

## SUMMARY OF OVERALL DISTRICT STRENGTHS

Among all of the strengths within each category, the CEC Assessment Team finds these strengths to be highest in priority. It is hoped that recognizing and celebrating these strengths will showcase past investment of resources in improving performance results.

### **Focus on Learning - Strengths:**

- The implementation of the iReady curriculum has created alignment in instruction and assessment in math.
- Work in Curriculum and Instruction is moving forward in a deliberate and thoughtful way. A description of work is outlined in the *Curricular Guidepost* document that encompasses a 3-4 year time period.
- Social-emotional learning needs are given attention through morning meetings, advisory, and classroom lessons supported in some schools by the counselors.
- The on-going 1:1 initiative provides every student with a device.
- A referendum was successfully passed which allowed for new construction at MacArthur and Sunnyside and major renovations at Riley and Northlake.
- District administrators see what the district can be. They can openly identify the areas that need improvement and work to correct these areas using the resources they have or resources they can obtain.

### **Focus on Collaboration - Strengths:**

- Almost every stakeholder said the strengths of the district are the people and the relationships they form with each other.
- Staff members believe district administration cares about them.
- BPAC is an organization that gives voice to the Hispanic community.
- Parents value and trust the staff as professionals.
- The district has made a commitment for PLCs.

- Staff prides itself on its inclusive nature; being able to meet the needs of students in the mainstream and the blended classes they have in the specials' areas.
- District documents, both internal and external, are informative and often incorporate best practice. They highlight the priorities of the district and provide background information and updates for stakeholders. These documents range from *Berkeley's Teaching and Learning Blueprint* to the *Journey into Learning* community newsletter.

### **Focus on Results - Strengths:**

- A School Improvement Template is given to the schools to use in developing their School Improvement Plans. Most of the schools incorporate district priorities and goals (this year they are discourse, differentiation, and responsive learning environment) into their plans as strategies to use to achieve their targets.
- School Improvement Plans include both academic and social-emotional goals.
- A Plan, Do, Study, Act model is emphasized for schools to use for continuous improvement.

## **SUMMARY OF OVERALL DISTRICT OPPORTUNITIES**

**Among all of the opportunities for improvement within each category, the CEC Assessment Team finds these opportunities to be highest in priority. It is hoped that addressing these opportunities will yield a high future return on investment of resources in improving overall system performance results.**

### **Focus on Learning - Opportunities for Improvement:**

- High Turnover in Staff and Administration - This is an area that can negatively affect all focus areas.
  - The district invests time and money to teach new staff members about the district and school culture, methods, and priorities. The teacher then often leaves after a short time in the district to go to another district that pays more. Other districts benefit from the experiences and training District 87 has given them while D87 is the training ground.
  - Initiatives are started but then discontinued when a new administrator brings in a different priority.

- Teachers resist the district's push to go deeper into the standards when they have so many students performing below grade level. They believe the best way to promote student growth is to go back to previous grade level standards during instructional time.
- Teachers don't feel their students are able to demonstrate proficiency in math due to what they see as unrealistic pacing guides.
- Science and Social Studies are expected to be embedded into the literacy block in the primary and intermediate grades. However, teachers are still looking for lessons and units that were created in the past. Many of them would like to see these subjects given more priority in the day rather than be a part of literacy time.
- It can be challenging to provide on-going, embedded Professional Development, especially when there are substitute shortages. An emphasis is placed on PD when new programs are rolled out, but then it drops off and is not provided to teachers who are new to the district.
- There is no clear MTSS structure in place to identify students and provide services to them in a timely manner but the district is in the process of developing a MTSS guidebook.
- Curriculum is often written in the summer when some of the more knowledgeable teachers are not available or developed quickly.
- Piloting of materials is done by teachers who volunteer. This can include new teachers who aren't as familiar with the district's needs or who have had limited exposure to other materials.

**Focus on Collaboration - Opportunities for Improvement:**

- **Communication** is an area for improvement that is mentioned across stakeholder groups. However, note that this area varies by school and school administration.
  - Communications are seen as being sent out at the last minute or on the day of a particular event/activity.
  - Staff want to receive clearer messages from the top down. They believe they are interpreted differently by different buildings.
  - Teachers feel they are not heard. They are asked for input at times, but do not see evidence that their feedback is considered. They do not feel their input is included as part of the solution.

- Staff believe that some building administrators don't want feedback from them.

