

Chapter 2

Instructional Delivery System

This chapter addresses several areas within the instructional delivery system as reviewed by the Office of Educational Quality & Accountability in the following sections:

- A. Professional Learning Community
- B. Curriculum
- C. Instructional Delivery and Assessments
- D. Student Performance
- E. Special Service Programs
- F. Student Services

The primary purpose of any school system is educating children. Effective schools deliver quality instruction based upon a district's capacity to manage and implement a rigorous, relevant curriculum. The education process requires robust policies and procedures that direct the instructional process, provide well-designed programs to meet the needs of all students, and provide resources to support program implementation. The monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness based upon student performance data are also essential.

A. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Through ample educational research over the years, it has been confirmed that when schools and districts effectively implement professional learning communities (PLC) there is considerable improvement in student learning as well as adult learning (Annenberg, 2014¹; Leana, 2011²). Although the PLC concept has been misinterpreted and defined differently in multiple contexts, OEQA has adopted the definition provided by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many (2008)³:

PLCs are defined as educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. (p. 14)

Within the context of this definition, school districts should create the structures for the successful implementation of PLCs by providing the time, space, expectations, accountability, and leadership needed for overall school improvement. Research has shown that when the relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction—that is, when social capital is strong—student achievement scores improve (Leana). DuFour, et al. (2008) suggested six characteristics that contribute to successful PLCs:

¹ <http://annenberginstitute.org/sites/default/files/product/270/files/ProfLearning.pdf>

² Leana, C. (2011). The Missing Link in School Reform.
http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_missing_link_in_school_reform/

³ Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker. Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools, Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2008

- Shared vision, mission, values, and goals focused on student learning
- A collaborative culture with a focus on learning
- Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality
- Action orientation – learning by doing
- A commitment to continuous improvement
- Results orientation – based on results rather than intention or assumptions

Creating strong professional learning communities holds several potential advantages for schools and districts. Among the positive outcomes reported in the research are: increased efficacy, both collectively and individually; collective responsibility for student learning; reduction in teacher isolation; substantial learning about good teaching and increased content knowledge; higher morale, greater job satisfaction, greater teacher retention rates, and enthusiasm (Annenberg, 2004). Based on these findings and the benefits of PLCs, it is important to commend districts who actively promote these communities in their schools and to support districts that are involved in the earlier stages of PLC development.

FINDING 2-1

It was apparent to the consulting teams during many performance reviews of the instructional delivery program that although school staff and administrative staff advocated a collaborative culture for learning, there were usually no formalized processes in place for an accountable and effective PLC. Some districts allowed sufficient time for vertical/horizontal collaborative team meetings or content-specific meetings while others had not prioritized this crucial element of an effective PLC culture. However, without formalizing the collaborative process by including the essential structures and tools then the current informal efforts will not produce the critical growth needed in student achievement and teacher development.

One of the important aspects a school or district should consider in ensuring a productive PLC is to create structures for the initiative. To accomplish this mission, the school leaders – both formal and informal – must take the lead on examining what structures are currently in place and/or not in place to support formalized collaboration among staff. Structural elements that should be considered to ensure successful implementation may include:

- **Values** – what we believe and aspire to make happen
- **Procedures** – expectations, norms, agendas, accountabilities
- **Time** – specific time delegated weekly for collaborative teams
- **Space** – designated data rooms, meeting rooms
- **Materials** – formative assessments, multiple sets of data;
- **Technologies** – software to support PLC actions
- **Human Resources** – professional development of teachers and leaders

RECOMMENDATION

School leaders should formalize the PLC collaboration process by incorporating supportive structures and tools to propel improvement of student achievement and contribute to the professional growth of teachers.

The district/school leaders must take the lead on examining what structures are in place or not in place to support the PLC Initiative. In schools reviewed, consulting teams noted some common values shared by many staffs such as the importance of working together as a commitment to continuous improvement. **Exhibit 2-1** provides the results of one question from a sampling of archived staff surveys. Teachers were asked if they often collaborate on projects related to the curriculum. The sampling data conveyed that most, 74 percent, of the staff surveyed were involved in a collaborative effort as it related to curriculum.

