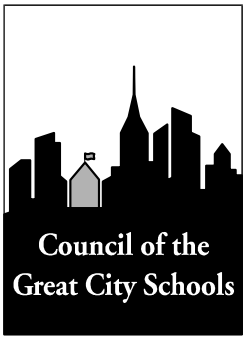
Raising Achievement in the Milwaukee Public Schools

Report of the Strategic Support Team
of the
Council of the Great City Schools

Submitted to the
Milwaukee Public School District

By the Council of the Great City Schools



June 2006

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Council of the Great City Schools thanks the many individuals who contributed to this project to improve student achievement in the Milwaukee Public School District. Their efforts and commitment were critical to our ability to present the district with the best possible proposals.

First, we thank Superintendent of Schools William Andrekopoulos. It is not easy to ask for the kind of review that a project like this entails. It takes courage, openness, and an uncompromising commitment to the city's children. He has those qualities in abundance.

Second, we thank the Milwaukee Board of School Directors for supporting this effort and for meeting with our team to discuss issues and challenges that the district faces.

Third, we thank the staff members of the Milwaukee Public Schools, who provided all the time, documents, and data that the Council team needed in order to do its work. Their openness and enthusiasm were critical to our understanding of the challenges faced by the Milwaukee school system.

Fourth, we thank the many individuals, groups, organizations, and associations with which we met. Our only regret is that we were unable to meet with everyone that we know had something valuable to contribute.

Fifth, the Council thanks the school districts and organizations that contributed staff to this effort. They include the Houston, Ft. Worth, and Richmond (Va.) school districts. The enthusiasm and generosity of these school districts serve as further example of how the nation's urban public school systems are working together to help each other improve student performance.

Finally, I thank Council staff members Ricki Price-Baugh, Shirley Schwartz, and Amanda Petteruti, whose skills were critical to the success of this effort.

Michael Casserly
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Raising Achievement in the Milwaukee Public Schools: Report of the Strategic Support Team of the Council of the Great City Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

FINDINGS

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is one of many urban school systems across the country that is struggling to boost student performance and earn community respect. It is making some headway in meeting these goals but continues to face substantial challenges.

MPS has performed better than some school districts in the state of Wisconsin, but its students still score well below state averages. Public support for charter and private schools has been growing; the state's investments in the district have been waning; the city itself is undergoing substantial economic strain; and federal and state accountability systems have added new stresses to a school system that is laboring to keep pace with the public's growing need for a better-educated citizenry.

One of the most substantial challenges facing the district involves the strategic issue of decentralization versus more standardization. The issue will need to be addressed as the district strives to advance student achievement. The district made the decision long ago to decentralize, but in the process of decentralizing, it did not define which decisions were best left to the district and which were appropriately delegated to the schools. Instead, each school was given so much latitude in decision-making that MPS has become a system of schools rather than a school system.

Some elementary schools, for example, have selected as many as five different reading basal textbooks, each with a different approach to teaching reading. This level of decentralization has proven to be counterproductive in other big city school districts across the country because it causes instructional programming to be so fragmented that it becomes ineffective. Milwaukee has pulled back some from this approach over the last several years in requiring that each school use the same textbook series, but there remains substantial conflict over philosophical approaches and the timing of how and when knowledge and skills are taught. This diversity of opinion is healthy in some ways and in some settings, but it can be dysfunctional in school districts experiencing high student mobility. In such districts, children change schools repeatedly over the school year and encounter differing instructional tactics each time that they move.

Staff members in Milwaukee have invested considerable time and effort—school by school—in designing curriculum and pacing systems, developing common assessments, and aligning resources, and other activities in order to improve instruction.

This delegation of responsibilities is positive in that it expresses confidence in school staff members to work as professionals and design the best programming for their own buildings. But it also results in a great deal of duplication and fragmentation. A lot of people are working independently on the same things that the central office could be doing more efficiently and with greater consistency.

For its efforts, however, MPS has seen only small, incremental gains in student achievement over the last several years. Even more troubling, it is apparent that many people in the district seem to see these marginal improvements as acceptable. At the current rate of improvement, however, it is very likely that the district will fall deeper into sanctions under the federal *No Child Left Behind* law and the state accountability system.

In many ways, it is not hard to figure out how these marginal gains occurred. The central office, for all intents and purposes, has delegated responsibility for improving student achievement to the individual schools, in effect saying, "You figure it out." The result is not only marginal gains in student achievement but also a marginalized central office that has little to no role in shaping where the district is going instructionally. Discussions with school-based staff members indicate that they do not view the central office as instrumental in helping to raise student performance. They do not look to the central office for help in solving instructional problems or in obtaining state-of-the-art instructional tools. All in all, they do not view the central office as providing strong instructional leadership.

There is no single "right answer" to the question of how much to decentralize and when. The decision depends on many variables at any given time—including student achievement trends and the district's status on its reforms. One of the side-effects of the Milwaukee school district's decentralized practices over the years is that it has built considerable capacity and expertise at the school level that could be marshaled on behalf of all the students in the system. The expertise developed at the building level could be used to create a centralized set of curriculum expectations that define the level of rigor needed at each grade level to explicitly boost performance. In addition, the district need not standardize everything. It might want to leave higher-achieving schools alone, concentrating instead on those in need of the most improvement.

The state, for its part, has made the work of local school districts in Wisconsin nearly impossible by testing students in November and then returning achievement data to the districts long after it can be used to improve teaching targeted at individual students. This counterintuitive practice affects all the districts in the state; however, it has an especially detrimental effect on the Milwaukee school district, where student performance lags behind the statewide average.

The superintendent asked the Council of the Great City Schools to review the instructional program of the Milwaukee Public Schools and propose ways to accelerate gains in student achievement. To accomplish this task, the Council assembled a Strategic Support Team of instructional specialists with strong reputations for improving student

achievement in their own cities. The team looked specifically at the district's curriculum and instructional program and prepared a list of recommendations for the superintendent based on interviews and document reviews. All observations and recommendations were current as of the March 2006 site visit.

NEXT STEPS

The Council of the Great City Schools benchmarked—or compared—the instructional program of the Milwaukee Public Schools against those of other urban school districts that have been making substantial progress in raising student achievement. As the Milwaukee school district plans its next steps, the Strategic Support Team asks the leadership of the district to consider the following:

1. **Articulate a clearer sense of urgency and high expectation supported by the board, superintendent, and all district staff members, and develop a process to ensure that progress is made in meeting explicit district goals.**

The Milwaukee Public Schools has a superintendent and many hardworking staff members who are determined to raise student achievement and revitalize the school district. To help ensure that this determination brings about the desired results, the school system might want to—

- Shift the district's current culture of satisfaction with slow, incremental increases in achievement to one that fosters more rapid gains.

- Conduct board, superintendent, and senior staff site visits to urban districts with higher performance and faster gains to see firsthand how other districts have instituted reforms.

- Conduct a series of externally facilitated board retreats to develop a unified agenda for district reform, including:

    - *Reorienting district reforms from a school-based to a more uniform and standardized instructional structure*. Specify which functions most efficiently belong in the central office and which belong in schools. Leave budgeting and hiring at the school level.

    - *Developing a more aggressive public relations and marketing effort.* The first step in this effort would be to study the trends, forces, and events likely to have political, economic, social and technological impact on the district. The second step would be to sell the positive aspects of the district and address the challenges posed by competition from by charter and private schools.

    - *Ensuring that time is set aside on each board agenda to reviewing some aspect of the academic program*, hearing progress reports on the district's reforms, and developing a more in-depth understanding of districtwide academic issues than is currently the case with the monthly board agendas.

2. Engage an outside facilitator to assist the district in updating its strategic plan to encompass and go beyond state and *No Child Left Behind* targets.

The district's strategic plan is out of date and lacks explicit targets by subgroups. It does have an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) plan, but it is unclear whether the plan can guide the work of the district. The district might want to—

- Cite a strategy not only for having schools meet specific numeric achievement scores by subgroup, but also for encouraging greater rigor in courses, such as having higher goals for participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Talented and Gifted (TAG) program participation targets, dropout prevention, and higher performance on college entrance tests.

- Revise the school educational plan to ensure that school goals align with systemwide goals, including goals for subgroups.

- Set stretch goals for student achievement that go beyond NCLB's safe harbor targets.

- Evaluate strategies being used by schools to address identified needs.

- Charge instructional units with developing their own plans that are aligned with the new districtwide strategic plan. Require a process that ensures collaboration across departments to eliminate duplication of effort and reduce conflicting demands on school staff.

3. Demonstrate commitment to higher student achievement by including achievement measures and the implementation of district initiatives into evaluations of senior staff members, principals, literacy coaches, and at-will employees.

The district has an excellent research department with experience in analysis of performance data. The district is in the process of redesigning its evaluation of principals. Current evaluation systems do not include student achievement measures, however. As next steps, the district might consider the following—

- Revise the evaluation system to place senior staff members on performance contracts tied to attaining the districtwide achievement goals stated in the revised strategic plan and in department plans.

- Ensure that revisions to evaluation forms for principals include a strong component assessing progress on meeting their schools' educational plan goals and implementing and monitoring the district's instructional programs and strategic plan effectively.

- Charge instructional unit leaders with conducting cross-functional planning and hold unit leaders accountable within the evaluation system.

4. Revise learning targets and specifications so that they are in complete alignment with state content and process standards, and state assessment frameworks. Use the revised learning targets and specifications as the foundation for pacing guides and professional development.

By establishing learning targets and developing literacy and mathematics frameworks, the district has shown that it is moving to provide unifying tools to support student achievement throughout the school system. However, the district philosophy has been to leave much of responsibility for student achievement in the hands of teachers. While the original intent behind this thinking was to deepen understanding at the school level, the result may be duplicative efforts and varying interpretations. To ensure that the intent of the district is communicated clearly, is supported, and is monitored, the district might consider the recommendations below—

- Charge the district's instructional division with defining its leadership role and responsibilities, including focusing directly on high-leverage actions to improve student achievement.

- Use the opportunity afforded by the upcoming math K-8 adoption cycle to use the learning targets and specifications in connection with textbook alignment, and consider requiring a single adoption in Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI) so that they can be supported better. Consider narrowing the number of choices of math textbooks districtwide so that curriculum materials can include information that enables teachers to know when they need to supplement textbooks to align with learning targets and specifications.

- Charge the instructional leadership with taking the initiative in identifying a district-approved philosophy for reading instruction rather than the current set of conflicting philosophies represented in the eleven separate reading series.

- Revise the writing booklets to include a wider range of examples and annotate how the scoring rubric would be used for each one so that teachers can develop a common understanding of why a particular rating is earned.

- Develop a common pacing guide with an articulated, phased rollout plan and an evaluation plan. Anchor the pacing guide in state assessment, learning targets, and specifications for teachers in reading and math. The pacing guide timelines will provide an indication of the importance of a particular concept or skill. The pacing guide also will enable the district to develop benchmark tests to know how well students are progressing through the curriculum so that interventions can be made as quickly as possible and data can be used to refine the learning targets and specifications, the pacing guide itself, and professional development offerings.

- Consider curtailing the latitude of individual schools to purchase textbooks outside of the district adoption unless these schools are demonstrating high levels of student achievement on their own.

5. Rethink the vast amount of professional development taking place in the district to ensure that it is focused on the areas of greatest leverage, such as implementing aligned learning targets and specifications with the intended rigor, and using intervention strategies when data reveals weaknesses in student performance.

The district and its partners offer extensive professional development opportunities around a myriad of topics. The next step the district should consider is evaluating the content of these offerings, their effectiveness at the classroom level in terms of student achievement gains, and which sessions should become required for all teachers to ensure that initiatives can be implemented with fidelity. The team recommendations include—

- Develop a districtwide professional development plan that is tied to districtwide goals for student achievement priorities.

- Mandate attendance for some districtwide professional development through set-aside days to focus on districtwide priorities.

- Establish a district professional development tracking and evaluation system grounded in student achievement.

- Monitor the type, quality, and cost of school-based professional development.

- Develop central office and principal leadership training around leadership in curriculum and instruction, including how to use the new pacing guides in classroom observations.

- Ensure that all teachers that use reading and math textbooks have received professional development in their use, strengths, and weaknesses.

6. Ensure that teachers have support for the intended curriculum and reforms and that intervention support is given to students who are not achieving.

The district has put initiatives in place to build collaboration, monitoring, and support. It has provided literacy coaches and math teacher leaders in every school. It has instituted “learning walks” to monitor classroom environment and instruction, and it has enabled schools to purchase intervention materials. However, the district might consider the following steps—

- Clarify the expectations for literacy coaches and math teacher leaders by aligning their work with the district goals for student achievement and providing these

educators with additional professional development. Link their evaluation to student achievement and the classroom implementation of district initiatives.

- Consider options to enable math teacher leaders to have at least part of the day free to coach and guide their peers.

- Inform school staff about the reasons to follow the pacing guides and revised learning targets and monitor to see that schools are doing so. If they are not, determine the reasons and address those issues.

7. Develop a data reporting system that provides schools with the data that they need to inform decision-making, and establish a three- to five-year plan to evaluate major programs and initiatives, including the impact they have on student achievement.

The district has recognized the importance of data-driven decision-making and has established strong research unit. The district has produced well-executed analyses of data and programs. As next steps, the district might—

- Create a "dashboard" reflecting data needs that are essential to monitor and drive instructional decisions at the district and school levels. Use focus groups of stakeholders to be sure that the data gathered and reported are grounded in district policy and priorities.

- Incorporate guidance on how to use data to make instructional decisions into professional development.

- Charge the research department with developing a regular schedule for routine program evaluation, follow-up, and reporting that goes beyond process and data findings to assess possible implications of the data.

- Develop a tracking system on the use of the data warehouse and portal.

8. Mandate the instructional program, interventions, and professional development for Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI) and establish intervention strategies in reading and math for students who are beginning to fall behind.

The district already provides some additional assistance to SIFI, including assistance with the development of their education plan. However, many schools have been unable to move out of the SIFI status. Additionally, every school has students who are falling behind, and there does not appear to be a district proposal for how schools can begin to intervene. The team proposes that the district—

- Establish a districtwide intervention strategy in reading and math.

- Provide additional technical support to schools on the "watch list." Consider any school making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) using confidence intervals or safe harbor as a school on the "watch list."

9. Assemble principals to explore and share options for creating common planning time for elementary teachers.

For teachers to work effectively on the learning targets, specifications, and pacing guides and to address the needs of students across and within grade levels, there must be have time to meet. Within the district, expertise can be shared to develop solutions. Additionally, the district may want to revisit and revamp its criteria for participation in Talented and Gifted (TAG) programs to ensure that gifted English language learning (ELL) students and children whose poverty has impeded their vocabulary development have a means of qualifying for the services that they deserve.

10. Establish strong evaluation of small schools and small learning community efforts to examine their impact on student achievement.

The district is using funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to begin moving to small learning communities. As it does so, the district needs to maintain its focus on the learning targets and specifications by ensuring that students are engaged around the content and expectations that lead to higher achievement. As next steps, the district might consider the following recommendations—

- Have the district pay for ACT PLAN participation in the eighth and ninth grades and use the results to move students into more rigorous courses.

- Share Advanced Placement resources across small schools to boost participation rates, and improve parent outreach.

- Increase the number of math courses required for graduation from two to three.

- Examine the expectations for middle school students to be sure that these expectations systematically form a strong foundation for high school work. Use exemplars of student work and the new pacing guide to ensure that teachers, administrators, students, and parents understand the expectations and that support for teachers and interventions for students are in place to meet the expectations.

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE AND ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The Council of the Great City Schools, the nation's primary coalition of large urban school systems, has prepared this report to summarize its recommendations to the Milwaukee Public Schools about improving student achievement. Superintendent of Schools William Andrekopoulos and Chief Academic Officer (CAO) Aquine Johnson coordinated this project.

To conduct its work, the Council assembled a Strategic Support Team made up of curriculum and instructional leaders who have worked to address some of the same issues as those faced by the Milwaukee Public Schools. Each of the team members came from an urban school district that has improved student achievement significantly over the last several years. Council staff members accompanied and supported the team and prepared this report summarizing its findings and proposals.

In collaboration with the superintendent, the team sought to review the school district's efforts to improve student achievement, to benchmark the district with faster-improving urban districts throughout the country, and to make recommendations aimed at accelerating gains in student achievement.

The team made its site visit to the Milwaukee Public Schools February 28 through March 3, 2006. The team's meetings began with a discussion with Superintendent Andrekopoulos and his management team on the strengths of the district, the challenges that it faces, and the efforts that it was making to meet those challenges. That discussion was followed by two days of fact-finding and a day devoted to synthesizing the team's findings and proposing preliminary strategies for improving student achievement. The team debriefed the superintendent and his management team at the end of the site visit.

We commend Superintendent Andrekopoulos, the school board, and the staff for their courage and openness in conducting a peer review such as this. It is not an easy decision to subject oneself and the institution one leads to the scrutiny that such an analysis entails. These leaders deserve the public's thanks.

PROJECT GOALS

The main goals of the Council's review were to—

- Review the instructional program in the Milwaukee Public Schools and assess the district's potential for accelerating student achievement in the midst of its current financial crisis and declining student enrollment.

- Propose ways for the Milwaukee Public Schools to strengthen its instructional program and accelerate gains in student reading and math achievement.

- Compare and contrast the instructional practices of the Milwaukee Public Schools with the instructional practices of other urban school systems across the country that are making gains in student achievement.

- Identify expertise, resources, strategies, and materials from other city school systems across the country that the Milwaukee Public Schools could use to accelerate student performance.

THE WORK OF THE STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM

The Strategic Support Team visited the Milwaukee Public Schools February 28-March 3, 2006, as noted. This team was made up of curriculum and instructional leaders from other urban school systems that have been making progress in improving student achievement.

The team used the February 28 discussion with Superintendent Andrekopoulos and his management team to customize its focus for the subsequent two days of fact-finding. This work included extensive interviews with central-office staff members, board members, principals, teachers, and representatives of outside organizations, parents, and others. The team also reviewed numerous documents and reports and analyzed data on student performance.

The team examined the district's broad instructional strategies, materials, core reading and math programs, assessment programs, and professional development efforts. It also reviewed district priorities and analyzed how the strategies and programs of the Milwaukee school system reflected those priorities. The team briefed Superintendent Andrekopoulos and his management team on preliminary findings and proposals at the end of the site visit. After the visit, team members gathered additional information, refined their initial recommendations, and reviewed the draft report.

This approach to providing technical assistance to urban school districts that are working to improve student achievement is unique to the Council and its members and is proving effective for a number of reasons.

First, the approach allows the superintendent to work directly with talented, successful practitioners from other urban school systems that have an established track record for performance and improvement.

Second, the recommendations developed by these peer teams have validity because the individuals who developed them have faced many of the same problems now encountered by the school system requesting Council review. These individuals are aware of the challenges faced by urban schools and their strategies have been tested under the most rigorous conditions.

Third, using senior urban school managers from other communities is faster and less expensive than retaining a large management-consulting firm. It does not take team

members long to determine what is going on in a district. This rapid learning curve permits reviews that are faster and less expensive than could be secured with experts who are not as well versed on urban education systems.

Finally, the teams comprise a pool of expertise that a school system superintendent, board, and staff can use to implement the recommendations or to develop other strategies.

Members of the Strategic Support Team included the following individuals—

STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM

Maria Crenshaw Math Specialist Richmond Public Schools Richmond, Va. Leslie Stalc Director of English/Language Arts Houston Independent School District Houston, Tex. Nancy Timmons Former Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Fort Worth Independent School District Forth Worth, Tex.	Michael Casserly Executive Director Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C. Ricki Price-Baugh Director of Academic Achievement Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C. Shirley Schwartz Director of Special Projects Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C.

CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT

This report begins with an Executive Summary of the issues facing the Milwaukee Public Schools as it works to boost student achievement. It includes an outline of the proposals that the Council and its Strategic Support Team are making. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the Milwaukee Public Schools and student performance. Chapter 2 summarizes the findings of the Strategic Support Team and its recommendations to improve student achievement. Chapter 3 provides conclusions and a discussion of the findings and recommendations.

The appendices of the report benchmark Milwaukee school district practices against characteristics of fast-improving urban districts (Appendix A); lists the people the teams talked to (Appendix B) and the documents that the team reviewed (Appendix C). The appendices also present brief biographical sketches of team members (Appendix D) and a brief description of the Council of the Great City Schools and the past teams it has conducted (Appendix E).

The Council has shied away from using a specific school reform model to guide its fact-finding and recommendations. Instead, it has taken a distinctly district-level orientation to reform and tailor its reports specifically to each district and the particular challenges that the district faces. The Council has now conducted more than 140 Strategic Support Teams in more than 35 major city school districts in a variety of instructional, management, and operational areas.

The Council developed a protocol to benchmark urban districts against these faster-improving urban districts. The survey is based upon the groundbreaking report *Foundations for Success* conducted for the Council by the research firm MDRC.[1] This research has focused on the key organizational and instructional strategies behind the academic gains of some of the fastest-improving urban school systems in the nation and how those reforms differ from those of districts that are not seeing much progress under their reforms.

The Council recognizes, of course, that each city is different. No city has the same mixture of student demographics, staffing patterns, and resources that Milwaukee has. Our recommendations, therefore, may not be applicable elsewhere.

It is also important to note that this project did not examine the entire school system. This analysis cannot be considered an audit as such. For example, we did not, spend time looking at food services, special education, federal programs, transportation, personnel, facilities management, security, or other operational functions. The Strategic Support Team did not conduct a detailed review of staffing allocations and did not examine staff qualifications. We did not look at school board policies or other governance issues. Our focus in this report is exclusively on student achievement and how to improve it.

