

Appendices

Appendix A. List of District Documents Requested and Submitted

Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals	Current District Strategic Plan and/or District Improvement Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategic Plan 2010-2015 ● WRMS Restructuring Plan 10-11 ● Southwick School In Need Of Improvement Plan 10-11 ● 2008 NEASC WRHS Special Report ● 2009 NEASC WRHS Special Report 	X
	Current central office organization chart	X
	Written district curriculum for all grades in core subjects or link to location on district website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing Portfolio Curriculum, Grades K-5 ● Earth Science, Grades K-2 ● Earth Science, Grades 3-5 ● Life Science, Grades K-2 ● Life Science, Grades 3-5 ● Physical Science, Grades K-2 ● Physical Science, Grades 3-5 ● Preschool Curriculum ● Technology Curriculum, Grades K-8 ● Technology Checklists, Grades K-7 ● Power Standards website, Grades K-8, HS (math and reading) ● Course Competencies, Grades 9-12 (68% of core content and electives) ● UbD draft Unit Plans, Grades 9-12 (some core content and electives) ● Course Overviews, Grades 9-12 (some courses) 	X
	Full list of all supporting materials developed by the district to help teachers implement the written curriculum, with at least one sample of each kind of support material (or link to online location). These materials may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pacing calendars ● Information on curricular alignment across grades and subjects ● Documents showing how the district curriculum aligns with state standards ● Specified learning outcomes for each grade and subject ● Information to help teachers prioritize amongst state standards ● Standards-aligned model lessons <p><i>(continued on next page)</i></p>	

Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals <i>(continued from previous page)</i>	Description of training sessions used to orient new teachers and school leaders to the district curriculum, including training agendas and copies of training materials distributed to teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agenda and Packet New Teachers Train ● Differentiating materials ● Lesson Planning CTW ● New Teacher Packet on 6 Traits ● New Teachers Mentoring Description ● Questioning Techniques Parent Conference 	X
	Any handouts, websites, or other materials used to communicate with parents about the content of the district curriculum, and their child’s desired learning outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample Newsletter ● Sample Title I Newsletter ● Websites to reinforce skills 	X
	Documentation related to the curriculum development, review and revision process. Documents may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schedule or cycle for review in each subject areas ● Agendas from curriculum review meetings ● List of district personnel involved in curriculum development, review, and revision ● Criteria used to evaluate curricular effectiveness 	
	District high school graduation requirements	X
	Description of any district programs designed to increase college and career readiness amongst its students	X

Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building	Principal recruitment plan, including information about where and how new principals are recruited	X
	Documents related to the principal interview and selection process. These documents may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Principal interview protocols, including descriptions of any performance-based components ● List of those involved in the interview and selection process (i.e. district administrators, teachers, parents) 	X
	List of current principals in the district, length of time they have served in the position, and the job they held immediately before becoming principal	X
	Description of any district leadership training programs (i.e. those designed to help promising staff members earn administrative certification.) Documentation may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Selection criteria ● Program curriculum and completion requirements ● Statistics about the number of staff members who have passed through the program and then earned certification ● Statistics about staff members who have successfully completed the program and been hired as principals in the district 	
	Documents related to the teacher recruitment and selection process. Documentation included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher Interview and Selection Process ● Teacher Openings and Pool ● Teacher Recruitment 	X
	Description of any alternative teacher certification process offered by the district, along with statistics detailing the number of alternatively-certified teachers hired in the last few years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alt 5_Professional Education Outline Sample ● Alternative Teacher Certification Process Description ● Sample Individualized Professional Development Plan 	X

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Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building <i>(continued from previous page)</i>	Documents related to the district’s professional development plan for teachers and administrators. Documentation included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● District Professional Development Calendar 2009-10 ● Sample Agenda PD Workshop (January 16) ● Sample PD Evaluations ● WRSD ARCHES PD Monthly Workshops ● WRSD PD Plan 2006 ● WRSD Professional Staff Development Survey Results 09-10 	X
	Documentation of the district's instructional coaching program(s). These documents may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● District-developed Coaching Model ● Detailed instructional coach job description, written by district administrators ● Interview protocols used when hiring new instructional coaches ● Description and agendas for training provided to instructional coaches ● Instructional coaches’ assignment list for the 2009-10 school year. Should contain detail about the amount of time spent by each coach per campus 	
	Description of any district-mandated collaborative time, including sample master schedules, showing when and how often (e.g. daily, weekly) teachers are able to collaborate during the school day	

Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies	List of all district instructional programs currently mandated district-wide	X
	Documents related to the process for selecting, approving, evaluating, and adjusting instructional programs. Documentation included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption Timeline rev 10 ● Gap Analysis Template ● Pilot Evaluation ● Sample gap analysis timeline for math ● Sample Science Visitation Questions ● Textbook Acquisition Process ● Sample Textbook Adoption Checklist (Social Studies) 	X
	Documentation developed by the district showing how instructional programs currently in use align with the district’s written curriculum	
	Copies of resources provided to teachers to assist with implementation of instructional programs. District can provide hard copies, or a link to their location online	

Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data	Detailed description of district's student data management system, including a temporary login/password for the district's online data system, if applicable	X
	Examples of state assessment reports provided to school administrators and teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grade 5 Reading Released Item Support Materials ● NECAP 09-10 Grade 5 School Results ● NECAP 2009 Grade 5 Student Work Samples ● Sample Item Analysis 	X
	Examples of student data reports provided to teachers by the district: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample MAP reports ● District Growth by School ● Sample Lexile Reports ● Sample Class Reports ● Sample Student Reports ● Sample Student Progress Reports ● Sample Teacher Class Report ● Class by Goal Report ● Class by RIT Report 	X
	Description of the district's benchmark testing program. Documents may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● District benchmark testing schedule (all applicable grades & subjects) ● Sample of a district benchmark assessment ● Examples of how benchmark results are reported to school leaders and teachers, along with timeframes for distribution ● Guidance or instructions provided by the district to school leaders and teachers about how to use benchmark test data ● Alignment documents or maps distributed to teachers, explaining how benchmark tests align with the curriculum 	
	Diagnostic assessment procedures for students new to the district	
	District guidelines for the school improvement planning process	
	Principal/school evaluation instruments	X
Teacher evaluation instruments	X	
Examples of district leadership team meeting agendas	X	

Theme	District Documents Requested	Submitted
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment	Observation protocols used by district administrators for classroom visits	X
	Description of district intervention programs for low-performing schools	X
	Sample of intervention plan currently in effect of a low-performing district school, if available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Non-Title I SINI Progress Report ● Southwick School SINI Plan 2010-2011 ● SCS SINI Progress Report 2008-09 ● WRMS Restructuring Plan 2010-11 	X
	Description of district intervention programs for struggling principals	
	Description of district intervention programs for struggling teachers	X
	Description of district intervention programs for struggling students. Documentation included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● District Interventions ● Southwick School Academic Target Team Process 	X

