

Rochester City School District Final Report

June, 2006



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Introduction

This interim report is the result of an audit of the written, taught, and tested curriculum of the Rochester 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. The audit examined curriculum, instruction, assessment, 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 counterinterpretation process for Rochester City District schools.

Finally, the Recommendations for Action Planning section provides advice for the district in planning actions for each critical problem area. Upon approval by the Rochester Board of Education, the recommendations and the district's action plan will be considered binding.

District Background

Overview

Located in western New York along the shore of Lake Ontario, Rochester is the state's third largest city. It has a population of approximately 220,000 and a median income of \$31,257. African Americans and Hispanics compose 60 percent of the population. In 2004–05, the Rochester City School District served approximately 1,741 PK students at 64 sites; 33,055 K–12 students at 40 elementary and 19 secondary schools; and 11,555 adult students at an adult and family learning center and a program for young mothers. The 2002, 2003, and 2004 district data indicate a steady number of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students (7 percent, 8 percent, and 8 percent in each measurable year, respectively) and a growing percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (81 percent, 80 percent, 86 percent respectively, and 88 percent in 2005)

The average ethnic composition at the K–12 level is as follows: 65 percent black, 20 percent Hispanic, 13 percent white, 2 percent Asian, and 0.4 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. The district's poverty rate was 86.2 percent for the 2004–05 school year—6.1 percent increase from the previous year. Rochester is one of the largest city school districts (along with Buffalo, Syracuse, and Yonkers) identified as having high student needs relative to district resource capacity (Citi-Data.com, n.d.; Learning Point Associates, 2005; Widerquist, 2001).

Rochester is ranked 11th in the nation per capita for child poverty among medium/large US cities, ahead of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington DC. Eighteen percent of Rochester's African-American children live in extreme poverty, compared to eight percent nationally. 88 percent of Rochester's Public School children are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and all 58 of RCSD schools meet the definition of "high concentration of low income students."

Student Academic Performance

On October 14, 2005, the state of New York designated the accountability status of Rochester as a district "in need of improvement, Year 4" for English and language arts. Rochester's 2003–04 fourth-grade students made Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for both English language arts and mathematics, with the exception of the students in a disabilities subgroup. In addition, the LEP fourth-grade students did not make AMO or AYP for English language arts. Overall, 2003–04 eighth-grade students did not make AMO or AYP for English language arts, including the subgroups of students with disabilities, African-American and Hispanic students, LEP students, and economically disadvantaged students. Overall, eighth-grade 2003-04 students made AMO and AYP for mathematics, with the exception of students with disabilities and LEP subgroups. Overall, 12th-grade students in 2003–04 did not make AMO or AYP for English language arts or mathematics, including the following subgroups: students with disabilities and African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian, and economically disadvantaged students (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

Despite not meeting AYP for specific sub-populations in the area of English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4 and 8, and more broadly at the high school level, RCSD is experiencing noteworthy performance gains (2003 to 2005) in student achievement in the elementary grades. Significant grade 4 gains are seen in schools meeting ELA 4 NCLB Annual Progress Targets (61% to 95%) and meeting New York standards (42% to 57%). RCSD was recognized in 2005 for having the greatest increase (15 points) on the grade 4 ELA exam amongst the state's large districts. Overall, 86% of RCSD schools showed improvements in student performance in ELA and/or math in 2005.

Student Academic Goals

The Rochester City School District's agenda is to ensure that all schools are demonstrating increased student achievement. Annual district performance goals are aggressive: 90 percent of students must meet or exceed standards within four years. The annual goal for Grade 4 English language arts is a 12-point percentage increase in meeting or exceeding standards; Grade 4 mathematics is targeted for a 6-point percentage increase. Grade 8 English language arts is targeted for an annual 12-point percentage increase, and Grade 8 mathematics is targeted for an 11-point percentage increase. Across the district, there is a goal to increase the number of high school students who meet or exceed the Regents comprehensive English and mathematics exams by 10 percentage points (above the baseline for each school) within the next five years. In addition, the district has set goals of a 70 percent graduation rate and an attendance rate of 95 percent for Grades 7–12 by 2008 (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

School Redesign and New and Ongoing Program Initiatives

The district is currently in the process of redesigning its secondary schools. Secondary school redesign in Rochester began in 2003 when district schools were reconfigured from K–5, 6–8, and 9–12 grade groupings to predominantly K–6 elementary schools and 7–12 secondary schools. This initial reconfiguration was intended to lessen transitions for students by allowing them to remain in elementary schools an additional year in smaller settings and set the stage for smaller, more closely aligned secondary schools. The redesign began with middle schools extending their reach up to Grades 7–12, and high schools extending their grade levels down to Grades 7–12.

RCSD has demonstrated a commitment to research-based school improvement that began prior to the DICA audit. The district has implemented comprehensive school reform models at 29 elementary schools including America's Choice, Expeditionary Learning, Atlas, and Success for All. The district is in the midst of school redesign in an effort to increase student achievement by transitioning the district to a high-performing school system comprised predominantly of grades K-6 and 7-12 programs. The 7-12 component will include grades 7-9 Foundation Academies and grades 10-12 Commencement Academies incorporating Smaller Learning Communities.

For 2005–06, 43 of the Rochester district's 59 schools (73 percent) will be using comprehensive school reform models. The breakdown is as follows:

- Twenty-nine schools are using the America’s Choice model.
- Two schools are following the Expeditionary Learning model.
- Three schools are using the Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment for All Students (ATLAS) learning model.
- Two schools are using materials and technology from Plato/Lightspan.
- Three schools are incorporating the Success for All design.
- Six secondary schools are using the Ramp-Up component of America’s Choice.
- Four elementary schools are Reading First Schools

The comprehensive design models improve student achievement by using research-based strategies to teach literacy and mathematics skills. Through a significant grant from the Gates Foundation, the Rochester City School District is incorporating small learning environments through foundation and commencement academies in the high schools and, more explicitly, aligned curriculum and standards across schools. The district also is using the seven principles of effective schools, based on the model endorsed by the Gates foundation.

The district also reports a number of ongoing program initiatives, which include the following:

- Rochester Children’s Zone
- Identifying “watch schools” to receive targeted district level support
- School principals’ of English language arts and mathematics “watch schools” and “performing schools” implementing actions to assess needs and improvements.
- Use of the literacy program “ramp-up” for students in Grades 7–9 who are performing two to three years below grade level in 10 schools.
- Use of College Board’s Spring Board Program in one elementary and selected secondary schools.
- Provision of building-level coaches or “lead teachers” in the areas of English language arts, mathematics, and academic intervention to support classroom teachers.
- Implementation of the Rochester instructional framework to organize lesson plans and to incorporate Readers and Writers workshop across elementary and secondary English language arts classrooms.
- More professional development for staff in literacy
- Aligning Grades K–4 and 5–9 curricula to ensure Grade 7 readiness (Learning Point Associates, 2005).
- Coaching for administrators
- The development of more specific accountability systems
- Intensive summer programs in literacy and mathematics for students in grades 5-9 to boost performance before the start of the school year.

- Redefining entry and exit criteria at grade 9 to ensure preparation for Regents level work.