Exhibit 2-1
Sampling of Staff Survey Results Regarding Collaborative Efforts

Survey Questions	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Teachers often collaborate on projects related to the curriculum.	74%	15%	11%

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2012-2017

In the past decade there has occurred a deeper understanding of what steps and procedures should be in place in moving teachers from isolation or even from a collaborative “hit and miss” approach to a more structured result-oriented event.⁴ Providing only the element of time for teachers to meet is not sufficient and will not affect school improvement if the focus is on issues that do not directly impact student learning. When school leaders consider a procedural approach that is focused on student learning and purposeful strategies then educators will engage in collaboration that impacts both students and adult learning.⁵

Teaching staff should consider developing agreed upon norms that are drafted by the group (vertical teams or horizontal teams) to follow each meeting. Norms make collaboration and group meetings more effective by guiding team behavior. Adopting norms enable team members to hold each other accountable for any behavior that is negatively impacting the success of the team. Clearly assigned roles and responsibilities help the team build internal capacity for planning and holding effective and focused meetings.⁶

Next, there should be an emphasis to facilitate team meetings that are conducted based on best practices that produce optimal gains for both teachers and students. During reviews it was noted that some schools had not crafted time or space needed for these collaborative team meetings and lacked the procedures for successful facilitation. This can be accomplished with implementing expectations and attainable outcomes for each collaborative team meeting that is guided with a

⁴ DuFour, et. al., (2008). Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <http://www.schoolimprovementcoach.org/manual/7%20Norms%20and%20Roles.pdf>

structured agenda. Although it should be consistent and structured, the agenda should be unrestricted to the degree that it will allow for engagement of all participants. **Exhibit 2-2** provides a sample of a five phase PLC Agenda that can be used throughout a month if meetings are held weekly. For a full view of the document see **Appendix D – Resources**.

Exhibit 2-2
Sample PLC Agenda for Team Meetings

PLC PHASES	DESCRIPTION OF PHASES
PHASE I: Creating or revising the Pacing Calendar	This should occur quarterly and should be revised based on quarterly assessment results (benchmarks of standards taught/and/or summative data).
PHASE II: select & study the standards and objectives (Phases II – V are listed on the PLC Meeting Agenda Worksheet)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the pacing calendar. What objectives have been assigned for the upcoming week? 2. Read the item specifications of the objectives you are going to teach next week. 3. What depth of knowledge (DoK) will be used when teaching/assessing each objective? 4. What vocabulary will need to be addressed? 5. Using the Blue Prints, how many questions will be on the test that corresponds to each objective?
PHASE III: prepare to teach the objective(s)	<p>Prompts for team discussions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to establish and relate the objective to the learners? What background knowledge will be needed? 2. In order to involve all learners, what methods will I use to explain/model the content and at what level (Depth of Knowledge -Webb) (Blooms – remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating) 3. Will I present the content? What questioning techniques will I incorporate into the presentation? 4. What modeling actions should be considered when delivering the directions during the lesson sequence? How will I activate student’s prior background knowledge throughout the lesson? 5. During guided practice and independent practice I will incorporate literacy by using the following domains: Reading, Writing, Listening Speaking. 6. While monitoring students during the learning process, I will adjust the instructional environment by using the following differentiated approaches: independent study, small group, peer tutoring, other? 7. Evaluate the learning: What assessment(s) will be used? Review the released test items.
PHASE IV: data analysis of formative assessment results	<p>Prior to the team PLC Curriculum Meeting complete this section:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using the Monitoring Student Learning Graph review the objectives that were taught the previous week. On the table below record the following: What objectives did you teach? How many scored Proficient? Advanced? 2. List the students that scored in each category (Limited Knowledge/Unsatisfactory) and select type of focus group – if applicable

