

Eugene District 4J's Cohesive Leadership System: Defining Indicators of Progress

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Background

The principal aim of the Eugene Cohesive Leadership Indicators Project is to work with the Eugene K-12 Learning Communities to identify a compelling, measurable, and technically feasible set of indicators to help leaders chart their progress in seven strategic areas. These areas, as identified by the K12 Leadership Communities, are to:

1. Strengthen regional and district articulation and program coherence;
2. Increase access to and use of regional and district performance data as the basis for all decision making related to instruction;
3. Provide the context for intellectual stimulation and learning about research-related practices that are transforming the way school leaders think about and approach their work;
4. Provide seamless transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school for all students, teachers, and principals;
5. Increase access to learning opportunities for all students from kindergarten and continuing through high school graduation; and
6. Strengthen relational trust among all Eugene stakeholders

Each of these areas of work reflects a major strategy guiding the district's efforts to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for all of its pupils. But, more important for the purposes at hand, each reflects a high-leverage opportunity for leadership decision making in both the short and long term. Progress toward these objectives hinges on the policies and programs adopted and enacted by the district's leaders. Taken together, these objectives and their respective indicators constitute a strategic map for the next three years.

Introduction

Before launching into a strategy-by-strategy account of indicators, however, we first lay out our understanding of the general characteristics and the appropriate role of indicators in assessing educational progress. Following Raizen and Jones (1985) we define an indicator as "a measure that conveys a general impression of the state or nature of the structure or system being examined. While it is not necessarily a precise statement, it gives sufficient indication of a condition concerning the system of interest to be of use in formulating policy" (pp. 27-28). In addition to their use in formulating *policy*, however, we would add that indicators can also be of use in designing and assessing district *programs* and *practices*. There are several points to consider here. First, an indicator is just one among many possible measures that can help us understand the health or progress of a more complex system. Given limited time and resources to collect data relevant to these measures, we try to select those that tell us something especially critical about the system or that are known to co-vary with other measures. For example, internal body temperature is an important indicator of the health of human biological systems because it points to infection or other system failures and because it is covariant with a host of other important symptoms. Second, indicators imply a theory (complex

causal theories or less complex, though prospectively valuable, program theories) about the relationship of the selected measure to other features of the system. Ideally, the indicator has some direct or well-established connection to the overall functioning of the system, i.e. it has high levels of explanatory or predictive power. In the case of internal body temperature, for example, there are well established biological theories that account for the relationship between temperature and other conditions of the organism. Social indicators are seldom this clear-cut, but they, nonetheless, imply a theoretical account of the workings of the system. Third, the best indicators provide critical information about a system from easily collected and analyzed data. The ease and speed of collecting data on body temperature make it an ideal indicator and explain why most visits to the doctor’s office involve a quick temperature check. Fourth, indicators are most valuable when they refer to some baseline measure against which progress can be charted. The baseline may simply be the first measure of a chronological sequence or it may be a standard derived from studies of similar phenomena or systems. Body temperature has a “normal” reading of 98.6 degrees F (+/- 1 degree) based on a sample of many millions of measurements. This is an excellent reference point against which to compare subsequent readings. Baseline indicators in education may refer to data from prior research or to preliminary measurements of a sample population. See Figure 1 below for selection criteria.