[1] Snipes, J., Doolittle. F., Herlihy, C. (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools.

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND

LEADERSHIP

The Milwaukee public school system is governed by a nine-member elected Board of School Directors. One member is elected at large, and eight members are elected from numbered districts. Members serve four-year terms, with five terms expiring in 2007 and four expiring in 2009. The board hires the superintendent. The board has strongly supported shared decision-making to improve school effectiveness and student learning. Approximately 95 percent of the school operations budget is allocated to schools, with chargeback costs used to fund central services and programs, including the funding of additional services through "buyback" choices.

In the last 15 years, the district has had six changes in leadership. The average length of tenure for a superintendent during that period has been slightly more than three years.

Mr. William Andrekopoulos	August 2002 – present
Dr. Spence Korte	June 1999 – August 2002
Dr. Alan Brown	October 1997 – May 1999
Ms. Barbara Horton (Acting)	July 1997 – October 1997
Mr. Robert Jasna	June 1995 – July 1997
Dr. Howard Fuller	June 1991 – June 1995

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is the largest school district in the state of Wisconsin, enrolling some 97,293 students in 2002-2003, the most recent year for which these data are available from the National Center for Education Statistics. While the district enrolls about 11 percent of the state's total students, its students are almost three times as likely to be poor as are their peers statewide. Some 71.8 percent of MPS students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, compared with about 27.5 percent statewide—accounting for about 28.8 percent of the statewide total of students receiving free or reduced price lunches.

A total of 59.7 percent of MPS student enrollment was African-American in 2002-2003, compared with 10.4 percent statewide. Milwaukee had more than three times the enrollment of Hispanic students—17.1 percent—compared with 5.4 percent statewide. Milwaukee's student population was 15.5 percent white, compared with 79.5 percent statewide. And some 15.5 percent of the district's enrollment was composed of students with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), compared with 14.3 percent statewide. (See Table 1.)

The average school in Milwaukee enrolled some 446.3 students, compared with an average school enrollment statewide of about 393.8 students.[2] The district has a higher student-to-teacher ratio (15.0) than has the average Wisconsin school district (14.7). The per-pupil expenditures for Milwaukee are approximately 12 percent higher than are the statewide average. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Comparison of Milwaukee Public Schools with Wisconsin Schools Generally and the Great City Schools, 2002-2003[3]

	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	CGCS
Enrollment	97,293	881,231	7,457,832
% African-American	59.7%	10.4%	38.3%
% Hispanic	17.1%	5.4%	32.5%
% White	15.5%	79.5%	22.4%
% Other	2.4%	4.8%	6.8%
% Free/Reduced Price Lunch	71.8%	27.5%	64.2%
% with IEPs	15.5%	14.3%	13.0%
% English Language Learners	7.6%	2.9%	16.7%
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	15.0	14.7	16.9
Number of Schools	218	2,238	10,954
Average Enrollment per School	446.3	393.8	681
Current Expenditures per Pupil	$9,629	$8,634	$8,209

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Wisconsin changed the cut scores for the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) in the 2002-03 school year, rendering comparisons with prior years meaningless. Therefore, data analysis in this report only covers school years 2002-03 through 2004-05. Tests for the high-stakes test are administered in the fall, making it more difficult for the district to ensure that students are prepared to pass them. However, all districts in Wisconsin face the same challenge, but Milwaukee performance lags behind statewide averages. The achievement gaps are not closing very fast, and many students are not yet reaching proficiency.

We have looked at student achievement in the Milwaukee Public Schools from several vantage points—spring 2005 results, 2005 results compared with the results in 2003, Milwaukee's achievement gap compared with that of the state, Milwaukee's status on both the *No Child Left Behind* and the state accountability systems, and indicators of college preparation.

[2] This statistic includes all schools – elementary, middle, and high.

[3] Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary and Secondary School Universe Survey," 2002-2003.

State Assessment Results[4]

Wisconsin gives the statewide WKCE test to students in grades 4, 8, and 10 in November of each year in reading, English/language arts, and math. Changes in Milwaukee student achievement generally track changes at the state level. In every grade level, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency on the WKCE reading test was higher than was the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency on the WKCE English/language arts test. Additionally, a large gap persisted between the achievement of Milwaukee public school students and that of their statewide peers.

School year 2004-05 results indicated that 60 percent of the city's fourth-graders scored at or above the state-defined proficiency level on the reading portion of the WKCE, compared with 81 percent of the state's fourth-graders. This gap of 21 percentage points in reading was the same as the disparity in English/language arts scores in fourth grade. In 2004-05, approximately 58 percent of Milwaukee fourth-graders scored at proficient or above on the WKCE in language arts, compared with 78 percent of fourth-graders statewide.

In the fall of the 2004-05 school year, 57 percent of Milwaukee eighth-graders scored at proficient or above in the reading portion of the WKCE, while 84 percent of eighth-graders statewide achieved at that level. This 27 percentage-point gap in reading was similar to the 29 percentage-point gap between MPS and Wisconsin student achievement in eighth-grade English/language arts in 2004-05. Some 35 percent of the city's eighth-graders scored at or above the proficiency level in English/language arts, compared with 64 percent of eighth-graders statewide.

In the 2004-05 school year, the gap between MPS and Wisconsin student performance in reading was even wider in the tenth grade. Thirty-two percentage points separated the proportion of Milwaukee tenth-grade students attaining proficient or above in reading from their statewide counterparts (42 percent versus 74 percent, respectively). And, there was a 30 percentage-point gap between scores of tenth-graders in MPS and their statewide counterparts in the English/language arts portion of the WKCE in 2004-05. Only 39 percent of MPS tenth-graders students scored at or above the proficiency level in English/language arts, while 69 percent of tenth-graders statewide achieved proficiency or above in this area. (See Graphs 1 - 2.)

The district's math scores in school year 2004-05 also followed the pattern of declining in tenth grade, while state averages of students scoring at or above proficiency were stable across the three grade levels. In 2004-05, 27 percentage points separated the math scores of Milwaukee fourth-graders on the WKCE from the scores of their statewide counterparts (44 percent versus 71 percent, respectively). A 38 percentage-point gap separated the math performance of Milwaukee eighth-graders from that of eighth-graders statewide. That is, 34 percent of the city's eighth-graders scored at or above the proficiency level in math, compared with 72 percent of eighth-graders statewide. And, a similar achievement gap of 32 percentage points occurred between

[4] Grade 9 reading and math data are for 2003.

MPS tenth-graders and tenth-graders statewide in math. Only 29 percent of tenth-graders in MPS scored at or above the proficiency level in math in 2004-05, compared with 71 percent scoring at that level statewide. (See Graph 3.)

Trends: School Years 2002-03 to 2004-05[5]

In general, scores of Milwaukee public school students on the state achievement test show no sustained gains, and in some cases, actually declined.

In examining performance on the WKCE since 2002-03, the data indicate that generally MPS scores mirror gains and declines statewide. However, the proportion of fourth-graders at or above proficiency on the WKCE in reading decreased 3 percentage points between 2002-03 and 2004-05, compared with a 1 percentage-point gain in statewide performance. The proportion of MPS eighth-graders in 2004-05 at or above proficiency increased 1 percentage point over performance levels in 2002-03, recovering from the decline in 2003-04. Eighth-graders statewide also experienced a decline in eighth-grade reading scores in 2003-04. Between 2002-03 and 2004-05, eighth-graders statewide also showed a 1 percentage-point gain in reading scores. As with scores of their statewide counterparts, scores for Milwaukee tenth-graders improved by 2 percentage points from 2002-03 to 2004-05, with students in both the state and MPS experiencing a decline in scores in 2003-04. (See Graph 1.)

Language arts performance showed slightly different trends between Milwaukee students and students statewide than did reading scores. Between fourth and eighth grades, the performance of Milwaukee students in language arts still showed a decline; however, tenth-grade scores in language arts for 2004-05 surpassed eighth-grade scores by 4 percentage points. In the fourth grade, student achievement in language arts both in Milwaukee and for the state as a whole remained flat between 2002-03 and 2004-05.

Among Milwaukee fourth-graders, 44 percent attained proficiency or above in math in the 2004-05 school year. The proportion of students reaching math proficiency or above declined to 34 percent for eighth-graders and only 29 percent for tenth-graders that school year.

Reading scores for MPS fourth-graders declined by 3 percentage points during the three-year period between 2002-03 and 2004-05. Both Milwaukee eighth-graders and eighth-graders statewide improved their scores in reading by 1 percentage point over this period. And MPS tenth-graders improved their performance in reading by 2 percentage points over the same three-year period, while students statewide did so by 3 percentage points.

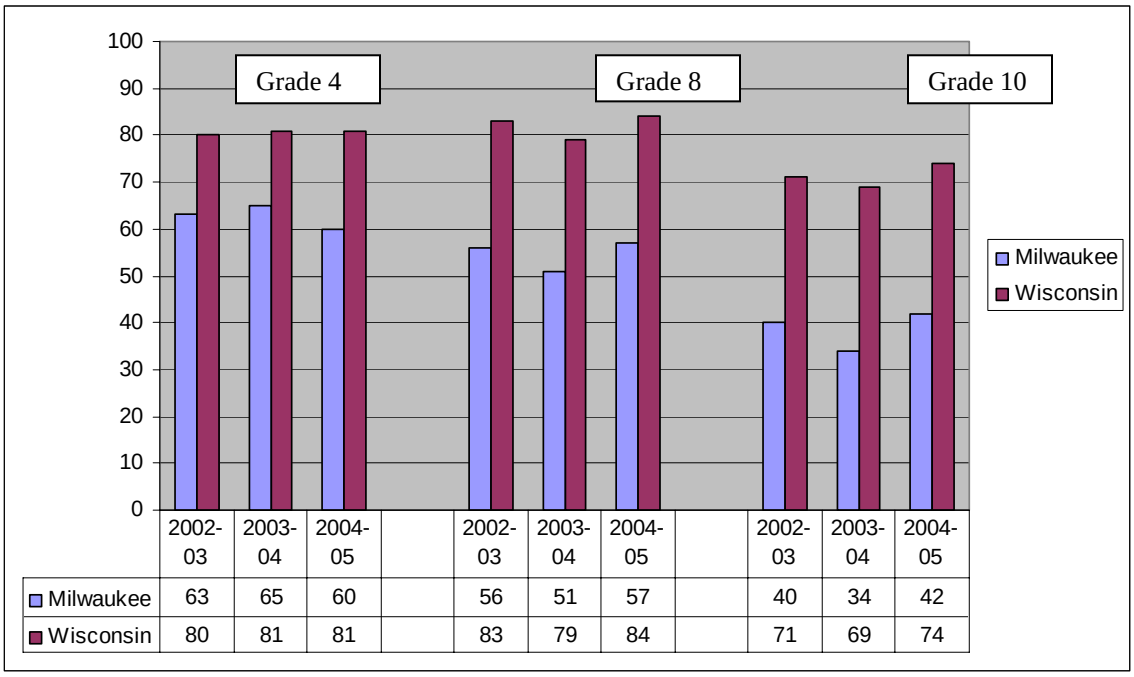
In language arts, scores of MPS students showed minor variations over the 2002-03 through 2004-05 school years. Statewide scores remained relatively flat in language arts also. MPS fourth-graders made no lasting gains in language arts in three years. MPS eighth-graders gained 3 percentage points since 2002-03, while eighth-graders statewide

[5] Grade 9 reading and math data are for 2002 and 2003.

gained only 2 percentage points. MPS tenth-graders gained 1 percentage point in language arts over the three-year period, while the language arts performance of tenth-graders statewide declined by 1 percentage point.

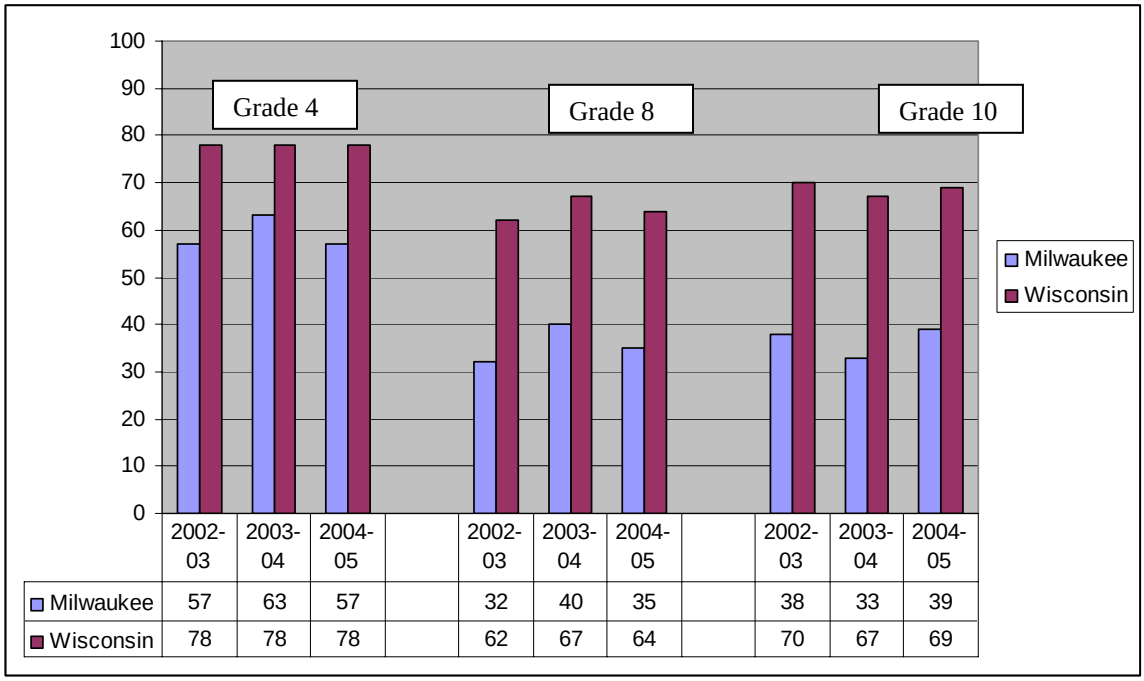
Statewide math scores remained flat between 2002-03 and 2004-05, while Milwaukee's fourth-grade math scores declined by 3 percentage points over the three-year period. Math scores of Milwaukee eighth-graders declined by 1 percentage point, which parallels the decline of math scores for eighth-graders statewide over the same period. Milwaukee tenth-graders gained 1 percentage point in math, again mirroring the 2 percentage-point gain of tenth-graders statewide during the 2002-03 through 2004-05 school years. (See Graphs 1-3.)

Graph 1. Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE)
Percent Proficient or Above in Grades 4, 8, and 10 Reading



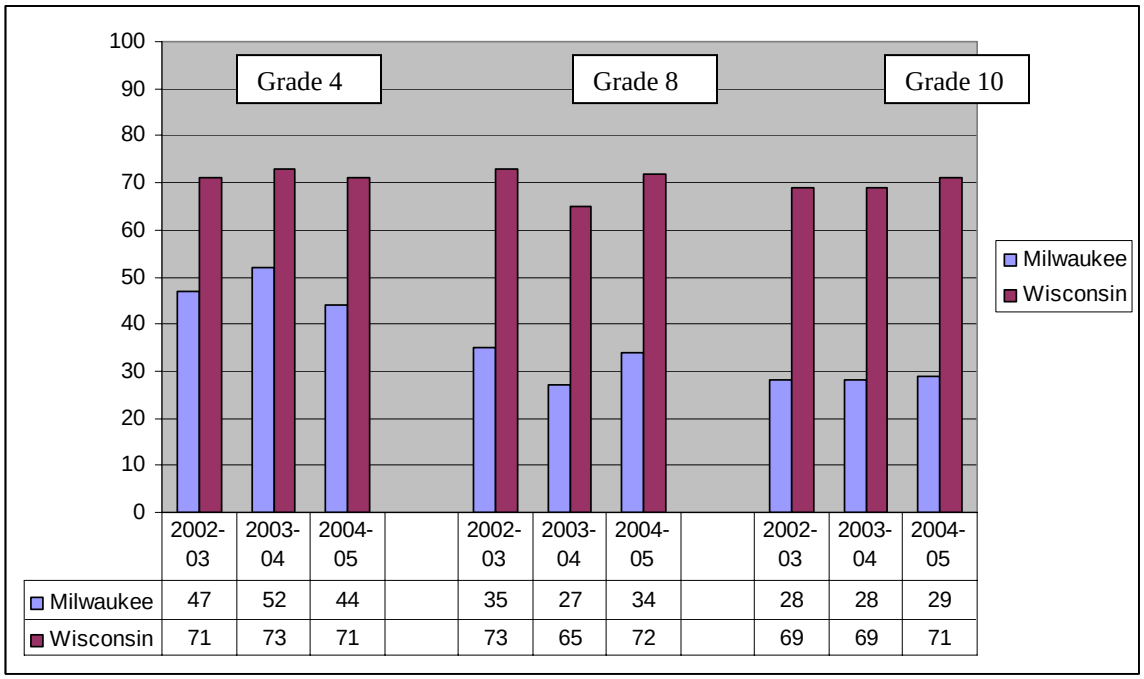
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Milwaukee	63	65	60		56	51	57		40	34	42
Wisconsin	80	81	81		83	79	84		71	69	74

Graph 2. WKCE Percent Proficient or Above in Grades 4, 8, and 10 Language Arts



	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Milwaukee	57	63	57		32	40	35		38	33	39
Wisconsin	78	78	78		62	67	64		70	67	69

Graph 3. WKCE Percent Proficient or Above in Grades 4, 8, and 10 Math



	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Milwaukee	47	52	44		35	27	34		28	28	29
Wisconsin	71	73	71		73	65	72		69	69	71

Trends in the Gap between Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide

While the pattern of scoring below state-defined proficiency levels is consistent, the gap between district student performance and statewide student performance in school year 2004-05 adds another perspective on student achievement in Milwaukee. Student performance in the Milwaukee school district tends to mirror student performance statewide, demonstrating double-digit gaps at all grade levels and in all content areas. Furthermore, MPS has not been able to close the gaps in any notable way.

Achievement gaps between Milwaukee students and students statewide remained high in school years 2002-03 through 2004-05. In fact, gaps appeared to be increasing, rather than narrowing.[6] The gaps in performance between MPS students and students statewide were smallest in fourth grade and became larger in the upper grades

In 2004-05, some 21 percentage points separated the reading scores of MPS fourth-graders from those of their statewide counterparts. This gap represented an increase of 5 percentage points over the previous year. Reading performance of Milwaukee eighth-graders was relatively flat for the three school years 2002-03 through 2004-05, showing a 27 percentage-point gap in scores between city students and students statewide. The gap in reading scores between MPS tenth-graders and their statewide counterparts was 32 percentage points in 2004-05, which represented a decrease of 3 percentage points from the previous school year. (See Table 2.)

The gap in language arts scores between MPS fourth-graders and fourth-graders statewide was 21 percentage points in 2004-05, which represented an increase of 6 percentage points from the previous school year, but was equal to the gap demonstrated in the 2002-03 school year. The gap in language arts scores between MPS eighth-graders and eighth-graders statewide was 29 percentage points, 1 percentage point less than the gap in 2002-03 but 2 percentage points more than the gap in 2003-04. Tenth-grade language arts scores showed a slight narrowing of the achievement gap in the three-year period from 2002-03 through 2004-05, but MPS tenth-graders stilled scored 30 percentage points below their state counterparts in the 2004-05 school year.

The gaps between the performance of MPS students and students statewide in math were greater in every grade level and year than were the gaps in reading and language arts. The smallest gap in math scores between MPS students and students statewide was 21 percentage points, which occurred in 2003-04 in grade 4. However, the gap in fourth-grade math scores increased by 6 percentage points in 2004-05. While the math performance gap between MPS eighth-graders and eighth-graders statewide had narrowed by 1 percentage point since the 2002-03 school year, the size of the gap in 2004-05 still amounted to 29 percentage points. At tenth grade, the gap between the math scores of Milwaukee students and students statewide had increased by 1 percentage point to some 42 percentage points in 2004-05. (See Table 2.)

[6] In 2002-03, gaps ranged form 17 to 41 percentage points. In 2003-04, the gaps ranged from 15 to 41 percentage points. In 2004-05, the gaps ranged from 21 to 42 percentage points.

Table 2. WKCE Achievement Gaps Between Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide in Reading, Language Arts, and Math, 2002-2005*

Subject	Grade 4			Grade 8			Grade 10		
	2002-2003	**2003-2004**	**2004-2005**	**2002-2003**	**2003-2004**	**2004-2005**	**2002-2003**	**2003-2004**	**2004-2005**
Reading	17	16	21	27	28	27	31	35	32
Language Arts	21	15	21	30	27	29	32	34	30
Math	24	21	27	38	38	38	41	41	42

*Data stated in percentage points

Trends in the Racially-Identifiable Achievement Gap

Data from the 2005 Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) show that white students in Milwaukee consistently scored higher than did the school district's African-American, Hispanic, or Asian students in both reading and math. Usually, tenth-grade performance for all subgroups was lower than either fourth- or eighth-grade performance. In almost every case since 2002-03, Milwaukee student subgroups had a smaller percentage of students scoring at proficient or above on the WKCE that did their counterparts statewide. However, the gap in performance between Milwaukee subgroups and their statewide peers at each grade level is often very small. Within MPS, the performance gaps between white students and students in other subgroups was usually slightly smaller than were the gaps between the statewide performance of white students and the statewide performance of students in other subgroups.