PLC PHASES	DESCRIPTION OF PHASES
	(SPED/ELL). Also record attendance data (ADA) for the previous week/month.
PHASE V: response to intervention	<p>Processes for Interventions: This phase requires the specialist (Special Education teacher/ Reading Specialist/ or assigned tutor to be part of the discourse.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the list of students scoring Limited Knowledge and Unsatisfactory on the above chart and determine if they can be moved forward using strategies within the classroom (Tier One). Those students needing more intervention should move into a Tier Two approach (Use Small Group Worksheet). Students who still struggle with the objectives after Tier Two approach then move forward to Tier Three (Use Individual Worksheet). Flex grouping should be at the center of the Tier two interventions. Review the number of students remediated last 2 weeks and the grade they received after receiving remediation (both Tiers Worksheets). 2. Review strategies to be used or have been used in remediation (see Worksheets). Are specific strategies working better than others? What may not be working as well? 3. Compare the students not mastering to their scores from last years' OCCT or previous district Benchmarks. What is their percentage of growth?

Source: OEQA's BDLC Toolkit (2015)

B. CURRICULUM

Oklahoma state education laws, as codified in the Oklahoma Administrative Code (210 OS § 15), manage the instructional process to ensure academic success for all students. It is the responsibility of the school district to meet the requirements of the law. A district's instructional program, along with its allocation of resources, is the means by which a district attempts to meet the educational needs of all students. A well-designed and managed process for developing curriculum and directing instruction, collecting assessment data to evaluate and monitor programs, and providing the resources needed to support educational efforts is essential if a district is to meet the needs of its students.

Curriculum development and instructional delivery are critical components of student learning. The presentation of materials, concepts, skills, and new ideas greatly affects the acquisition of knowledge. Curriculum content and instructional strategies need proper alignment and regularly scheduled evaluations. This promotes improvement of student performance and ensures curricular relevance, rigor, and equity.

Oklahoma school boards and superintendents provide principals and teachers with the necessary tools to deliver the state adopted standards. The Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS) drive educational delivery. With the adoption of the OAS, educators are encouraged to shape their educational efforts by integrating the best practice of instructional shifts. The goal is that such efforts will provide the rigor and relevance students need to be college and career-ready.

The OAS provides a consistent, clear articulation of learning expectations, guides teacher instruction, and assists parents in knowing what they need to do to assist in the educational process. The academic standards are intended to mirror the robust, relevant, real world

knowledge and skills that students need for success in college and careers. The OAS defines the content, knowledge, and skills students should gain during their K-12 educational careers. It prepares high school graduates for success in college courses and in workforce environments. **Exhibit 2-3** further explains the OAS standards.

**Exhibit 2-3
Oklahoma Academic State Standards**

What the OAS Does	What the OAS Does Not Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on deep thinking, conceptual understanding, and real world problem solving skills • Set expectations for students to be college, career, and citizenship ready • Incorporate literacy in science, social studies, and technical subjects • Emphasize the use of citations and examples from texts when creating opinions and arguments • Increase rigor and grade level expectations • Determine the full range of support for English language learners and students with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictate how teachers should teach • Mandate a specific curriculum • Limit advanced work beyond the standards • Require the purchase or development of entirely new instructional materials • Prescribe all that can or should be taught • Limit efforts to prepare students for college, career, or citizenship readiness • Prescribe interventions for students below grade level

Source: SDE, 2017

Exhibit 2-4 provides a 10-year overview of the state average of instructional expenditures as a percent of total expenditures as well as the annual instructional expenditures per student. Over that time, instructional expenses have decreased from 55.7 percent to 53.6 percent (-2.1 percentage points) of all expenditures. Instructional dollars per student has dropped from \$4,237 in 2007-08 to \$4,105 in 2016-17 (3.1 percent decrease).

**Exhibit 2-4
Ten Year Overview of the State Average for Instructional Spending**

Year	Percent of all Expenditures	Spending Per Student
2008	55.7	\$4,237
2009	55.4	\$4,310
2010	56.1	\$4,384
2011	55.2	\$4,189
2012	54.0	\$4,128
2013	53.7	\$4,155
2014	52.7	\$4,151
2015	53.0	\$4,177
2016	53.7	\$4,208
2017	53.6	\$4,105
Change	(2.1 pp)	(3.1%)

Source: Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, Profiles Database

FINDING 2-2

A common theme arose in many of the districts when curriculum was reviewed: There was little evidence of a comprehensive vertically aligned curriculum. Learning gaps and redundancies were not comprehensively addressed. There was no process ensuring a seamless transition from one grade level and content area to the next. Additionally, there was no monitoring to ensure an appropriate scope and sequence of skills and content was being implemented from one grade to the next. Interviews and focus group discussions from several districts indicated only isolated instances of vertical alignment.