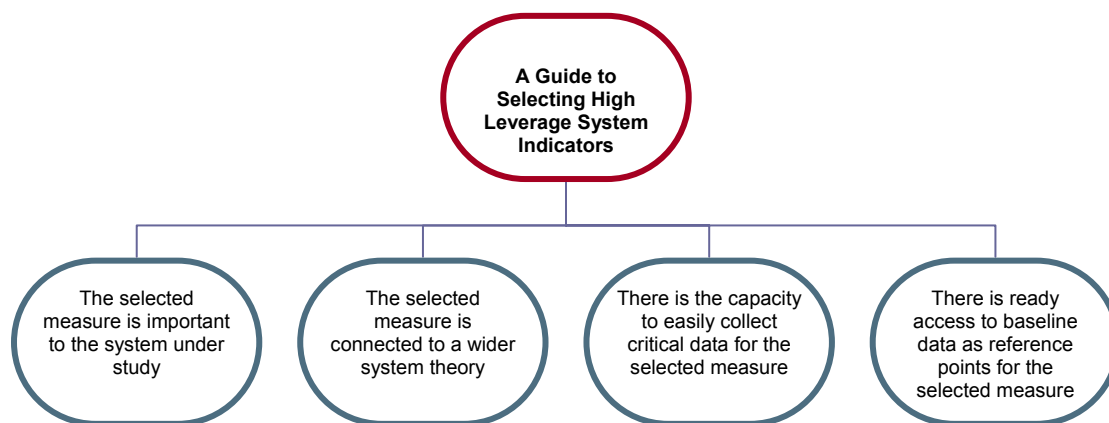


Figure 1: Guide for Selecting High Leverage Indicators

These four criteria—importance of the measure to the system under study, connection of the measure to a wider theory, ease of collecting the relevant data, and access to a baseline reference point—can help to guide selection of indicators, and we will rely on them as we proceed. In the Indicators Matrix, for example, we direct leaders’ attention to the availability of baseline data, level of stakeholder support, extent of district readiness, and potential impact as a way of determining the feasibility and utility of the specific indicators. In the following sections, we take up each of the seven strategic areas in turn, identifying candidate indicators, tracing their roots in district priorities, and exploring their connection to the relevant research literature (cited at the end of the report).

Objective 1: Strengthen regional and district K-12 articulation and program coherence.

A significant body of recent research (see citations at conclusion of this report) has identified instructional program coherence as an important feature of student, teacher, and administrator success. The proliferation and fragmentation of improvement programs — e.g. new curricula, professional development programs, and school management strategies — presents a serious challenge for school leaders. On the one hand, there is a strong incentive for identifying and implementing a wide range of improvement programs to make progress on multiple fronts when resources are scarce and the way ahead is uncertain. On the other hand, implementing a multitude of programs, especially those that are mutually inconsistent, can lead to confusion and frustration and serve as a distraction from the school's core mission. In general, there is little persuasive evidence that operating multiple, uncoordinated programs yields long term student success or teacher satisfaction, even when the discrete benefits of any one of these programs are demonstrably positive. There is, however, a growing body of evidence (Copeland et al. 2000; Newmann et al. 2001) that a smaller number of carefully coordinated and well-supported programs sustained over time can yield desirable student outcomes and create a more manageable working environment for teachers and school administrators.

Eugene K-12 Learning Communities recognize that they can orchestrate decision making in ways that give greater overall coherence to the 4J educational experience (for everyone involved—district administrators, principals, teachers, students and parents). Whether in adopting or designing coherent curriculum across subjects and across grades or in providing the professional development for administrators and teachers who are charged with implementing that curriculum, the district is faced with the need for more coherent programming. The Learning Communities, building on work already underway, will focus their efforts on developing a more coherent curriculum across subjects and across the grades

Indicator 1.1: *There is a common curriculum with research-based instructional strategies articulated in a district-wide scope and sequence for each grade level and subject area.*

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

Regional leader collaboration to develop a coordinated plan to fully implement the new ELA adoption across grade levels in every school with planned accommodations for special populations and profession development for all affected staff.

Recent district-wide adoptions in ELA, especially at the elementary and middle school level (Houghton, Prentice-Hall, Holt) hold out promise of cross-classroom, cross-school and cross-regional coherence in students' literacy instruction. In year one, the leadership

team will develop a plan to implement and track implementation of the ELA adoption. In addition to the plan itself, the K-12 Learning Communities will want to identify data that will help them establish the level of implementation. These data might include quarterly status reports on availability of textbooks and supporting materials, evidence of use in the classroom (based on observations by principals or coaches), samples of student work from each grade in each school (collected on the same day or in the same week), as well as ELA student performance data from statewide tests.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Regional leader collaboration to adopt, adapt, and implement a coherent curriculum for the other core content areas -- mathematics, science, and social studies-- for all grades and schools.

While the ELA adoptions may provide a basis for narrowing this indicator for year one (i.e. concentrating largely on data related to emerging coherence in ELA classrooms), the team's goal and the district objective is to broaden this kind of coherence into the other core content areas and non-academic programs as well. Mathematics, especially, is an area where standards-based adoptions could lead to more coherent offerings across grades and across schools. While this is obviously tied to adoption cycles and to state, local board, and district decisions, the potential for greater coherence is there, and the district should be encouraged to pursue and carefully assess such a strategy for the various content areas. The point of this kind of coherence is not to take judgment out of the hands of individual principals and teachers, but, rather to afford a more consistent focus on content across classrooms and across schools, so that students' experiences in the district are not dramatically dissimilar. Even comparing differences among curricula in use would constitute an important first step

The plan should include a clear account of the current status of curricula in use and a preliminary assessment of their compatibility or incompatibility with broader district goals and state standards, specific timelines for new adoptions or consolidations, identification of candidate curricula for new adoptions, and goals for achieving coherence across regions. The plan could be developed by an appointed district-wide committee. Evidence of progress would be based on the initial findings and recommendations of this committee.