Appendix B. Site Visit Schedule

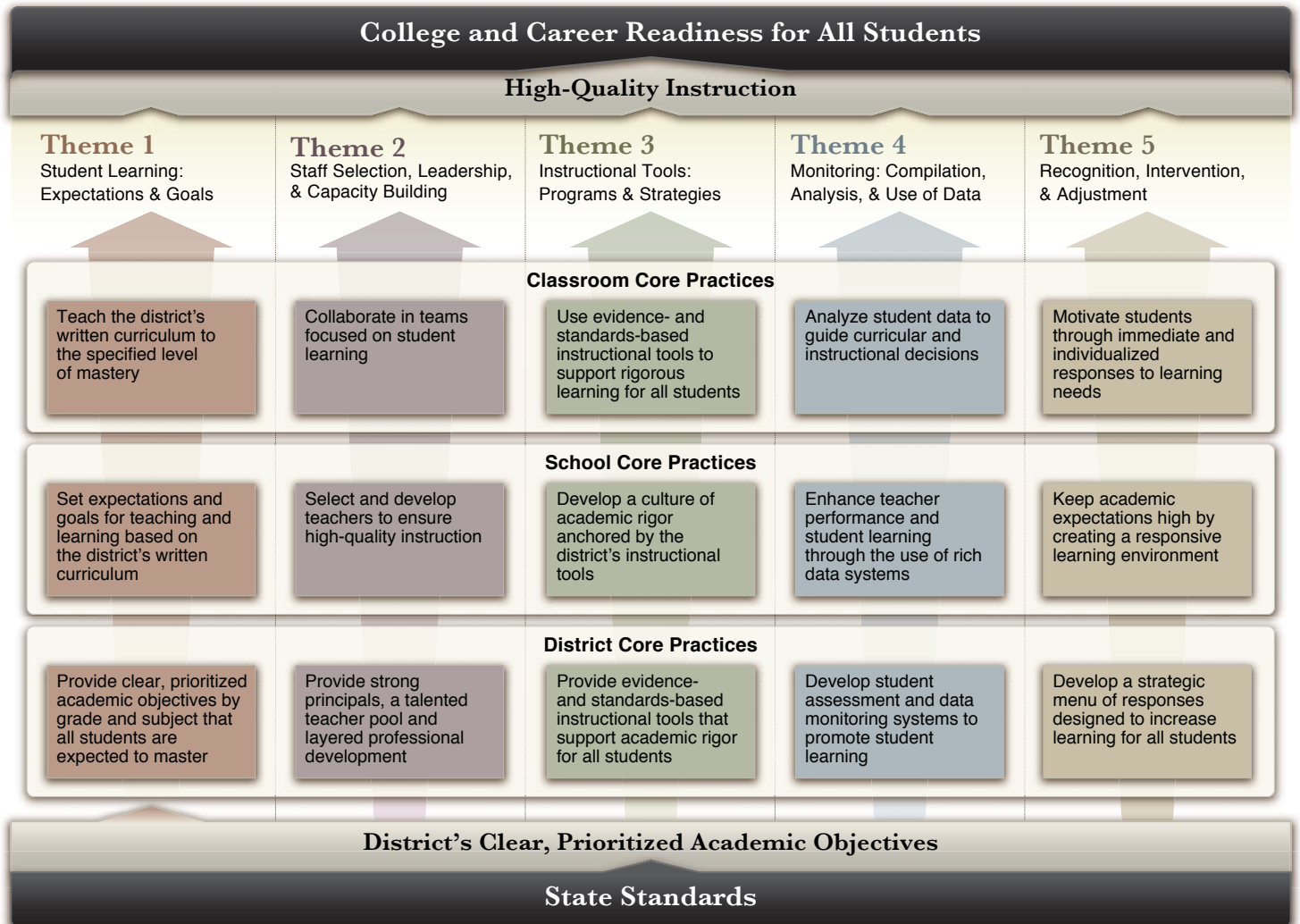
Monday, September 27, 2010	
8:45 a.m.-9:30 a.m.	Dr. Tammy Davis, Superintendent
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Administration Team: Dr. Tammy Davis, Superintendent Cheryl Somma, Business Administrator Lori Krueger, Director of Special Education Janice Grenier, Director of Accounting and HR Mikel LaChapelle, Principal, Sanbornton Central School Tim Neville, Principal, Union Sanborn School Richard Hines, Principal, Southwick School Dr. Pam Miller, Principal, Winnisquam Regional Middle School Dr. Ronna Cadarette, Principal, Winnisquam Regional High School
1:15 p.m.-3:45 p.m.	Suzan Gannett, Director of Curriculum
Tuesday, September 28, 2010	
8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.	Winnisquam Regional Middle School: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interview with Principal and Assistant Principal ● School Tour ● Teacher focus group
10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Union Sanborn School: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher focus group ● School Tour ● Interview with Principal
1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m.	Southwick School: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interview with Principal ● School Tour ● Teacher focus group
3:45 p.m.-4:30 p.m.	Brenda Lawrence, President, Winnisquam Regional Teacher Association
<i>(continued on next page)</i>	

Wednesday, September 29, 2010	
8:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.	Winnisquam Regional High School ⁴ : <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Interview with Principal and Assistant Principal● Teacher focus group
11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Sanbornton Central School: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Interview with Principal● School Tour● Teacher focus group
3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.	Wrap-up Interview with Dr. Tammy Davis and Suzan Gannett

⁴ The interviews ran over time at WRHS, which did not allow time for a school tour.

Appendix C. NCEA Core Practice Framework

The Core Practice Framework



Appendix D. Recommendations

The eight Critical Actions reviewed in the *Leverage Points* section of this report are contained within four of the five themes in the Core Practice Framework: Themes 1, 2, 3, and 5. These eight Critical Actions are presented in the order that they appear in the Framework, not in a recommended order of action for WRSD. However, Theme 1 is the foundation for all actions within the Framework; therefore, the reviewers recommend that any *Leverage Points* Critical Actions within Theme 1 be addressed first.

LP Leverage Points

Theme 1

Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

District Practice

Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.

Perhaps the most important *Recommendations* within the Core Practice Audit for Winnisquam Regional School District relate to the development and delivery of a tightly aligned written curriculum. While district leaders clearly understand the importance of an aligned curriculum as well as the importance of aligning that curriculum to rigorous standards, the institutionalization of this curriculum is not a current reality. The first four *Recommendations* deal with this theme and practice—this includes all four Critical Actions related to this practice.

Recommendation #1

Critical Action

District leaders establish a written district curriculum—the academic objectives specifying what students are to know and be able to do by grade and subject.