Superintendent's 2005–06 Goals, Objectives, and Deliverables

In October 2005, the superintendent posted the *Superintendent's 2005–2006 Goals, Objectives, and Deliverables* on the district's website (Rivera, 2005). This document presents a specific plan to the public, covering (1) student and school achievement, (2) fiscal management, (3) operational and technological excellence, and (4) culture change as well as providing detailed information about goals, steps, and expected measurable outcomes.

Student and school achievement objectives include:

- Accelerate and refine the implementation of the 7-12 redesign,
- Develop and implement district curricula in core subject areas,
- Create and implement an instructional management system,
- Implement school accountability system to ensure replication of best practices
- Implement benchmark assessment systems that facilitate student data analysis to improve classroom practices
- Target professional development for teachers and administrators in literacy and numeracy
- Revise our professional development model to focus on coaching strategies for administrators and school specialists
- Establish innovative joint District and community strategies for improving student attendance, especially at the secondary level

Fiscal management objectives include:

- Implement internal and external recommendations to improve process controls
- Use long-term planning tools to ensure fiscal prudence and long range district capacity for initiatives
- Implement the local level living contract school effort and expand to include policies, processes, and procedures to evolve into formal contract schools
- Establish an inclusive budgeting process that is aligned with district goals, objectives, and deliverables

Operational and Technological Excellence objectives include:

- Develop and advance a Facilities Modernization plan to the Facilities Modernization Board and Board of Education
- Improve student, staff, and building security
- Develop and implement a program transfer opportunity for secondary students completing the Foundation Academy
- Reach consensus with Board of Education on findings and improvement recommendations associated with a comprehensive assessment of managed choice policy
- Implement technology solutions that will have the greatest impact on student and school performance

Culture Change objectives include:

- Achieve a culture and workforce that is more reflective and responsive to our students and community
- Develop and implement new leadership and professional development programs that promote our new vision for culture change
- Formulate and launch the Rochester Children’s Zone comprehensive strategy to rally the community in support of students and families
- Establish office, function, protocols to address the role of partners, volunteers, partnerships, in carrying out the district vision
- Build customer satisfaction and service to children and families
- Advance recommendations to revise and enhance performance appraisal for administrators, including performance based compensation
- Develop District level Accountability standards, rubric, and system to replicate those best practices found in high performing school districts and improve service to schools and customers
- Use long term planning to monitor progress

District Resources

In 2004–05, the approved district budget was \$575,814,029. Total staffing based on data submitted for the Basic Education Data System reporting indicated a total number of 5,883 staff, which consisted of 2,903 full-time and 132 part-time teachers; 664 full-time and 75 part-time paraprofessionals and student support staff; 672 full-time and 12 part-time other professional staff; and 1,123 full-time and 302 part-time other support staff.

The district’s annual budget in 2001–02 was \$497,399,626. The annual budget for the 2002–03 school year was increased by approximately 11 percent to \$552,080,273, primarily to cover the rapidly increasing cost of health care, retirement benefits, charter schools, and transportation. The 2003–04 annual budget of \$575,814,029 had a modest increase of about 4 percent. The district fiscally is dependent on the city of Rochester and has no control over school taxes (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

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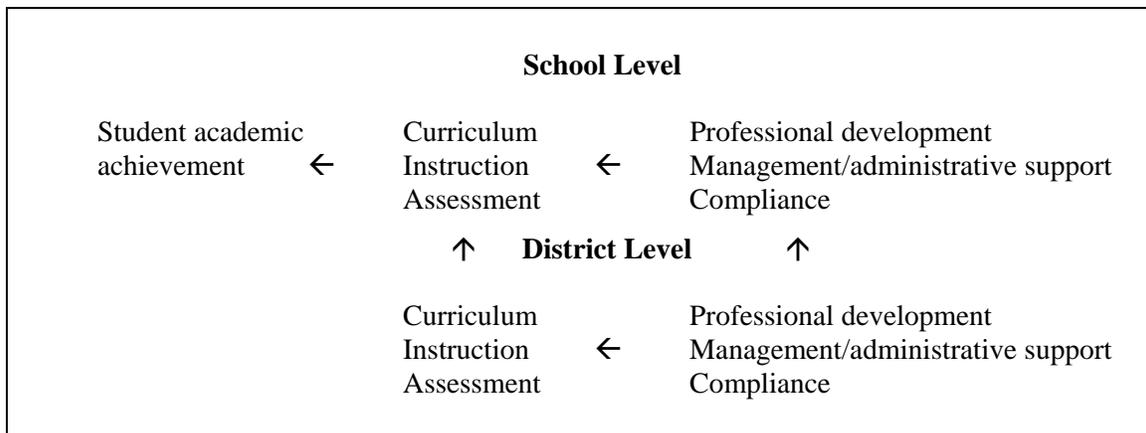
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Theory of Action

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 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? (this question was addressed by Education Resource Strategies [ERS])
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, management, and compliance. A separate data collection analysis of professional development was conducted by Education Resource Strategies. Similar information sources were reviewed, other than SEC and Observation of Instruction.

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, the *Surveys of Enacted Curriculum* (SEC), observations of instruction, semi-structured 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.

Semi-structured 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 Rochester 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 | Semi-structured 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:

- 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 Rochester, 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 process entails initial goal and strategy setting by a core district team, including teachers, administrators, central office staff, and union representatives. On February 10, 2006, representatives of this group along with community representatives provided input into the success indicators and potential barriers to success. 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 District will align this plan with other district plans.

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Key Findings and Problem Statements

Areas of Strength

To provide a balanced understanding of the district's current status, the district's strengths, as well as areas for improvement were identified during the cointerpretation of the data. The findings regarding strengths are highlighted in the Interim Report to assist the district in action planning. Areas of Strength provide critical information on "what is working" and can be used to support the district's improvement efforts. Data sources indicate that the district has significant areas of strength regarding curriculum, data analysis, formative assessment use, professional development, vision and mission building, and goal setting. The district has comprehensively outlined and shown evidence of implementation plans to further develop these areas, and has also provided considerable evidence that current policies and procedures have supported and furthered their school improvement efforts.

Regarding student achievement results over time, there is a great deal of evidence for steady improvement between 2003 and 2005. Only two ELA subgroups classify RCSD as a "District in Need of Corrective Action." This suggests that current initiatives have been effective in many areas. While the district itself has stated that there are areas in need of improvement, it has many existing strengths already in place that will greatly assist and support change efforts.

Although the findings support a need for additional breadth and depth in the alignment of the written, taught, and assessed curriculum, the data also indicates that the district utilizes a standards-based instruction processes, and has some success with general alignment. The district recognizes the importance of alignment and has continued efforts in that area, which is evidenced by project literacy, as a part of their ongoing programs and initiatives.

The district's framework will help build the process of curriculum coherence and articulation within and across grade levels. The goal of vertical and horizontal alignment is achievable as the district continues to build upon its current initiative to align elementary and secondary school curriculum.

