

**COMPREHENSIVE APPRAISAL  
FOR  
DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT  
District Report**

**Adams County 14  
School District**

**May 30, 2008**

**Process Completed  
April 7—April 15, 2008**

## Preface

This Comprehensive Appraisal of District Improvement for Adams County 14 School District was completed under a grant from the Colorado Department of Education. Under current requirements of Title I Part A, Section 1117 of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), districts identified by the Colorado Department Education as needing “program improvement” are required to conduct an appraisal of current educational practices and use the results of that appraisal to develop a plan for improvement.

This report is a comprehensive, research-based analysis of the district’s performance and current educational practices. It is intended to be used to support the district in continuous improvement.

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# Section I

# Background

# Information

## **Mission and Purposes**

### **Process Mission**

The mission of this review is to serve the Adams County 14 School District, and consequently the community, staff, and students, by providing data, observations and feedback relative to the current status of the district's educational program. It is designed to help the district identify strengths and assets, needs and challenges, and recommendations for planning to support ongoing improvement efforts. It is intended to be a tool that can guide the district in improving its educational practices, raising student achievement, and closing existing achievement gaps.

### **Process**

This appraisal process assessed the district in nine standards of district effectiveness, consistently identified in the professional literature, relative to the district's academic performance, learning environment, and organizational effectiveness. The appraisal team reviewed district documents and records, conducted onsite visits, and interviewed numerous staff, students, parents, members of the board of education, and community members.

### **This Comprehensive Appraisal is:**

- An objective, comprehensive, research-based process;
- A response to state requirements for long-term continuous improvement;
- A snapshot in time of current practices;
- Based on multiple sources of data and information;
- A systems approach to continuous improvement;
- A foundation for the district to engage in strategic planning and to implement actions to increase student achievement.

### **The Appraisal is not:**

- About a single issue, program or solution;
- Based on individual sources of information;
- About individuals or personnel;
- A prescription or quick-fix for the district.

## APPRAISAL PROCESS

During the appraisal process, team members conducted 251 formal interviews and numerous other informal discussions and conversations with staff, community members and students. In visits to schools the team conducted 228 short observations and “walk-throughs” in classrooms. Additionally, the appraisal team attended several district and school meetings including the Board of Education, District Accountability Committee, District Leadership Team, school data team meetings and community engagement meetings. Interviews included the following district and school personnel along with community members, parents and members of the board of education:

- District-level leadership (36)
- District operations Staff (2)
- District technology staff (4)
- Building principals and assistant principals (22)
- Program coordinators/specialists (16)
- Classroom teachers and specialists including bilingual teachers (119)
- District and school classified and paraprofessional staff including advocates and coordinators (26)
- Parents and community members including Spanish speaking parents (17)
- School board members (5)
- Teacher’s on special assignment (TOSAs) (4)
- District/school accountability committee members (3)
- Informal conversations with students at all schools (39)

Additionally the appraisal team reviewed documents and artifacts including information from surveys, written documents, policies, procedure manuals, and accreditation and improvement plans. Specific documents reviewed included:

- Administrator Appraisal and Growth Plan Examples
- Administrative Team (PLC) Agendas, Documents and Notes
- Alpine Achievement Executive Summary
- Assessment Plans and Calendar
- Board of Education Policies, Agendas, Minutes and other Documents
- CDE’s English Development Standards
- Certified Evaluation Plan, Procedures and Appraisal Forms
- Classroom Walkthrough Protocols, Records and Data
- CSAP Historical Data and Trends
- Curriculum Documents, Maps and Calendars
- School and District Performance Data
- Demographic Data and Trends
- DIBELS and IDEL Data
- CELA Data
- District Accreditation & Accountability Plans & Reports
- District Accountability Committee Agendas/Minutes
- District Consolidated Grant and Title I Plan
- District NWEA MAP Data

- District AYP Data
- District Longitudinal and Cohort Data
- District Budget
- District Community Partners
- District Community Resource Guide
- District Data Regarding Achievement Gaps of Subgroups
- District English Language Acquisition Plans
- District Grants and Allocations
- District Instructional Program Cycle
- District Mission and Vision
- District Report to the Community
- District Grants and Allocations
- District and School-Level Surveys
- District Technology Plan
- District Title I and Consolidated Grant Applications and Reports
- District Website
- ELA Transition Data/Graphs
- ELL Achievement and Gap Data
- Grade Level Essential Targets in Core Academic Areas (GLETS)
- Homework and Grading Policies for Some Schools
- Instructional Strategies for Some Schools
- Personnel Procedures and Guidelines
- Professional Development Plans, Calendar and Examples
- Report Cards
- Sample Scoring Guides/Rubrics
- School Accountability Reports
- School Accountability/improvement Plans
- Staff Curriculum Surveys
- StART Balanced Scorecard, Protocol and Data
- Walkthrough Protocol and Data

## Team Members

<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
<b>David J. Benson, Team Leader</b>	<b>Former School/District Administrator</b> Director of Assessment, Pupil Personnel, Organizational Development, Principal, Teacher and Psychologist District & School Leadership, Planning, Organizational Effectiveness
<b>Karen L. Benner</b>	<b>Former Superintendent</b> Director of Consolidated Federal Programs Literacy Specialist Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction District and School Improvement Planning
<b>Robert Kulovany</b>	<b>Elementary Principal</b> Former Elementary and Secondary Teacher Leadership Resource Allocation District Support to Schools
<b>Shelly Lantz</b>	<b>Former Human Resource Director</b> Secondary Education and Administration Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction
<b>Colleen Rickert</b>	<b>Former Director of Title I – Literacy and Mathematics</b> Professional Development Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language
<b>Deborah Rose</b>	<b>Former School Board Member</b> Parent and Community Relations District Culture Board Role, Functions & Leadership
<b>Fred Wall</b>	<b>Former Superintendent &amp; Principal</b> Standards-based Practices Resource Allocation Leadership and Improvement Planning

**Adjunct Team Members:**

**Linda Barker**

**Colorado Education Association**

Director of Teaching and Learning  
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The appraisal team thanks those district staff members who provided support or participated in this appraisal for their cooperation, help, and candid feedback. Specifically the team wishes to thank John Lange, Superintendent of Schools and Bob DeBlauw who supported the team in planning and logistics. The district staff supported the process with their time and access to their work. The building principals also gave the team full access to their time and their schools. The work and attitudes of these individuals speaks highly of Adams County 14 School District.

## NINE STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THE DISTRICT APPRAISAL

This district appraisal report is based upon the interviews completed by the audit team, examination of district documents and artifacts, observations, and an assessment of the *Colorado Standards and Indicators for District Improvement*. The specific needs, challenges and recommendations identified in this report address nine standards for district performance and are organized under the headings of Academic Performance, Learning Environment, and Organizational Effectiveness.

### ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The following Academic Performance Standards address district/school curriculum, evaluation and assessment of student performance, and the schools' instructional program.

- Standard 1:** The district develops or adopts a curriculum that is rigorous and aligned with state standards.
- Standard 2:** The district creates a body of evidence using multiple assessment and evaluation strategies to inform instruction, monitor practice, promote proficient student work, and meet accountability requirements.
- Standard 3:** The district's standards-based instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

### LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The following Learning Environment Standards address district and school culture, student, family, community support, professional growth, development, and evaluation.

- Standard 4:** The district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.
- Standard 5:** The district partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and development needs of students.
- Standard 6:** The district provides research-based, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

### ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The following Organizational Effectiveness Standards address leadership, district and school structures, resources, and comprehensive and effective planning.

- Standard 7:** District provides focus and support for improved student achievement, high quality teaching, organizational direction, high performance expectations, a learning culture, and leadership capacity.
- Standard 8:** The organization of the district, the budgeting process, and allocation of resources align with structures and systems that enhance attainment of high levels of student achievement.
- Standard 9:** The district develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, provides direction and an action plan focused on student achievement.

# **Section II**

## **Narrative Report**

This section includes:

1. Introduction
2. District Strengths and Assets
3. Recurring Themes with Findings and Recommendations
4. Guiding Questions

## Introduction

During the last decade, Adams County School District 14 has been working to improve student learning. This effort has shown small but positive trends in yearly achievement averages during the last seven years. The efforts of the district have yielded positive trends in student achievement deserve recognition. However, given the current trajectory of student achievement, it will be necessary for the district to strategically enhance its current practices to meet state and federal student achievement targets and to best prepare its students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The importance of district-level policy and practice, particularly in urban districts with the community demographics of Adams 14, cannot be understated. The practices of districts with the same challenges as Adams 14 have been addressed in a number of research studies and in professional literature. In a 2002 study conducted by MDRC\* a team of researchers investigated improvement strategies in low income districts that raised student achievement and closed the achievement gap. The researchers found a number of common practices employed by these districts including:

- Creation of a culture of accountability and administrative infrastructure to support it.
- A focus of efforts on low performing schools.
- District-wide adoption of uniform curricula closely aligned with state standards and centralized instructional strategies.
- Focused, substantive, intensive professional development to support implementation of curricular reforms.
- A focus on thorough implementation of district identified strategies at the school and classroom level.
- The use of data to drive instruction and determine resource allocations.
- Efficient business operations, with a focus on customer service to schools.
- An initial focus on elementary schools and early childhood education.

Districts who implemented these practices encountered similar challenges in implementing reform, including changing the role (and attitudes and district-wide perceptions) of the central office, facing controversy when staff performance concerns were addressed, building infrastructure to meet data needs, gaining support among teachers for more prescriptive curricular reforms, and confronting charges that their educational focus was too narrow or that reforms undercut academic excellence.

In addition to the above common practices, the study also compared districts that saw themselves as making many of the same reforms but were, in fact, less successful. These comparison districts were different from the successful districts several of significant ways:

- These districts lacked a clear consensus around a vision for reform.
- District goals were not specific.
- District leadership was less clear about or had not committed to specific achievement targets, and goals were not associated with times, deadlines, specific measurement or consequences.

- There was less focus on clear, research-based instructional strategies and often multiple and conflicting curricula, practices and instructional expectations of staff.
- Improving student achievement was not the specific focus of the day-to-day operations throughout the central office or school board.
- The central office was not committed to ensuring their strategies were actually being implemented at the school level.