Year 3 (2009-2010)

An articulated K-12 scope and sequence of district 4J instruction for each core subject.

By year 3, the district will have developed a comprehensive and coherent scope and sequence for each core subject at each grade level and as well as a preliminary plan for rolling out the selected curricula. Again, progress here will depend on adoption cycles and state or district curriculum policy, but the broad outlines of curriculum coherence should be visible.

Indicator 1.2: *A professional development plan for teachers and principals that is aligned to support the coordinated implementation of a common curriculum and instructional strategies.*

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

There is regional leader collaboration to develop a coordinated plan for professional development in support of the ELA adoption.

A strategic approach to principal and teacher professional development can help to foster instructional coherence by focusing attention on (and developing skills and knowledge around) the new curriculum. The professional development plan would spell out an integrated and coordinated system of learning opportunities rather than a loose configuration of training sessions. In year one, data would include a full-year plan for initial and follow-up training, in-class coaching, and grade-level curriculum study groups in ELA (for looking at student work or discussing the content and effectiveness of particular lessons).

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Regional leader collaboration to expand the professional development plan to support curriculum adoptions in the other core content areas - mathematics, science, and social studies-- for all grades and schools.

Building on the professional development design in ELA, district leaders should take steps toward design and implementation of a clear professional development plan for supporting improvement in the other core content areas-- mathematics, science, and social studies-- across grades and across schools. Data here would include the plan itself and evidence of system-wide implementation of prescribed training, coaching, and collegial models of professional development.

Indicator 1.3: *Stability of curriculum and/or teaching and leadership assignments over time.*

Evidence of Progress:

Years 1-3 (2007-2010)

Track curriculum adoptions and variation in curriculum in use at the outset of each year. Track teacher and principal assignments at the outset of each year.

Instability in curriculum selections and/or teacher and principal assignments can contribute to program incoherence within or across grades. In the worst case, teachers and school leaders are not afforded the time they need to implement a curriculum or to become familiar with the students they serve. Data for this indicator is comparatively easy to collect and can serve as a preliminary signal of a breakdown in coherence

Objective 2: Increase access to and use of regional and district performance data as the basis for all decision making related to instruction.

Education leaders in Eugene, as in districts throughout the country, face increasing demands to collect, analyze, and use student performance data (as well as other forms of student data) to guide a host of decisions and actions affecting teaching and learning. NCLB, state testing, and local demands for better information about student performance place a high premium on what Knapp et al. (2006) call data-informed leadership. As Knapp and his colleagues recognize, data are deeply contextual and seldom drive decisions independent of the core values, interests, and insights of the individuals interpreting that data. Data can be ambiguous, incomplete, or off point, and it takes the judgment of accomplished leaders (often working closely with colleagues at all levels of the system) to sort through the data and transform it into useful information. Whether data are being used for purposes of performance tracking, external accountability, or program planning, one key point stands out--

...data by themselves are not evidence of anything, until users of the data bring concepts, criteria, theories of action, and interpretive frames of reference to the task of making sense of the data (Knapp 2006, 10)

The K-12 Learning Communities have placed a high value on disaggregating and analyzing a range of student data to better understand who does and who does not benefit from current curriculum and instructional programs and what might be done to improve outcomes for those who have fared most poorly. Yet, the various facets of data-informed leadership are not always transparent, especially the technical skill set required to develop data infrastructure, to assemble and use data appropriately (data literacy), to involve critical stakeholders in a “culture of inquiry” built around the data, or to communicate the results of data analysis to various audiences (e.g. parents, school boards, legislators, or funders).

Eugene’s cross-regional disaggregated data on Participation, Academic Status, and Academic Growth reveal disparities that might not be visible if analyzed on a school-by-school basis. Given the small overall population of LEP students, Students with Disabilities, and Black and Hispanic students, underlying inequities would be concealed in the smaller sample sizes of individual schools. Having revealed these disparities, however, the question remains what additional data are needed to inform decisions that address the inequities. For example, if there is a clear achievement gap for Hispanic students at elementary, middle school, and high school levels, what else does 4J leadership need to know about the root causes of this gap in order to begin to close it. Recent research on the achievement gap (Rothstein 2004; Ladson-Billings 2006) points to a host of social class, family, and community differences that have serious implications for academic success. These include differences in access to health care and stable housing (closely tied to indexes of student mobility), access to summer school and

after school learning, and access to a variety of cultural opportunities and influences that are closely tied to parental income.