### **Focus on Results - Opportunities for Improvement:**

- The majority of instructional time is spent on teaching below grade level work.
- There are perceived differences between the **North Side and the South Side** of the district.
- There are limited to no protocols or processes in place for continuous improvement.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT**

**While this report is not intended to be prescriptive, this section provides some “Next Steps” for addressing key opportunities for improvement. It provides suggestions that could serve as Next Steps. The strengths and areas of opportunity are based on set criteria framed by continuous improvement research. The priorities are not listed in any order, although the identification of essential learning outcomes is central to the development of all these Next Steps. Each Next Step is equally important. Next Steps are framed by the experiences and opinions of the External Review Team.**

**PLEASE NOTE: These Next Steps are presented as multi-year priority recommendations. To implement all these priorities at the same time, or any one of them in full at one time, would likely overtax the capacities of any typical school district.**

### **Priority #1: Focus on Learning**

- A viable curriculum and assessment system must be guaranteed across all schools.
  - Clarify curriculum with horizontal and vertical alignment (across subject areas, grades, and schools).
  - Align what students are expected to learn (the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions) in each course or subject, unit by unit.
  - Monitor each student's learning on a timely basis through the use of frequent, formative, common assessments.
  - Continue to explore instructional strategies or programs staff can implement so that students can make more than one-year's growth in core subject areas when they are below grade-level standards.
- Once the decision is made regarding curriculum adoption (e.g. ELA), consider creating a 1-page summary document and/or brief presentation in each school from the committee to explain the process and criteria used to select the program.
  - Resolve staff concerns about needing a foundational reading skills component in the ELA curriculum.

- Address how science and social studies skills are going to be emphasized if they are embedded in the ELA curriculum. Explain how inquiry-based science will be included.
- Share (in multiple ways and times) the overall vision and mission and the short-term and long-range plans of the district with the focus on learning, collaboration, and results.
- Explore starting a “grow your own” program that can be used to develop administrators’ and teachers’ leadership skills and help to address staffing shortages or turnover.
- Plan a comprehensive program for new teachers (consider one for new paraprofessionals as well) to review district priorities and curricula.
- Provide classes/workshops for parents to help them to support their children’s learning, to advance their skills/knowledge about technology (especially how to access the district website and portals such as Skyward and Class Dojo), to learn English as a Second Language, to acquire parenting skills, etc.).

### **Priority #2: Collaborative Culture**

- There are many inconsistencies in the way buildings operate and how staff members and parents feel about them. Some stakeholders feel very valued and supported at certain buildings and believe their ideas count. But, the opposite is felt at other schools. Consider giving staff/parent satisfaction surveys (other than 5 Essentials Survey), using mentors for building leaders, discussing the topic at administrative meetings, etc.
- Work with community leaders, staff, Board and administrators to showcase and celebrate achievements at all schools to begin to bridge the perceived gap between the schools on the northside and southside of the district.
- Collaborate and/or set up a committee that has representatives from the Board, Administration and Union to find creative ways to attract and retain teachers and administrators (hiring and retaining highly effective staff was a goal in the strategic plan). Review HR’s exit reports to identify trends that might have influenced staff members to leave D87.
- Revisit the purpose, structure, roles and responsibilities of PLCs. Focus on learning and results using the critical questions of learning, inquiry cycles, sharing of professional practice, assessments, etc.

- The district and individual schools try to recognize and celebrate students from different cultural or racial backgrounds. Hispanic Heritage Week and Black History Month are highlighted. While these two groups are focused on during a specific time period, there are comparisons made regarding how much emphasis each one gets and a few questions the lack of highlighting other groups such as Asians. Some staff members have added that they are black, Hispanic, Asian, etc. all-year round, not just for one week or one month. Look to celebrate everybody every day and make it a part of the ongoing curriculum and culture. Classroom materials and displays should affirm the district's commitment to inclusion and representation of all groups.

### **Priority #3: Results Orientation**

- Continue to follow or slightly modify the 3-4 year action plan of district priorities and initiatives. Follow the plan so that targets are reached, and the continuous improvement cycle is in effect.
- Increase the impact PLCs can have by looking to increase the weekly meeting, protecting its agenda, and finding a way for content-area teachers to be in PLCs with others who teach the same subject.
  - Provide training for creating formative and summative assessments, analyzing and sharing data, creating data trust rules, etc.
  - Identify or create formative and summative common assessments for grade levels across the district.
- Align the classroom, school, and district continuous improvement efforts by developing aligned PLCs, School Leadership Teams, and District Leadership Teams.
- Consider doing a comparative study of the district data as compared to other schools in the area and schools who excel.
- Continuously ask stakeholders if school/district actions support “One District, One Mission, One Team”. Have staff members and administrators actualize this motto by reflecting upon what this looks like, sounds like and feels like.