, and (5) ensuring that paraprofessionals are highly qualified. In addition, principals indicated that state compliance requirements were being met at the district level.

Problem Statement 1

The district does not have a rigorous, specific, PK–12 English language arts written, taught, and tested curriculum aligned to New York state standards.

Data sources suggest that the district’s English language arts curriculum needs better articulation within and across grade levels to support higher levels of classroom implementation. District interviews and an extensive curriculum document review reveal that the district’s curriculum and pacing guides are not specific enough to be useful to teachers, and they do not adequately address students’ differentiated needs. In particular, the data sources show that performance indicators and/or benchmarks are broadly defined at each grade level, providing schools and teachers with extensive latitude for interpreting the implementation of these benchmarks at each grade. In addition, the majority of principals and teachers interviewed reports that curriculum implementation is loosely monitored, indicating uncertainty about the extent to which instructional materials and strategies are adequate or consistently implemented. This issue is particularly relevant at the secondary level (Grades 7–12).

The *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* corroborate these findings, showing misalignment between the types of topics and skills that teachers focus on in the classroom as compared to state standards. At the elementary level, teachers report focusing more intensively on phonics, phonemic awareness, and comprehension as compared to state standards, with much less time reserved for teaching writing, listening, and speaking. The *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* information suggests that Buffalo take a further look at instructional time. If teachers are spending more time in these three elements of reading but still focusing on all the elements, students will benefit from this type of instructional focus. Some elements reading might receive more or longer instructional time based on student needs but, not at the cost of excluding any one of the five elements. At the high school level, teachers report emphasizing a broad array of literacy topics, lacking depth of study in specific areas such as critical reading, the writing process, and writing applications. While a low response rate limits generalization across the district, survey results show that those teachers who completed the survey need to spend more time explicitly teaching these areas to improve alignment with state standards.

Hypotheses center on the need to more clearly articulate the district’s written curriculum. With new state standards released in 2005–06, participants report that the current curriculum needs to be rewritten, requiring an in-depth understanding of these standards, more specific performance indicators and benchmarks at each grade level, and updated pacing guides for teachers.

Other issues to be addressed for a new curriculum to be effectively implemented include (1) the need to find sufficient funding to develop a literacy curriculum, (2) stronger administrator and teacher leadership for better monitoring and implementation support, (3) more effective strategies for recruiting and retaining highly qualified and effective teachers, (4) continuous, embedded training to support teachers’ understanding and implementation of the curriculum, and

(5) more effective union negotiations and contracts that enable the district to more effectively impact student achievement.

Research

A fully articulated English language arts curriculum using standards provides a common language and set of expectations for all stakeholders. Curriculum needs both depth and coverage, but teachers need to decide on priorities or the critical standards in order to make the curriculum viable (Marzano, 2003). This process is transparent if there is an explicitly written curriculum that provides clear information on frequent, ongoing goals and expectations for student learning. Using a standards-based curriculum aligns, integrates, and connects assessments, curriculum and instruction (Burger, 2003). According to Linn and Herman, standards alignment uses local content standards to foster the use of multiple assessment sources, describes how classroom instruction and assessment relate to each other, and aligns assessments with learner outcomes (Burger, 2003).

Having a fully articulated curriculum allows grade-level teachers to make decisions about differentiation while they maintain high expectations for students—meeting state standards. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to vary the instructional approaches in relation to the learning style of the students (Hall, 2002). Providing this type of guidance in written curriculum documents supports the model of instruction and can help ensure that benchmarks and goals for students are achieved through the model of differentiation.

A rigorous standards-driven curriculum extends beyond the written components. For implementation, grade-level teachers work together to develop lesson plans and identify qualities of good student work, providing teachers with the opportunity to see the connection between instruction and learning. These processes happen before instruction, requiring teachers to make decisions about instruction during the planning phase (O’Shea, 2005).

Regarding content, the National Reading Panel suggests that a comprehensive reading program includes the elements of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension delivered on a regular basis (National Reading Panel, 2000). Daily classroom instruction must be given in each of these elements in all grade levels. Research has not suggested specific time allotments devoted to each element, so the time on each element varies depending on student grade level, skill level, and ability.

Finally, researchers support the notion of professional development aligned to the curriculum implementation. Tying student learning or achievement to professional development makes it imperative that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the goal (Guskey, 1999). While teachers are learning and trying differentiation instruction, they need support from building- and district-level leaders. Continuous and consistent curriculum implementation requires knowledgeable, skilled, committed, and supportive building- and district-level leaders (Fullan, 2003). This leadership consists of leaders working together to motivate others and monitor curriculum implementation.

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Problem Statement 2

District resources (financial, personnel, materials) and instructional strategies are not targeted at meeting the varied English language arts needs of all students.

Findings and hypothesis from this problem statement focus primarily on district resources, as instructional strategies are addressed in Problem Statement 4. Interviews with district and school staff suggest that the district is constrained by limited resources, which may not be tied to curricular priorities or targeted to meet all students' needs. District administrators report that limited resources have impacted their ability to respond to district needs. The district wants to expand embedded professional development, but the literacy and English language arts coaches who have been hired are unable to meet the needs of all of the schools in the district. Some reported indications of resource allocation challenges include the reported layoff of assistant principals as well as attendance monitors. As a result of this resource strain, the district's response to persistent issues has been piecemeal, targeting only the neediest schools.

Schools' efforts to secure additional resources have influenced fragmentation, as schools compete with one other for district funds and have sought out grant funding on their own to meet student needs. Staff report a great deal of uncertainty about the amount of funds they could plan to receive from year to year as well as the time at which those funds are available. Schools' limited control over these issues makes it difficult to plan, implement, and sustain long-term systemic improvement initiatives. While some interview respondents indicate that the district needs more resources to address English language arts issues, others indicate that improvements could be impacted by changing the district's funding allocation strategies.

According to several participants at cointerpretation, the district culture reinforces a top-down decision-making process that constrains schools' influence and control over fiscal resources. In addition, participants indicate that union contracts may impact the extent to which money is available for programs and initiatives focused on improving English language arts achievement.

Research

Research indicates that current resources can and must be used better if current educational reform goals are to be attained. But decision making must be collaborative; "administrators, principals, and teachers [must] play the key roles in determining how to use current educational resources better" (Odden & Archibald, 2001, p. 1). Rosenholtz (1991) points out that staff members work more successfully, resourcefully, and steadily when they work together in a group. The resulting efforts, when compared to their inputs, can only help the overall product.

In order for a broader participation in the reallocation of resources, districts need to develop their own leadership capacity but also that of its schools as well. Two strategies that can provide the necessary leadership are "learning together (capacity building) and involving people early in the process of decision making as a way to build trust and credibility (grassroots democratic participation)" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 140). Leadership, according to Lambert (1998), is about "learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and

assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings” (pp.5–6).

There also is substantial support in the Effective Schools research that recommends that district leaders encourage and support school-based management and share decision making regarding budget, staffing, and curriculum with school leaders (Cotton, 1999).

The implementation of these strategies requires district administrators to model certain leadership behaviors as follows:

- “District administrators model, develop, and support broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership.
- Shared vision results in districtwide program coherence.
- An inquiry-based accountability system informs decision making and practice at classroom, school, and district levels.
- Organizational relationships involve high district engagement and low bureaucratization.
- During professional selection and development, administrators recruit and educate learners and leaders in partnership with schools.
- Student achievement and development are high or steadily improving in all schools, with equitable outcomes for all students” (Lambert, 2003, p. 81).

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Problem Statement 3

Data are not used effectively to monitor program implementation and drive English language arts instruction for *all* students.

A review of key district documents provided evidence that the district encourages the use of test data to inform instruction. While guidance to use district assessment data is provided, district and school interviews suggest that district policy and constrained resources severely limits the impact of such guidance. For instance, professional development for teachers is currently voluntary for teachers, unless it is provided during the regular school day. Assistant principals, instructional coaches, and other key support positions have been cut, which has prevented data training and support from occurring on a regular basis.

No evidence was available to suggest alignment exists between the written curriculum and the multiple assessment instruments that the district administers and uses. According to school interviews, the majority of teachers and principals report little confidence that standards, assessments, and classroom practices are aligned. While teachers report that they administer a number of formal state and district assessments, they indicate that the state data are not available to them until the following year. Principals indicate that the data they received from the district are not always reported in a meaningful or user-friendly way. As a result, the data that schools use to make decisions varies widely, and in some schools, they are reportedly not used systematically to monitor program implementation or to inform instruction in the classroom.