In many districts at the elementary level, fourth and fifth grades were departmentalized with teachers responsible for only one or two subjects or possibly just one subject but teaching that subject to more than one grade level. It was noted that in some schools departmentalizing began as early as third grade. Clearly those districts' graded curriculum documents were more aligned due to the departmentalized approach. Overall, however, few districts were deliberate in vertical alignment processes within K-5 or between the elementary and middle grade levels in any core content area.

Exhibit 2-5 shows that 61 percent of a sampling of staffs surveyed *agree* there are a district-adopted pacing calendar. Yet there were cases when the consulting teams did not receive or find an adopted pacing calendar. The sampling of survey results indicated that 74 percent of teachers had a working knowledge of the adopted standards, assessment blueprints, and item specifications provided by the State Department of Education.

Exhibit 2-5
Staff Survey Results Regarding Curriculum Documents

Survey Questions	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Teachers know what is to be taught and when because they have access to a district adopted Pacing Calendar that reflects the current Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS).	61%	23%	15%
Teachers understand the OAS objectives, test blueprints, and Item Specifications that are provided by the state.	74%	20%	6%

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2012-2017

Vertical alignment articulates the logical, consistent order for teaching the standards-based content in a subject area from one grade level or course to the next. Vertical alignment is conducted as a multistep process that requires substantial time and input from district staff. In a standards-based system, vertical alignment provides a structure by which to assess achievement results. When an aligned curriculum also is aligned with performance or benchmark assessments, educators can begin to examine differences in instruction across grades and subjects within the

district.⁷

Vertical alignment is defined as “Ensuring that curriculum objectives are specific and build one upon another, that prerequisites are mastered, gaps are eliminated, and there is an increasing sophistication and rigor in concepts, processes, and skills across the grades”⁸. A process for vertical alignment asks teachers to address the following issues as they pertain to reading:

- align *student expectations* across grades;
- align *assessments* across grades;
- find and fill *gaps*;
- clarify and minimize *overlaps*;
- increase *expectations* with regard to rigor and sophistication year to year;
- build upon *prerequisite skills*; and
- build *common vocabulary*.⁹

In the lower elementary grades, many rural or small-town districts have only one teacher per grade level. This makes horizontal alignment different from larger districts with multiple teachers assigned to the same grade level. Because there is only one teacher per grade level in the elementary grades, vertical alignment is a critical component of the curriculum.

The importance of vertical alignment is evident as skills progress over time, and teachers should have opportunities to collaborate with other grade levels to ensure skills and concepts are taught effectively and with appropriate tools to prevent gaps and overlaps from occurring within the curriculum. For example, building a solid foundation for understanding proportional thinking in mathematics occurs in the early elementary years. **Exhibit 2-6** illustrates how this is developed from elementary to middle school.

⁷ <http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/CenterIssueBriefAug09.pdf>

⁸ Curriculum and Alignment - Arizona Department of Education <https://www.azed.gov/> p.12

⁹ Ibid

Exhibit 2-6
Vertical Alignment - Algebraic Reasoning & Algebra (A)

Grade level	OAS Standard
1	1.A.1 Identify patterns found in real world and mathematical situations.
2	2.A.1 Describe the relationship found in patterns to solve real-world and mathematical problems.
3	3.A.1 Describe and create representations of numerical and geometric patterns.
4	4.A.1 Use multiple representations of patterns to solve real-world and mathematical problems.
5	5.A.1 Describe and graph patterns of change created through numerical patterns.
6	6.A.1 Recognize and represent relationships between varying quantities; translate from one representation to another; use patterns, tables, graphs and rules to solve real-world and mathematical problems.
7	7.A.1 Understand the concept of proportionality in real-world and mathematical Situations and distinguish between proportional and other relationships.