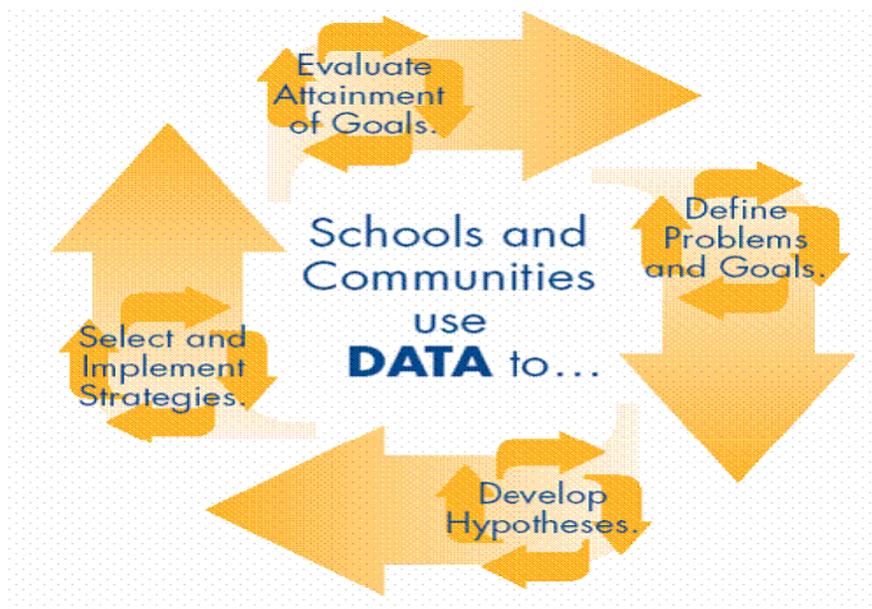
The district's plan to provide more staff professional development in literacy to support further curriculum development is also an identified strength. The fact that Principals' are making plans to assess needs and improvements will add value to this process. Rochester has demonstrated a strong commitment to teacher quality by investing significantly in professional development, approximately 7.5% of its operating budget in the 2004-2005 school year. Professional development activities in Rochester include many critical components of a high quality system-wide strategy, including school-based instructional coaching, research-based school reform models, and mentoring support for new and struggling teachers.

Furthermore, as indicated in the preliminary report, the district implements supplementary programs in their efforts to strengthen their curriculum. Key curriculum document reviews, district administrator interviews, teacher interviews, and the preliminary report suggests that the district has provided strategic and aligned support for struggling students. Furthermore, the district states that the sampled schools "appear to have a common set of programs and strategies

for implementing curriculum and delivering instruction.” The summer school program is a major part of the support provided for struggling students. The district has also implemented school based planning teams as well as the consensus model to support principals in their efforts for school improvement.

Part of the district’s success in being able to achieve the beginnings of an aligned curriculum is supported by data driven decision making. The findings within the preliminary report indicate that, “teachers and the district administration seem focused on assessment.” Research recommends a balance between formative and summative assessments. This is also referred to as “Assessment *for* Learning with Descriptive Feedback” and Assessment *of* Learning (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis p.36-37). Traditionally, summative assessments, or Assessment *of* Learning are used for external reporting purposes, while formative assessments, or Assessment *for* Learning with descriptive feedback assist in informing instructional practices (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis p.36-37). While, the district is held accountable to summative assessments, the incorporation of formative assessments at the classroom level helps teachers within the district to use data to inform their instruction. As the district endeavors to build upon their standards-based instruction model, this model will validate their data-driven decision making process. “Our communication is only as good as the assessments on which it is based. If assessment information is not accurate, communication will be meaningless, at best, with the potential to do damage in all other instances. Accuracy, as we have seen, depends on beginning with clear targets...” (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis p. 294). The standards-based instruction model, informs the utilization of formative assessments within the classroom as it clarifies “what” are the learning targets to be assessed, as articulated by content standards.

According to management and compliance reviews the district has a good framework of vision, mission, and goals. Note the following school improvement cycle:



Graphic taken from pg 4 of Facilitator’s Guide Data Retreat 2nd edition, by Judy K. Sargent © 2003 Learning Point Associates

As indicated in the figure above, goal setting (defining and then ultimately evaluating the attainment thereof) is a key part of the school improvement cycle. The district and LPA management and compliance reviews have indicated that the district has a good framework of vision, mission, beliefs and goals and that this is supported by extensive and current policies. The *Superintendent's 2005-2006 Goals, Objectives, and Deliverables* document has been made available on the district's website for review and its effort to make information transparent to the public is further evidence of its strength in this area. As previously indicated, this plan incorporates and articulates areas pertinent to the district's goals regarding student and school achievement, fiscal management, operational and technological excellence and culture change (Rivera, M. J. 2005. see also *Superintendent's 2005-2006 Goals, Objectives, and Deliverables* section). This articulation of goals, district vision, and mission strengthens the district's ability to move forward in the school improvement process.

As the *Superintendent's 2005-2006 Goals, Objectives, and Deliverables* document has been made available for public review, teacher interviews suggest that collaborative decision making and team-work take place effectively at the school level as well. Management and compliance reviews suggest that the district incorporates collaborative hiring decisions, and employs democratic and consistent decision making processes. The district utilizes a model that is described to be quite comparable to a cooperative school based planning team model. According to data gathered from another management and compliance source, the staff meets their goals through team work and respect. The district's plan to revise its professional development model to focus more on coaching strategies for administrative and school specialists is further evidence of its effort to build on its strength and successes. These revisions add value to its existing efforts and would support its effort to build a collaborative professional development model.

The Parents and Students Focus Groups were cited as another source of information about the district's strengths. Parents were appreciative of the support provided by teachers and instructional assistants, while students in higher performing schools reported that high expectations are balanced by a very supportive staff.

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Problem Statements

For the purposes of this audit, data was analyzed, reviewed through a co-interpretation, and sculpted into problem statements. As illustrated in the Phase 3 process description, each problem statement was generated through the cointerpretation process. In a facilitated process, groups of district administrators and staff (see Appendix A) identified key findings across multiple datasets to develop the district problem statements. With each problem statement, the key supporting findings and hypotheses are included. These can be mapped back to the original datasets using the data map in Appendix B. A short review of research is included, which is intended to provide a broader context for the findings and hypotheses and, in some cases, to provide insight into potential strategies for action planning.

It is important to note that these problem statements and hypotheses have been, and may continue to be, refined because this is an iterative process. As the district and audit partners revisit data, and begin action planning, these problem statements, developed by the district, will guide the thinking.

Problem Statement 1

The English language arts curriculum is not consistently taught in a way that fully matches the depth (weighting) or range of the New York state standards, written curriculum, and assessments.

Participants determined from evidence in the data, and from their experience in the district's central office, schools, and classrooms, that generally there was alignment between the written, taught, and assessed curriculum. However, the major finding of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment group at the cointerpretation meeting was that more depth and breadth of language arts instruction is necessary. The SEC, in particular, revealed instructional focus on student recall and demonstration rather than on higher-order cognitive skills, such as evaluation and creativity; this was true across the grade levels.

In addition, a focus on comprehension was noted, but adequate attention to other language arts skills, such as fluency, critical reading, writing processes, speaking, and presenting is necessary. While classroom observations suggested that a large percent of classrooms (81.7 percent) were organized to support reading instruction and practice, the materials and instructional strategies implemented in classrooms varied. Materials across K–12 classrooms primarily were teacher-created (more than 50 percent), with teachers focusing the majority of their time on comprehension strategies. Although instruction appeared relatively consistent, an analysis across SEC and observation results suggests that instruction could be better aligned to state standards with a greater focus on writing, listening, and speaking. In addition, alignment could improve with more instruction at the higher cognitive levels.

