

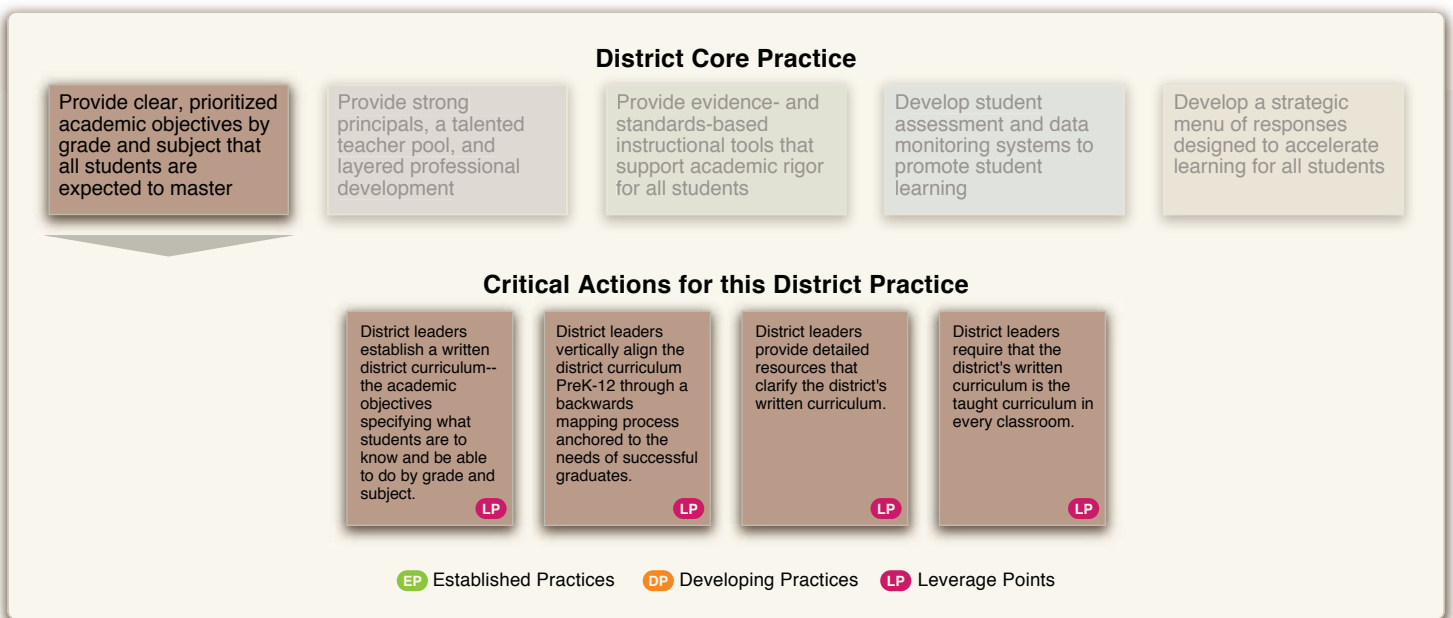
Review and Rating of Core Practices

The following sections of the audit report present each of the three categories of district Critical Actions based on the analysis and benchmarking process undertaken by the NCEA audit review team. The first two categories, *Established Practices* and *Developing Practices*, are presented in less detail than the third category, *Leverage Points*. *Leverage Points* represent the areas that the audit review team believes might most serve district leaders as they seek higher achievement levels. As a result, the review team focused most intensely on analyzing this category of practices.

The graphic below, and on pages 13-14, summarizes the review team’s categorization of the Critical Actions associated with district-level Core Practices.

Theme 1

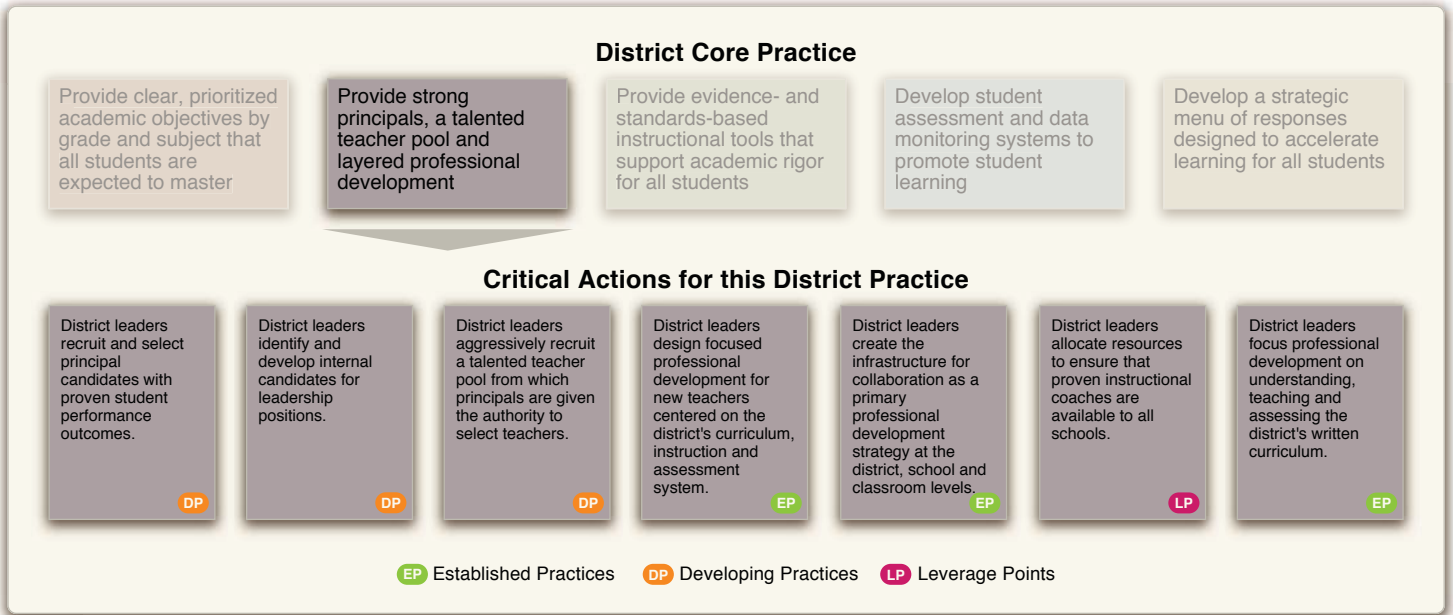
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals



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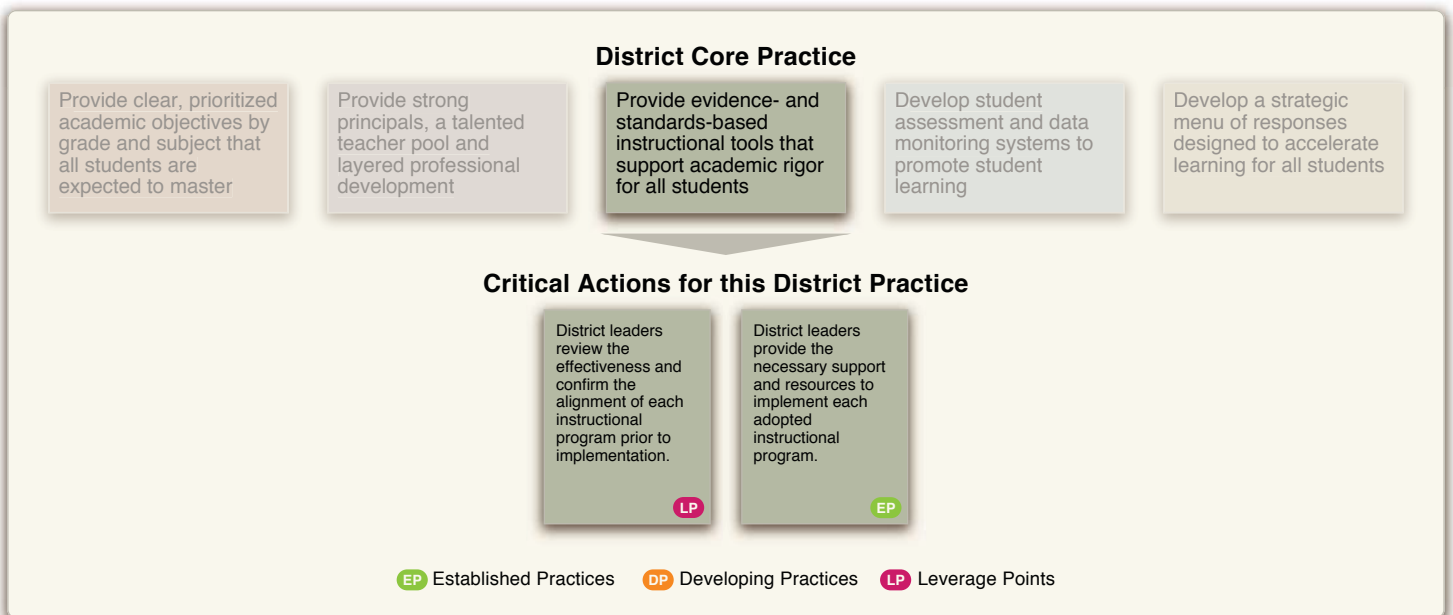
Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building



Theme 3

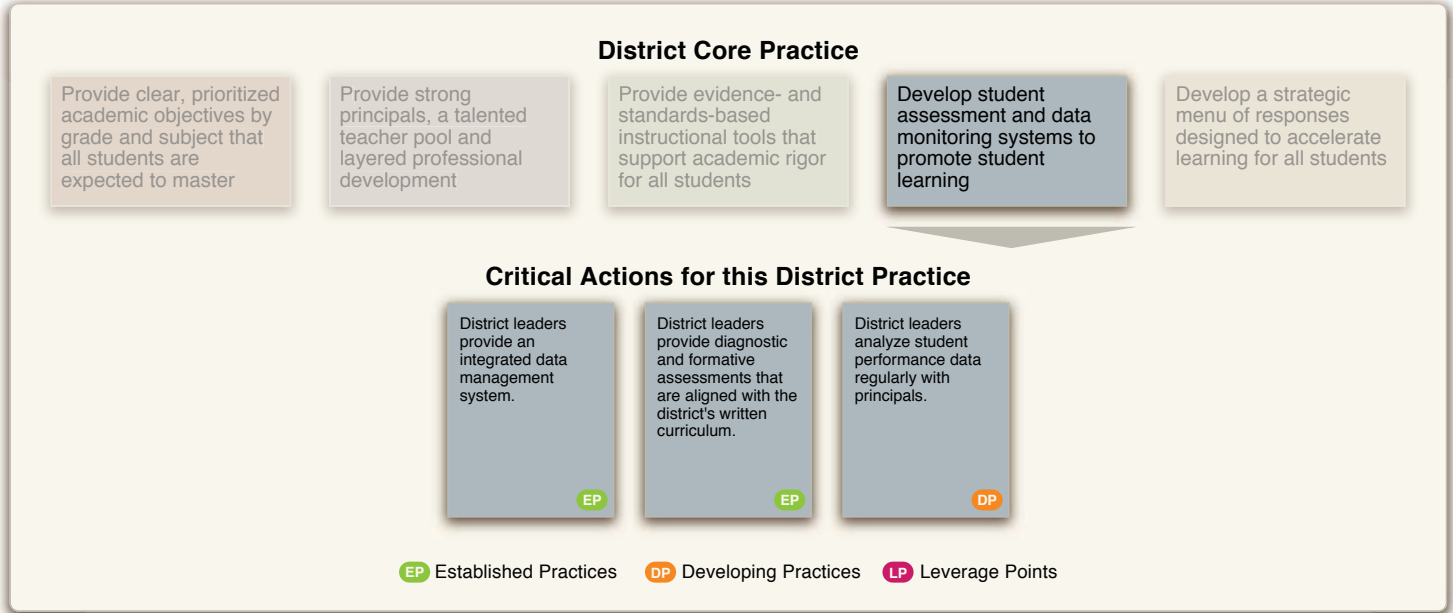
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies



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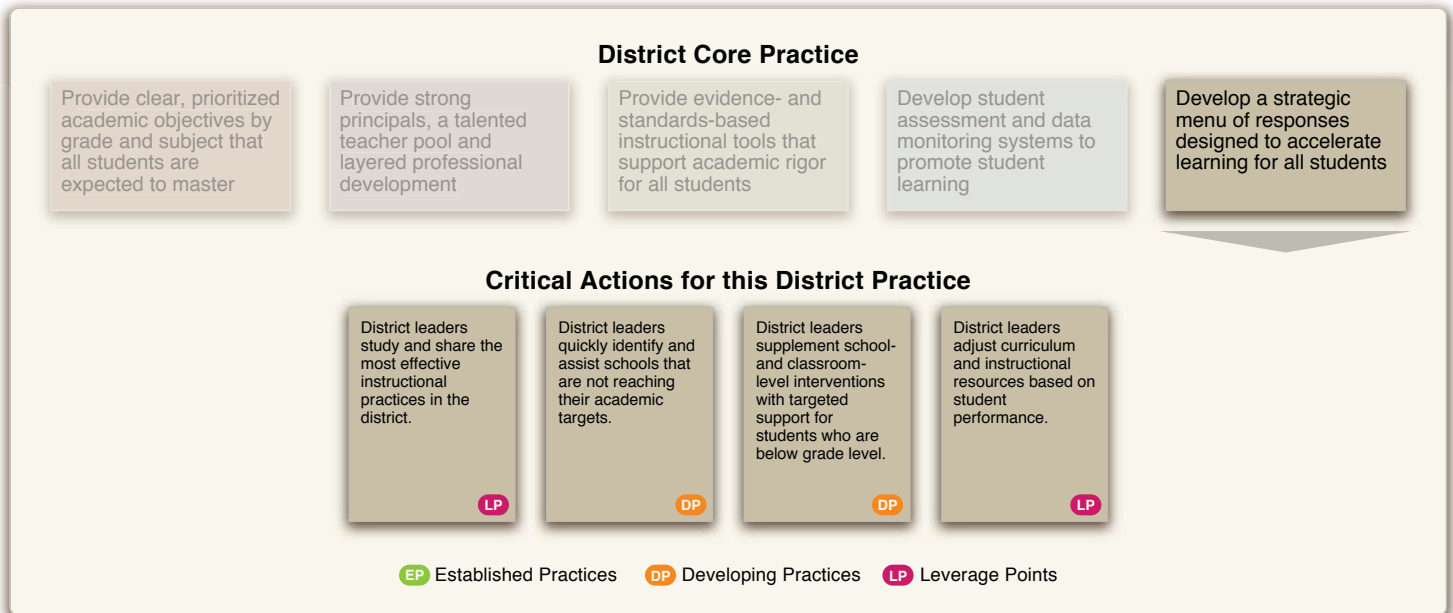
Theme 4

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data



Theme 5

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment



EP Established Practices: 6 Critical Actions

After interviewing district stakeholders and reviewing district documents, the audit review team found evidence that Winnisquam Regional is closest to the practices of higher performers in the following six Critical Actions. The following section details the district's accomplishments to date, as well as outlines additional opportunities for growth and continued improvement relative to each Critical Action.

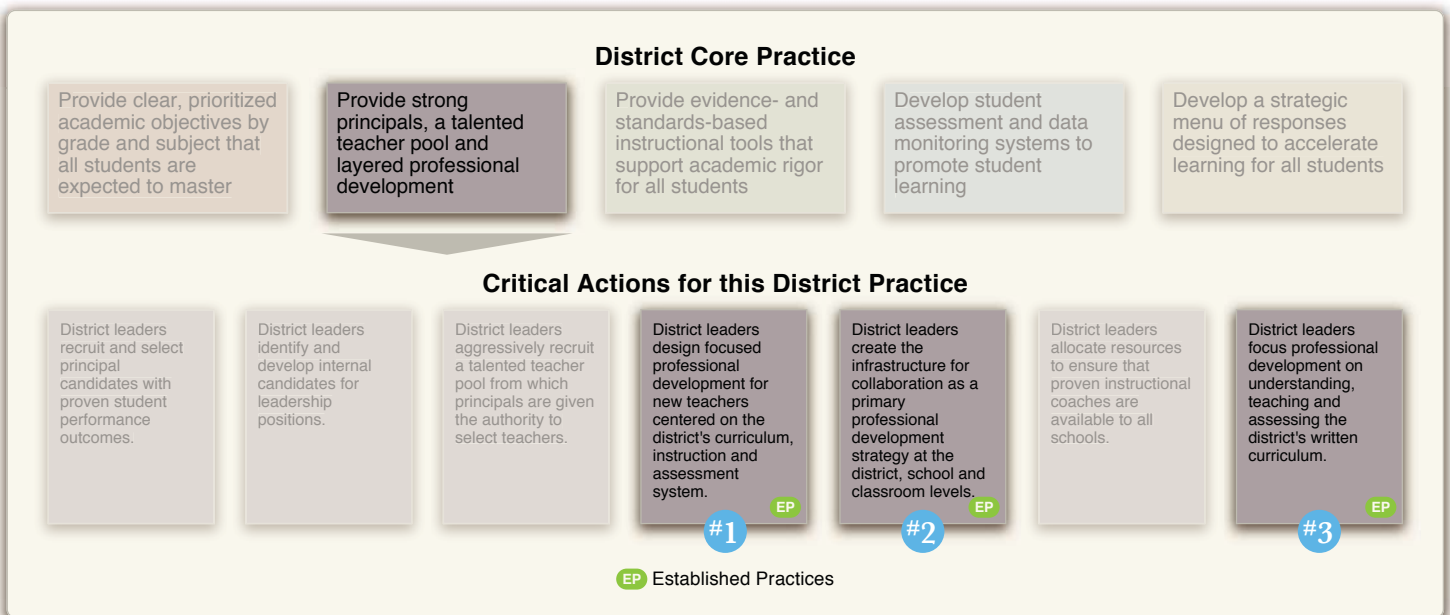
Leveraging existing areas of strength could allow district leaders to see immediate and meaningful improvements in teaching and learning and, by extension, in student achievement.

The six of 20 Critical Actions included as *Established Practices* represent three themes in the NCEA Core Practice Framework: Theme 2—Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building; Theme 3—Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies; and Theme 4—Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data. These Critical Actions are numbered within the context of the Framework below.

Please refer to Appendix C of this report to view the Core Practice Framework in its entirety.

