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Needs Analysis of Wichita Public Schools

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

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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).

The rationale for this model, called the Learning Network, was 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 five participating districts focused on their ability to foster and sustain a school improvement process. The needs analysis comprised analysis of student achievement and other data; surveys of teachers, principals, and district administrators; and three-day site visits[1] 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 Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success (K-PALSS). All needs assessment activities were designed to both 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 concluded with a debriefing conducted by Cross & Joftus for the district's leadership that included a presentation of some preliminary findings. This report presents all findings and represents the culmination of the needs assessment for Wichita Public Schools.

Wichita, currently being served by an interim superintendent, has a great deal with which to be proud. Student achievement is on the rise, 36 schools were recognized by the Kansas State Board of Education for receiving the Standard of Excellence (the highest honor from the Kansas Department of Education), Northeast Magnet High School was one of eight high schools nationally selected by the U.S. Department of Education as a successful magnet high school, and the Wichita Public School bond issue passed on November 4, 2008, showing that the public supports the district's efforts and helping to

[1] The site visit for Wichita occurred November 3-5, 2008.

fund additional classrooms and schools, storm shelters, and upgrades for technical education programs and facilities.

Despite these accomplishments, Wichita is not, and should not be, satisfied. Serving a poor (67.2% of the students), ethnically and racially diverse (45.4% White, 21.5% Black, 21.1% Hispanic, and 10.6% ELL) student population of 48,155 (Kansas's largest district), Wichita student performance remains low relative to the state. For example, in 2007, 71.1% of Wichita fourth graders were proficient in reading compared to 84.8% in Kansas, and 73.1% of Wichita fourth graders were proficient in math compared to 86.0% in Kansas. And, as is many other districts, significant achievement gaps remain, most notably for English language learners and African Americans. Wichita did not demonstrate AYP for the fifth straight year, missing in 2008 for most subgroups including all students (reading), students receiving free and reduced price lunch (reading and math), students with disabilities (reading), and African American students (reading and math).

II. Findings

Findings from the needs assessment of Wichita are summarized below in the areas of leadership, empowering culture, human resources and professional development, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Leadership

One of the main, overarching findings of the district needs analysis is that the district lacks systemic coherence. Coherence means that "the elements of a school district work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy."[2]

The district's goals are to increase the graduation rate to 100 percent, reduce the achievement gaps among student populations, increase the achievement level of all students, and increase the percentage of graduates who are prepared and competent. The (implied) theory of action is to improve teaching and learning through "a focus on classroom instruction; a culture that emphasizes continuous learning; continuing professional development for all staff; and alignment in standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development." This theory of action assumes that the district's central office structure is organized in a way that supports integrated strategies and actions to improve teaching and learning.

The problem is that the district is not organized and often does not function in ways to support this theory of action. A Chief Academic Officer (CAO) supervises all instructional coaches and several instructional divisions (e.g., Special Education, ELL) in addition to supervising the planning, preparing, and delivering of professional development to the schools; and four assistant superintendents work with the school

[2] Childress, S., R. Elmore, A. Grossman, and Caroline King (2007). Note on the PELP Coherence Framework. Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University.

principals to implement the curriculum. The assistant superintendents are responsible for supervising and evaluating principals. This structure fails to support the theory of action for several reasons:

- The CAO and the four assistant superintendents are managed loosely by the superintendent, work independently within their respective areas of responsibility, and often are not coordinated with one another.

- The roles and duties of the CAO and the four assistant superintendents need to be more clearly defined. While there are weekly meetings among the CAO and assistant superintendents, there is a need for more clarity and understanding of their relationships and duties.

- The planning, implementation, and follow-up of professional development is not always coordinated among the CAO's departments, the assistant superintendents, and schools. When asked who is responsible for professional development in the district, some staff reported the CAO while others reported the assistant superintendents. In addition, the coaches play a key role in professional development and there is some confusion regarding their reporting structure.

- There is a significant lack of communication regarding the district's goal of improving student achievement between the non-instructional and instructional sides of the district. While the heads of these areas meet weekly with the superintendent, little time is spent in meetings discussing the roles and priorities of all departments in supporting teaching and learning.

- There is a perception of the district administration operating with an organization of "siloes" that often do not communicate and coordinate planning, decisions, and actions.

Without a permanent superintendent, the district will be challenged to foster systemic coherence. Indeed, the greatest challenge facing the Board of Education is to hire a new superintendent this spring. Fortunately, the Board has at least three advantages working in its favor:

- It is unified in its efforts to find a new superintendent who will focus the district and the community on improving student achievement.

- The Board has a strategic plan that it reviews and updates each year and has demonstrated its commitment to supporting students and schools by, for example, using recent, significant increases in funding to increase teacher salaries and resources (e.g., academic coaches) for the district's highest poverty schools and to provide extra resources for professional development.

- The district has effectively planned and implemented campaigns resulting in the passage of two major bond issues in recent years to improve facilities.

The Board, however, also must address at least three challenges:

- Any division among Board members must be addressed if the Board is to be able to operate efficiently and effectively and if the district is to foster and sustain systemic coherence. Failure to do so may have a negative impact on the employment of a new superintendent as well as future district progress in reaching district goals.

- While the Board uses data in its decision-making process, members reported a need to have more relevant data regarding student performance and budgeting earlier in their planning process. Board members reported that they had not received student achievement data for individual schools.

- Although the district has a strategic plan, a new one is needed. The existing plan was written in the 1990s and currently has little or no meaning to staff and community members. Few stakeholders interviewed knew what the strategic plan was or even whether one existed, and little or no input is provided from staff and community during the Board's yearly review of the plan. The process to develop a new plan should be undertaken by the Board as soon as possible.

Other findings related to the leadership of the district include the following:

- The staff in key administrative positions are experienced, capable, and committed to the district's focus on improving student achievement for all students. Moreover, the district is committed to establishing effective leaders at all levels. For instance, there is a partnership with Wichita State University to prepare future principals, and new coaching positions have been created in schools and staffed with teacher leaders.

- While the district has provided additional support staff to schools at a considerable cost, there is some concern about the effectiveness and impact of the additional staff. There are questions as to whether some of the funds used to provide the additional staff could have been better utilized to employ additional teachers to continue to lower the PTR or to provide additional support to the "bubble" schools in the district.

- There is a need for more transparency and input into the budgeting process. The district currently has a process that involves Board members, staff, union members, and community members in budget planning. Both community and staff reported a need for more information and input regarding the budget process and decision-making regarding the budget. Staff report little change in budgets from year to year except for new money. Both staff and community expressed a need for strategic planning and prioritizing of budget decisions to support

improving student achievement. Board members reported a need for additional training in reading and understanding the district's budget.

- Building leaders expressed concern regarding the process for getting work done on facility needs. There is a lack of communication regarding the status of work orders that are submitted. Also, the process that requires schools to pay for any work not considered standard maintenance is a sore point among school leadership and should be reviewed. Schools report high and sometimes inconsistent costs for such work, and hiring outside contractors is "frowned upon." School staff report doing much of the work on their own. There were also concerns expressed about transportation schedules that do not support student learning.

- There is a need to communicate and cooperate more effectively with business and government leaders in the city. While these leaders expressed an appreciation for the difficult work facing the school district and the progress the district has made, they also expressed a need to repair the lines of communication between district leaders and community leadership.