- **Develop a tightly aligned PreK–12 written curriculum outlining the knowledge and skills students will master by grade and subject.** Teachers and leaders are doing a lot in WRSD. One of the auditors' primary concerns, however, is that all of the various efforts—particularly related to curricular work—are not guided by a highly intentional, well-defined process. For example, reviewers were unable to access one central document for any subject area that showed exactly what was to be taught and learned at each grade level (e.g., PreK–12 WRSD Math Curriculum). While various resources and materials at a given grade (e.g., Grade 4) included references to standards (primarily state standards), those standards were never seen within the context of the full PreK–12 continuum.
- **Understand that the state standards do not provide the structure referenced above.** The state standards must be clarified across grades¹ and subjects so that

every teacher in the district knows exactly what to teach and *to what level* if students are to be able to access rigorous coursework in high school and be college and career ready upon graduation. The district's written curriculum must become the *sense maker*, thereafter, for every instructional decision in the district. This type of curricular coherence can never be achieved by teachers working independently at different grade levels.

- **Define the system by which curriculum for every grade and subject will be developed, reviewed, and revised.** This structure should provide for continuous improvement of the written curriculum, rather than cyclical reviews. In many higher performing districts, vertical teams of teachers from across the district spend summer months on this work. Understanding that curriculum development requires particular skills; district leaders ensure these teachers are trained in these skills. Teams may meet monthly throughout the school year to monitor how well the curriculum is being implemented and what impediments teachers may be encountering. Monthly monitoring typically defines the work to be done the following summer. Currently, neither district nor school leaders could provide any formal documented process for curriculum development, review, or revision. In addition, teachers across the district were unable to articulate a clear understanding of the process. This process needs to be clearly articulated, ongoing, and dynamic.

Once vertical teams in language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science have tightly aligned the written curriculum to rigorous coursework at the high school level, then district leaders need to ensure this same work is completed for all subject areas. Keep an important caveat in mind when developing the district's written curriculum—*quantity is not quality*. A primary error in the development of the written curriculum is to place far too many learning objectives or standards at any given grade or subject for a teacher to teach or student to learn. Originating from U.S. textbooks that consistently contain far more topics than those in higher performing countries, a tendency to place far too many standards by grade continues. Set clear and prioritized standards by grade with a manageable number of topics that will be taught and assessed in greater depth.

- **Tightly align each core content curriculum to rigorous coursework at the high school level.** For example, if all students are to have the option to complete Calculus in Grade 12, then we already know what they must be able to do by the end of Grade 11, etc. Continuing this mapping leads to the set of skills that must be mastered in kindergarten if students are to be on the ramp to successful post-secondary options. Far too many educators, students, and parents find out that students are woefully underprepared for rigorous high school work once they reach high school. Kindergarten through Grade 2 are linchpin grades to ensure students are ready to tackle Grade 3 work at the level required. Pay special attention to the level of rigor in the written curriculum at these grade levels.
- **Provide all staff with easy access to the district's written curriculum.** Given the technology of the day, it is most common for this curriculum to be Web-based. Start

simply, and provide access to core content PreK–12. School leaders and teachers should have daily access to this content. Continue to build this online center to include curriculum for all grades and subjects in the district. Providing curriculum electronically rather than in hard copy also facilitates easier maintenance of the resources by eliminating concern that teachers may be working from outdated versions.

¹ Ensure that the written curriculum details a subject's specific learning objectives for each grade. If a learning objective stays the same across two grades, then the depth to which the objective is to be learned must be differentiated. For example, perhaps a skill will be introduced in one grade, developed in the next, and mastered in a third. Teachers in any given grade must be able to clearly differentiate the knowledge and skills students are to attain in their grade from the grades before and after. (For an outstanding article on the importance of alignment and the role of prior knowledge to effective learning, see Classroom Research and Cargo Cults, Hirsch, E.D., 2004. <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/7262>).

Recommendation #2

Critical Action

District leaders vertically align the district curriculum PreK–12 through a backwards mapping process anchored to the needs of successful graduates.

We already know that students who are not on the ramp to *college and career readiness* by Grade 8 face overwhelming challenges to ever getting on that ramp. Therefore, students who participate in General Math in Grade 8 would rarely be expected to access Calculus in high school.² More tellingly, in most states students' fifth grade math scores on the state assessment will predict their likelihood of ever reaching AP Calculus, etc. The importance of mapping backwards from a rigorous endpoint to ensure graduated steps in any curriculum beginning in kindergarten cannot be overstated.

- **Develop a detailed academic portrait of a WRSD graduate.** This profile should be grounded in research and be clear and specific about the knowledge and skills graduates will possess in all core content areas. More importantly, determine how you will provide evidence that students have mastered these skills. Many leading educators are now embracing the *college and career readiness benchmark* on a nationalized test as the evidence of a successful graduate. It would be difficult to argue for less. Earned course credits, unfortunately, do not ensure that high school graduates have mastered the skills to prepare them for college or a skilled career.

Ensure that whatever evidence you accept as a student's readiness to receive a diploma actually translates into a clearly defined set of guaranteed skills.