Research

Research supports that creating and sustaining a data-driven decision-making culture is a challenge in many districts and schools (Noyce, Perda, & Traver, 2000). Schools and districts find it difficult to make data accessible and allocate time to allow staffs to look at them in deep and meaningful ways. Districts that decide to use a data-driven model for school improvement need to strategically plan the process and resources. A model of continuous improvement using data allows schools to examine their progress on a regular basis (Deligiannis, 2004). Data-driven systems include setting a vision, collecting and analyzing data to determine strengths and challenge areas, action planning, and assessing progress on a regular basis (Deligiannis, 2004).

In order for assessment data to be used effectively to monitor program implementation and drive instructional decision making, a systemic model needs to be in place within the school district that aligns curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The importance of this alignment can be traced back to Ralph Tyler (1949), when he proposed the following four basic principles of curriculum and instruction:

- What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Since that time, numerous models have been proposed to accomplish this alignment. O’Shea (2005) provides instruction to teachers as well as to administrators to guide them to standards achievement in his Standards Achievement Planning Cycle. In this model, faculty and administrators identify the standards to be addressed, analyze the selected standards and frameworks, describe student performance or products, select and sequence learning activities, and evaluate student performance and products. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) propose a curriculum design model that has three stages: identifying desired results, planning learning experiences, and determining acceptable evidence. Marzano and Kendall (1996) propose a model in which districts must identify the source of standards, articulate benchmarks, determine the means of assessment, develop methods of reporting on student progress, and clarify who will be accountable. In all three models, faculty and administrators work together in a collaborative environment to identify what students need to know and be able to do, create assessments, decide on learning experiences, and use data to inform instructional decisions.

Other researchers call attention to additional factors that must be taken into consideration when designing a data-driven monitoring system. Stiggins (1994) clarifies the roles and responsibilities of those assessing and provides an extensive study of assessment methods and an analysis of assessment uses. Schmoker (1999) describes how results can be used to continuously lead to school improvement, and Deligiannis (2004) provides a review of the literature on using data to inform school improvement. The Committee on the Foundations of Assessment (2001) suggests a cognition and learning model should be the foundation for the design of assessments. This model should include the most current information about how students learn and represent the knowledge gained. Use of this model, according to the Committee, can bring cohesion to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. They also discuss the use of informational technologies that can be used to remove some of the constraints that have limited assessment practice in the past.

Additional elements that need to be considered in the program implementation include scheduling collaborative planning time, aligning curriculum guides with standards, adding pacing information to guides, choosing curricular materials, clarifying the principal’s role, supervising and sustaining the cycle, evaluating the achievement of standards, and creating effective professional development for teachers and leaders (O’Shea, 2005). Some researchers even discuss how data can be organized in order to promote faculty and administrator reflection (Dougherty, 2001; Foriska, 1998; Marzano & Kendall, 1996; Committee on the Foundations of Assessment, 2001; O’Shea, 2005).

Implicit within the successful use of data by schools is some semblance of assessment literacy by all users of the data. Stiggins (1994) describes sound classroom assessments as those that stem from a clear and appropriate target and examine student work based on that target, using an appropriate assessment. Deligiannis (2004) found in his review of data use that schools that use data effectively share several characteristics as follows:

- They ask the right questions before gathering data.
- They gather a wide variety of data.
- The most effective performance data are taken from locally developed assessments.
- They operate in a model of longitudinal, continuous improvement.

- They work with data and make decisions collaboratively, across, and between levels.
- They have support from the district, leadership, teachers, and community

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Problem Statement 4

District English language arts instruction does not maximize the use of research-based strategies.

A review of key district documents provides limited evidence to suggest that the district adequately supports consistent implementation of scientifically based instruction through (1) materials and resources available to teachers to guide classroom instruction or (2) detailed descriptions of available district-sponsored professional development offerings to promote research-based instruction (see Problem Statements 4 and 5 for more information). As stated in

Problem Statement 1, the written curriculum lacks the specificity needed for teachers to consistently implement the curriculum on a daily basis, and few resources and materials (e.g., sample lesson plans, instructional guides) are available to teachers to support and guide research-based instructional strategies.

Interviews revealed a perception that training on the district curriculum and English language arts materials is not perceived as robust at the primary level. In addition, while teachers report implementing a variety of instructional strategies in an effort to provide flexible grouping and targeted instruction classroom observations during summer school and the regular school year, both showed that the majority of teachers' instruction occurs in whole groups.

Hypotheses center around (1) the lack of instructional time to adequately implement research-based strategies, (2) the need for more consistent and effective principal monitoring, (3) inadequate professional development for teachers (see Problem Statement 6), and (4) a lack of professional "sharing" and collaboration among schools and teachers. Participants report that class sessions and school days need to be lengthened for teachers to have enough time to adequately cover the curriculum. In addition, principals need more time in their schools with district professional development and materials (e.g., monitoring protocols) to ensure that they can monitor instruction and effectively support teachers. Finally, participants suggest finding ways to encourage the transition from a culture of isolation to one that promotes idea sharing and collaboration among teachers.

Research

The value of a fully articulated English language arts curriculum is discussed in Problem Statement 1. Once this has been developed, implemented teachers will have common expectations for all stakeholders. This will allow all stakeholders to have common research-based practices on which to focus. In order to focus on research-based instructional strategies, one must first look at the reading research.

At the core of reading instruction lies comprehension. Reading comprehension is the construction of the meaning from a series of exchanges between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2005). This process integrates complex skills and cannot be understood without first inspecting the role of vocabulary learning and instruction. In order to build comprehension, a reader needs to use interactive strategic processes during reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). The National Reading Panel looked distinctly at two areas of research: text comprehension instruction and vocabulary instruction. Results of the vocabulary research showed the need for direct instruction, multiple and repetitive exposure to vocabulary items, and multiple instructional methods.

This scientifically based research identified eight kinds of comprehension strategies that improve comprehension: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, story structure, question answering, question generating, summarization, and multiple-strategy instruction. Once teachers understand that readers use multiple strategies to build comprehension, teaching more than one strategy allows readers to use the strategies flexibly during the reading process.

In addition to examining comprehension, the panel looked for research on effective instructional methods. A strong body of research based best practices for English language arts exists and can be taught (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1996). The most effective instructional methods require teacher explanation, modeling, guided practices, and discussion throughout the process. During this process, students are asked to reflect on the use and effectiveness of the strategy while construction meaning (Roller et al., 1990).

Implementation of systemic, aligned, research-based instructional strategies requires a professional development plan with evaluation of effectiveness. Research also supports the need to have accountability for professional development results. Reports suggest that effective professional development models have staff, schools, and districts working together to plan professional development. Schools or districts need to start with the end result in mind. By tying student learning or achievement to professional development, it is imperative that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the goal (Guskey, 2000).

Many successful models of job-embedded professional development exist. Characteristics of these models include understanding of the coordination of efforts to improve student achievement, fostering teacher participation in formal and informal professional communities, developing a caring attitude, and fostering lifelong learning (Langer, 2002). These processes allow schools to identify problems or issues, set high standards, brainstorm suggestions, analyze options, and make a commitment to change (Sparks, 2002).

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Problem Statement 5

There is a lack of coordination among departments and schools in the design, delivery, and monitoring of professional development.

At the time this audit was conducted (summer/fall, 2005), multiple data sources provided little evidence to suggest that the district encourages (1) instructional leadership, (2) professional reflection, and (3) professional collaboration. For instance, SEC results show that 69 percent (n=22 of 32) of teachers either “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never” report that the professional development they received was designed to support the school’s improvement plan. Seventy-two percent (n=23 of 32) of teachers indicate that the professional development they received was “sometimes” or “rarely” aligned with their personal goals. District and school interviews similarly support these statements and the need for professional development that is focused on instructional objectives and relevant to teachers. In addition, interview results reveal that school staff was often uncertain about whether and under what conditions district professional development sessions were mandatory.

In regard to instructional leadership, district administrators report that the district is attempting to improve the instructional leadership capacity of the principals. For example, the district recently instituted a districtwide walk-through process. One administrator reported that principals are becoming increasingly comfortable giving teachers feedback on the instructional strategies observed in the classroom. Several administrators indicate the need to obtain professional development in English language arts and other content areas they are overseeing to effectively monitor and mentor the teachers in their schools. However, the loss of many of the assistant principals in the district last summer makes this more challenging. The district is limiting the times the principal can be asked to leave the school building for training to compensate for the lost administrators. Further, with principals picking up much of the workload of the assistant principals, there is less time to be in the classroom and meeting with teachers to improve instruction.

Data from the *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* suggest that professional development across the district is inconsistent and not supported by ongoing and embedded activities. At the school level, 22 percent of teachers (n=7 of 32) indicate that follow-up activities were “often” provided after professional development sessions that clearly related to what they learned. Thirty-one percent report that professional development opportunities they received in the last 12 months built on what they learned in previous professional development activities. In addition, limited resources have made it difficult to sustain professional development initiatives. Several administrators discussed the lack of embedded professional development in the schools, including coaches and lead teachers who could work with teachers to implement new strategies aimed at meeting student needs.