Several themes were cited by the researchers emerging from this study. It underscores the importance of district-level policy and practice in addressing the challenges of districts with the demographics of Adams 14. Successful districts:

- Shared a stable consensus for change created and maintained by the board and superintendent.
- Maintained a culture of accountability to support and implement reform efforts.
- Demonstrated that quality teachers and instructional coherence, made possible by focused, consistent and extensive professional development, can improve learning.
- Demonstrated that student achievement can increase by providing early and on-going assessment data with training for teachers and administrators in using that data to diagnose weaknesses and develop instructional responses.

This study highlights the significant role of the school district as the leader in school reform. It also suggests that while districts may often know, at least in part, *what* to do, they might not always know or have the most effective strategies in *how* to do it. This appraisal attempts to help Adams 14 to not only become clearer on *what* to do to improve student learning, it also attempts to support the district in considering *how* it might improve performance.

\*MDRC was founded in 1974 as the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. In 2003, this group became simply MDRC. This study was presented in 2002 in Washington, D.C. at the American Youth Policy Forum that addressed closing the achievement gap in low income schools.

## **District Strengths and Assets**

During the last two decades, Adams County 14 School District has seen an increase in students that would be identified as “at risk.” The district is currently serving a notably high percentage of students living in poverty, facing significant life challenges, and with a high mobility rate. Additionally, the district is educating numerous students without proficient English language skills. While these challenges have increased over time, during the last seven years the district has seen small upward trends district-wide averages in student achievement. The district deserves recognition for the work it has accomplished so far.

It is evident to the appraisal team that the district is making progress in developing and implementing some effective practices at the district level that have the potential to have a long-term positive impact on student performance. Additionally, school level leadership appears to be working diligently to identify and implement practices that will improve student achievement in their school. Such established or developing practices are assets for the district and can provide a foundation to continue the work of improving student learning. The team identified a number of the assets that are currently having a positive impact on staff practice and student learning and can provide a basis for further improvements in professional practice and student performance. These assets are identified below.

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- The Student Achievement Resource Team (StART) has organized itself to work as a professional learning community to collaborate with principals and schools in implementing professional practices that will raise student achievement.
- The current school-level administrators bring positive energy, leadership and potential to the district’s improvement efforts.
- There is technology infrastructure and various data systems to identify, store, and disaggregate student demographic and performance data.
- The Adams 14 Education Foundation has created a significant funding source for the district.
- The district is making some efforts to “grow their own” leaders through training and leadership opportunities.
- The district appears to have established a strong budgeting, fiscal management and accounting system.
- The district has invested heavily in technology and infrastructure that is beginning to be accessed within the schools and offers an ability to significantly enhance staff and student use of technology in the future.
- There is a strong elementary principal group that regularly collaborates to study, plan, share best practices and support each other in improving leadership and teaching practices.
- The StART Balanced Report Card provides a structured, data-based system to monitor and evaluate district goals and actions.

### **District and School Culture**

- The district maintains a large number of positive relationships and partnerships with various businesses and community agencies. Thirty-two partnerships were documented.
- Health services are provided to students through the Tri County Health Department and the school-based clinic.
- The district's support of the arts for students is commendable.
- The district has created a variety of opportunities to communicate with the community including the district website, newsletters, and televised meetings.
- District communications are made available in Spanish and translation is provided at district and school meetings.
- Numerous opportunities for parent education are offered through the district and schools.
- The Intergenerational Learning Center provides services to parents and community members including English classes for non-English speaking parents.
- The resource center housed in the administration building provides needed food, clothing and other necessities to support children and families.
- The district, individual schools and staff members have received a notable number of significant awards and recognitions (14) in a variety of areas over the last two years.

### **Academic Performance**

- The district has taken several recent strategic actions to build a foundation for standards-based practices in the areas of curriculum and assessment such as identification of essential targets, district-wide instructional calendars and common formative assessments.
- There are pockets of excellent instruction in classrooms throughout the district.
- The development of all day kindergarten will be able to give students an opportunity to acquire more academic and social skill development in the early years.
- The district has taken some steps to train staff in using data to drive decisions at the schools.
- There is an emerging collegiality at many schools that enhances collaboration among staff regarding data, student progress, and curricular issues. This offers the opportunity to improve staff practices in delivering a coherent curriculum, designing strategic instruction and accessing interventions for all students.
- There is evidence that some schools are making use of student data to drive decisions and teaching.

## **Recurring Themes**

### **Findings (Challenges and Needs) and Recommendations**

To help develop a coherent understanding of the needs and challenges facing the district, the team used the results of the district ratings and descriptions of practices in the *Colorado Standards and Indicators for District Improvement* to identify **four systemic themes** that emerged in the findings. Those themes are identified and described in four sections, with each section including Findings, Recommendations and Guiding Questions for the district. These four themes are:

**Theme 1:**

Developing Organizational Effectiveness with the Board of Education and District Leadership, through Strategic Planning, Implementation and Coherent Work

**Theme 2:**

Ensuring a Learning Environment with a Culture of High Performance

**Theme 3:**

Implementing Standards-Based Practices in Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction

**Theme 4:**

Developing Proficient English Language Skills in All Students through a Well Designed and Competently Delivered English Language Acquisition (ELA) Program

## **Theme 1:**

### **Developing Organizational Effectiveness with the Board of Education and District Leadership, through Strategic Planning, Implementation and Coherent Work**

Organizational effectiveness describes the work of the district in the areas of planning, leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support high performance. The work of a school district is manifested in its leadership at the school board and district level. The job of leadership is to develop a common vision and a culture of collegiality and respect where all leaders regularly and collaboratively assess status, problem-solve, and plan for improvement. Effective districts ensure that leaders constantly focus on the improvement of teaching and learning. Effective leaders clarify and expect results through plans, goals, and strategies built on a belief that all staff can impact student success. Clear expectations for proficient student performance are always in the forefront and supported by the professional practices identified in educational research and literature. Effective districts build institutional integrity by continually evaluating progress in improvement practices and student achievement and take appropriate and timely action to improve areas of identified need. This implies documenting the district's actions and results through ongoing internal review, monitoring progress on district and school goals, and reporting that progress to stakeholders.

Adams 14 district leadership has been working to build its capacity to raise student achievement through effective professional practices. However, there are still challenges in leading the district towards higher levels of performance.

While there is power in cohesive and coherent leadership, the district's organizational structure does not appear to foster such leadership. There are two administrative divisions at the district level that are each responsible for different elements of the educational program delivered in all schools. As a result of these two parallel divisions, there is lack of a clear, singular vision or a consistent working leadership framework that emanates from the district. This is particularly evident in addressing the language needs of English Language Learners (ELL). This inhibits the development of focused, unified goals and thus, coherent, systematic actions in the schools. There appear to be differences in philosophies, leadership styles and strategies, and even visions for the district. These disconnects between the two divisions create misunderstandings and a lack of focused, aligned work in the schools. It will be critical for the district to address this structure and resolve the differences that create barriers to focused, strategic leadership at the district level and clarity of purpose, goals, and actions at the school level.

There is a need throughout the district to create a safe, collaborative environment to foster dialogue in determining a common path for the district to lead the schools into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this collaborative work, there need to be voices of reason along with passion, a reliance on research and data to guide decisions, and the ability to communicate respectfully about diversity in beliefs, approaches, or strategies, rather than advocacy for individual perspectives or philosophies.

To be a powerful district, Adams 14 must develop fidelity and cohesion of plans and actions, based in research, to take further steps toward improvement. Plans, strategies, and frameworks must be proactive rather than reactive and aligned rather than disconnected. Communication processes must serve to enroll all district-level and school staff members in common goals and actions that have meaning, purpose, and rationale for all staff.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Organizational Effectiveness through District Leadership**

- The district's mission and goals were developed several years ago by the school board along with the superintendent of schools.
- The board of education has articulated five goals that set priorities for work of the district.
- Board goals are general in nature and lack specific action or implementation plans.
- There is currently no strategic plan that determines a long-term direction for the district.
- The District Student Achievement Resource Team (StART) and the elementary principal group have identified research-based priorities (e.g. data-driven instruction, instructional calendars, tiered interventions, and active student engagement) to improve student learning. The StART team has taken some preliminary actions to provide feedback to schools and monitor fidelity to these initiatives.
- At monthly meetings, the StART team and principals review progress in each school's accreditation plan.
- Many principals participate in weekly data talks with teachers to track student progress and ensure students are receiving appropriate interventions.
- The district has the technological capacity and personnel expertise to fully analyze district and school level data. The use of performance data to prioritize needs or actions at the building levels is not fully developed.
- The elementary principal group is beginning to implement a professional learning community (PLC) and focusing their work on initiatives identified by the StART team.
- While data is disaggregated for the entire school population, subgroup results do not appear to be analyzed or used to inform decisions.
- District-wide strategies for improving instruction and programs which address performance gaps are not evident.
- There appears to be a disconnect between the initiation of new policies and practices and an understanding of the capacity of schools to implement those initiatives.
- Physical facilities may be deteriorating due to inadequate monies to support effective maintenance programs. As a result, care for facilities appears to be reactive rather than proactive. A facilities audit is planned for the near future.
- StART and ELA personnel do not typically work together to promote student learning.

- While every new program contains an evaluative component, existing programs may not always be evaluated for effectiveness nor modified based on that data.
- Little emphasis seems to be placed on sustainability of grant programs once funding expires.
- Classroom walkthroughs by district and school leaders are in a preliminary stage and occurring regularly.
- A high level of non-retention of probationary teachers is evident. There appears to be a history of moving under-performing, non-probationary personnel to different positions rather than addressing performance concerns directly with opportunities for improvement in performance.
- The district culture is such that individual principal actions may not be aligned with district initiatives. Such actions may not always be readily apparent to district leadership.
- Much of the professional development for some principals occurs in ad hoc bi-monthly meetings of the principal group.
- The administrative evaluation tool does not emphasize professional development of administrators.
- Evidence of budgetary adjustments based on meeting changing student needs was not apparent. Allocations of personnel and resources appear to be based on student numbers rather than consciously addressing specific learning needs at schools.
- A formal process for obtaining the involvement of staff members, parents, and community members to garner input into the budget process at the district and school levels was not evident. As a result, there may be a lost opportunity for creative problem-solving to come up with ideas that could improve current programs or practices.
- Discussion has taken place regarding the District Accountability Committee's participation in budget review. This activity has not yet been initiated.
- Hiring practices in the recent past have included recruiting teachers from Mexico. This has been viewed with mixed results by principals due to low skills in educational pedagogy and English language competencies.
- The degree of support to schools offered by district personnel is perceived as inconsistent. Support provided from the StART team appears to be highly regarded by most principals.
- No procedures are in place to match highly-skilled staff with students having the greatest needs.
- The district budget does not reflect substantial financial support for professional development to build the competencies of all staff.
- A district accountability/improvement plan was developed by district office personnel. There is no process identified to orient new staff members to the district accountability/improvement plan.
- It does not appear there is a clear structure for obtaining staff and community input into the district improvement plan.