Theme 2

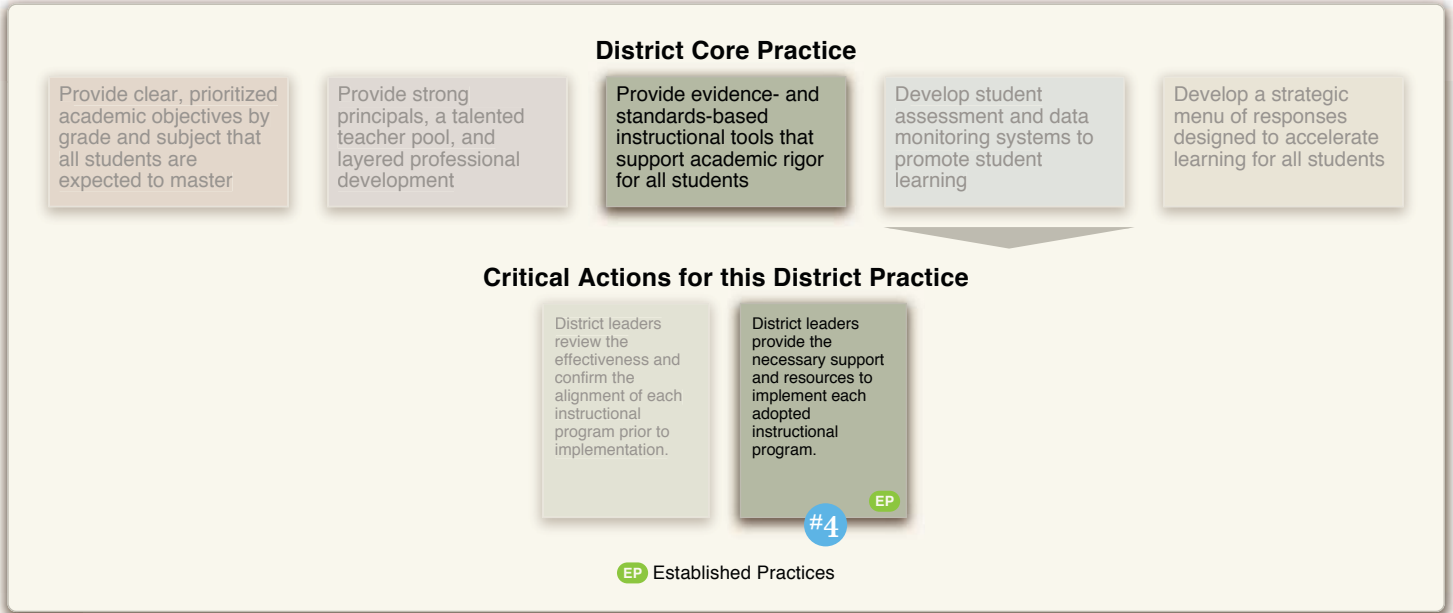
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building



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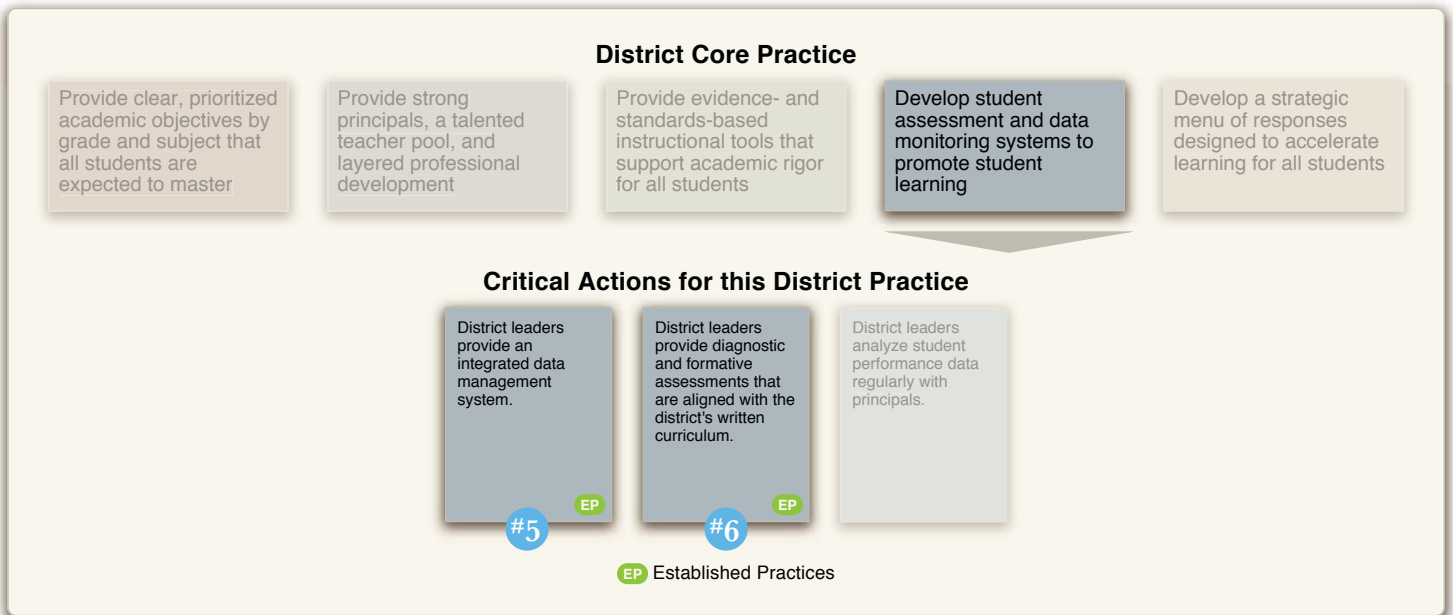
Theme 3

Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies



Theme 4

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data



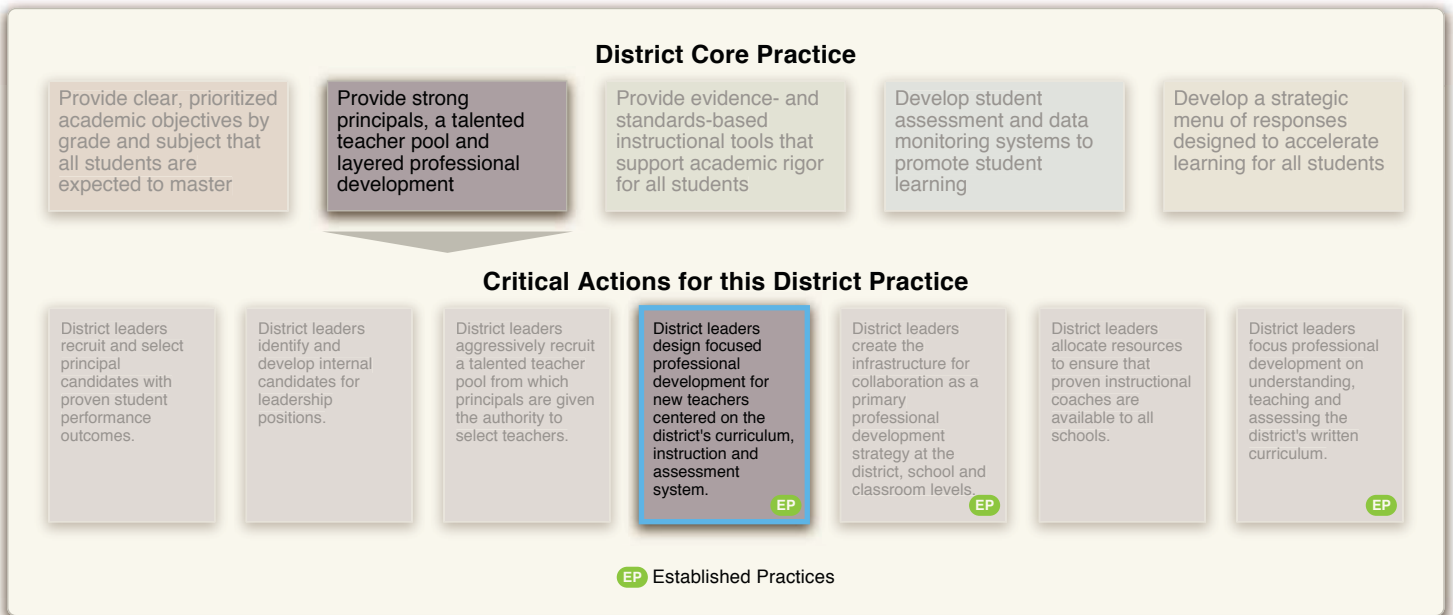
EP Established Practices: Critical Action #1

Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Critical Action

District leaders design focused professional development for new teachers centered on the district’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment system.



Throughout the site visit, reviewers heard consistent positive feedback about the new-teacher orientation program provided by the district. This program, which began with an intensive, three-day training at the beginning of the school year, supports new teachers with mentors, monthly workshops, and an online *Ning* community.

A study of the agendas and content for the initial training sessions for new teachers showed that a primary focus of that time was to orient new staff members to the instructional expectations and assessment program in WRSD. Significant time was devoted to the concept of instructional differentiation and high-yield instructional strategies (e.g., Marzano’s research-based strategies). Throughout the three days, new teachers were also introduced to the peer coaching they would receive, the detailed lesson planning template used in some schools, the *Classroom Walkthrough* protocol, and many of the professional learning community protocols. New teachers were also introduced to the district’s strategic plan and district policies related to communication with parents, staff evaluations, and professional development opportunities.

While this practice was rated as an *Established Practice*, reviewers note a significant omission in the new-teacher training: any pointed discussion of the district’s written curriculum. Given the confusion in the district about what the curriculum *is* and its apparent absence, such exclusion is understandable. However, as district leaders continue the

curriculum work, it is critical that a thorough introduction to the curriculum become part of the new-teacher orientation as well. As current staff members begin to make these shifts in thinking, new teachers must also be equipped to distinguish *curriculum* from *instructional programs* and must understand their unique and critical contributions within the students' K-12 learning experience. Incorporating this type of information into the new-teacher training would make the orientation truly established and consistent with the practices of higher performing school systems.

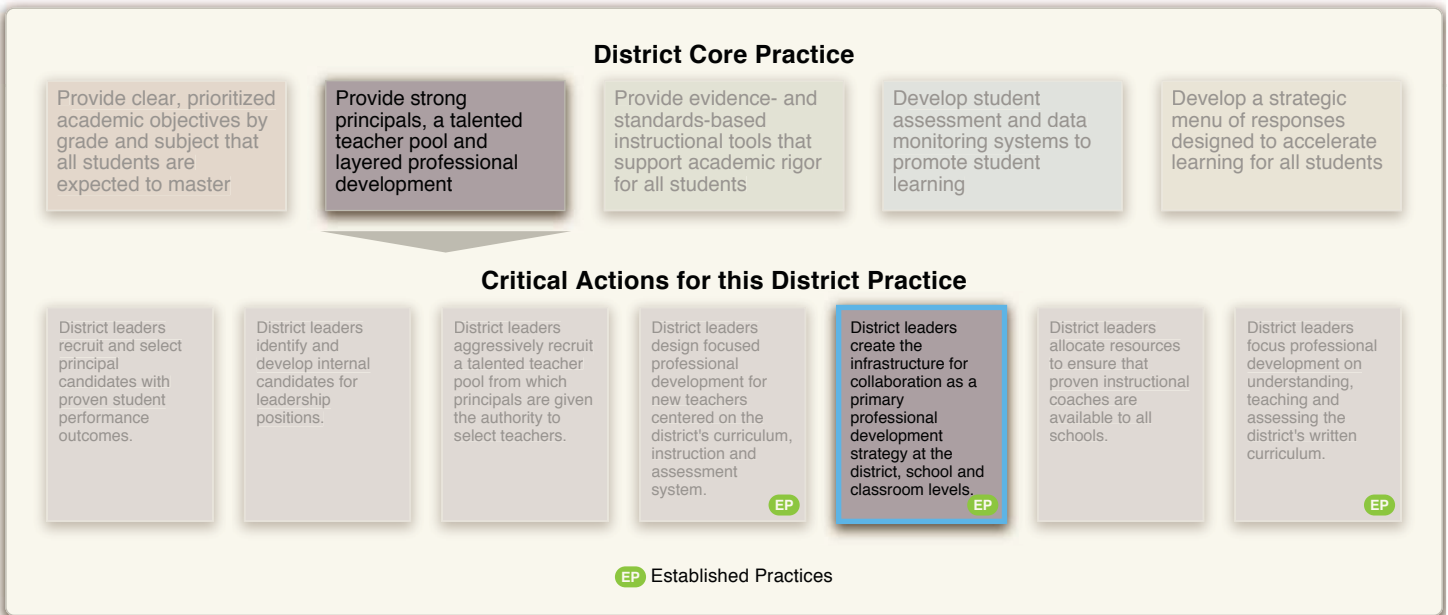
EP Established Practices: Critical Action #2

Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Critical Action

District leaders create the infrastructure for collaboration as a primary professional development strategy at the district, school, and classroom levels.



Instituting professional learning communities is a priority initiative for the Winnisquam Regional School District. Winnisquam Regional Middle School (WRMS) staff are farthest along in establishing learning communities and Critical Friends Groups, since part of the restructuring plan for WRMS was hiring a consultant coach from the Center for Collaborative Education. PLCs are becoming a more common structure across the district, with some of the protocols even being incorporated into new-teacher orientation activities.