Empowering Culture

Wichita exhibits some clear strengths that help to foster a school and district culture that supports the teaching and learning process:

- It appears as though teachers and school and district leaders have high expectations and push students to succeed at higher levels. This is evidenced, for example, by the recent decision to have the district pay the cost of AP exams for all students in AP classes and by principals' decisions to offer extra "zero hour AP classes" to increase their availability.

- The AVID program—which works in middle and high schools to create an expectation among students, parents, and teachers that students will attend college—is widely viewed as a success.

- The district has four small, alternative high schools, which most respondents described as successful in keeping youth in school and helping them to graduate.

- The America's Choice model, which is being implemented in all middle schools that have not made adequate yearly progress over a period of years, is viewed as generally successful although teachers expressed a need for more information about it.

- Magnet programs, started during the desegregation era, appear to be a positive force for improving culture and a focus on academics.

- Schools have been quite successful in helping students improve their organizational skills using tools such as agendas, binders, etc. Schools are also using positive incentives to improve student behavior and motivation.

- The district is trying to engage and empower parents. For example, some schools hold parent-teacher conferences in the local Boys and Girls Club for the convenience of parents. The Toyota Family Literacy program was mentioned favorably as giving ELL parents opportunity to learn English. There is a "Parent-Link" phone system that is used to communicate with parents. Finally, school websites were also mentioned as being useful to parents, but there are major concerns about the unevenness of information.

- Parents were extremely appreciative of their opportunity to participate in the Learning Network focus groups. They urged the district and schools to conduct regular meetings of this sort in order to communicate clearly on issues like the transfer of principals and to improve multi-cultural awareness.

- There is evidence that students with disabilities are making significant progress and that special education teachers are beginning to deliver the regular curriculum to these students.

Wichita also must address some challenges relative to an empowering culture:

- Although each school has a part-time parent development coordinator, communication with parents and civic leaders can be greatly improved from the central office and schools.

- The district's policy of moving principals from school to school every few years is viewed as both a strength—since it helps get strong leaders into relatively weak schools—and a challenge, since it creates disruption and creates discomfort among teachers and parents.

- There is a perception among teachers and school and district administrators that there is significant inequity of resources between Title I schools and non-Title I schools. Wichita serves a very high percentage (67.2%) of low-income students. In an effort to concentrate resources on serving these students, the district appropriately set a high poverty threshold (75%) for schools to receive Title I funding, which supplements any other funding the school receives. The problem is that Wichita has many schools that serve large percentages of poor students that fall under the 75% threshold. For example, Blackbear Bosin serves a student population that is 73.8% poor, but the school does not receive Title I funding. Overall, there are 11 schools that are above the district average for poverty but below the district's poverty threshold for receiving Title I.

- Teachers expressed concern that the focus of their schools was preparing students for NCLB testing and that they were being pulled out of class too frequently for professional development.

- According to a survey of employers, a majority of businesses (73%) report that Wichita's students do not graduate with the skills needed to be successful. Business leaders, however, express strong support for the new technology high school and indicated that they could and wanted to do more to support schools.

Human Resources and Professional Development

In the past five years, Wichita has implemented numerous strategic changes within its Department of Human Resources. Most of the changes are centered on student improvement via the recruiting and retaining qualified staff, communicating the policies and procedures associated with educational management, and developing collegial relationships with community organizations, businesses, and universities.

Key findings related to human resources in Wichita include the following:

- There appears to be a low turnover rate (7.6%) among certified staff.

- The recent implementation of AppliTrack, an online application program for teachers and principals, is widely lauded by district and school administrators. Principals indicated that the program is extremely user friendly, has made hiring teachers significantly more efficient, and has enabled them to staff their buildings sooner than they had in previous years. The partnership with the Urban League is also considered a boon to the district's ability to recruit and retain teachers.

- The human resources department recently instituted other procedures that have received favorable reviews:
    - Movement toward a paperless environment, including electronic posting of the district's policies.
    - Development of an administrator's guide to personnel issues (the Green Book). The Green Book was developed as an administrator's quick reference to key personnel issues. HR also increased its support to administrators with regard to personnel issues.
    - Publishing of a monthly newsletter that described anonymously personnel issues that had arising in the district and provided steps for others to avoiding similar problems.

- The mentoring for new teachers and principals, "grow your own" teacher and math teacher, and teacher and principal leadership programs also received favorable reviews.

- Concern was expressed over the ability of the district to recruit teachers for special education, ESOL, and secondary science and math. District administrators voiced

support for the State Board of Education to review teacher qualification requirements and provide reciprocity for teachers from other states.

- Nearly all of the principals interviewed expressed a need for more effective teacher-evaluation and exist interview processes than those currently in place. The district is currently in the process of revising the teacher-evaluation process, but some principals were not aware of this development.

- The district currently pays about $3 million per year to provide $1,500 bonuses for teachers and principals in high-poverty schools. Providing differentiated pay for educators in high-need subjects and schools is a potential best practice, but there is a widespread belief that the bonus system as currently structured is not a good use of limited resources.

Key findings related to professional development in Wichita include the following:

- Wichita School District has approximately 175 coaches in its 11 high schools, 13 middle schools, and 52 elementary schools. The availability of coaches is consistent with best practices. Three issues, however, should be considered:

    - The district is spending over $17 million for 11 different types of coaches, each with their own responsibilities and supervisory relationships. There is widespread agreement that the quality, activities, and goals of the various coaches vary markedly and frequently lead to confusion and lack of focus among school staff.

    - In general, teachers said that they would like to see academic coaches in classrooms more frequently modeling instructional strategies.

    - There are concerns that there is an inequitable allocation of coaches. As noted in the section on empowering culture, the district has appropriately focused resources on the highest poverty schools. This policy, however, has provided stark differences of resources between some schools with very similar student demographics and may need to be reviewed.

- In addition to the 11 district-wide professional development days, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) sessions are conducted every Wednesday morning for 40 minutes prior to the beginning of school for all schools in the district. The intent of the PLC time, as described by central office staff, is a time for teachers to meet, share instructional issues, review data, or collaboratively develop strategies for helping children. PLCs are highly valued in many schools and may serve as a potential best practice. Some teachers and principals, however, suggested that the quality of the PLCs vary widely across schools. Some teachers, for example, said that PLC time was wasted and/or used by principals for administrative, rather than instructional improvement, purposes. Principals

agreed that the district needs to build capacity among schools to make most effective use of this time.

- The student-achievement data-analysis process is not uniform and varies widely in quality. Teachers reported that their data-analysis sessions with coaches ranged from coaches giving teachers a stack of reports and telling them to disaggregate the information to coaches disaggregating the data and discussing the data and instructional strategies with teachers. Most teachers indicated that they have neither sufficient time to absorb the major lessons from the data-analysis sessions nor adequate follow-up support to implement instructional changes based on the sessions.

- Concern was expressed that very little teacher or principal input went into the planning or implementation of professional development sessions offered and that minimal evaluative input was gathered from school personnel about the professional development sessions attended.

- Instructional technology skills of all staff should be reviewed, needs analysis skills conducted, and processes developed focusing upon the technical skills associated with educational management. The technology structure seems to be in place to access and analyze student and district-wide data. However, school-based and central office staffs do not appear to be using instructional technology components provided.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Findings related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment—while frequently overlapping are presented in those categories below. More detail about the data collected during classroom visitations using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) process, cited below, can be found in the appendix of this report.

Curriculum

Wichita Public Schools exhibits some clear strengths related to curriculum:

- The district uses its "Quality Instructional Framework" to identify strategies and resources to guide the implementation of the pacing guides that accompany written curricular programs at all levels of schooling.