Participant hypotheses regarding these issues are similar to those that emerged regarding curriculum implementation. Participants in cointerpretation report that (1) misaligned departmental goals and (2) separate “pots” of money to fund school curriculum and district professional development influence the disconnect between the district’s curriculum expectations and professional development to support implementation.

Research

Research indicates that professional development efforts are effective at changing instructional practice and impacting student achievement when the professional development is tied intricately to the system's instructional goals and areas of greatest need (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Guskey, 2000). In prioritizing school system's instructional goals and areas of greatest need, content should focus on (a) subject matter knowledge, and (b) teaching strategies/learning theories.

Alignment of professional development objectives, content, and methods to (a) the district's written curriculum, (b) state standards, (c) assessments, (d) instructional performance objectives, and (e) identified areas of student need is, according to Desimone et al. (2002), a principle prerequisite to educational reform and improvement. Explicit alignment of all these areas will ensure that the professional development teachers receive will better provide equal access to the full written curriculum across the district (Webb, 1997).

Strong professional development ensures that participants are actively engaged in learning (Garet, Porter, DeSimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lieberman, 1996; Richardson, 1994). Typical in-service sessions have shown to produce little to no gain in instructional change (Steiner, 2004; Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). However, alternative formats of professional development typically embedded within teachers' regular work and meeting schedules have shown to produce a stronger effect (Peery, 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Corcoran, 1995). Possibilities of alternative formats—outside of coaching, which the district has determined is not financially feasible at all school sites at this time—include study groups, mentoring, peer observations, examinations of student work, critical friends groups, and lesson study.

Professional development also needs to be sustained over time (Steiner, 2004). In many ways, monitoring practices and accountability measures assist in providing duration to learning as the topics of professional development are held alive by conversations and work that utilizes the new knowledge.

Successful professional development programs utilize available resources through clear organizational structures and specific guidelines for teachers, administrators, and staff developers (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The lack of consistency across a school system has been noted in the literature as a significant cause for teachers' loss of interest in new professional development opportunities (Grant, Peterson, & Schojgreen-Downer, 1996). In addition to maintaining a consistent vision and set of standards, organizational structures that enhance professional development include evaluations tied to learning from professional development, structures for timely feedback, and venues for follow-up. Strong leadership is a central component to any professional development plan (Berry, Turchi, Johnson, Hare, Owens, & Clements, 2003).

Monitoring of professional development is a significant part of a new plan's success. Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore (1988) recommend benchmarks for the implementation and delivery of professional development. Accountability of professional development includes assessing the effectiveness of the actual activities (Guskey, 2000), as well as keeping the conversations of the

training alive through feedback, observation, and other accountability measures (Desimone et al., 2002). Principals are key in this process. The district notes that principals may not have the time or content knowledge to effectively monitor the instructional effects of professional development. However, instructional leadership must be a priority for a school in the process of rigorous improvement. Although the principal does not need to be the only figure in the monitoring of professional development and its instructional effects, the principal needs to set the standard of continued progress toward higher student achievement and improved instructional practices.

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Problem Statement 6

Professional development is not aligned to student academic needs and achievement goals.

According to district and school administrators, district money for professional development is sent to each school, which decides what professional development is needed. Individual grants received by schools also are used to fund professional development, which can vary from school to school and from year to year. As a result of this structure, the professional development is not aligned to the district goals or curriculum. In addition, school-level interviews indicate the heavy reliance on grant-related funds to support school-based professional development initiatives has led to inconsistent and unstable professional development services. While teachers in some schools indicate that special programs (e.g., America's Choice, Reading First) offered high-quality school-based support, teachers in other schools reportedly did not receive the professional development support they needed.

Hypotheses to explain this problem statement shed light on the complexities involved in providing and improving professional development (see Problem Statement 5). According to cointerpretation participants, the district relies on grant funding due to the fact that district funds alone are limited and insufficient to adequately support professional development. Professional development funding from external (e.g., grants) sources is often short term, making it difficult for the district to know what schools are actually doing in regard to professional development.

The current collective bargaining agreement states that professional development must be voluntary, unless it is offered during teachers' working days. Finding available funds to pay expenses and secure substitute teachers and other resources associated with in-school professional development is difficult. When high percentages of teachers do not attend voluntary professional development and resources may not be available to offer in-school professional development, the district finds it difficult to implement districtwide professional development programs that impact instruction. Participants also indicate that one reason teachers do not attend voluntary professional development is because the lack of support personnel places extra burdens on them and limits the time they have to attend these sessions.

Research

Hawley and Valli (1999) synthesize significant research on professional development and conclude that programs that make a difference in student achievement have a thorough focus on

areas of student need as identified by data. In designing a professional development plan, as discussed in Problem Statement 5, analysis of student achievement data—as well as the instructional practices of teachers in the district and content standards—must be a central component to the process. All professional development endeavors must be directed toward improving student achievement and aligned to the written curriculum. Full alignment of professional development to curriculum, standards, assessment, and identified student needs will help the district focus on the factors necessary for improving student achievement (Webb, 1997). Additionally, Cohen and Hill (2001) suggest that alignment of professional development to curriculum and assessment helps to drive instructional reform efforts.

While the impetus for modifying a systemwide professional development program ideally emerges from the central office, teacher involvement in the planning *process* is critical for teacher buy-in, needs assessment, and format (Bodilly, Keltner, Purnell, Reichardt, & Schuyler, 1998; Clark, 1992). Without teacher buy-in, the plan will not have the sustainability it needs to create significant growth over a multiyear period.

However, significant research *does* indicate that district cohesiveness in professional development is important for successful school-based implementation. For example, districts can set a strong vision and high standards for professional development for all school sites (Massell, 1998; Spillane, 1996). Districts can lead schools through reform processes with clearly articulated professional development goals that all schools within a district would be expected to meet (O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Furthermore, if the momentum starts with the district—and the district holds all schools equally accountable to the reform plan—that plan will have a greater chance of permanency (Fullan, 1993).

In regard to the district's need to find the time for professional development—and not infringing on contractual obligations with teachers—many successful models of job-embedded professional development exist. Characteristics of these models include the undertaking of the coordination of efforts to improve student achievement, foster teacher participation in formal and informal professional communities, develop a caring attitude, and foster lifelong learning (Langer, 2002). These processes allow schools to identify problems/issues, set high standards, brainstorm suggestions, analyze options, and make a commitment to change (Sparks, 2002). Job-embedded professional development models include coaching, study groups, mentoring, peer observations, examinations of student work, critical friends groups, and lesson study.

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Problem Statement 7

Finance and human resource issues are impacting student achievement in English language arts.

According to district and school interviews, the district's financial issues are negatively impacting the district climate. A state control board has taken over Buffalo's finances and frozen the salaries of all city employees, including teachers. Additionally, many district employees—including assistant principals, librarians, and attendance monitors—have been laid off in the last year. The union is currently in negotiations with the district over the health insurance benefits offered employees. Administrators report that all of these factors impact how teachers and other staff feel about working in the district. It has been increasingly difficult to keep qualified

teachers from taking positions in neighboring districts where they will earn more money and see their salaries increase quickly.

School-level interviews suggest that English language arts programs are in constant flux and teachers do not perceive clear direction from the district. Principals and teachers report that the district changes programs frequently, which keeps many from buying into English language arts programs that will likely not be sustained over time. School staff also indicate the need for better communication between the district and schools to promote continuity within and across schools.

Hypotheses center on the district's unclear procedures. Participants at cointerpretation meetings indicate that district procedures are not clear to all stakeholders, particularly those working in the schools. Other root causes include (1) a lack of leadership and monitoring by school leaders and the control office (2) unclear district policies and procedures (3) the lack of alignment between state and district policies and budget allocations (4) the lack of alignment between district policies, programs, and student achievement (5) a lack of principal's attention on instruction and (6) an absence of a collaborative decision-making structure at the district and school levels.

Research

It is important to recognize that student achievement is a means of measuring school performance (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Managing the resources in a way that supports student improvement is a key element of success in school reform (Odden & Clune, 1995). Although some have argued for dramatic reform in the way schools are financed (Odden & Clune, 1998), it is possible to make the structural changes necessary to improve student performance within the prevailing system of finance (Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1994).

References

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Problem Statement 8

Students from NCLB subgroups, particularly students with disabilities and students learning English as an additional language, obtain lower scores in NCLB state-mandated language arts testing than their peers.

District documents and interviews reveal that additional attention is needed for students with disabilities and students learning English as an additional language, and for their teachers. Documents indicate that district policies and plans do not consistently mention or include students with unique needs nor delineate how equal access and opportunities are provided. In addition, student achievement scores for students with disabilities and students learning English as an additional language are lower than would be expected.