It is important to note that the audit team considers this practice *Established* and consistent with higher performing school systems in its intent more than its reality at the present time. Regularly scheduled collaborative planning time was not yet in place at each school (although teachers at all schools described “meeting a lot”). Faculty across the district were familiar with and used terms such as “meeting norms” and “protocols” which communicated

to the audit team that they were aware of the process and expectations of such learning communities. However, the practice is still relatively new in the district: much of the effort is currently given to planning the logistics of PLCs and establishing norms and expectations.

Interviewees at all levels explained that educators in the district were still becoming comfortable with openly discussing their teaching and its impact on student achievement. However, many of the meaningful, fundamental activities of PLCs (e.g., planning common lessons and studying student work) are already occurring in several schools in the district, just not necessarily under the banner of PLCs. Collaboration that occurred informally because of the collegiality of the various faculties can become even more purposeful through the PLC structure. Ultimately, having high-functioning, collaborative teams in all schools and a clear district curriculum about which to collaborate will have a great impact on the way WRSD educators go about the business of teaching and learning.

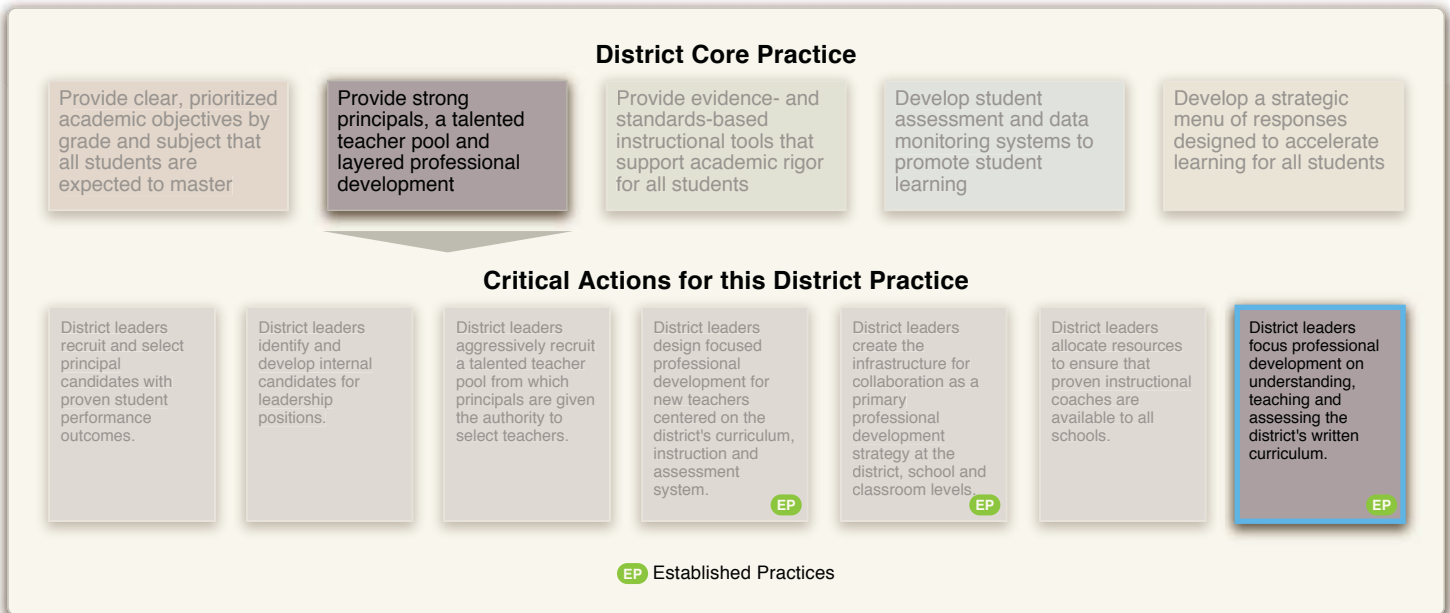
EP Established Practices: Critical Action #3

Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Critical Action

District leaders focus professional development on understanding, teaching, and assessing the district’s written curriculum.



Submitted documentation describes a three-tiered approach to staff development in WRSD. “District level staff development is an ongoing, long-term plan to increase the effectiveness of employees through interventions aimed at achieving district identified goals. Building level development is a one to three year plan at the school or department level to achieve identified building goals. Building and department goals will relate to district goals yet be flexible in adapting to the desired direction of the site administration and staff. Individual

level development is a three-year, formal and informal plan for activities, which meet individual needs aligned with district direction.” Professional development offerings at each level must be linked to the district’s strategic plan.

Reviewers heard broad praise for the district’s support for professional growth opportunities, particularly those at the individual level. Nearly every teacher focus group mentioned the significant funds allocated for teachers to pursue college courses and workshops (although the first-come, first-served approach to distributing the funds was cited as somewhat problematic). Teachers use the Individual Three-Year Professional Growth Plan (Form A) to set individual, evidence-based professional goals. Proposals for professional development activities must be linked explicitly to these established goals.

In addition to supporting individual teachers’ pursuits, the district provides a series of professional development sessions throughout the year that focus on enhancing teachers’ understanding of the instructional programs (e.g., *FOSS* kits), best instructional practice (e.g., co-teaching, best practices in mathematics, and integrating technology), and assessment (e.g., *NWEA MAP* and *AIMSweb*). These topics are determined primarily based on staff surveys but supplemented with information from classroom walkthroughs and *NWEA* and *NECAP* data. The focus of training is targeted to the needs of each school site. For instance, middle school educators participate in more training about PLCs than other schools; middle and high school teachers attend training on Understanding by Design (UbD); and elementary teachers are focusing on implementation of the *FOSS* science kits. School leaders also participate with their teachers in many of these core sessions about the instructional programs and professional learning communities.

Many sessions in the professional development calendar were devoted to curriculum development. Yet, the confusion within the district about curriculum, curriculum resources, and instructional programs means that these sessions are occurring without the necessary grounding in a clear understanding of the K-12 learning continuum.

