

GLEN ELLYN SCHOOL DISTRICT 41

SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW REPORT

MARCH 5, 2017

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## I. DESCRIPTION/OVERVIEW

Glen Ellyn School District 41 has a strong reputation for academic achievement, family engagement and tremendous pride in their school system. With a district enrollment of approximately 3500 students and 12% of the student population receiving special education services, the district has determined that an audit would provide valuable insight and analysis to guide the evolution of the district special education model with recommendations and supports that advance effective and progressive practices.

In the spring of 2016, in conjunction with a district survey, a special needs assessment was conducted and subsequently several parents shared their perspective at a May District Board meeting. With several questions and concerns presented, Glen Ellyn School District 41 initiated a listening session for parents in early June, 2016. With the administration and three board members present, approximately 45 parents candidly conveyed their hopes, fears and expectations for the district. The evening forum and the input that preceded it served as an important springboard in pursuing a more in depth audit of district special education programs and services. Input that reflected challenges, questions and suggestions at the parent forum were incorporated in the following proposal goal and objectives. In a customized review process and based on the scope of the questions generated, it was determined that further review should include a blended qualitative and quantitative process that would provide important insights to assist in a comprehensive and customized audit and plan development. The proposal indicated, that “the process should reflect a collaborative and integrated approach that includes key stakeholders and aligns to the broader context of the district strategic plan and associated short term and long term action steps.”

## II. REVIEW/FOCUS

Develop a customized plan to advance the opportunities for Glen Ellyn School District 41 in providing quality programs and services that create optimum learning experiences that meet each student’s unique and specialized needs.

### Objectives:

1. Engage stakeholders in a collaborative, comprehensive review/audit process that customizes an approach that reflects input and engagement in designing a plan to advance specialized services in D41.
2. Facilitate several different focus groups of parents, staff, students, and administrators to gather important information and perspective that will provide valuable insight during the review, analysis and comprehensive planning.

3. Use a customized research-based approach to complete a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the continuum of programs, services and processes D41 special education programs and services.
4. The audit will include review and analysis of:
  - a) data on instructional practices.
  - b) student achievement and regional, state and national comparative data that includes continuum of services, identification rates, program and service provision, eligibility practices and patterns of supports and services.
  - c) resource allocation practices that include staffing patterns, use of assistants, related services and other supports.
  - d) indicators of quality inclusive practices and how services and supports are individualized to address diverse student needs.
  - e) need-driven decision-making processes that reflect resources aligned to appropriate levels that accelerate student growth in the areas of academic, social-emotional and independence.
5. Based on the data analysis and evidenced-based best practices, the consultants will conclude the review by providing a comprehensive plan that reflects the identified key priorities for Glen Ellyn School District 41, aligned and incorporated into the district strategic plan. The plan will advance the mission and vision reflecting inclusion of district students and enhanced parent engagement. The comprehensive plan will include recommendations, resources, professional development and potential growth measures to monitor and evaluate progress and additional supports that may be beneficial for next steps.

### III. DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

- Facilitated focus groups with questions targeted to priority areas
- District, review of 2 other districts and state comparative data that included IIRC, special education profile data, school report cards, professional development and staffing patterns
- Student achievement and behavioral data (MAP data)
- Glen Ellyn District 41 Strategic Plan 2017
- Parent Collaborative Work September – December, 2016
- Student Services Parent Advisory Council (SSPAC) information
- District 41 Special Education Needs Assessment (past 2 years)
- Best Practices educational research
- Customized Comprehensive Special Education Blueprint research

#### IV. REVIEW PRIORITIES

Educational practices are continually changing and evolving. Any educational system intent on improving, needs to regularly examine its performance. A more intense review, like this one related specifically to special education practices, can be extremely worthwhile and guide future decision-making. It is important, however, to recognize that in order to move forward in relation to educational evolution, there is a need for the district to agree on the values and priorities needing to be addressed. Additionally it is not the “job” of any individual or small cadre of individuals to be entirely responsible for systemic change and continuous improvement plan. Rather it ultimately is the responsibility of district parents, community members, board members, administrators, and staff to work together to make and support the necessary changes that will benefit students and their families.

Preliminary conversations with stakeholders throughout School District 41 indicated there are a number of issues worthy of more extensive examination. This review process investigated these issues, however discovered that four areas of greatest interest emerged. These are: instructional practices; aligned professional development; vision/mission, leadership, and goals; and communication and collaboration. The four priority categories are not mutually exclusive, therefore there is overlap among them. The information shared for the four categories are arranged by research, School District 41 data and analysis, and recommendations.

##### A. INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

###### Research:

Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment adds coherence and effectiveness to teaching and learning processes. Alignment is defined as the match between what is to be learned (the planned curriculum based on learning standards), what is actually taught (instruction), and what and how it is tested (assessment). Research reflects that deeply aligning the content, context, and cognitive demand of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment impacts student learning. The match between what is taught and tested with the state standards is critical; however, effective instruction has the greatest influence on achievement (Porter, et al., 2007).

Instruction that builds on the following principles is likely to increase student learning (Fullan, Hill, & Crevols, 2006, p. 33):

- ◆ Constructing knowledge – learners are active participants in the learning process using their prior knowledge and experiences

- ♦ Active engagement – learners respond to having a choice, time to reflect, opportunities to participate in decisions about their work, express learning in a variety of ways, do something with what they learn, and have some open-ended experiences or “mystery” in their learning, rather than encountering only predetermined results
- ♦ Meaningful content – students make connections with the content; content is personally relevant
- ♦ Collaboration and social interaction – students work together, teach one another, converse about their learning
- ♦ Reflection / Self-Assessment / Metacognition – students are aware of their thinking processes and how to regulate the processes by monitoring and directing the process and making adjustments when something isn’t working
- ♦ Inclusivity – students feel valued and welcomed in classrooms ; they need teachers who believe in them and expect them to do well

Student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education. The concept of student engagement typically arises when educators discuss or prioritize educational strategies and teaching techniques that address the developmental, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, physical, and social factors that either enhance or undermine learning for students. It should be noted that educators may hold different views on student engagement, and it may be defined or interpreted differently from place to place. For example, in one school observable behaviors such as attending class, listening attentively, participating in discussions, turning in work on time, and following rules and directions may be perceived as forms of “engagement,” while in another school the concept of “engagement” may be largely understood in terms of internal states such as enthusiasm, curiosity, optimism, motivation, or interest.