Source: OEQA Archived Exhibit (2017)

RECOMMENDATION

Implement processes and procedures to pace and vertically align Kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum based on state standards and student performance results.

The district should begin a process of vertical alignment of the new Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS) for math and reading. This may involve seeking an outside consultant to assist the district in this challenging but necessary task.

FISCAL IMPACT

Districts should consider an external consultant to assist in the development of its curriculum alignment. The consulting team estimates that such a consultant will cost \$2,500 per year and may require two years to complete the alignment.

Recommendation	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Implement a vertically aligned curriculum.	(\$2,500)	(\$2,500)	\$0	\$0	\$0

FINDING 2-3

During reviews of the curriculum it was noted that many districts that did not actively implement vertical alignment processes also did not have a comprehensive system in place for pacing the instruction and assessments of the core content. Some districts had outdated pacing calendars while others had only used their teacher textbooks to guide and pace their instruction and assessments. During interviews with instructional staff from various districts, some acknowledged the value of pacing calendars for new teachers as well as for experienced teachers

especially with the state’s adoption of the Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS). Others expressed how the pacing guides/calendars could contribute to eliminating the curriculum gaps from grade to grade and subject to subject.

A pacing guide is sometimes referred to as a curriculum map, scope and sequence, standards schedule, instructional calendar, or road map. It is specific to a particular content area and level (e.g., 5th grade Science) and details when particular content standards should be taught and/or assessed. While still offering teachers flexibility on how to teach, its integration with common assessments is crucial to judging student progress. A dialogue among teachers within a collaborative team may consist of statements such as, "Students didn't know that answer because I haven't taught that yet" or "I covered that and expected students to do better; now I know some students require intervention, and I might change the way I'm teaching that". Once districts begin the process of vertical alignment of the curriculum based on the OAS, the development of a pacing calendar for math and reading should be upmost in the process for improvement.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop grade level/content specific pacing calendars that reflect standards taught quarterly; include test items specifications and blue print assessment information.

There are multiple promising outcomes for creating and implementing Pacing Guides/Calendars. Below are just a few that school districts should consider:

- Improve student performance and reduce gaps in student achievement.
- Avoid gaps in learning when students transfer from school to school or move from grade/level to grade/level.
- Avoid unintended repetition in learning when students transfer from school to school or move from grade/level to grade/level.
- Render results that inform decisions made concerning (e.g., changes needed in) instructional strategies, programs, curriculum, etc.
- Inform collaboration between educators.
- Facilitate the process for updating from the PASS to the Oklahoma Academic Standards
- Highlight cross-curricular opportunities.
- Help teachers be more effective while making lesson planning easier and saving them time.
- Help teachers and students make the most of their time.

OEQA has developed sample pacing calendar templates that might even serve as lesson plan templates to provide support for OSPR districts. **Exhibit 2-7** presents a section from the fifth grade English/Language Arts (ELA) pacing calendar/lesson plan template Not shown in the exhibit is the key that details the levels of DOK, OAS strands for ELA, and Quarter Marks. The key and full-page exhibits can also be found in **Appendix D - Resources**.

Exhibit 2-7
Excerpt from Fifth Grade ELA Pacing Calendar/Lesson Plan Template

OAS #	DESCRIPTION OF OAS	QUARTER 1, 2, 3, 4 (circle one)	BLUEPRINT		DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE		
			# of items	% of test	# of L1	# of L2	# of L3
	Standard & Objectives <i>*Italics = not assessed on OCCT</i>	Period: Weeks 1-2; 3-4; 5-6					
		Resources: (text, p#, web-support)					
1.0	Vocabulary - The student will develop and expand knowledge of words and word meanings to	Action: I/ T2M; Assessment: F/B/S	12	24%	20-25%	65-70%	5-15%
1.1.a	Words in Context: Use knowledge of word parts and word relationships, as well as context clues (the meaning of the text around a word), to determine the meaning of specialized vocabulary and to understand the precise meaning of	Week: Resources: Action: Assessment:					
1.1.b	Words in Context: Use prior experience and context to understand and explain the figurative use of words such as similes (comparisons that use like or as: His feet were as big as boats), and metaphors (implied comparisons: The	Week: Resources: Action: Assessment:					

Source: OEQA's Toolkit (2016)

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources. OEQA can provide technical assistance with the adoption and implementation of pacing calendars at no cost to the district.