The annualized changes in WKCE reading scores in Milwaukee indicate that there was little movement between 2002-03 and 2004-05. Annualized changes in MPS ranged from a decline of 1.5 percentage points in fourth-grade reading for Asian students to an increase of 3 percentage points in reading for tenth-grade Asian students. All reading scores for Milwaukee fourth-graders declined slightly in the three-year period. There were small gains for all ethnic groups in eighth- and tenth-grade reading in MPS, but the annualized gains were very small, ranging from 0.5 to 3.0 percentage points. Statewide gains also were negligible over the three-year period (0.5 to 2.5 percentage points), and there were small annualized declines for African-American and Hispanic fourth-graders in reading. Annualized gains for Milwaukee students outpaced gains made by students statewide in only three of the 12 categories shown on Table 3.

In 2004-05, WKCE reading results showed that the proportion of white students in Milwaukee achieving at or above proficiency in reading ranged from 66 to 82 percent. The proportion of white students statewide scoring at or above proficiency in reading showed a smaller range—from 80 percent to 89 percent. The gap between reading scores for Milwaukee's white fourth-graders and white fourth-graders statewide grew from 6 percentage points in 2002-03 to 8 percentage points in 2004-05. The gap between reading scores for Milwaukee's white eighth-graders and their statewide peers narrowed during this period—from 11 percentage points in 2002-2003 to only 7 percentage points in

2004-05. However, at the tenth-grade level, the achievement gap in reading between MPS white students and their white statewide peers increased from 13 to 14 percentage points between 2002-03 and 2004-05. (See Table 3.)

Both in Milwaukee and Wisconsin as a whole, African-American students had the lowest percentage of students attaining proficient or above levels in reading in the three school years from 2002-03 through 2004-05. Performance of African-American students on the WKCE reading test showed minor variations over that same period. The highest proportion of African-American students attaining proficient or above in reading occurred in fourth grade, with percentages declining in eighth and tenth grades. The proportion of African-American students in Milwaukee scoring at proficiency or above in 2004-05 in reading ranged from 37 to 57 percent. Reading scores for African-American fourth-graders in Milwaukee declined slightly in reading, but were always within 3 percentage points of state performance each of the three years. Reading scores of African-American eighth-graders in MPS also mirrored the statewide performance of their African-American peers within 5 percentage points. At tenth grade in 2004-05, a majority of African-American students in both Milwaukee and Wisconsin as a whole failed to score at a proficient level. MPS African-American performance was only 4 percentage points below that of their African-American statewide peers in reading, but this gap had been slowly growing since 2002-03. (See Table 3.)

Scores on the reading portion of the WKCE for Milwaukee Hispanic students indicate small gains in eighth and tenth grade, and a small decline in fourth grade, reflecting statewide performance of their Hispanic peers. In 2004-05, the proportion of Hispanic students achieving at proficient or above in reading ranged from 41 percent in tenth grade to 59 percent in both fourth and eighth grades. Reading scores of Milwaukee's Hispanic students were as close as 2 percentage points below the scores of their statewide Hispanic peers in fourth grade to 8 percentage points below the scores of their statewide Hispanic peers in tenth grade. (See Table 3.)

Asian students in Milwaukee and Wisconsin as a whole are the second highest-scoring ethnic subgroup in reading on the WKCE. Data indicate that in 2004-05, the percentage of MPS Asian students scoring at proficient or above in reading ranged from 49 percent in tenth grade to 69 percent in eighth grade. At fourth grade in 2004-05, performance of MPS Asian students in reading declined, while statewide performance of Asian students in reading increased, leading to an achievement gap of 9 percentage points between the two groups. In eighth grade, scores of MPS Asian students in reading were within 5 percentage points of their statewide counterparts. In 2004-05, the greatest reading gap—10 percentage points— between MPS Asian students and Asian students statewide occurred at tenth grade. This disparity represented a slight narrowing of the 12 percentage-point gap between the two groups in 2002-03. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. WKCE Disaggregated Reading Scores at or Above Proficient for Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide, 2002-05*

		Milwaukee				Wisconsin			
		2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Annualized Change	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Annualized Change
Grade									
4th	White	80	83	78	-1.0	86	86	86	0.0
	Black	58	61	57	-0.5	61	62	59	-1.0
	Hispanic	60	59	59	-0.5	62	62	61	-0.5
	Asian	67	74	64	-1.5	69	73	73	2.0
8th	White	78	73	82	2.0	89	85	89	0.0
	Black	50	45	51	0.5	54	49	55	0.5
	Hispanic	54	53	59	2.5	60	56	63	1.5
	Asian	68	57	69	0.5	69	62	74	2.5
10th	White	65	62	66	0.5	78	76	80	1.0
	Black	34	28	37	1.5	36	31	41	2.5
	Hispanic	40	32	41	0.5	45	41	49	2.0
	Asian	43	40	49	3.0	55	53	59	2.0

*Data stated in percentage points

The team also examined the achievement gaps in reading between African-American and white students, Hispanic and white students, and Asian and white students. The data indicate that the gaps remained intransigent between 2002-03 and 2004-05 in both the state and Milwaukee. Generally, for the subgroups in both the state and MPS, the smallest achievement gap occurred at fourth grade[7].

The largest achievement gaps in both Milwaukee and the state occurred between African-American and white students, with the gaps in MPS being slightly lower than at the state level. In Milwaukee in 2004-05, the achievement gap between African-American and white students ranged from 21 to 31 percentage points in reading. The achievement gap for white and African-American students in reading at the state level ranged from 27 to 29 percentage points. (See Table 4.)

The reading achievement gap between Hispanic and white students in Milwaukee and the state as a whole remained relatively unchanged from 2002-03 to 2004-05. In MPS in 2004-05, the gap in reading scores between the two groups ranged from 19 to 25 percentage points. That same year, the gap in reading scores between MPS Asian and white students ranged from 13 to 17 percentage points. Again, Milwaukee students showed smaller achievement gaps in reading than did students statewide.

[7] The one exception was with achievement gap in reading between Asian and white students in Milwaukee, where the eighth-grade gap was 1 percentage point less than the fourth-grade gap.

Table 4. WKCE Reading Achievement Gap Between Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide, 2002-05*

Comparison Groups and Grade Levels	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Milwaukee Change in Gap	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Wisconsin Change in Gap
African-American-White Gap								
4th	22	22	21	1	25	24	27	-2
8th	28	28	31	-3	35	36	34	1
10th	31	34	29	2	42	45	39	3
Hispanic-White Gap								
4th	20	24	19	1	24	24	25	-1
8th	24	20	23	1	29	29	26	3
10th	25	30	25	0	33	35	31	2
Asian-White Gap								
4th	13	9	14	-1	17	13	13	4
8th	10	16	13	-3	20	23	15	5
10th	22	22	17	5	23	23	21	2

*Data stated in percentage points

Fourth-, eighth-, and tenth-graders also took the WKCE language arts test in 2002-03 through 2004-05. The team also disaggregated these data by ethnic subgroups (See Table 5.) The proportion of students scoring at or above proficient in language arts was almost always higher at the state level than for the same subgroup and grade level in Milwaukee. This tendency was particularly pronounced in the eighth grade.

In 2004-05, the proportion of MPS students reaching proficient or above in language arts ranged from a low of 34 percent for African-American tenth- graders to a high of 77 percent for white fourth-graders. Notably, in almost every group except Asian fourth-graders in Milwaukee, the percent proficient or above in language arts was always lower than in reading for the same group and grade level. This gap between performance in reading and language arts closely mirrored performance at the state level. (See Table 6.)

In almost every case, the proportion of MPS students reaching proficient or above status in English language arts indicates small, incremental growth from 2002-03 to 2004-05. Annualized gains for Milwaukee students in language arts ranged from 0 to 2.5 percentage points. However, at current rates of improvement, the large gaps in performance between white students and their minority peers in Milwaukee and the state will not close in a reasonable time frame. (See Table 7.)

As with reading, white students performed better in language arts than all other subgroups at fourth, eighth, and tenth grades in the state and in Milwaukee. MPS African-American eighth-graders lagged as much as 36 percentage points behind their white peers in language arts.

Table 5. WKCE Disaggregated Language Arts Scores at or Above Proficient for Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide*

		Milwaukee				Wisconsin			
		2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Annualized Change	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Annualized Change
Grade									
4th	White	76	82	77	0.5	83	84	84	0.5
	Black	53	60	53	0	54	59	55	0.5
	Hispanic	56	58	58	1	57	60	60	1.5
	Asian	64	72	67	1.5	67	72	70	1.5
8th	White	58	63	64	3	70	74	71	0.5
	Black	27	36	28	0.5	29	36	31	1
	Hispanic	31	43	35	2	36	43	38	1
	Asian	42	54	47	2.5	48	56	50	1
10th	White	62	59	63	0.5	76	73	76	0
	Black	32	27	34	1	34	29	37	1.5
	Hispanic	34	32	36	1	42	39	43	0.5
	Asian	42	37	47	2.5	52	51	50	-1

*Data stated in percentage points

Table 6. Subgroup Differences in Percent of Students Proficient or Above on the WKCE Reading and Language Arts Tests, 2002-05*

		Milwaukee				Wisconsin		
		2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005		2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Grade								
4th	White	4	1	1		3	2	2
	Black	5	1	4		7	3	4
	Hispanic	4	1	1		5	2	1
	Asian	3	2	-3		2	1	3
8th	White	20	10	18		19	11	18
	Black	23	9	23		25	13	24
	Hispanic	23	10	24		24	13	25
	Asian	26	3	22		21	6	24
10th	White	3	3	3		2	3	4
	Black	2	1	3		2	2	4
	Hispanic	6	0	5		3	2	6
	Asian	1	3	2		3	2	9

*Data stated in percentage points

Table 7. WKCE Language Arts Achievement Gap Between Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide, 2002-05*

	Milwaukee				Wisconsin			
	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Years to Parity	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Years to Parity
African-American–White Gap								
4th	25	22	24	24	29	25	29	--
8th	31	27	36	--	41	38	40	40
10th	30	32	29	29	42	44	39	13
Hispanic–White Gap								
4th	22	24	19	6	26	24	24	12
8th	27	20	29	--	34	31	33	33
10th	28	27	27	27	34	34	33	33
Asian–White Gap								
4th	14	10	10	2.5	16	12	14	7
8th	16	9	17	--	22	18	21	21
10th	20	22	16	4	24	22	26	--

*Data stated in percentage points

WKCE math performance continues the pattern observed in the reading and language arts tests. On the WKCE math test, white students outperform their statewide peers in math at every grade level in Milwaukee and the state. African-American students are the lowest-performing group in math. Indeed, in 2004-05, the majority of African-American and Hispanic students failed to reach proficiency levels in math. Hispanics did slightly outperform African-Americans, while Asians have outperformed Hispanics on the WKCE math test since 2002-03.

Scores at the state level in math reflect very little change for any subgroup. In Milwaukee, math performance for all subgroups has fallen slightly in fourth grade, improved slightly in eighth grade, and improved for all but Hispanic students in tenth grade. Asian students made the greatest progress in improving their achievement in math in the eighth and tenth grades. (See Table 8.)

Table 8. WKCE Disaggregated Math Scores at or Above Proficient for Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide*

		Milwaukee				Wisconsin			
		2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Annualized Change	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Annualized Change
Grade									
4th	White	67	73	65	-1	76	80	78	1
	Black	40	46	38	-1	41	45	40	-0.5
	Hispanic	50	50	46	-2	51	53	50	-0.5
	Asian	64	67	64	0	66	71	70	2
8th	White	64	51	66	1	81	73	81	0
	Black	24	20	25	0.5	30	24	31	0.5
	Hispanic	37	33	39	1	46	38	49	-1.5
	Asian	52	45	58	3	68	56	67	-0.5
10th	White	55	58	58	1.5	76	76	78	1
	Black	19	19	20	0.5	23	23	26	1.5
	Hispanic	31	27	29	-1	38	38	40	1
	Asian	32	43	48	8	54	58	58	2

*Data stated in percentage points

The data in Table 9 indicate that there have been very large gaps between white students and students of other ethnic subgroups in math achievement at both the district and state levels since 2002-03. In 2004-05, achievement gaps were largest between African-American and white students in all three grade levels, ranging from 27 percentage points in fourth grade to 41 percentage points in eighth grade. Gaps between Hispanic and white students were slightly smaller than gaps between African-American and white students. The math achievement gap in Milwaukee is quickly closing between Asian and white students. In 2004-05, only 1 percentage point separated the math scores of Asian fourth-graders from white fourth-graders, while in tenth grade, only 10 percentage points separated the math scores of the two groups.

Table 9. WKCE Math Achievement Gap Between Milwaukee Students and Students Statewide, 2002-05*

	Milwaukee				Wisconsin		
	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005		2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
African-American-White Gap							
4th	27	27	27		35	35	38
8th	40	31	41		51	49	50
10th	36	39	38		53	53	52
Hispanic-White Gap							
4th	17	23	19		25	27	28
8th	27	18	27		35	35	32
10th	24	31	29		38	38	38
Asian-White Gap							
4th	3	6	1		10	9	8
8th	12	6	8		13	17	14
10th	23	15	10		22	18	20

*Data stated in percentage points

ACT Scores

According to high school records that Milwaukee staff members provided to the team, 3,803 students were enrolled in twelfth grade in 2004-05. Of that number, 44 percent took the ACT test. High school participation rates ranged from 21 to 81 percent. King High School had the highest representation (81 percent of its 337 twelfth graders) and the highest average student composite score (20.4).

Both MPS and the State of Wisconsin have increased the number of students participating on the ACT test since the 2002-03 school year. However, the actual percentage of students participating declined for MPS by about 6 percentage points from 2002-03 through 2004-2005 because the number of twelfth-graders in the district increased.

With the increase in the number of students taking the ACT test in MPS, scores declined slightly over the three-year period. In Milwaukee, students performed best on the science portion of the test, while students statewide performed best on the reading portion. MPS average scores in 2004-05 were tightly grouped from 16.6 on the English portion of the test to 18.2 on the science portion. The average scores for MPS students on the ACT were always lower than Wisconsin averages on all subtests. (See Table 10.)

Table 10. Comparison of Milwaukee and Statewide Student Participation Rates and Average Scores on the ACT, 2002-05

	Enrollment			---------- Average Student Score ----------				
	(12th grade)	Number Students Tested	Percent Students Tested	English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
MPS District 2004-2005	4,605	1,749	37.98	16.6	17	17.9	18.2	17.5
State 2004-2005	68,837	39,249	57.06	21.5	22	22.4	22.3	22.2
MPS District 2003-2004	4,085	1,640	40.15	17.2	17.6	18.4	18.7	18.1
State 2003-2004	68,533	38,822	56.68	21.4	22.2	22.4	22.2	22.2
MPS District 2002-2003	3,782	1,651	43.65	17.1	17.7	18.3	18.6	18.1
State 2002-2003	67,696	38,785	57.32	21.2	22.1	22.3	22.3	22.1

Advanced Placement

The Strategic Support Team also examined Advanced Placement (AP) scores to determine the number of students tested and the number of exam grades of 3 or higher. In Milwaukee, a course that results in a minimum of two students taking the AP exam is considered to be an AP course.[8] According to data provided by the district, 15 MPS high schools offered 74 AP courses in 2004-05. In 2004-05, some 2,439 students completed AP courses. Students took 1,148 AP exams in 2005, an increase of 212 exams since 2003.

Students took AP exams in 24 subjects in 2005. Participation in AP U.S. History was greatest, with some 323 students taking this exam in 2005. The next most popular test was Calculus AB, with 113 students participating. However, while the number of exams students took increased in 2005, the number of AP exam scores of 3 or higher decreased to 302 (26 percent) from 342 (37 percent) in 2003.

While minorities made up 83 percent of the student population in 2004-05, minority students accounted for only 66 percent of those taking AP exams. The mean score for white students on AP exams in 2005 was 2.29, while for African-Americans it was 1.44. About 39 percent of the white students earned a score of 3 or better on their 385 AP exams in 2005. African-American students took 331 of the AP exams in Milwaukee in 2005. Of that number, only 10 percent scored a 3 or higher. Hispanic

[8] Milwaukee Public Schools Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Report 2004-2005, Office of Academic Excellence, Division of Teaching and Learning, page 1.

students are divided into three categories: Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Other Hispanics. Together, they accounted for 186 AP exams in 2005, having a mean score of about 2.3. Approximately 40 percent of Milwaukee Hispanic students taking an AP exam in 2005 earned a 3 or above on the AP tests. Asian students took 140 AP exams in 2005, with a mean score of 1.53 and having only 14 percent earning a score of 3 or above.

International Baccalaureate

According to data furnished by the district, three high schools participate in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program: King, Madison, and Marshall.[9] In 2005, King had the most active program with 24 IB courses, compared with 10 each at Madison and Marshall. King also had more participation in IB exams (630), compared with Madison (51) and Marshall (48). At King, 63 percent of students who took IB exams in 2005 attained a score of 4 or higher, far above the percentages at Madison and Marshall. Of King's 52 IB candidates, 26 received IB diplomas in 2005. Madison had only six candidates and Marshall had only four candidates, but none of them received IB diplomas.

Graduation and Dropout Rates

Finally, the Council requested graduation and dropout data. Under the Milwaukee school district's system for determining the percentage of students dropping out of school, the district rate was 8.8 percent in 2003-04, while using the Wisconsin state definitions yielded a dropout rate of 6.7 percent. According to the 2004-05 MPS district report card, the state combines the total number of dropouts recorded in previous years at selected grades plus the number of graduates in the current year to determine the percentage of students graduating from high school. Under that method, MPS had a 67 percent graduation rate in 2003-04.

DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY

To meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in reading and math under the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, 67.5 percent of students enrolled in Wisconsin schools for the previous full academic year must score at or above proficient in reading and 47.5 percent must score at or above proficient in math. The same targets apply to subgroups of at least 40 students. In addition to the safe harbor provisions, schools can still meet AYP by use of the confidence interval (CI), instituted in the 2004-05 school year. Using these provisions has increased the number of schools in Milwaukee meeting AYP.

According to data furnished by the district for 2005-06, 17 schools in MPS failed to make AYP due to their performance in math and 16 schools failed to make AYP due to their performance in reading. Fourteen of those schools failed to make AYP for both math and reading.

[9] Milwaukee Public Schools Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Report, 2004-2005, Office of Academic Excellence, Division of Teaching and Learning, pages 28-42.

For the first time, Milwaukee Public Schools as a district failed to make AYP in 2004-05 due to low achievement for students with disabilities in both reading and math. Of the 227 MPS and alternative or partner schools, 16 percent (36) did not make AYP in 04-2005.

Chapter 2. Curriculum and Instruction

This chapter summarizes the findings and proposals of the Council's Strategic Support Team to the Milwaukee Public Schools. Research by the Council of the Great City Schools has found that urban school districts that have improved significantly over the last several years share a number of common characteristics that set them apart from urban school systems that have not shown such progress.[10] This report organizes the Strategic Support Team's findings and its suggested next steps around 10 of these important common characteristics: political preconditions, goals, accountability, curriculum and instruction, professional development and teacher quality, reform press (or the ability to get reforms into the classrooms), assessment and use of data, lowest-performing students and schools, early childhood education and elementary schools, and middle and high schools.

FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

The Strategic Support Team assembled by the Council interviewed dozens of people and reviewed scores of documents for this project. The team devoted most of its attention to the district's reading and math programs, rather than to social studies, the sciences, and other content areas. The team's proposals are based on practices that research shows make a difference in accelerating student performance in urban schools systems across the country.

HIGHLIGHTS

★ The district is led by a skilled superintendent with a long background in the school system.

★ Student achievement scores have not shown substantial gains over the last three years.

★ The district has published a comprehensive literacy framework and a mathematics framework, as well as learning targets and specifications in an effort to clarify systemwide expectations.

★ The district is funding literacy coaches and math teacher leaders in every school to support instructional initiatives and improve teaching and learning.

★ Textbook adoptions vary widely in the district, many with contradictory philosophies. The various adoptions have not been evaluated for effectiveness and are difficult to support centrally.

[10] Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, C. (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools.

- ★ The differing literacy and math programs being adopted by the schools also make it hard to know where and how to supplement the instructional program in order to attain state standards.

- ★ The district lacks a tracking system for participation in its professional development programs.

- ★ The district is facing declining state funding sources.

- ★ The district has developed strong relations with the Milwaukee Partnership Academy to support student achievement initiatives.

- ★ The district has obtained many grants to improve student achievement.

A. POLITICAL PRECONDITIONS

Urban school districts that have improved significantly over the last several years have a number of common characteristics. These commonalities also set them apart from urban school systems that have not seen significant improvements. One key indicator of an effective urban school district is the political unity of the school board, its focus on student achievement, and its ability to work with the district administration to improve academic performance. Another is the support of the community and the readiness of staff to focus systematically on the most effective strategies to accomplish the board's student achievement goals.

Positive Findings

- The board has an overarching goal to have all the district's schoolchildren on grade level, which indicates the board's belief that all children can learn at least at grade level.

- The district recognizes the need to close achievement gaps and improve student achievement.

- The district has moved to protect coaches and other instructional staff from budget cuts.

- The board agreed on an explicit policy some time ago to move to a decentralized system but is gradually moving back to a more centralized system in regard to instruction.

- School reform pre-K-16 has the support of the Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA), a unique coalition of local groups, including higher education institutions, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors, business and community organizations, MPS, and the Office of the Mayor. The MPA is dedicated to improving reading, writing, and mathematics through shared responsibility for

student success. It champions instructional and professional development initiatives and has raised more than $60 million in grants to support reform and achievement programs in Milwaukee Public Schools. The grants include $20 million from the National Science Foundation to support mathematics education and $17 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support a move to smaller high schools as part of the overall plan to improve student achievement.