Differentiation refers to a wide variety of teaching techniques and lesson adaptations that educators use to instruct a diverse group of students, with diverse learning needs, in the same course, classroom, or learning environment. Also called “differentiated instruction,” differentiation typically entails modifications to *practice* (how teachers deliver instruction to students), *process* (how the lesson is designed for students), *products* (the kinds of work products students will be asked to complete), *content* (the specific readings, research, or materials students will study), *assessment* (how teachers measure what students have learned), and *grouping* (how students are arranged in the classroom or paired up with other students). (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). Compared with the general student population, students with mild or severe learning disabilities received more benefits from differentiated and intensive support, especially when the differentiation was

delivered in small groups or with targeted instruction (McQuarrie, McRae, & Stack-Cutler, 2008).

Personalized education through the use of a multi-tiered approach for academic and behavioral instruction has shown to be an effective method of meeting the needs of learners. Historically this has been referenced as Response to Intervention (RtI) and has evolved into Multi-tiered Support Systems (MTSS). While numerous examples of the model have been proposed, most models comprise several common features (Batsche, et al., 2005; Gresham, 2007), including universal screening of all students, multiple tiers of intervention service delivery, a problem solving- method, and an integrated data collection and assessment system to inform decisions at each tier of service delivery. Effective use of systemic early intervention, data-based decision making, planned problem solving and integrating multiple data sources has demonstrated improving student outcomes.

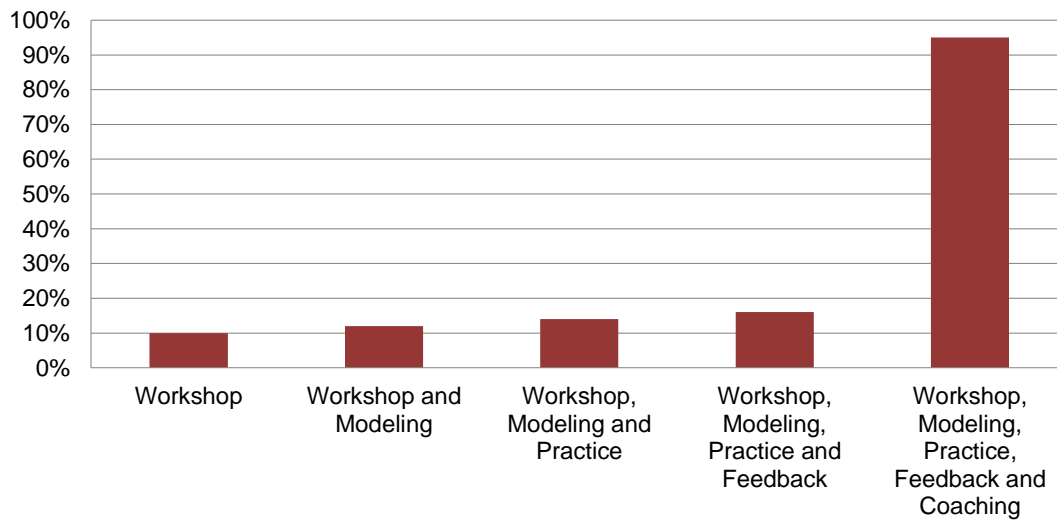
The use of systemic instructional coaches can have a noteworthy impact on assisting teachers and improve student performance. It is important to note that the benefits of an instructional coach are correlated to having a coach who can observe instruction, model good instruction, provide reflective and constructive feedback, enlist the collaboration of the teacher, and follow-up in the actual learning environment. It is an ongoing process spread out numerous times throughout the school year.

“Instructional coaches can have an enormous impact on the teaching and learning that happens in a school. Technology coaches help bridge the learning gap between teachers and technology. Content coaches can help teachers gain a better understanding of standards and subjects. Instructional coaches can help teachers improve their instructional practices in any subject at any time.

It's not that all teachers are weak and need help. It's about the idea that we all have blind spots and coaches can help others see their blind spots. According to this article in the New Yorker, even doctors have coaches to help them improve and see their blind spots.” (DeWitt, P., 2015)

“Coaching provides an alternative method for teacher professional development, which involves an expert teacher (known as the coach) who works with other teachers to provide ongoing support in one-on-one or small group meetings. Small scale studies have shown evidence that compared to the traditional approach to professional development, when teachers work with a coach, they are more likely to use newly learned pedagogical strategies (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Bush, 1984).” The research completed by Bush (1984), has been replicated numerous times, resulting in the conclusion that effective use of instructional coaches can dramatically impact instruction (see the chart below).

## Rate of Transfer into Instructional Practices



### District 41 Data Analysis:

With regard to instructional practices for students with disabilities, feedback from numerous stakeholders early in the process helped to guide this special education review to focus on instructional practices, inclusive practices and differentiation, interventions and programs for student needs, student engagement, and multi-tiered support systems.

During this special education review, observations were completed in every school and in multiple settings within each site. In addition, numerous interviews were completed with staff and administrators in all schools.

Alignment in education is a significant issue for most districts. It is a broad scale district-wide component that is typically addressed as part of curriculum and instruction goals. Thus it is most often addressed at the highest level of district leadership, with guidance and oversight provided by the curriculum and instruction department. While this alignment is a critical issue for school districts, the special education review did not focus as extensively on this area as it was an intense focus of the several of the priorities in the Glen Ellyn District 41 Strategic Plan being developed and finalized during the course of this review.

Examining the Glen Ellyn District 41 special education service delivery model, it became clear that individuals within the district have a wide range of varying perspectives regarding its early intervention capacity as well as the district's ability to use data to make educational decisions. A very small number of staff referenced the district



Response to Intervention or Multi-Tiered System of support process. A district RtI plan document was provided during this review and includes descriptions for each tier, graphics that depict the tiers and a RtI process flow chart to guide the process. However the majority of staff who participated in forum groups did not mention the process and were not aware of any system in place that is designed to include the positive components of a multi-tiered support system. These observations are reflected in some staff comments including, “We know how to help our students. It’s done individually, you know, one case at a time”; “Our district doesn’t have an organized way of getting all of us to work together from start to finish. We need a process that guides us from the first time we see a student all the way until the student leaves us”; “Sometimes the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing. Our system could improve on how to use data and carry it on from program to program”; I’m frustrated because a friend of mine works in a district close by and she tells me they have a great RtI system that works. Where’s ours?” The varied level of understanding and application may be a reflection of a number of variables but the willingness and interest in supporting students with needs was reflected in the compassion and interest conveyed on doing what’s best for students. In both staff and parent forum discussion, the use of data and the purpose of assessment was also discussed and while the district uses a combination of data sources and assessments, the strategic plan references NWEA MAP growth percentage increases as the focused indicator in reading and math, consistent with several other elementary districts. Data analysis of the comparable state assessment data reviewed from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC) show similar trends – a gap between non-IEP and IEP students continues to be an important focus as well as a new alternate assessment for students who qualify for that assessment (DLM) and baseline results that could be another important measure in years to come.