- The district's systematic process for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing the curriculum and the pacing guides occurs during weekly Thursday meetings after 4:00 p.m. and are conducted with the coaches from all schools along with selected or identified teachers who serve on "Instructional Learning Teams" (ILTs).

"The District's Common Assessments (DCA) serve as the accountability measure for the pacing guides." *Administrator*

- To support linkage to continuing education, the district administers the "Kansas Career Pipeline," which provides an interest inventory for students so they can focus on how their education will support attainment of a future career.

- The district is in the second year of implementing "Cultural Proficiency for Leaders" to support skill development in providing a "culturally responsive" academic core.

- K-PALSS observations found ***evidence*** (50-69% of classrooms visited) of teachers providing checks for student understanding and feedback regarding progress with the curriculum (although at the elementary level only 20% of the teachers were observed doing so).

Wichita's challenges relative to the implementation of the curriculum include the following:

- District staff, coaches, teachers, and administrators agree that the extent of implementation of the district's curriculum is at approximately 50% overall, with slightly higher levels at the elementary level due to the "Power of Two" and slightly lower levels at the senior high school level due to the schools' "unique features." There was also general agreement that curriculum implementation is expected to increase due to the "Pacing Guides" now serving as the catalysts for change. There was consensus that if the "Pacing Guides" could be consistently used as a shared frame of reference during classroom observations, then feedback could be provided that focused on data being linked to this common measure.

- Although there are "discussions" about vertical articulation of the curriculum at transition points between the various grade level configurations during the regularly scheduled Instructional Learn Team meetings with coaches and the Learning Services staff, the annual revisions of the "Pacing Guides" could provide explicit guidelines on how the implementation of this intentional focus will be regularly reinforced.

- Focus groups also identified the need for the curricular focus to make explicit links to "continuing education." Currently District Learning Services staff members are developing guidelines for schools to follow in order to link specific practices to the "Graduate Outcomes" document they have created. Principals and teachers felt by including students as well as school and community representatives in the development of those practices it would strengthen the connection between the "Graduate Outcomes" serving as statements of student

advocacy as well as serving to promote the value of education explicitly being linked to student's future "earning power" as productive citizens.

- Even though the district is only in its second year of a five-year plan for implementing "Cultural Proficiency for Leaders," teachers, principals, district administrators, and coaches agreed that progress indicators for implementing a culturally responsive curriculum need to be made explicit in each School Improvement Plan as soon as possible. Currently, according to K-PALSS observations, there is ***minimal evidence*** that effective, culturally relevant practices or strategies that accommodate for the learning needs of ELL students and students with disabilities are being promoted and integrated into instruction.

> "We're good at LOOKING at the achievement gaps…we're just not good at CLOSING them." Academic Coach

- K-PALSS observations found ***evidence*** (50-69% of classrooms visited) of teachers providing checks for student understanding and feedback regarding progress with the curriculum (although at the elementary level only 20% of the teachers did so).

Instruction

In general, Wichita teachers and, to an even more pronounced degree, principals believe that sound instructional practices are strongly evident in their schools. Table 1 presents the results from a survey of teachers (response rate 14.6%) and principals (response rate 67.0%) administered online by Cross & Joftus.

The sound instructional strategies that ***principals*** believe are most ***strongly evident*** in their schools include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited by 84% of principals as strongly evident);
- using data to determine staff development (80% of principals); and
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (67% of principals).

The strategies believed by ***principals*** to be ***least evident*** include:

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (selected as strongly evident by 10% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 49%);

- applying research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students (selected as strongly evident by 26% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 8%);
- delivering subject matter to students at an appropriately rigorous level (selected as strongly evident by 26% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 11%);
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (selected as strongly evident by 28% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 18%); and
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support student learning (selected as strongly evident by 31% of principals and as not evident or minimally evident by 19%).

The sound instructional strategies that teachers believe are most strongly evident and least evident in their schools are similar to those selected by principals. ***Teachers*** believe that the strategies that are most ***strongly evident*** include:

- creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (cited as strongly evident by 71% of teachers);
- using data to determine staff development (59% of teachers); and
- meeting regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment (57% of teachers).

The strategies believed by ***teachers*** to be ***least evident*** include:

- empowering students to use data to monitor their own progress (selected as strongly evident by 15% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 36%);
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support teacher and administrator learning (selected as strongly evident by 15% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 37%);
- providing adequate resources, incentives, and interventions to support student learning (selected as strongly evident by 21% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 32%); and
- measuring effectiveness of staff development by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning (selected as strongly evident by 23% of teachers and as not evident or minimally evident by 30%).

Table 1. Extent to Which Principals and Teachers Believe that Sound Instructional Strategies Are Present in Their Schools

Percentage of respondents rating the extent to which they believe the following instructional practices are evident in their schools.	Principals#		Teachers~	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
Educators create safe, orderly, and	84%	0%	71%	1%

Percentage of respondents rating the extent to which they believe the following instructional practices are evident in their schools.	Principals#		Teachers~	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
supportive learning environments.				
Teachers and administrators use data from class, school, districts, and state assessments to determine results-based staff development.	80%	0%	59%	5%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to plan instruction and assessment.	67%	5%	57%	11%
School or district leaders facilitate, monitor, and guide the continuous improvement of instruction.	57%	4%	33%	18%
Educators participate in staff development designs that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and support for implementation.	54%	5%	33%	20%
Students who are struggling to master content are identified by educators and provided with support individually or in small flexible groups using differentiated instruction.	52%	9%	49%	14%
Educators meet regularly on school-based learning teams to examine student work and identify effective teaching practices that address learning priorities.	48%	15%	41%	18%
Students participate in research-based instructional practices that assist them in learning the curriculum, meeting rigorous academic standards, and preparing for assessments.	46%	5%	52%	8%
Educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for high expectations, development levels, and adaptations for diverse learners.	46%	5%	54%	5%
Administrators, academic coaches, or teacher leaders monitor instructional practices and provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	43%	7%	32%	25%
The effectiveness of staff development is measured by the level of classroom application and the impact of those practices on student learning.	43%	5%	23%	30%
Educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using appropriately allocated time and	41%	13%	42%	13%

Percentage of respondents rating the extent to which they believe the following instructional practices are evident in their schools.	Principals#		Teachers~	
	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^	Strongly Evident*	Not Evident or Minimally Evident^
resources.				
Educators foster collegial relationships with families, school personnel, and the larger community to support students' learning and well being.	38%	8%	41%	11%
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.	34%	7%	55%	6%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support student learning.	31%	19%	21%	32%
Adequate resources (human, fiscal, and physical), incentives, and interventions are provided to support teacher and administrator learning.	28%	18%	15%	37%
Subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.	26%	11%	43%	9%
Educators apply research to decision-making to develop instructional practices related to diverse learning needs of students.	26%	8%	32%	14%
Students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.	10%	49%	15%	36%

Source: Cross & Joftus survey of Wichita principals and teachers November 2008.
*The response option "Evident" was deleted from this presentation to help highlight differences.
^The response option "No Opinion" was deleted from this presentation.
#Response rate was 67.0%.
~Response rate was 14.6%.