- The district has received a large number of external grants to support reform, including Reading First, Early Reading First, IDEA Discretionary Projects, and Improving Literacy through Libraries.

- District staff members are aware of and refer to a great deal of research and literature, such as Michael Fullan's work on change management and Robert Marzano's work on research-based, effective teaching strategies.

- Board agendas reflect a monthly report on special education compliance and include a report from the MPA, which features materials from the Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership.

- The board requires that someone who has an item for the board agenda provide a written statement showing the item's compatibility with the strategic plan.

Areas of Concern

- A sense of urgency to raise student achievement is not apparent throughout the organization. The board, administration, and staff appear fairly complacent about slow, incremental growth in student achievement over the last three years.[11]

- The board is fractured on the direction of district reform. The division includes philosophical differences on decentralization of functions, use of vouchers, and high school reform.

- The district can be characterized as a system of schools, not a school system per se.

- The board spends the majority of its time on noninstructional issues, with instructional items relegated mostly to committee work. While instructional reports are included on the board's agenda, management issues are the mainstays of discussion.

[11] *MPS Student Achievement Data – At a Glance* dated 2/2005 compares achievement data between 2000-01 and 2003-04 and claims that significant improvements have been observed in achievement. But *Milwaukee Public Schools District Results—Three-Year Achievement Trend* indicates that changes in the time of year in which the WKCE is administered, changes in the content coverage of several subjects, and changes in the "cut score" for what is proficient limits direct comparisons to testing beginning in 2002-03 and subsequent years.

- Special education reports to the board deal only with compliance, not results. The reports do not address the instructional program for these students or their academic progress.

- There is no clear articulation of what decisions or functions belong in the central office and which ones belong in schools.

- The district's budgeting process is not tied explicitly to its instructional priorities.

- The district does a poor job of communicating with parents and the community about district initiatives. Parents also reported poor outreach from the district.

- In September of 2005, 3,084 Milwaukee students transferred *to* suburban schools, while only 408 students transferred *from* suburban schools to Milwaukee public schools under Chapter 220 (Minority to Majority) provisions. An additional 3,662 Milwaukee students used Open Enrollment to transfer to suburban schools, while only 304 suburban students transferred to Milwaukee public schools.[12]

- The district has not addressed the threat posed by vouchers and charters to the school system's future, especially in light of declining enrollment and budget shortfalls.

Recommendations

Urban districts that have made significant improvements in student performance have school boards that have made student achievement their first priority. These districts define the initial vision for the district and work closely with the CEO to transform that vision into a coherent theory of action and to set goals. These boards also work to sell the districts' goals and reforms to the community and to hold the superintendent accountable for results. As the Milwaukee Public Schools takes the next steps in its own reforms and improvement, it should:

1. *Articulate a clear sense of urgency and high expectations at board, superintendent, senior staff, and school levels.*

   Students who live in poverty, which include more than 70 percent of Milwaukee's pupils, often enter school with little preparation for academic work. They generally have been exposed to fewer vocabulary words and have less experience with books and higher-level conversations with adults than do children from middle- or upper-income homes. The high poverty rate of students in Milwaukee means that staff members at every level of the organization need to understand that the right experiences in school can help children overcome these deficits. Other districts have addressed this concern by developing a sense of urgency and a laser-like focus on

[12] Milwaukee Public Schools Chapter 220 and Open Enrollment History, dated 9/16/05.

student achievement. They have set measurable goals that reflect high expectations and have constructed an accountability system for upper management tied to achieving those goals. They have embraced the competition that they face from outside organizations and created an understanding within the organization that every staff member plays a major role in earning the trust of the community by demonstrating that they are the most proficient in educating the city's children.

To shift the culture of the district requires that the board, superintendent, and senior staff consistently convey that the current level of student achievement is unacceptable. Related to this, they need to define their expectations for the district and explain how they will connect accountability with attainment of measurable goals. This sense of urgency can be combined with a message of confidence that Milwaukee Public Schools can and will focus its resources and energy decisively to support staff members in meeting high expectations for student learning. This support can take many forms, including providing staff at all levels with the information and training they need to understand Wisconsin standards for student learning; ensuring the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and developing tools that can improve student achievement efficiently and effectively, as well as mechanisms for monitoring and supporting instructional services.

2. *Shift the district's current culture of satisfaction with slow, incremental achievement growth to one that fosters more rapid student achievement gains.*

   Interviews with MPS staff members indicated that most were proud of the gains that the district had made, even though scores reflected minimal progress. Only a few staff members expressed any sense of passion for making greater gains. The district lags far below state averages in measurements of student achievement. The district can ensure that all staff members are familiar with the research demonstrating that even schools with high percentages of students qualifying for a free and reduced-price lunch have attained some of the highest student scores on state and other measures of student achievement. The public's trust and the city's future economic soundness are linked intimately to the performance of its public schools. Strides in student achievement can occur when all staff members districtwide focus on teaching students to attain mastery of clearly articulated knowledge and skills that are not only aligned with state requirements, but also aligned with concepts essential to complex learning at higher grade levels, including postsecondary levels.

3. *Conduct board, superintendent, and senior staff site visits to urban districts with higher performance and faster gains to see firsthand how other districts have instituted reforms.*

   The district does not have to reinvent strategies for reforming district culture and instructional focus. There are several outstanding school districts that have found successful ways to deal with the same challenges that Milwaukee faces. By studying how those districts instituted their reforms and the lessons that they have learned in the process, Milwaukee can save time and resources by avoiding pitfalls and taking

advantage of the experiences and successes of other urban districts. The Council will provide the district with suggestions for specific areas, such as goal setting, accountability systems, progress monitoring, curriculum development, professional development support, use of data, and program evaluation.

4. *Conduct a series of externally facilitated board retreats to pursue a more unified agenda for district reform.*

   - *Reorient district reforms over time from a school-based to a more uniform and standardized instructional structure. Clarify which functions belong in the central office and which belong in schools—leave budgeting and hiring at the school level. (See subsequent sections for additional detail.)*

   - *Pursue a more aggressive public relations and marketing effort to sell the positive aspects of the district and the variety of choices it offers to the public and parents.*

   - *Dedicate time at each school board meeting to reviewing some aspect of the academic program and hearing progress reports on instruction and instructional reforms in order to develop a deeper understanding of districtwide academic issues. Put more noninstructional items on the consent calendar.*

   The board has reached a critical point where it must build public support, yet the board is not united around a single strategy for raising student achievement. Without a consensus, leadership is fractured, a situation that can be exploited by various community and district factions. Using an outside facilitator to reach consensus around a unified stand for the board will keep the focus on why the district exists.

   A rift also exists in how people see the school district functioning. Some favor a more centralized operation; others want even more decentralization. An efficient, effective school system can provide centralized services and functions, while still providing decentralized decision-making. For example, the school system can determine what it deems all students should know and be able to do at each grade level, can set the level of rigor to be attained, and can adopt textbooks to support that curriculum. This approach provides continuity for students transferring among schools, enables staff to develop concepts and skills in a logical manner across grade levels, and provides greater support for teachers. However, school staff would still decide on the best methodology to teach those concepts and skills to the required level of rigor. Budgets and staffing functions could be decentralized in exchange for greater accountability for results.

   The district faces increasing competition from charter and private schools. The district could establish a task force made up of educators, business leaders, religious leaders, government leaders, parents, and other key stakeholders to design a strong district marketing program to counteract the rise of charter schools and vouchers. Among other issues, the task force should determine why parents are electing to send

their children outside of MPS. The task force should use this information to help the district in its reform efforts and its marketing campaign.

While shrinking state budget resources are foreseeable for the next 10 years and must be addressed, the board must also work to improve student achievement greatly if the district is to regain community confidence. However, board agendas indicate that meetings are largely devoted to management issues. By dedicating time at every board meeting to reports on student achievement, rather than relegating this core mission to a subcommittee, the board would send a message to the public that student performance is the district's highest priority. An agenda item might be an update on the implementation of the reading or mathematics programs, the status of the strategic plan, the evaluation of an instructional program or initiative, or a new analysis of student achievement—but the agenda should include something of substance related to student achievement at each board meeting.

5. *Reorganize the academic excellence unit to better support instructional progress in schools and provide consultant support to develop and lead a cohesive, focused instructional program.*

   As the district redefines its priorities and lays out explicit, measurable goals, the district should rethink the organization of the Academic Excellence unit to facilitate collaboration and alignment between the instructional program and the early childhood, kindergarten, and bilingual education units. The unit also should build explicit linkages to special education programs to prepare students academically.

   In addition, the district should ensure that staff is strongly grounded in instructional leadership skills so that programs are understood and implemented. Staff from the Council of Great City Schools can help in this regard or can refer the district to exemplary member districts or outside consultants who specialize in specific content areas.

B. GOALS

Urban school systems that have seen significant gains in student achievement often have a clear sense of where they are going. This clarity is exhibited not only in the consensus of the leadership about the system's direction, but also in how leaders have translated that broad vision into explicit academic goals that are set for both the whole school district and for its individual schools. These goals are realistic, while also representing a stretch for the district. They are measurable and are accompanied by specific timelines for when particular targets are to be met.

Positive Findings

- The research unit has initiated a review of the alignment of the Milwaukee school district's learning targets with the state's standards.

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 2005-06 plan has a strong needs assessment component with details describing partnerships and programs in place to address district challenges.

- The education plans for each school include SMART goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and research-based, and time-bound. (SMART stands for **S**tretching, **M**easurable, **A**spiring, **R**igorous, and with **T**imelines.)

Areas of Concern

- The district's strategic plan was written in 2001 and is out of date. It predates the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation, which has a great impact on minimum requirements for student, school, and district academic performance. While there is a 2005-06 *No Child Left Behind* ESEA plan, it does not appear to guide district action substantially.

- School goals rely on "safe harbor" provisions under *No Child Left Behind* to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets, since there are few districtwide, measurable goals for student achievement.

- School goals lack subgroup targets and individual school goals do not align with the districtwide plan.

- The office of academic excellence does not appear to have written goals or a strategic plan to guide its work.

- While a large majority of teachers (87.9 percent of 5,686) and of parents (92.8 percent of 6,938) who responded to a school climate survey conducted in 2004-2005 "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the district had high expectations for student achievement, student achievement remained relatively unchanged over the past three years. Only 66.4 percent of 8,648 high school students responding to the survey agreed that the district had high expectations for student achievement.[13]

Recommendations

6. *Engage an outside facilitator to assist the district in updating its strategic plan. The updated plan should include goals such as student performance by subgroup, and a plan for how numeric targets will be developed for the district and each school.*

   Broaden the new goals to go beyond federal and state requirements and include such objectives as Talented and Gifted (TAG) identification, dropout prevention, and

[13] 2004-05 MPS School Climate/Perception Survey (Parents of MPS Students), page 3; 2004-05 MPS School Climate/Perception Survey (Teacher/Staff Version), page 3; and 2004-05 MPS School Climate/Perception Survey (High School Students), page 3.

school safety and discipline. Use the goals to assess the progress of the district and individual schools, as well as to drive instructional planning and interventions.

The strategic plan was last updated in August 2001, with the state-driven Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) *No Child Left Behind* Consolidated Improvement Plan for Milwaukee apparently serving as the update to the plan. The strategic plan provides the following mission statement—

> The Milwaukee Public Schools will ensure that maximum educational opportunities are provided for all students to reach their highest potential so that:
>
> - Students achieve their educational and employment goals, and
> - Parents choose the Milwaukee Public Schools to educate their children.

The current strategic plan does not cite numeric targets and lacks subgroup targets as defined by *No Child Left Behind.* The strategic plan should have both immediate and longer-term goals and be designed to narrow achievement gaps among the district's various subgroups. The goals in the short term should meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), but in the long term, should look beyond state and federal requirements. For instance, a goal to increase the number of students taking Advanced Placement exams, as well as the number earning a score of 3 or higher on the exams, might be included in the strategic plan. All school staff members should be completely aware of their school's targets so that they can work together strategically to help every child meet his or her goals.

The school boards of urban school districts that have shown substantial gains in student achievement often take the lead in explaining their "theory of action" to the communities that they represent. This approach clarifies for the community and the school staff where the district is going. At the same time, it strengthens the ability of board members to work toward the same ends, build trust in each other, and stick together during decisions that are politically difficult.

A monitoring system based on progress toward district goals will alert the district to how well initiatives and interventions are supporting classroom work. The district cannot afford to wait until it receives results from state tests to know if schools are progressing at a sufficient rate to meet school and district targets.

7. *Revise the school educational plan to ensure that school goals align with systemwide goals and that subgroup goals are included in the plan. Charge leadership teams with ensuring that school goals go beyond* No Child Left Behind *safe harbor protections. Engage schools in ongoing evaluation of strategies that are being used to address identified needs.*

The district developed a 10-section school educational plan, with a clearly written workbook to assist school staff members in developing their individual school plans[14]. But the district appears to have no oversight over setting performance expectations that align with district goals, including subgroup goals. A process is in place to help Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI) with their education plans, and the district wants to extend this oversight on a smaller scale to all schools. The school educational plan provided to the Strategic Support Team for review does have SMART goals aligned with *No Child Left Behind* safe harbor requirements. But the plan does not spell out any formal evaluation strategies to determine what contributed to increases or decreases in scores. Teacher turnover and inexperience are mentioned as possible causes for decreases in achievement, but no data comparing experienced teachers to inexperienced teachers are presented to corroborate that conclusion. Nor is there an indication that anything will be done differently if that indeed is the cause of poor student performance.[15]

C. ACCOUNTABILITY

It is not sufficient for a school system, particularly an urban one, to have goals if no one is held accountable for attaining them. Urban school systems that have seen substantial improvement have devised specific methods for holding themselves responsible for student achievement, usually starting at the top of the system and working down through central office staff and principals. Many successful districts also have instituted rewards for achieving their targets.

Positive Findings

- Principals have substantial control of their budgets and hiring.

- The principal evaluation system is under revision and presents the district with an opportunity to emphasize district priorities.

- Administrative Policy 2.16, adopted in May 2002, requires the district's accountability system to be aligned with the State of Wisconsin's accountability measures and consequences, as well as with federal guidelines. The policy establishes a value-added analysis that includes student growth and consideration of school climate. The policy calls for support and consequences in assisting schools to achieve state target goals. And it calls for the district to assist in identifying strong educational practices for replication and to report results to the public once a year.

[14] Milwaukee Public Schools Educational Plan Workbook: A School Improvement Planning Resource, updated December 16, 2005.
[15] 2005-2006 Milwaukee Public Schools Educational Plan for Malcolm X Academy, completed August 1, 2005.

Areas of Concern

- While the district has a policy that requires a substantial accountability system, the team did not hear any comments or see any evidence that a system of rewards or consequences was in effect for meeting or failing to meet targets. The policy therefore appears to be a mere formality, rather than a truly driving force in the district. Additionally, the sanctions for schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) indicate that an evaluation of principals must take place. The team was not informed of any principal being demoted or fired or losing some freedom to select programs or launch initiatives because of ongoing lack of student progress. The team also did not hear interviewees refer to changes that could be required as one of the consequences for Level 3 Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI).

- While the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) plan indicates that it was developed by a cross-functional team, interviews and work products provided little evidence of cross-functional collaboration.

- The evaluation process for administrators, principals, and teachers gives very little weight to student achievement.

- Administrative standards do not specifically include student achievement considerations.

- There are no consequences for failing to meet school goals or no rewards for meeting them.

- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction administrative standards do not include student achievement. However, the district is redoing its evaluation form, providing an opportunity to add achievement standards.

Recommendations

Urban school districts that are seeing significant gains in student performance attribute some of their progress to improved systems of accountability. Accountability is a mainstay of all district activities. The importance of these accountability systems is that they focus staff attention and energy on a defined systemwide goal. They also make it clearer to staff members how and on which criteria they will be evaluated. Finally, they have the added benefit of signaling to the public that school staff members are responsible for getting results. It is important to note that accountability does not always have to be punitive.

8. *Revise the evaluation system to place senior staff on performance contracts tied to attaining districtwide achievement goals articulated in the revised strategic plan.*

There are many competing issues vying for staff attention. Using the numeric goals from the revised strategic plan as part of senior staff performance evaluations indicates to the staff that attaining these goals is the priority of the district. Doing this also communicates clearly to the public that the district truly has high expectations for performance and is willing to be held accountable for that performance.

9. *Ensure that current revisions to principal evaluation forms include a strong component assessing school progress on meeting school educational plan goals and effectively implementing and monitoring the district's instructional programs and relevant portions of the district strategic plan.*

   MPS is in the process of revising the principals' evaluation system. This presents an opportunity to explicitly link the attainment of district and school goals into a meaningful proportion of the evaluation. In exchange for giving principals the added responsibility for meeting achievement goals, the district must ensure that they have control of budget and hiring decisions.

10. *Charge instructional unit leaders with conducting cross-functional planning and collaboration, and hold unit leaders accountable within the evaluation system for cross-functional collaboration, including that relating to curriculum, special education, bilingual/ESL education, early childhood, TAG, Title I, and career and technology education.*

    In conducting interviews and examining the materials provided to the team, it was evident that there is fragmentation across departments. Several times an interviewee would name some unit as being in charge of a cross-department function, while that person in a separate interview would contradict those claims. This type of fragmentation leads to duplication of effort or situations in which no one has responsibility for ensuring that students are receiving quality curricula and instruction systemwide.

11. *Establish a system of rewards and sanctions for meeting or failing to meet school and district achievement and other goals.*

    Components of accountability systems such as those in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Houston, New York City, and Guilford County (N.C.) could be part of a study to determine a starting point for a stronger MPS accountability system.

D. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Urban school districts that have seen substantial improvements in student achievement have a curriculum that is focused, coherent, and articulated clearly. Also, these districts analyze the content of their basal textbooks and compare those findings to state standards and then adopt or create supplemental materials that fill the gaps. Consequently, schools have a complete package of basal texts and core supplemental and intervention materials to move student achievement forward.

Positive Findings

- The district has initiated the first step in reforming literacy instruction: the comprehensive literacy framework. The framework envisions a comprehensive literacy program across content areas with a balance of skills development and literature-rich activities that include reading, writing, listening, speaking, deep thinking, and research skills.

- In the FY 06 proposed budget, the Office of Academic Excellence is proposing a reading intervention model to improve the reading abilities of middle and high school students.

- The mathematics framework incorporates the Wisconsin content and performance standards. As part of the Milwaukee Mathematics Project (MMP), the framework represents the first step in guiding challenging mathematics instruction.

- The examples provided in the August 2003 publication of "Notes from the Mathematics Curriculum Specialist" demonstrate a strong understanding of curriculum alignment. The format also features a column for the teacher to indicate modifications for special education students.

- The district has created grade-specific K-8 and high school learning levels (foundation, intermediate, and advanced) to align MPS mathematics learning targets with Wisconsin content and performance standards.

- *Learning Targets Work!* provides a grade-specific parent- and public-friendly guide to inform the community about what students should be learning.

- The *MMP Messenger* fosters communication about mathematics professional development opportunities, the work of the math teacher leaders, and activities within the MMP, which is funded by a five-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

- The NSF grant funds math teacher leaders and math teaching specialists.

- The district published learning targets for core content areas to assist teachers in defining essential content for instruction and showing the correlation of the learning targets with the Wisconsin academic model content standards and the code numbers for the corresponding state performance standards. Learning targets appear to be further clarified with grade-level specifications in a separate document. These products have potential for assisting teachers to unpack and uniformly understand the Wisconsin standards.

- The district has conducted a comprehensive study to determine the alignment of content and rigor of the learning targets with Wisconsin standards and assessment frameworks. This study can guide the refinement of the learning targets.

- The district and Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA) have developed a new booklet articulating the characteristics of high-performing urban classrooms.

- The district includes learning targets and specifications research and for the use of media and technology within English/language arts.

- A textbook study planned for 2006-07 will pave the way for textbook adoption for the 2007-08 school year. The study includes English 11 and 12 and math K-8.

- The district has a curriculum alignment project that recognizes the importance of linking learning targets, classroom assessments, and instruction with academic rigor.

Areas of Concern

- Decentralization has rendered the central office instructional unit irrelevant to the process of raising student achievement. The central office has largely abdicated its leadership role for the instructional program and student achievement. Documents provided to the team have a strong theoretical base, but usually lack guidance in how to implement these ideas in the classroom.[16]

- On pages 74-75 of the FY 06 proposed budget, the Office of Academic Excellence has only one mention of the comprehensive literacy and mathematics frameworks. There is no mention of revising or continuing the implementation of the learning targets or revisiting the frameworks to determine if they are adequate to improve teaching and learning.

- The curriculum frameworks are conceptual in nature and by themselves are inadequate to guide teachers and drive instruction.

- Discussions with various staff members indicate a lack of shared understanding of program definitions and components. For example, staff members interviewed by the team often stated that textbooks or programs were the district curriculum. Yet schools use a wide variety of textbooks and programs that are not equivalent in philosophy, content, or approach.

- The learning targets and specifications do not always provide teachers with the precise skills and knowledge to guide classroom instruction.

- The *K-12 Curriculum Alignment Resource Guide* provides only a cursory amount of information for the language arts teacher to use for instructional alignment and instructional delivery. Examples are provided only for one learning target in grades 2 and 10. If, as stated in interviews and the newly released document,

[16] Section 10 of the Reading Administration Handbook does provide a listing of instructional strategies by learning target, dated 7/17/05. Interviewees did not mention this resource.