Observations indicated a variety of different teaching methodologies being utilized. They included, authority or lecture style; demonstrator, or coach style; facilitator, or activity style; developer, or group style; hybrid, or blended style. The ages and functioning levels of the learners greatly influenced the teaching styles employed. Overall, the staff understood the needs of the learners and provided instruction accordingly. However, focusing on time on task, the range of engaged student time varied greatly, from 25% to 95%. This significant range reflected a number of factors including instructional topic, instructional methodology, learner characteristics, time management, instructional organization, and student-teacher relationship. While it is understandable that student engagement time will fluctuate, overall a 70% level or higher is optimal for effective instruction.

Inconsistencies were observed as well as reported related to differentiated instruction. Some staff displayed high levels of differentiation, while others demonstrated none. The most frequently observed method of differentiation was related to the grouping of

students. Many times it was observed that students with special education needs were placed in smaller learning groups and the teacher frequently interacted, reviewing expectations, providing necessary clarification and giving helpful prompts. There were also a number of examples noted of the educational content being modified in order to accommodate the learning styles of the students. However the planned systematic quick measurement/evaluation of student performance was not observed often. There were some teachers who did not demonstrate much variety of instruction and seemed not to fully appreciate the different learning styles of the learners.

Related to differentiated instruction, a number of parents stated they did not believe the district fully understands nor knows how to instruct certain types of learners (e.g. students with dyslexia (see Appendix for more detailed information regarding dyslexia)). Additionally some parents commented that the district sometimes ignores the interests of parents or refuses to do anything different. The parents shared that they feel forced into seeking independent assistance (e.g. private providers) because the district does not follow through on their instructional obligations. This has created considerable animosity between the school district and many parents over time.

With regard to instructional practices for students with disabilities, feedback and suggestions from the various stakeholders influenced some of the focus of this special education review, with priorities that included student engagement, differentiated instruction, inclusive educational practices and defining and refining how multi-tiered support systems support all learners.

#### Recommendations:

1. Advance a customized Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model which incorporates increasing intensities of instruction through progressive levels of intervention provided to students in direct proportion to their individual needs.
2. Through a customized systemic approach, review/build a greater consensus of the rationale for inclusive practices and effective implementation strategies to blend it into an effective MTSS model.
3. Align necessary resources that support staff that most effectively addresses the learning needs of the district's diverse learners. Two examples of this include (a) providing knowledgeable and skilled instructional coaches who are familiar and experienced with students with significant learning needs, and (b) providing trained special education consultants who can work with staff when addressing the needs of unique learners.
4. Provide additional methods to increase student engagement in the various learning environments.

5. As suggested in the Fall, 2016 parent collaborative discussions, incorporate a 'buddy' program that will enhance greater understanding and peer relationships between students.
6. Build consensus among building teams across the district on the data collection systems and components that provide the critical information that will inform decision-making.
7. Review roles and responsibilities aligned to the revised systemic approach to support changing student need and practices.
8. Incorporate opportunities for teams to plan together to facilitate a more differentiated approach within classrooms
9. Using a continuous improvement model, build in greater understanding, infrastructure changes and evaluation to ensure that students' academic, social-emotional and independent skills are constantly being met as a critical part of the inclusive focus.
10. Employ frequent measures that determine the effective use of best practices in observable practice (integrity checklists, engagement, peer socialization opportunities, problem solving meetings, etc.)

## B. ALIGNED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Research

Continuous, on-site, job-embedded focused professional development serves as one of the strongest influencing factors impacting instruction to improve student learning. Effective professional development, when viewed as competency-based rather than deficit-based, is a shared, public process; it promotes sustained interaction; emphasized substantive, school-related issues; relies on internal expertise; expects teachers to be active participants; emphasizes the why as well as the how of teaching; articulates a theoretical research base; and anticipates that lasting change will be a slow process (Colinson, 1996, cited in Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 134).

Professional development that "works," according to experts in the field, reflects some common themes, including

- ◆ importance of explicitly connecting teacher and student learning
- ◆ supporting professional collaboration and collegial accountability with time and space for conversation, joint action, and critique
- ◆ coupling teaching and assessment practices
- ◆ encouraging the development of a common language through oral and written communication
- ◆ developing and using structured tools and protocols to guide discussion...
- ◆ using the real-life events of teaching as the source of professional development (Lieberman & Miller, 2001, p. ix).

Four approaches for professional development are:

1. Mentoring and peer support – peer support, mentoring, and school-based facilitators are variations of this approach
2. Teacher inquiry – Teacher study groups and action research are approaches that engage a whole faculty or teacher teams in collaborative investigations related directly to school and classroom practices.
3. Lesson study and looking at student work – Lesson study, which occurs at the local level, is connected to the curriculum of the school, focuses on student learning, involves groups of teachers working collaboratively, and is based on long-term continuous improvement.
4. Walk-throughs – The walk-through, coupled with reflection and brief conversations, is an approach used to observe classrooms on a regular, informal basis. “Brief, one-on-one, focused feedback (one-legged conversation) is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact and change behavior,” according to Hall and Hord (2000, in Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004, p. 8).

Meaningful professional development is based on continuous professional learning and growth as reflected in the following steps: (1) district goal development; (2) develop a professional development plan based on goal; (3) implementation of plan; (4) evaluation of plan; and (5) integration into practice. Additionally when engaging in the development process it is important to recognize that it necessary to identify those areas of interest, as well as those areas of need. Often staff will identify the areas of interest and may not fully appreciate the areas of need. For example staff may demonstrate interest in gaining additional insight into the latest research-based methods of instructing students with autism. However the staff may be less interested in learning better methods of documenting student progress within the district’s technology student information system. In this example, while the staff may only want to learn the newer teaching methodologies, it is also critical to learn the documenting process. Therefore when planning professional development it is important to pursue those areas of interest as well as those areas of need. It is critical this is well-communicated with staff so there is appreciation and support of both.