Research

Research supports the need for teaching language arts skills with more depth and breadth, and a lack of both is a recurring issue throughout the United States, especially in middle and high schools. Students typically do well with basic literacy skills, such as decoding and comprehension, but struggle with making inferences, drawing appropriate conclusions, connecting text to their lives, and communicating complex ideas (Carr, Saifer, & Novick, 2002).

According to the participants, other areas needing more time and greater depth of instruction are fluency, vocabulary, and writing. Fluency and vocabulary are essential to the development of reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000), and increasing instruction in these areas is appropriate. Writing is a nationwide concern; 14 percent of freshman in degree-granting institutions are required to take remedial writing courses (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Research indicates that since similar skills are required for reading and writing, instruction in writing can improve reading comprehension (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991).

Marzano (2003) also supports the importance of developing curriculum for depth and coverage. Curricular priorities need to be addressed to create a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

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Problem Statement 2

There are students who are not engaged in meaningful learning which may, in turn, affect their school attendance.

Student attendance emerged as a problem statement at the cointerpretation meetings from the evidence in key district documents and interviews with teachers, principals, parents, and students. While this problem was identified as a concern for high school students, it was noted that early elementary school should not be overlooked as a time to establish positive habits and values regarding regular school attendance. Participants noted that a relationship existed between regular student attendance and achievement scores. While student attendance at the elementary level was relatively high (92 percent to 95 percent in sampled schools), school-level interviews revealed attendance at the secondary level (Grades 7–12) was a major problem that needed addressing as students progressed from the middle school to high school. Policies are in place to address attendance issues.

Research

Research points to a number of factors impacting student attendance. School-based factors such as teacher-student relationships (Alvermann, 2003) and student engagement in content-based work can contribute to positive effects on student attendance. Other factors, such as past school performance, personal characteristics, and family and school relationships, also can contribute to student attendance and were identified by the district as hypotheses (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998). Corville-Smith et al. (1998) distinguished six factors that contribute to school attendance; the following factors were found to be statistically significant predictors for distinguishing absentee high school students from regularly attending students:

- Students' school perceptions—absentees are less likely to perceive school favorably.
- Perception of parental discipline—absentees perceive discipline as lax or inconsistent.
- Parental control—absentees believe parents are attempting to exert more control over them.
- Students' academic self-concept—absentees feel inferior academically.
- Perceived family conflict—absentees experience family conflict.
- Social competence in class—absentees are less likely to feel socially competent in class.

The impact of consistent school attendance on academic achievement may be greater than historically thought (Roby, 2004). To many educators, the link is clear: to learn the curriculum, students must be in school. According to Baker and Jansen (2000), studies indicate that students who are absent from class have lower academic achievement, and this may be evidenced on test scores. Frequent absences may lead to retention and possibly to truancy (Baker & Jansen, 2000). When students are absent, they miss learning opportunities; in addition, teachers must then provide instruction upon the student's return, meaning loss of instructional time for other attending students (Williams, 2002). Unfortunately, absenteeism can lead to problems in arenas

aside from academia. Some research has pointed to the fact that students who have absenteeism problems generally suffer both academically and socially (Williams, 2002).

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Problem Statement 3

Individual needs-based supports are not consistently provided to assist students in targeted subgroups, such as English Language Learners/ LEP and Students with Disabilities.

In response to the essential question related to the supports for “struggling students,” the participants identified groups of students who need additional services: ESL and LEP students and students with disabilities (as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)). Directors of these programs offered valuable information in outlining the current status of the programs and services.

Research

Research shows that schools across the United States face the issue that students learning English as an additional language have lower performance levels in reading and writing than native speakers (Fenner, 2003). However, schools can implement systems and structures that increase the performance of their students who are learning English. For example, one research study determined the structural features of six high schools that improved the achievement of ELLs (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990):

- A demonstrated value placed on students’ language and culture.
- High expectations held by teachers.
- School leadership support.
- Staff development designed to meet the learning needs of the students.
- Parents’ substantive involvement in their children’s education.
- School staff sharing a strong commitment to the empowerment of language-minority students.

Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri (2002) similarly found that many of these same elements represent a strong framework for ELL instruction at all grades.

At the classroom level, Rochester classroom teachers were not alone in their need for stronger instructional methods for diverse learners. With the dramatic increase in this population in the last 10–15 years (Padolsky, 2005), many teachers find themselves without university coursework or classroom experience in teaching learners with unique needs (Hamayan, 1990). Yet “mainstream classroom teachers have an essential role to play in the[ir] education” (Hamayan, 1990, p. 1).

This supports the hypothesis that more focused professional development is needed. Classroom teachers need to understand, at a higher cognitive level, the challenges faced by their students and ways to meet those challenges. For example, classroom teachers need to know about first- and second-language acquisition, reading and writing in a second language, alternative assessments, and sociocultural issues in education (Coady & Latina, 2003; Intercultural Development Research Association, 2002). They need to know about the types of learning disabilities and how they affect students’ receptive and expressive abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Thus, intensive professional development that builds this knowledge and supports teachers through implementation in their own classrooms is an essential element of support for teachers of diverse students (Garcia & Beltran, 2003).

The need for better collaboration between teachers of students with different needs and classroom teachers was cited as a hypothesis for this problem statement. Research supports the importance of strong collaboration for the mainstreaming of students to be successful (Ripley, 1997). Collaboration occurs at all three levels—the district, the school, and the classroom (as delineated in the hypotheses)—with time to meet, plan, and evaluate being the most critical variable of success (Ripley, 1997).

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Problem Statement 4

Assessment data on current ELA performance at the District and school level are not informing instruction and instructional decisions for all populations soon enough.

In response to the guiding question, “Are assessment data used to determine program effectiveness and drive instruction?” the participants found numerous data sources determining that this could be implemented more effectively. While district report cards, standardized test scores, and other data are available for teachers, schools, and districts to use, evidence suggested that more needed to be done to use data to inform and change instructional practices. For

instance, district and school respondents revealed that a variety of assessment data are provided to schools to make formative instructional decisions. However, administrators have mixed opinions about the extent to which schools and teachers actually are using data to drive instruction. Teachers tended to report that too much time is spent administering “high-level” assessments as opposed to classroom-level assessments, which provide teachers with more information to address individual needs.

Research

Research supports that data-driven decision making requires professional development and continued support (Holloway, 2003). A consistent data-driven approach requires strategic planning, support for the initiative, and sustained focus (Feldman, Lucey, Goodrich, & Frazee, 2003). The hypotheses identified in the Rochester area were validated by this research.

Research also indicates that teachers often feel confused, frustrated, and anxious when creating and delivering assessments (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2002). Teachers need to understand the elements of strong assessments when choosing and using them (Stiggins, 2002).

Formative assessments are a key ingredient for consistent and detailed data-driven decision making. When these assessments are used during instruction, they can aid in the planning of instruction, identify students at risk for reading difficulty, monitor student progress, and determine what curricular changes need to be made. Formative assessments complement summative assessments in the goal of improving student academic achievement (Shinn, Shinn, Hamilton, & Clarke, 2002).

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Problem Statement 5

Research-based best practices in English Language Arts are being used in many classrooms and schools but are not consistently implemented across all schools.

