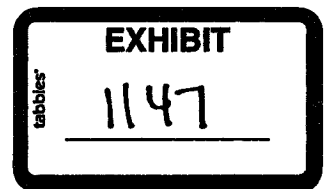October | 10

Needs Analysis of Hutchinson – USD 308

Conducted by and for the Kansas State Department of Education's Learning Network

I. Introduction

In September 2008, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) contracted with Cross & Joftus, LLC to implement a model for working with KSDE and five Kansas districts—Garden City, Kansas City, Topeka, Turner, and Wichita—struggling to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In 2009, this model, the Kansas Learning Network (KLN), was expanded to reach 12 more Kansas districts not making AYP, and subsequently in 2010, to reach 11 more, including Hutchinson Public Schools, USD 308. Since that time, one district has left the Network because it demonstrated AYP two consecutive years.[1] And, seven additional districts demonstrated AYP in the area(s) identified for improvement; they will continue to remain in the Network for an additional year. It should be noted that Hutchinson is not yet on improvement, and chose to participate in the Network voluntarily.

The rationale for the Learning Network is that districts struggling to demonstrate AYP need a combination of support and pressure to make difficult changes that will result in higher overall levels of student achievement and a narrowing of achievement gaps. Unfortunately, there is no "silver bullet" for making improvements, and the KSDE has finite capacity to help. Districts and the KSDE, however, can make significant progress if they think and act systemically, focus resources and energy on improving the teaching and learning process, and work collaboratively and with support from an external "critical friend."

The goal, then, of the Learning Network is to improve school and district quality and increase student achievement through a collaborative, organization-development approach focused on applying systems theory and using data effectively.

One of the first activities in pursuit of this goal is to conduct a needs assessment of KSDE and all participating districts, focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis encompasses an analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and three-day site visits[2] that include interviews and focus groups with students, parents, civic leaders, teachers, academic coaches, principals, district administrators, and board members as well as classroom observations using a process designed by Cross & Joftus called the Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities are designed both to produce findings leading to recommendations for technical assistance and to train school and state officials to do their own needs assessments and classroom observations in the future.

The site visits conclude with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Joftus for the district's leadership that includes a presentation of some preliminary findings. This report presents

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[1] Under the No Child Left Behind Act, a district must demonstrate AYP two consecutive years in order to be removed from the "needs improvement" list.
[2] The site visit for Hutchinson occurred October 6-8, 2010.

all findings and represents the culmination of the needs assessment for Hutchinson Public Schools, USD 308 (referred to throughout the report as USD 308 or Hutchinson).

USD 308 Student Demographics

Currently, approximately 73% of Hutchinson's student population of 4,691 students are classified as White, 15.4% as Hispanic, 9% as African-American, 1.6% as American Indian, and less than 1% as Asian or Hawaiian-Pacific Islander. About 5% of students are identified as English language learners (ELLs), more than double the number of students identified as ELLs just five years ago. A majority of students—almost 65%—are classified as Economically Disadvantaged. Additionally, over 15% of students are identified as students with disabilities, above the state average of 13.5%.[3]

The number of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals has climbed steadily in Hutchinson over the past few years. In three of the district's eight elementary schools—Avenue A, Lincoln, and McCandless—approximately 90% or more of students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and in most of the remaining schools, at least 60% of students are identified as economically disadvantaged.

USD 308 currently serves 847 students identified as in need of special education services—primarily students with learning disabilities (300), developmental disabilities (167), and speech and language disabilities (144).

Student Achievement

Overall, district students have demonstrated relatively high levels of student achievement in most areas (for additional detail, see Table I below). As a group all students exceeded state benchmarks in reading and math for the past three years.

Table I—Hutchinson Summary Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data

Reading – Met AYP in 2008 and 2009; did not meet AYP in 2010. Not yet on Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2008 - 72%	2009 - 76.7%	2010 - 81.3%
All students	Met (84.2%)	Met (86.2%)	Met (85.6%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (78.2%)	Met (82.3%)	Met (81.6%)
Students with Disabilities	Met (64.6%)[4]	Met (66%)[5]	No (62.9%)
ELL Students	Met (60.3%)[6]	Met (66.7%)[6]	Met (71.1%)[4]
African-American Students	Met (74.7%)	Met (80.8%)	Met (80.8%)[6]
Hispanic	Met (75.3%)	Met (79.1%)	Met (81.2%)[6]

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[3] USD 308 data.
[4] The group made safe harbor.
[5] The group made safe harbor through the hypothesis test at the 75% level of confidence.
[6] The percent standard or above is below target but above the criterion percent when the hypothesis test (at the 99% level of confidence) is applied.