#### District 41 Data Analysis:

Each of the comparative districts provided information regarding the institute days, school improvement days and other related training. The trainings from the other districts ranged in scope from topics on executive functioning and legal updates to

inclusion training, Rtl overview, autism, behavioral interventions and specific training for related service staff and paraprofessionals. The review revealed that professional development trainings based on the interest of district staff, leadership and strategic plans for the respective districts/schools. Some aligned more to needs assessments conducted in the districts and others used institute days and school improvement days to provide a more concentrated focus on designated priorities. Evidence of the generalization of knowledge and skills obtained through professional development was not reflected in the information provided.

This is an area identified as a need from staff, leadership and parent stakeholders, in line with the focus of the strategic plan, the needs assessments, the focus groups and the many important priorities established for the district. Based on data review, professional development trainings over the past several years have focused primarily on inclusion, low incidence disabilities, autism and behavior training, IEP writing and CPI, assistant training, Rtl process and Wilson training. Within the associated trainings throughout the year on interventions, the trainings have included: LLI training for Tier 2 interventions, Wilson training for Tier 2 interventions, Running Records, Read Live, Skyward (IEP software tool) and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS).

A considerable amount of feedback from multiple sources indicated that there is a need for more meaningful professional development related to students with significant learning needs. One administrator stated, "We recently had more students with greater needs come back into our district. We weren't ready for this very quick change. And we didn't get enough quality professional development for staff. We desperately need more for the staff." A teacher said, "We especially need training for our aides. They do so much of the hard work with our students and they typically don't get sufficient training."

Some staff commented on a narrow approach to professional development. A teacher indicated, "We're tired of the "sit and git" method. We need to roll up our sleeves and get involved with the training." Another teacher noted, "I think we could do a better job of following up on training. How do we really know if we're doing it right? I can't believe I'm saying this, there needs to be more evaluation of how well we're implementing what we've learned."

Often associated with quality professional development is building in time for staff to collaborate. In many school systems this presents a considerable challenge. While this may be difficult there is a need for dedicated time for staff to discuss the students' needs, progress being made, the effect of interventions and planning collaborative efforts. As one teacher noted, "It's so helpful when we can plan together. We need more time and better schedules that will help us get this done."

In addition, there was commentary by a number of staff members that the district does not take advantage of local resources. One example is the limited use of the CASE special education cooperative. A teacher stated, "We get good service from CASE. They have many highly trained staff who are willing to help us yet we don't use them as much as we should." A related service provider said, "CASE offers great training. For some reason District 41 under-utilizes their services."

There was inconsistency among staff related to the development and implementation of professional development. Many staff members expressed appreciation for the various opportunities they have been given. They also indicated the district has many resources that make it easier to connect new learning to classroom based implementation. Additionally many staff said ongoing professional development is a high priority of the district and greatly supported by the administration.

However there were a number of staff indicating they did not have enough time to engage in professional development. Additionally some staff did not believe there was a systemic plan for staff development. In this context they said, "we're on our own". Some staff indicated that the professional development is building-based and did not understand why there is a need for district guidance.

It was not apparent that staff understood the significance of professional development being linked to a district continuous improvement plan. In addition, there was extremely little appreciation for a need to evaluate the impact of professional development. Comments suggested the staff viewed professional development more linked to their or administration's interest, and no appreciation for the importance of pursuing areas of personal, school, or district need.

#### Recommendations:

1. Related to LRE/inclusive educational practices, use a systems change framework [build consensus (understanding, agreement and valuing), develop infrastructure, and initiate planned implementation] that will increase the probability of systemic success.
2. Using a systems approach to develop understanding and generalization of the new skills listed under instructional practices focus, embed professional development and specialized coaching on the designated areas of a data-driven decision-making process using a problem-solving approach and establishment of measures that will look for evidence of applied skills within the educational context.

3. Advance the impact of professional development through the continued use of the PLC, embedded coaching to generalize skills and integrity checklists to look for evidence of in classroom practice.
4. Redesign a customized, embedded coaching model that provides modeling, practice and building greater capacity to advance the impact of a multi-tiered professional development plan that is evaluated by student outcomes.
5. Differentiate training aligned to the range of positions and focus areas to enhance depth of knowledge and training.
6. Consider outside facilitation, resources and consultation to guide professional development training priorities and multi-year implementation

### C. VISION/MISSION, LEADERSHIP AND GOALS

#### Research:

In order for special education programs and services to be effective it is important that there is evidence of a shared vision, meaningful goals and strong leadership.

Successful organizations require a sense of what its members are working toward (Peters & Waterman, 1982). A clear focus assists in aligning programs and activities for school improvement. A clear and shared focus includes a vision that captures the imagination and enthusiasm of members of the organization as well as specific goals, which concentrate attention, effort, and resources.

To effectively determine a specific focus, school leadership and stakeholders use collaborative processes to analyze data and target one or two areas as school goals and then build consensus around them. In other words, high-performing schools succeed in establishing shared, data-driven goals, which resonate with stakeholders.

Setting goals increases achievement. Hundreds of correlational and experimental studies show evidence that setting goals increase success rate in various settings, including education (Latham & Locke, 2007; Locke & Latham, 1990).

Often the establishment of goals reflects commonly understood and appreciated standards and practices. Two examples are creating goals as SMART and/or CLEAR goals.

#### SMART Goals:

Specific (Goals must be clear and unambiguous)

Measurable (Results must be able to be measured in some way)

Attainable (Goals must be realistic)

Relevant (Goals must relate to your organization's vision and mission)

Time-bound (Goals must have definite starting and ending points, and a fixed duration)

#### CLEAR Goals:

Collaborative (Goals should encourage employees to work together collaboratively and in teams)

Limited (Goals should be limited in both scope and duration)

Emotional (Goals should make an emotional connection tapping individuals' energy and passion)

Appreciable (Large goals should be broken down into smaller goals so they can be accomplished more quickly and easily for long-term gain)

Refinable (Goals can be modified as needed)

Leadership can be defined as influencing persons to achieve goals held mutually by leaders and followers through the use of institutional, political, psychological and other resources. Leadership depends on relationships and shared values between leaders and followers.