The cointerpretation meeting revealed from six data sources that research-based best practices for English language arts were not used consistently across the schools. A review of key documents and district and staff interviews suggests that implementation of the written curriculum is not completely articulated, which leads to different interpretations across schools in how the curriculum should be enacted. While not a surprising finding, this speaks to teachers' and principals' knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of an agreed-upon set of instructional practices from which to draw in English language arts instruction. Educators must set aside their standard practices at times to maintain consistent instruction within and across schools. This and other issues emerged as the hypotheses underlying this finding.

Research

Research suggests that while the challenge in implementing research-based best practices is a common one, a consistent philosophy across schools and classrooms can ease the implementation (Guskey, 1986). A strong body of research-based best practices for English language arts instruction exists and can be taught (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). For example, research suggests that teachers who view reading as a process that requires readers to develop knowledge and skills allow students to become strategic in their thinking. 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 constructing meaning (Duffy et al., 1987).

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Problem Statement 6

There is a need to have a better accountability system that connects effective professional development with increases in student achievement.

RSCD invests significant resources (7.5% of its 2004-2005 operating budget) in professional development of teachers and school-based administrators, representing a critical commitment to teacher quality. However, interviews revealed a need to establish clearer accountability for these funds in terms of delivery, implementation, and impact on student achievement. For example, while the district relies on its extensive network of instructional specialists to support teachers in improving their practice, the decisions on how these specialists are actually used in buildings on a day-to-day basis is made by the principal and can be different from their intended use. In addition, there are limited processes in place to track and measure the impact of the various professional development initiatives on student achievement.

Participants voiced the need to more effectively use professional development resources in English language arts and create a means to measure the relationship between professional development and student achievement. Six data sources confirmed that the information and skills presented through professional development are not communicated or implemented consistently in schools and classrooms. While professional development is implemented, measures of how it is implemented or whether the implementation is positively affecting student achievement needs to be fully developed.

Research

Researchers and practitioners identify a common set of characteristics in professional development that appears most likely to lead to improved student performance (Knapp, 2003, AERA 2005). One of these primary characteristics is professional development that promotes accountability for improved practice and student performance. Findings suggest that professional development resources are more likely to have an impact when school teams adopt practices and ensure follow through by all members. Accountability for these practices must be monitored by both school and district leaders to ensure they are both being implemented and successful.

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Problem Statement 7

Principals and teachers would like more job-embedded time to support strategically organized professional development on effectively implementing research based instructional practices.

Despite the large amount of contractual professional development time, including Wednesday professional development time and dedicated Superintendent days, many RSCD schools do not have enough identified time where strategically grouped teachers collaboratively work to improve their practice. In all interviews there was a universal desire to create more time for teachers to work collaboratively together with expert help.

Cointerpretation participants agreed that time is extremely limited. The participants discovered six data sources that reveal more time is needed to learn, transfer, and evaluate the information and skills from professional development sessions into the classroom. Specifically, district-staff and school-level interviews suggested that more professional development was needed to support how teachers use assessments to differentiate instruction. In addition, respondents from several schools indicated that there is a need for more formalized opportunities to collaborate and plan with content-area or grade-level team members.

This lack of identified time where strategically grouped teachers work together also limits the effectiveness of RCSD primary professional development delivery resource, the Instructional Support Specialists. RCSD has made a substantial investment in an evidence-based instructional coaching model - “Instructional Support Specialists” - as a strategy for improving the quality of instruction. During the 2004-2005 school year, each school had at least two instructional specialists focusing on literacy. In general each elementary school had an English Language Arts Specialist and an Academic Intervention Specialist and each secondary school had an English Language Arts specialist. However, the effectiveness of this school –based model varied by school based on the fidelity of implementation of the district model and unclear accountability for effective use.

Research

Numerous studies cite the lack of teacher time to work together as a critical barrier to reform (Raywid, 1993, Swaim, 1999, Neufeld, 2005). Research suggests that teachers need at least three hours a week to work together (Bodilly & Berends, 1998) to make significant improvement in instruction. Research by Rowan and associates analyzing student performance data over time, found that common planning time along with teacher control over instructional decisions were the two most important work place predictors of student performance (Rowan et. al 1997).

With regards to using instructional specialists, evidence suggests that skillful, well-supported, school based instructional coaching in combination with other professional development strategies can increase school level instructional capacity (Neufeld et.al 2003). This is especially true when the coaching work is part of a larger, well-conceived plan for school and district improvement (Richard 2003). Evidence and our own experience working with other districts show that a successful instructional coaching model:

- Has a rigorous selection process that results in hiring coaches that are credible to teachers and principals.

- Clearly defines the coaches roles and responsibilities and these roles and responsibilities are clear to coaches, principals, teachers, and district administrators.
- Provides comprehensive induction and on-going training to coaches, in both content and adult learning, that is differentiated based on school instructional design and coach need.
- Provides time in the school day for coaches to work one-on-one with teachers as well as collaboratively with groups of teachers organized around teacher and student needs.
- Ensures that principals, coaches and teachers are held accountable for effective implementation of the coaching model.
- Provides professional development to principals around the effective use and implementation of coaching.

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Problem Statement 8

Allocation of resources for ELA instruction and professional development for schools is not necessarily aligned with student needs.

School-level professional development resources appear to vary across schools in ways that may not be tightly linked to school need or capacity. It is important that the level of investment be part of a larger strategic plan.

Professional development resources should be tailored to school needs and capacity. Where school based capacity is high and school performance is high, schools should be provided the resources and the freedom to structure and plan professional development and where capacity is low and need is high any investment should be accompanied by the appropriate technical support.

At the co-interpretation sessions, as participants studied the data sources, they found there was not a clear relationship between student need, achievement in English language arts, and the

allocation of funds. This finding extended to teacher and principal professional development as well. For instance, several data sources suggested that the district needed to more clearly articulate and implement a systemic approach to leadership development. The key district documents reviewed did not indicate a clear connection between funding and English language arts curriculum and instruction, even though this area is a major concern of the district, schools, principals, and teachers.

While some alignment may occur unintentionally between funding allocation and English language arts, the participants recognized a lack of any purposeful alignment between the two.

Research

Most districts distribute resources unevenly among schools within the districts that that serve children with varying characteristics. Many of these inequities result from unplanned historic or programmatic causes. Most inequities are buried in complicated accounting procedures, staff-based budgeting policies and cost variations that accompany special student programs. Some spending differences make sense, such as additional dollars for handicapped children, but others are not systemic and may even conflict with the district’s stated goals. Districts must understand how it invests its resources – in which children and in which schools. Spending levels should vary based on need.

Schools receiving the resources also need to have the capacity to use these resources appropriately. Without an understanding of how to use professional development and ELA resources effectively, increasing control over resources usually results in limited change.

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Recommendations for Action Planning

In this section, we use the problem statements and key findings, along with research and best practices on literacy, teaching learners with disabilities, those placed in ELL settings, and district improvement to direct the district's efforts in the next three years. After a review of the district problem statements as well as complete review of the findings, Learning Point Associates identified what is believed to be the most critical areas for focus for the district to meet AYP targets in ELA. Education Resource Strategies professional development recommendations are included separately. Recommendations provided here are followed by specific actions for the district to consider during the action-planning process. The complexity of each problem statement places limits on the extent to which we can discern their relative impact on the district's improvement process. While these recommendations are firm, the associated actions for implementation should be considered points of reference for consideration during the action-planning process.