White	Met (87%)	Met (88.4%)	Met (87%)
Asian & Pacific*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	Met (83.3%)	Met (76.7%)[6]	N/A
Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial*	N/A	N/A	Met (86.4%)

Mathematics – Did not meet AYP in 2008; met in 2009; did not meet in 2010. Not yet on Improvement

Student Category	Year & State Target		
	2008 - 64.6%	2009 - 70.5%	2010 – 76.4%
All students	Met (78.4%)	Met (81.1%)	Met (81.3%)
Free & Reduced Meals	Met (71.9%)	Met (75.5%)	Met (76.8%)
Students with Disabilities	No (51.4%)	Met (60.5%)[4]	No (54.7%)
ELL Students	Met (56.2%)	Met (56.3%)[5]	Met (74.4%)[6]
African-American Students	Met (70.2%)	Met (77.3%)	Met (72.5%)[6]
Hispanic	Met (69%)	Met (74.1%)	Met (77.1%)
White	Met (81%)	Met (82.8%)	Met (83.2%)
Asian & Pacific*	N/A	N/A	N/A
American Indian or Alaskan*	Met (73.3%)	N/A	N/A
Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial*	N/A	N/A	Met (80.9%)

Overall Graduation Rate: 2008 – 93.4%; 2009 – 89.9; 2010 – 91.8%

Notes:
*These categories were reconfigured in 2010: Asian-Pacific Islander was split into two categories—Asian and Native Hawaiian or Pacific; Multi-Ethnic was changed to Multi-Racial; and Alaskan was added to American Indian.

The district also boasted 25 standards of excellence certificates in the 2009-10 school year, 14 in reading and 11 in math, and the only two district schools deemed on Improvement according to No Child Left Behind—Lincoln and Avenue A elementary schools—both made AYP in 2009-10.

That said, USD 308 faces several challenges. Students with disabilities did not meet reading or math benchmarks in 2009-2010. Moreover, at least two other groups of students—ELL students and African-American students—are struggling to meet state benchmarks.

The Big Picture

Overall, in addition to generally high levels of student achievement, USD 308 has a number of strengths. The community takes pride in and seems to be very supportive of the school system. Hutchinson passed a $78.8 million bond issue in November 2006, for example, which enabled the district to build a new Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center at Hutchinson High School, add libraries to many schools, and make improvements to all schools in the district.

> "Over the last ten years or so, Hutchinson Public Schools have turned around."
> —*Hutchinson community leader*

USD 308 is also committed to offering students world-class educational opportunities—opportunities which are evident not only in the district's state-of-the-art CTE program, but more broadly through programs such as an International Baccalaureate (IB) program at the middle and high school level, several honors and AP courses, and a variety of well-supported extracurricular activities.

Further, this work is supported by a culture of continuous improvement—evident at the school board level, in the administration, and within each of USD 308's schools.

To continue to improve, however—to, as one board member put it, "move to the next level"—Hutchinson must draw on these strengths and others to address four key systemic challenges:

1) Insufficient prioritization of district initiatives—too much information, too little filtering and integration
2) Increasing student poverty, a shrinking budget, and a stagnant local tax base
3) AYP and instructional challenges for students with disabilities, and increasingly, English Language Learners
4) A transition in leadership.

The report elaborates on these strengths and challenges in the Findings section below. Detailed recommendations about how to address them can be found in the section titled Recommendations for Technical Assistance.

II. Findings

Findings from the needs assessment of Hutchinson are summarized below in the areas of Leadership; Empowering Culture and Human Capital; and Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development.

Leadership

Hutchinson displays a number of clear leadership strengths.

- First, the district has developed a governance structure for the school board—termed "Coherent Governance"—that enables the Board of Education to work at the policy level, focus on the big picture, and hold the superintendent accountable for results. This approach to governance, articulated in board documents and reinforced through regular board training, creates trust between board members and helps foster a culture of continuous improvement at the board level.

- Hutchinson has worked to create a culture of continuous improvement throughout the district. USD 308 has implemented aligned strategic and operating plans, which are monitored regularly and tied directly to student results. The district has also developed "key indicators" for each strategic goal and regularly tracks student progress against those indicators.

- Hutchinson principals and assistant principals appear to have significant building-level responsibility. This enables principals to exercise appropriate authority within their schools and serve as instructional leaders.

- There is clearly a focus on student achievement throughout the Hutchinson school system. This focus manifests in ways that far exceed AYP scores. For instance, Hutchinson recently implemented the Middle Years Program at the middle school level to encourage more students to engage in challenging courses and prepare for the IB program at the high school level.

- There appears to be widespread respect for district leadership in the community. As a number of focus group participants—both parents and community leaders—pointed out, district leaders are perceived by many to have "turned the district around." Recent superintendents were frequently described as visionary and courageous leaders, and the current interim superintendent was praised for her outreach to staff members and the community.

> "Hutchinson Public Schools are committed to providing an engaging learning community for our students, faculty and staff. We challenge our students to achieve the skills to work in the 21st Century, and to reach their full personal and academic potential. Excellence will be accomplished in a trusting, caring and cooperative environment."
>
> —*Hutchinson Public Schools' Vision*

Despite these strengths, however, Hutchinson also faces some clear leadership challenges.