The phenomenon of giving increasing percentages of students credit for courses whose content they have not learned may be labeled "course credit inflation" by analogy with the concept of grade inflation. In the case of grade inflation, the knowledge and skill level of the median student receiving an "A" decline over time. In the case of course credit inflation, the level of content mastery by the median students receiving credit for a course with a given title declines over time. If the decline is dramatic, then course completion can lose its ability to predict student success in college.³

- **Begin with the end in mind.** Some district leaders want all students to have an equal chance of accessing the district's most rigorous and elite coursework, yet do not create the only learning ramp that can lead them to it. If a student is to access rigorous coursework in any core academic subject in Grade 12, then you already know exactly what skills they need as they exit Grade 11 to be prepared for those courses. Mapping backward—Grade 10, 9, 8—leaders can clearly state what students must know and be able to do by the end of kindergarten to be on a learning ramp that can grant them access to a Grade 12 course. Far too many students are so shortchanged in early grades that they can never get back on track to academic rigor. District leaders need to make certain that the written curriculum—beginning in kindergarten—has been anchored to the end goals for all graduates.

- **Provide the foundation for articulation of teachers across all grades in any given content area.** Different than curricular development teams, these vertical teams gather periodically throughout the year to extend teachers' knowledge of the full PreK–12 learning continuum for their subject areas. In particular, the team activities help deepen teachers' knowledge of their exact role in the learning continuum. Of course, teachers at the elementary level will be involved in activities with multiple teams – primarily the core content areas. Lead teachers of the vertical teams often serve strong roles within curricular development work also.
- **Address every possible variable that is within your control to create a seamless learning transition from one school level to the next.** Typically, there will be a drop in student performance wherever the district's grade spans separate. For instance, if a school district organizes K–5, 6–8, and 9–12, an observer will likely note decreased student performance in Grades 6 and 9. Interestingly, if a neighboring district organizes K–8 and 9–12, the drop in performance will typically only be seen at Grade 9. Explanations for this common performance pattern usually focus on characteristics of students. It is true that students encounter a number of transitions as they progress through a school system, from changing school buildings to adjusting to different teachers' personalities to meeting increasingly rigorous academic expectations. All of these transitions introduce variation and adjustment into the educational process. However, do consider the effect that your system has on students. Decreased student performance across schools is primarily a reflection of educator practices, particularly the strength of alignment and articulation across schools. District leaders play an important role in creating seamless transitions for students from one school level to the next. The district's written curriculum is one of the first issues to investigate. Does the strength of your curriculum's alignment minimize or exacerbate the transitions that students experience in your system? What support for students and teachers must be built into the system at transition years?

² The reviewers strongly encourage WRSD leaders to do a longitudinal study of math participation in the district. While a math sequence document provided to reviewers showed a possible path from General Math to AP Calculus, reviewers would predict that no greater than 2% of any given class would actually be able to do this. (http://nc4ea.org/files/preparation_matters-04-01-09.pdf) While showing a pathway to rigorous coursework from any given eighth grade course is laudable, it is also a bit misrepresentative if, in fact, no students can successfully maneuver the pathway. In addition, the number of students who exit Pre-Algebra in eighth grade and make their way to AP Calculus should be examined.

³ http://nc4ea.org/files/orange_juice_or_orange_drink_02-13-06.pdf

Recommendation #3

Critical Action

District leaders provide detailed resources that clarify the district's written curriculum.

Leaders in higher performing districts indicate that providing teachers with a clear and detailed curriculum of what students are to know and be able to do by grade and subject is merely *the first step* in a very lengthy development and support process. These leaders say that the work of *unpacking the standards*—helping to detail and define them through pacing guides, student exemplars, model lessons, and sample assessment items—begins the moment the curriculum is developed. Given the uneven curricular development of the core subjects in WRSD, some subject areas may well be prepared to proceed with this recommendation before others. It is highly recommended, however, that 1) district leaders set the expectations for how—and in what order—detailed resources will be developed, and 2) district leaders ensure that resource development in any given subject area does not precede the development of a tightly aligned, rigorous written curriculum across all grades.