Rochester has many strengths that can be built upon to further the success of all students. It should be noted that many of the Learning Point Associates and Education Resource Strategies recommendations build upon efforts that are currently in progress in this district. Examples of these efforts include:

- Current teams working to revise and further articulate the curriculum
- Implementation of the Rochester literacy framework for all schools
- Plans and implementation of summer school programs targeted to students in need of assistance
- Creation of a district level accountability system for ELA

In addition to the above bulleted efforts, the Superintendent has set forth a plan to strengthen the secondary school program and increase the number of students graduating and pursuing college studies. Rochester has sought partners in the higher education area, and has secured commitments from several colleges and universities.

Recommendation 1

Review the district's English language arts curriculum to ensure that it meets the explicit depth and breadth of the state standards, and implement teacher supports and monitoring processes to ensure consistent curriculum implementation across the district.

Problem Statement 1 identified the misalignment of cognitive emphasis of instruction in English language arts. In addition, Problem Statement 5 indicated that research-based instructional practices are not implemented consistently across schools. Learning Point Associates suggests that Rochester City School District review and revise or supplement its current English language arts written curriculum to provide specific and clear guidance to teachers in these areas. Prior to the audit, the district had teams in place focused on developing and refining the curriculum. These teams should continue efforts towards alignment of curriculum to standards and the development of support and monitoring tools. This could be accomplished through a variety of formats, including curriculum mapping, written scopes and sequences, and documented district guides for instructional strategies. Currently, Rochester has a written curriculum for both

elementary and secondary schools, but this lacks vertical alignment, and may not provide enough teacher supports for lesson planning. The K-6 curriculum which includes performance indicators that are aligned to standards could be a model to build from for the remaining curriculum development and implementation and should be fully implemented across all schools. Marzano (2003) explicitly writes that a guaranteed and viable curriculum is the most important factor impacting student achievement.

Findings also suggest that more professional development is needed. This is addressed in more detail in the recommendation addressing professional development.

Lack of monitoring curriculum implementation also was identified as a root cause for this misalignment. Actions for consideration include developing a framework and standards to support curriculum monitoring, revising or creating instruments to conduct reliable evaluations, and providing training for school administrators to support consistent instructional practice.

Reference

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

Recommendation 2

Implement actions to increase student achievement for students in the targeted subgroups of ELLs, LEP students, and students with disabilities by providing consistent, broad-based, and equitable educational and social opportunities and needs-based academic assistance.

Findings related to serving ELL and students with disabilities (Problem Statement 3) indicate that this issue needs to be addressed at the district, school, and classroom levels. One place to start is a review of the district strategic plan and other public documents to determine whether students in subgroups are considered for their needs, clearly valued as equal citizens within the school community, and provided with equitable opportunities. An examination of the numbers of students with unique needs enrolled in AYP classes, gifted programs, or afterschool clubs and athletics would reveal whether the district's related policies are effective.

As with most other problem statements, professional development for teachers and administrators is a key recommendation at the school level. Long-held assumptions and stereotypes may need to be challenged to accomplish this; attitudes and beliefs regarding learners with unique needs, their families, and their communities may need to change.

It is important to assist teachers as they practice and discuss new instructional methods for students enrolled in special education and ESL classrooms. Coaching and co-teaching are two ways to achieve this. Collaboration among all of the teachers also is needed to sustain this type of professional development.

Time is a factor for many of the recommendations and needs to be considered here if teachers are to work together to serve learners with unique needs. Classroom, ESL, and special education teachers need dedicated time to learn about each other, develop a trust in one another's teaching abilities, plan and develop lessons, and evaluate outcomes. Research provides valuable descriptions of how other districts find time during and after the school day, which may serve as models for Rochester City School District.

Recommendation 3

Design and implement a plan that will result in the systemic use of data to drive decision making in the district and across schools, specifically in English language arts.

Problem Statements 4 and 7 identified the need to better disseminate and utilize English language arts assessment data to inform instruction. Learning Point Associates suggests that the Rochester City School District first determine what essential data elements are needed at the district, school, and classroom levels to improve and individualize English language arts instruction and communicate progress to both students and parents. The District has already identified this as a need. Specifically, the district currently has an objective to implement benchmark assessment systems that facilitate student data analysis to improve classroom practices.

In addition, findings suggest that teachers may need more targeted training to use these data to differentiate instruction. Specific strategies could be the following:

- Training administrators and teachers to understand the data sources they receive and how to use them as well as to more generally implement effective data-driven decision-making practices.
- Implementing procedures for administrators, academic directors, instructional specialists, and related staff to support and monitor effective data use in the classroom.
- Integrating and streamlining various assessments that provide similar information.
- Implementing new and different kinds of classroom-based assessments, which are reported to the school and district and provide user-friendly information for teachers (e.g., running records, observation logs).
- Improving communication between district and school staff to help them understand and interpret regularly provided data.

Creating a data-driven culture that implements and uses formative and summative assessments is a critical initiative that will take time. Achievement test data should be used as a component of assessment, with the emphasis on formative, or current, data. Although required as outcome measures, high-stakes tests, such as standardized achievement tests, have a limited ability to accurately represent students' reading achievement (Afflerbach, 2004). A score on the reading section of an achievement test represents a snapshot in time of a student's reading ability, given the constraints of the testing environment. Effective data-driven decision making requires the use of not only the standardized test data, but also formative assessments conducted throughout the academic year to accurately represent a student's reading achievement level (Afflerbach, 2004).

RCSA initiated a formative assessment program using the Developmental Reading Assessment prior to the beginning of this audit.

Reference

Afflerbach, P. (2004). *National reading conference policy brief: High stakes testing and reading assessment*. Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference. Retrieved December 20, 2005, from <http://www.nrconline.org/publications/HighStakesTestingandReadingAssessment.pdf>

Recommendation 4

Review and integrate literacy-based initiatives into a fully, articulated plan.

Rochester City School District may consider revising its plan so it does the following:

- Clarifies how the district's vision and beliefs are translated into school and classroom practice.
- Specifies the types of English language arts programs or strategies implemented in the schools.
- Creates actionable procedures for ensuring that school staff will be held accountable for student achievement.
- Delineates the alignment across curriculum and assessments, professional development, and management and compliance.

In addition, Learning Point Associates suggests that the district implement its plan through improved communication processes to create stronger bridges between the central office and schools. A further suggestion is that the district reviews its current reform models to ensure all reflect standards-based reform.

Recommendation 5

Develop and implement a planning and budgeting process that ensures all funding allocations are aligned with the district's instructional goals and objectives, including English language arts instruction and professional development.

Funding allocated at the district and school levels should be connected clearly to the district's strategic goals and objectives and school plans. Connecting planning and budgeting provides a systematic way of integrating educational planning with the alignment of resources for accountability. This alignment facilitates the gathering of critical information required for performance evaluation to ensure that plans to improve student achievement are being implemented. The district's annual budget should integrate all of the individual schools'

plans and the district plan into one document, which can be used as a tool to further align specific resources to the targeted areas.