- There appears to be a lack of clarity about what USD 308 expects of all students. Many participants in focus groups—parents, teachers, community members, and principals—were challenged to explain clearly what the district hopes for all students when they graduate from Hutchinson. The district's mission "today and tomorrow: excellence for all" is vague, and the district's vision (see sidebar) may not be resonating. Teachers also reported an overload of visions and missions—"too many missions, too many visions," as one teacher put it—at the district, school, and classroom level.

- In teacher and principal surveys administered prior to the site visit, and in teacher and principal focus groups, it became clear that many teachers and principals are overwhelmed with district initiatives. On the one hand, staff members have access to and appreciate wonderful program materials and rich professional development opportunities. At the same time, however, they lack the time and resources to integrate and prioritize various initiatives. The district's current focus on Marzano's *Art and Science of Teaching* should help to serve as a filter and integration tool. The district needs to deploy this approach strategically over a

number of years to ensure that it operates as an organizing principle for teaching and learning in the district.[7]

- Conversations with principals and teachers suggest that staff members do not always have a clear understanding about how decisions are made and who has the authority to make them. Teacher leaders noted, for instance, that it's unclear to them who makes professional development decisions for the district, and principals pointed out that while they are often asked for input, they are sometimes uncertain about how and to what extent their input is incorporated. This may be a factor of the district's transition in leadership. It is important to note, however, as the district prepares for transition again over the coming year.

- The district's overall operating budget has been cut by almost 12% over the last three years, due primarily to state cuts, but also declining local tax revenue. While this is a challenge for districts across the state of Kansas—and throughout the nation, for that matter—it is particularly challenging in Hutchinson for a couple of reasons. First, with the passage of the bond in 2006, the district has added new facilities and upgraded existing facilities, creating the perception on the part of many in the community that the district is flush with cash. These funds, however, are restricted, and can only be spent on items included in the bond. The addition of new facilities also means that the district must absorb new maintenance costs as well. Additionally, Hutchinson is limited geographically, and as poverty increases in the community, its tax base is shrinking. Hutchinson could increase the local option budget—which is under consideration—but administrators and the board must also look creatively at continuing to leverage local community partnerships and taking advantage of additional federal funds that could come to the district as poverty increases.

- While the district was generally lauded by focus groups for staying in touch with the community—through newspaper, radio, community advisory groups, and now a telephone system that makes automatic calls to parents when children are absent for example—there is an ongoing need to continue to improve communication. When Hutchinson decided to implement a Friday early release program so that elementary school teachers could have collaborative planning time, a number of stakeholders interviewed, especially parents and community members, reported that they didn't learn about the early release decision until they received the school calendar right before school started. Further, they are unclear about why and how the decision was made, and they also expressed concerns about how much instructional time was lost as a result. "An extra five minutes a day does not add up to the amount of time lost," noted one parent.

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[7] Marzano, R. (2007). *Art and Science of Teaching: A comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

- Finally, the district is in the midst of leadership transition. The current interim superintendent, Jan Strecker, is well liked and respected in the district. As a former teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent for many years, Strecker is seen by many as a balanced, caring leader who is well positioned to guide the district through the transition to a new superintendent. The former superintendents' shoes may be difficult to fill, however. Both prior superintendents (Winn and Flowers) are viewed as powerful forces for change in the community—each with her or his own agenda and strengths. One issue clearly facing the new superintendent concerns how to tell the district's story of continuous improvement. Some focus group participants, wondered, for example, what had happened to the Baldridge work one of the former superintendents had initiated. How does it mesh with the district's current focus? As one focus group participant put it, "What happened to Dr. Winn's 'drive for excellence? Are we still moving in that direction?"

Empowering Culture and Human Capital

Hutchinson displays several strengths in the area of Empowering Culture and Human Capital:

- There is significant community support for Hutchinson Public Schools. This was clear not only in interviews with parents, community leaders, and board members, but also with passage of the $78 million bond issue in 2006, and a bond passed earlier in the decade to support technology infusion and maintenance in schools.

- Despite budget cuts, the district found a way to fund full-day kindergarten, providing much needed support to Hutchinson's young learners.

- Hutchinson students have access to state of the art technology, which is upgraded and maintained on an annual basis. There are Smart Boards in virtually every classroom, for example. Moreover, the new Career and Technical Education facility allows students to complete coursework in a variety of technical fields in modern, open, and very well equipped spaces.

- There are ample opportunities for students to complete concurrent coursework through a partnership between Hutchinson Community College and Hutchinson High School. It was reported that one student who graduated recently, for example, received concurrent High School and Associate's Degrees. The schools are located within walking distance of each other, they share space and resources, and students are encouraged to enroll concurrently where possible.

- In addition to Hutchinson Community College, the district boasts several active community partners, including: the Boys and Girls Clubs, which provides afterschool care and enrichment activities funded through 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grants in three schools; Big Brothers, Big

Sisters; Youth Friends, which serves as a free volunteer recruitment and placement agency for the district; the Davis Foundation; the United Way; and many others.