- The district plan uses a SMART goal format. The number of goals, while comprehensive, does not create a focus on a few targeted goals that give schools guidance as to focus their work at the schools.
- The goals in the district's accountability/improvement plan may not always be addressed through research-based practices or provide guidance in engaging staff in the needed changes in practices required to implement the plan.
- No mid-year changes in the action steps of the district accountability/improvement plan occur after the plan is implemented.
- A template is provided to school-level administrators to guide the development of school accountability/improvement plans.
- It appears there was limited opportunity for staff to provide input into school accountability/improvement plans in some schools and no opportunities for input in other schools.
- The process of providing achievement updates to the board of education regarding school accountability/improvement is mostly focused on achievement gains or losses as indicated by state assessments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Organizational Effectiveness through District Leadership**

- It is recommended that the district convene a collaborative working group, representing all stakeholders, to develop a new common vision and mission for the district. This mission and vision should communicate a sense of urgency, through a purposeful learning community, to improve student learning and develop the skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in all students.
- Develop an inclusive, collaborative, facilitated strategic planning process that guides and focuses the work of the district on continuous improvement. Include the following elements:
  - A limited number of specific and measurable goals.
  - A rigorous analysis of student data in order to identify achievement gaps and modify programs to better meet student needs and guide instruction.
  - A research-driven action plan identifying timelines, resources and responsibilities.
  - Research-based interventions for students not meeting learning targets.
  - A communication plan including all stakeholders.
  - Alignment of processes, programs, budget and goals.
  - Alignment of resource allocation with the strategic plan and goals for student learning.
  - Alignment of school accreditation plans with the strategic plan.
  - Professional development opportunities for all staff clearly focused on the goals and practices identified in the strategic plan.
  - Alignment of goals and actions from the boardroom to the classroom.
- Use the strategic plan as a guiding tool to guide district actions in a purposeful and planned direction, focused on deep, system-wide implementation of the plan.

- Provide expanded training in professional learning communities (PLC) as a collaborative framework for working together. Nurture the growth of PLC practices with all district leadership and at each school.
- Leadership needs to ensure that teachers have the necessary training and follow-up support to effectively analyze data to inform instruction.
- Reestablish the tenets and principles of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) so that all staff understands and fully participate in this program.
- Broaden the level of staff and stakeholder participation in school accreditation plans to promote best thinking, improve buy in and increase accountability.
- Expand the working relationship of the principal group by including principals at all levels in developing professional learning community collaboration focused on improving student academic performance.
- Develop methods to inform staff members about the purpose, context, and rationale for each improvement initiative and create open dialogue to discuss and analyze the effectiveness of implementation of those initiatives.
- Increase the level of alignment, review, and oversight of the district budget.
- Develop a staffing process based on meeting student learning needs.
- Identify and target resources for professional growth of all staff.
- Develop strategies for retention of highly-qualified staff and recruitment of staff to meet critical needs.
- Reassess the overall organizational decision-making structure for the district. Determine which decisions are primarily district-directed or and which are site-directed. Determine a clear path for decisions to be made with a focus on clarity, understanding, and coherence throughout the district.
- Review all positions in the district office to determine redundancies of services and review job descriptions to provide strategic delivery of services to the schools.
- Determine areas of organizational conflict, clarify responsibilities, and ensure that there is a clear chain of command with accountability for every staff member in supporting the district's goals and plans.
- Create a collaborative process for developing the district's accountability/improvement plan. A focused district accountability/ improvement plan, tied to the overall district mission, vision, and strategic plan can provide the organization with a map to reach its goals. Involve building level administrators and staff in the development of the district's plan.
- Continue to provide school level administrators and staff with a template to guide the development of the school accountability/improvement process. Ensure staff and community involvement in the development of each school plan.

## **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

### **Organizational Effectiveness through District Leadership**

- ✓ In what ways can the development of a shared mission, vision and strategic plan contribute to improving student achievement?
- ✓ How can funding allocations more strategically target identified student achievement needs?

- ✓ In what ways can the district expand input into the budget process at the district and school level?
- ✓ What processes can district-level personnel use for obtaining staff and community input into a district accountability/improvement plan?
- ✓ What next steps should the district take in supporting staff to better analyze student performance data to inform instructional decisions?
- ✓ How can the district and individual schools establish operational norms and structure collaborative work time so that professional learning communities can evolve?
- ✓ How can district leadership engage more building-level staff in developing understanding, rationale and coherent implementation of improvement initiatives.

### **THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION IN LEADING THE DISTRICT**

Knowledge and beliefs of school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different than school boards in low-achieving districts (Iowa School Board's Association Lighthouse Study, 2000). There are five key areas that exemplify school boards in high-achieving districts. These boards have the following traits:

- A belief that all students can learn with “no excuses”, resulting in an on-going dedication to improvement at the board level.
- The ability to identify the board's role in supporting the process of school improvement efforts and understand how improvement efforts are being carried out.
- The use of data and other information on student needs to make decisions, followed by monitoring progress and making changes as needed.
- The creation of a supportive workplace for staff by ensuring regular staff development aligned with district goals and then routinely expressing appreciation for staff engagement in professional growth and improvement efforts.
- The ability to connect and listen to community members while focused on involving parents in education.

Developing effective boardroom decision making is a very complicated task. Individual board members tend to make two very common mistakes in their approach to the decision making process.

1. School boards tend to jump to the development of solutions rather than properly defining the existing problem. This tendency is complicated by the fact that not all individuals see the same situation in the same way and may fail to establish or agree on the definition of the problem.
2. Individual board members tend to believe that they have the solutions to the problems and they personally may have the primary responsibility for implementation of those solutions.

The challenge for Adams 14 (and all school boards) is to come to common understandings of the challenges facing the district, to support the district administration through effective policies and expectations, and to attend to the five key findings of the Lighthouse Study cited above.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Board of Education**

To become great leaders, as members of the board of education, learn the operational principles of participation and understanding that leadership is an unwavering commitment to the success of the district. Thus it is recommended that all school board members participate together in training focused on their roles and responsibilities. It is highly suggested that the board members participate in facilitated experiences to develop a common understanding of the role, responsibilities, and operational norms of all board members. Keep in mind this work is difficult. The work of school boards is not about the individuals on the board, but in moving the district toward higher academic achievement for every student. Some topics to be considered:

- Developing a common understanding of the current realities of the district.
- Re-committing to the board's norms/code of conduct.
- Living by acceptable behaviors that create a civil and dignified environment including listening with respect, following the chain of command, and maintaining confidentiality.
- Developing and using a process to self monitor fidelity to agreed upon working norms for all board members.
- Developing and adhering to appropriate communication channels and processes.
- Committing to excellence and determining collaboratively what success looks like for the school board, staff, students, parents, and community.

## **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

### **Board of Education**

- ✓ What work do board members need to do internally to open up channels of communication and trust with each other to guide their work in the future?
- ✓ What are the most powerful and appropriate actions for the board to support district leaders in achieving the district's goals?
- ✓ How does the board define success for the district?
- ✓ What ways can board of education members, along with the superintendent of schools, build and sustain channels of communication with members of the community and the schools to build a foundation of trust and openness?

## **Theme 2:**

### **Ensuring a Learning Environment with a Culture of High Performance**

Effective districts create a learning community that supports a culture of high performance. Such a culture ensures a safe and civil learning environment for every student, staff member, and stakeholder. Successful districts involve families and the community to support children as learners and remove barriers to effective practices and student learning. In these districts, strategic, focused professional development supports teachers and administrators to increase their knowledge and skills in implementing successful, researched-based practices in their schools. In a high performing culture, professional practices of staff and the impact of those practices on student learning are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness.

To create a professional learning community in Adams 14, there needs to be clarity of purpose, agreements regarding expectations and behaviors, and modeling of those expectations and behaviors from the boardroom to the classroom. Research suggests that what is continually addressed at the board and district level will be translated into the schools and classrooms. That is, what is important for the board and district leadership will become important for the schools and classrooms. If there is not trust and collaboration at the board level, there is a risk that there will not be trust and collaboration throughout the district. If there is not alignment and agreement regarding plans and actions at the district level, there will be lack of focus and the potential for schools to become autonomous in their work rather than collaborative, aligned partners. Without common understandings about what should be done and how it should be done, there can be fragmentation of work and a potential for stagnation in improving the district's practices and performance.

Adams 14 has worked in the last decade to create a professional learning community among its leaders and within the schools. However, challenges to achieve this goal continue. The findings and recommendations below are intended to guide the district to create a vibrant, supportive culture with professional practices that will support improvement in daily teaching and learning for students.

#### **FINDINGS:**

##### **District Culture**

- While there is a stated commitment to high expectations, it does not appear to be well defined, articulated, or pervasive. There is not agreement on what proficient student performance should look like at each grade level and for each-content area.
- A belief that all children can learn and be successful is not pervasive throughout the district. Thus, daily actions in the school or classrooms may not always challenge students to achieve their full academic potential. There is not a sense of urgency to broadly address areas of identified needs and gaps in achievement. Barriers to learning at high levels occur even within some classrooms when the first instruction a student receives is not engaging, motivating, or targeted and explicit.