To determine how well the Learning Communities are doing in integrating data into leadership decision making, we recommend that they attend to the following indicators. [Note that the point here is not to establish specific indicators, benchmarks, or milestones for AYP data, but rather to identify indicators for the overall system of data use by district leaders].

Indicator 2.1: *There is a robust culture of inquiry among the district's professional staff that is reflected in the way that teachers, principals, and central office staff collect, analyze, and use data to make all instructional decisions.*

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

A district-wide analysis of access to data issues by school and region is completed and identifies data gaps and data literacy training needs for teachers and principals. A complete report is prepared that presents a gap analysis for each school and region to the district leadership team. Data presented will be used to determine a strategic course of action for strengthening the districts data infrastructure.

The analysis should address variation in access to data by content area (e.g. more regular access in ELA than in science), by grade level (easier at elementary and middle school levels than at the high school level), and by school (Not all schools have access for technical reasons.). It should also determine if frequent changes in access protocols make it more difficult for some teachers to get the data they need.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Data literacy in Eugene is defined and incorporated as a core component of the professional development plan for teachers and principals and includes a tiered level of proficiency that moves staff along a continuum from beginning to accomplished levels of proficiency within three years. There is a commitment of resources (people, money, time) to build and sustain the technology infrastructure needed to build a data literate community of practitioners.

To support a robust culture of inquiry among the district's professional staff, it is imperative that expertise in collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and/or communicating a wide range of data (external, school-wide, and classroom-based) be widespread. Reticence of education professionals to use data often stems from their lack of familiarity and general discomfort with the technical and political aspects of its use. A well-developed program to build data literacy and thus to broaden ownership of the knowledge generated through data analysis can increase school responsiveness. Relevant data here includes an initial assessment of data literacy and attitudes toward data use (based on questionnaire or interview), a review of who, at present, uses data and for what purposes (relying on questionnaire and observation), and an itemization of the training

and support currently available to those who use data (relying on document review and interview). Each of these data points could be revisited during the school year (perhaps at mid year) to assess progress in strengthening and expanding data literacy.

Year 3 (2009-2010)

Authorization and approval of all new programs and practices are based on overwhelming data that clearly demonstrate the need and establish an order of priority in decision-making. Accountability for the continual use of data to demonstrate need, progress, and priority is a common expectation throughout the district from the classroom to the board room.

Objective 3: Provide the context for intellectual stimulation and learning about research-related practices that transforms the way teachers and principals think about and approach their work.

Critical to the work of the K-12 Learning Communities is principals' and teachers' access to cutting edge ideas with clear connections to leadership responsibilities and instructional proficiency. In the best case, rigorous content-based professional development is closely tied to within-school learning opportunities that test ideas in practice. Principals and teachers need frequent exposure to new ideas as well as carefully structured opportunities for collegial critique of practices that are the visible manifestation of these ideas. For principals, this may involve peer walkthroughs, coaching, or job shadowing; for teachers it may involve cross-classroom observation, debriefing, or collegial analysis of student work. This kind of public scrutiny of practice is essential to improvement in virtually all professions, and teaching and school administration are no exceptions. Tightly coupled with high quality professional development, these within-schools and cross-schools learning structures can strengthen and accelerate instructional improvement.

We propose that the K-12 Learning Communities collect and review data on the overall health of the professional learning environment, especially those facets of the system aligned with curriculum adoption and implementation in the core content areas.

Indicator 3.1: *There is a comprehensive professional development continuum for teachers and principals that is directly linked to improving the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment practice and includes measures for determining the impact of training on improving practice and moving teachers and principals from beginning to accomplished levels of proficiency in essential areas.*

Professional learning of administrators and teachers is critical to the improvement of leadership and instructional practice. Traditionally, professional learning has been the byproduct of individual decisions about what is most important to know or be able to do in providing quality instruction. Less attention has been paid to developing a more coherent system of professional development opportunities that help to focus and guide teacher or administrator learning over the course of career, across schools, and across

professional generations. The K-12 Learning Communities have expressed an interest in developing and implementing such a district-wide plan with a more formal set of learning expectations for pre-service, novice, and experienced principals and teachers. This plan would outline a core of learning toward which everyone would work coupled with other opportunities for individual development. Such a plan would capitalize on the best available research and reduce regional and district-wide fragmentation. The K-12 Learning Communities have identified the new ELA curriculum adoptions as an important initial focus (year one) for developing this more cohesive professional development system.