- Teachers are highly qualified. Further, parents, students, and community members praised both teachers and administrators for their work on behalf of Hutchinson's students.

- The district appears to have very strong extracurricular activities. In addition to state champion debate and football programs, Hutchinson also has robust music, intramurals, athletics, and after school programming at several elementary schools.

- The reconfiguration of middle schools several years ago—though controversial at the time—seems to have united the community and its students. While middle schools used to be divided along economic lines, now all Hutchinson students attend one middle school for seventh grade and another for eighth grade. Though students must transition from one school to another, both schools share the same principal (they each have an assistant principal), an aligned curriculum, and the same space layout, which makes transitioning from one building to another easier than it might otherwise be.

- It was clear from interviews with all stakeholders that the high school has done an excellent job of cultivating good will among parents, students, and community members. Through "caught you being good" calls—calls initiated by administrators on behalf of teachers and other high school staff—for instance, discipline incidents appear to be declining and parents are thrilled to receive good news about their children's accomplishments.

Along with these strengths, however, Hutchinson must also confront several challenges:

- The teacher evaluation process has not been updated for 10 years. Currently, teacher evaluation is not linked to student performance. Hutchinson is part of a statewide evaluation team and sees participation in this team as an opportunity to update the evaluation process. Administrative evaluations were updated two years ago.

- Parent and community focus group participants expressed frustration that schools have become too test-driven. Parents noted that many schools begin preparing students for state assessment tests early in the year, and that AYP has become the overriding concern of schools—especially elementary schools.

> "It's all about AYP anymore."
> —*Hutchinson parent*

- Parents, community members, and some teachers expressed concern about kids "falling through the cracks." In some schools, for example, students are not

retained (in fact many teachers we spoke with believed that the district did not retain ANY students, even young students; we learned from principals that this is not the case), and students tell teachers that there is nothing they can do to them if they don't complete schoolwork. Teachers also noted that some students appear to be truant frequently, but it's not clear who's keeping track of them, or how many kids are dropping out. No one blamed this on the school system per se, but rather made the case that someone in the community needed to be looking after "these children."

- Parents, teachers, and administrators identified persistent challenges around parent engagement in some schools. The district appears to be very aware of this problem, and school leaders are taking proactive steps to address it.

- The addition of Friday early release time has generated some angst among parents and community members. It also appears to have created some ill will toward the district, and more specifically toward teachers. Though generally teachers are described as caring and committed, we also heard the sentiment on the part of some parents and community members that "teachers are doing the bare minimum in terms of time in the classroom."

- There also appear to be some disconnects between schools and community partners. Partners noted for example, that in some schools it had been difficult to communicate effectively with teachers and administrators about what afterschool programs were available to students and how staff could take advantage of 21st CCLC funding to purchase supplies and other materials that could be used by schools after 21st CCLC federal funding ended.

- Discipline and behavioral challenges appear to be approached differently in different schools. Special education and general education teachers pointed out that there was not a consistent approach to behavior and discipline across schools. According to the teachers with whom we spoke, some schools take a more punitive approach than others. Principals also noted that they have seen an escalation of behavior problems in recent years, and that they would like support from a behavioral interventionist.

Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development

Findings related to the areas of Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Professional Development are based upon a comparative analysis of information from the following three sources: (1) student achievement data; (2) perceptions identified by Hutchinson educators on surveys of educational practices, and by representatives from all constituent groups during focus groups and interviews; and (3) data collected during classroom visits, which document to what extent effective teaching/learning practices are being implemented.

More detail about the data collected during classroom visits using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process can be found in the Appendix of this report.

Curriculum and Assessment

USD 308's curriculum and assessments are key strengths for Hutchinson; they clearly support the quality of education students receive in the district.

- First, an outstanding, rigorous, intentional, and aligned curriculum is available at all levels. Strategic and operational plans are highly organized, detailed, and aligned, and monitoring is built into the implementation process. For example, the district has a Gauge of Implementation of District Initiatives, based on principals' assessments. This year, 21st Century skills are being embedded in the curriculum as well.

- USD 308 has excellent curricular options for both college-bound and career and technical students, with opportunities for certification in a variety of fields including: welding, auto body, auto mechanics, medical sciences, building trades, and CISCO networking. In addition to regular and honors core courses, the state-of-the-art Hutchinson Career and Technical Education Academy offers 120 courses in ten areas (Transportation, Distribution and Logistics; Health Science; Information Technology; Manufacturing; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math; Communications; Education and Training; Business, Marketing and Management; and Human Services) including 13 dual credit courses at Hutchinson Community College (HCC). The district has also implemented articulation agreements with Sterling College and Kansas State University. HHS currently offers 18 honors courses, five Advanced Placement Courses, 12 International Baccalaureate (IB), and three other advanced courses. Seven advanced courses are available at the middle school level in 7th and 8th grades in the areas of English/Writing, Reading, Literature, Algebra I, and Geometry.