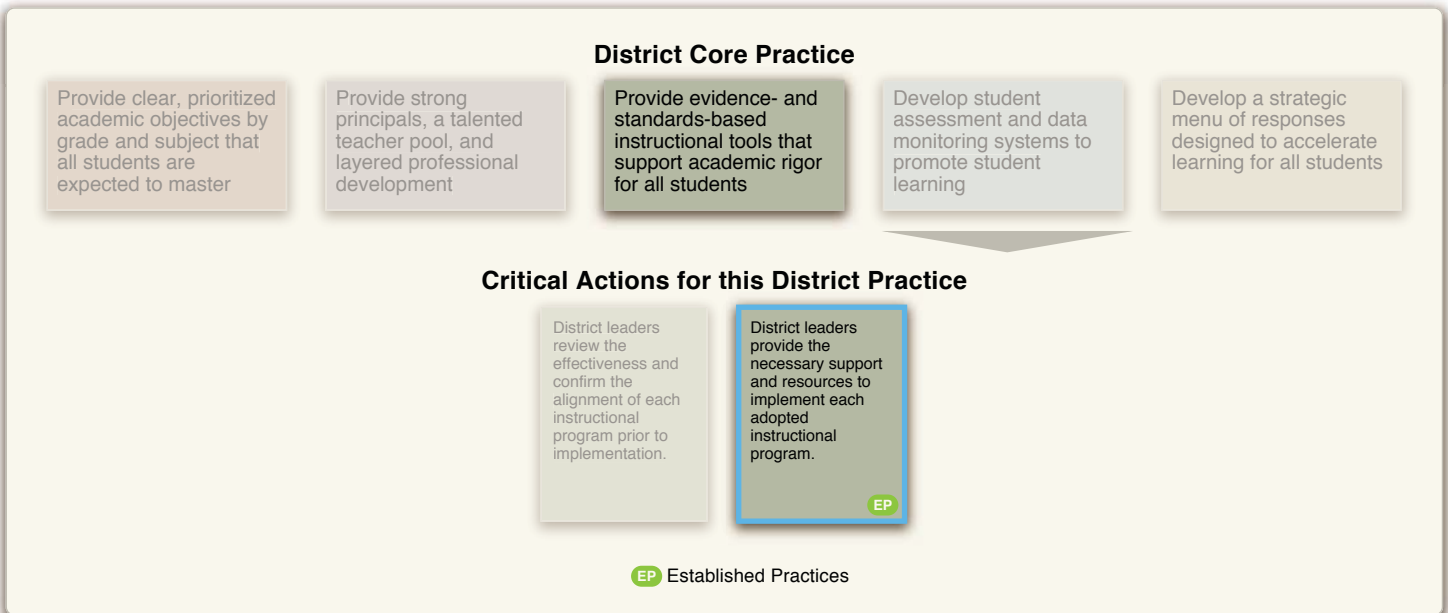
EP Established Practices: Critical Action #4

Theme 3

Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

Critical Action

District leaders provide the necessary support and resources to implement each adopted instructional program.



Just as they had general praise for the professional development offerings in the district, elementary teachers conveyed that district leaders are also intent on supporting the adopted instructional programs. District and elementary level interviewees communicated that the addition of the *FOSS* kits in science made that program's implementation a focus of professional development for elementary teachers. The training is periodic (about six times) throughout the year to provide ongoing and timely support as teachers proceed with the new program. Teachers at some schools mentioned similar support for the implementation of *Story Town*. Special education teachers participated in training to support the *WILSON Reading System*®.

The periodic professional development at the secondary level is focused more on PLC and Understanding by Design than on particular instructional programs. Targeted *Read 180* training for teachers of those courses is one exception.

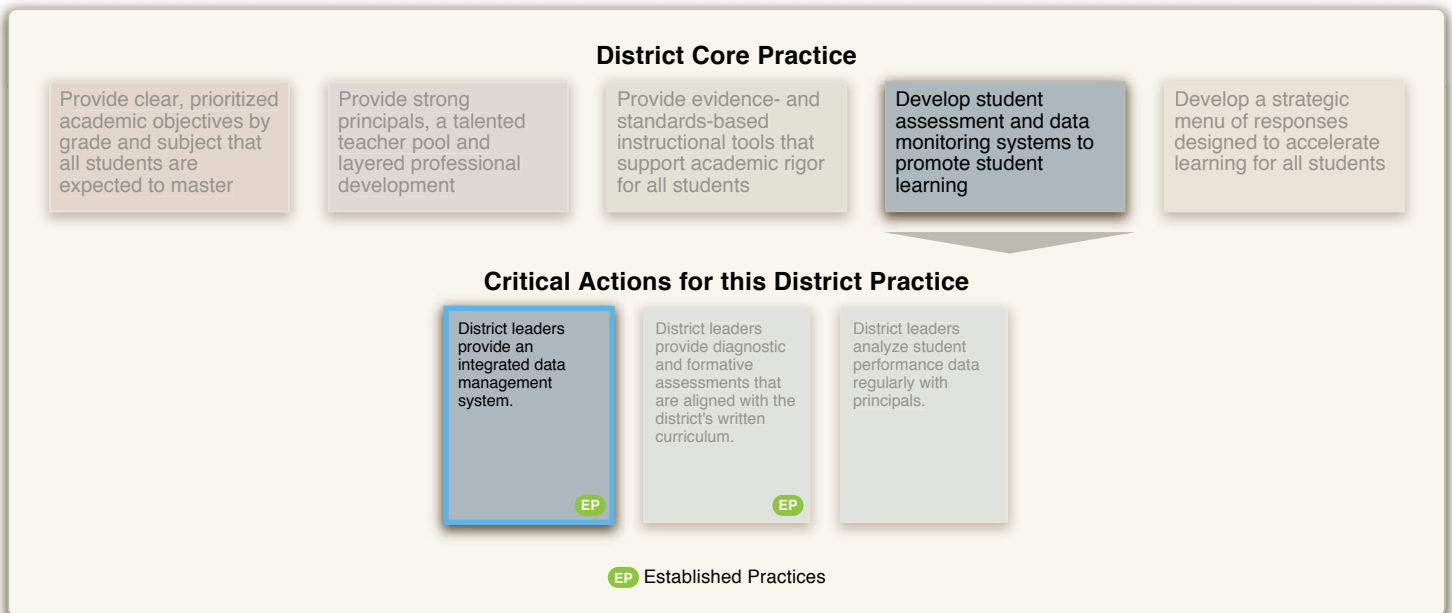
EP Established Practices: Critical Action #5

Theme 4

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data.

Critical Action

District leaders provide an integrated data management system.