- **Study the role of district leaders in higher performing districts and schools relative to the support they provide for curriculum delivery.** These leaders understand the importance of providing detailed resources to clarify the district's written curriculum. By providing these resources, they allow classroom teachers to refine their own teaching styles and to address the varied needs of students. Consider the alternative: teachers have to figure out what they are supposed to teach, what materials they are supposed to use to teach, what instructional strategies to use, how to differentiate instruction for varied learners, and how to measure to see if students have learned the content. That scenario – all too common across the country – leads to uneven student achievement and teacher burnout!
- **While the reviewers understand the budgetary constraints facing WRSD, the fundamental importance of an aligned and rigorous curriculum to all teaching and learning expenditures requires that WRSD leaders determine how they might garner monies for this work.** While it is only one of many possible approaches, leaders might consider the following. Identify a K-12 leader for each core content area. This curricular specialist might be given a release period during the day to attend to curricular development and implementation. Each of the core content specialists would be responsible for planning specific work in their subject area for the monthly curricular meetings.
- **Develop a bank of proven standards-based model lessons that are continually refined.** Work closely with school leaders to identify the most effective lessons being taught in their schools. Also, study student performance data to determine which teachers have experienced the most success on given objectives. Begin to collect the lessons associated with teaching those objectives. Leaders in higher performing school systems often attach these proven lessons to the respective learning objectives in a Web-based curriculum resource center. Then teachers can begin to review lessons from across the district that have proven most effective. Build a system that

allows teachers to continue to comment on posted lessons and to offer suggestions for further refining them.

- **Begin to provide the clarity needed for teachers to know the level to which each academic objective is to be learned.** A first step toward achieving this clarity can be to code all academic standards on some type of rubric (e.g., academic standard needs to be 1) introduced, 2) developed, 3) mastered and 4) assessed.) Soon after receiving this clarity, however, teachers need concrete examples of what that level of learning “looks like.” Further clarity is typically provided in one of two ways: 1) by showing sample assessment items that students should be able to successfully answer if taught at the correct level, and/or 2) by presenting student exemplars. The sample problems included in the Power Standards for some grades begin to address this need, although without the anchor of the level of mastery expected at each grade.
- **Provide curriculum maps or pacing guides for all courses in the curriculum. Begin by providing pacing guides for all core subjects, PreK–12.** At the most basic level, pacing guides may simply show the learning standards organized by weeks across the school year. Curriculum maps or pacing guides are often used interchangeably, although some educators use the term curriculum maps to indicate a more inclusive document – offering a sequence for delivering content, associated resources or materials for teaching that content, and a tool for collecting data about the implemented curriculum. Either way, there are a plethora of resources for creating curriculum maps or pacing guides at your disposal on the Internet. The most important thing to remember is that these guides or maps should be developed at the district level and used by all teachers in the district.

Recommendation #4

Critical Action

District leaders require that the district's written curriculum is the taught curriculum in every classroom.

This action is best clarified by a *what* and *how* statement. *What* teachers teach is non-negotiable; *how* they teach it must be informed by their professional judgment. Tragically in the United States, educators have confused teacher professionalism with each teacher having the right to make decisions about what they teach. The result—curricular chaos—has had a devastating effect on student learning.

Unless a teacher plans to stay with the same students throughout the PreK–12 years, that teacher's work must be carefully connected and tightly aligned to experiences both before and after his/her own.

- **Clearly communicate to all school leaders and to teachers that the district's written curriculum is to be the taught curriculum in every classroom.** Of course, this expectation can only be enacted when you are certain that the following conditions are met.
 3. *A clear, specific, and rigorous written curriculum does indeed exist.* The variance noted in curriculum development work across subjects requires that district leaders be absolutely certain when, for any given subject, they can in fact clearly communicate that the written curriculum is to be the taught curriculum.
 4. *All teachers have been given adequate opportunity to become knowledgeable regarding the written curriculum.* This requires varying levels of training support as well as easy access to the written curriculum.
- **Clearly communicate to all principals that they are accountable for ensuring the integrity of delivery of the district's written curriculum in all classrooms.** Work with principals to determine how they can be certain that this expectation is being met in their schools. For example, district leaders and principals in higher performing school systems regularly report that the learning objective of each lesson is posted daily in a visible place within each classroom. As a result, in quick walkthroughs or visits, the leaders know exactly what the lesson objective is and can observe how the activities of the lesson are related. Whatever the solution, be certain that the principal understands that he/she is responsible and that you will both provide whatever support is needed and monitor to ensure the practice is enacted.
- **Ensure that district leaders are prepared to monitor the communicated expectations.** The two primary methods for ensuring the fidelity of the taught curriculum are 1) benchmark assessments and 2) observations.
- **Prepare a response plan to be enacted if district leaders determine the written curriculum is not the taught curriculum in all schools.**

District leaders can leave no room for confusion or uncertainty relative to this expectation.

Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

District Practice

Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development.

The next recommendation—*Recommendation 5*—deals with district practices relative to staff selection, development, and support. Only one of the seven Critical Actions related to this practice at the district level have been categorized as *Leverage Points*.

Recommendation #5

Critical Action

District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.