A positive working relationship exists between the board and the administration, and the board and the superintendent are committed to improving student achievement. These positive aspects will lay the groundwork for this alignment. The district's solid framework of vision, mission, beliefs, and goals will support this effort. Furthermore, the superintendent's commitment to a budget process aligned with district goals was established in his 2005-2006 Goals, Objectives, and deliverables presentation. Some of these actions are already underway.

At Learning Point Associates, experience in working with districts indicates the alignment between funding and educational planning can best be accomplished through an annual, district-planning cycle. This includes major district activities, such as budget development. While this specific area was not explored in data gathering, Rochester City School District should consider whether its planning cycle acknowledges the interrelationship of major events and provides the opportunity for staff and public involvement. Examples include the creation or reaffirmation of the district's vision and mission and review of performance standards, goals and objectives, enrollment, budget processes, staffing, testing, monitoring, and reporting results.

Recommendations - Professional Development

While examining data on curriculum, instruction, assessment and management and compliance Learning Point Associates and district staff identified a significant interrelationship between those areas of emphasis and that of professional development. Outside the Learning Point Associates scope of work, the professional development audit was conducted by Education Resource Strategies and incorporated in this report. The Professional Development recommendations from Education Resource Strategies follow.

PD Recommendation 1

Develop a multi-year Professional Development Plan based on the needs of the district, school leadership, teachers and students that: (1) addresses the highest priorities; (2) aligns and clearly defines components, (3) uses research based designs that provide job embedded expert support and opportunities for teacher to collaborate, (4) varies content, delivery and control based on school/individual need and capacity, and (5) holds leadership accountable for use of professional development resources.

RCSD does invest significant resources on professional development activities, which represents a strong commitment to teacher quality that must be continued. Professional development activities in Rochester include many critical components of a high quality system-wide strategy, including school-based instructional coaching, research-based school reform models, and mentoring support for new and struggling teachers. With the investment earmarked and many of the structures in place, RCSD needs to continue to refine and integrate the professional development strategy to reduce fragmentation, improve implementation and increase

accountability for effective professional development. RCSD needs to create an explicit multi-year professional development plan that

- Addresses the district's highest priorities
- Aligns and defines the components and activities so that they work together and do not duplicate or conflict with each other
- Uses the research based professional development designs that provide coaching around instruction and opportunities to work together during common planning time
- Varies the content, delivery and control of professional development based on school needs
- Holds school leaders accountable for the use of professional development time and money.

This comprehensive professional development plan should ensure that high quality systemic professional development opportunities are available at critical career junctures, with special focus on: teacher leadership and career opportunities, and principal's leadership and support, including creating a pipeline for aspiring school leaders.

Any comprehensive professional development plan must track and evaluate all professional development spending, reviewing annually to determine effectiveness and alignment with needs and priorities.

Rochester has recognized this need and has already taken the first step in this process by centralizing the responsibility and accountability for the development, communication and implementation of the district wide professional development plan in a newly created cabinet level position, the Chief for Diversity and Leadership Development.

PD Recommendation 2

Organize school schedules to identify time for teachers that allows instructional support specialists to work on a consistent basis with strategically grouped teams of teachers.

Research suggests that high performing schools incorporate into the daily life of the school time for teachers to work to improve practice. However, it should be noted that simply creating the time is not sufficient. It must be created in a way that is strategically based on a school's instructional design, it must be blocked in ways that provide adequate time for collaboration and learning and it must be used effectively. RCSD has devoted significant investment in Instructional Specialists in both ELA and Academic Intervention Services. The effectiveness of this resource has been limited by insufficient time for these individuals to work with teachers in groups. Effective school-based coaching requires that schools have consistently scheduled and adequately blocked time for coaches to work with teachers.

PD Recommendation 3

Build principal capacity to strategically manage professional development resources, and hold them accountable for effective use. Special focus should be on principal's use of instructional support specialists and contractual time.

Problem Statement # 6 identifies the need for an accountability system to determine the effectiveness of the use of professional development resources. While an effective accountability system is critical, it is important to provide those who will be held accountable with the knowledge and skills that they will be held accountable for.

ERS interviews and observations suggest that three factors influence whether RCSD principals use instructional specialists to improve teacher practice as envisioned in the design of the role. Principal capacity represents the first and perhaps most important factor driving the fidelity of implementation. By capacity we mean the principal's:

- Understanding and ownership of the role of the instructional specialists in improving teacher practice,
- Knowledge about how adults learn, and
- Expertise on how to organize and structure of effective school-based professional development.

Appendix A

New York State District Audit Rochester Cointerpretations

Participant List

December, 2005

January, 2006

February, 2006

District Administrators

Rebecca Boyle
Patti Brockler
Jana Carlisle
Michael Chan
Michael Christman
Marie Cianca
Tim Cliby
Vern Connors
Joyce Dunn
Kim Dyce
Miriam Ehtesham
Libbi Gandy
Michele Hancock
Lynne Hawthorne
Diana Hernandez
Christine Hill
Terry Hofer
Cheryl Holloway
Barbara Jarzyniecki
Sue Kaufmann
Paul Lampe
Connie Leech
Manuel Rivera
C. Michael Robinson
David Silver
Jeanette Silvers
Lillie Stone
Gloria Sullivan
Susan Tripi
Rob Ulliman

School Administrators

Larry Ellison
Robert Goldsberry
Vicki Gouveia (*ASAR
Union Officer*)
Barbara Hasler
Kathy Lamb
Beth Mascitti-Miller

Brenda Murphy-Pough
Jane Scura
Mary Thomas
Tim Wagner (*ASAR Union
Officer*)
Tyra Webb-Johnson

Teachers

Marie Costanza
Thea Delehanty
Karen Dingwall
Ester Fisher
Sue Goodwin
Jonathan Hickey (*RTA
Union Officer*)
Debbi Jackett (*RTA Union
Officer*)
Martha Keating (*RTA
Union Officer*)
Linda LoCastro
Margaret Sergent (*RTA
Union Officer*)
Gaya Shakes
Diana Vega

Paraprofessionals

John Jackson (*RAP Union
Officer*)

BENTE (Non-Teaching
Staff Union)

(chose not to participate)

Parents / Parent Representatives

Carolee Albert
Charmaine Cohen
Robert Davey
Dwight Fowler

Florence James
Lillie McClara

Community

Maxine Smith – *ABC
Headstart*
Aida Vera - *IBERO*

Board of Education

Domingo Garcia
Shirley Thompson

State Education Department

Larry Hunt
Mike Washousky

Learning Point Associates

Linda Miller
Sheryl Poggi
Shazia Miller
Chris Brandt
Jayne Sowers
Danielle Carnahan
Iris Taylor

ERS

Regis Sheilds

Appendix B

Data Maps

During the cointerpretation process, participants' analyzed 12 datasets (see introduction to Table 5). The datasets are summaries of documents and interviews compiled by the auditors. The process of using the datasets to develop problem statements was as follows:

- After forming five groups, the participants examined the datasets that corresponded to their assigned audit strand: curriculum, instruction, assessment, management, or compliance.
- After careful and thoughtful discussion, the participants identified findings from the datasets. The participants then evaluated the findings to determine the key findings or the most significant findings.
- The entire group combined and categorized the key findings into problem statements.
- Participants listed possible explanations or causes underlying the problems. These were termed *hypotheses*.