New Hampshire provides *Performance Plus* to the district at no cost. According to the program description, *Performance Plus* includes “an assessment management solution for tracking and analyzing student achievement in K-12 education. [It] provides educators a single location to easily access national, state and local assessment data along with essential student information.” This online data management system allows teachers to access assessment information even for students who are new to the district. The ability to begin the school year with information on every student is a powerful function of this data system.

Students in Grades 1-10 take the *Measures of Academic Progress*® (*MAP*) in mathematics and reading two to three times per year, and teachers have access to their preliminary results online within 24 hours. Leaders and teachers also have access to student assessment data through the *MAP* website. This system presents results in a multitude of report formats for teachers and leaders to study and use to guide their instructional decisions.

Although not completely integrated into a single data management system, the information provided through *Performance Plus* and *MAP* serves the necessary purposes at a reasonable cost to the district. If the district were larger and needed to manage data for far more students, a custom solution might be preferable. However, without district staff dedicated to maintaining such a system and to responding to principal or teacher requests

for custom data reports, the state- and NWEA-supported resources are likely adequate for the district at this time.

Having the data available to leaders and teachers is only the first step. *Using* assessment data meaningfully is a critical next step. Interviewees at all levels discussed the emphasis placed on student growth within the district. At the same time, however, everyone also acknowledged that educators were “at different places” relative to the use of data.

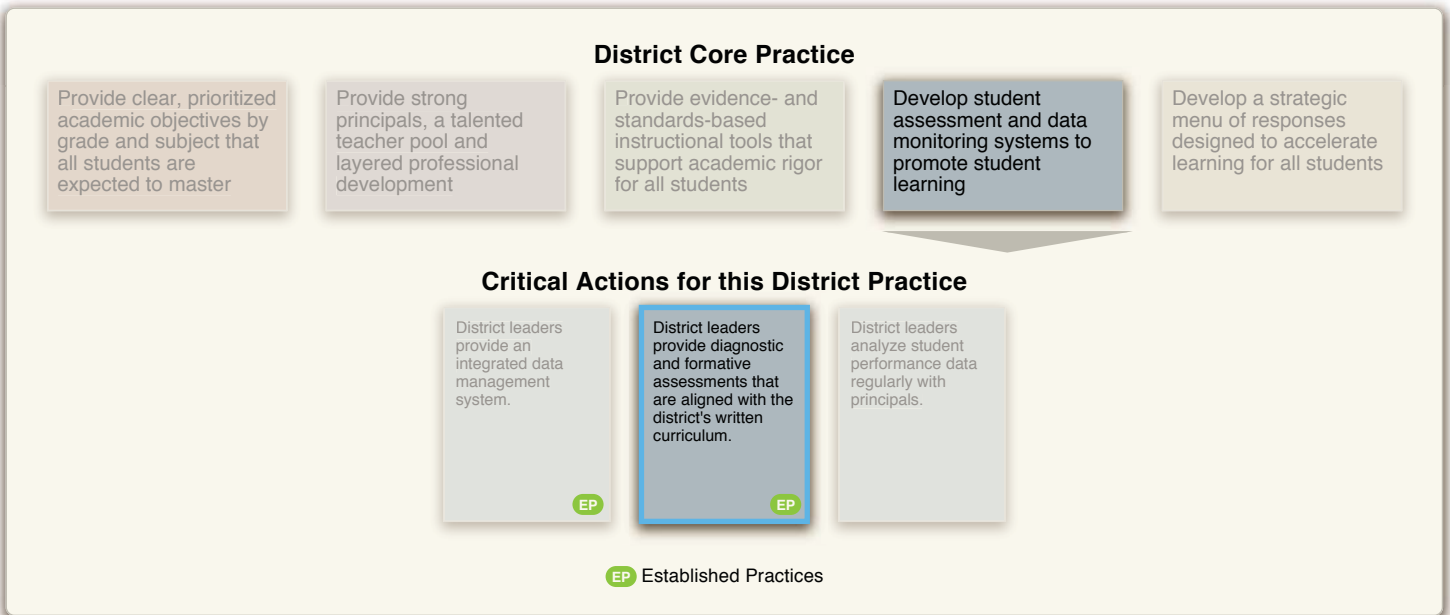
EP Established Practices: Critical Action #6

Theme 4

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data.

Critical Action

District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district’s written curriculum.



The district relies largely on the NWEA MAP in mathematics and literacy (reading and language usage) as their formative assessment measures. Primary grades are tested three times per year, upper elementary grades are tested two times per year, and secondary students are tested once per year. These assessments are computer adaptive so that they are customized to each student, thereby providing a tailored view of each student’s instructional needs. Educators in WRSD use the results of these tests to set student growth goals (often in collaboration with students), to monitor program effectiveness, and to predict student performance on the state NECAP. Interviewees also use NWEA tests as diagnostic assessments for new students.

The MAP in reading and mathematics serves as a strong beginning to a coherent assessment system within WRSD. Recognizing that, ultimately, those resources are insufficient for such a system and building on them toward greater curricular alignment and better content coverage should be priorities for further strengthening this practice.

The MAP is a well-known, well-respected resource that provides considerable information to educators about students’ performance in reading and mathematics. The primary concerns

reviewers had about the reliance on these assessments as the formative assessment system are their alignment with the district's written curriculum and the lack of similar resources in other content areas. At one school, for instance, educators questioned the logic of the results: "One student's NWEA scores indicated they are ready for Geometry, but the only way to know if they missed critical curriculum in Algebra is to wait and see when they test in tenth grade." Also, without a pacing guide to follow in the district, alignment of what is tested to what has been taught cannot be ensured. Another educator described a perceived dilemma: "Do we teach the curriculum or differentiate for each student to move NWEA scores?" The alignment between the curriculum and assessment should be crystal clear to all teachers. The same issues apply to the use of *AIMSweb* testing for special education students—the alignment of such assessments with the written and taught curriculum is essential to a coherent assessment program.

The priority district leaders are placing the development of common assessments is an important means to supplement the *MAP*. Not only can common assessments occur more frequently and be linked more specifically to the district's written curriculum, but they can also be developed for content areas that are currently overlooked by the testing program. Science is not tested through *MAP* and is only tested at the state level in Grades 4, 8, and 10. Social studies is not tested at all by either testing program.

The *MAP* in reading and mathematics serves as a strong beginning to a coherent assessment system within WRSD. Recognizing that, ultimately, those resources are insufficient for such a system and building on them toward greater curricular alignment and better content coverage should be priorities for further strengthening this practice.