Given the budgetary concerns facing all school systems at this time, it is with great caution that reviewers make any recommendation that requires the allocation of resources. The review of higher performing schools, however, consistently demonstrates that schools facing even extreme budget challenges still make the availability of instructional coaches a priority.

- **Allocate the resources to provide all schools access to instructional coaches in core content areas.** Understanding that teachers often learn best from other teachers, leaders in higher performing systems carefully craft the position of instructional coach to ensure maximum impact. District leaders must ensure high-quality coaching across all schools. Have instructional coaches from all buildings meet centrally to develop the position. Clarify that instructional coaches will work directly with teachers – modeling and monitoring lessons, clarifying the curriculum, analyzing data and studying instructional strategies. It is very important to communicate through this position that every teacher in the district is to be a learner – coaches are not focusing only on teachers who are experiencing difficulty in the classroom. It will be important to explore all possibilities for creatively providing this type of support to teachers in WRSD.
- **Select instructional coaches with proven track records in student achievement gains.** As you begin to develop the role of the instructional coach, it is critical that the coaches have demonstrated success in their own classrooms. Make “a proven track record of student achievement gains” part of the job description. Establishing the position is important. Ensuring credibility with teachers relative to your selection of coaches is even more important.
- **Develop a culture of adult learning in your district.** To begin, set the expectation that knowledge sharing is at the heart and soul of a learning community – and one of the primary tasks of the instructional coach. For a number of reasons (e.g., don't want to appear as if they are bragging, don't trust colleagues, feel their lessons are their own personal property), some leaders and teachers are reluctant to openly share lessons, strategies, etc. Any reluctance must be viewed and dealt with as

an impediment to school improvement efforts. It may take time and concentrated effort, but eventually teachers will be energized by sharing openly and honestly in a collaborative team. Instructional coaches can be instrumental in building both skills and trust among teachers. They can also serve as important agents in transferring best practice across schools in your district.

Theme 3

Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

District Practice

Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.

The next recommendation—*Recommendation 6*—deals with district practices relative to instructional programs and strategies. One of the two Critical Actions related to this practice at the district level have been categorized as *Leverage Points*.

Recommendation #6

Critical Action

District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.

- **Select textbooks or instructional programs based on evidence that they were effective with similar student populations.** Identify the highest performing schools in the grade/subject for which you are selecting new materials. You may choose to select schools serving students with similar demographic profiles to your schools. The site visits currently included in the process serve this purpose, only without necessarily having an anchor in demonstrated student achievement.
- **Continue to pilot instructional programs prior to selection.** Higher performing school leaders indicate that they may pilot one or two programs for a particular unit of study. After your standards and curriculum are set for the unit, ask representatives for any programs you are considering to indicate exactly which of their materials are aligned to that curriculum. This provides both a test of alignment and the pilot experience. Have several teachers use each of the proposed materials and give a common assessment at the end of the unit. The performance data can be one component of your evaluation of the programs. Actual use of the materials by teachers within your own district can provide powerful, informed feedback on the potential programs.
- **Select instructional programs that are tightly aligned with the academic objectives of the district's written curriculum.** It is imperative to establish a deep understanding on the part of all district leaders that instructional programs or materials are NOT the curriculum, but simply a means by which your written curriculum will be taught. This difference is critical. School leaders and teachers are often easily confused when district leaders use the term curriculum inaccurately. Make sure that your district leadership team communicates clearly and consistently on this important teaching-learning variable.
- **Study the publisher's documentation relative to the alignment of any new instructional programs or materials with your district's written curriculum.**
At best, the publisher will typically document a program's alignment to the state

standards. The clarity that you add to the state standards in your written curriculum in terms of specific academic objectives must also be reviewed. It is your responsibility to study this alignment to ensure that you are selecting resources that will help each teacher present the academic objectives at the level to which they are to be taught and learned. The current gap analysis process at WRSD occurs after adoption and implementation. This analysis must be completed before the materials are adopted in the district. As teachers use the program more extensively, they may suggest tweaks and revisions, but these adjustments should be relatively minor since the primary alignment work has already occurred.

- **Provide teachers with documentation citing the connections between the district's academic objectives (in the written curriculum) and the new instructional materials.** It is absolutely not enough to simply indicate that the new materials are aligned; it is imperative to actually demonstrate and document this alignment. As you develop expertise in this area, it will be important for the associated curricular specialists/committee members in your district to create additional documentation that provides even greater detail for teachers. Exactly what knowledge and skills do students need to master and how can the instructional materials be best used to accomplish this? Sections of the new materials may need to be omitted and the order of presentation adjusted.

Theme 5

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

District Practice

Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students.