Tables B1, and B2 demonstrate the results of the above process. However, they are presented in reverse order of development; Table B1 lists the key findings, and Table B2 lists all findings.

Table B1 lists the key findings identified by the cointerpretation participants. The right-hand column lists the number of participants' votes for each finding. Several of the key findings are a compilation of several findings; thus, several votes (e.g., 20 + 6) are listed.

Table B1. Key Findings

| Key Findings | Votes |
|---|---------------|
| 1. The components of the taught curriculum are not aligned proportionately with the essential elements of the written curriculum, standards, and assessments. (Integrated Findings 1, 14, and 15) | 20 + 6 + 6 |
| 4. The district needs to better address the learning needs of students with disabilities and ELLs. | 11 |
| 5. Professional development and instructional strategies are not implemented and communicated consistently. | 6 |
| 8. There is insufficient formal common planning time for instructionally focused professional development. (Integrated Findings 2 and 8) | 3 + 4 |
| 9. Professional-development spending is not aligned strategically with the needs and capacity of the schools. (Integrated Findings 3 and 9) | 6 + 6 |
| 10. There is inconsistency in the effective use of research-based practices across schools. | 7 |
| 11. There is a need to make better use of assessment data and item analysis to inform and change instructional focus in a timely manner. | 12 |
| 12. Student attendance is a problem. | 4 |
| 13. The strategic plan needs to be specific and should demonstrate integration of all initiatives and plans. (Integrated Findings 7 and 13) | 6 + 6 |

Table B2 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 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 numbers in the columns in Table B3 refer to the page numbers of the dataset in which the support was found. (As the datasets are edited and merged into other documents, the numbering may no longer correspond.) An “X” in the column indicates that the participants found support in the dataset, but did not include a page number. The final column indicates participants’ votes in elevating the finding to the level of a key finding. The findings in italics were adopted by the group as key findings.

Table B2. All Identified Findings

| Findings | Datasets | | | | | | | | | | | | Votes |
|--|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Curriculum and Instruction Group | PR | SA | KDD | DS | TP | PS | SEC | CO | MC1 | MC2 | MC3 | PD | |
| 1. Our written and taught curriculum and assessments do align with standards, but we lack a unified focus on key components (e.g., comprehension, critical thinking, highly individualized). | | X | 5 | | | | X | 8 | | | | | 20 |
| 2. We do not consistently schedule students with their graduation, outcomes after high school, or teachers' instruction in mind. | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 3. Allocation of funds need to better support curriculum and instructional practices. | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | 6 |
| 4. The district needs to address the learning needs of students with disabilities and ELL students. | | | 3 | 2 | | X | | | | | | | 11 |
| Professional Development Group | PR | SA | KDD | DS | TP | PS | SEC | CO | MC1 | MC2 | MC3 | PD | Votes |
| 5. Professional development and instructional strategies are not consistently implemented and communicated. | | | 1 | 1-2, 4 | X | 3 | | 4, 6 | | 2 | | | 6 |
| 6. There is no school-based accountability for fidelity of implementation of model or effective use of instructional specialist. | | | 2-4 | | | | | | | | | 3-6 | 3 |
| 7. There is no systematic or systemic approach to leadership development or differentiated instruction for adult learning. | | | | 2 | | | 47 | | | 2 | 2-3 | 11, 13 | 6 |

| Findings | Datasets | | | | | | | | | | | | Votes |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| | PR | SA | KDD | DS | TP | PS | SEC | CO | MC1 | MC2 | MC3 | PD | |
| Professional Development Group | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. There is insufficient formal common planning time for instructionally focused professional development. | 12-14 | | 8 | | | | | | | | | 8 | 4 |
| 9. Professional development spending is not aligned strategically with the needs and capacity of schools. | | | 8 | | | 4-5 | | | 2, 5 | | 1 | 8-9 | 6 |
| Management and Compliance Group | PR | SA | KDD | DS | TP | PS | SEC | CO | MC1 | MC2 | MC3 | PD | Votes |
| 10. There is inconsistency in the effective use of research-based practices across schools. | | | 4 | X | | X | | | X | | X | X | 7 |
| 11. There is a need to make better use of assessment data and item analysis to inform or change instructional focus in a timely manner. | | 2 | X | 2 | 1, 3 | X | 14, 17 | | | | | | 12 |
| 12. There is a need for home-school collaboration to improve high school attendance. | | | | X | 3 | X | | | | | | | 4 |
| 13. The strategic plan needs to be specific and to demonstrate integration of all initiatives and plans. | 11 | | 1 | | | | | | | | 1 | | 6 |
| 14. The written curriculum is not completely understood or applied to impact daily instruction. | | | X | 1 | | X | | | | | | | 6 |
| 15. The taught curriculum is not fully aligned to state content standards. | 5, 17 | | 2 | 3 | X | | X | 5-7, 12-17 | X | | | | 6 |

Appendix C

Action Planning

Action Planning Process Overview

Rochester conducted a very thorough action planning process. A brief description of the participants, goals and strategies is included below.

Goal and Strategy Planning

Rochester City School District (RCSD) began district action planning in January of 2005. To develop the goals and strategies, a total of thirty eight participants worked together. This number included teachers, union leaders, district representatives and facilitators. The staff worked in small groups to identify themes and to direct a focus for the district plan. These thoughts were then gathered, analyzed, and matched against recommendations to create draft goals and strategies. The district worked diligently to ensure alignment. The goals and strategies were solidified in February. Learning Point Associates was present for all goal setting and strategy meetings.

Action and Task Planning

After Rochester worked to identify goals and strategies, they broke into small teams to define success indicators and action steps. These action steps, and subsequent tasks outlined district initiatives required to fulfill the district goals. To ensure cohesive representation, fifty four individuals in various positions ranging from Dr. Rivera, teachers, board members, parents and community members worked to provide input on the implementation. The district set success indicators to monitor its own progress toward goal achievement. Learning Point Associates and RCSD facilitated multiple meetings to complete this process.

Integration and Alignment Actions

After the completion of action and task planning, RCSD worked to create a shared understanding of the NY audit action plan and it's alignment with other district plans. Strategies, actions and tasks for each of the goals were reviewed across groups to identify areas of overlap, commonality, and possible degrees of integration needed with the work teams.

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

Rochester's penultimate component of the Action Planning process involved a group integration and alignment of the audit action plan with other district and school initiatives and plans. Once this was completed, Rochester began the process of formal approval by the board. Learning Point Associates attended a meeting that was the first step in this process.

Audit Participants: Data Collection and Interpretation

- 12 Schools
- 72 Students
- 396 Teachers
- 82 Administrators
- 50 Parents
- 2 Paraprofessionals
- 10 Community Providers
- 2 Board Members
- 4 Union Presidents

Audit Participants: Strategy Development

- 9 ASAR Representatives
- 9 RTA Representatives
- 9 District Representatives
- 2 Facilitators

6/6/2006

Information pending SED approval

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Audit Participants: Input Regarding Actions and Implementation

- 26 Central Staff (Including Dr. Rivera)
- 2 School Board Members
- 4 Teachers
- 5 School Administrators
- 2 Parent Office Staff
- 4 Parents
- 3 Union Officers
- 2 NYSED
- 2 Community Providers
- 4 LPA Representatives

Our Response: Three Year Action Plan



6/6/2006

Information pending SED approval

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