Characteristics of a High Performing Urban Classroom, the curriculum alignment responsibility falls to the teacher, a more in-depth document describing the process of curriculum alignment needs to be developed and disseminated.

- The two examples in the *K-12 Curriculum Alignment Resource Guide* provide activities and curricular examples that are not aligned with the learning targets. For example, in grade 2, the learning target D.2.1 deals with the development of vocabulary by using grade-level resources. Under the heading "Curricular Examples," teachers are referred to activities in the English textbook and the "Task Description" section directs teachers to have students revise a passage from a given text by using more descriptive language. "Specifications" require students to "understand the components of the writing process" and "understand the different ways to revise writing." If the purpose of this learning target is ultimately to have students use new vocabulary in writing assignments, and particularly as they revise, then the target should be modified and/or one of the specifications should explicitly state "use newly acquired vocabulary to revise written work to extend or modify meaning." In addition, in this grade 2 example, the assessment correlated to this target requires students to add three adjectives, three verbs, and three adverbs to revise an existing example of published work from author Louis Sachar. Since none of the specifications for the learning target refer to adjectives, verbs, or adverbs as focus points for vocabulary development, this assessment is not aligned with the target.

- In the document, *Curriculum Alignment in English Language Arts: From Research to Action*, the superintendent's vision includes the statement, "the curriculum in each classroom in every school is aligned to district, state, and national standards." The expectation that schools and teachers align their site-based curricula with the local, state, and national standards seems to promote unnecessary duplication of effort and potential misalignment due to misunderstanding and lack of site-based capacity (e.g., time and skill set).

- Teachers at every school are supposed to do curriculum alignment. Materials given to the team indicate that the process requires teachers to set up a columnar chart listing the learning targets, Wisconsin state standards, more detailed specifications, curricular examples, Classroom Assessments Based on Standards (CABS), special education modifications, sample student work examples, links to the balanced literacy and mathematics frameworks, cross-curricular connection, and linkages to the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) and Terra Nova. While it is admirable that the district wants to build teacher capacity by having teachers deconstruct and align learning targets and standards on their own, for an elementary teacher having to teach multiple content areas, this becomes an onerous undertaking without many clues on where to concentrate in order to attain the greatest impact on student achievement.

- From the results of an MPS survey with responses received from 130 teachers from 20 campuses, it is clear that MPS has not clearly communicated the purpose

and importance of a district curriculum represented by learning targets and specifications in reading, language arts, and mathematics. It would also appear that the alignment process, so evident in written materials presented to the team, is not actually taking place in every school.

- The district has no centralized plan to focus staff and monetary resources on high-leverage areas within curriculum or in professional development, or to guide teacher instruction in the classroom. Instead, it appears that all areas are to be focused on simultaneously. The team did receive some materials that encompass some of the necessary classroom guidance, such as the Reading Administrator Handbook, but it is unclear whether this material is known or used widely.

- The centralized curriculum plan in English/language arts does not define the components of the district curriculum, the level of detail required to clarify the meaning of the learning targets, a revision cycle based on new data received, or implementation and monitoring of the district curriculum. The plan refers teachers to seven different publications to support the MPS learning targets and Wisconsin state standards. There is no single document that gives teachers all they need to know to guide classroom instruction.

- Some literacy learning targets, developed prior to the state tests, have been found to be out of alignment with the new state tests. In addition, math learning targets need revision to reflect the depth of knowledge expected by the state. [17]

- Grade-level specifications are open to interpretation. For example, in grade 6, the student is to "apply the rules of spelling, capitalization, grammar, usage, and punctuation to writing." This is repeated in grades 7-12. The teacher has no guidance on which rules of spelling are to be mastered at each grade level, nor is there an indication of changes in the sophistication of the grammar and punctuation across grade levels. This is an issue throughout all of the strands of English/language arts.

- There are multiple versions of similar documents. The 6/30/2005 reading learning targets in Section 8 of the Reading Administration Handbook have more explicit specifications than are seen in other versions of these materials. Since the team received a variety of versions, it is likely that teachers also have received multiple versions. No one indicated to the team which version teachers were using in their curriculum alignment process or in their teaching.

- Individual school educational plan goals for reading provided to the team vary widely in the performance gains they set and even which of all the grade levels tested will be targeted for improvement.

[17] Milwaukee Public Schools Alignment Study of Milwaukee Public Schools' Learning Targets in Reading and Math to Wisconsin Student Assessment System Criterion-Referenced Test Frameworks in Reading and Math.

- It is unclear whether teachers are expected to use the Understanding by Design Template for lesson planning or whether they are to use the materials by Jim Burke from English Companion. The team was given a sample model lesson from Irvine Unified School District as an example of Planning Standards-Based Instruction. However, that unit assumed that students already had all of the skills to handle the unit and provided for specific instruction only in one area: the use of photography to strengthen arguments.[18] The low proficiency scores on the WKCE would argue that model lessons should demonstrate how to teach the foundational concepts and skills for a unit of instruction.

- The district allows individual schools to select core reading and math materials, resulting in inconsistencies in philosophy and approach (Direct Instruction versus Balanced Reading; exploratory versus traditional math). Such multiple adoptions are difficult to support effectively and exacerbate the effects of high student mobility.

- There are 11 reading adoptions in use in grades K-8 in Milwaukee. Six of them are in 10 or more schools. SRA Direct Instruction is in 44 schools, McDougal-Littell is in 43 schools, and Houghton-Mifflin is in 34 schools. These programs conflict with each other philosophically and would complicate learning to read for children transferring into the various programs from one school to another.

- The district has a selected list of 25 supplemental and intervention reading programs, including Accelerated Reader, Soar to Success, HOSTS Learning, Waterford, and Trophies Intervention Resource Kits. The listing does not indicate the strengths or weaknesses of any of the programs or have evaluation data on their effects.

- As a stand-alone document, *Curriculum Alignment in English Language Arts: From Research to Action*, provides insufficient guidance for teachers and other school staff to make decisions about curriculum alignment. Perhaps the document could be used in conjunction with intensive training/professional development. However, if it is intended to be a comprehensive reference for school-based alignment, it needs to be more thorough. For example, page 1 lists components of curriculum alignment in English/language arts. The first step advises using data-driven decision-making and outlines how this can be accomplished. But the document does not recommend any specific data or data queries currently available to English/language arts professional staff that should be used to make decisions for prioritizing, goal setting, or other alignment activities. This document also lacks information on all aspects of the language arts; it lists learning targets only for writing, not for oral, language, media and technology, or research and inquiry. These omissions could lead a school to determine that alignment is not necessary or optional for these targets.

[18] The assumed skills include: the ability to understand basic elements of persuasion, analyze text that uses proposition and support patterns, balancing researched information and original ideas, supporting a thesis, and having the basic technology skills to design a PowerPoint, Web site, or video presentation.

- The *High School Expository Writing Booklet* provides examples of student work to illustrate responses earning scores of 1, 2, 3, and 4, but no annotations are presented to help teachers develop greater insight into how specific criteria are evaluated as present or absent based on the scoring rubric indicators.

- The *High School Expository Writing Booklet* provides nine weeks of writing prompts for journals. Since this is a guide for grades 9-12, it is possible that students could be expected to respond to the same prompts in each year of their high school coursework.

- There are no pacing guides or other systemwide tools to guide teachers on what to teach, what level of rigor is required, when to teach a specific concept, in what sequence concepts are best introduced, and what resources are available.

- Collaboration around the curriculum is weak among the special education, bilingual education, early childhood, and TAG departments.

- Teachers on textbook evaluation committees set evaluation criteria for the content area. There was no evidence presented to the team that the criteria must ensure alignment with state and local curricula in the content area or that student performance data were used in any way to determine which textbook series would best meet student needs.

- Math subskill descriptors are not specific to grade levels.

- Only those schools using *Connected Mathematics Program* or *Investigations* have any type of pacing schedule. Only new teachers who use *Investigations*, *Connections*, and project-based curricula receive curriculum training workshops.

- Schools use a variety of mathematics programs, some of which are contrary to others in philosophy and approach. (Harcourt, Houghton Mifflin, Saxon, *Investigations*, etc.)

- Classroom assessments have not been reviewed for alignment with the learning targets and the WKCE. Classroom Assessments Based on Standards (CABS) do not always adhere to the same modalities as those used on the state test.

- There was no evidence presented to the team that the district has implemented the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's recommendations for time allotments for elementary reading/language arts and mathematics instruction. However, the Reading Administration Handbook lists reading time allotments.

Recommendations

Preliminary research suggests that urban school districts that are improving student performance have standardized their curricula and have adopted a more

prescriptive approach to reading and math instruction. This approach brings greater focus to the districts' instructional programs; mitigates the effects of high student mobility; and leverages the ability of districts to design and carry out the support and monitoring of program implementation.

12. *Charge the instructional division with focusing its actions directly on high-leverage strategies to improve student achievement.*

    The documents presented to the team indicated a strong theoretical base on which to build. WKCE results indicate that there was a disconnect, however, in the translation of these materials into actions that affect student achievement. As the district emphasizes the urgency of improvement, the central office should consider how it is responsible for providing the most strategic support to schools.

    Documents that are most necessary for teachers include those that provide clarity about what must be taught and mastered at each grade level, and sample strategies that could be used to actually teach the concepts and skills rather than merely practice them. Teachers need to know where their textbooks are strong and where they need to be supplemented. Teachers need to know what types of interventions are the most useful when students start to fall behind—or are already behind. It is inefficient for each school to have to reinvent this information. The school system should recognize that teachers do not have time to sift through multiple documents to gather essential information. This task should be done for them to make their work easier to accomplish. It would still leave a great deal of worthwhile study to personalize and internalize this information.

    There does not appear to be a system in place to use performance data to refine the curriculum or target professional development. The system seems to be scattering its efforts in many directions simultaneously without a clear picture of what it intends to accomplish each year or in each stage of the implementation process.

13. *Use the opportunity afforded by the math K-8 adoption cycle to develop systemwide criteria for textbook adoption that include alignment with the Wisconsin standards and assessment requirements, as well as with unpacked learning targets for the district.*

    - *Develop a detailed matrix comparing the strengths and weaknesses of alignment with the learning targets and specifications, as well as with unpacked Wisconsin content and performance standards. There will be gaps in all proposed textbooks. Indicate in the matrix where student achievement areas need the greatest support based on past performance and look for textbooks that are very strong in those areas.*

    - *Establish a districtwide math program (and, in the future, a reading program) with a consistent philosophy and phase it in over time, if need be, by school*

classification, grade levels, geographic region, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status, by quadrant, or with value-added data.

- *Consider requiring Schools Identified for Improvement* (*SIFI) to adopt a single, best-aligned textbook series so that the adoption can be supported strongly.*

- *Consider narrowing choices of math textbooks systemwide to the two best-aligned textbooks, and set up an evaluation of student achievement progress to determine if one textbook series is more, less, or equally supportive of raising student achievement. Use the results of the longitudinal study to drive future decisions about multiple textbook adoptions.*

Math performance is very low on the WKCE and is weaker at higher grade levels. Math is a content area that builds on the foundations learned in previous grade levels. If there are gaps in early math instruction, those gaps will become ever more problematic as students move into more complex concepts at higher grade levels. Student mobility is a factor to be considered. What happens to a student moving into math programs with very different approaches and philosophy? What happens when children enter a different program that has already covered a concept that was not yet presented in the classroom the child was previously attending because the two textbook series order or sequence those concepts differently? With multiple books and pacing, it is difficult for a district to monitor student progress through the curriculum. Consequently, no one is alerted that children are falling far behind.

Having a common textbook adoption, at least in SIFI, would ensure that teachers can receive strong support from coaches and that teachers know where the book is strong and where to supplement it to ensure that students develop a strong foundation in math and can demonstrate their knowledge and skills in computation and complex problem solving.

14. *Complete the analysis of MPS learning targets and specifications, indicating how they align with state standards and assessments grade by grade for each content area. Incorporate the revised targets and specifications into the pacing guide detailed below.*

Teaching based on a well-aligned, clearly articulated curriculum is one of the highest leverage activities for raising student achievement. Students can be highly engaged in wonderful learning activities, but if that learning is not of the rigor and content that will be assessed, it may not be reflected in student achievement scores. This reality does not mean that the district needs to abandon its efforts to use the best instructional strategies. It does mean that those strategies are insufficient if they are not linked directly to what students need to know and be able to do.

The dependability of the learning targets is essential in establishing confidence in the district's curriculum. The specifications must then provide enough particulars to ensure a common understanding throughout the district of what students must learn at

each grade level. The learning targets and specifications must incorporate an unpacking of the Wisconsin standards and assessments and can certainly go beyond them. These targets and specifications are central to all of the work in the instructional program. They should be fundamental components of all professional development and coaching and form the basis for the pacing guide that can provide coherence to the work of all MPS schools.

15. *Conduct a school-by-school inventory of all instructional programs in use.*

    MPS has a limited process in place to track the instructional programs being used in each school. With a complete inventory of programs, the district can evaluate which programs have a positive correlation with student achievement, and which do not. The team did not see evidence of a process to share information or to provide quality support to schools, such as indicating where the materials may have gaps that must be supplemented. Each school's staff has to spend time conducting the analysis, in addition to planning instruction.

16. *Charge the instructional leadership with taking the initiative in identifying a district-approved philosophy, approach, and program in reading. Use current teacher and instructional task forces to build ownership.*

    The district has taken steps toward reforming literacy instruction by 1) adopting a comprehensive literacy framework, a conceptual model of the essential outcomes and components of MPS literacy instruction; 2) setting MPS learning targets for literacy; and 3) implementing an initial coaching model consisting of district-level and school-based literacy coaches. While these first steps are laudable, they constitute only a beginning and thus are insufficient to bring about the progress required. Namely, curriculum tools, such as pacing guides, should support the comprehensive literacy framework. Supporting professional development is also needed to change instruction at the classroom level. The MPS learning targets for literacy should be rewritten to align more closely with the WKCE and the state standards. In addition to being well-trained for their roles, the literacy coaches should be empowered to actually coach, not just serve as on-call assistants.

    The Milwaukee school system lacks a single districtwide philosophy to support literacy instruction. The result is that some students are instructed *via* a direct instruction approach and others are instructed via a more balanced literacy approach.

    The district now allows each school to select core literacy materials, resulting in a mélange of school-based and site-controlled literacy programs. This arrangement is not only difficult to implement and monitor, but it also makes it more difficult to smooth the transition of students who move from one school to another. The MPS must move to replace this hodgepodge of site-based materials with a consistent, research-based districtwide literacy adoption, at least beginning with Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI).

17. *Develop a standardized or uniform language arts curriculum based on the learning targets and specifications for <u>all</u> the strands of language arts with a completed alignment chart and utilize change management strategies for its rollout and implementation.*

    Based on the interviews from the strategic support team visit and December 2003 findings from the *Preliminary Documentation Report: The Learning Targets Initiative of the Milwaukee Public Schools,* revision of targets and specifications should be the first priority to ensure alignment with the Wisconsin content and performance standards. Saving teachers' time in the alignment process will enable them to focus more on instruction.

18. *Revise the writing booklets to include a wider range of examples of a variety of types of writing for each genre (i.e., expository, descriptive, etc.), and annotate exemplars based on quality points for each criterion used in the scoring rubric. In addition, the integrated learning activities in these documents should be correlated to learning targets and/or specifications for a learning target.*

19. *Ensure that curriculum and resource documents developed for secondary (grades 6-12) English instruction reflect a more integrated, collaborative effort between the reading and English/language arts specialists.*

    Coursework associated with secondary English traditionally includes literary analysis and comprehension. Combining the learning targets from these two content areas ensures that a more comprehensive and useful curriculum document is developed to guide instruction in English courses.

20. *Develop a common pacing guide with an articulated, phased-in rollout plan and an evaluation component. Anchor the pacing guides in the state assessment frameworks, learning targets, and specifications for teachers in reading and math. Provide all of the information in a single document for each of the content areas by grade level, and include—*

    - *What to teach*
    - *When to teach key concepts*
    - *How to sequence the learning targets and specifications*
    - *When to begin reviewing for the November WKCE test*
    - *How to measure student progress*

    Rather than refer teachers to multiple documents, including ones that they must develop themselves, provide central-office leadership to make better use of teacher time and provide continuity of focus across the district by developing pacing guides. If implementation is politically unpopular, then begin with schools whose performance is under 50 percent proficient. The pacing guide proposed by the team is one that can guide the work of the classroom teacher without dictating the precise

instructional activities that could be used. The determination of the best strategies then becomes the focus of the collaborative work of teachers and coaches.

Consider using the skills of an expert external consultant, in conjunction with the central office, coaches, and teachers, to develop pacing guides in reading and math. Ensure that each guide is aligned with the learning targets, specifications, and state standards. Pacing guides should structure concepts to be taught week by week or in the form of units of instruction. They should avoid quarterly pacing and repetition of the same targets week after week. For example, if the topic of editing is a target early in the year, indicate a specific focus within the editing process, such as refining transitions or word choice, and change the focus throughout the year.

A single pacing guide unites a school district as a system. It enables strategic coaching support for upcoming concepts and provides continuity for students who transfer during the school year. It allows the creation of uniform benchmarking assessments to determine how well students are progressing through the curriculum. Such benchmark tests could be used as examples of the rigor expected by the district and as models for Classroom Assessments Based on Standards (CABS) being designed by teachers. The research department should conduct an analysis of the alignment and predictive validity of the benchmark tests.

At this time, teachers have no indication about how much time they need to devote to a particular concept or skill—or at what depth or rigor. The pacing guide can define a specific range of time for teaching concepts, knowledge, and skills and can indicate that the most important concepts and skills explicitly have greater emphasis in terms of time for learning and intentional periodic review. This is not a rigid timeline, but rather guidance on which objectives are the most important for students to master and revisit.

The pacing guide should be realistic in terms of how much time is actually available for teaching in a school year, subtracting days for holidays, snow days, testing, etc. Time also must be allotted for re-teaching. By having to provide this type of timeline, the central office will be sure that its expectations are doable within a single year.

The WKCE does not provide very specific information on each student’s strengths and weaknesses. Benchmark or interim assessments can fill in the detail. Analysis of student performance on the benchmarks can be used to modify the pacing guides and indicate where textbooks need to be supplemented or professional development embedded.

Since the test is given in November, it is imperative to not only teach the content eligible for testing in the prior year, but also to plan in frequent reviews. That way, the concepts introduced can be reviewed clearly and in greater depth throughout the school year, providing a greater opportunity for students to retain information and skills over the summer. The pacing guides help remind teachers to spiral the review and development of concepts, knowledge, and skills throughout the year. This

approach will assist students in building long-term memory of content and skills as the foundation for the next school year.

Because of the large number of programs adopted for reading, it will be impossible for the pacing guide to indicate all of the resources for teaching a particular target or specification. However, the guide can refer to the most commonly adopted materials. Pacing guides should indicate how and when to supplement textbooks where they are weak or not aligned with state and/or local assessments, and indicate how to assess student learning, including and going beyond state assessments

21. *Consider curtailing the latitude of individual schools, principals, and teachers to purchase textbooks outside of the district adoption unless these schools, on their own, are demonstrating high levels of student achievement.*

E. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER QUALITY

A common characteristic of many of the faster-improving urban school districts across the country is a high-quality and cohesive professional development program that is closely aligned with instructional offerings. These programs are often defined centrally, but built around the district's articulated curriculum, delivered uniformly across the district, and differentiated in ways that address the specific needs of teachers. These faster-improving districts also find ways to ensure that some of their better teachers are working in schools with the greatest needs.

Positive Findings

- MPS has conducted professional development on how to evaluate student work.
- The district has developed a teacher induction handbook that breaks out what a new teacher should expect from different supporters within the induction process. The handbook also provides a useful glossary of terms used in the district.
- Math teacher leaders and literacy coaches receive monthly scheduled professional development.
- The district and the Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA) have cultivated close relationships with local universities to provide professional development and prepare teachers.
- There appears to be a loose connection between professional development and what actually takes place in the classroom.
- There are 22 MPS teachers currently going through National Board Certification.
- Funding from the National Science Foundation through the Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership (MMP) to improve student mathematics achievement

and transition to higher education includes collaboration with two- and four-year colleges and universities to prepare mathematics teachers.

- A two-day summer institute is held for school leadership teams to bring in nationally-known speakers such as Rick DuFour and Doug Reeves.

- The district maintains a calendar of professional development activities on the MPS portal.

- The district has placed so many curriculum and staff development responsibilities at the school level that it is developing a pool of potential future leaders.

Areas of Concern

- There is little mandatory professional development for principals, with the exception of special education. While there is monthly professional development on a wide variety of important instructional topics, choice of strands is voluntary and the time is so short that only an overview of the topic is possible. While the team received a 12/12/05 list of accomplishments stating that the district holds monthly study groups on mathematics for principals, the list did not indicate how many principals attended.

- There does not appear to be a carefully developed follow-up to summer institutes for school leadership teams in terms of deepening the focus of those sessions throughout the school year to improve student achievement.

- The district does not track participation in professional development sessions centrally and has no way to evaluate whether the professional development produced positive changes.

- There are a great many professional development offerings, but the team did not see an indication that there are any districtwide professional development activities with required outcomes. Indeed, even embedded professional development does not appear to require emphasis on implementing the district's curriculum. The survey of 130 teachers indicates how far the district has to go to have penetration of the curriculum into schools. Results indicate that coaches and learning teams have not made the learning targets and specifications a priority or a requirement.