Cointerpretation meeting participants hypothesized that teachers lack a shared priority for student achievement for *all* and that teachers often held low expectations for students with unique needs. Limited knowledge about students' specific needs as related to their disability, second language acquisition status, and home cultures also was hypothesized as a contributing factor to low achievement.

Following the coarticulation meeting, additional state and district documents and interviews were conducted to examine this problem statement at a deeper level. As the students are members of the NCLB "subpopulations," extensive data are available and provide invaluable information for understanding the current situation and for future action planning.

New York state assessment results show that school performance levels in English language arts remain below average annual progress targets in several Buffalo schools. District-level assessment trends show that gaps continue to exist between overall student performance and subgroup performance for (1) male students, (2) students with disabilities, (3) black students, (4) Hispanic students, (5) economically disadvantaged students, and (6) limited English proficient students.

Students With Disabilities. In particular, state assessment results show the largest percentage point differences exist between students with disabilities and the overall school population. A review of key district documents revealed that special education planning has specifically focused on equal access and opportunity for all students, and trends among students with disabilities show significant increases from 2003 to 2005. However, test results remain between 20 percent to 42 percent below the total percent of students meeting or exceeding standards at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels.

Participation rates in the state testing for students with disabilities were at 95 percent or higher for years 2002–03 and 2003–04, but at the middle school level, the rates were below 95 percent for mathematics both years and for English language arts in 2002–03. However, the most recent data available demonstrates an increase of participation rates in 2003–04 with all rates more than 95 percent except for middle-level mathematics at 93 percent. Graduation rates are of concern with a rate of 21 percent and 22 percent for students with disabilities for 2002 and 2003 respectively, while students in general education graduated at rates of 66 percent and 71 percent.

According to the “The New York State School Report Card Fiscal Accountability Supplement” for the 2002-03 school year (the latest year for which data are available), Buffalo City School District spent \$13,925 per student in special education while similar district groups spent \$16,180, with the state average at \$17,818. Thus, Buffalo spent 14 percent less than similar districts and 22 percent less than the state average per student with a disability.

Regarding placements or inclusion, district staff report a concerted effort the past four to five years toward increasing the amount of time students spend in general education classrooms. Staff mentioned the recognition of the need for general education and special education teachers to work together collaboratively. Information regarding steps taken to encourage collaboration (e.g., common planning time) or the success of the collaboration were not provided. In addition, the latest available data (“New York State School Report Card Information about Students with Disabilities” as of December 1, 2003) reveal that the statewide percentage of students with disabilities spending more than 60 percent of their time outside regular classrooms was 27 percent. In Buffalo, that number was 19 percent. The statewide percentage of students with disabilities spending between 21 and 60 percent of their time outside regular classrooms was 12 percent; in Buffalo, 17 percent. And the percentage of students with disabilities statewide in separate settings was 6.6 percent; in Buffalo, 9.3 percent. More current data would be useful to determine if Buffalo’s goal to increase the number of students and the amount of time that those students with disabilities spend in regular classrooms is being met.

Schools throughout the district have Instructional Support Service Teams but according to district interviews they vary greatly in their effectiveness. Variability occurs in the principal’s and team members’ investment and belief in the process of working with teachers to investigate why a student is struggling and in exploring instructional options other than enrollment in special education.

Students Learning English as an Additional Language. Performance among LEP students has emerged as needing particular attention. Documents provided by the district showed minimal evidence that district planning has focused on equal access and opportunities for LEP students. The percent of LEP students who meet or exceed standards increased substantially from 2003 to 2005 at the elementary level (Grade 4 results). While these results are encouraging, it is important to understand that the large percentage point change is confounded by the fact that such a large increase in the population of LEP students occurred during the three years. This change in the population makes it difficult to interpret the true significance of the increase.

In addition, 2005 results in Grade 4 showed that the percentage of LEP students meeting or exceeding standards was two points higher than the overall student population. LEP students meeting or exceeding standards at the middle school level showed significant increases from 2003 to 2005, but results at those levels remain eight points below overall student English language arts performance. At the high school, the percent of LEP students meeting or exceeding standards was 20 points below the overall student population.

According to the “Overview of District Performance in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Analysis of Student Subgroup Performance” published in 2005, the percentage of students earning a local diploma by August 2002 was 60 percent for all students and 52

percent for LEP students. The percentages by August 2003 were 64 percent for all students and 47 percent for LEP students. This is a significant discrepancy.

The district has a large Somali population currently enrolled in general education classrooms and receiving ESL services. Because of the multiple, high-level needs of this group in terms of language, cultural orientation, and socialization, the district is struggling to determine the best ways to help these students. Somali students attend content-area classes with minimal assistance in their native language. Since generally the students have no prior education, the ESL staff voiced concern that this placement is not an appropriate educational setting for these students.

The staff of the bilingual/ESL program is working closely with the framers of the Three-Year Academic Achievement Plan to ensure that their program objectives are (a) aligned with the district's initiatives and (b) meet the needs of students in bilingual and ESL programs (*Source*: District interviews).

Hypotheses developed by the participants included that the district has not provided teachers with knowledge about federal laws or about district and school policies and procedures concerning students with disabilities and students learning English as an additional language. Participants also suggested that teachers are unaware of their students' cultures, in terms of race, language, and economics; how culture impacts students learning; and the teachers' role in making adjustments to provide appropriate learning environment for their students. In addition, participants cited lack of support for teachers in addressing the educational needs of students with unique needs. Other hypotheses included (1) the need to raise expectations for all students, including those in all subgroups, (2) changing the way in which money is distributed to schools, and (3) better use of formative data to monitor students' English language arts progress and adjust instruction.

Research

A similar problem statement to Buffalo's is appropriate for almost every school district in the United States and corresponds to a major intent of NCLB—to draw attention to and address the needs of students learning English as an additional language. In *No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference 2002*, the government notes that “a congressionally mandated study found that these [limited English proficient and immigrant] students receive lower grades, are judge by their teachers to have lower academic abilities, and score below their classmates on standardized tests of reading and math” (p. 91). Buffalo and most other districts have found these to be true in the analysis of student achievement data. Similarly the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) addresses the needs for students with disabilities—another subgroup that historically has not received adequate attention and resources.

As noted by Buffalo City School District, teachers, principals, and district-level administrators need information in many areas as they strive to serve the subpopulations of NCLB. With the student population becoming diverse and dissimilar to their teachers during the last 10 to 15 years (Padolsky, 2002), many teachers find themselves without university coursework or classroom experience in teaching learners with unique needs. With mainstreaming and immersion of students with disabilities, “mainstream classroom teachers have an essential role to

play in the(ir) education” (Hamayan, 1990, p.1). The student population has changed and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future; teachers, schools, and districts need to respond to those changes.

As noted as a hypothesis, teachers’ and students’ cultures, backgrounds, and histories in Buffalo are less likely to be similar than in previous years. While students increasingly represent cultures that are nonwhite, non-middle class, and non-English speaking, their teachers remain predominately white, middle-class, native English speakers. The National Center for Education Statistics (2004a, 2004b) reports that for the years 1999–2000 (the most recent data available) 32 percent of children ages 5 to 17 were nonwhite, while only 19 percent of teachers were nonwhite. Characteristics of various cultures are well studied and now available for teachers to examine and consider in creating environments and instructional practices that more closely align to the comfort level and the needs of their students (Sowers, 2004).

References

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Recommendations for Action Planning

Recommendation 1

Refocus district planning, budgeting, and organizational structures to foster accountability for student achievement at all levels. (Problem Statements 2, 7, 8)

The Buffalo superintendent has stated his commitment to using audit findings to drive comprehensive district improvement. Toward this end, action planning for Buffalo will be focused on strengthening the Three-Year Academic Achievement Plan. Efforts are under way to encourage instructional leadership on behalf of principals. This can be built upon for broader inclusion of school leaders in the planning and budgeting process through utilizing some of the strategies identified in the research base in Problem Statement 2.

A broad-based planning process should be fully implemented. Developing and implementing a predictable cycle for planning activities will allow stakeholders to participate fully in these important processes. It is crucial that this planning cycle, especially budget development activities, provide for staff and public involvement at the district and school level. A regular planning cycle also will help Buffalo schools to anticipate and clarify data needs.

In establishing a budget-planning cycle, the following steps are suggested:

- Identifying goals, objectives, and expenditures for individual district office operating units and individual schools.
- Budgeting funds from all sources, including both general fund and grants, in a timely way and in aggregate, to the district offices for district results and to the schools for school results.
- Preparing and allocating funds for schools on projected enrollment and amending allocations in a timely way based on actual enrollment.
- Identifying and communicating to the person responsible the requirements for and results expected from grant expenditures prior to any expenditure being made.
- Establishing a financial management reporting system that provides timely and accurate information for all budget holders, enabling oversight and ongoing monitoring of both revenues and expenditures.
- Identifying priorities for the improvement of achievement within each school and allocating funds directly to the schools to support them.
- Scheduling reports to the Board of Education on budget revenues and expenditures at least four times per year.