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

Fully implemented cross-region plans for in-depth training that is linked to the new ELA adoption for both principals and teachers and includes: the development of a cadre of teacher and principal coaches; cross-region grade-level teacher study groups; and a set of assessment tools designed to determine the impact of training and coaching on overall levels of implementation by region.

As outlined above in our treatment of indicator 1.2, the focus of content-based professional development in year one is on the ELA adoptions. The aim is to develop a system of learning opportunities that links regional or district-wide training to within-school support and continuous instructional improvement. A carefully crafted professional development rubric closely aligned with implementation of the ELA curricula would help to establish levels of instructional proficiency (similar to proficiency ratings established by NBPTS). Data include: a fully developed, clearly articulated, and broadly disseminated plan for professional development focusing on the implementation of the new curricula and the district-wide improvement of ELA instruction; a syllabus for each of the discrete ELA-related professional development activities; implementation of a plan for in-class follow up that includes the work of principals, coaches, teacher leaders, and collegial study groups; and an on-line questionnaire for teachers and principals eliciting information about the effectiveness of the professional development program.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

There is an addition of another core curricular area to the professional development plan for principals and teachers. There is continued commitment to increasing the number of instructional coaches for teachers and principals in an effort to build adequate capacity for providing effective feedback to teachers and principals that supports improved instruction and strengthened leadership practices.

Sound instructional leadership and development of a cadre of highly skilled content-based coaches can help to solidify the impact of initial training. Expanding the professional development program into a second content area insures that benefits and burdens are more equally distributed across professional staff.

The overall effectiveness of the professional development plan is measured in its impact on teacher and principal performance and on its contribution to an environment in which all professional staff are willing to take more risks (see Objective 6) and open up their own practice to collegial review and critique. Relevant data include systematic observation of a sample of classrooms to determine level of implementation (e.g. none, partial, full), self-reports of implementation from teachers and principals, samples of student work, and measures of collegial contact around the selected curricula.

Year 3 (2009-2010)

A comprehensive professional development plan targets the development of identified competencies for teachers and principals in three core content areas and articulates an explicit continuum of expectations for proficiency in each area. There is a sustainable commitment of resources (people, money, time) and incentives for motivating teachers and principals to train for increasingly challenging leadership roles at the school, region, and district office levels.

Objective 4: Provide seamless transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school for all students, teachers, and principals

Improving the transitions between elementary school and middle school and between middle school and high school has been identified as a critical factor for improving academic achievement for K-12 pupils. The Eugene K-12 Learning Communities will focus on transitions as one of six key strategic leverage points in improving student outcomes within and across the grades. The current literature on transitions (see, for example, Morgan and Hertzog, 2001) suggests that, to succeed, school leaders need to take concrete steps to address all facets of student experience—curriculum, instruction, counseling, school organization, and school-community relationships. Students are often anxious about transitions, and the failure to construct a system that openly and actively addresses these anxieties can lead to students' social and academic disengagement. Morgan identifies a number of concrete steps that can be taken to create a more hospitable and academically coherent transition between levels. These include developing packets of sample high school tests, homework assignments, and student work for eighth grade students; conducting a curriculum fair where high school departments operate booths that inform eighth grade students about high school subjects; and enlisting transition grade teachers to work together on curriculum articulation. Eugene school leaders and teachers will need to make measured investments over time to insure continuous, incremental improvement. Here, the leadership needs to develop a clear logic model about how these transitions improve over time and a set of indicators and benchmarks to track progress.

For example, in Eugene, the transitions are rockier in some subjects than in others (The data show that students bounce back in high school ELA.). Why does this happen, and what does it tell us about likely points of intervention? Are the interventions likely to be different in different subject areas? The disaggregated data also indicate that the transitions are more difficult for some sub-groups than others (especially LEP students,

students with disabilities, and Hispanic students). Why? The answer to this question may suggest varied sets of decisions about improving transitions for different groups of students. So, for example, if lack of coherence and continuity in the curriculum is the likely source of decline in achievement for some sub-groups, then decisions may need to focus on curriculum adoption, adaptation, and implementation (see Objective 1) to insure that students recognize a conceptual bridge across the grades. The indicators for this strategic area are dependent, at least in part, on the interventions the Learning Communities decide upon. Given that transition outcomes are quite different across subject areas, we assume that achieving greater curriculum and instructional coherence may be one key to improving these transitions.