Additional strengths related to Wichita's instructional program include the following:

- The district provided initial training with follow-up monthly meetings with school leadership on how to use the "Quality Instruction Framework" (QIF) to implement "equitable and aligned instruction for all general education, inclusion, and special education classrooms." Secondary schools, which effectively implement QIF, represent pockets of fidelity based upon the results they have accomplished related to "Extreme Literacy" for Tier 2 students performing at two grade levels below grade level and America's Choice for "intentional instruction"

at the middle school level. Both of these programs benefit from extensive training being provided to all mathematics and English/ Language Arts teachers with follow-up coaching support. Additionally, America's Choice has two full-time employees dedicated to support implementation efforts.

- The district funds 175 positions—including Instructional Coaches, Learning Coaches, Data Coaches, Curriculum Coaches and Coordinators, Instructional Technology Specialists, ESOL/SPED and Cooperative Learning Coaches, Peer Consultants, and Assessment Leaders—to work within the schools to monitor the quality of instruction and provide feedback and support.

- The district supports the use of technology in classrooms by funding ten Site Technological Specialists (STS) who assist staff at school sites.

Several challenges related to instruction also emerged during the needs analysis:

- An accountability system needs to be systematically and consistently implemented to ensure fidelity to QIF; there is a need to use the information collected during monitoring of classrooms to inform future professional development sessions and change future instructional practices.

- During focus group sessions, it was suggested that "expectations related to instructional improvement" need to be framed as "student advocacy efforts" so students might be persuaded to believe that we are committed to "targeting their personal growth and not just targeting test score gains."

> "Except when middle school principals share best practices during citywide meetings, there is no systemic way to identify and promote successful practices that lead to increased learning...there are too many unique pieces and not enough unity pieces." *Principal*

- There exists a lack of consistent procedures for monitoring and modifying educational practices to build continuity with professional development sessions that are conducted at the district level during quarterly Leadership Learning Time (LLT) with principals and four teachers from each school, Assistant Superintendent's meetings with principals, and Chief Academic Officer's meetings with coaches, and at the school level during PLC time on Wednesday release time, "Team Time" (for middle schools), and the 12 days dedicated to professional development. Additionally, frustration was expressed by administrators, principals, coaches, and teachers that they been trained to conduct numerous types of classroom observations (e.g., the Downey "Walk-Throughs," Hope Foundation and America's Choice "Focus/Learning Walks," and AVID "Data Walks") that have different perspectives and outcomes. Most of these

stakeholders agreed that teachers would feel that the credibility of the classroom visitation program would be strengthened if one protocol were used districtwide and that the data collected during those observations were used systematically to plan for future professional development appropriate to the skills of their staff.

- Implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) would benefit students and teachers.

- K-PALSS observations found ***minimal evidence*** (observed in less than half the classrooms) that teachers:

  - Provided instruction and opportunities for learning at higher levels of thinking (rigor) aligned to state assessment questions that require Bloom's cognitive levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
  - Designed lessons using inquiry-based or student-led learning.
  - Used small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning practices.
  - Used modeling or guided practice (except at the elementary level where it was observed in 60% of the classrooms visited).
  - Provided homework and connected it to instructional practice.
  - Demonstrated the following research-based practices that enhance student learning: (a) identify similarities and differences; (b) summarize and take notes; (c) set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback by reinforcing efforts & providing recognition (except at the elementary level where it was observed in 58% of the classrooms visited); (d) organize learning in groups; (e) represent knowledge in multiple ways; and (f) generate & test hypotheses.

- Focus groups attributed minimal demonstrations of research-based effective teaching practices in the classroom to the need for professional development sessions to be "redesigned to provide in-depth practice opportunities for teachers to demonstrate these skills with peers during the session and experience repeated follow-up support and feedback from coaches on a continual basis."

Assessment

Wichita exhibited several strengths related to evaluation, assessment, and use of data:

- K-PALSS observations found ***significant evidence*** (70-100% of classrooms visited) that the results from classroom assessments were prominently displayed in classrooms.

- K-PALSS observations found ***evidence*** (50-69% of classrooms visited) of student learning being demonstrated using verbal-linguistic and mathematical-logistical skills.

- The district's "Comprehensive Assessment Plan," which provides a description of the multiple assessments designed to provide feedback on student learning progress related to the Kansas Content Performance Standards, includes the following:
    - Kansas State Assessments in reading and math beginning in grade 3, in writing beginning in grade 5, and Science/Health beginning in grade 4, KELPA, LAS (Language Assessment Scale), or KAMM for special education.
    - District Common Assessments (DCA), NWEA-MAP for math & reading, writing samples, performance tasks and SSPD (Social Studies' Performance Demonstrations) beginning at grade 4 through 11, DIBELS, Jerry Johns (BRI), ACT-Explore, Plan, and PSAT.
    - Building (Optional): End of unit curriculum tests, KanEd, and CETE.

- The district's "Schoolnet" serves as a data warehouse for the storage of summative test data.

- All teachers are required to participate in training at the beginning of every year on how to access and read the data reports from the "District's Common Assessments." Additionally, technological support to teachers is provided through virtual and face-to-face classes as well as the STEPS program, which offers incentives such as free laptops and smart boards for participation.

- DIBELS is used for early identification of low-performing students and for providing intervention.

Several challenges were also identified. First, K-PALSS observations found ***minimal evidence*** (0-49% of classrooms visited) of students being provided with opportunities for self-evaluation to increase shared responsibility for future learning. In addition:

- According to focus group participants, there is no systemwide process for using the various protocols the district has implemented for analyzing student work to inform future professional development in order to determine teaching or learning practices that need to be changed. For example, the district would benefit from developing an implementation plan that connects the analysis of student work to professional development practices by focusing on the consistent and systematic use of one of their protocols.

> "We are awash with data but void with practice for turning that data into information that is used." *Administrator*

- During focus group discussions, educators expressed frustration with Schoolnet because they felt it is too cumbersome and does not work as a "user-friendly" tool for informing instruction. The district's assessment staff expressed commitment

to obtaining feedback from user groups to continuously improve the use of this data-management tool.

- Focus groups targeted the need for the district to address their most frequently agreed upon priority: "to build consistency, transparency, explicit expectations, and relationships to support going deep into the practices for using information presented during professional development and then analyzing the results or outcomes of those efforts to inform future practice."

III. Recommendations for Technical Assistance

One of the primary goals of this needs assessment is to identify areas in which the district would 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. Based on this needs assessment, Cross & Joftus, LLC recommend that the technical assistance provided to Wichita address one or more of the following general recommendations:

1) Develop a plan and create systems for fostering and sustaining systemic coherence, which includes addressing issues related to organizational structure, roles and responsibilities of senior staff, communication among senior staff, strategies for supporting schools and holding them accountable, and strategies for improving the quality and consistency of professional development—including use of coaches and implementation of PLCs—across schools. ***Due to its impact on all other recommendations, Cross & Joftus strongly recommends that the district implement this recommendation prior to—or at least at the same time as—any of the following recommendations.***

2) Develop or refine a plan and strategies for improving instruction to address the challenges outlined in the findings above. This plan should include a process for systematizing walk-throughs and other evaluation strategies as a way to hone professional development and leverage instructional improvement, providing professional development on using technology and applying analysis of student achievement data to improve instruction, and evaluating the quality and effectiveness of professional development.

3) Develop a new strategic plan and revise the budget and planning process to be more systematic and inclusive.

4) Conduct training for the members of the school board.

5) Create a new system and process for evaluating and recognizing teachers.