The following two guiding principles are reflected in this recommendation:

- District funds should be spent to support clearly established district goals and objectives.

- The allocation of funds between individual central offices and individual schools should be based on the responsibility for achieving these goals and objectives that have been assigned to each.

Another key component of this recommendation is to ensure that each individual is aware of direct supervision, responsibility for results, and authority for his/her position. It is especially important that delineation of results assigned to schools and central office is articulated. At the time of the audit, the organizational structure results in a number of central office authorities operating in isolated environments while exercising authority over the schools. The cumulative impact of these individual decisions may have destabilized the role of the principal as the educational leader of the school, responsible for its outcomes. Many activities are central-office directed. Some examples are the requirement to attend professional development activities during the school day at the direction of different central office staff, placement of staff in schools by Human Resources and directors, and evaluation of school staff by directors.

The absence of a clear line of accountability results in multiple requests of schools and conflicting guidelines. Schools are asked for information that the district has in its possession. Because a number of the requests are not known beforehand in a scheduled way, the schools have to generate information by going back to source documents. In general, the schools do not perceive that many of the district officer personnel possess a service-to-schools orientation.

In addition, written role and responsibility statements for all administrative positions will provide transparency and clarity across the district. Role and responsibility statements are not job descriptions, which merely describe how jobs are to be performed and what work is to be done. Instead, they delineate publicly the results for which the incumbent is responsible. Written statements serve to clarify each individual's commitment to accountability for results. These role and responsibility statements could be established for all departments, but could especially address needed clarification of responsibility for results in the following:

- Department of Student Support Services
- Special Education
- Community Superintendents
- Directors of various departments
- Human Resources
- Grants
- Title I
- Technology
- Testing and Assessment
- Facilities

Recommendation 2

Build collaborative systems consistently across the district and within the schools to ensure that teachers and administrators are involved in analyzing student achievement data, revising curriculum, selecting appropriate instructional strategies, evaluating program success, making needed changes to written curriculum, and implementing a professional development plan. (Problem Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

Several problem statements indicate that the district culture reinforces a top-down decision-making process that strains relationships across the district. Participants suggested initiatives that encouraged communication and collaboration between schools and the central office and within departments at the central office. These themes of collaboration should extend from planning (Recommendation 1) into the classroom. A key mechanism to build collaboration among teachers and administrators is professional development.

A starting point for this is the establishment of a district committee made up of teachers and administrators who set district goals or priorities for staff development. These goals may focus on the key concerns identified in the problem statements. Some possible structures for implementing collaborative structures include building school learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), schoolwide study groups, and the Lesson Study model (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). These all effectively focus learning while building collegiality, and they allow groups to work cooperatively as they learn together over time. Furthermore, they can incorporate data analysis, curriculum development, and implementing instructional strategies.

References

- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
- Walpole, S. & McKenna, M. C. (2004). *The literacy coach's handbook: A guide to research-based practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Recommendation 3

Implement a clear, articulated curriculum that all teachers will use to guide instruction. The curriculum will be aligned to the most recent state standards and will include specific grade-level benchmarks and performance indicators that specify concepts, knowledge, and skills to be learned, and be articulated carefully across and between grade levels and be explicit so that it can be used to make daily instructional decisions. (Problem Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8)

There are multiple indications that the district's English language arts curriculum has some areas for improvement: inadequate articulation within and across grade levels, a lack of specificity that provides limited direction for teachers in the classroom, and an inadequate monitoring system to ensure implementation.

To redress these areas of deficiency, the district should implement a comprehensive and articulated English language arts curriculum from K–12. A fully articulated curriculum would be (1) standards based, (2) have benchmarks, (3) be based on scientific reading research, and (4) include aligned assessments to monitor student progress, instructional practices, and programs.

Many researchers support the notion of a standards-based curriculum. Using standards will provide a common language and set of expectations for all stakeholders and will ensure alignment to state priorities and assessments. Using a standards-based curriculum aligns, integrates, and connects assessments, curriculum, and instruction (Burger, 2003).

A strong standards-based curriculum would include the following:

- State learning standards.
- Benchmarks and performance indicators by grade level that break down the standards into reasonable expectations for acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to reach the standards.
- Curriculum guides or maps that translate the standards, benchmarks, and performance indicators into course, unit, and lesson curriculum standards that represent instruction at the classroom level.
- Assessments, both formative and summative, that measure student mastery of the benchmarks and standards.

Some other considerations include the following:

- Articulation of the curriculum across and within grade levels. This was formerly known as scope and sequence but still holds true for good design. The curriculum could sequence learning across grade levels from K–12, increasing the complexity of the knowledge and skills students are to learn. It also could specify the extent of coverage and depth of instruction in key areas of learning at each grade level. Specifically for English language arts curriculum, cross references to other subjects at the same grade level would be helpful.
- Differentiation of the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students.
- Some flexibility in the design so that teachers still have some latitude to adjust for student needs.
- A system for monitoring implementation of the intended curriculum.
- A process for curriculum revision based on student achievement.

Regarding the development and implementation of this curriculum, we suggest that the district adopt a collaborative model (as described in the research in Recommendation 2) for the design and implementation. There are many excellent models available from which a curriculum team could choose, but whichever model is chosen, it should become the required model for all curriculum design within the district. A common language would foster a common understanding. Some suggested texts that might be helpful include the following:

- *Succeeding With Standards: Linking Curriculum, Assessment, and Action Planning*, by Judy F. Carr and Douglas E. Harris, published in 2001 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). This text provides a comprehensive review of how to translate standards into curriculum.
- *Restructuring Around Standards: A Practitioner's Guide to Design and Implementation*, by Terry J. Foriska, published in 1998 by Corwin Press. This text presents a step-by-step guide to designing curriculum around standards.
- *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum & Assessment K–12*, by Heidi Hayes Jacobs, published in 1997 by ASCD. This text presents an excellent guide for creating curriculum maps for courses of study.
- *From Standards to Success: A Guide for School Leaders*, by Mark R. O'Shea, published in 2005 by ASCD. This text presents a Standards Achievement Planning Cycle.
- *Understanding by Design* (2nd expanded edition), by Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, published in 2005 by ASCD. This text presents an excellent but rigorous model for unit design.

References

Burger, D. (2003). *Using standards-led policy to align assessment and accountability systems*. PREL Briefing Paper. Honolulu, HI: Regional Educational Laboratory at Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.

Recommendation 4

Create and implement a plan promoting systemic use of selected research-based instructional strategies that focus on differentiation of instruction. (Problem Statements 4, 5, 6)

Problem Statement 4 indicates that the instructional quality in the school district is widely varied, and that the secondary instruction is—as a whole—not as strong as elementary instruction. At all levels, the data indicate teachers generally do not use research-based instructional strategies at a level where the strategies will make a difference in student achievement.

In order to increase the usage of research-based instructional strategies in English language arts and reading, the district could convene a group of specialists and teachers from across grade levels and subject areas to investigate and suggest a series of recommended instructional strategies that meet scientific-based research standards. Strategies could be included for both English language arts and reading instruction as well as secondary-level content-area instruction of informational text reading strategies.

In order to support the implementation of these strategies, explicit support materials can be created and disseminated as well as professional development designed or developed, coordinated, and rolled out to fully support implementation. Monitoring and compliance ensures fidelity to the framework and provides formative information on the professional development.

The district should refer to the research base provided in Problem Statements 4, 5, and 6 as a starting point for planning action in this area. According to one central office staff member, an internal group was convened in the fall to address these issues.

Recommendation 5

Implement an assessment framework that is aligned with state standards and provides periodic data on the progress of students toward standards mastery. (Problem Statements 1, 2, 3)

The analysis of student achievement data can be a powerful way in which to improve student learning; however, as indicated in Problem Statement 3, the district can improve the effectiveness of its current assessment system. Standards, classroom practices, and assessments are not aligned.

“Student achievement is the measure of school performance” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). If a school or district hopes to improve student learning, it builds a learning community in which teachers and administrators focus on student assessment data to make instructional decisions. In order to ensure that this will happen, the district can develop a comprehensive assessment system that is built on an alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment—the three elements that are crucial to effective learning. The assessment system includes clear guidelines and designated procedures and schedules for screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments.

Another portion of an effective assessment system is building assessment expertise among both teachers and administrators. An articulated plan for professional development on the assessment system could be helpful. This professional development also could include data-driven decision making based on assessment results. Monitoring and compliance on assessment procedures could be tied into the professional development. The research base in Problem Statement 3 provides a foundation for framework development.