Indicator 4.1: *A system is in place to actively facilitate smooth transitions for students and their families, teachers, and principals and address all facets of the school experience and ensures an academically and socially coherent transition from one level to the next.*

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

There is a regional transition team in place that collects, analyzes, and reports on student performance at the transition grades at least twice a year and based on the findings recommends strategies that appropriately address the unique needs for each transition grade by school and region. Findings and recommendations will be made to school and regional teams on an annual basis at an appropriate time of the year to affect necessary change. Parents and students are included as members of the regional transition teams and across school activities are jointly planned on a regular basis.

The formation of a regional transition team and a careful review of relevant student performance data in the transition grades is a critical first step in the effort to smooth transitions for all students. Knowing, with higher levels of confidence, which students fare most poorly, which subjects present the greatest challenges, and which regions or schools have had the greatest or least success, will help district leaders craft a more targeted and more effective transition plan. The relevant data here include student test data as well as a preliminary analysis (in terms of well-structured hypotheses) about why the data look the way they do.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Based on findings, appropriate strategies for addressing key areas of weakness, identified in the data, will be developed and will include specific cross grade level professional development for teachers and principal teams related to adolescent development.

The K-12 Learning Communities identify several cross-school, cross-regional efforts that aim, at least in part, to improve transitions for Eugene students, especially those from groups which have struggled in the transition grades. Leaders point to Regional Professional Development Teams, monthly meetings of elementary school principals, and the collaborative efforts of the K-12 Learning Communities. Other steps toward

addressing some parts of the transition problem include participation in the Gates Foundation program supporting small high schools, a partial shift to a K-8 strategy that provides more continuity and faculty support for students in the critical grades 6-8, a ninth grade summer academy that provides additional support to students in transition years, and efforts to provide students with information through school choice week and counselor exchange. These and other transition strategies should be the subject of reports from the annual transition team.

Year 3 (2009-2010)

By year three, there are a significant number of collaborative inter-school, inter-regional relationships with both formal and informal arrangements in place and fully operational to ensure smooth transitions from elementary to middle to high school.

Collection of student performance data continues. Results should begin to reflect the targeted interventions of the previous two years. The bottom line for improving transitions is improved student performance. Assuming implementation of a sustained program to strengthen elementary-middle and middle-high school transitions, the district should expect to see fewer sharp declines in performance in core subjects and/or among students most at risk. Existing test data should provide an adequate picture of performance in the transition grades.

Objective 5: Increase access to learning opportunities for all students beginning in kindergarten and continuing through high school graduation.

In districts throughout the country, evidence abounds that certain socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups fair more poorly than others in the traditional K-12 public education system. These disparities are most visible in large urban school districts and poorer rural districts where larger numbers of students falling within these groups reside. The conceptual shorthand for describing these disparities is what educators have come to call the “achievement gap.” Closing this gap has become a focal point for the efforts of federal, state, and local policy makers, administrators, and teachers. An assumption informing most of these efforts is that these inequities

...must be the result of wrongly designed school policies—either expectations that are too low, teachers who are insufficiently qualified, curricula that are badly designed, classes that are too large, school climates that are too undisciplined, leadership that is too unfocused, or a combination of these (Rothstein 2004, 1)

And while, on a national basis, there have been some measurable gains, these gains have been comparatively small, and, by and large, the discrepancies persist. The question confronting educators today is no longer how to make slight movements in the floor of these data, but rather how to significantly increase the ceiling for gains among these students. For years, the assumption was that the gap was primarily an urban phenomenon and that students from target groups who attended school in more prosperous and, on

average, academically more successful, suburban or small urban districts would perform on par with traditionally higher achieving groups. As state-level NCLB data have revealed however, even in these higher performing districts, the achievement gap is evident among individuals who, statistically, identify with underperforming groups. Although the numbers may be small and may in fact be largely invisible when data are aggregated, the disaggregated data demonstrate that these students lag behind the traditionally more successful groups. The Eugene K-12 Learning Communities have identified an achievement gap affecting several groups within the district, including LEP students, students with disabilities, Hispanic students, and African American students. The challenge facing district leaders is how to insure that these students receive equitable opportunities to achieve at high levels, and how, over time, to eliminate the achievement gap completely.

Indicator 5.1: *Systems are in place to ensure that students from underperforming groups have access to the same quality of curriculum and instruction as their higher achieving peers.*

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

A thorough analysis of achievement gap data is conducted by school and region for the purpose of identifying underperforming students by name and school; an historical profile of the teachers they have had; an account of instructional methods and curricular programs associated with their schooling over a multiple year period. This will constitute the baseline data that will be used to determine progress at the end of year three.