- From art exhibits to a Film Festival, the district endeavors to showcase the arts. However, student academic work is displayed primarily at the schools without descriptions or examples of proficient performance that emphasizes high expectations and celebration of high achievement.
- Most celebrations of student academic success occur at the school level.
- Collaboration among some schools is limited. Sharing of innovations that have resulted in higher student achievement is not evident as a district-wide practice.
- Most district-generated material is distributed in English and Spanish.
- The Family Resource Center was established this year with a purpose to enhance communication and support of families.
- The district is reaching out to families in various ways such as printed material, cable access channel and programs. However, there does not seem to be a clear, consistent meaning of family involvement throughout the district. A general rule of thumb is to give information to parents without much opportunity for them to provide reactions or input.
- Behavior expectations and responses to inappropriate behaviors are not consistent throughout the district.
- Learning environment surveys are limited with little understanding by stakeholders of how the data is or can be used.
- There often is not a clear understanding of how and why district-level decisions are made.
- Trust and morale are topics of concern within the district. In some areas within the district, communication is guarded, fostering an environment that is not open. Such a climate impacts a willingness to share ideas and accept new or different approaches, thus preventing the development of shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility
- A widespread perception exists that the school board does not understand their role in establishing policy or supporting high student achievement.
- There is not a clear procedural strategy for handling concerns from staff and the community through a chain of command protocol.

### **Professional Development**

- There are no long-range comprehensive plans for professional development at the district or individual school level.
- Much of the current year's professional development appears to focus on knowing the content of the curriculum and raising test scores.
- Principals are beginning to request input regarding teachers' needs in planning professional development activities in their buildings.
- Teachers report the effectiveness of professional development sessions varies and they suggest that little training or coaching support is provided to improve instructional practices.
- Professional development sessions for principals are beginning to focus more on instructional issues as the group moves toward a Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework for collaboration and action.
- Some structures are in place that can sustain professional growth. Coaches in all buildings, the series of SIOP training sessions with follow-up activities, regularly

scheduled professional development time for teachers and principals, and walkthroughs all provide opportunities for ongoing, job-embedded professional development. The utilization and implementation of these opportunities varies.

- Coaches have varied roles from building to building.
- Intensive, sustained training on how to coach is not provided.
- Support for the regular use SIOP strategies and continual reinforcement of effective strategies for ELL students varies.
- Time designated for teachers and principals for professional development appears to be often used to discuss issues and logistics such as administration, accommodations, and practice materials for CSAP.
- Teams in schools are beginning to examine data to determine needs and track progress of students. In some schools, staff members are consistently engaged in data conversations.
- Much of the content for this year's professional development days has been short, one-time training with minimal follow-up. Reflection, continued learning and practice do not appear to be an integral part of professional development throughout the district.
- The StART team conducts weekly walkthroughs in each building and provides feedback to individual teachers on whether the curriculum objectives are posted, type of grouping observed, and percent of students engaged. Many teachers report the feedback does not provide useful information to help them improve instruction.

### **Induction**

- Although there are designated classes and training sessions for teachers and principals new to the district, there is no structure or formal plan for mentoring all new teachers. Mentors for new teachers appear to be colleagues who informally support them.
- A mentor is assigned to new principals.
- Assistant principals new to their position receive informal support from the principal or other assistant principals in their building.

### **Personnel Evaluation System**

- A revised evaluation process for licensed staff is being piloted this year. Issues and concerns with the process expressed by the staff are being addressed.
- Principals receive annual training on how to use the evaluation document, timelines, and procedures.
- Professional growth goals are developed by most licensed and classified staff on a yearly basis. Monitoring and support regarding progress of these goals varies at each school.
- Professional growth goals related to student achievement tend to be very broad and general.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **District Culture**

- Research shows that people want to be valued, respected, and recognized for what they contribute to the organization. They need to know that they are included in the overall process of the work and have an understanding of what role they play

in the operation. Thus, throughout the district, it will be important to continuously grow a culture of trust and respect that permits openness, ability to share ideas, and be accepting of different approaches and beliefs. Establishing and following agreed upon norms of conduct and behaviors for all stakeholders is one way to build trust.

- Another way to enhance district culture is to share successes. Celebrations help mark milestones and build motivation to accomplish the work ahead.
- Develop a culture that *expects the best* from staff, students, and parents and *celebrate* success when you achieve it! Some guidelines for celebrating successes are:
  - Determine in advance what constitutes success.
  - Tie celebrations to your goals, reinforcing what is important to the district.
  - Coordinate informal and formal celebrations.
  - Be specific for the reason for recognition.
  - Design celebrations throughout the year so that you have involved stakeholders in some celebrations.
- Research has shown that teachers' expectations for students tend to be self-fulfilling. The belief that ALL students can and will achieve at grade level or higher must permeate the culture of every school. Everyone must believe that it is imperative to raise the academic achievement of all students now.
- Student learning must be accelerated. The district cannot afford only one year's growth in a year's time. Articulate a clear emphasis and sense of urgency for closing learning gaps within the district. Align all programs, grants, and resources with that focus. Any future programs, grants, and resources should only be added if they align with that focus.
- From art exhibits to a Film Festival, the district works to showcase the arts. Using lessons learned in featuring the arts, consider ways to exhibit student academic work within the community. Include information about standards to expand the understanding of standards by the community. One suggestion would be to feature a class on a rotating basis, post the work within Education Support Services and at a local business. Encourage stakeholders to view the exhibit.
- Continue to administer climate surveys with staff, parents and students. Review and then share results. Ensure the information gained is used to plan and implement improvements in the school culture and climate that will support student academic success.
- Commendable community outreach programs already exist within the district. However, family involvement may often be created with little, if any input from families. Consider ways to build upon what is in place. As a district, take inventory of the family outreach that is in place from site to site. Determine through a collaborative process what family involvement should look like.
- Use a collaborative process to review behavior standards at each school. Implement procedures that will aide in developing consistency throughout the district.

## **Professional Development**

- Develop and implement a comprehensive long-range professional development plan based on identified instructional needs of staff and disaggregated student achievement data.
  - Design professional development opportunities so they are ongoing and provide time for reflection, deepening of understandings, and application. Strive for depth versus breadth.
  - Examine how current available resources can be used to provide job-embedded professional development to ensure application of effective instructional practices in all classrooms.
  - Include plans for providing ongoing professional development for paraprofessionals who work instructionally with students.
- Define the role and responsibilities of coaches in buildings to ensure they provide support and guidance to teachers in improving instructional practices in all classrooms.
- Develop an ongoing training program for staff members in a coaching role so they can develop and continue to refine coaching skills.
- Delve deeper into the purpose, procedures, and use of walkthroughs. Read, reflect and discuss how and what data to gather, analyze, and evaluate, so that information can be used to improve instructional practices. Ensure all staff understand the purpose of and information gathered from walkthroughs.

## **Induction**

- Evaluate the current induction program and from those findings, refine the induction program to ensure all staff members new to the district receive the learning and support they need to be successful in their role.
- Develop a structured mentor program for all new teachers to provide them with the support they need to develop effective classroom management and instructional skills.
- Develop a defined mentor program for all building administrators new to their position.
- Provide training and support for teacher and administrative mentors.

## **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- ✓ How do we build upon the existing strengths of our district as we embrace the changes in practice needed to move students to higher academic success?
- ✓ How can we collaborate together to permeate the schools with high expectations for every single student?
- ✓ What can we do to become a true learning community and how can we continually collaborate to get there?
- ✓ How are we promoting collaboration and collegiality in both formal and informal decision making?
- ✓ What structures, protocols, and accountability do we have to support our collaboration?
- ✓ What is everyone's role in improving student achievement?
- ✓ How can we build teacher and school effectiveness through professional learning communities?

- ✓ What should successes or “wins” should we celebrate? How should we celebrate?
- ✓ How do we showcase the academic work of our students?
- ✓ How should we use learning environment survey data?
- ✓ How can we ensure families are productively engaged in the education of their children?
- ✓ How do we help all families to feel welcome and a part of this district?
- ✓ How will we ensure consistent implementation of behavior expectations?
- ✓ What methods could we use to collect data about the professional needs of our staff and administrators and to determine the degree to which the professional development meets the identified needs?
- ✓ How can coaches provide ongoing support to promote the improvement of instructional practices in all buildings? How can we ensure all building staff understand the value, role,
  - ✓ and responsibilities of a coach?
- ✓ What characteristics are necessary for being an effective coach or mentor?
- ✓ How do we select the right people for coaching and mentoring roles?
- ✓ What does a training program for coaches look like?
- ✓ How can data from walkthroughs be used to identify patterns and trends and serve as information for instructional decision-making?
- ✓ What do we need to communicate to all staff so they understand the purpose and value of walkthroughs? How can we collaborate with staff to refine and make walkthroughs useful tools for improving instructional practices?
- ✓ What professional development and support do new teachers and building administrators need as they come into the district or a new position? How can we structure this support to promote staff retention?

### **Theme 3: Implementing Standards-Based Practices in Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction**

A standards-based district delivers on its plans and expectations for student learning through a curriculum that is coherent, rigorous, and aligned to district and state standards. That curriculum is then delivered in the classroom and student learning is measured by formative and summative assessment systems. Standards-based districts use student performance data to inform decision-making about teaching and learning and to provide feedback for improvement of instruction. Classroom-based assessments provide measures of students' academic knowledge and skills and help identify "next" learning targets. Standards-based districts support equity to learn through individualization and differentiation along with interventions to support individual student learning. Such districts maximize the effectiveness of teachers so they:

- Create classroom environments conducive to learning.
- Ensure instruction focuses on essential state and district standards.
- Maximize the use of time for instruction.
- Use instructional strategies that provide students with focus, feedback, and sufficient opportunities to master skills.
- Use appropriate strategies to assess the performance of students' academic skills.
- Adapt instruction to meet students' needs and engage them as learners.
- Provide interventions for students who need additional support for learning.
- Optimize technology and multimedia as learning tools.

Over the last seven years, Adams 14 has seen small, district-wide average improvements in student achievement. Improvement trends vary among schools along with the professional practices that garner those successes in achievement. Some schools have made good strides in practices and results and others still struggle to reach those levels.

The district has begun to implement some critical elements of standards-based practices including identifying essential learning targets (GLETS) along with curricular/instructional calendars, pacing guides, and formative assessments. There is a new literacy program adoption pending that will hopefully align and support these curricular initiatives. Some of these initiatives are currently being piloted in schools which can then provide the district with information that can be used to improve implementation.