6) Evaluate the costs and benefits and/or implementation challenges of programs such as academic coaches, bonus pay for teachers in high-poverty schools, moving principals around, and support for students in "bubble schools."

7) Develop a plan for improving communications internally and externally.

8) Conduct a detailed management review of and improvement plan for the facilities department.

Once district leadership has had an opportunity to review this report, a representative from Cross & Joftus will contact the Wichita superintendent to finalize a technical assistance plan that includes approximately 24 days of external support for the time period January through June of 2009. 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.

APPENDIX
Findings from K-PALSS Classroom Observations
WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Using the K-PALSS (Kansas Process for Advancing Learning Strategies for Success) protocol and process, Cross & Joftus staff in collaboration with representatives from the Kansas State Department of Education and 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 below 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.

The graphs following the tables show a summary of the practices that were observed in all classrooms.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (45 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +		TEACHING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Learning Environment			
100%	Orderly/Clean		-Respect for cultural diversity needs to be more evident in the learning environment. -Support for high expectations for learning needs to be made more explicit for students.
100%	Safe		
71%	Displays student work		
22%	Respects cultural diversity with materials resources		
27%	Supports high expectations		
Instructional Design			
71%	Standards-based lesson		-Active engagement of students in the learning process would be strengthened by using inquiry-based and student-led learning. -Use of modeling and small flexible learning groups need to increase. -Opportunities to check understanding and give feedback need to occur prior to students being expected to perform independent practice successfully.
0%	Inquiry-based lesson		
62%	Total group		
20%	Flexible small skill group		
67%	Cooperative learning group		
33%	Teacher-led learning		
0%	Student-led learning		
33%	Modeling		
20%	Checking understanding		
60%	Guided Practice		
36%	Independent Practice		
Strategies Used			
0%	Adjust for multiple learning styles		-Adjustments for various learning styles needs to accommodate for a balance of ways students can receive information. -A larger repertoire of instructional strategies is necessary to provide educators with skills to scaffold instruction for all tiers of learning, address culturally responsive teaching, and address diverse learning needs. -Need to increase demonstration of the practices that were only evident in 2-40% of the classes visited.
67%	visual		
67%	auditory		
13%	kinesthetic		
9%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives		
18%	Address diverse language needs		
13%	Identify similarities & differences		
20%	Summarize & take notes		
58%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition		
38%	Use homework & practice opportunities		
13%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways		
29%	Organize learning in groups		
38%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback		
2%	Generate & test hypotheses		
80%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers		
60%	Increase student engagement		

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (45 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +			PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Interactive Behaviors			
84%	Asks/answers questions	LEARNING	-Students need to be able to demonstrate their learning using a variety of multiple intelligences. -Students need to be provided regular & continuous feedback on performance with opportunities for self-evaluation and for taking responsibility for their future learning.
56%	Active involvement in classwork		
0%	Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways:		
11%	interpersonal		
0%	intrapersonal		
51%	verbal-linguistic		
4%	logistical-mathematical		
27%	visual-spatial		
20%	bodily-kinesthetic		
7%	musical-rhythmic		
42%	Receives feedback on performance		
2%	Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		
Cognitive Level			
22%	Knowledge		-Need to provide instruction and opportunities,for students to practice higher-level thinking skills.
38%	Comprehension		
36%	Application		
7%	Analysis		
2%	Synthesis		
2%	Evaluation		
Work Produced			
47%	Individual Work		-Need to provide assignments that require students to present their work by project, performance and presentation and include opportunities for students to demonstrate self-evaluation/reflection practices.
16%	Group Work		
49%	Written work		
0%	Project		
7%	Presentation/Performance		
0%	Self-Evaluation/Reflection		
Resources			
29%	Textbooks		-Student use of textbooks, technology, and manipulatives should be increased to address diverse learning needs; the use of resources needs to be extended beyond worksheets.
53%	Supplemental materials		
22%	Manipulatives		
27%	Technology		
4%	Materials reflect diversity		
11%	Worksheets		

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (35 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +			PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Learning Environment			
100%	Orderly/Clean		-Respect for cultural diversity needs to be more evident in the learning environment. -Support for high expectations for learning needs to be made more explicit for students.
100%	Safe		
71%	Displays student work		
11%	Respects cultural diversity with materials resources		
34%	Supports high expectations		
Instructional Design		TEACHING	
77%	Standards-based lesson		-Active engagement of students in the learning process would be strengthened by using inquiry-based, student-led learning, and opportunities to guide practice during learning and prior to providing feedback during independent practice. -Use of modeling, small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning needs to increase.
0%	Inquiry-based lesson		
69%	Total group		
0%	Flexible small skill group		
6%	Cooperative learning group		
54%	Teacher-led learning		
9%	Student-led learning		
20%	Modeling		
63%	Checking understanding		
20%	Guided Practice		
31%	Independent Practice		
Strategies Used			
0%	Adjust for multiple learning styles:		-Adjustments for various learning styles needs to accommodate for a balance of ways students can receive information. -A larger repertoire of instructional strategies is necessary to provide educators with skills to scaffold instruction for all tiers of learning, address culturally responsive teaching, and address diverse learning needs. -Need to increase demonstration of the practices that were only evident in 0-49% of the classes visited.
49%	visual		
49%	auditory		
6%	kinesthetic		
0%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives		
6%	Address diverse language needs		
3%	Identify similarities & differences		
3%	Summarize & take notes		
26%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition		
31%	Use homework & practice opportunities		
26%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways		
9%	Organize learning in groups		
20%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback		
6%	Generate & test hypotheses		
71%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers		
57%	Increase student engagement		

MIDDLE SCHOOLS (35 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +			PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Interactive Behaviors			
77%	Asks/answers questions	LEARNING	-Students need to be able to demonstrate their learning using a variety of multiple intelligences. -Students need to be provided opportunities for regular & continuous feedback on performance with self-evaluation and for taking responsibility for their future learning.
57%	Active involvement in classwork		
0%	Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways:		
20%	interpersonal		
0%	intrapersonal		
23%	verbal-linguistic		
14%	logistical-mathematical		
17%	visual-spatial		
9%	bodily-kinesthetic		
0%	musical-rhythmic		
46%	Receives feedback on performance		
0%	Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		
Cognitive Level			
26%	Knowledge		-Need to provide instruction and opportunities for students to practice higher-level thinking skills.
23%	Comprehension		
20%	Application		
3%	Analysis		
11%	Synthesis		
11%	Evaluation		
Work Practices			
51%	Individual Work		-Need to provide assignments that require students to present their work by project, performance and presentation and to include opportunities for students to demonstrate self-evaluation/reflection practices.
14%	Group Work		
37%	Written work		
0%	Project		
0%	Presentation/Performance		
0%	Self-Evaluation/Reflection		
Resources			
29%	Textbooks		-Student use of textbooks, technology and manipulatives should be increased to address diverse learning needs; the use of resources needs to be extended beyond worksheets.
54%	Supplemental materials		
23%	Manipulatives		
26%	Technology		
3%	Materials reflect diversity		
11%	Worksheets		

HIGH SCHOOLS (10 classrooms)