- The curriculum is uniform across elementary schools and vertically aligned

between school levels. According to the district, a significant portion of Hutchinson' students move between district schools. With a uniform curriculum, students are exposed to the same curriculum no matter what school they attend.

- USD 308 uses a full range of assessments to assess student needs and measure student achievement. In addition to the Kansas Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Writing Assessments, the district uses Compass Math, criterion referenced tests (CRT) in math and writing; Scott Foresman baseline, criterion referenced tests, and end of year tests; Bader early reading assessments; STAR Reading; Phonemic Awareness Assessment; Hayes School Publishing (HSP) tests; and kindergarten reading and math assessments. Students may take the alternate assessment or the Kansas Assessment of Modified Measures (KAMM), if deemed appropriate in their IEP's. Students who are not proficient in English take the Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessment (KELPA) to ascertain at what level they speak, read, write, and understand English. Students identified as possibly in need of special education services also receive an appropriate set of diagnostic tests.

- The district uses the large volume of information derived from these assessments to make data-driven instruction and professional development decisions.

- In elementary school, a one-page student assessment record is maintained on each student so teachers and administrators can easily check students' patterns of gains and monitor instructional needs. As students transition to 9th grade, assistant principals at the high school verify that they are being placed in appropriate classes.

- The Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) is in the beginning stages of implementation. During the 2007-08 school year, Hutchinson began to train individual teachers. In 2010-11, MTSS will be implemented systemically. MTSS is viewed as a preventative approach that seeks to catch and remediate student challenges when they first manifest, so that challenges will not grow into major problems. At the same time it allows teachers and staff to provide students with a full spectrum of supports, based on the students' performance, from individual and small group instruction within the regular classroom, to more time in specialized classes.

- Curriculum maps appear to be especially helpful to special education staff as they help teach the core curriculum.

"Now I know where I'm going!"

—*Special education teacher*

Despite a generally strong curriculum and assessment system, there are challenges as well.

- Monitoring of the implementation of curricula with fidelity and successful integration of the various initiatives have only just begun. More systematic implementation and integration monitoring and assistance are needed.

- The curriculum, though well planned, has limitations. Instructional coaches, ESOL teachers, and special education staff are concerned that the curriculum may be too inflexible to meet diverse student needs.

> "Fidelity to curriculum won't meet the needs of every child."
> —*Teacher*

- Teachers, administrators, and parents in focus groups expressed concern that the focus on state tests limits the curriculum that is actually taught and may be leading to gaps in skills and knowledge.

- USD 308 has many transition points; as students move from 6th to 7th grade, 7th to 8th grade, and 8th grade to high school, each move entails transitioning to a new building. Many students find transitions challenging, and with each grade in a different building, teachers and administrators have to make a focused effort to align curriculum vertically and communicate individual student needs effectively.

- There appear to be varying degrees of teacher and administrator resistance to implementing MTSS across schools and within schools, particularly around the paperwork involved in documenting and addressing student needs.

- Students taking or eligible to take adaptive assessments may not be receiving the full accommodations to which they are entitled, limiting their performance on state tests and adding to the district's difficulties in meeting AYP goals.

Instruction

Table 1 presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 67%) and principals (response rate 76%) administered online by Cross & Joftus. Instructional strategies that principals and teachers *believe* are most strongly evident and are least evident, are highlighted below. Additional instructional strengths and challenges are identified later in this section.

In general, principals identified a few sound instructional strategies as strongly evident. The sound instructional strategies that *principals* believe are most *strongly evident* in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited by 77% of principals as strongly evident and 0% as not evident or minimally evident)
- using data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development (cited by 77% of principals as strongly evident and by 0% as minimally evident or not evident).

Principals and teachers are in agreement about the *least evident* sound instructional strategy:

- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities (cited by 23% of principals as strongly evident and by 15% as minimally evident or not evident; citied by 36% of the teachers as strongly evident and by 22% as minimally evident or not evident).

In general, teachers' views are not significantly different from principals'. The sound instructional strategies that *teachers* believe are most *strongly evident* in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 76% of teachers and not evident or minimally evident by 2%)
- using a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections (cited by 60% of teachers as strongly evident and by 5% as minimally evident or not evident).

Table II—Extent to Which Principals and Teachers Believe that Sound Instructional Strategies Are Present in Their Schools

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
Educators create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.	77%	0%	76%	2%
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	77%	0%	59%	3%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	62%	8%	49%	17%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	54%	15%	59%	3%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by	54%	0%	48%	11%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.				
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	54%	0%	44%	11%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	54%	0%	30%	19%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	54%	8%	54%	6%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	54%	8%	47%	4%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	54%	8%	38%	17%
Educators use a variety of appropriate instructional strategies and resources, including technology, to actively engage students, encourage positive social interaction, and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and interdisciplinary connections.	38%	8%	60%	5%
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	38%	15%	43%	9%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	38%	15%	34%	15%
Adequate resources (human,	31%	15%	28%	19%

Please rate the extent to which you believe the following instructional practices are evident in your school.	Principals		Teachers	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.				
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and resources.	23%	0%	46%	10%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	23%	0%	45%	13%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	23%	8%	40%	10%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	23%	15%	36%	22%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	15%	0%	29%	22%

Teacher Response Rate = approximately 286/427
Principal Response Rate = 13/17

Source: Cross & Joftus survey of Hutchinson principals and teachers October 2010.
*The response option "Evident" was deleted from this presentation to help highlight differences.
^The response option "No Opinion" was deleted from this presentation. Two percent or less of teachers and 0% of principals selected this option on any response.