Along with the challenges of implementing these new initiatives, the appraisal team identified a number of other findings that impact the goal of implementing widespread standards-based practices through the district's curriculum, assessment systems, and instructional practices.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Curriculum**

- The district has a comprehensive and rigorous plan for the development and revision of its curricula. In addition to curriculum revision, the plan includes components for a needs assessment and program review, piloting, and selection of instructional materials, assessment alignment, development of rubrics and exemplars, all with an intentional focus on current research and implementation of each of these components.
- Comprehensive updating and revising of district curricula, aligned with Colorado standards, has been occurring in the district in the last few years. Curricula in reading, writing, math, and science have been completed. In addition to the Colorado Model Content Standards, Colorado Grade-Level Expectations and CSAP Assessment Frameworks are used in developing curricula. National standards for science and math are referenced, as are Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) skills for early literacy. Grade Level Essential Targets (GLETs) for reading, writing, math, and science have been identified, using these same documents. These essential learning targets have been prioritized as red - "must teach", blue - "try to teach", and black - "teach if have time".
- Curriculum documents for reading, writing, math, and science have been distributed and are known by most staff and principals. They are also available electronically. Few teachers know of any other recent curriculum documents, especially for social studies.
- Implementation of the district's curriculum plan is in progress with many of the components at beginning stages (e.g. assessment alignment, rubrics, exemplars, and research updates). Sometimes, changes in plans or processes are made without adequate communication regarding new expectations that can build understanding for their implementation. Teacher understanding of the rationale underlying expected practices and their grounding in research is often lacking. This then creates distrust and/or unwillingness to implement the new initiatives.
- Monthly Curriculum Instructional Calendars and the Scope and Sequences outline the pacing and re-teaching of curriculum content. Implementation of the expected instructional pacing varies from school to school and teacher to teacher. There is sometimes independent re-ordering of sequences and the pacing appears to be often slowed down or minimally adhered to across the district.
- Although the curricula are based on state and national expectations, many teachers have expressed concern that the curriculum expectations are too difficult for many of Adams 14 students, as well as there are too many essential targets. Teachers report making their own modifications to the core content curriculum expectations because of these concerns.
- Some intervention efforts are being made to increase students' ability to be successful in the curriculum, but often these are program and/or material-driven, rather than based on the learning expectations in the curriculum.
- While many teachers are aware of the Curriculum Frameworks, Scope and Sequences and Monthly Instructional Calendars, planning and instruction is still often based on textbooks and other instructional programs. Fidelity to the use of the core content Curriculum Frameworks and related documents and the

implementation of standards-based practices appears to range from minimal to moderate across the district.

- The district continues its refinement of the Curriculum Frameworks and Monthly Instructional Calendars at scheduled meetings, based on feedback from building representatives. Those teachers who participate in this process understand it; others feel they do not have a voice. While teachers have the opportunity to participate in curriculum revisions, it is on a voluntary basis. Participation varies because of the work is being done after school or during the school day, with substitutes provided for participating teachers.
- There appear to be disconnects between the selected math programs, curriculum frameworks and monthly instructional calendars which create gaps or overlaps in curriculum learning expectations. Many elementary teachers report frustration, expressing a need for changes in the calendar sequence and additional materials. Also, there is a gap between the selected elementary and middle school programs. This creates disconnects in how students are taught to process and problem-solve in mathematics, as well as increases the potential for gaps in the development of a common mathematical vocabulary.
- At the present time, three different editions of the McGraw Reading Program are being used across the district. A new reading adoption is in the final stages, with plans for implementation of the new program to begin in the fall of 2008.
- As new core instructional programs/materials are selected, research-based practices as well as suggestions from teachers are considered as a part of the selection criteria.
- As each new curriculum framework and related documents are developed, principals are oriented in their use. District personnel also provide this orientation to each school's staff in the fall.
- Walkthroughs are being conducted by the principal and central office staff, using the Observation Checklist. "Look fors" primarily focus on whether instruction is on pace with the district curriculum frameworks and if learning objectives and essential targets are posted in language understood by students. In some classrooms, the postings are used to bring meaning and focus to the day's learning.
- Grading and reporting are based on traditional practices, with very limited profiling of student learning of essential targets. The elementary report card portrays learning targets and reports academic and affective progress separately. Attendance, effort, participation, and other factors are incorporated into the academic grades at the secondary level.
- Use of rubrics or scoring guides is generally limited to measurement of writing. Proficiency level descriptors for each content area have not been developed by the district. There is not a bank of exemplars, anchor papers, or scoring guides available for teachers that demonstrate proficiency levels in essential learning targets. There appears to be limited emphasis or monitoring by the district to ensure instruction and learning expectations are at grade-level.
- It does not appear that the district coordinates or monitors communication regarding classroom standards and proficiency levels to parents or the community. Schools are responsible for this communication.

- Pre-K learning expectations are included in core content curricula. There is a perception that alignment of the pre-k expectations is not always consistent with other early childhood expectations and that preschool teachers were not involved in the initial development of pre-k expectations.
- Educational Technology and Information Literacy (ETIL) Standards for each grade level are not integrated into core curricula. A document of grade-level expectations for ETIL standards was not available.
- There are various documents throughout the district that teachers are using as the district's English Language Acquisition Plan, dated from 2001-02 to 2006. Currently a revised plan is going through a review process. Varied use and fidelity to implementation of any of these plans occurs from classroom to classroom and school to school.
- ELA paraprofessionals currently have limited opportunities for updating their knowledge and skills.
- Time for grade-level and content area collaboration is scheduled into the instructional day for most staff. There are expectations that this time is used as intended. Some schools use a protocol and provide a written summary of these meetings to the principal. Often the meetings are used for data analysis. Common instructional planning varies by teams and from school to school.
- Discussions among schools, especially regarding key student transitions, are informal and dependent upon each school and its feeders. Focus of these discussions is generally on what students need to know at the subsequent level and on transition logistics.
- While several programs are in place such as Online Academy, Lester Arnold Alternative High School, and career pathways at Adams City High School and there are various avenues for students to earn their diploma, the district's drop-out rate is high and its graduation rate is low. These factors raise the question of how well high school requirements/expectations are actually preparing students for post-secondary work or further education or how well the school is building connections between the graduation requirements and preparation for meeting real-life/work-related requirements.

#### **Instruction**

- Goals for achievement growth are evident in school and district accountability/improvement plans. However, the annual degree of expected growth does not reflect a trajectory to move students to grade-level proficiency. The need for accelerating student learning in order to realize more than a year's growth in a year's time for many of the district's students is not apparent.
- Standards are posted in most classrooms, but some teachers report that they do that only to "stay off the radar" of the district. The emphasis on the expected learning for the day or the GLET in kid-friendly language is not pervasive throughout the district.
- While there are pockets around the district in which exemplary practices, differentiation, and high expectations are present, there are other classrooms where such practices are not evident.

- Behavior expectations are not consistently applied and enforced. It appears that rigor in both behavior and academic expectations diminish as students move up through the system.
- Student engagement varies across the district with many of the differences related to the amount of teacher talk, time-on-task and active learning opportunities.
- The primary responsibility for instruction appears to be in the hands of the individual buildings with little district direction or support.
- Instructional strategies appear to be determined most often by the program which is used as well as site-specific focuses. For example, Colorado Reading First (CRF) schools use specific instructional strategies to move students from intensive to strategic to benchmark.
- The use of coaching expertise varies from building to building and there is limited training for coaches.
- The district is in the preliminary stages of identifying those elements necessary for the standards-based units and lesson plans. The development of lesson maps has begun at the elementary level with individual schools working in isolation or in some cases partnering with other schools to create them.
- The district expects consistent use of the evaluation process and expects building administrators to frequently monitor the instruction in each classroom.
- Most teachers report that the feedback from their principals is helpful and informs their own professional practice.
- This year the district is requiring building principals to hold weekly data meetings in their schools. The opportunity for staff to work collaboratively on both analyzing data and improving teaching performance is available. In addition, common grade-level planning time exists in buildings with additional configurations for content collaboration and vertical articulation. However, district resources to support the work of implementing research-based instructional strategies appear to be limited.
- Collaboration among schools appears to be limited. After-school content area meetings are held with voluntary participation.
- Staff members are required to have training in SIOP strategies to support English Language Learners. The district provides two formats for SIOP instructional planning, but their use is not widely evident. Coaching support is provided to new teachers during their first three years of service by an ELA coach. Little accountability is evident to ensure fidelity in the implementation of SIOP strategies or that they are intentionally being used in all classrooms.
- The use of sheltering strategies varies across the district and is not evident in many classrooms.
- In some buildings, the use of sheltering strategies is monitored by the ELA coach, but this practice varies from building to building.
- Planning instruction to meet a variety of learning needs or styles appears to be limited, with some re-grouping of students used as the predominant strategy.
- StART team members and building principals conduct regular walkthroughs in each building. The focuses of these walkthroughs are primarily on whether instruction is aligned with the Monthly Instructional Calendar and that essential targets and learning objectives are posted. Some instructional approaches, such as

- multiple grouping patterns, are also "looked for". District ELA personnel are also conducting instructional walkthroughs. Teachers have mixed perceptions about the value of the walkthroughs and often feel they are being "checked on". Impact on teacher practice is viewed as limited.
- Many teachers understand they are to teach the standards and that the use of data is necessary, but they have had minimal training in developing curriculum maps and standards-based lesson plans. The district has constructed a comprehensive flow chart to use for planning lessons aligned with the content standards; however, reference to this document or its use is not evident. Instruction is often based on the program and materials being used more than the curriculum frameworks.
  - While there are opportunities for teachers to collaborate, there is limited formal focus on strategies to intentionally target and close achievement gaps such as:
    - tracking the progress of ELL students learning English and how long it takes students to reach FEP status;
    - understanding the “when” and “how” to transition ELL students from Spanish to English literacy;
    - evaluating how well the needs of advanced, low socio-economic, and ELL students are being met;
    - profiling proficiency levels by essential targets; and
    - using the results to design instructional plans and delivery.
  - Under the present organizational structure, the English Language Acquisition department is within the Department of Student Learning. All other instructional programs are housed within the Student Achievement Resource Team. This results in little coordination or collaboration between ELA and instructional personnel at the district level.
  - The district has initiated the Response to Intervention (RtI) Model. Understanding and implementation of the RtI framework varies from building to building.
  - A variety of intervention programs are being used throughout the district. Lindamood-Bell, SOAR to Success, CRF Strategies, Language!, and Read 180 are some examples. There appear to be limited formal processes for the selection of interventions and monitoring of their implementation and each school appears to choose their own interventions.
  - Few enrichment opportunities are available for proficient and advanced students.
  - District personnel and many principals are accessing research findings to guide their decisions. Understanding of those findings by many teachers is not prevalent.