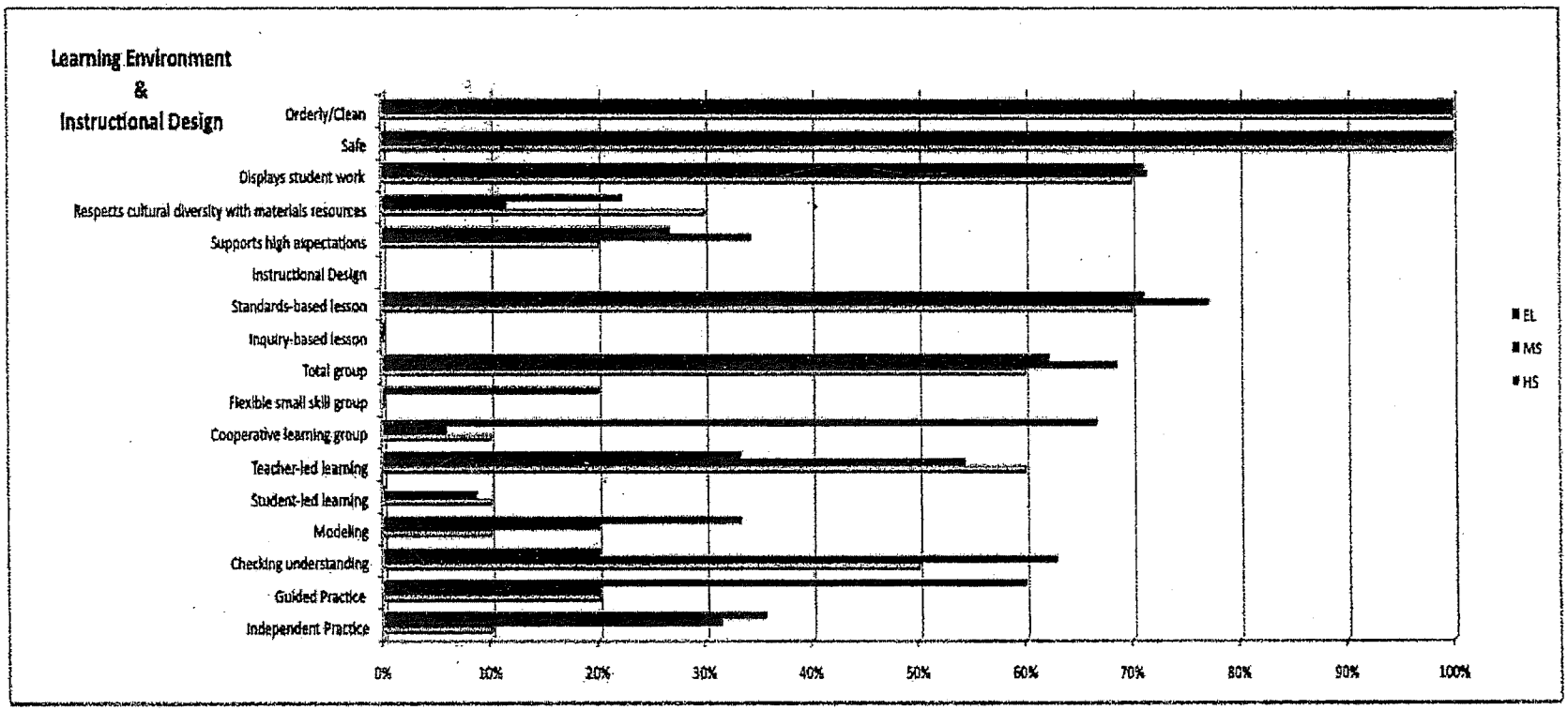
OBSERVED PRACTICES +			PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Learning Environment			
100%	Orderly/Clean		-Respect for cultural diversity needs to be more evident in the learning environment. -Support for high expectations for learning needs to be made more explicit for students.
100%	Safe		
70%	Displays student work		
30%	Respects cultural diversity with materials resources		
20%	Supports high expectations		
Instructional Design		TEACHING	
70%	Standards-based lesson		-Active engagement of students in the learning process would be strengthened by using inquiry-based, student-led learning, and opportunities to guide practice during learning and prior to providing feedback during independent practice. -Use of modeling, small flexible learning groups and cooperative learning needs to increase.
0%	Inquiry-based lesson		
60%	Total group		
0%	Flexible small skill group		
10%	Cooperative learning group		
60%	Teacher-led learning		
10%	Student-led learning		
10%	Modeling		
50%	Checking understanding		
20%	Guided Practice		
10%	Independent Practice		
Strategies Used			
0%	Adjust for multiple learning styles		-Adjustments for various learning styles needs to accommodate for a balance of ways students can receive information. -A larger repertoire of instructional strategies is necessary to provide educators with skills to scaffold instruction for all tiers of learning, address culturally responsive teaching, and address diverse learning needs. -Need to increase demonstration of the practices that were only evident in 10-40% of the classes visited.
50%	visual		
50%	auditory		
0%	kinesthetic		
10%	Incorporate culturally responsive readings/perspectives		
10%	Address diverse language needs		
20%	Identify similarities & differences		
40%	Summarize & take notes		
40%	Reinforce efforts & provide recognition		
40%	Use homework & practice opportunities		
10%	Represent knowledge in multiple ways		
0%	Organize learning in groups		
40%	Set objectives & provide immediate/continuous feedback		
0%	Generate & test hypotheses		
70%	Use cues, questions & advance organizers		
40%	Increase student engagement		

HIGH SCHOOLS (10 classrooms)

OBSERVED PRACTICES +		LEARNING	PD RECOMMENDATIONS Δ
Interactive Behaviors			
90%	Asks/answers questions		-Students need to be able to demonstrate their learning using a variety of multiple intelligences. -Students need to be provided opportunities for self-evaluation and for taking responsibility for their future learning.
40%	Active involvement in classwork		
0%	Demonstrates knowledge in multiple ways:		
20%	interpersonal		
0%	intrapersonal		
20%	verbal-linguistic		
10%	logistical-mathematical		
30%	visual-spatial		
10%	bodily-kinesthetic		
0%	musical-rhythmic		
20%	Receives feedback on performance		
10%	Demonstrates reflection (meta-cognition)		
Cognitive Level			
20%	Knowledge		-Students need to be provided instruction and opportunities for practicing higher-level thinking skills.
30%	Comprehension		
20%	Application		
20%	Analysis		
10%	Synthesis		
0%	Evaluation		
Work Required			
70%	Individual Work		-Teachers need to provide assignments that require students to present their work by performance and presentation and includes opportunities for students to demonstrate self-evaluation/reflection practices.
10%	Group Work		
70%	Written work		
0%	Project		
0%	Presentation/Performance		
0%	Self-Evaluation/Reflection		
Resources			
20%	Textbooks		-Student use of textbooks, technology and manipulatives should be increased to address diverse learning needs; the use of resources needs to be extended beyond supplemental materials and worksheets.
40%	Supplemental materials		
10%	Manipulatives		
40%	Technology		
0%	Materials reflect diversity		
50%	Worksheets		