In the context of distributive leadership, the leadership needs to be distributed throughout a school organization based on individual predispositions, interests, knowledge, skills and roles. Distributed leadership means "multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through common culture" (Elmore, 2000).

As it relates to lateral capacity building, Fullan (2005, 2006) stresses school leaders must reach beyond the usual boundaries of their organization to support, teach, and learn from one another. Collaboration across schools and districts, according to Fullan, "pays enormous dividends in relation to new knowledge and wider commitment."

Relational trust is a critical variable. Tschannen-Moran (2004) defines trust as "one's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest open, reliable, and competent".

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) identified the following seven important leadership attributes:

1. having knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment



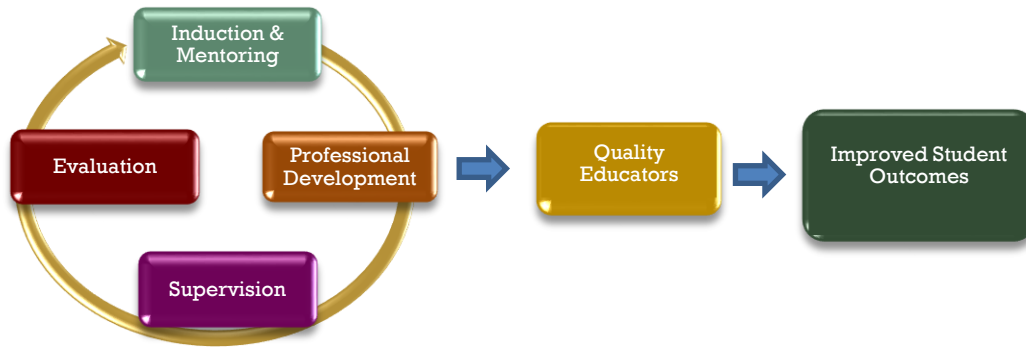
2. providing intellectual stimulation – ensuring faculty are aware of the most current theories and practices, and make discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture
3. monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
4. communicating and operating from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
5. willing to be a change agent by challenging thoughts, beliefs, and the status quo
6. being able to be flexible by adapting own leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and being comfortable with dissent
7. inspiring and leading new and challenging innovations

Effective school leaders lead by example, focus first on students and their learning, support and empower their colleagues, are learners, understand change processes, recognize and reward the achievement and struggles of others, invite participation and share responsibility, use expectations to change attitude and behavior, and create safe learning environments in which others can take risks to improve.

School district leaders need to understand and implement a systems change process that reflects the importance of consensus building, infrastructure development and effective implementation. Guiding the district and the schools through such a process can be extremely time consuming and can be confusing for a number of individuals. Effective leaders manage these three areas recognizing different staff members learn and respond at different rates, and some do not respond well to change.



Leaders within the educational setting need to fully understand and to be capable of developing and implementing a meaningful continuous improvement process. This process guides the development of staff which then has the greatest impact on student outcomes. There is a need to connect the various continuous improvement pieces so that it is cyclical and systemically evaluated.



District 41 Data Analysis:

This area of review was also qualitative in nature and in most forums of discussion, questions regarding vision/mission/goals and leadership arose. Many participants in the discussions voiced their appreciation and acknowledgment of the complexity of the work district and building leadership has in adjusting to the changing requirements and needs of students. They often relayed personal stories and examples of their experiences, meetings and frustrations in particular forums and many shared that they felt the impetus for this review was generated because parents strongly voiced their concerns for action at a board meeting in spring, 2016. Both general and special education staff members provided perspective in several forums and some asked for additional time to share their thoughts. In those discussions, they conveyed the strengths and appreciation for a general feeling of care and dedication to students in D41 but also frustration and concern ranging from lack of support, clarity of purpose, process or changes to rising expectations and challenges that impact time, planning and professional development.

Many staff members stated they believe the school building and district administrators are extremely knowledgeable and care deeply about the students and their families. Related to this perspective numerous staff shared that they think the administrators are providing good guidance and lead by example. Some noted that the district has been “moving quickly lately” which has made it challenging for the administration to communicate as quickly as needed. However these individuals stated that the building and district leaders challenge the staff to embrace necessary change and work hard to include the staff in the process. Additionally it was noted that the administration connected newer practices to research-based information and methodologies.

A number of staff also expressed frustration related to building based and district leadership. As a contrast to many of the comments noted earlier, a number of staff was critical of some administrators. Their concerns included the perceived lack of district direction, limited communication and lack of genuine shared collaboration. Many of these individuals could not identify the goals for the district or the goals for their school buildings. Further there was no evidence that staff understood the significance of connecting essential components of continuous improvement, such as mentoring, professional development, supervision and evaluation.

### Recommendations:

1. Advance the collective understanding of the change process and model actions that successfully leads to a systemic change of attitudes and behavior.
2. Facilitate open dialogues with district/building team to review priorities and align recommendations with existing expectations and current practices.
3. As an extension of the Glen Ellyn District 41 Strategic plan under priority 4, review the action steps of the district and building leadership to ensure that the decision-making structures and discussions reflect the vision, mission and goals of an inclusive, student-centered process of instruction and supports aligned to individual needs.
4. Align and embed the priorities established for student services with the established long-range Glen Ellyn District 41 Strategic Plan and the critical leadership focus to guide implementation and prioritize special education goals and initiatives which guide and support building based implementation activities.
5. Actively engage in district and building level discussions with leadership, staff and parents to determine continued areas of focus for stakeholders to engage in activities that reflect the vision, mission and goals of a student-centered approach to individualized needs.
6. Use a systems change framework: build consensus (understanding, agreement and valuing), develop infrastructure, and initiate planned implementation (e.g. inclusive educational practices including evidence indicators)
7. Build greater PLC capacity in key roles that enhance instructional leadership and inclusive, student-first philosophy
8. Systemic development and implementation of new initiatives using a consistent method of developing understanding, infrastructural supports and implementation guides.
9. Increase shared leadership as evidenced by building-based leaders embracing, modeling and supporting foundational level change.
10. Increase active engagement by district-based leaders in district and school-based activities.