The final two recommendations—*Recommendation 7* and *Recommendation 8*—both deal with district practices relative to supplying pyramids of intervention that provide immediate and intense intervention at multiple levels when learning is interrupted. Two of the four Critical Actions related to this practice at the district level have been categorized as *Leverage Points*.

Recommendation #7

Critical Action

District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.

- **Use the current structured walkthrough system to study the most effective instructional practices in the district.** It is incredibly important to ensure curricular fidelity prior to identifying any strategy or approach as *effective*. That is, effective instructional practices should only be documented relative to the particular standard that is being taught. Also, the criteria by which a particular lesson is deemed effective should be transparent and credible (e.g., demonstrated the highest student performance achievement on a given objective.) Praising or sharing instructional practices in the absence of either of the above more likely contributes to confusion than coherence. Recognition of effective practices should also be tightly connected to the curriculum and student performance.
- **Ensure that data collection through observations leads to structured follow-up conversations with school leaders and individual and/or teams of teachers.** Follow-up activities related to classroom observations provide a valuable opportunity to model the type of collaboration and professional learning community that leaders want to foster. Learning to have frank discussions about what worked and what didn't work is a hallmark of higher performing systems.
- **Systematize the taping of effective teaching strategies.** Using Flip® video cameras to capture effective teaching examples is an excellent strategy that can be used to promote knowledge sharing across the district. As with other practices noted in the *Leverage Points* category, this practice needs to be very intentionally developed to serve the designated purpose. For example, on what basis do district or school leaders determine that an observation is worthy of taping and sharing? The reason that one teacher or interaction is taped rather than another should be absolutely transparent to teachers, (i.e., outstanding student performance results). Become sophisticated at identifying teachers who are demonstrating outstanding student performance results in different ways. Perhaps one teacher is extremely effective with students who enter the classroom far below grade level. Perhaps another teacher

finds effective means and strategies to challenge students who demonstrate early mastery. Using common assessments or district benchmarks, identify teachers who made the greatest gains on particular objectives. Your vehicle for identification must be easy for teachers to understand and highly credible. Many other aspects of this practice also need to be addressed (e.g., will there be a single conduit through which all videotaped segments are vetted, how will clips be posted and described, how long will clips be retained, etc.)

- **Consider conducting formal case studies of teachers who are achieving the strongest student performance results in your district.** This incredibly rich source of information remains vastly untapped in most districts. Begin to forge an annual history of the most effective teaching practices captured in case studies and shared with teachers—and possibly parents—across the district.
- **Structure the ways in which the most effective teaching practices are shared in the district.** Be very intentional about the different venues you will use. How can you provide the best base for knowledge sharing across your district? Have you established the culture that is open to this type of sharing? From forums on their websites to formal case studies, leaders in higher performing districts are skilled at creating the environment and the opportunity for teachers to share best practices.

Recommendation #8

Critical Action

District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.

- **Develop a clearly defined process—based primarily on student performance data—to make any curricular revisions in the district.** Obviously, the review and revision process cannot precede the establishment of a clearly aligned written curriculum (i.e., one must have an established curriculum before it can be revised). Reviewers had some concerns, however, that teachers were already discussing adaptations to curriculum or course competencies based on the anticipated national Common Core Standards. Until the WRSD's written curriculum clearly states what it is that each student will know and do by grade level, it would be impossible to know how any new national standards would impact the curriculum at any given level.

Once the WRSD curriculum is clearly defined in each subject area, student performance data should be the primary indicator by which curricular adjustments are made. Leaders in higher performing districts indicate that these curricular reviews are ongoing. The old system of curricular review – cycles rotating subjects across years – is replaced by regular review using each benchmark and assessment to suggest refinements. Typically, designated teachers for each subject area meet in the summer to consider the data and feedback that has been collected throughout the year, and curricular adjustments and refinements are recommended. For example, if students across the district are performing poorly on a given objective, the curricular adjustments that may address the deficiency must be considered. Of course, it is critical to be certain that the written curriculum is anchored to a sufficiently rigorous endpoint (e.g., college and career readiness standards) prior to making any revisions. Without this anchor, curricular revision would be analogous to *rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic*.

- **Thoroughly analyze student performance data to determine when adjustments to instructional resources are needed.** District leaders need to be skilled at discerning whether learning problems should be addressed through curricular adjustments, instructional adjustments, or both. Like curricular review cycles, the adoption of instructional programs for a set number of years is only the very first step in the district's role in reviewing and adjusting instructional resources. In average- and low-performing school systems, it is often the only step that district leaders take. Leaders in higher performing school systems, however, see the selection of instructional materials as the signal for much more detailed work to begin – aligning the materials to the district's written curriculum, documenting this alignment for all teachers, supplementing the materials or programs when data suggest a need, etc.