- There is a plethora of professional development opportunities through requirements of reforms, redesigns, grants, and other considerations. But these efforts do not appear to be coordinated to ensure that the same audiences are not targeted for so many different programs that participants lose focus on the key elements of improving student achievement. For example, English-as-a-second language (ESL) teachers and bilingual teacher representatives from each school have monthly professional development regarding new policies, initiatives, and

compliance issues. However, English language learner (ELL) students must learn the same content as English-speaking students to demonstrate achievement. There is no indication that the professional development includes in-depth understanding of the district curriculum and learning targets.

- The district has no idea what professional development is offered at schools or how professional development money is used. It therefore has no means to judge which factors have impact on student learning or how the district should alter its professional development strategies.

- There are no quality criteria or controls set for professional development offered at the school level, which increases the possibility of redundant or contradictory professional development across schools and inefficiencies in designing and delivering it.

- No one monitors the fidelity of the trainer-of-trainer model.

- No plan appears to be in place to orient new staff to positions in the central office so that they thoroughly understand the goals of the district, important procedures, and responsibilities.

Recommendations

Many of the faster-improving urban school districts across the country are also standardizing and focusing their professional development to ensure better implementation of their curricula and to clarify to principals and teachers what is expected. This standardized approach does not mean that each school is limited in the kind of professional development that it can promote. Schools may supplement the districtwide training with other activities, but the standardized approach does require principals and teachers to participate in professional development that is common across schools and is based on district priorities.

22. Develop a districtwide professional development plan that is tied to districtwide goals for student achievement priorities, including—

- *District math and reading programs*
- *Pacing guide usage*
- *Benchmark tests and use of data*
- *Differentiating by teacher/student skill and experience*
- *Education plans*
- *Training for substitute teachers*

The district has much that it can build upon. The Milwaukee Partnership Academy and the Milwaukee Mathematics Project have detailed lists of professional development offerings. What is lacking is an overall decision of what concepts and skills are mandatory for teachers and administrators to understand and master and

who is responsible (e.g., central office, universities, coaches, study groups) for ensuring that mastery is attained and under what timeline. The proposed plan would detail who is responsible for planning and implementing professional development for those individuals who will be conducting the training. The plan also should consider how to evaluate the success of the professional development efforts in terms of student achievement gains. The proposed plan would have long- and short-term goals and include specific, planned follow-up and support. The professional development plan should be tied explicitly to results of the WKCE and any benchmark tests that the district implements.

The primary focus of the plan should be, first, on the core curriculum and, then, on the materials and strategies used to support that curriculum. Milwaukee's embedded professional development allows for differentiation of training based on teacher experience and the students that teachers teach. However, district expectations for teachers at each step of their careers need to be clarified. One cannot expect a new teacher to reach mastery of every concept and skill in one or two years. One can set higher expectations for more experienced teachers. While there should be allowances for teacher selection of professional development activities, there must also be some nonnegotiable requirements based on districtwide or school needs.

The district has been proactive in employing a variety of professional development models, including workshops, seminars, university courses, distance learning, study groups, development of alignment materials, serving on textbook committees, and developing teacher leadership.

The professional development plan also should indicate how teacher performance would be monitored, particularly in the focus areas of literacy and math.

23. *Mandate attendance for some districtwide professional development by setting aside days to focus on districtwide priorities, such as the revised learning targets, the pacing guide, or the WKCE and its implications for classroom practice.*

    The district must have a means of knowing that its priorities are well understood. Quality professional development with subsequent embedded follow-up around district priorities will add focus to district improvement efforts. Among high priority topics, the district might consider ensuring that all instructional staff members have a deep, working understanding of the level of rigor required at every grade level in order for students to be successful. With a pacing guide in place, particular areas can be stressed prior to the quarter in which those areas will be featured. The district has begun a project of examining student work. This project can be part of the professional development linked with each quarter for the pacing guide. Having clear expectations districtwide linked with aligned targets and specifications will enable students to make faster progress in demonstrating their achievement.

24. *Establish a district professional development tracking and evaluation system grounded in student achievement.*

The district might look at a system, such as the one in the Cleveland Municipal School District, which allows a school district to evaluate the effects of its professional development.

25. *Monitor the type, quality, and cost of school-based professional development.*

    The district needs to have a means to share strategies that work and search for efficiency and effectiveness. This recommendation is not intended to restrain school-based professional development. Rather, it is designed to give the district a means to judge where the professional development is worth emulating and where it needs to be improved to benefit teachers and students.

26. *Develop central office and principal leadership training that includes instructional leadership, effective practice, use of data to drive instruction, and use of the pacing guides in monitoring instruction, special education, bilingual/ESL programs.*

    Ensure that the training provides sufficient time to delve deeply into priority areas, with time to share ideas and revisit concepts to check progress over time. For example, one topic to include might be what to look for in classrooms to indicate that the learning targets and pacing guides are implemented and that instruction is at the correct level of rigor.

27. *Ensure that all teachers using reading and math texts have received professional development in the use, strengths, and weaknesses of these texts.*

    It is imperative that all elementary teachers and principals receive appropriate training. If implementation is to be successful, the district should ensure that every teacher understands what the district has articulated in its literacy initiative and how that links to the curriculum and the textbook resource.

    Fostering this kind of understanding also applies to math. Developing training also will ensure that a vision is articulated clearly for what good instruction looks like in math, so that teachers can implement that model and administrators can monitor it. This knowledge should be incorporated into curriculum pacing guides and be evident in all professional development. All math teachers should have the professional development to ensure that district staff members are working together toward the same ends.

F. REFORM PRESS

Urban school systems that are succeeding in improving student achievement are not waiting for their reforms to trickle down from the central office into the schools and classrooms. Instead, these faster-improving school districts have developed specific strategies to drive instructional reforms into schools and classrooms, and they create strategies to monitor the implementation of these reforms to ensure their integrity and comprehensiveness.

Positive Findings

- Every school has an instructional coach and a math teacher leader to demonstrate teaching strategies within classrooms and to observe and provide feedback to teachers as they implement these strategies. Instructional coaches and teacher leaders also can provide embedded professional development based on the school's identified needs, including implementation of the comprehensive literacy and mathematics frameworks, and leadership of staff collaboration, study groups, action research, and lesson studies.

- The district has published a literacy coach toolkit for the second semester of 2006 that does contain the major duties and responsibilities of the literacy coach and directions for maintaining a log of activities and other reference materials.

- Learning teams analyze school data, write the school educational plan based on these data, and provide professional development and support to their school.

- Learning teams help build capacity and ownership for reforms.

- The district has principal coaches who are to visit or contact their assigned principal weekly to provide one-on-one mentoring and assistance in setting goals and action plans.

- The district uses a variety of learning walks.

- Every school develops an educational plan that is to be targeted to specific areas of need.

Areas of Concern

- Literacy coaches report not having seen their job descriptions.

- Literacy specialists are often being pulled away from instructional responsibilities to handle administrative tasks in schools.

- Math teacher leaders lack release time to disseminate information effectively and perform their professional development responsibilities.

- Teachers do not have to use coaching services—or even let coaches into their classrooms.

- Materials received describing literacy coach training from September through May of 2006 have only a portion of one day devoted specifically to work with the learning targets and a portion of another day in March to work on reading specifications. The multiple topics presented to coaches during these training sessions may indicate a lack of focus that is then reflected on campus.

- Learning walks do not measure whether teachers are teaching to the learning targets, but focus on student engagement and instructional strategies.

- It is unclear to the Council team what training central office teams received to review school educational plans.

- School-by-school needs assessments lack reflective discussion in some school educational plans.

- The emphasis in monitoring student engagement using the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) does not explicitly call attention to what students are being taught. This result marginalizes the importance of curriculum even when engaging strategies are observed. If students are not engaged in learning key concepts and skills at the right level of rigor, their work is unlikely to result in gains in student achievement.

- Multiple rubrics were provided to the team beyond the IPI, including the "Characteristics of a High Performing Urban Classroom and Rubrics on the Five MPS Capacity Builders." There were no materials provided to clarify the uses for these documents or whether one takes precedence over another.

Recommendations

Urban school districts that are seeing steady progress in student achievement do not develop new policies at the central office and hope that these policies will find their way into district classrooms. Instead, these school districts design specific strategies for ensuring that reforms are being supported and implemented in all classrooms.

28. *Clarify the expectations for literacy coaches and math teacher leaders by aligning their work with the goals for student achievement. Provide professional development linked to the implementation of the learning targets and proposed pacing guide. Make student achievement and the classroom implementation of district initiatives and reforms significant components of coaches' and teacher leaders' evaluations. Ensure that principals, coaches, and math teacher leaders share the job descriptions and evaluation expectations. Require principals to explain the expectations for the coaches and teacher leaders to the entire faculty and clarify what the principal expects of the faculty.*

    The district has invested appropriately in providing on-site support for literacy and math instruction. However, achievement scores are not reflecting expected gains. This could be due to a lack of curriculum alignment, instructional alignment, or understanding about what is assessed and the rigor with which it is assessed. One possible reason for the lack of progress is that coaches are not able to devote the necessary time to their work. Another possible and related reason is that coaches lack appropriate training.

A monthly meeting is probably insufficient to provide literacy coaches and math lead teachers with all the information that they need to do their jobs. The district should consider increasing their professional development time or providing an intensive, extensive summer institute.

The ability of teachers to close their doors to coaches should only extend to those teachers whose results show 90 percent or more of their students are achieving at proficiency or above. Moreover, those teachers who do attain that level of student performance should be tapped for sharing their skills with others.

29. *Consider options to enable math teacher leaders to have at least part of the day free to coach and guide their peers. Options might include using discretionary funds, seeking external funding, sharing a position across schools, or differentiating staffing at an elementary school whereby the literacy coach and math teacher leader share a single class to free each to work with other staff part of the day.*

    Math teacher leaders can become essential to enhancing student achievement by being able to share the professional development that they are receiving. However, the opportunity to work with peers must not be left to chance.

30. *Assign members of leadership teams to establish a standard protocol of what to look for in classrooms that is linked to the school's educational plan and also tied to district learning targets and specifications.*

    The team was presented with three different rubrics that could be used to examine classroom teaching and learning: The Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI), Characteristics of a High Performing Urban Classroom, and the Aligned Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction portion of the Five Capacities Rubric. The team found little evidence that could be used to determine how any of these materials are used. The district does not seem to have a systematic or consistent process for using data from the learning walks to influence teacher practices or professional development activities at the school or district level. School staff members who were interviewed did not mention learning walks.

    The IPI materials presented to the team seem to focus on classroom management and teaching strategies, without examining what is being taught and the rigor of expectations for student work. Being in classrooms is an excellent way to monitor the quality of the school's instructional program and to get an idea of where additional support is needed and where exemplary practices could be shared with others. Student engagement is important. Equally important, however, is the type of learning students are being asked to master. The team recognizes that there may be very good reasons for teaching below grade level or working on low-level skills at the moment of a given visit. When visits occur often, a pattern does emerge. Students cannot be expected to perform well on high-level tasks when they have only had practice on rote skills. The observation form should explicitly require an examination of the level of that work students are being asked to do.

The newly released MPS Characteristics of a High Performing Urban Classroom does have a component that calls attention to "high expectations based on Learning Targets." This component could be the foundation for careful professional development on determining whether classroom instruction is focused on the learning targets at the correct level of rigor. Frequent, brief, focused classroom visits can expand the awareness of curriculum objectives and teaching strategies that are selected by teachers and the type of work and rigor expected of students. Yet, in MPS, this process does not yet appear to be used systematically.

The team suggests that a single form be developed and endorsed by all central office and school stakeholders. Professional development on use of the form should include how to observe what is actually being taught (rather than what the objective on the board in the classroom says is being taught) and how to assess the level of rigor of teacher presentations or student work. Use of the district's revised curriculum and pacing guides should be highly useful in guiding observations. The team also is convinced that such brief visits should not be used as part of the teacher's evaluation, but could be used in determining professional development needs for the teacher or the school. If continued poor teaching is discovered through use of these visits, then school leadership should change to a more structured monitoring tool that can be used for evaluation purposes.

31. *Inform schools about the reasons to follow the pacing charts and revised learning targets, and monitor to see that schools are doing so. If schools are not using the charts, determine the reasons for not doing so and address those issues.*

There are several common reasons for teachers being reluctant to use curriculum materials. First, they may not understand how these materials differ from the textbook resources. Second, they may not understand that textbooks are not perfectly aligned in content and rigor with what students need to learn at each grade level in Wisconsin. Third, the materials themselves may be so open to interpretation as to make them useless to teachers or require too much of a time commitment from teachers to know how to use them. Teachers need to see evidence that use of the curriculum and pacing charts will improve student performance.

G. Data, Assessment, and Evaluation

Two of the most noticeable features of urban school systems that are seeing significant improvements in student achievement involve the regular assessment of student progress and the use of data to decide on the nature and placement of intervention strategies before the end of each school year. Data also are used in more effective districts to shape and define their curricula and their professional development content and strategies. Moreover, these districts use data to monitor school and district progress and hold people accountable for results.

Positive Findings

- The leadership of the Milwaukee school system wants district action to be data driven. The focus can be seen in the design of the school education plan, which begins with WKCE data to be used in reaching SMART goals, or goals that are **S**tretching, **M**easurable, **A**spiring, **R**igorous, and with **T**imelines, as noted previously. The district is also asking schools to develop Classroom Assessments Based on Standards (CABS) to assess student progress in attaining state standards.

- The district administers TerraNova at grade 9 and the state's WKCE at grades 3-8 and 10. It also goes beyond state requirements by assessing student writing with its own test in four grade levels (grades 3, 5, 6, and 7).

- An annual district report card shows three-year trends in performance for statewide district-level assessments, disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, English proficiency status, and disability status. It also reports on graduation, promotion, and attendance rates, as well as GPA, mobility and stability rates, suspension rates, and enrollment information. The report card also presents three years of value-added analyses of student achievement information.

- Every school is expected to develop an educational plan based on data analysis. Each school's learning team analyzes school data, writes the educational plan based on the data, and provides professional development and support to its school.

- Learning teams can be used to build school-level capacity and ownership for reforms.

- The district provides principal coaches the opportunity to build reflective practice among its school leaders and improve the quality of the education plans.

- Principals conduct learning walks to gain greater awareness of classroom practices.

- The Milwaukee Partnership Academy has developed a research agenda around high-leverage topic areas (including achievement gaps, strategies to improve achievement, classroom assessment, data support, current MPS efforts, teacher induction, etc.) and research questions.

- The Joyce Foundation supports a collaboration between the district and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) for a value-added system to identify schools and programs that are particularly successful with low-achieving and disadvantaged students; identify instructional practices that are most effective throughout the district; and provide diagnostic reports, classroom by classroom,

on the differential effects of instruction on low-, middle-, and high-achieving students. Schools are classified in one of four quadrants, separate from the state accountability system. The quadrants are: low value added with high attainment; high valued added with high attainment; low value added with low attainment; and high value added with low attainment.

- The district administers writing performance assessments at grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 and reports the results annually in the MPS report card by subgroups. Two scorers use a four-point rubric, and a total of six points or above is deemed proficient.

- The district produces high-quality, informative reports on WKCE performance and district report cards.

- The Milwaukee Partnership Academy published a research agenda on January 21, 2006, defining research questions for future investigation and listing those areas currently being studied.[19]

- The district encourages the development of Classroom Assessments Based on Standards (CABS).

- Evaluations of initiatives provided to the team for review indicate that the research department has the capacity to provide important analysis to guide future decisions.[20]

- The 78 schools where Optimizing Success through Problem Solving (OSPS) operates have entered 26,195 records for Basic Early Literacy Scales (DIBELS), 50,721 records for Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) of Oral Reading Fluency, and 6,761 records for CBM Arithmetic Fluency.[21]

- OSPS assists schools in making data-driven decisions through facilitators available to participating schools each week as determined by the school.

Areas of Concern

- Staff members interviewed generally were unfamiliar with data in their respective areas of responsibility.

- Data are not adequately driving instruction. The WKCE data lack specificity and often are only superficially analyzed at the school level. The team read state

[19] Milwaukee Partnership Academy Research Agenda, December 14, 2005; rev. January 21, 2006.
[20] Examples of evaluation reports include *Evaluation of the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center at Elementary Grades*, and *Milwaukee Public Schools Alignment Study of Milwaukee Public Schools' Learning Targets in Reading and Math to Wisconsin Student Assessment System Criterion-Referenced Test Frameworks in Reading and Math*.
[21] According to data in the Optimizing Success through Problem Solving 2004-2005 Mid-Year Report, page 9.

reports of data by state content standard number rather than writing out the standard. While the state reports the percentage of students selecting each answer on a multiple-choice item, the state does not release old tests. The data would be more useful if the item itself were available for review.

- No district mechanism exists to determine how students are doing throughout the school year on targets or specifications. CABS cannot replace the need for such a mechanism.

- The team did not receive usage reports to see how many people actually use the portal area for new teachers called "Tapped In" for development opportunities, and the data warehouse.

- The Milwaukee school system lacks a districtwide plan for data collection, analysis, or program evaluation to ensure that data-driven decisions can be made about programs, initiatives, and student progress.

- Training on data and data use appears to be uneven.

- The connection between the curriculum and research units is very weak, which undermines the potential synergies that could improve district initiatives more rapidly.

- The team was presented with a P-5 Portfolio Learning Target Assessment for 2003-04 that included considerations for students with special needs. There was no indication from interviewees or evaluation materials that these forms were actually being used.

- It is unclear how OSPS links directly to other district initiatives, such as the use of learning targets and CABS. Gains in student achievement are not among the four performance indicators for the project.

Recommendations

A common feature in urban districts making rapid gains in student achievement is their use of statistical data. These districts use data to monitor progress, identify schools or students that are starting to slip behind, and decide on intervention strategies to bring students back up to speed and professional development to help teachers strengthen skills.

32. *Decide on a specific "dashboard" for data needs essential for monitoring and driving instructional decisions at the district and school levels. Use focus groups of stakeholders to be sure that the data gathered and reported are grounded in district policy and priorities.*

While the district can produce excellent reports on the data that it has, the results are often too generic or are not always used to guide decision-making at the school level. WKCE does not report on specific student needs that could be more readily determined with district benchmark tests, for example. Among the data that principals and teachers may want are items such as attendance patterns of teachers and students, course grades and their relationship with benchmark and WKCE performance, linkages between courses at the middle school level and the rigor needed for enrollment into high school Advanced Placement (AP) courses, connections between course enrollment with college entrance testing, and evaluations of interventions and their ability to provide the greatest returns in improving student achievement.

33. *Incorporate into professional development guidance on the use of data and how to use data to make instructional decisions.*

    Once the district has invested in a data warehouse that provides useful information, all staff should know how to access the data and how to interpret and use them. Knowing that a group of students is weak in problem solving skills is not sufficient. Teachers must also have access to information about how to respond to that weakness. Central office staff, coaches, and math lead teachers can get additional professional development to help provide support in that regard.

34. *Charge the research department with developing a regular schedule for routine program evaluation, follow-up, and reporting.*

    The district has a strong research and evaluation unit that is capable of doing a good job of evaluating most programs, but the district could benefit from a well-defined plan describing how it will determine which programs will be evaluated and within what time period. The district should use the results of these evaluations in a systematic way to continue to improve its programs and practices.

    The research department should consider a three-to five-year plan for evaluating district instructional initiatives and professional development. The plan should give priority to the areas of student achievement with the most urgent need for improvement.

35. *Develop a tracking system on the use of the data warehouse and portal.*

    In order to know if the data warehouse and portal are meeting the needs of the district, the district should track how frequently they are used, how many different users use them, and the average length of use. This step is not meant to be a means of forcing staff to use the technology, but rather to inform the technology unit about the need for training or the need for revision of the materials available to end users.

H. LOWEST-PERFORMING STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Urban school systems that are seeing substantial improvement in student performance have a targeted strategy to intervene in and increase achievement in their lowest-performing schools. Such strategies may vary from city to city, but they share a number of common elements.

Positive Findings

- The Milwaukee school district has reduced its number of Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI) from 55 in 2003-04 to 33 for 2005-06.

- The district provides a team (District Assistance Team) to assist SIFI with writing their educational plans and holds regular meetings with principals of these schools. The principal coach chairs this team. The DAT must have a representative from the academic excellence unit, an administrative specialist, a data support specialist, a parent center representative, and a special education representative. Other content area and budget specialists can also serve on the team.

- Each school in SIFI status receives approximately $50,000 through the school improvement fund and various sate and federal programs. These schools are encouraged to use these funds for teacher certification, professional development, curriculum alignment, parental involvement, class size reduction, early intervention programs, discipline/health/safely, and/or extending learning opportunities.[22]

- The district utilizes value-added data to identify schools most in need within a four-quadrant system—high/low value added with high performance versus high/low value added with low performance.

- The school instructional conference material that accompanies the SIFI January 4, 2006, meeting agenda directly addresses the learning targets and the assistance that the teacher has received from the literacy coach. The material also addresses the teacher's use of the school educational plan goals.

- The district has very low due-process rates. There were only four due-process hearings last year

- Only 150 special education students are in external placement settings—a very low number for a district of Milwaukee's size.

- Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are on a Web-based system.

[22] Milwaukee Public Schools District Assistance Teams (DAT), undated material.

- The district provides a free summer-school program for credit recovery for 4,000 high school students and summer school for 6,000 students in K-8.

- In the board agenda dated January 26, 2006, item 4 authorizes $150,000 to enable SIFI s to use one-on-one teacher coaching services from the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC). These services cover a number of topics, including differentiation of instruction, classroom management, student engagement in higher order thinking skills, effective instruction strategies, curriculum alignment, use of data and assessments, and collaboration strategies. The item also includes a third-party evaluation of the effectiveness of the initiative.