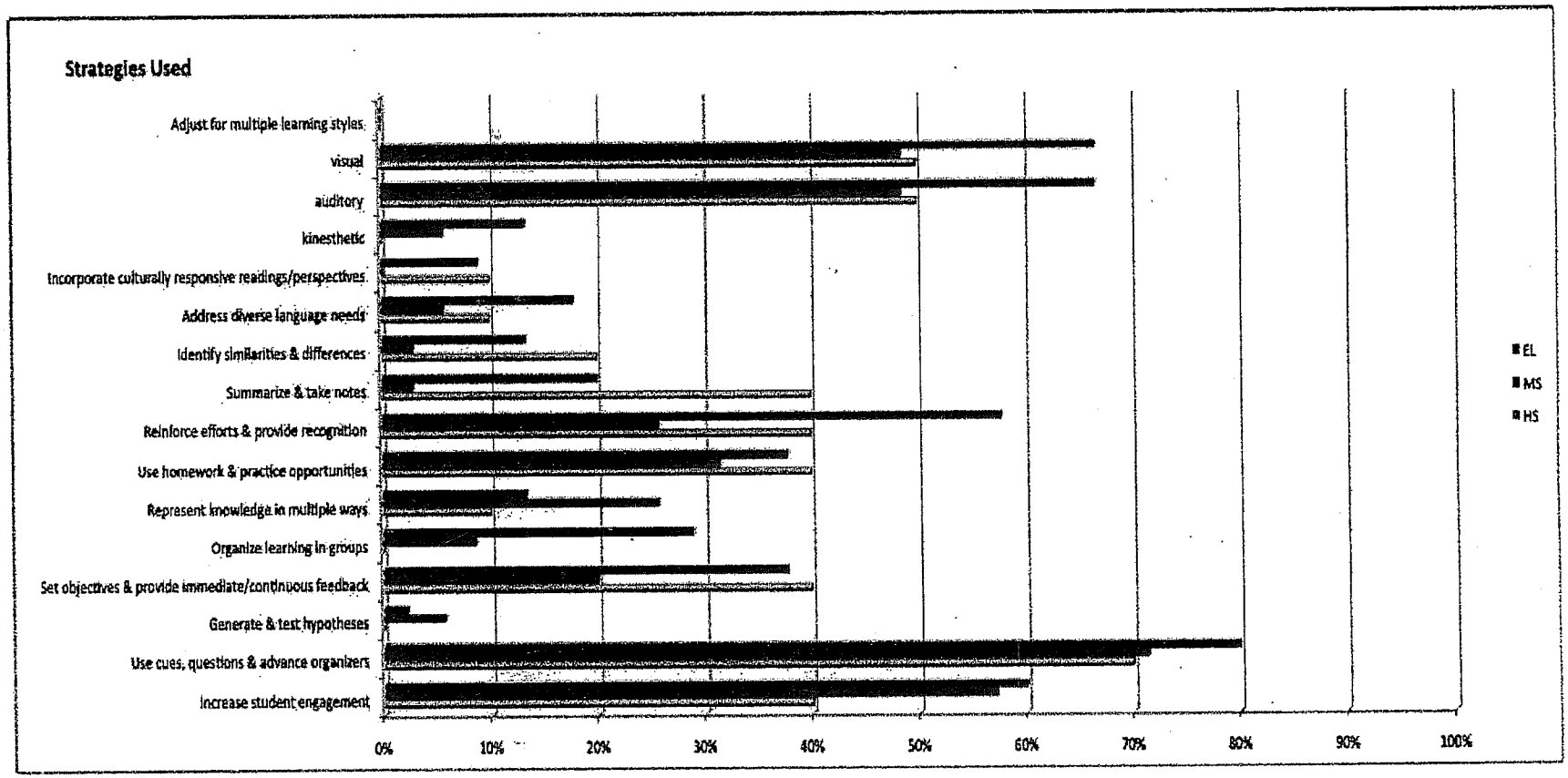
USD259 001527

TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



USD259 001528

TEACHING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (continued)



USD259 001529

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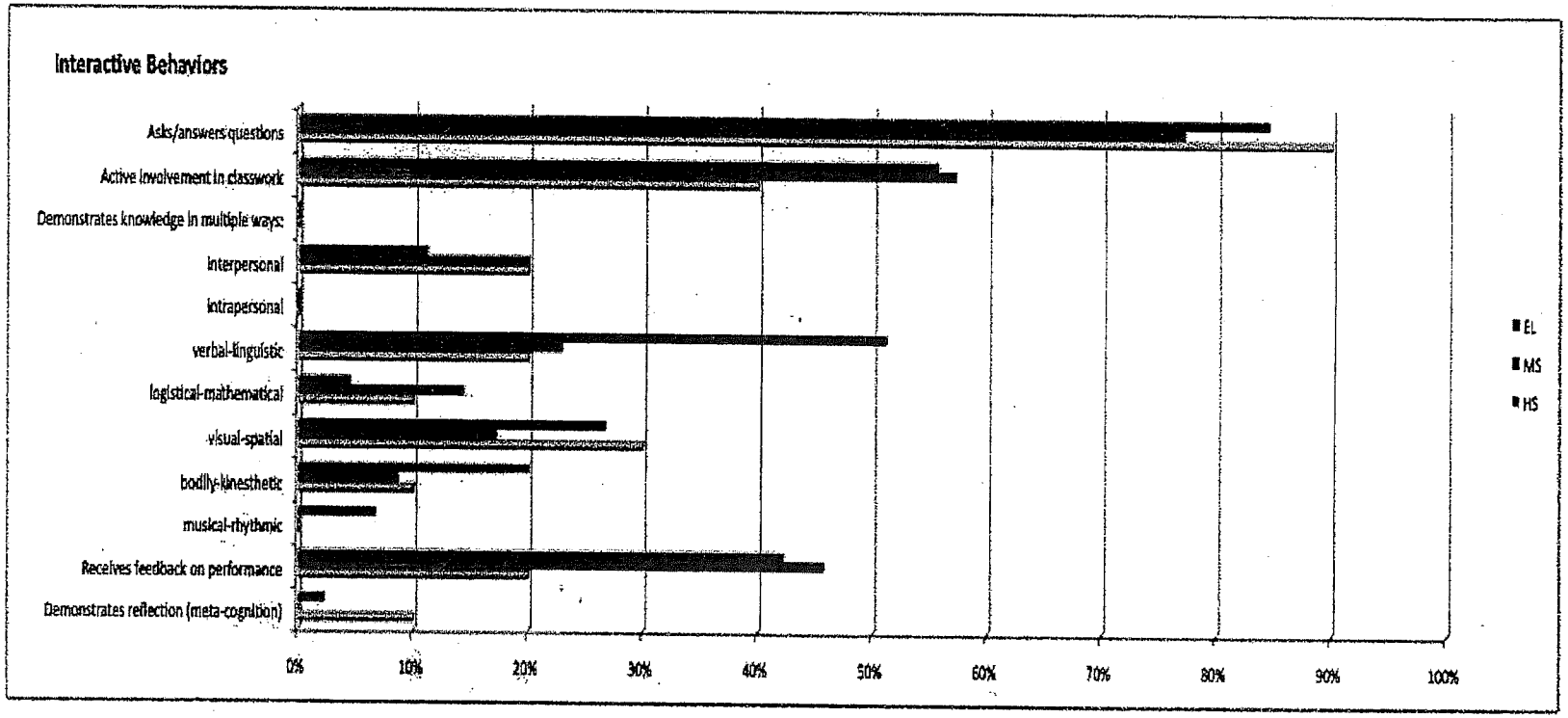

