

To: Scott Murphy, Littleton Superintendent of Schools
Lori Kinney, Assistant Superintendent Human Resources
Connie Bouwman, Assistant Superintendent Learning Services
Mary Haney, President Littleton Education Association
Dan Maas, Chief Information Officer

From: Annette Fante, Project Manager, Littleton Educator Effectiveness
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Re: Initial Results of Needs Assessment: Senate Bill 191

My initial data collection has focused on three types of information sets. The first data set is comprised of **perceptions** as shared by key district leaders as well as a review of information publicly disseminated through the district website. The second data set focuses on essential **processes and/or strategies** utilized by Littleton Public Schools to improve student-learning outcomes. These processes and strategies were illuminated through personal interviews with key leadership staff as well as through a review of LPS improvement and strategic planning documents. Finally, the third data set is comprised of actual **student learning outcomes**. These outcomes were surfaced through a review of the District Unified Improvement Plan, School Performance Frameworks, state and federal accountability targets and the Littleton Public School's Strategic Plan.

It is important to have this context of data sets as they provided the initial evidence underpinning my assessment of the system strengths, gaps and promising practices. It is also important to note that this communication represents my initial assessment of LPS in alignment to the expectations of Senate Bill 10-191 and that as time progresses additional strengths, gaps and promising practices may emerge.

System Strengths/Assets

Support of the Superintendent and Board of Education were noted as key stabilizing factors for LPS especially given the challenging times of economic shortfalls and politically charged national reform initiatives. Both were described as knowledgeable, involved and engaged.

LPS Staff receives a great deal of affirmation when interviewees responded to the question, "To what do you attribute the success of Littleton Public Schools?" Professionals at all levels of the organization were cited for their effectiveness, their desire to be the best and their ongoing commitment to professional development. LPS staff is perceived to be collaborative, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and caring.

Professional Development opportunities provided through LPS as well as supported through other professional organizations and affiliations also were noted as strengths of the district. LPS has invested in coaching and mentoring to support teachers in their ongoing professional growth.

Hiring Practices and Processes closest to the ground level surfaced as a key component of Littleton's success. Specifically, interviewees noted the authority of the local school leadership in receiving applications at the sight and conducting screening with key stakeholders in the local

school. These practices allow principals and other school leaders to directly connect with candidates who are seeking a position. The perception is that LPS is hiring the best.

Involvement of Key Stakeholders was most commonly cited when interviewees were providing positive examples of change/improvement efforts in LPS. Consistent and regular feedback loops regarding the Inspired Writing initiative, standards implementation, and the universal literacy framework provided examples. It is important to note that while most of the examples cited directly impacted staff and were therefore, evidence of staff input, I also heard this strength when seeking parent and community input for such key issues as the late start calendar, closing schools and the District's Strategic Plan.

Clarity of Expectations and Timelines were themes regularly spoken to when interviewees clarified the ingredients for successful implementation of changes and improvement efforts. This speaks to a strong system of communication at all levels and has assisted LPS staff in reaching desired outcomes. Respondents consistently noted the willingness of leadership to adjust expectations and timelines based upon ongoing stakeholder input. Interviewees regularly referenced the concept of "loose/tight" in defining clarity of expectations.

A strong **Partnership between the Local Education Association (LEA) and District Leadership** was another essential ingredient to the success of LPS. Historically, this partnership has brokered a shared vision for improving the educational system to serve all students in LPS. It has also generated a belief that "we speak with one voice" when addressing our community, parents, staff and students.

Local District and School Autonomy emerged in response to the success of LPS quite regularly. There are strong perceptions and beliefs held at most levels of the organization regarding the importance of implementing change initiatives in an "accordion" fashion, meaning that the ground swell from the local school meets the direction of the district somewhere in the middle. This value for autonomy has been more recently highlighted in regards to school performance. i.e. the higher the performance of a local school, the greater the level of autonomy.

Implementation of a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum was most often linked to the improvement of student learning and the narrowing of achievement gaps. Central office leadership is providing ongoing professional development and content collaboration opportunities to support teachers in the delivery of the guaranteed and viable curriculum including the new common core standards.

Commitment to Professional Learning Communities has been an implementation strategy to support the guaranteed and viable curriculum, foster effective instructional practices and support the development of common, local assessments. Interviewees consistently cited this vision and dedicated time as instrumental to improvement in student learning. This time is viewed as a major support to the development of a collaborative rather than a competitive work environment.