- MPS Homeless Education Program works with family shelters to enroll any preschool or school-age child immediately, even if required documents are not available at the time of enrollment.

- Awareness of the achievement gaps in MPS is leading to numerous workshops and programs directed at areas such as data-driven decision-making, leadership, exemplary school and classroom plans, and those activities will have a formative and summative evaluation.

- Milwaukee Public Schools has a partnership (Project CALL) with Alverno College under a two-year grant from the Joyce Foundation to work with eight elementary and middle schools classified as low-performing/low value-added schools for three years. Using a train-the-trainer model, the learning teams from those schools meet with Alverno staff four times during the school year, concentrating on curriculum alignment and assessment, using data from the assessments to adjust classroom teaching, and student engagement. The project is listed on the Milwaukee Partnership Academy research agenda.

Areas of Concern

- The district lacks a clear instructional intervention system or guidance for how to work with the district's lowest-performing students or students who are starting to slip behind. While the team saw a schematic of a three-tiered intervention system in reading, it did not find references to specific interventions for students in Tier II or Tier III. Schools use a wide variety of supplemental materials and intervention strategies that may or may not be tied to state standards. Indeed, there appears to be no system for aligning with or using these standards.

- The district has no strategy for promoting achievement in schools in improvement status. Schools are expected to determine what they need to do differently, which may lead to wasted efforts or to efforts that others have already determined to be ineffective.

- The district has defined a system of supports for Schools Identified for Improvement (SIFI), but without evaluating these supports it is unclear whether

those actions are responsible for improvements in these schools. Support and sanctions include customer service training, previews of the school's educational plan, and a data retreat for watch list schools. Other actions include the addition of principal evaluation, problem solving, exemplar work, instructional coaching for teachers, and the use of the Instructional Practices Inventory for Levels 1-IV, with additional *No Child Left Behind* sanctions for Levels II through IV.

- It is unclear how many, if any, SIFI principals are using the school instructional conferences forms, and, if they are using the forms, what and how the results are to be monitored.

- The district does not appear to use its growth data to make instructional decisions or to design effective strategies for low-performing schools.

- There appears to be poor collaboration between curriculum specialists and special education and bilingual/ESL curriculum specialists, providing little assurance that the academic needs of their student populations are defined and met.

- The implementation of the bilingual education program appears to vary from school to school.

- The 23 Reading First schools were allowed to select five different basal programs. Of the 11 schools that chose Direct Instruction, nine had gains of up to 20 points in grade 3 reading on the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test (WRCT) and one school showed a decline in performance by more than 20 points. Of those 12 schools selecting other programs, only six saw gains on the WRCT in 2004-05..[23] That test has now been eliminated.

- MPS reports that one of every four elementary and middle schools equal, surpass, or are within 90 percent of the statewide achievement level, and many of those schools serve predominantly at-risk students. However, MPS schools serving similar populations have not been able to replicate that success.[24]

- There does not appear to be overall coordination of the multiple efforts directed at closing the achievement gaps. The concept of aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment is not mentioned in the 12 separate achievement gap activities listed on page 17 of the MPS Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Consolidated Improvement Plan for Milwaukee 2005-2006.

- Of the 5,016 slots for supplemental educational services, 3,894 were filled by students from only 20 schools. Madison High School had the largest number of students taking advantage of these services (762).

[23] The Reading First Grant 2004-2005: A representation of data reflecting the impact of Direct Instruction when Reading First Grant funds provide additional teacher training.
[24] Milwaukee Public Schools ESEA Consolidated Plan – 2005-2006, page 15.

Recommendations

36. *Establish a districtwide intervention strategy in reading and math for students who are beginning to fall behind on benchmarks and state tests.*

    The district cannot afford to wait until Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) reports are returned before intervening with students who are falling behind. Appropriate benchmark testing should begin in grades 1-3 to prevent problems from developing. More specific testing aligned with the pacing guides will pinpoint areas where students need immediate support. Then, the district needs to be prepared to provide targeted interventions based on the needs revealed. If schools have an intervention that has been successful, the district can make that information known.

    The district should review intervention strategies and levels of intervention that complement the reading and math revised learning targets and specifications. By adopting a limited set of approaches, coaches, principals, and teachers can be trained in the use of these approaches with children who begin to slip behind academically. Decisions about interventions should be based on skill deficits that the district and schools are identifying on the state test and the district's own tests.

37. *Mandate instructional programs, interventions, and professional development for SIFI schools—leadership team should provide technical support and monitor on a regular basis and review programs in low-performing schools. (Designate some teams just for low-performing schools.)*

    SIFI are in need of more targeted support that, in effect, reduces the latitude of these schools to pursue independent strategies for change. However, the schools can then focus more intensely on areas most likely to produce results, rather than spending time searching for alternate solutions.

38. *Develop a set of technical support for "watch list" schools headed for low-performance status.*

    The value-added system enables the district to determine schools that are in danger of becoming low performing. Becoming proactive in helping schools with strategies to avoid falling into low-performing categories should be a priority of central office leadership that triggers technical support and additional monitoring.

39. *Consider revamping the use of Title I funds districtwide, so that more emphasis is placed on supporting instructional staff and interventions rather than auxiliary staff like nurses.*

I. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

It is often difficult for urban school districts to improve everything at once. The districts experiencing success in improving student achievement did not take on the entire system at once. Instead, these districts started their reforms at the early elementary grades and worked up to the middle and high school grades.

Positive Findings

- MPS recently passed a federal Head Start audit. The system is the largest grantee in the state of Wisconsin.

- MPS created learning targets for K-4 that include the state standards and address social and emotional needs of students.

- The early childhood program builds in opportunities for bilingual and special education collaboration, and works with the research office.

Areas of Concern

- There appears to be a lack of common planning time in elementary schools.

- The participation of English Language Learners (ELL) in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program is limited, and some schools do not have a TAG program.

- Some elementary schools have elected not to offer music, physical education, or art to cope with declining budgets.

- The comprehensive literacy framework does not appear to be improving student reading success adequately across the 11 different reading adoptions.

Recommendations

40. *Assemble principals to explore and share options for creating common planning time for teachers.*

    In accordance with the confidence that the district places in its school staff, the district should ask principals to assist in determining possible ways to create common planning times so that teachers can work on the critical areas of student achievement together.

41. *Revisit and revamp criteria for participation in the TAG programs. Set specific targets for participation in talented and gifted programs, include a nonverbal screening instrument in the identification process, and conduct regular evaluations of the talented and gifted program and the performance of participating students.*

Include information on how to modify the district curriculum for gifted students in materials teachers receive with the revised learning targets and specifications.

Rather than use a referral process and current achievement requirements, the district should consider that students who speak English as a second language or who live in poverty may not yet have the academic background to demonstrate their talent or giftedness as currently required by district criteria. Provide a nonverbal screening test such as the Naglieri to assist the district in identifying students who are gifted.

J. MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

While many urban school systems that see gains in student performance focus initially on their elementary schools, they do not ignore their middle and high schools. There is no national consensus on how to improve high schools, particularly in the nation's urban areas, but the faster-moving districts have put a number of strategies in place to ensure that students who did not learn the basic skills in elementary school do so before they graduate from high school.

Positive Findings

- Item 9 of the December 20, 2005, board agenda is in response to a board request to lay out the administration's plans and processes for the conversion of large schools into multiplexes of smaller schools, addressing issues of redistribution of assets of affected schools and the handling of a budgetary deficit or surplus resulting from the conversion.

- The district has received a large Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant to pursue small schools and small learning communities.

- In the small high schools, the schools have instituted common planning time.

- A "Critical Friends" protocol has begun as part of high school reform.

- The research unit has initiated a study of the effects of the K-8 grade configuration. Initial findings show positive correlations of student engagement and some academic achievement to the K-8 configuration over the traditional middle school. The author is cautious in attributing causality solely to the configuration.[25]

- The district has developed a student engagement observation index and tool.

- The district has a math summer-school program for students who are transitioning into high school.

[25] What's Best in the Middle? Student Engagement, Achievement, Attainment, and Growth Differences Between K-8 and Middle School Grade Configurations at Milwaukee Public Schools (Research Report #0501).

- MPS has a mechanism for tracking and analyzing student discipline cases.

- In the board agenda for January 26, 2006, Item 2 of the Reports of the Board of School Directors indicates that MPA is beginning to work on increasing the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses and on enhancing middle school students' awareness of postsecondary opportunities.

- The district has published a research report comparing student performance in middle schools with those in K-8 schools in the areas of student engagement, academic achievement and proficiency levels, and achievement growth. Results slightly favor the K-8 configuration.

Areas of Concern

- So far, the high-school small learning communities reform has produced minimal gains in student achievement.

- The district lacks consensus about implementing its K-8 structure.

- There is apparently little participation in the ACT PLAN or PSAT assessments. The district does not support participation for students who cannot afford to pay for those services.

- Only one-third of MPS high schools offers AP courses.

- The team saw evidence of an excessive number of high school courses, as well as a lack of uniform expectations for students in these courses.

- Only two math courses (Algebra and Geometry) are required for graduation. There is no requirement to pass a valid, reliable test of mastery of course content.

- There is no assurance or written plan to maintain alignment of core courses with state standards in schools with career and technology education themes.

Recommendations

42. Establish a regular and thorough evaluation of the small schools and small learning community efforts for their impact on student achievement.

As the district moves forward in implementing small learning communities, the urgency of monitoring student achievement is as important as monitoring structural changes and student services and engagement. Essential learning defined in the revised learning targets and specifications can be taught in engaging ways. Interventions can begin in middle school and summer school so that students are better prepared for rigorous high school work. Benchmark tests can monitor student progress throughout a course.

43. *Have the district pay for ACT PLAN participation in 8th and 9th grade and use the results to move students into more rigorous courses.*

    While the district has serious issues in meeting the needs of low-performing students, it is equally important to help students reach for more demanding courses. This work cannot wait until high school. Teachers should add rigor to middle school work and put students on a path to be able to handle more complex work at the high school level if the district is to have any hope of raising high school achievement levels.

44. *Share AP resources across small schools to boost participation rates and improve parent outreach.*

    While small schools strive to maintain their populations within the community, all students should have the opportunity to take AP courses. Parents need to understand the importance of these courses to encourage their children to participate.

45. *Increase the number of math courses required for graduation from two to three.*

    Most urban districts have increased the rigor of student requirements for graduation so that students are better prepared for postsecondary work. In sending the message that the district values high expectations, the increase in math requirements demonstrates this commitment is more than in words alone.

CHAPTER 3. SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Milwaukee Public Schools is committed to developing a capable, knowledgeable work force. It has forged an alliance with the Milwaukee Partnership Academy and has developed a vision for literacy and mathematics instruction. It has emphasized embedded professional development and has placed literacy coaches and math teacher leaders in a position to assist principals and peers with turning vision into reality. And it has initiated a number of leading-edge national reforms.

The district has been working hard to improve, but is not seeing large achievement gains. It is the opinion of the team that achievement gains have been slow to emerge because the system is trying to do too much. Schools are choosing from hundreds of items off of a menu of choices rather than having their focus on two or three high-leverage activities.

Additionally, the team feels that the decentralization of the Milwaukee Public Schools has gone too far. This decentralization has created a system of schools, rather than a school system. While budgeting and instructional activities are best handled at the school level, the central office has abdicated its instructional obligations in favor of having the schools and teachers assume most of the responsibility. The district has created learning targets, but many are not sufficiently detailed to guide instruction. The central office plays no role in monitoring progress towards mastery of explicit expectations for student knowledge and skills in the content areas at every grade level and has not provided much guidance and support when students and schools achieve below expectations. The central office also has not set goals for high-achieving students or put in place a continuum of coursework that would prepare more students to be ready for rigorous coursework.

The laissez faire attitude of many central office staff members about gains in student achievement has marginalized their role in improving performance and largely undercut any sense of urgency to attain higher goals. No one would expect a person who sees a train heading towards a cliff to watch without trying to get the attention of the engineer. Yet too many people use decentralization as a rationale for not alerting schools to the urgency of their situation and providing information and suggestions to meet their needs. Instead, in the name of building ownership, each school is reinventing curriculum, pacing, alignment information, and assessment tools. The idea of building capacity is a sound one, but the team believes that the district has gone too far in this regard. The precious resource of time is squandered in an exercise of individual judgment that should be led by the district. Having test scores that are basically stagnant for three years should alert the district that it is time to reconsider its centralized versus school-based decisions.

The Council of the Great City School's Strategic Support Team proposes several areas of focus for next steps. The first calls for creating a sense of urgency around student achievement. The second involves the district setting and communicating explicit, measurable goals. To support achieving those goals, the team recommends revisiting the

learning targets and specifications in accordance with the MPS alignment research. It also asks the district to consider adding specificity so that even the newest teacher will not have to guess about the content and level of rigor contained in the content area at each grade level. Professional development should not take the place of having information in writing to refer to months or years after the professional development experience.

The team also recommends a systemwide pacing system to enable all schools to address the learning targets and specifications and so that benchmark tests can inform the district of student progress through the curriculum, enabling timely interventions as needed.

The team further asks the district to ensure that reforms penetrate into each classroom in ways that fulfill district expectations. This can being done through the district's use of data, improved use of literacy coaches and math teacher leaders, and the creation of districtwide benchmark testing aligned with pacing. The team encourages the district to examine professional development to make it more systematic in priority areas.

The team proposes, further, that a systematic set of evaluations be undertaken to ensure that reforms are working on the right areas and are having the desired impact.

In taking the next steps forward, Milwaukee Public Schools can be proud of many of the programs it has put in place. It has strong support from foundations and community partners. As the system modifies its course to make better use of its resources, build capacity and clarify expectations, it can become Milwaukee's school system of choice.

APPENDIX A. BENCHMARKING MILWAUKEE

APPENDIX A. BENCHMARKING MILWAUKEE

The chart below presents the average scores of the curriculum and instructional Strategic Support Team on a draft tool developed by the Council of the Great City Schools to benchmark school districts against the practices and characteristics of faster-improving urban school systems on areas that the organization's research shows are instrumental in boosting student achievement districtwide. Scores range from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest).

Political Preconditions							
Setting a Vision							**District Score**
1. Board has not articulated a clear direction for the future of the district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board articulates a vision around where it wants the district to go.	1.6
2. Board has multiple objectives that compete with improved achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets student achievement as a clear, top priority and uses this to guide decisions.	1.6
3. Board shows no sense of urgency for improvement.	1	2	3	4	5	Board proclaims urgency for raising student achievement and establishes a "no excuses" attitude.	1.4
School Board							
4. Board is fractured, and most decisions are made on split votes.	1	2	3	4	5	Board has a stable working majority on most issues.	1.5
5. Board is involved in administrative and operational issues of the district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board is focused on policymaking and lets superintendent handle policy implementation and administration.	2.5
6. Board devotes most of its time discussing nonacademic issues.	1	2	3	4	5	Board devotes most of its time monitoring academic progress of district.	1.2
Superintendent							
7. Board selects superintendent because he/she had success elsewhere and brings own vision about how to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5	Board selects superintendent because of his /her commitment to pursue board's vision and priorities.	1.8

8. Board has nebulous goals for superintendent and has no specific provisions for holding him/her accountable.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets initial goals for superintendent and holds him/her accountable for making progress on them. Superintendent welcomes the accountability.	2.0
9. Board and superintendent are not in accord about the direction of the school district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent refine district goals jointly and are in agreement about them.	3.0
10. Board evaluates superintendent mostly on administrative operations.	1	2	3	4	5	Board evaluates superintendent mostly on the progress the district is making on student achievement.	3.0
11. Board and superintendent experience high rates of turnover.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent have stable and lengthy relationship as the district improves.	2.3
Subtotal: Political Preconditions							2.0
Diagnosing Situation							
12. Board and superintendent conduct no assessment of the district's challenges, conduct a general assessment, or use an assessment brought to the district by the superintendent.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent jointly analyze specific local factors affecting student achievement that are under the control of the district.	1.5
13. District leadership does not consider strategies that are being successful in other cities.						District leadership spends time and effort seeking out evidence of what works in other cities.	2.0
Making Plans							
14. Board and superintendent have no specific plan for raising student achievement or plan lacks details and tactics.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent develop a detailed blueprint for raising student achievement.	1.2

15. Board endorses superintendent's plan but has little role in crafting it.	1	2	3	4	5	Board is involved actively in crafting strategic plan and has a strong interest in its implementation and success.	3.0
Selling Reform							
16. Board and/or superintendent develop reform plan on their own.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent meet with community leaders and listen to them as plan is being developed.	2.7
17. Superintendent takes the lead in selling the reform plan, but board members are only sporadically involved.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent work jointly to sell the reform plan to key community stakeholders.	2.0
18. Board and/or superintendent moves forward with reform plan without community input.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent garner community support before moving forward with plan.	2.5
Subtotal: Strategic Planning							2.1
Administrative and Operational Foundations							
Setting Goals							
19. District lacks specific systemwide academic goals or timelines for meeting goals.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent translate the reform plan into "SMART" goals– **S**tretching, **M**easurable, **A**spiring, **R**igorous, and with **T**imelines.	1.0
20. District's goals lack explicit targets for academic performance of subgroups.	1	2	3	4	5	Districtwide goals have specific targets for improving the academic performance of subgroups.	1.0
21. District does not have school-by-school goals or goals do not align with systemwide targets.	1	2	3	4	5	Districtwide goals have been translated into specific school-by-school targets for principals.	1.8
22. School-by-school goals lack specificity and/or do not have targets for subgroups.	1	2	3	4	5	School-by-school goals are specific and have explicit targets for subgroups.	1.4
23. "School Improvement Plans" do not contain school and subgroup targets.	1	2	3	4	5	School-specific goals, including subgroup targets, appear in "School Improvement Plans."	1.0

24. District's work seems fractured or distracted by noninstructional priorities.						District appears to be focused relentlessly on improving student achievement.	1.8
Being Accountable							
25. Central office staff members have nebulous goals or no goals that are tied to districtwide student performance.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office staff members have specific performance goals tied to districtwide targets.	1.0
26. District has no formal mechanism for holding senior staff accountable for student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a way (e.g., performance contracts) to hold senior staff accountable for district results.	1.0
27. School board can protect favored senior staff without regard to districtwide progress.	1	2	3	4	5	Superintendent evaluates senior staff based in part on progress on districtwide goals.	1.0
28. Principals are evaluated mostly on administrative performance.	1	2	3	4	5	Principals are evaluated on their progress in meeting their school's goals and targets.	1.4
29. School board and/or constituent groups protect principals when progress is not made.	1	2	3	4	5	Superintendent can remove or transfer principals for lack of progress on meeting school goals.	2.5
30. District does not recognize staff or principals when goals are attained.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a well-publicized system to recognize staff or principals when goals are attained.	2.0
Operating Smoothly							
31. Central office is generally seen as focused on compliance and rule-setting.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office is generally seen as working to lead and support schools in meeting goals.	1.2
32. Noninstructional operations are seen as a barrier to meeting academic goals.	1	2	3	4	5	Noninstructional operations generally work to support the district's academic goals.	1.0

33. Noninstructional staff is seen as remote and unresponsive to immediate needs of schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Noninstructional operations staff is seen as responsive to the immediate needs of schools.	1.3
34. Noninstructional staff members are often promoted because of longevity or contacts.	1	2	3	4	5	Superintendent is able to hire and place noninstructional staff members because of their expertise.	2.5
Finding Funds							
35. District has little way to fund reforms that it is pursuing.	1	2	3	4	5	District identifies how it will fund reforms by moving monies internally or through external sources.	3.2
36. District pursues and/or accepts funds without regard to their relationship to plan.	1	2	3	4	5	District pursues and accepts funds that are tied explicitly to strategic plan, reforms, and priorities.	3.0
37. District is not moving funds into its instructional priorities.						District is moving funds into instructional priorities.	2.5
38. District is pursuing funds to fill budget shortfalls.	1	2	3	4	5	District is working to build public confidence for reforms in order to attract new funds.	1.6
39. District has a reputation for management and fiscal inefficiency.						District is working to improve operations and financial standing.	3.0
Subtotal: Administrative and Operational Foundations							1.6
Programmatic Strategies							
Unifying Curriculum							
40. District permits schools to choose their own programs in reading and math.	1	2	3	4	5	District picks a uniform program in reading and math at lower grades or uses an overarching framework for its instructional system.	1.0
41. District has a multiplicity of reading and math programs in its schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses a single program or framework for teaching reading and math at the lower grades.	1.0

42. District has not analyzed and filled the gaps between its program and state standards and tests.	1	2	3	4	5	District's reading and math program has been explicitly aligned with state standards and assessments.	1.4
43. District reading and math instruction is not vertically aligned or is aligned by grade bands.	1	2	3	4	5	District's reading and math program or curriculum is aligned grade-to-grade.	1.0
44. District uses a reading program that is not scientifically-based.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses a scientifically-based reading program developed after 2000.	2.4
45. District has no policy defining the time each day teachers are to spend on reading and math instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	District requires a specific amount of time each day for reading and math instruction.	1.0
46. District lacks a system by which it determines the pace at which skills are taught.	1	2	3	4	5	District has an explicit pacing system to ensure teachers are covering the curriculum before skills are tested.	1.0
Training Staff							
47. Schools define and control the bulk of professional development for principals and teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	District defines and controls the bulk of professional development for principals and teachers.	1.2
48. School-by-school professional development focuses on many different instructional programs not related to the district's programs.	1	2	3	4	5	Districtwide professional development is focused explicitly on implementation of the district's reading and math programs.	2.0
49. Professional development is not defined on the basis of teacher skills or student needs.	1	2	3	4	5	Districtwide professional development is differentiated by teacher skills and student needs.	1.8
50. Professional development is sporadic and fractured.	1	2	3	4	5	Professional development is intense, ongoing, and is followed by support and technical assistance.	1.4