FINDING 2-4

Most school districts that have limited local revenue streams continue to face a budget crisis with textbook purchases being considered a luxury practice and a remnant from the past. In particular, a few textbook adoption periods have passed since many districts have been able to purchase new textbooks, specifically math books based on interviews and focus group discourse. Some administrators and teaching staff feel this has contributed to dismal growth of math proficiency among the districts, more so for districts that are categorized as small town or rural and serving a high percentage of students qualifying for the Free & Reduced-Payment Lunch Program.

These districts purchase used textbooks, leaving many classrooms with older texts. Some teachers are not knowledgeable of how-to crosswalk the state standards with the older textbook content. Some indicate the older texts did not include needed content or the content was misaligned with OAS. Some teachers use textbook-published tests. No evidence was provided to ensure these tests assessed students with appropriate DOK questions nor do they fulfill the writing expectations required by state standards.

Exhibit 2-8 captures a five-year overview of eighth grade students’ math proficiency for Community Groups D2 - H2¹⁰ (Districts with less than 5000 students enrolled and percentage of students eligible for the federally funded Free or Reduced-Payment Lunch Program is above the state average). There was a decrease in math proficiency in all community groups overtime with the exception of Community Group H2, which stayed at the same proficiency level.

Exhibit 2-8
Five-Year Overview of 8th Grade Students’ Math Proficiency for
Community Groups D2-H2

Community Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change in Percentage Points
D2	72%	72%	62%	61%	56%	(16 pp)
E2	73%	69%	62%	63%	66%	(7 pp)
F2	69%	70%	67%	62%	66%	(3 pp)
G2	63%	66%	63%	61%	61%	(2 pp)
H2	59%	58%	58%	59%	59%	0 pp

Source: OEQA Database

Some districts sought external support to assist in boosting student math performance. Yet one district chose two successful interventions. This district had only 53 percent of their students scoring proficient prior to these interventions. On the 2016 math assessments an average of 74 percent of all students were proficient in math. This district’s focus group responses all agreed that support from an external consultant (Alpha Plus) was a contributing factor to their improvement, but additionally, the math teachers for third through eighth grades had become quite innovative and creative in their efforts to find digital resources to supplement outdated math textbooks.

Teaching and learning resources significantly impact student achievement by supporting, enriching, and challenging student learning. They also add important structure to lesson planning and delivery of instruction. For example, if a language arts teacher is teaching new vocabulary words, playing a related game gives students practice and reinforces learning. Hands-on resources make learning fun. Resource materials also assist teachers in differentiating instruction. Differentiation of instruction adapts lessons to different learning styles and student capacities. Hands-on and interactive instructional resources enable teachers to present content in a variety of modalities. Regardless of what kind of resources are implemented, it surpasses “answer the questions at the end of the chapter.”

The internet has digital teaching materials and many of them are free. These significantly increase teaching and instructional tools and peak student engagement. Many teachers make their own materials. Any time or money invested in securing and implementing relevant, supplemental instructional resources yields learning dividends for all students.

¹⁰ OEQA Community Group Model
https://www.edprofiles.info/doc/profiles/2017/Profiles_Methodologies_2017.pdf p. 15.

RECOMMENDATION

Implement an in-depth assessment to ensure all teachers have access to, and use, up-to-date teaching materials, digital resources, or textbooks that align with all aspects of the OAS.

District superintendents and principals need to set clear expectations that all teachers use effective supplemental instructional resources. It should be clear that hands-on resources are a valued component in the teaching and learning cycle. The goal is to move teachers toward “standards driven” curricula. Digital and hands-on resources need to supplement the outdated textbooks. The internet has many digital resources and most publishers have online resources for teachers. Today’s classrooms are no longer a teacher lecture followed by chapter reading and worksheet assignments. Classrooms in the 21st Century are to be student-centered and characterized by small interactive groups, multiple modes for learning, and digital media.