Technology Leadership and Integration came through loudly and clearly as a strength of the district. The Inspired Writing initiative was most often cited as a successful innovation that was implemented well. Interviewees often cited this implementation as a model for other



improvement efforts. In addition, LPS has embraced technology as an essential tool in supporting student learning.

Student Performance has been noted as a strength given the district's ability to focus on narrowing achievement gaps, maintaining high levels of performance as measured by state and local assessments. It was noted that most students come to LPS ready to learn and with positive attitudes about the importance of a quality education.

Parent and Community Engagement is a cornerstone of LPS values and has resulted in strong, positive relationships between the school system and its key external stakeholders.

Promising Practices

When interviewees were asked to reflect on the readiness of the LPS system to be more reliable, fair and equitable when assessing student growth and implementation of professional practices required through the Senate Bill, the following strategies, practices and themes emerged as promising. For the purpose of this initial needs assessment, **“promising” is being defined as likely to produce positive gains in student learning.**

Standards Based Grading has been implemented at the elementary level. The essential linkage of what a student knows and is able to do with assessments of learning and adjustments of instruction, ultimately culminating in specific feedback to the learner on next steps provides a solid foundation for a system to measure educator effectiveness in a fair and equitable manner. Issues noted with standards based grading included the lack of implementation at the secondary level and the lack of validated common assessments.

Student Grade Level Index was the only body of evidence that interviewees noted as promising for measuring student growth. This body of evidence has measurement ingredients that are standardized as well as others that are not. It includes measures that are given at multiple times (DRA2, MAPS, TCAP-reading, writing and mathematics) as well as single one-time assessments such as the district writing assessment. While respondents noted this concept as promising, there were also significant concerns about the lack of interrater reliability and disparate grading practices.

Instructional Walk Through Tools have begun to be more readily used for classroom observations conducted by school and district administrators. The “universal literacy framework” was surfaced as one such example that is providing greater clarity about expectations for effective instruction and is being supported by continuous professional development opportunities for leaders as well as teachers.

Local Common Assessments are surfacing in some content areas and at some grade levels as work products through the PLC time allocated to staff. There is a noted ownership and engagement of the content staff with the development of these measures. However, at this time, there is no systemic capturing of these assessments or a validation methodology across schools.

Cross-School Content Collaboration especially in the content areas beyond the core of mathematics, science, language arts and social studies provides a strong foundation for developing and implementing common student growth measures in areas such as art, music, physical education, health, consumer and family studies, business, and technology. Given that many of these staff members are the lone educator in their school, they have quickly come to value and accept the professionalism of their content colleagues. In addition, given the small number of staff members in these content areas, achieving consensus is less time consuming and more feasible.

Restructuring of Learning Services under the direction of one assistant superintendent holds promise for the integration of goals, strategies, resources, and personnel especially when addressing student learning gaps rooted in issues such as poverty, language acquisition, learning disabilities, giftedness. Interviewees noted the promise of alignment not only for the departments within learning services but also for the alignment of focus for improvement of student learning.

Linkage of Learning Services and Human Resources came forward given the partnership that has been developed between the two assistant superintendents. It has been noted that “silo” work is being addressed and that the leadership of these two critical areas of the central administration are working collaboratively to support the goals and vision for LPS especially as related to SB 10-191. However, all interviewees cited technology capability as a critical key to creating a manageable new evaluation system.

Professional Practices Body of Evidence emerged as an area that is promising given the district’s long history of success that came forward in identifying the strengths of the district. While some may say that this body of evidence has not been formally validated, it is clear that the professional judgment of school leaders and district leaders has resulted in a high quality workforce that has earned the trust and respect of the community. Typical to this body of evidence are direct observations, pre and post conferencing, parent and student feedback, colleague feedback, individual goal setting, perception surveys and demonstrations of leadership. To move this body of evidence to strength, it is necessary to establish professional practice standards especially for school leaders as well as formalize process components to ensure fairness, transparency and equity.

Locally Designed Assessments of Student Learning, these measures enjoy a high degree of teacher ownership and engagement. There is strong professional perception that these measures are in fact, valid and reliable and can be utilized for linking student growth to educator effectiveness.

Gaps

It is important to again clarify that gaps are noted in direct correlation to the expectations of Senate Bill 10-191. For this section of the report, I have chosen to move away from a narrative and provide a notated, color-coded summary based upon the “must” statements of SB 10-191.

Green indicates that LPS is already in alignment/compliance with this requirement.

Red indicates that LPS either does not have this essential in place or what exists does not align with the new Senate Bill. **See: EXCEL Spreadsheet**