51. District's teacher recruitment efforts are not strong enough to prevent the weakest teachers from continuing.	1	2	3	4	5	District's teacher recruitment efforts are strong and timely enough to strengthen teaching pool over time.	2.5
Pressing Reforms							
52. District approves reform policies and waits for staff to accept them at school level.	1	2	3	4	5	District-approved reforms are pressed explicitly into schools and classrooms.	1.0
53. District is uncertain about the extent to which its reading and math policies and programs are implemented and has no way to monitor their implementation.	1	2	3	4	5	District pushes explicitly for districtwide implementation of reading and math policies and programs through "walkthroughs," classroom observations by principals, lead teachers or coaches, or other methods.	1.2
54. District does not have its principals monitor classroom practice in any systematic way.	1	2	3	4	5	District holds principals accountable for monitoring the implementation of reforms.	2.6
55. Central office leaves instruction up to individual schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office takes responsibility for nature and quality of instruction.	1.0
Using Data							
56. District waits until end of school year before testing students and determining whether they have fallen behind.	1	2	3	4	5	District administers regular (often quarterly) low-stakes tests of student progress over course of school year to assess student progress.	2.2
57. District has not determined if its tests or quarterlies are aligned with state standards and assessments.	1	2	3	4	5	District end-of-year and interim tests are aligned explicitly with state standards and assessments.	1.2
58. District does not disaggregate either end-of-year or quarterly tests by school and subgroup.	1	2	3	4	5	District disaggregates end-of-year and interim tests by school and subgroup.	2.4

59. District distributes interim and final test results to schools and teachers in the next school year.	1	2	3	4	5	District distributes results of interim and end-of-year test results fast enough to allow teachers to use them.	2.0
60. District relies almost exclusively on test data to measure its progress.	1	2	3	4	5	District performance indicators include an array of data beyond standardized test scores.	2.2
61. District does not use student test results to determine where to intervene or provide professional development. Results often used simply to rank or rate schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses results of annual and interim tests to decide on where and how to target instructional interventions and provide professional development.	1.6
62. District has no ongoing way of training principals and teachers on how to interpret and use test data.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides ongoing training to principals and teachers on the use of end-of-year and interim test results to improve instruction.	1.6
Focus on Lowest-Performing Schools							
63. Lowest-performing schools receive little attention over and above districtwide program or are left to fend for themselves.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a specific strategy designed specifically to improve instruction in its lowest-performing schools.	2.0
64. District lacks any specific interventions for its lowest-performing schools or lets schools identify their own strategies.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a bank of specific interventions for its lowest-performing schools and students.	1.4
65. District does not differentiate instruction for its low-performing students.	1	2	3	4	5	District differentiates instruction for its low-performing students.	1.2
66. District's "School Improvement Planning" exists only on paper and does not drive real improvement.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses the "School Improvement Planning" process to improve performance in its lowest-performing schools.	1.4

67. District assigns the least experienced and weakest teachers to its lowest-performing schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides incentives for its most experienced teachers to work in the lowest-performing schools.	2.0
68. District provides the same resources to all schools regardless of need.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides extra resources to its lowest-performing schools.	2.2
Starting Early							
69. District has no strategy for where to start or how to sequence its reforms.	1	2	3	4	5	District starts reforms in early elementary grades and works up.	1.2
Handling Upper Grades							
70. District has no strategy for improving instruction for older students who have fallen behind.	1	2	3	4	5	District has fledgling strategies to strengthen teaching for older students.	2.3
71. District provides no extra time for students lacking basic skills.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides additional instructional time for older students who lack basic skills.	2.4
72. District offers AP courses in select schools only.	1	2	3	4	5	District offers AP courses in all high schools.	1.0
73. District does not monitor course-taking patterns of high school students.	1	2	3	4	5	District actively encourages and places high school students in higher level courses.	1.3
Subtotal: Programmatic Strategies							1.6
Total: All Categories							1.8

APPENDIX B. INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

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- William Andrekopoulos, Superintendent of Schools
- Aquine Jackson, Chief Academic Officer
- Jeff Spence, School Board Member (District 2)
- Joseph Danneker, School Board Vice President (District 8)
- Deb Lindsey, Director of Assessment and Accountability
- Kathy Williams, Director of Teaching and Learning
- Victoria Frazier, Professional Development Coordinator
- Flora Flagg, Director of Administrative Service
- Sue Apps, Director of Leadership Support
- Hughes George, Director of Student Services
- Pat Yahle, Director of Special Services
- Cris Anderson, Executive Director, Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA)
- Marleen Pugach, MPA Implementation Team member and Professor, UW-Milwaukee
- Linda Post, MPA Implementation Team member and Professor, UW-Milwaukee
- Doncella Washington, Reading Curriculum Specialist
- Patti Ball, English/Language Arts Curriculum Specialist
- Henry Kranendonk, Math Curriculum Specialist
- Mary Gisal, Director of Recreation, Support Services, and CLC
- Joseph Brown, Title I Coordinator
- Arlene Dansby, Principal on Special Assignment
- Marty Locksman, Coordinator of High School Redesign
- Lauren Baker, Director of Career and Technical Education (CTE)
- Caroline Williams, Director of Guidance and Counseling
- Marty Locksman, High School Coordinator
- Lauren Baker, Director of Career and Technical Education (CTE)
- Ivy Covert, Director, Bilingual and Multi-Cultural Education
- Sam Carmen, Executive Director, Milwaukee TEA Union
- Ann Terrell, Coordinator of Early Childhood Programs
- Tom McGinnity, Executive Director, Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC)
- Marcia Staum, Optimizing Success through Problem Solving
- Audrey Potter, Coordinator of Allied Health Services
- Katharine Sprouse, Literacy Coach
- Tracy Quarino, Math Teacher Leader
- Angela Daniels, Literacy Coach
- Tonesha Sanders, Math Teacher Leader
- Elnore McKinley, Math Teacher Leader
- Jacqueline Van Hook, Literacy Coach/ Implementer
- Kirsten Lathrop, Literacy Coach
- Marti Jones, Math Teacher Leader
- Judi Offenbacher, Literacy Coach
- Laura Barton, Math Teacher Leader
- Wendy A. Smith, English Teacher/Literacy Coach

- Janice Udovich, Math Teacher/Math Coach
- Pat Bilot, Literacy Coach
- Dennis Cary, Math Teacher Leader
- Amy Onderak, Grade 4 Teacher, Math Teacher Leader
- Patty Wagner, Literacy Coach
- Barbara Goss, Principal, Bay View High School
- Cheryl Clancy, Principal, Kosciuszko Middle School
- Ruth Maegli, Principal, Garland Elementary School
- D. Rose Cappine, Principal, John Muir Middle School
- Rose M. Carr, Principal, Ralph W. Emerson Elementary School
- Carletta Noland, Principal, Happy Hill Elementary School
- Cynthia Ellwood, Principal, Hartford University School K-8
- Winnifred Aitch, Principal, Washington High School of Information Technology
- Betty McCarrier, Teacher, WCLL
- John Di Padova, Teacher, Hamilton High School
- Bernadette Kiper, Teacher, Pulaski High School
- Laura Maly, Teacher, Bradley Technical School
- Theresa James, Teacher, Curtin Leadership Academy
- Zene Peer, Teacher, Sarah Scott Middle School
- Shahnah R. Holt, Teacher, Lee K-8
- Carey Flesner, Teacher, Victory K-8
- Annette Perry, Teacher, Hawthorne Elementary School
- Ahmed Ahmed-Yahia, Teacher, Vincent High School
- Theresa Mattson, Teacher, Burdick K-8
- Wansheba Townsend, Parent, Emerson Elementary School
- Kenneth Kingsby, Parent, Sarah Scott Middle School
- Norma Anwar, Parent, Hartford University School and Hamilton High School
- Peggy Radakovich, Parent, Washington High School of Information Technoology, Burroughs Middle School
- Pamela Williams, Parent, Pulaski High School
- Tamelita Jenkins, Parent, Lee K-8 and Sarah Scott Middle School
- Alice Trunnell, Parent, Hartford University School
- Shannon Gordon, ESEA Implementation and Compliance Manager

APPENDIX C. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

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- Milwaukee Public Schools Learning Targets
- Essential Components of Every Reading Lesson
- 2005-06 K-8 List of Reading Adoptions by School
- Curriculum Planning Documents: English/Language Arts 2005-2006 Goals
- Curriculum Alignment in English/Language Arts: From Research to Action
- Student Writing Samples from the Spring 2004 MPS Writing Assessments
- Teacher Induction for Urban Education Handbook
- Characteristics of High Performing Urban Classrooms
- Teacher Induction for Urban Education
- Elementary Grades—Expository Writing Guide
- Middle Grades—Expository Writing Guide
- High School Expository Writing Booklet
- Milwaukee's Direct Instruction Schools
- The Reading First Grant 2004-2005
- Specifications for Writing
- High School Language Arts Research Paper Curriculum
- Literacy Coach Toolkit
- Reading first Resource Binder
- Reading Administration Handbook
- Milwaukee Public Schools Alignment Study of MPS Learning Targets in Reading and Math to Wisconsin Student Assessment System Criterion-Referenced Test Frameworks in Reading and Math
- Educational Plan Template and Resources
- Middle School Evaluation 2005
- Rubrics on the Five Capacity Builders
- Milwaukee Public Schools District Report 2004-2005 MPS School Climate/Perception Survey (Parents of MPS Students)
- 2004-2005 MPS School Climate/Perception Survey (Teacher/Staff Version)
- Milwaukee Public Schools District Report 2004-05 MPS School Climate/Perception Survey (High School Students)
- Characteristics of a High Performing Urban Classroom: Closing the Achievement Gaps in Milwaukee Public Schools
- Teacher Induction for Urban Education Handbook: Meeting the Technical, Emotional, Socio-Cultural, and Standards-Based Needs of New Teachers
- Teacher Induction for Urban Education pamphlet
- Milwaukee Partnership Academy Research Agenda, December 14, 2005; revised. January 21, 2006
- P-5 Portfolio Learning Target Assessment for 2003-2004
- P-5 Program Celebrates Its Nineteenth Year
- Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership (summary sheet)
- Milwaukee Partnership Academy Overview (MPA Folder)

- Instructional Practices Inventory sheet
- March 24, 2006 MPS Banking Time Day Professional Development Activities Offered by the Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA Folder)
- MPA Family Report (MPA Folder)
- MPS 2003-04 School Report Card (MPA Folder)
- MPS Class Report (MPA Folder)
- 2004-2005 District Report Card for the Milwaukee Public Schools
- WCER Implementation Study of the MPS Learning Targets: Summary of Findings and Recommendations (MPA Folder)
- Superintendent's Fiscal Year 2006 Proposed Budget notebook
- Milwaukee Public Schools Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership 2004- present Professional Development Resources
- Alternate Assessment for Limited English Proficient Students Levels 1 and 2 Uniform Alternate Performance Indicators
- Optimizing Success through Problem Solving, 2004-2005 Mid-Year Report
- Milwaukee Public Schools Student Expulsions
- Milwaukee Board of School Directors Agenda for Regular Board Meeting, December 20, 2005
- Milwaukee Board of School Directors Agenda for Regular Board Meeting, January 26, 2006
- Milwaukee Board of School Directors Agenda for Regular Board Meeting, February 23, 2006
- Milwaukee Public Schools Alignment Study of Milwaukee Public Schools' Learning Targets in Reading and Math to Wisconsin Student Assessment System Criterion-Referenced Test Frameworks in Reading and Math.
- What's Best in the Middle? Student Engagement, Achievement, Attainment, and Growth Differences Between K-8 and Middle School Grade Configurations at Milwaukee Public Schools (Research Report #0501)
- Mayhem in the Middle: How Middle Schools Have Failed America—and How to Make Them Work.
- The Reading First Grant 2004-2005: A representation of data reflecting the impact of Direct Instruction when Reading First Grant funds provide additional teacher training.
- Milwaukee Public Schools Chapter 220 and Open Enrollment History, dated 9/16/05
- A Principal's Guide to Classroom Observations in the Milwaukee Public Schools, Draft dated 12/7/05
- Memorandum regarding SES Update, dated 12/7/05
- Supplemental Services Update 1-4-06, distributed at SIFI Principals Meeting
- Milwaukee Public Schools Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Report, 2004-2005
- Milwaukee Public Schools District Assistance Teams (DAT), undated
- SIFI Meeting, January 4, 2006, with School Instructional Conferences form attached.
- Preliminary Documentation Report: The Learning Targets Initiative of Milwaukee Public Schools, December 2003.
- FY 06 Proposed Budget

- Milwaukee Public Schools Educational Plan Workbook: A School Improvement Planning Resource, December 16, 2005
- Project CALL summary
- Directions: MPS Point the Way to Educational Opportunities 2006-2007
- Road to Reform brochure
- Bilingual folder of materials, including mission statement, policies and procedures, program enrollment figures for 2005-06, language levels, alternative assessment (WAA) for ELL students, increase of second language instruction in development bilingual programs, and other similar materials

APPENDIX D. STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM MEMBERS

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Michael Casserly

Michael Casserly is the Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 66 of the nation's largest urban public school districts—including Milwaukee's. Dr. Casserly has been with the organization for 28 years, 13 of them as Executive Director. Before heading the group, he was the organization's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and served as the Council's director of research. Dr. Casserly has led major reforms in federal education laws, garnered significant aid for urban schools across the country, has spurred major gains in urban school achievement and management, and has advocated for urban school leadership in the standards movement. He led the organization in holding the nation's first summit of urban school superintendents and big city mayors. He has a Ph.D. degree from the University of Maryland and a B.A. degree from Villanova University.

Maria Crenshaw

Maria Crenshaw is the instructional specialist for Title I math in the Richmond (Va.) Public Schools. Mrs. Crenshaw has been involved in education for 31 years, bringing a wealth of experience to the students and faculty in the city of Richmond as teacher, math specialist, and assistant principal. She has served in her current position for four years. Mrs. Crenshaw received districtwide honors as Teacher of the Year, *TV 8* Golden Apple Award winner, and R.E.B Award nominee. As an instructional specialist in Richmond, Mrs. Crenshaw provides technical support and training for both teachers and administrators, supervises math resource (specialist) teachers, creates benchmark tests for the district, analyzes district data, and monitors math instruction for the district. Mrs. Crenshaw worked diligently to assist the schools in Richmond to earn accreditation in math by aligning the curriculum and materials with the state standards, designing lesson plans, and providing high-priority schools with personalized professional development. When she started in her position in 2002, 16 schools were accredited in math. Currently, 45 schools are fully accredited.

Ricki-Price Baugh

Ricki Price-Baugh retired as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instructional Development in the Houston Independent School District. She was responsible for strategic planning and the design, implementation, and evaluation of the district's prekindergarten through Grade 12 curriculum, staff development of teachers and administrators, and alternative certification. Since beginning her work in 1970 in the Houston schools, Dr. Price-Baugh served as a teacher, department chair, resource coordinator, project manager, director of curriculum services, and director of curriculum. Her major accomplishments include a districtwide effort to align curriculum, textbook, and assessment systems, and the development of a detailed curriculum and set of model lessons in the four core content areas and supporting implementation of that curriculum.

These efforts led to a substantial increase in student achievement scores. She is a certified curriculum auditor for Phi Delta Kappa. Dr. Price-Baugh received a doctoral degree from Baylor University, a master's degree in Spanish literature from the University of Maryland, and a B.A. degree (magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa) from Tulane University.

Leslie Ann Stalc

Leslie Stalc is the manager of English/Language Arts for the Houston Independent School District, where she has also served as assistant principal, Title I instructional supervisor, and an elementary school teacher. In her current position, she has responsibility for curriculum development and implementation, as well as professional development based on analysis of student performance data. She helped design and led the development of the Houston English/Language Arts curriculum for K-12, including working with the Multilingual Department to develop the Spanish/Language Arts curriculum for K-5. As part of the plan to have ongoing measurement of student progress throughout the curriculum, she develops benchmark tests aligned with the district pacing guide and state assessments. She also provided leadership and oversight to a team of writers involved in producing detailed model lessons for all years of secondary school English/Language Arts. The lessons sought to illustrate how to combine objectives and use research-based strategies to teach the concepts that students must master. To prepare students for more advanced coursework, she worked with the Advanced Academics Department to write and implement pre-AP supplements for all Grade 6 English/Language Arts classrooms. She also has established adolescent reading institutes, and coordinates the training of English/Language Arts lead teachers in 300 schools. She earned a B.A. degree from San Francisco State University and a M.Ed. degree from the University of Houston.

Shirley Schwartz

Shirley Schwartz is the Director of Special Projects at the Council of the Great City Schools. At the Council, she is responsible for overseeing a variety of programs and initiatives that focus on improving teaching and learning in urban schools, including several major projects to facilitate the redesign of urban high schools and to recruit, prepare, and retain a diverse and highly qualified teacher workforce. Dr. Schwartz also serves as the liaison to the Council's affiliate, the Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, and is a member of several editorial and national advisory boards that focus on urban teacher preparation and quality. Before joining the Council of the Great City Schools, Dr. Schwartz was the Dean of the School of Professional Studies at Trinity College in Washington, D.C., and a research associate in the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Schwartz has authored numerous articles in the areas of metacognition and strategy instruction for at-risk learners, teacher supply and demand in urban schools, alternative urban teacher preparation, and the development and assessment of content and performance standards for urban schools**.**

Nancy J. Timmons

Nancy Timmons is a national consultant and textbook contributor. She recently retired as Associate Superintendent for the Fort Worth (Tex.) Independent School District. During her 14 years with the Fort Worth schools, she served as Associate Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services, and Executive Director for Curriculum. Dr. Timmons had been a middle and high school teacher in the Rockdale and Temple Independent School Districts in Texas, supervisor of English Language Arts/Social Studies, and Director of Curriculum in the Temple Independent School District, Texas. Dr. Timmons earned a B.S. degree from Prairie View A & M University and M.S. and Doctorate of Education degrees from Baylor University in Texas. She is a certified Phi Delta Kappa curriculum auditor and has served on audits in several states. She also has been an adjunct professor in the Graduate School at Tarleton State University in Texas. Dr. Timmons has extensive experience in curriculum design and development, campus and district planning, school improvement, and staff development. She is listed in *Who's Who in American Education* and has served on boards for numerous community, civic, and educational organizations. She currently is a member of the Board of Visitors for the Texas Christian University School of Education and serves as executive advisor to the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

APPENDIX E. ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 66 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent of Schools and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in the improvement of leadership and instruction. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in areas such as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Strategic Support Teams Conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools

City	Area	Year
Albuquerque		
	Facilities and Roofing	2003
	Human Resources	2003
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2005
	Legal Services	2005
Anchorage		
	Finance	2004
Broward County (FLA.)		
	Information Technology	2000
Buffalo		
	Superintendent Support	2000
	Organizational Structure	2000
	Curriculum and Instruction	2000
	Personnel	2000
	Facilities and Operations	2000
	Communications	2000
	Finance	2000
	Finance II	2003
Caddo Parish (LA.)		
	Facilities	2004
Charleston		
	Special Education	2005
Cincinnati		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
Cleveland		
	Student Assignments	1999, 2000
	Transportation	2000
	Safety and Security	2000
	Facilities Financing	2000
	Facilities Operations	2000
	Transportation	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
Columbus		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Human Resources	2001
	Facilities Financing	2002
	Finance and Treasury	2003
	Budget	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005

Dayton		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2001
	Finance	2001
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Budget	2005
Denver		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Bilingual Education	2006
Des Moines		
	Budget and Finance	2003
Detroit		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2002
	Assessment	2002
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Assessment	2003
	Communications	2003
	Textbook Procurement	2004
Greensboro		
	Bilingual Education	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2003
	Facilities	2004
Hillsborough County		
	Transportation	2005
	Procurement	2005
Jacksonville		
	Organization and Management	2002
	Operations	2002
	Human Resources	2002
	Finance	2002
	Information Technology	2002
	Finance	2006
Kansas City		
	Human Resources	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Finance	2005
	Operations	2005
	Purchasing	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006

Los Angeles		
	Budget and Finance	2002
	Organizational Structure	2005
	Finance	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Human Resources	2005
	Business Services	2005
Louisville		
	Management Information	2005
Miami-Dade County		
	Construction Management	2003
Milwaukee		
	Research and Testing	1999
	Safety and Security	2000
	School Board Support	1999
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
Minneapolis		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Finance	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
New Orleans		
	Personnel	2001
	Transportation	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Hurricane Damage Assessment	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
Norfolk		
	Testing and Assessment	2003
Philadelphia		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Food Service	2003
	Facilities	2003
	Transportation	2003
	Human Resources	2004
Pittsburgh		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Technology	2006
Providence		
	Business Operations	2001
	MIS and Technology	2001
	Personnel	2001
Richmond		

	Transportation	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Special Education	2003
Rochester		
	Finance and Technology	2003
	Transportation	2004
	Food Services	2004
San Francisco		
	Technology	2001
St. Louis		
	Special Education	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Human Resources	2005
Toledo		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
Washington, D.C.		
	Finance and Procurement	1998
	Personnel	1998
	Communications	1998
	Transportation	1998
	Facilities Management	1998
	Special Education	1998
	Legal and General Counsel	1998
	MIS and Technology	1998
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Budget and Finance	2005
	Transportation	2005