## D. COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

### Research:

At the most basic level good communication, or being a good communicator, involves three essential elements: listening, verbal communication and non-verbal communication. However communication is about more than just exchanging information. It includes understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information. Effective communication is a “two-way street”. It is not only how an individual conveys a message so that it is received and understood by someone in exactly the way intended, it is also how an individual listens to gain the full meaning of what is being said and to make the other person feel heard and understood (Northcutt, S., 2009).

More than just the words an individual uses, effective communication combines a set of skills including nonverbal communication, engaged listening, managing stress in the moment, the ability to communicate assertively, and the capacity to recognize and understand one’s own emotions and those of the person with whom you are interacting.

Effective communication is the glue that helps individuals deepen connections to others and improve teamwork, decision making, and problem solving. It enables one to communicate even negative or difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust. (Covey, S., 2004).

Constantino (2005) suggests that family members and schools “communicate regularly and clearly about information important to student success. Schools should inform families about standards and how they relate to the curriculum, learning objectives, methods of assessment, school programs, discipline codes, and student progress” (p. 152). He also offers a variety of means for implementing communication (e.g., newsletters, handbooks, conferences, open houses, home visits, hotlines, internet, e-mail, and voice mail).

Stated simplistically, collaboration is working well with others. At a more complex level the most effective schools, based on test score improvement over time after controlling for demographic factors, have developed an unusually high degree of "relational trust" among their administrators, teachers, and parents. Five organizational features contributed to this success:

- A coherent instructional guidance system, in which curriculum and assessment were coordinated within and across grades with meaningful teacher involvement.
- An effective system to improve professional capacity by providing ongoing support and guidance for teachers, including opening teachers' classroom work for examination by colleagues and external consultants.

- Strong ties among school personnel, parents, and community service providers, with an integrated support network for students.
- A student-centered learning climate that identified and responded to problems individual students were experiencing.
- Leadership focused on cultivating teachers, parents, and community members so that they became invested in sharing responsibility for the school's improvement.

These five features tended to reinforce one another; a significant weakness in any of them could threaten progress. Schools with strong rankings on all five criteria were 10 times more likely to improve than schools that were weak in the majority of the areas. (Anrig, G., 2013).

Collaboration is a term popularly used to describe a variety of joint endeavors in school improvement. Cooperative work among teachers is one dimension; shared participation in school governance is another; partnerships among schools and businesses for financial support and collaboration among schools and other public agencies to provide social services are others (Johnson, 200, in Pounder, 1998, p. 9).

Collegiality is often used as a synonym to describe sharing of authority among colleagues. "Collegiality is the presence of four specific behaviors, as follows: Adults in schools *talk about practice*. These conversations about teaching and learning are frequent, continuous, concrete, and precise. Adults in schools *observe each other* engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become the practice to reflect on and talk about. Adults engage together in *work on curriculum* by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating curriculum. Finally, adults in schools *teach each other* what they know about teaching, learning, and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated, and shared" (in Barth, 1990, p. 31).

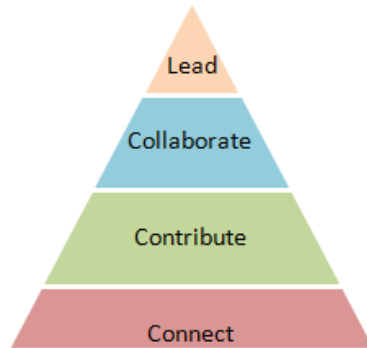
Several outcomes may be associated with collegiality. According to Little, "Decisions tend to be better; implementation of decisions is better; there is a higher level of morale and trust among adults; adult learning is energized and more likely to be sustained (Little, 1981).

Motivation of students and *their* achievement rises, and evidence that when adults share and cooperate, students tend to do the same" (in Barth, p. 31).

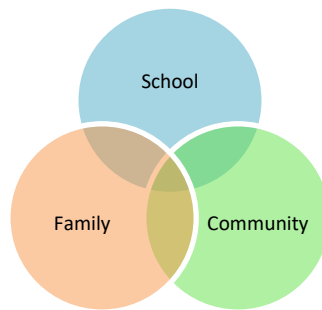
Research by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that student learning increased in response to the increased capacity of the school organization as educators focused on teaching and learning, shared their work, and took joint responsibility for student learning.

Student learning is enhanced when schools, families, and communities share goals, demonstrate mutual respect and trust, and join in partnerships to promote the well-

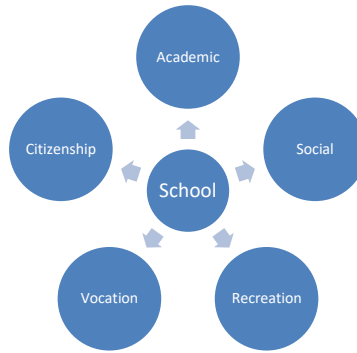
being of students. Families and communities should be invited to participate in school affairs at all levels: governance, planning, program development, and implementation. The following graphic demonstrates the various levels of involvement and engagement. It has been noted in the literature that often schools invite parents to be involved, yet do not seek actual engagement. To be actively engaged families need to be supported in their role as genuine contributors, problem solvers, decision-makers and leaders.



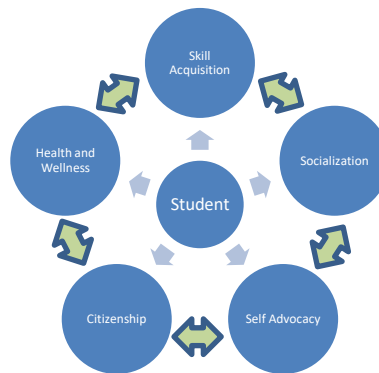
A Collaborative Partnership – Engaging all three systems so there is mutual understanding and trust, and genuine working together with shared responsibilities. The more convergence of these three areas generates the best outcomes for all students.



Traditional Model – The school system expected to “do everything” thereby unintentionally creating over-reliance on the school system and ultimately creating greater future limitations.



Revised Model – The student is at the center of consideration, understanding it takes all three systems (school, family and community) working together at early stages to ultimately create more future options beyond the school.