In addition to the survey responses, 96 classroom observations, reviews of district and state assessment data, and conversations with focus group participants indicate of number strengths.

- Hutchinson maintains safe, orderly, and clean schools conducive to student learning. This finding was reflected in teacher and principal surveys—77% of principals and 76% of teachers agreed that safe, orderly, and clean learning environments were strongly evident in their schools. School visits and classroom

observations overwhelmingly corroborated this finding as well—safe, orderly, and clean learning environments were observed in 100% of middle and high school classrooms and 95% elementary classrooms visited (see Appendix for more detail). Further, with the passage of a $78.8 million bond in 2006, instruction now takes place in district buildings that all have been significantly upgraded, rehabilitated, and/or newly constructed.

- There appears to be consistent collaboration between general education and special education teachers on instructional issues. In addition to regularly scheduled planning time and newly instituted every other Friday afternoon collaboration time at the elementary level, teachers interact on a day-to-day basis, discussing instructional content and creating strategies to ensure that students with disabilities are being taught the course content and receiving instruction in the core curriculum.

> "It's amazing how much more special education staff members are involved with all staff compared to the district I came from two years ago."
>
> "Special education teachers were included in the district math textbook selection."
>
> "Through planning and collaboration, special education and regular staff members know what others teach. There is a good tiered system at the high school."
>
> *—Special education teachers*

- Hutchinson is using Marzano's *Art and Science of Teaching* as the basis for a common instructional framework across the district.

- USD 308 is taking proactive steps to meet the needs of its increasing ELL population. Hutchinson has 244 students designated as English language learners, with a very large concentration of elementary school students—90 out 171 (52.6%)—at Avenue A Elementary School. Since 2008, the district has provided support (through the provision of tuition reimbursement, materials, coursework, and time) for all teaching staff. All staff at Avenue A are participating in an ESOL program this school year.

- Additionally, the district has established an intensive program for newcomers with little or no English language experience, and it offers a summer school program designed to enable K-6 ELL students to build and maintain skills developed during the school year. Avenue A also purchased Dyn-Ed, a technology program that focuses on listening and speaking skills for ELLs through a three-year grant.

There are some clear instructional challenges, as well, however.

- Though survey results suggest that teachers and principals believe they are using effective instructional practices to meet rigorous academic standards, observations of 96 classrooms in Hutchinson identified the need to increase the following

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teaching practices, which were "minimally evident" in the classrooms visited (see Appendix for specific percentages related to these and other strategies). Improvement in these areas may bring about higher student achievement for those students not yet meeting proficiency benchmarks. Specifically, observations indicate there is a need to:

- o Design lessons to include more teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice with teacher support
- o Adjust presentations of information to accommodate for kinesthetic learning styles
- o Increase the use of Marzano's research-based instructional strategies:[8] identify similarities and differences; summarize and take notes; represent knowledge in multiple ways; provide opportunities for cooperative learning; generate and test hypotheses; and use higher level questioning and advance organizers
- o Provide instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking, aligned to state assessment questions that require cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

- The district has invested heavily in technology for classrooms including Smart Boards and laptop computers. With the exception of a few classrooms, however, we saw little or no use of this technology by students in the 96 classrooms visited at the elementary, middle, and high school buildings.

- There are multiple pressures competing for instructional time. The following issues were raised in various focus group conversations or in the survey:

- o Even though teachers and principals view professional development opportunities as valuable and applicable, the wealth of professional development available to teachers appears to be cutting into instructional delivery time.
- o With the introduction of the every other Friday teacher collaboration time at the elementary level, parents and others raised concerns that students are receiving less instructional time than in years past.

- Building walkthroughs and discussions with focus groups indicate that students with disabilities may not be receiving sufficient direct instruction from certified teaching staff, and at the same time, para-educators may not be receiving consistent and appropriate supervision from teaching staff. Special education staff in focus groups noted that para-educators do a significant amount of direct teaching at the elementary level. As one teacher

> "There is a lack of consistent communication from staff to paras. Some are great at it, some are not."
>
> —*Paraprofessional focus group*

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[8] Marzano, R. (2001). *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

put it, "there are now more students with disabilities than a special education teacher can handle, so paras are now having to do more."