It also might be important to create a technological framework to support the assessment framework. The district can find a software system that could provide teachers with easy access to assessment data in a way that they could disaggregate data by standards/benchmarks/performance indicators and produce easy-to-understand reports. The district also could establish a technological infrastructure that could support this software system and link it to a centralized mainframe containing student demographic information. In this way, data could be disaggregated by subgroup, grade level, course, or class. And finally, the district could provide support for the system through building coaches, seminars, a help desk, and a central office person expert in assessment.

References

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

Recommendation 6

Improve the supports and opportunities for students with disabilities and English language learners, including (1) developing the knowledge base for all teachers regarding the subpopulations and the role that culture plays in learning, (2) implementing research based instructional approaches specific to these learners in all classrooms, and (3) providing equitable access to and opportunities for these students in academic programs. (Problem Statements 4, 6, 8)

Problem Statement 8 indicated that the district is not providing sufficient services for students with disabilities and learners of English as an additional language to enable them to meet the English language arts standards. The lack of provisions relates both to the students and to their teachers, and not simply to the teachers of special education or ESL, but to all teachers. Professional development in a variety of forms (e.g., coaching, mentoring, professional development teams, study groups) and is of “consistent, high-quality” (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Kwang, 2001) will play a key role in increasing teachers’ knowledge and skills (Problem Statement 6).

Regarding teaching *English language learners*, professional development should minimally include second language acquisition, reading in a second language, linguistics, cultural awareness, and research-based strategies to engage English language learners in academic tasks (Problem Statement 4). Concerning teaching *students with disabilities*, professional development would include information and skills development about legal requirements, types of disabilities, collaborative teaching, and effective instructional approaches.

For *both subgroups*, attitudes and perceptions should be examined and addressed with efforts made to create change in thinking as needed. As use of data to drive instruction has been shown to improve instruction (Protheroe, 2001), increased interpretation of classroom assessments to guide and alter instruction is needed. Finer tuned disaggregation of achievement data would assist in determining which types of programs seem to be more successful and for which students. The information should be used to inform programming changes and to create professional development plans.

District and school policies and plans should be reviewed to determine the consistency and rigor of articulated recognition of and response to the student subpopulations. As Buffalo spends less than similar districts on special education services, a more thorough investigation of the costs and funding may prove helpful in developing stronger, more effective services and supports. These would include but not be limited to subpopulations’ participation in academic programs (e.g., gifted and talented, afterschool programs).

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Appendix. Data Map

Buffalo City School District Cointerpretation Key Findings, Problem Statements, and Hypotheses

During the cointerpretation process, participants analyzed 12 individual reports (datasets). Participants identified findings from across the datasets under each of the six strands examined through the audit: curriculum, instruction, professional development, assessment, management, and compliance. Participants worked together to identify which findings were most significant. The key findings were then translated into problem statements. The participants articulated hypotheses on what the root cause of each problem is. The following tables document the results of this cointerpretation process.

Table A1 lists each of the problem statements identified by cointerpretation participants, followed by the hypothesized root causes. The hypotheses followed by ++++ are those that received enough support to move on in the process. The column to the right of each problem statement indicates the key finding associated with each problem statement. The key findings are associated with either curriculum, instruction, and assessment (CIA), professional development (PD), or management and compliance (MC). The problem statements are divided into the audit guiding question they answer.

Table A1. Guiding Questions, Problem Statements, and Hypotheses

Guiding Questions, Problem Statements, and Hypotheses	Key Findings		
	CIA	PD	MC
Guiding Question 1: Are the written, taught, and tested curriculum aligned with one another and with state standards?			
Problem Statement 1: The district does not have a rigorous, specific, PK–12 English language arts written, taught, and tested curriculum aligned to New York state standards.	6, 7, 9, 11		
Hypotheses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No one has taken the time to write a good curriculum. 2. No one understands the NYS standards to explain. 3. Old curriculum never updated to new standards. 4. No updated pacing guides given to teachers. 5. No funding to develop a curriculum (paying teachers after school, etc.). 6. No strong district leadership in this effort. 7. “People” do not understand what a curriculum is. 			

Guiding Questions, Problem Statements, and Hypotheses	Key Findings		
	CIA	PD	MC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. The status quo worked for some students and that was satisfactory. 9. Lack of strong curriculum leadership. 10. Lack of communication with teachers. 11. Poor NYS standards. 12. Hire better teachers. 13. Negotiate better union contracts. 			
Guiding Question 2: What supports exist for struggling students, and what evidence is there of the success of these opportunities?			
Problem Statement 2: District resources (financial, personnel, materials) and instructional strategies are not targeted at meeting the varied English language arts needs of all students.	14, 23		
Hypotheses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of shared priority toward student achievement. 2. Belief that not all students can learn—low expectations. 3. Silos—no collaboration between schools and central office responsible for money. 4. Focus on descriptors (economically disadvantaged, LEP, etc.) and not students. Accept that students have varied needs. 5. Lack of understanding that there is no need for a budget if no schools. 6. Top-down management. 7. Union agreements. 8. No collaboration from teachers on... 9. Don't know the "varied" needs. 10. No equity of resources among buildings. 11. Lack of understanding instructional strategies. 12. Clarify what equal access means—based on student needs. 13. One size does not fit all—look at individual needs. 			
Guiding Question 3: Are assessment data used to determine program effectiveness and to drive instruction?			
Problem Statement 3: Data are not used effectively to monitor program implementation and drive English language arts instruction for <i>all</i> students.	7, 11, 23, 26		

Problem Statements and Hypotheses	Key Findings		
	CIA	PD	MC
<p>Hypotheses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of data-gathering tools. 2. Need for instructional management system tool. 3. IT tools not used to collect and share data. 4. No criteria (consistent) used to monitor program implementation. 5. Data are not coming from a single source, but multiple sources with different results. 6. Data not available in a timely fashion. 7. Lack of knowledge on interpreting data—and implications for all levels of schooling. 8. Too many believe this is only a classroom function. 9. Lack of how to read/understand data as it relates to all students. 10. Teachers might not know how to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities or other reading difficulties. 11. No frequent assessments to monitor progress of program or instruction. 12. People request data and don't know what they really need. 13. Need to ask better questions. 			
Guiding Question 4: Does classroom instruction maximize the use of research-based strategies?			
Problem Statement 4: District English language arts instruction does not maximize the use of research-based strategies.	9, 11		3
<p>Hypotheses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional staff are unaware of best practices (not shared). 2. Teachers have not been taught what research strategies are. 3. Not used. 4. Lack of instructional time. 5. Principals/administration not monitoring. 6. No professional “sharing”/collaboration. 7. No resources available—funding for outside training. 8. Confusion about whose responsibility this is (school or central office?). 9. Whose research? Do they benefit all children? 10. Strategies cannot exist in isolation from curriculum. 			

Problem Statements and Hypotheses	Key Findings		
	CIA	PD	MC
11. No strong district leadership 12. Conflict exists among experts about these strategies. What are best practices?			
Guiding Question 5: Is the district professional development focused on the appropriate content areas, and are there strategies in place to translate it into effective classroom practice?			
Problem Statement 5: There is a lack of coordination among departments and schools in the design, delivery, and monitoring of professional development.	18	3	2
Hypotheses: 1. Everyone has their own “pot” of money—schools, departments, district professional development department, Teacher Center. 2. Goals not coordinated. 3. Lack of focus on overall district goals using data. 4. No district directive to coordinate and no monitoring. 5. Silos and fiefdoms. 6. One person must make people behave 7. Poor professional development leadership. 8. Lack of communication. 9. Limited professional development staff. 10. Lack of strong district leadership in all areas—curriculum and others. 11. Perception of professional hierarchies and control of knowledge base.			
Problem Statement 6: Professional development is not aligned to student academic needs and achievement goals.	9	2	
Hypotheses: 1. No district curriculum. 2. Because culture is not identified as critical to student academic needs and achievement. 3. Funding sources/guidelines are not aligned. 4. Knowledge base of professional development may be limited- do we know what’s out there? 5. Difficulty in funding opportunities to provide standard development given the voluntary nature of it (collective bargaining agreement). 6. Past professional development more a fad than the result of a critical analysis of a body of knowledge.			

Problem Statements and Hypotheses	Key Findings		
	CIA	PD	MC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Student academic needs are hard to define. 8. Professional development is optional. 9. Teachers don't have time for professional development. 10. Not enough incentive for professional development. 11. PD should also address teacher needs as well as students. 12. PD should demonstrate scientifically based best practice. 13. No money available to create alignment efforts. 14. Principals not equipped to lead professional development. 15. Lack of scheduled time for professional development. 16. All departments must listen to each other as to what they are doing. 17. Need to use data to develop a professional development plan for the district. 18. Professional development needs to be mandatory (summer). 			
Guiding Question 6: Do management and administrative structures and processes support increased student achievement?			
Problem Statement 7: District policies and procedures related to curriculum are not consistently implemented, which impacts annual student achievement in English language arts.	20		
<p>Hypotheses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. District policy is not clear to all. 2. Lack of leadership and monitoring by school leaders/control office. 3. Need early interventions for struggling students. 4. Early identification of struggling students. 5. Better screening assessments. 6. No clear understanding of relationship between achievement and implementation of policies. 7. Need to assist teachers with working with these struggling students 8. Hire better teachers. 9. Policies do not have funding support. 10. Policy and procedures not easily available. 11. Lack of/vague district policies and procedures. 12. Principals' roles have moved further from instruction toward... 			