#### **Assessment**

- Adams 14 uses a variety of assessments for the purposes of collecting summative student performance data including the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Basic Early Assessment of Reading (BEAR) for Colorado Reading First (CRF) schools and Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA).
- District-created common assessments in CSAP-tested content areas are used for collecting formative data. Assessments connected to the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) including Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Dynamic

Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS/IDEL) are used to collect formative data and to monitor progress in literacy at the elementary level in some schools. Unit tests that are used in core content areas are also used to monitor progress.

- Writing assessments are administered three times a year using CSAP released prompts.
- At the beginning of each school year the district offers an opportunity for building staff to look at their CSAP data. Staffs are encouraged to look for trends within their data and district personnel are available to help with the interpretation of the data.
- There has been an intentional effort to get common formative assessments scored quickly, using Scantron scoring, with results available to teachers within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Grade-level and content teams hold data talks to analyze information from the common assessments. Some exemplary models of this practice were observed.
- The district has extensive electronic capacity to profile achievement data. The degree to which schools and teachers access and use this data varies from building to building.
- Progress monitoring is being done, but many teachers are not sure what to do with the data, nor are the data commonly and intentionally used to make instructional decisions.
- It is not apparent that the majority of teachers in the district are consistently using data to inform instruction; however, there are pockets in the district where this practice is occurring.
- The understanding or use of common assessments at the secondary level is inconsistent. Several teachers report that the assessments are not aligned to what is being taught so the data from the assessments are not useful. The significance of this data then is downplayed in importance and teachers do not realize the role this data plays in planning and instruction.
- The StART team is in the beginning stages of working with each principal and school in addressing the use of the data that is gleaned from the assessments that are currently administered.
- The Balanced Scorecard is used by the StART team to gather implementation data to self evaluate their progress toward meeting goals in four areas (Customers, Internal Processes, Learning and Growth, and Financial).
- The quality of posted work varies from level to level with some of the highest quality examples displayed at the elementary levels.
- Students report that their use of rubrics or scoring guides is limited to use with short constructed and extended constructed responses.
- With the exception of writing, examples of high quality grade-level work do not appear to be available across the district. Some schools have developed exemplars for their own use.
- Building principals work with district leadership throughout the year in looking at data through bi-weekly principal meetings. In addition, members of the StART team are available to participate in the weekly meetings at the schools as needed. However, some teachers report that they have limited understanding of data-

driven instruction and do not have the skills to know what to do with the data once they have it and how to use it to inform instruction.

- The overall analysis of data varies from building to building. Much of the success of this effort is directly related to the skills and understanding by the facilitators of the meeting.
- Alpine Achievement, TAAT and the DIBELS website are used to warehouse student achievement data. All three of these are reported to be teacher friendly and easily accessible. In addition, district personnel will run data reports for principals and help interpret the data as necessary.
- Wide-spread and extensive use of accommodations for CSAP administration were reported. There appears to be limited monitoring or evaluation of these practices in regard to the Colorado Department of Education's expectation, that while accommodations should be legitimately used for identified students, they are to be used judiciously.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Curriculum**

- It is critical that all instructional staff have on-going training and support in the use of the district's Curriculum Frameworks, Scope and Sequences, and Monthly Instructional Calendars to ensure they are being used with fidelity so every student has the opportunity to learn the same learning targets. Additionally staff need to understand the purpose, rationale, and context of these initiatives to develop their support and implementation.
- All instructional staff need continued training and support in the development of curriculum maps to assist their implementation of standards-based unit and lesson plans. Practices need to be aligned for each grade level and content area.
- Ad hoc changing of the curriculum and related documents defeats the intentional progression of teaching students at their grade-level and preparing them to handle subsequent work at the next grade level. Consistency and congruence eliminates gaps and overlaps in curricula and is imperative in creating a seamless progression of knowledge, concepts, and skills for all students.
- However difficult it may seem, and however teachers perceive that the expectations are too hard for Adams 14 students, growth in student achievement cannot be realized without higher expectations. Establish task forces to assist the district in the development of expected proficiency descriptors (rubrics/scoring guides) and in the identification and collection of exemplars and anchor papers. These tools can then be reliably used as models for classroom instruction and scoring of student work. It is important that they meet grade-level proficiency expectations and be used with rigor by all teachers.
- Students must pervasively know the expectations for grade-level proficiency in each content area. Involve students in their own learning. Students need to understand what they are learning, why they are learning it and how it will benefit them. All students should be familiar with essential learning targets, be comfortable using rubrics or scoring guides, and know what proficient work looks like.

- As the curriculum tools are reviewed and refined, ensure there is careful alignment of the adopted instructional programs and materials to avoid gaps and overlaps in content. Publish the review process and ensure that all teachers are informed of any adjustments and changes.

### **Instruction**

- Create an accountability system for ensuring that the adopted Grade Level Essential Targets are taught to proficient levels.
- Identify, agree upon, and publish those specific instructional strategies and practices that have been shown to be effective in building student engagement, scaffold learning, and positively impact student achievement. Train staff in these research-based practices, provide on-going support, and strive to ensure they are regularly implemented with fidelity in all classrooms. Hold everyone accountable through a supportive system of constructive monitoring and feedback.
- Dedicate time, share model agendas, and establish protocols for teachers to work collaboratively in planning units, lessons, and teaching strategies.
- Through collaborative problem-solving teams, formally focus on strategies to intentionally target and close achievement gaps across subpopulations such as:
  - tracking the progress of ELLs learning English and how long it takes students to reach FEP status;
  - understanding the “when” and “how” to transition ELLs from Spanish to English literacy;
  - evaluating how well the needs of low socio-economic, and ELL students, as well as advanced students, are being met;
  - profiling student achievement by proficiency levels and essential targets; and then
  - using the results to design instructional plans and delivery.
- Ensure that lessons and units are developed using a backwards design process; beginning with the learning target in mind along with a defined method or assessment for students to demonstrate learning.
- Continually monitor student learning using simple formative assessments and adjust instructional strategies accordingly.
- Provide students with multiple and varied opportunities to reach proficiency.
- Build capacity of teachers to regularly differentiate instruction as well as to incorporate intentional development of higher-order thinking skills.
- Create multiple opportunities for students to learn through individualization and differentiated strategies. Determine what changes in the learning setting and opportunities outside of the initial classroom instruction are available and provide these opportunities for students who are not performing proficiently.
- Build understanding regarding the purposes of instructional walkthroughs and build relationships to realize successful utilization of this tool. Construct norms and parameters that are communicated to everyone. Strive to realize constructive impact on teaching and learning through effective and appropriate feedback.
- Study the loss of instructional time throughout each day in each school. Identify the most prevalent factors that contribute to this loss, such as the time spent on inefficient transitions, time lost at the beginning and ending of the school day and

- of each class period, inactivity and inattention of students during class, ineffective classroom routines, management practices, and lesson preparations.
- Study the educational and safety impact of students using a variety of electronic devices at the secondary levels and of students leaving and entering classrooms at will. Make intentional agreements that will minimize these factors in all classrooms to maximize the use of instructional time every day.
  - Continue the development and implementation of the district's Response to Intervention model and processes:
    - Ensure there is explicit, direct "first" instruction of the essential targets for all students in the regular classroom.
    - Define a systematic, school-wide system or pyramid of intervention for each school.
    - Establish school-level teams to support teachers in determining individual interventions for students.
    - Provide grade-level or content area instructional interventions beyond the classroom for students performing below proficiency as well as acceleration and enrichment opportunities for students performing above proficiency.
    - Identify strategies and support for those students at Tier II. Describe which needs are best met through the use of each strategy and the context for its use.
    - Identify intervention programs and materials for Tier III. Include descriptions of which needs are best met through the use of each intervention and the context for their use.
    - Evaluate the effectiveness of each intervention to determine the degree to which students are making good progress as a result of their use. Monitor implementation to ensure fidelity to the program and appropriate matching to student needs.
    - Ensure that interventions are research-based and provide intensive, targeted and accelerated opportunities for students to learn. Guarantee that they are based in proven instructional pedagogy and found, through research, to be effective with identified students.
    - Regularly monitor student progress. If the intervention is not effective over a reasonable length of time, consider adjustments to the student's placement in a timely manner.
  - Publish grade-level expectations for the integration of educational technology and information literacy into the curriculum and classroom instruction. Educate teachers about the information literacy standards and how they can support critical thinking, ethics, and development of higher-order thinking skills.
  - Critically analyze the factors contributing to the low graduation rates and high drop out rates of secondary students. Target actions that will support changes in these profiles and monitor their impact on building connections for students to want to stay in school and ultimately realize successful pathways to career and post-secondary pursuits.
  - Ensure that there are strong and effective Pre-K to Grade 12 instructional pathways for all students. Remove barriers that lock students into a trajectory of

- low academic achievement because of the school(s) they attend. While retaining uniqueness of each school, standardize common expectations and practices that must be a part of every school's culture.
- Ensure alignment at key transition points (Pre-K to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, and middle to high school) through vertical meetings and by feeder pathways. Ensure alignment and consistency of best practices horizontally at each school level, especially at the elementary and middle school levels.
  - Build understanding of strategies and practices that support children of poverty. Build a culture and belief system that Adams 14 School District can join the ranks of those high poverty/high performing districts and schools that are successfully raising the bar for academic performance and realizing great results. Revisit the study of these 90/90/90 schools to understand those strategies that fostered their success.