District 41 Data Analysis:

Perspectives shared in focus groups, interviews, phone calls and observations provided extensive qualitative data from several members of the D41 community who conveyed frustrations, lack of clarity or understanding of a number of different areas of focus for the department or focus for special education. As an important part of the messaging and understanding of the district’s priorities, values and actions, this was repeated throughout several months of review. Several individuals shared their frustrations with examples of limited or mixed message communication. Others shared an emotional experience with their child, their student or colleague and concern and felt strongly that they were not being heard. Regardless of the group, there was strong emotion and perspective that the district needed a greater concerted focus on the programming, services and supports of students with special

needs. Special education and general education staff voiced a need for further discussion and consensus on process, on use of data, on dyslexia supports, on inclusive practices and on integrating data in IEPs in more meaningful ways. Some communicated that the district moved through the inclusion process too quickly and without the proper supports in place, others felt vulnerable when in challenging situations without the tools or resources they deemed necessary for the student(s).

Many parents in School District 41 supplement the special education received at school with the services of private providers. Understanding this can be legitimately challenging to coordinate, school staff need to appreciate these additional services and strive to consider incorporating these ideas and practices as part of the entire educational plan for the students. For this process to work well, effective communication and collaboration is necessary, and feedback from many parents suggest that there is not sufficient communication and collaboration in this area.

A number of parents stated they are not informed sufficiently as it relates to newer educational initiatives. One parent said, "I know I'm not the first person that needs to be told what's going on, but do I have to be the absolute last?" Another parent noted, "Not only do I not always know what the school is working on for my child, but I often feel like they don't want to know what I think." In addition, some parents noted that there does not appear to be a well-planned process for mapping out the school plan and the communication of such a plan is either incomplete or delayed.

Of considerable concern is that a number of parents shared that some school building staff at times will take them aside and say, "don't let anybody know I told you this, but ...". Embedded in this statement is the feeling of lack of trust combined with sharing mixed messages for parents.

There was inconsistent responses from school staff related to communication and collaboration. For example in two schools both staff and administrators stated there is good communication and follow-through within the school district. In these settings it was shared that there are open lines of communication and easy access of information. However in the other schools concerns were identified. At one school staff indicated they observe inconsistencies, noting that there are different messages given to different teams. As a follow-up to this they said that having additional time for team collaboration would greatly improve this. Another staff member indicated that there are times the school administrators do not consistently share district-level information. Many staff expressed how vital it is to get relevant information in a timely manner, yet did not believe this was happening well enough.

Related to collaboration connected to family engagement, some parents expressed concern. As one parent said, "I don't get the feeling that the district wants me to be a



part of the team. They say they do, but they really don't want to hear my ideas.” Another parent noted, “I've tried to participate in a way that shows we're all working together, but I've felt belittled; like since I'm not an educator my opinion doesn't count as much.” A more frustrated parent shared, “I might not know how to teach, but I know my child and I can tell you that means a whole lot more sometimes.”

#### Recommendations:

1. Advance the school, family and community collaborative partnership aligned to the established priorities and effectively integrate the focus into the ongoing focus of the district strategic plan.
2. Refine (school/parent/community) engaged partnership with established guidelines, purpose and timelines that reflect a collaborative consensus-building process to address the unique issues across special services in the district.
3. Reassess current structures of communication to reflect a proactive approach to sharing and engaging respective stakeholders – families, staff, leadership and community.
4. Refine the dissemination of information and advanced process for two-way communication on new focus areas, updates and highlights of progress and celebrations to parents, staff and district/building leadership.

## V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A district that embarks on a review of this nature with the defined purposes of review, analysis and recommendations that provide greater opportunities for advancing a system to reflect best practices and enhance greater outcomes for students should be recognized for its willingness and commitment to continuous improvement. Throughout this process, that openness and willingness to share was apparent with every stakeholder, reiterating a genuine interest in learning what works effectively and what areas need a more comprehensive action plan. The parents, staff and leadership share a commitment and dedication to the students they represent and a strong desire to make the necessary changes to work collaboratively to improve the system to enhance the service delivery model and supports for students and staff. While the springboard of this review was frustration and concern, the mutual interest is to do what it takes to ensure that the district reflects its mission/vision across all priorities to meet the needs of all students. Four main priorities emerged throughout the review and embedded in each of them are several important recommendations. Those four operational priorities are: instructional practices, aligned professional development to those areas, vision/mission, leadership and goals that serve as the foundation focus. The critical aspects of the fourth priority of communication and collaboration is essential to engage and successfully implement those identified goals.

## VI. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Glen Ellyn District 41 Mission states, *We embrace the future with optimism, working in partnership with our community on behalf of our children. We develop intellect, engage creativity, foster responsibility and build positive and collaborative relationships to enable all children to thrive in a changing and increasing global society.*

Any action steps that may be developed from this review should be consistent with the district strategic plan and reflective of the inclusivity of the district mission statement. A team comprised of district stakeholders should establish priorities associated with the recommendations identified within this report and develop a succinct district action plan. This plan should include the key indicators that measure effectiveness, associated professional development, communication, resources needed and delineated timelines for each action step.

It is the perspective of the consultants of this special education review that the following recommendations are noteworthy and should be considered for more immediate action by the district/building leadership team:

1. Model actions that reflect a supportive, inclusive educational culture.
2. Related to LRE/inclusive educational practices, use a systems change framework that builds greater consensus and understanding, builds a stronger infrastructure, and initiates planned implementation that will increase the probability of systemic success and sustainability.
3. Advance a customized Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model which incorporates increasing intensities of instruction through progressive levels of intervention provided to students in direct proportion to their individual needs.
4. Advance the school, family and community collaborative partnership emphasizing genuine meaningful engagement.

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## VIII. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### **SPECIAL EDUCATION DISTRICT/STATE COMPARATIVE DATA**

<b>Special Education State Data</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
Total enrollment	2,054,155	2,054,155	2,046,857	2,054,556
Students with IEPs	292,492	289,887	294,953	296,790
% IEPs	14%	14%	14%	14%
<b>Kildeer District 96</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
District Enrollment	3134	3054	3133	3140
Students w/ IEPs	13.4%	12.7%	11.6%	11.9%
% out of district	5.2%	6.5%	7.7%	7.2%
Self-contained	5.5%	11.6%	12.8%	11.0%
Gen. Ed.. Settings	89.3%	81.9%	69%	81.5%
<b>Wheaton-Warrenville D 200</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
District Enrollment	12,934	13,109	12,890	12,822
Students w/ IEPs	16.48%	16.0%	15.74%	15.93%
Out of district	4%	6.11%	6.75%	7.19%
Self-contained	13.18%	11.88%	12.96%	14.99%
Gen. Ed Settings	28.6%	27.9%	29.6%	30.9%
<b>Glen Ellyn D41</b>	<b>2012- 2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
Dist. Enrollment	3667	3621	3451	3539
Students w/ IEPs	10.8%	11%	11%	10%
Out of district	8.4%	9.5%	9.7%	7%

Self Contained	14.3%	11.9%	8.9%	9%
Gen. Ed. Setting	81.3%	82.2%	86%	86.4%

**Staffing Trends      2012-2013   2013-2014   2014-2015   2015-2016   2016-17**

(Certified/non-certified special education staff includes teachers, related services and assistants)

Kildeer

Wheaton                      338/285      333/272      287/285      326/193

Glen Ellyn D41              52/27        55/28        56/34        66/34        72/42

Insert in respective sections.