USD259 001530

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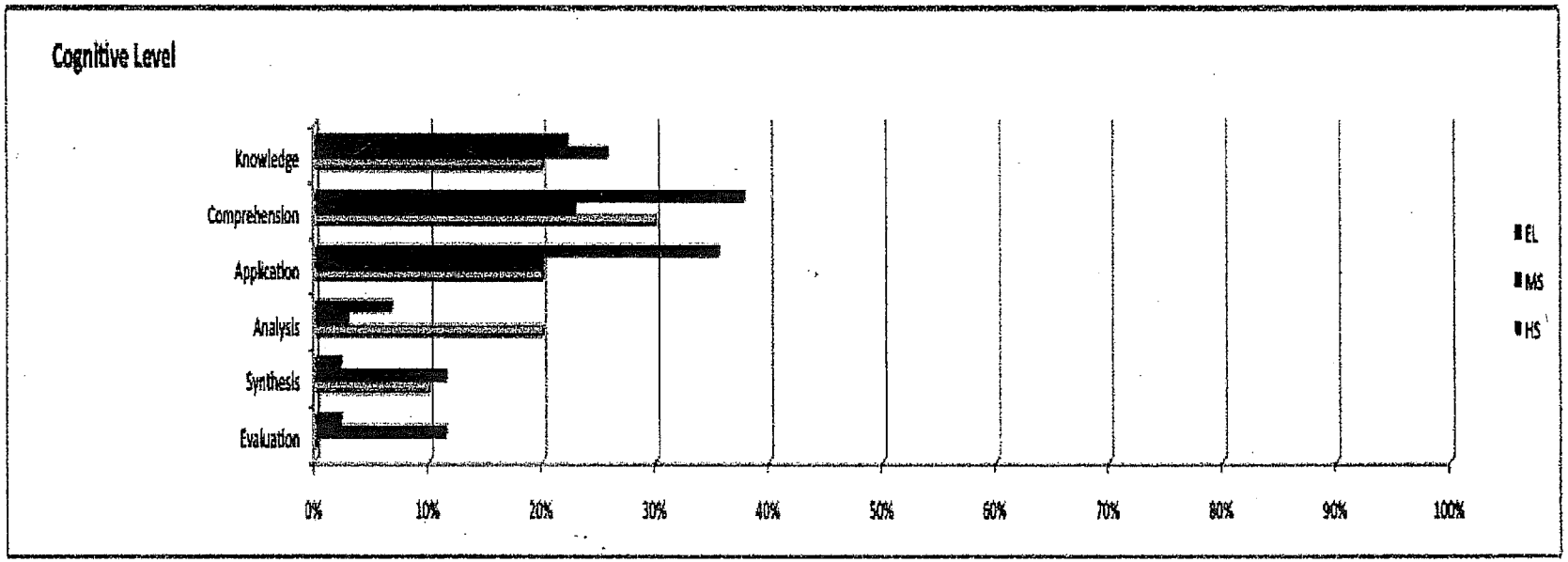

USD259 001531

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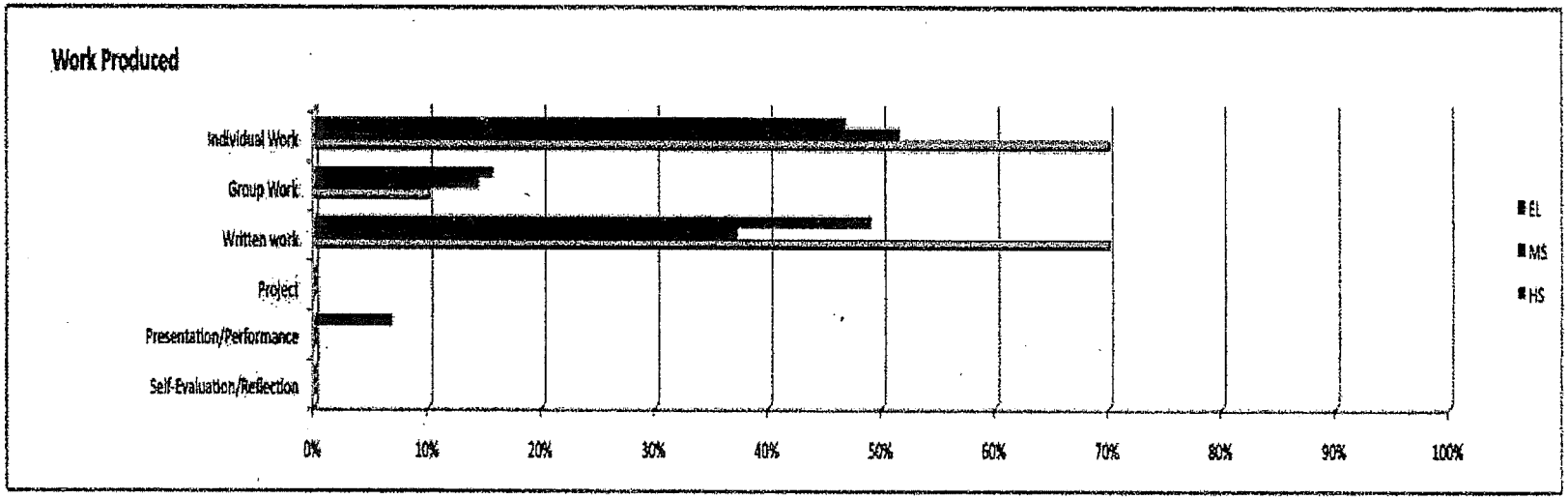
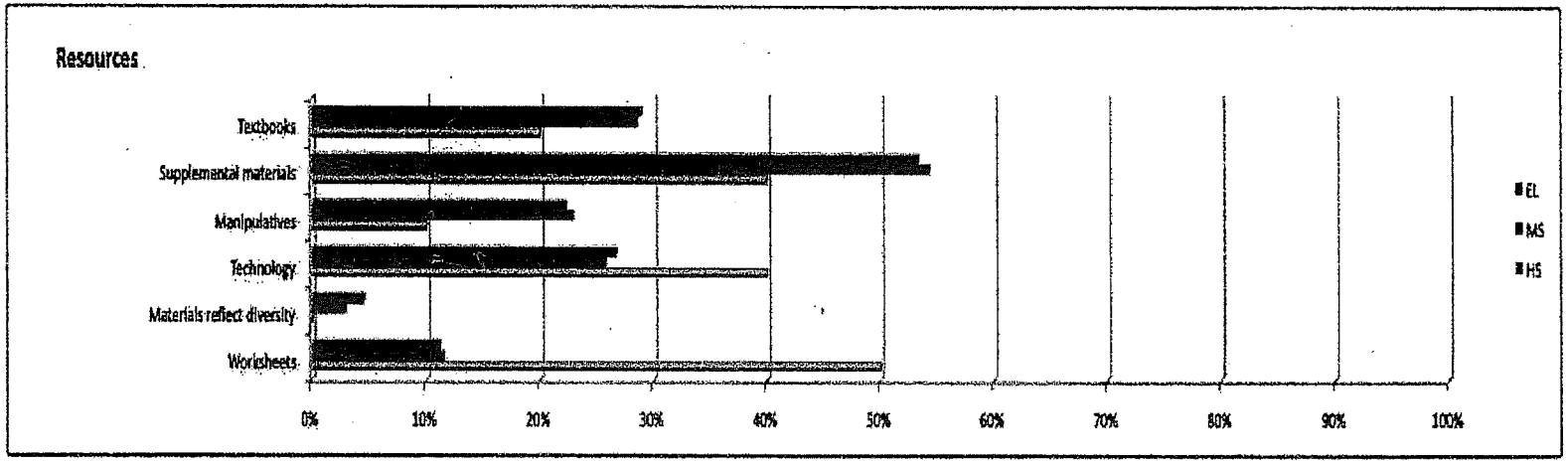


USD259 001532

LEARNING PRACTICES OBSERVED IN WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (continued)



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