This indicator goes to the heart of the question about equal opportunity. Two data collection strategies would be relevant here. First, are teachers of students from underachieving groups less well-prepared and/or less experienced than teachers of students from high achieving groups? For example, are teachers of students from underachieving groups as likely to have masters degrees in education and/or in the subjects they teach? Are they as likely to pursue intensive professional development (e.g. multi-day institutes)? Are they as likely to *feel* well-prepared to teach the grade or subject they are teaching? Relevant data here include background information on teacher preparation and professional development collected through questionnaires or review of district data bases. Data on how teachers feel about their preparedness can be collected through a straightforward questionnaire modeled on Horizon Research's NSF Local Systemic Change items.

Second, are students from underachieving groups successfully completing critical gatekeeper courses (e.g. Algebra I) and gaining access to/ enrolling in higher level courses in core subjects? Failure to complete these gatekeeper courses can close off access to academic pathways and result in lower academic achievement on high stakes exams. Relevant data here are course enrollment and course completion data reviewed each term.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Based on findings and recommendations from the year one analyses, specific steps are taken to implement high quality professional development programs that target teachers of underperforming students by school and region. Intentional relationships are formed between experienced and novice teachers as part of the learning community infrastructure.

The aim of these professional development opportunities is twofold—1) to insure that teachers of underachieving pupils have the same command of content and instruction as the teachers of high achieving pupils and 2) to insure that teachers of underachieving pupils have access to the best ideas about how to provide special support to these students. For example, Ferguson (2002) argues that non-white students (especially African Americans) are more likely to cite teacher encouragement as a source of academic motivation than their white peers (independent of socio economic status). This would suggest the importance of supporting teachers in their efforts to offer encouragement and then to track (among a sample of non-white students) how much encouragement they received to complete classwork and homework and to take on special challenges in core subjects. Relevant data here are student attitudinal reports, systematically collected each term.

Year 3 (2009-2010)

At the end of year three, data will be collected, analyzed, and shared to determine the overall impact of specific treatments on increasing student access to high quality teaching and learning.

Closing the achievement gap is one of the most challenging of all educational objectives. While it is unlikely that the perceived gaps in Eugene will vanish in a mere three years, it is, nonetheless, possible that significant progress can be made in equalizing learning opportunities for students who, till now, have fared most poorly.

Objective 6: Strengthen relational trust among all stakeholders to ensure support and long term sustainability of leadership reform efforts.

Progress in all of the five strategic areas identified above will be aided by the cultivation of a community of trust among Eugene 4 J's principals, teachers, and district administrators. In EDC's earlier technical assistance report, the authors identified the importance of "relational trust" in the successful functioning of the K-12 Learning Communities and noted the desire of the leadership group to extend this trusting relationship across the district's schools and faculties. In their book *Trust in Schools* (2002), Bryk and Schneider maintain that relational trust serves as a "resource for school improvement" in four ways—1) it facilitates risk taking by moderating the sense of uncertainty and vulnerability that accompany change. "In this sense, relational trust is a catalyst for innovation," 2) it facilitates collective decision making and public problem solving, hallmarks of effective school leadership, 3) it replaces extensive supervision or organizational prodding with a system of mutual trustworthiness in which individuals

know and accept their roles and responsibilities, and 4) it under girds a system of learning and change with a strong moral commitment to student improvement. These four features of environments rich in relational trust suggest the kind of indicators that Eugene's regions and schools should look for as their strategic work proceeds.

Indicator 6.1: *Teachers and principals feel comfortable taking risks as they seek to improve the teaching and learning for their students.*

Evidence of Progress:

Year 1 (2007-2008)

Construct survey questionnaires and collect baseline data from students, teachers, parents, and principals on levels of trust between teachers and principal, parents and teachers, parents and principal, students and teachers, students and principals, school staff and central office, district and external agencies.

Determining the level of trust among key stakeholders will help district leaders assess the likelihood of success in other strategic interventions. It is best to develop a system-wide picture of trust including parents and the broader community. We direct the K-12 Learning Communities to measures of trust identified in Bryk and Schneider (2002), Appendix B, as a likely starting point for the initial identification of levels of trust among and between key stakeholders.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Based on the data, identify areas of focus for strengthening relationships within, between, and across groups and take steps to begin implementing relational improvement strategies.