- Related to this and particularly noteworthy are the data from the Kansas IDEA State Performance Plan related to "least restrictive environment" (LRE). For three successive years (with the most recent data for FY 2008-09 reported on March 15, 2010), the district has not met the state targets for Indicator 5 for Least Restrictive Environment for student learning—2009 data indicate that only 49% of students with disabilities were included in the regular classroom for **80% or more** of their school day, a figure nine points below the state target; and 11% of students with disabilities spend **40% or less** of their school day in the regular classroom, receiving 60% or more of their daily instruction <u>outside</u> the regular classroom. Eleven percent is more than two percentage points above the state target.

- The ELL population is growing quickly in USD 308—it has more than doubled over the past five years—and it includes a small group of newcomers with little or no English experience, and in some cases, little or no formal schooling. While the district has made and continues to make concerted efforts to meet the educational needs of English language learners, challenges remain:

  o Interviewees noted that there is a great deal of paperwork associated with serving ELLs, and this tends to interfere with instructional time and planning.
  o USD 308 has very few bilingual teaching staff, and this is true even at Avenue A Elementary School, where more than 50% of the students are identified as ELLs.
  o Even with the ESOL licensure process underway for many regular teaching staff, there is concern that additional ESL specialists might be warranted, especially with the growing ELL student population.
  o Currently, the ESL coordinator has both coordination (.2 time) and teaching duties (.8 time). This spilt leaves little time to devote to coordination activities, making it very difficult to manage ELL challenges as they arise and devote time to working with staff strategically.
  o PALSS classroom observation data indicate minimal implementation of teaching practices to support ELL students through the use of culturally responsive readings/perspectives/materials—such strategies were observed in 8% of high school classrooms, 11% of middle school classrooms, and only 7% elementary classrooms visited. Strategies to address diverse language needs were also rare—they were observed in 0% of high school classrooms, 5% of middle school classrooms, and 8% elementary classrooms visited.

Professional Development

The needs assessment uncovered several professional development strengths.

- Professional learning communities (PLCs) are active in all schools. The PLCs serve as a forum for teachers to discuss curriculum decisions and alignment issues. PLC time is also used to collaboratively assess student learning and plan appropriate instruction.

- The district provides significant support for professional development and access to rich opportunities for learning, both in terms of programs offered and funds to support professional development:

  - Along with the purchase of various technology hardware and software, the district provides ongoing training and support for technology use in instruction.
  - Special education teachers can participate in all the professional development opportunities provided to general education teachers.
  - The district is offering incentives for teaching staff to obtain ESOL licensure, with the most concentrated effort at Avenue A. In addition to embedding some professional development into the school day, the district reimburses staff for coursework and materials at Newman University, where much of the ESOL professional development is offered. The district recognizes that completion of the ESOL licensure process is time intensive so has relieved participating staff from some other general professional development as well.

> "The district has included special education teachers in professional development. I get so much."
> —*Special education teacher*

  - 21st Century skills are embedded in professional development as well.
  - Additionally, four ESL teachers and coordinators attended Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol (SIOP) training, which helped them design the newcomer's program. The goals of this training appear to be complementary to and overlap with the *Art and Science of Teaching* goals.

> "The district push is to help staff obtain ESOL licensure so teachers have higher performing ELLs in the room. This has provided really helpful strategies for all students, not just ELLs. It also dovetails well with the Marzano training."
> —*Teacher*

USD 308 must also confront some important professional development challenges.

- Professional development activities appear to be overwhelming to many teachers and administrators. In addition to professional development initiatives such as, but not limited to, Ruby Payne's Framework of Poverty, Marzano's *Art and Science of Teaching*, MTSS, and DuFour's Professional Learning Communities, teachers have been exposed to a variety of other recent professional development, as well. Given this large volume in a relatively short timeframe, and with some overlap in

concepts, many teachers and some principals expressed frustration. Staff members are unclear about how to prioritize and integrate what they've learned. As some teachers noted in a focus group conversation, "our attitude to new training is that this too shall pass."

- Additionally, teachers in focus groups noted that it was unclear to them who made professional development decisions and to what extent decisions were based on input from staff. Moreover, it was not always clear to some staff why they were asked to participate in some professional development activities.

> "Special education teachers keep being sent to math training, but it doesn't match the special education curriculum."
> —*Special education teachers*

- Although paraprofessionals participate in some professional development activities, it became apparent in various focus group discussions that access to professional development varies considerably within school buildings, across the district, and among the paraprofessionals.

- While new staff appreciate the opportunity to participate in the district's "new teacher induction program," provided during the four days leading up to the start of school, they expressed concern about receiving an overwhelming amount of broad information (e.g., an encapsulated review of Marzano's *Art and Science of Teaching*), yet not gaining more practical information (e.g., "how do I get copies of materials") they require to start the school year effectively in their respective schools.

III. Recommendations for Technical Assistance

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district could most benefit from technical assistance and to design that technical assistance in a way that will have the greatest impact on the district's school quality and student achievement.