Problem Statements and Hypotheses	Key Findings		
	CIA	PD	MC
13. Professional development for principals on curriculum policies and how to be instructional leaders. 14. Curricular policies are not the product of collaboration. 15. Grant monies never get to the students.			
Guiding Question 7: Is the district in compliance with local, state, and federal mandates and requirements?			
Problem Statement 8: Students from NCLB subgroups, particularly students with disabilities and students learning English as an additional language, obtain lower scores in NCLB state-mandated language arts testing than their peers.	9, 26, 30		
Hypotheses: 1. Tell people (teachers) what mandates are. 2. Tell teachers what is not being met. 3. Set up professional development to address issues. 4. All students are accountable to meet standards. 5. All teachers are accountable. 6. Begin with the end in mind. 7. Include ALL teachers in addressing the problem— mandate that they are all involved 8. Local, state, and federal mandates are flawed. 9. Adjust concept of “school.” 10. Low expectations for some students. 11. Beliefs that some children are unable to learn anything. 12. Expectations that mastery is the norm and failure is the exception. 13. Opportunities to move faster and higher. 14. Cultural dissonance between teachers and students. 15. District accepts failure. 16. Inequity in distribution of money to schools. 17. Lack of understanding student specific needs prevents student mastery. 18. No frequent assessments in English language arts to monitor progress toward mastery.			

Table A2 lists the key findings identified by cointerpretation participants. The right-hand column lists the number of participant votes each finding received. Several of the key findings were produced by combining multiple findings identified during the first stage of the cointerpretation process.

Table A2. Key Findings

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Votes
1. CIA 6: Curriculum lacks rigor and specificity.	2
2. CIA 7: Insufficient time spent on teaching specific content and skills (e.g., fluency, vocabulary, writing, speaking, listening).	5
9. CIA 9: Lack of alignment between (1) state and district assessments, (2) assessments and curriculum and (3) curriculum and materials.	3
10. CIA 10: Instruction does not reflect higher-order thinking skills (e.g., cognitive skills, investigation, demonstration). Merged with 6.	1
11. CIA 11: There is minimal evidence available to suggest that written curriculum is enacted or monitored. In addition, no evidence is available to suggest that effective accountability practices are connected to the monitoring of program implementation, student learning, or student test results.	6
14. CIA 14: No/limited evidence of resource allocation being tied to (1) curricular priorities and (2) most at-risk students. Or that there is certainty and appropriate timing of resource allocation in order to plan and effectively deliver programs. Replaced CIA 14 and MC 2 findings.	2
17. CIA 17: Limited evidence that professional development supports all district buildings, programs and employees equally. Merged with MC2.	2
18. CIA 18: Limited evidence that district encourages (1) instructional leadership, (2) professional reflection, (3) professional collaboration.	3
19. CIA 19: Factors such as workload, student behavior, and building administrative relations negatively affect school climate in non-AYP buildings.	2
20. CIA 20: Parents perceive a communication gap between school and home, especially in non-AYP schools.	2
23. CIA 23: Differentiated instruction is applied inconsistently, and parents see the need for more differentiated instruction.	2
26. CIA 26: More attention and support needs to be targeted to students in specific NCLB subgroups: economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, LEP, Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic.	3
29. CIA 29: Teachers' responses to (1) school climate, (2) factors affecting school climate, and (3) sources of decisions varied significantly between AYP and non- AYP schools. Non AYP schools spoke of a poor school climate. Factors affecting climate in non-AYP schools included faculty issues and workload, administration/turnover, and student behavior/safety/attendance. In addition, school administration and teachers were reported as being the major source of decision making, which differed from AYP schools. In schools making AYP, staff members reported higher levels of involvement from a variety of stakeholder groups (e.g., unions, parents/community, district, school board). See Table 2 for specifics.	4
30. CIA 30: There is minimal evidence ELL and special education students have equal access and opportunity. Merged with 26.	1

Professional Development	
2. PD 2: Professional development tends to be broad and generalized and not aligned to specific instructional needs.	2
3. PD 3: Professional development is inconsistent and not supported by follow-up and embedded activities.	4
4. PD 4: Professional development is limited due to district structure (structures create inconsistencies across and within schools), leadership issues (no leadership training), and teacher culture (PD voluntary).	2
Management and Compliance	
2. MC 2: Accountability: The district, building principals, and classroom teachers do not feel accountable for student achievement—including success for students in all subgroups.	3

Table A3 lists all of the findings identified by cointerpretation participants. Findings were pulled from various datasets which are available in the supportive documentation section of this report. The datasets include the following:

- PR—Preliminary Report (Supportive Document A)
- SA—Student Assessment Report (Supportive Document B)
- KDD—Key District Document Review Summary (Supportive Document C)
- DS—Key Findings from District Interviews (Supportive Document D)
- TP—Teacher and Principal Report (Supportive Document F)
- PS—Findings from Findings from Parent Focus Groups and Student Focus Groups (Supportive Documents I and J)
- CO—Classroom Observation Data Report (Supportive Document K)
- MC1—Management and Compliance Document Review Summary (Supportive Document L)
- MC2—Management and Compliance Findings from Administrator and Board Interviews (Supportive Document M)
- MC3—Management and Compliance Findings from Principal and Teacher Interviews (Supportive Document N)
- SEC—*Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* Reports for Schools and Districts (Supportive Document R)

The letters indicate which section of the supportive documentation the dataset can be found in. An indication of where support for each finding is supported can be seen in the table. The numbers indicate the page number in the original draft where the cointerpretation participants found support for this finding. While multiple drafts mean that these page numbers do not necessarily align with the page numbers on the documents as they exist. They still serve to let the reader know approximately where in the

document participants found support for a given finding. The final column in the chart indicates the number of participants who felt that each finding should be included in the key findings. The findings in italics were adopted by the group as key findings.

Table A3. All Identified Findings

	PR	SA	KDD	DS	TP	PS	SEC	CO	MC1	MC2	MC3	Vote 1	Vote 2
Curriculum and Instruction Group													
1. No evidence of board policy being implemented or reliable data being used, yet the district is said to be “in compliance” with board goals and objectives.									1, 5			2	1
2. There is limited evidence of communication regarding district corrective action and accountability status.									2			0	1
3. An example of collective bargaining compromising instructional quality is that staff is not assigned to schools based on students need.				6					3			0	0
4. Teacher and student absenteeism are linked to school climate, yet no district policy is enforced to monitor or improve this.			5				43		4			0	0
5. Student mobility and attendance is linked to continuity of program and student achievement, yet no district policy is enforced to monitor or improve this.			X			X	43					2	0
6. <i>Curriculum lacks rigor and specificity.</i>				1-2	9		14-3					0	2
7. <i>Insufficient time spent on teaching specific content and skills (e.g., fluency, vocabulary, writing, speaking, listening).</i>		X					X	X				4	5
8. Overemphasis on comprehension.								X				0	0
9. <i>Lack of alignment between (1) state and district assessments, (2) assessments and curriculum, and (3) curriculum and materials.</i>			2				14-1 14-8					1	3

	PR	SA	KDD	DS	TP	PS	SEC	CO	MC1	MC2	MC3	Vote 1	Vote 2
10. <i>Instruction does not reflect higher-order thinking skills (e.g., cognitive skills, investigation, demonstration). Merged with 6.</i>							9,10 14-4					0	1
11. <i>There is minimal evidence available to suggest that written curriculum is enacted or monitored. In addition, no evidence is available to suggest that effective accountability practices are connected to the monitoring of program implementation, student learning, or student test results.</i>			3	81- 82	3				3			2	6
12. <i>Inconsistent use of materials.</i>					5			3				0	0
13. <i>Insufficient time to fully implement and evaluate programs before they are discontinued.</i>					6	1						0	0
14. <i>No/limited evidence of resource allocations being tied to curricular priorities or targeted at the most at-risk students.</i>												2	2
15. <i>Financial issues impact the district’s ability to respond to improvement needs.</i>												0	1
16. <i>Teachers and principals want more time dedicated to instruction.</i>			5		6							1	1
17. <i>Limited evidence that professional development supports all district buildings, programs and employees equally. Merge with MC2.</i>	X		X				X	X				0	0
18. <i>Limited evidence that district encourages (1) instructional leadership, (2) professional reflection, and (3) professional collaboration.</i>	X						X	X				0	3
19. <i>Factors such as workload, student behavior, and building administrative relations negatively affect school climate in non-AYP buildings.</i>											X	0	2
20. <i>Parents perceive a communication gap between school and home, especially in non-AYP schools.</i>			X			2						2	2