### **Assessment**

- Ensure that teachers know what proficient performance looks and sounds like for all Grade Level Essential Targets (GLETs).
- Ensure that all rubrics and scoring guides describe at what level a student must perform to be considered proficient.
- Continually review assessments to ensure that all assessments are tightly aligned with standards and benchmark concepts and skills, curricula, and instruction.
- Ensure everyone understands the difference between summative (assessment of learning) and formative assessment (assessment for learning) particularly as those assessments impact teaching and learning.
- Monitor the use of formative assessments within classroom settings to ensure that teachers are using a variety of methods to measure and assess student learning.
- Ensure that students understand their own levels of performance and that they receive guidance and feedback in their own learning process.
- Establish a communication system for parents and students that reports student proficiency levels in essential concepts and skills and the progress students are making in reaching proficiency over time.
- Create protocols for analyzing formative and summative assessment data by grade levels, content areas, student sub-groups, schools, and at the district level. Ensure that this student data includes current achievement status as well as the progress students are making over time.
- Use multiple sources of assessment data to guide district and school decisions, along with classroom instructional decisions.
- Further develop viable professional learning communities at all levels of the district. As an organizational framework, the professional learning community model is a powerful job-embedded staff development tactic and potent strategy for realizing district change and improvement. To operate as a professional learning community (PLC), supportive conditions, collective creativity, and shared practices are necessary. With deeper understanding about the purpose and the way professional learning communities function, and commitment to continual improvement, this model can become an effective tool to engage all staff in continuous, job-embedded professional development. Excellent resources to consult as the district and schools move toward fully establishing PLCs are

Mike Schmoker's *Results Now, Professional Learning Communities at Work* and *Learning by Doing* by Rick Dufour and Robert Eaker.

Rick DuFour, commenting on results with professional learning communities states, "Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school." (Educational Leadership, May 2004). The "routine" is an exciting and passionate adventure for schools that embrace the belief that every staff member is there for any student who walks through the door of the school. This philosophy is one that must permeate all schools in the district. For the district and its schools to operate as a professional learning community, there needs to be:

- supportive and shared leadership;
- guidance and focus from shared mission, vision, goals and behaviors of all staff members; and
- supportive conditions, collective creativity, shared practice, and passion for helping ALL students reach high levels of achievement.

### **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- ✓ What will it look like when the district is fully engaged in the standards-based teaching and learning cycle?
- ✓ What policies and accountability systems are in place to ensure all students are provided access to a guaranteed and viable curriculum?
- ✓ Do we have curricula, curriculum maps and unit plans that:
  - include all the identified essential standards and benchmarks?
  - eliminate repetitive content?
  - promote integration of content?
  - support "best practice" instruction?
  - incorporate the use of common assessments to inform instruction?
  - are implemented across all classrooms?
- ✓ In what ways can we include staff from all levels of our system so that our consistent implementation of the curriculum becomes institutionalized across the district?
- ✓ How will we hold staff accountable for fidelity to the new curricula and related documents?
- ✓ What strategies can be used to create a culture of high expectations throughout the school and community?
- ✓ How might proficiency expectations be communicated to students?
- ✓ How are proficiency levels for essential concepts and skills described for all grades and content areas? How do we communicate these to our students and parents?
- ✓ How does the district ensure summative and formative assessments are tightly aligned to the Grade Level Essential Targets?
- ✓ How do teachers access examples of proficient student work or scoring guides and rubrics?
- ✓ How are teachers providing opportunities during instruction to practice proficient performance through formative assessments?

- ✓ How will the district know that teachers are utilizing formative and summative assessments for their intended purposes?
- ✓ How are formative assessments helping to monitor and adjust instruction?
- ✓ How are summative assessments informing school and district planning?
- ✓ In what ways will we support and hold our teachers accountable to engage in the professional development that will most impact their practices?
- ✓ How might the district best garner teacher feedback regarding the newly developed common assessments?
- ✓ How can we share assessment results with students and create opportunities for them to set goals for their own learning?
- ✓ How is instruction designed to engage students in learning, provide them with feedback about their learning, and help them learn strategies to demonstrate their learning at a proficient level?
- ✓ How will we identify the most effective instructional strategies that will be expected in all classrooms?
- ✓ How are teachers supported in learning and utilizing effective collaborative processes?
- ✓ What types of feedback and coaching are available for teachers that inform their instruction and professional development?
- ✓ How are teachers supported in assessing learning and using that data to guide their teaching?
- ✓ How might we incorporate simple ways to assess student learning in our daily teaching?
- ✓ How can we use student work to inform instruction?
- ✓ How do we modify instruction to ensure all students have adequate opportunities to learn?
- ✓ Are students receiving the most effective and appropriate intervention at the earliest possible time?
- ✓ What strategies are necessary to close the district's achievement gaps, particularly with ELL students?
- ✓ In what ways can we ensure that our instructional time is protected to ensure "bell to bell" instruction and student learning is maximized?
- ✓ How can we build teacher and school effectiveness through professional learning communities?

#### **Theme 4:**

### **Developing Proficient English Language Skills in All Students through a Well Designed and Competently Delivered English Language Acquisition (ELA) Program**

In effective school districts with English Language Learners (ELL) there is a clearly defined model and consistent implementation of a research-based program for ELL students. These districts provide direction, professional training, curricula, strategies, and monitoring for their English Language Acquisition (ELA) program and ensure that there is organizational capacity to effectively consistently implement the program. Throughout these districts, leadership works to create understanding and alignment of the ELA program with the district's overall academic curricula and practices.

Nearly all aspects of the academic programs in Adams 14 are impacted by the number of students who do not have proficient English language skills. There is currently an ELA board policy and program description developed for the district. However, there are a number of aspects of the current ELA program that, until addressed, will impede the district in improving English language acquisition and higher achievement for its ELL students.

Throughout the district's schools, the appraisal team found various frameworks, beliefs, and methodologies which are yielding varied results in English language acquisition and student achievement. It does not appear that there have been clear, concerted actions to develop a specific descriptive framework, curriculum, instructional strategies, or data-based evaluation systems to monitor student language acquisition, academic learning, or program effectiveness. Without ensuring that there is a strong, research-based program for English Language Learners along with adequate resources to deliver that program, the district will not make the strides in student achievement it needs. Regardless of the philosophy, design, framework or delivery system, the district's ELA program must be aligned and articulated with the rest of the district's teaching and learning practices.

#### **FINDINGS**

##### **Organizational Effectiveness and District Guidance**

- Principals and school staff receive mixed messages from the district about program design, use of Spanish, when to transition, appropriate English Language Development (ELD), reading materials, and assessments.
- The district's research-based ELA model is not followed. Rather, there is a "hodge-podge" of program designs, determined by principals, based on staff and resources, as well as philosophy. Some schools have scant ESL time while others have scant Spanish literacy instruction.
- There appears to be no program evaluation, monitoring of program fidelity, nor accountability for use of time, language, materials, strategies, etc.
- The department responsible for the ELA program does not appear to share accountability for student learning.

- The department responsible for curriculum, instruction, and assessment has little influence on the language instruction of ELL students.
- There is a lack of guidance and specificity on important program components including:
  - how to implement the ELA program model;
  - appropriate hiring and best use of staff;
  - time allocations for instruction in English and in Spanish by grade level
  - ESL curriculum scope and sequence;
  - transitioning between Spanish and English literacy;
  - grade-level expectations for academic performance, in Spanish and/or English;
  - grade-level expectations for growth in the four CELA indicators; and
  - expectations for teacher skills and knowledge in teaching Spanish and/or English.
- The district’s Language Arts frameworks have not incorporated Colorado’s English Language Development (ELD) standards or English Language Acquisition (ELA) Continuum.
- There is no ELD or ESL curriculum framework. As one teacher described the situation, “When I ask what I should teach everyone tells me that anything I teach them (ELL students) is fine because they need everything.”
- Although 78% of the district’s ELL students are eligible for Title I services, there is no coordination of services. Once again, the program managers are working in different departments of the district.

**Language and Academic Performance**

- ELL students are making incremental improvements in achievement, as are English Only (EO) students.
- Analysis of the district’s achievement data suggests that gaps between ELL and EO students have not decreased.
- Reclassification of students to fluent English proficiency does not appear consistent or systematic. Where reclassification does occur, the rates are extremely low, even after 6 years in the district.
- Inappropriate data comparisons are used to provide a false sense of program efficacy. Students who are reclassified as English Proficient (FEP) are compared with all EO (non-ELL) students in terms of percent reaching proficient on the CSAP. This is a biased comparison, as students who are reclassified FEP by definition, have attained high levels of academic performance.
- Use of the “appeals version” of the AYP data allows the district to ignore progress of ELL students during their first 3 years in the district. As there is no consistent benchmark assessment of students in grades 1-3, there is little indication of progress in literacy and language during the most important, formative years for young students.
- There is no systematic collection of Spanish achievement data to monitor student learning during the early years of instruction.

**Instruction**

- There is much variation in program offerings to ELL students. Time, content, and materials vary by school, program design, and teacher skills.

- Development of students' English skills is not systematic and lags behind their movement throughout the system.
- There is confusion between ESL and reading intervention materials. Some staff use English language development materials (e.g., Avenues) for English reading and some use reading interventions (e.g., Lindamood-Bell) for ESL.
- The district's Language Arts frameworks have not been modified to account for the different scope and sequence of Spanish skills instruction.
- The district's Language Arts frameworks, calendar, and pacing guide have not been modified to take into account the stages of language acquisition nor the additional time ELL students require to master essential standards.
- Most teachers and paraprofessionals do not use Colorado ELD standards or the ELA Continuum to guide instruction nor do they know they exist. Those who do know about them say they are of little help to guide instruction. They prefer an ESL curriculum framework, with systematic, structured language instruction.
- There does not appear to be enough ESL instruction. There is a lack of additional time for ELL students to learn English and a lack of focus on academic English.
- Specific, direct instruction in Spanish and English literacy appears to be highly variable and often left up to chance.

#### **Assessment**

- In the ELA program, there is no consistent use of, nor monitoring of literacy and language progress through benchmark and progress monitoring assessments. CELA scores are rarely used for instructional purposes.
- There is no district policy regarding what language students should be tested on the CSAP.
- Decisions about when to transition students from Spanish reading to English reading are made on inadequate data.
- Where the transitional bilingual program is effective, the district does not hold up the school(s) as positive examples.
- Data on what works for ELL students in Adams 14 schools is not collected.