For example, districts, schools, and departments that have cultivated environments high in trust make it possible for all professional staff to provide constructive critique of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teachers especially need to feel comfortable voicing their views and opening their classrooms to other educators. Principals need to feel comfortable discussing challenges with their peers from other schools and with district leaders. Relevant data here would include the presence and vitality of school-based or department-based groups that offer opportunities for teachers to observe one another teach and to provide constructive commentary on what they see (e.g. lesson study groups in core subjects) as well as regional and district-wide collegial critique among principals. An informal survey of relevant opportunities for sharing and critiquing professional practice would be adequate as an indicator. In year one, this indicator could focus on initiating and sustaining these groups in the context of the ELA adoption.

Distributed leadership is an essential component of school-based trust. Shared responsibility for the adoption and implementation of curriculum, the design and scheduling of professional development, and the regular review of assessment results builds ownership of school successes and failures. Relevant data here would focus on characteristics of school-based decision making in one or two of the other six strategic

areas (e.g. improving transitions and creating a more coherent curriculum). Schools would report the number of individuals involved in making and carrying out key decisions, the level of accountability tied to their work, and the (self-reported) effectiveness of their work

Year 3 (2009-2010)

Assess progress at the end of year three using a method and tools similar to year one. Share findings and begin the process again.

Indicator 6.2: *Evidence of strengthened collaboration between district 4 J and other school districts in the state of Oregon*

Year 1 (2007-2008)

Identify several areas for collaboration and establish partnership relationships of mutual benefit and trust as a way to strengthen the work and build political will and support for district 4 J initiatives in the future.

Many of the challenges outlined in the previous five objectives are not unique to Eugene, and while local context is extremely important in determining how best to proceed, there's much to be learned from the successes and failures in other districts throughout the state (or across the nation). Developing closer ties to Portland or Salem, for example may help to broaden perspective on district challenges in the Oregon context. Given Eugene's status as a "university town," a close look at cities such as Madison, Ann Arbor, Amherst (MA), or Burlington (VT) might shed light on strategies for closing the achievement gap or improving transitions in small cities with comparatively smaller populations of at-risk pupils.

Year 2 (2008-2009)

Assess progress on collaborative efforts and extend efforts to more challenging leadership efforts in partnership with the state and other districts on behalf of students.

Many of the enduring challenges of educational leadership, especially those regarding the conditions and policies that affect teaching and learning, are best addressed through state/district collaboration. With support from the Wallace Foundation, Eugene will have the opportunity to work more closely with the state over the next several years. Strengthening this relationship and charting its progress will be an important feature of Eugene's commitment to relational trust.

Year 3 (2009-2010)

There is a pervasive culture of risk taking across the district on the tough issues related to cultural competence, eliminating the achievement gap, and equity of access to quality for all. There are formal mechanisms for sharing decision making and leadership on matters relating to instructional improvement for all students as evidence by bold redefinitions of roles, responsibilities, and authority.

Conclusion

We have appreciated the chance to work with the 4J Leadership team to redefine and propose indicators of progress in the six strategic areas identified by the team last December. As a result of this process, we have taken the team's oral and written feedback to produce two documents: 1) A Progress Indicator Matrix (PIM) that provides a map linking objectives to specific indicators and includes a three year implementation timetable (the matrix was submitted to the team on March 16th to provide guidance for its planning process); and 2) a descriptive narrative that provides important background and supporting rationale for the PIM.

The team has indicated that it is especially interested in indicators for objectives 1 and 3 as a guide and measure for the group's year 1 activities. We have paid special attention to these indicators (indeed, it's likely that a chronological sequencing of the group's work makes sense given the breadth of the work they're undertaking); however, as part of our obligation to the team and, we hope, as a potential resource to sustain and accelerate the full range of work it has identified as critical to the district's progress, we have also included a discussion of indicators for objectives 2 and 4 - 6.

Both the matrix and the supporting narrative address indicators for each of the six objectives. Taken together, these objectives represent a bold program for improving leadership and its impact on teaching and learning throughout the district. We commend your efforts to date and encourage the K-12 Learning Communities to develop a comprehensive plan for pursuing these objectives and charting progress toward their implementation.

Relevant Research by Objective

Objective 1: Strengthen regional and district articulation and program coherence

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Objective 2:

Increase access to and use of regional and district performance data as the basis for all decision making related to instruction

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Objective 3:

Provide the context for intellectual stimulation and learning about research-based practices that are transforming the way school leaders think about and approach their work

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Objective 4:

Provide seamless transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school for all students, teachers, and principals

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Objective 5:

Increase access to learning opportunities for all students from kindergarten and continuing through high school graduation

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Objective 6: Strengthen relational trust among all Eugene stakeholders

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