Two key strengths of the district are its curriculum system and board governance approach. Given that many of the KLN districts face considerable challenges in these areas, Cross & Joftus would like the district to consider taking a leadership role in one or two of these areas with a consortium of interested districts.

At the outset of this report, four key systemic challenges were identified:

1) Insufficient prioritization of district initiatives—too much information, too little filtering and integration
2) Increasing student poverty, a shrinking budget, and a stagnant local tax base
3) AYP and instructional challenges for students with disabilities, and increasingly, English Language Learners
4) A transition in leadership.

To address these challenges and others identified in this report, technical assistance should address the following recommendations:

1) The leadership team (especially leaders within the Division of Student Learning, the Executive Director for Human Resources and Continuous Improvement, along with principals) should work collaboratively with teacher leaders to review and prioritize district instructional/professional development initiatives as they are tied to curriculum and assessment, and connected to larger district goals. This review should address questions such as the following:

   a. Based on the instructional needs of students—as determined by classroom observations (see Recommendation 2) and student data—what's most important for all students? For different groups of students, especially English language learners and students with disabilities?
   b. How effectively are current instructional approaches and corresponding professional development meeting these needs? Where are the gaps?
   c. How can staff—principals, teachers and paraprofessional staff—use and integrate approaches to meet students' needs more effectively? How, for example, are MTSS and the *Art and Science of Teaching* connected?
   d. What can/should be let go? How can the new teacher induction program be streamlined and focused as a result?
   e. How can professional development time be maximized so that staff members receive the resources they need to meet students' instructional needs?
   f. What supports do principals need to ensure that professional development is tied to instructional needs unique to each building?
   g. Are students receiving sufficient instructional time from highly qualified teachers? If not, how can professional development or meeting time be restructured to ensure that there is adequate instructional time?

2) Further develop PLCs and use classroom observations as catalysts for implementing research-based effective educational practices by:

   a. conducting classroom visits using common criteria and providing feedback to educators
   b. analyzing data using a consistent protocol to determine the extent of implementation of effective teaching/learning practices
   c. determining future professional development practices using observation data in collaboration with other data.

3) As part of the process of strengthening instruction and professional development, continue to provide support for and enhance the roles of the new instructional coaches.

4) Review decision-making processes and delineate who has the authority to make which decisions and how decisions will be made. The results of this process should be communicated to all district staff. This is especially important during

the superintendent transition process.

5) Work with an external consultant to conduct a resource review. This review should include a look at internal and external funding resources; ways to leverage local, state, and federal funding; possible community support, etc.

6) Given a relatively high percentage of students with disabilities and an increasing number of ELLs, both of which are facing growing AYP challenges, the district should a) review its current staffing and evaluate whether students are receiving (enough) direct instruction from appropriate staff, b) look at supervision and support for existing staff, and c) explore additional search strategies to locate and hire staff deemed essential to the district's needs.

7) Work in collaboration with KSDE's Special Education Technical Assistance Support Network (and external consultants, if needed) to a) make sure that teachers and paraprofessionals are using the best practices for students with IEPs and b) review testing accommodations.

8) Continue to enhance communications. Building on tools such as the PowerPoint developed for this KLN visit, communications (both internally and externally) should focus on telling the story of USD 308 in a clear and coherent fashion— explaining where the district has been and where it's headed; what success looks like for USD 308 students; and what a culture of continuous improvement means, so that everyone knows that the district is working to ensure that "students achieve the skills to live and work in the 21st Century, and to reach their full personal and academic potential." Communication should be as transparent as possible about the superintendent search and transition process, and also seek to address parent and community concerns about students who may be falling through the cracks, instructional time, Friday collaboration time, etc.

9) Examine the issues of student support, discipline, truancy, and dropout, and work with an expert to develop and implement a consistent behavior management policy across district schools.

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Joftus will contact the Hutchinson superintendent to finalize a technical assistance plan that includes 24 days of external support for the time period January through October of 2011. This plan, developed in collaboration between the senior leadership of the district and Cross & Joftus will describe in detail the goals, objectives, activities, service provider, and timeline of the technical assistance.

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NOTES ON APPENDIX (See attached PDF)
Findings from Classroom Observations
HUTCHINSON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process, Cross & Joftus staff in collaboration with representatives from the Kansas State Department of Education and other district staff visited classrooms and recorded observations of effective "teaching" demonstrated by the teacher and "learning" demonstrated by the students.

The entries under the "plus" column on the left side of the charts attached show the percentage of classrooms visited in which research-based practices that consistently contribute to enhanced learning were observed. The entries under the "delta" column on the right side highlight areas that the district should address to improve the teaching and learning process.

Data were aggregated in school-level alike (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) groupings to determine the percentage of classrooms in which evidence of the specified practices were observed. For reporting purposes in the narrative, we describe practices as having *strong evidence* if they were observed in 70% or more of the classrooms visited, *evidence* if they were observed in 50-69% of classrooms visited, and *minimal evidence* if they were observed in less than 50% of classrooms visited.