**Professional Development Focus –**

Each district provided details regarding the institute days for their respective districts and copies of the publication, overviews. Any follow up from the trainings were not provided but the trainings ranged from executive functioning and legal updates to inclusion training and RtI overview and interventions. The review revealed that professional development trainings varied based on the interest of district staff, leadership and strategic plans for the respective districts/schools. Some aligned more to needs assessments and others relied on Institute Days and school improvement days for a more concentrated focus on designated priorities.

**Glen Ellyn District 41 -Communication/Presentations**

2015- Board Presentations, Fall Parent Group Meeting, Spring Transition Meeting, Monthly Meetings with Parent Group

2016- Board Presentations, Fall Parent Group meeting, Spring Transition Meeting, Monthly Meetings with Parent Group Co-Chairs, End of Year Parent Meeting

2017 –Board Presentations, Parent Collaborative Meetings (8/17/16, 9/22/16, 10/4/16, 11/15/16, 12/13/16)

Monthly meetings with Parent Group Co-chairs

## APPENDIX B

Excerpted from:

### Dyslexia Treatment: Reading Programs That Work

#### Quick Facts About Reading Programs That Work

- Many reading programs are ineffective for dyslexic students
- Dyslexic readers require specific kinds of reading instruction
- The Orton Gillingham approach is the oldest and best researched for teaching dyslexics
- Explicit, intensive and multisensory methods work best
- Content should include phonemic awareness, fluency and explicit instruction of spelling rules
- Assistive technology is opening the door to more efficient and effective methods for teaching reading
- Software based reading programs hold many advantages over traditional programs but have not been widely adopted yet

According to Dr. Sally Shaywitz, in her book *Overcoming Dyslexia (2005)*, the key ingredients of effective early intervention programs are:

1) Systematic and direct instruction in:

- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Sounding out words
- Spelling
- Reading sight words
- Vocabulary and concepts
- Reading comprehension strategies

2) Practice applying these skills in reading and writing: Practice means using them every day from reading comic strips to writing e-mail.

3) Fluency training: Fluency is the ability to read quickly, smoothly, accurately and with good comprehension. When reading is slow and tough, kids spend all their energy to just sound out the words, often missing the meaning entirely.

4) Enriched language experiences: Interactive dialogue involving listening, speaking and story- telling.

In terms of successful methods to consider, the Orton Gillingham (OG) approach to reading, developed in the 1930s by Samuel Torrey Orton and Anna Gillingham,



continues to receive support as one of the most effective dyslexia treatment, based on the following process elements:

**Multisensory:** The simultaneous use of multiple senses including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic (touch). For example, a dyslexic learner is taught to see the letter A, say its name and sound and write it in the air—all at the same time. The use of multisensory input is thought to enhance memory storage and retrieval. Multisensory approaches can even be used for math.

**Structured, Systematic, Sequential, and Cumulative:** Language elements and rules are introduced in a linguistically logical, understandable order. Students go back to the very beginning of their language learning, to lay a proper foundation.

Beginning by reading and writing sounds in isolation (phonemes), then blending sounds into syllables and words. Elements of language—consonants, vowels, digraph blends, and diphthongs are introduced in an orderly fashion. Only later, learners proceed to advanced structural elements such as syllable types, roots, prefixes and suffixes.

**Cognitive:** Students study the many generalizations and rules that govern the structure of language.

**Flexible:** Instructors ensure the learner is not simply recognizing a pattern and applying it without understanding. When confusion of a previously taught rule is discovered, it is re-taught from the beginning.

**Personal and Direct:** Building a close teacher-student relationship with continuous feedback and positive reinforcement leading to success and self-confidence.

Other approaches for consideration that offers comparable benefit through somewhat different methods. The Lindamood-Bell learning centers are one of the best examples.

Research also supports the critical data-based decision-making process to determine what methodologies and interventions best align to individual student needs.

## APPENDIX C

### **Highly effective schools:**

**Set and enact a clear mission and vision.** Everyone in highly effective schools understands where the organization is going, why they are going there, and how they are contributing this greater cause (Collins, 2001).

**Apply high standards and expectations for all students.** Highly effective schools offer all students ambitious, rigorous courses of study regardless of the barriers and obstacles individual students face (Langer, 2004).

**Leverage effective instructional and administrative leadership strategies** to identify, address, and reform schools. Additionally, instructional leadership helps to foster communities of development for faculty and students (Elmore, 2000)

**Communicate and collaborate as a team** in order to achieve shared goals. High performing boarding schools require twenty-four hours of collaboration and communication a day between faculty, staff, and students in order to remain responsive to community challenges (Bryk & Schnieder, 2002).

**Align curriculum, instruction, and assessments** in ways that facilitate synergies to foster student learning. Faculty in high-performing schools design, utilizes, and reflects upon research-based strategies and materials used across each of these three components (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006).

**Frequently monitor student progress**, adjusting instruction to provide additional support. In highly effective schools, teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, and school leaders are responsible for managing teacher development and instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

**Prioritize development and training of teachers** in areas that are most applicable to the specific school context. Professional learning is extensive and ongoing and aligned to the school's overarching mission and vision (McLaughlin, 2006).

**Develop and maintain a safe and intellectually stimulating learning environment** for students. Students feel engaged in classroom learning and are invested in school (Marzano, 2003).

**Promote high levels of family and community engagement.** Students, teachers, parents and the community feel respected and connected with the school and are positively welcomed into the twenty-four hour learning environment. Families and community members understand their responsibility to educate students in partnership with teachers and the school (Henderson, 2007).