	PR	SA	KDD	DS	TP	PS	SEC	CO	MC1	MC2	MC3	Vote 1	Vote 2
22. Parents believe students are not being challenged.												0	0
23. <i>Differentiated instruction is applied inconsistently, and parents see the need for more differentiated instruction.</i>					3							0	2
25. More attention and support needs to be targeted to hiring more male English language arts teachers in K-3.								1				0	0
26. <i>More attention and support needs to be targeted to students in specific NCLB subgroups: economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, LEP, Alaskan Native, black, Hispanic.</i>		4-5										1	3
27. Little evidence that student engagement is a districtwide focus.			5									0	0
28. In meeting needs of struggling students, little consistency and alignment to district goals.				2								0	1
29. <i>Teachers' responses to (1) school climate, (2) factors affecting school climate, and (3) sources of decisions varied significantly between AYP and non-AYP schools. Non AYP schools spoke of a poor school climate. Factors affecting climate in non-AYP schools included faculty issues and workload, administration/turnover, and student behavior/safety/attendance. Also, school administration and teachers were reported as being the major source of decision making, which differed from AYP schools. In schools making AYP, staff reported higher levels of involvement from a variety of stakeholder groups (e.g., unions, district, parents/community, school board). See Table 2 for specifics:</i>						2-3					1,2,6	2	4
30. <i>There is minimal evidence that ELL and special education students have equal access and opportunity. Merged with 26.</i>			2									1	1

	PR	SA	KDD	DS	TP	PS	SEC	CO	MC1	MC2	MC3	Vote 1	Vote 2
Professional Development													
3. Professional development and instructional practice are not aligned to crucial English language arts skills.			46-47					3-7				2	1
4. <i>Professional development tends to be broad and generalized and not aligned to specific instructional needs.</i>					4		44-46	3-4				0	2
5. <i>Professional development is inconsistent and not supported by follow-up and embedded activities.</i>			7	3	4	1	45					5	4
6. <i>Professional development is limited due to district structure (structures create inconsistencies across and within schools), leadership issues (no leadership training), and teacher culture (professional development voluntary).</i>	X				4				2			0	2
7. Teachers and parents want instructional strategies that meet the different needs and abilities of students.	X	4-6		4		2-3						0	1
Management and Compliance													
1. <i>There is an underlying tension between central office and the schools—staffing and hiring, services to schools, data accessibility, provision of information.</i>					3					1	4	5	5
2. <i>Resource: Resource uncertainty and timing from year to year negatively impacts the district’s ability to plan and effectively deliver programs (often a top-down process without feedback from schools).</i>				5								0	2

	PR	SA	KDD	DS	TP	PS	SEC	CO	MC1	MC2	MC3	Vote 1	Vote 2
3. Accountability: The district, building principals, and classroom teachers do not feel accountable for student achievement, including success for students in all subgroups.									3		3,4,6	0	3
4. Curriculum/Instruction: Lack of evidence suggests that teachers are unaware of instructional expectations for aligning curriculum to standards on a daily basis (e.g., scope and sequence).				1,3,5					3			0	0

Appendix: Audit Process Conclusion Buffalo City School District

Process Overview Following Co-Interpretation

After the co-interpretation process, Learning Point Associates summarized Buffalo City School District problem statements, hypotheses, and recommendations; and provided this information within the district's interim report. Learning Point Associates then advised the district of an Action Planning process comprised of six progressive components that would begin to help the district outline and draft a plan for implementing the written recommendations from the interim report. Buffalo district staff, however, preferred another process and approach to their Action Planning. This process did not encompass Learning Point Associates support, but did include the district's continuation of an internal process to refine and establish goals as outlined by their Three Year Academic Achievement Plan. The State Education Department (SED) agreed that Buffalo City School District staff would utilize their internal planning processes and approach independent of Learning Point Associates. The district stated to have a preexisting cross-functional team that would proceed with the planning. The Buffalo City School District was encouraged, however, in their endeavor to have an Action Plan that addressed the recommendations given in the interim report.

Site Visits

Overall, many site visits to the Buffalo schools and the Buffalo School District were involved within the audit process. Subsequent to co-interpretation, however, Learning Point Associates visited Buffalo once to discuss the interim report and give district representatives a clear outline of a suggested Action Planning Process which the district could follow. Learning Point Associates provided a sample template of Action Planning components that would be used to facilitate the district through this process (see Figure 1.1). During the meeting with the district, several dates for site visits were initially set for Buffalo to engage in Action Planning utilizing the suggested process with assistance and facilitative support from Learning Point Associates. The dates that were tentatively set were March 21, 2006, March 28, 2006, April 4, 2006, and April 11, 2006. These dates ultimately were canceled by the district, as the district decided to utilize their process and facilitate planning independent of Learning Point Associates.

Prior to the cancellation of these dates, and the district's decision to plan internally; Learning Point Associates staff outlined the components of its suggested Action Planning Process during the meeting. This process would have entailed the following:

Recommended Action Planning Process Overview

1. Strategy Planning

After the review of the interim report, the Strategy Planning meeting would act as a preliminary step within the Audit Action Planning Process.

During Strategy Planning districts organize a district leadership team that review and reflect upon the recommendations for the district as written in the interim report. The team would then set goals with aligned strategies and success indicators. District leadership teams gain a perspective of the problems within the district; and draft some solutions to address these problem areas. The total outcomes of district strategy planning are district goals, strategies, and success indicators.

2. Preparing a District Profile

A district profile would include a brief demographic description of the district. This would also entail a summary of the data collection, organization, analysis, and interpretation processes. The district profile would also ultimately encompass the goals, strategies, and success indicators that were generated as a part of the strategy planning meeting. The district profile essentially is an overview and status report of the district, and acts as a preparatory step toward presenting the state of the district at a stakeholders' meeting.

3. Stakeholder's meeting

The stakeholder's meeting allows for a broader group of participants to review the district profile and to get a clearer perspective of the audit, as well as the goals, strategies, and success indicators identified by the district. The stakeholder's meeting can include: school staff, parent leaders, business and community organizations, school board members and others from leadership organizations. This meeting also offers an opportunity for such stakeholders to identify possible barriers and supports for strategy implementation, so that the district can become further equipped for implementing strategies needed for improvement.

4. District Department Action Planning

After districts identify goals, strategies, and success indicators, they are encouraged to begin to create action steps that would help employ the strategies and work towards the fulfillment of the district goals. The district monitors its progress through the utilization of the success indicators. The process and conversation first occurs within district departmental areas. The result of this process and discussion is a district departmental action plan with actions, timelines, responsibilities, and budget plans. (Figure 1.1)

5. Integration and Alignment of Department Actions

The fifth phase of Action Planning would include the integration and alignment of each of the district's departmental actions. This discussion encourages articulation and collaboration of action steps across areas of concentration. Ultimately representatives from the different departments would share and reconcile each of their drafts for actions, timelines, responsibilities, and budget plans according to high priority problems and hypotheses within the district. During this integration and alignment component, district staff will identify areas of overlap, commonality, and difference with regards to their action steps and timelines. Ultimately, the group aims to come to some consensus.

6. Integration and Alignment of Audit Action Plan with Other District Plans and/or to School Plans as Needed

The final component of the Learning Point Associates Action Planning process involves the integration and alignment of the audit action plan with other district and school plans. This component is included for districts to refer to any of their existing Action Plans and consolidate those plans with the audit Action Plan to comprehensively address areas of need as identified by the district audit. This component also helps the district to build upon areas of strength and ultimately build capacity to guide their improvement.

Internal Buffalo Planning

Buffalo City School district staff commented that prior support from Learning Point Associates has been both consistent and appreciated. While district staff are proceeding with an internal process for action planning, it has also been indicated that these internal processes are comparable to key components of the Learning Point Associates process for Action Planning. The district's ongoing cross-functional team is stated to proceed in carrying this endeavor forward; with meetings and processes in place to revisit the elements of the Buffalo City School District Three-Year Academic Achievement plan, and how this plan can address the findings that are a result of the Learning Point Associates audit process.

Figure 1.1 *Learning Point Associates Sample Action Plan Template*

Strategy 1.A:																
				Timeline					Budget							
	Action	Evidence	Responsibility	October - December	January - March	April - June	July - September	Recurring	Detailed Budget Breakdown	Fund Source	Salaries/ Stipends	Fringe Benefits	Materials/ Supplies	Other Services	Capital Outlay	TOTAL
1.A.1																
1.A.2																