#### **Staff**

- Staff qualifications are often brought into question. Lack of skills in teaching reading in Spanish and/or English, as well as variation in proficiency in the language of instruction are cited as concerns.
- Schools determine how they will use their ELA paraprofessionals. Some schools use them without training, as translators/Spanish language supports while others divide their time among all teachers and needy students, regardless of students' English proficiency levels. In other schools, ELA paraprofessionals are used as ESL teachers. Training is sporadic and usually determined by individual schools. Planning time is not equitable and most paraprofessionals have no time to plan with their cooperating teachers and are not included in data teams nor staff development.
- ELA coaches vary in their work with schools and students. Most coaches see themselves as spending too much time with paper, files and tests. Some rarely get to coach teachers. Others, based on principal decision, may provide direct services to students.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Organizational Effectiveness and District Guidance**

- It is strongly recommended that the ELA program department be moved from the Department of Student Learning into the Student Achievement Resource Team, perhaps combining with the literacy staff to form a Language and Literacy team. This would facilitate development of language curricula, instruction, and assessments in ESL/ELD, Spanish literacy, and the transition to English literacy. It would also facilitate alignment of ESL/ELD with the districts' content frameworks, calendars and pacing schedules; monitoring of effective instruction; integration and coordination of Title I and Title III services; clarification of expectations for program design; and focused, integrated professional development efforts. It is also suggested that the ELA program director be included in the StART team.
- Develop an ESL framework and pacing calendar that focuses on development of academic English. We should not assume that students are learning English simply because teachers are speaking in English. There are concerns nationwide, as well as in Adams 14, about the lack of explicit, systematic, focused instruction on English as a Second Language. The state and district English Language Acquisition programs are based on the theory that English skills are acquired through use and do not need direct instruction. Attention is then focused on content (meaning) which must be comprehensible. This focus on content has been at the expense of direct teaching of English skills (e.g., academic English literacy skills). ELD is often neglected and competes for time with other curricular areas. As Saunders and Goldenberg state in *Strengthening the Transition in Transitional Bilingual Education*, "In fact, students benefit the most when teachers spend a portion of the day actually teaching English, targeting interactions and instruction on specific vocabulary and language structures appropriate to students' level of English language development."
- The district should ensure that appropriate ESL instruction by certified ESL staff occurs throughout the district.
- Modify district walk-through protocols to include effective ELA instructional features (e.g., academic ESL instruction, explicit L1 literacy instruction, L1 content support, sheltering strategies, etc.)
- Integrate Title I and Title III planning and service delivery for 78% of the ELLS who qualify for Title I services.
- Clarify the differences between ESL/ELD instruction, reading instruction and intervention, as well as the corresponding use of appropriate materials and instructional approaches.
- Augment district frameworks and pacing guides with descriptions/exemplars of how students at various CELA levels would be expected to demonstrate mastery of the essential skills and with examples of strategies teachers can use to actively engage ELL students in standards-based content instruction.
- Develop broad-based support for a common vision of the ELA program.
- Focus recruitment efforts to meet the needs of this common vision.
- Enlist principals and members of the StART team in creating the vision for the ELA program and in the design of the ELA program models to ensure program

fidelity and implementation of transitional bilingual education with ESL (at the elementary level) and sheltered English content instruction with ESL and L1 support (at the secondary level).

- Make the following explicit in the ELA Program guide:
  - a concrete transition program;
  - an articulated process for adding English literacy;
  - time allocations for instruction in English and in Spanish by grade level and content area;
  - daily schedules with time allocations for reading instruction, ESL instruction, and reading intervention or enrichment (elementary and secondary);
  - an ESL scope and sequence (Pre-K-12) with suggested materials and district ESL benchmark assessments;
  - grade-level expectations for growth in L1 literacy and English literacy;
  - grade-level expectations for growth in ELD as determined by (CELA).
  - the specific role and responsibilities of para-professionals;
  - the specific role and responsibilities of ELA coaches and literacy coaches;
  - accountability of school staff for program implementation; and
  - program monitoring expectations.
- Ensure fidelity to program models through frequent monitoring linked to StART team and principal walk-throughs.
- Establish teacher competencies/standards for Spanish and English (ESL) instruction. Hire teachers who have these specific language teaching competencies. For teachers already in the district, institute a professional development plan and monitor the system to ensure highly qualified teachers are providing language instruction.
- Look at equity throughout the district, with an eye towards hiring personnel with whom the ELL parent/community population can identify and feel comfortable. Parents become involved in schools where they feel welcomed and valued. Staff cultural competence can foster these positive feelings. Strong parent involvement leads to increased student motivation, participation, and achievement.

### **Instruction**

- While the research (e.g., National Literacy Panel's meta-analysis) indicates that teaching reading in the first language is more effective in fostering English achievement than is immersing children in English, the debates about language of instruction often eclipse discussions about effective instruction and curricula. The focus on quality of instruction in both languages should be paramount. To this end, the district should provide clear guidance for and monitor implementation of the following curriculum elements:
  - explicit instruction in Spanish literacy along a skills continuum, with benchmarks/expectations for achievement within each grade level;
  - explicit instruction in English as a second language focused on academic English language arts skills necessary for academic success;
  - explicit instruction in Spanish-English language similarities and differences (e.g., sound/symbol correspondences, sentence structure, etc.)
  - a concrete transition process;

- explicit instruction in English literacy skills, as necessary; and
- engagement of students in the active use of academic language throughout the school day.
- Consider the possibility of more than one program model: transitional bilingual education and parallel literacy.
- Investigate the parallel literacy model (instruction in Spanish literacy and English literacy from grade 1) designed and researched by Dr. Kathy Escamilla (the Literacy Squared<sup>®</sup> Program). Her results indicate that this model of instruction, if implemented with fidelity, fosters significant improvement in English literacy while continuing to develop Spanish literacy. This model does not develop Spanish literacy at the expense of English literacy or vice versa. English literacy development does not have a negative impact on the development of literacy in Spanish. It is a way to develop English literacy without lagging behind, while using Spanish literacy to build on what students bring to school.
- Redesign the transitional bilingual education model to allow transition based on student performance rather than on time spent in the program. Student performance should include end-of-grade 2 reading level in Spanish and intermediate or higher CELA proficiency in the skill areas of listening and speaking.

#### **Assessment**

- Develop or purchase formative (progress monitoring) and benchmark ESL assessments linked to the ESL Framework and to the CELA. Provide professional development for principals and ELA and Literacy coaches on how to guide teachers to use results from these assessments to regroup students and differentiate their ESL instruction.
- Require all schools to use ESL Benchmark assessments.
- Keep track, school by school, student by student, of ESL Benchmark data.
- Clarify the use of Spanish CSAP, specifying who takes the test in Spanish and when.
- Carefully monitor ELA program implementation to evaluate school and district effectiveness.
- Each year, look at all ELL (NEP, LEP, and FEP) students' growth on CSAP to get a complete picture of performance by grade level.
- Gather DRA, DIBELS, and other benchmark assessment data on students in grades K-2 on a consistent basis. Analyze growth of all ELL students.
- To focus on narrowing the wide achievement gaps between all ELL and EO students (non-ELL students), each year compare reading and math achievement growth, using CSAP and other K-2 indicators.
- Form a task force to investigate the low reclassification rates across the district.
- Analyze student CELA and CSAP data by student length of time in district. This will determine the long-term ELL students. Identify students who have not made adequate progress and provide lists of these students to principals for their staff to develop ILPs. Continuously monitor these students' reading and language growth and hold principals accountable for student progress.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ✓ How can the ELA program be integrated into the Student Achievement Resource Team to maximize its effectiveness?
- ✓ What ESL expertise currently exists in Adams 14?
  - What ESL instruction is currently taking place in the schools?
  - Which teachers have ESL certification or Graduate level ESL education?
- ✓ What other districts have developed ESL Scope and Sequences or Frameworks?
- ✓ Where transitional bilingual education is effective, how is instruction delivered? What are the program models, class schedules, teacher competencies, time allocations, etc?
- ✓ What is the district's vision for the ELA program? Do all role groups share this vision? How does the StART team feel about the vision? How do principals feel about the vision?
- ✓ How are Spanish literacy teachers and ESL teachers recruited and how are their competencies determined?
- ✓ What are the characteristics of students who have effectively transitioned to English reading? What Spanish literacy and English oracy skills did they need to be successful in English literacy?
- ✓ What does transition look like in the classroom? What skills are taught?
- ✓ What does parallel literacy look like and is there evidence that districts with the same needs and demographics as Adams 14 are successful with such a model?
- ✓ What are the desired roles and responsibilities for para-professionals who work with ELL students at elementary, middle, and high school levels?
- ✓ How do para-professionals currently spend their time? Are they provided time to plan with their cooperating teachers?
- ✓ What is the district's professional development plan for para-professionals?
- ✓ What checks are in place to ensure equitable hiring practices in the district?
- ✓ What is the Spanish literacy scope and sequence/continuum of skills?
- ✓ How do teachers use the Spanish literacy continuum to plan instruction?
- ✓ What pedagogical training is required to be an effective teacher of Spanish literacy? What other skills are required?
- ✓ What model for Spanish literacy instruction does the district support? Literature-based with skills support or skill-based with literature support?
- ✓ What does the typical day of an ELA coach look like? How much time is spent coaching?
- ✓ How are ELA coaches taught to coach?
- ✓ What English skills are necessary for students to be academically successful?
- ✓ What academic vocabularies have been identified for instruction by grade level and content area?
- ✓ How are academic text and discourse structures taught in Adams 14?
- ✓ How is the academic language of tests included in the curriculum?
- ✓ What do teachers, students, and parents know about the yearly expectations for performance in Spanish literacy? In ESL? In English literacy?
- ✓ How much growth do teachers expect per year in English? In reading? In math?
- ✓ What academic performance data are currently collected in K-2?
- ✓ How can K-2 data be used to monitor student progress toward content mastery?

- ✓ Why are reclassification rates so low? Are they similar to other similar districts throughout Colorado?
- ✓ What is the current process and time frame for reclassifying students?
- ✓ Are there ways to streamline the process and make it more objective/consistent across schools?
- ✓ Who are the long-term ELL students? Why aren't they making progress?