Professional development days and PLC meetings can be venues for teachers sharing resources. A portion of professional development days can provide teachers with time to make, search the internet, and acquire resources that reinforce learning of OAS. Teachers should methodically peruse the content they teach and selectively determine areas lacking in resource materials. If there are content standards with a pattern of failure, or the content is difficult to teach, these are areas to add supplemental resources. It is important that aligning and pacing the curricula works in concert with selecting relevant, rigorous teaching materials that enhance learning and student engagement.

FINDING 2-5

In several reviews in the past five years it has been noted that high school students were being offered a limited number of curriculum units in many of the core areas. Interviews and focus groups indicated dissatisfaction with the minimal selection and availability of curriculum units especially in the STEM areas.

A comparison of the state average of core curriculum units from 2012-13 to 2016-17 shows a decrease overtime in most all curriculum units with the exception of Social Studies and Fine Arts. **Exhibit 2-9** shows that Language Arts courses have decreased by 2.9 units, which was a greater loss than any of the other core subjects within that same period. With the sharp focus and external attention on improving STEM curriculum during this same era, it would be expected to see an increase in those core units; however, Exhibit 2-9 indicates a slight decrease in Science, with Math decreasing by 0.9 units. Surprisingly Social Studies and Fine Arts gained during this period.

Exhibit 2-9
Change in State Average of Core Curriculum Units by Subject 2012-13 to 2016-17

Subjects	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Change
Language Arts	8.1	7.9	7.8	8.0	5.2	(2.9)
Science	6.3	6.1	6.1	6.2	6.2	(0.1)
Math	6.6	6.5	6.5	6.6	5.7	(0.9)
Social Studies	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.6	6.8	1.2
Fine Arts	7.1	7.1	7.0	6.9	8.1	1.0
Languages	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.4	(0.4)
Total	36.4	35.7	35.3	35.9	34.4	(2.0)

Source: OEQA Database

It is critical that Oklahoma students develop skills in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Many of the state’s fastest growing occupations are in STEM fields, and many other occupations require literacy in math and science. Further, the problem-solving, analytic, and critical thinking skills demanded by STEM fields are also applicable to a host of other sectors and real-world problems. For all these reasons, STEM skills are also the ones parents want their children to learn and they are the skills our new state standards – including the Next Generation Science Standards – are intended to cultivate in our students¹¹.

Research related to learning in rural schools indicate that students, especially in remotely rural schools, may be disadvantaged by (1) the narrow scope of curriculum in their schools (Oakes & Maday, 2009), (2) instructional practices that constrain individual opportunities for acceleration and remediation (Howley et al., 2009), and (3) their lack of access to the supports and resources of programs, organizations, and educational institutions prevalent in urban and suburban areas¹². Many may believe that increasing enrollment would decrease these problems. However, it has been revealed that doubling a school’s enrollment does not necessarily increase the amount of course offerings in fact an estimated 17% increase in course offerings were all that was found in a previous study (Ehrich, n.d.).

Despite these challenges, districts can provide more curriculum units related to STEM than what is being provided now. In order to address these challenges of STEM education, schools must rethink what STEM education is and how it can be related to the local community and culture. Consideration must be given to rethinking the local delivery system. A reallocation of resources must be examined and not limited to those available internally, but what resources can be leveraged from the community, and how can resources be leveraged through collaboration with others. Examples of what other rural areas have implemented to combat such challenges can be

¹¹ <http://west.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/09/ETW-Sept-2015-STEM-Drought-Final.pdf>

¹² http://www.adi.org/about/downloads/Promoting_Learning_in_Rural_Schools.pdf

accessed via the National Rural Education Association (NREA)¹³.

RECOMMENDATION

Increase the number of courses related to the STEM curriculum by forming alliances with school districts and industry within the region while also utilizing resources that are currently available within the district.

A large number of like-minded school districts, community colleges, and universities have formed alliances for working together to address course offerings, professional development, increasing access to technology, offering dual credit course, and connecting education and regional development. One such example was found in Ohio. In the 2010 school year 21 Appalachian Ohio school districts established the Ohio Appalachian Cooperative with the idea “that by joining together, small districts...can leverage the best and brightest to create more opportunities for kids.”¹⁴ Members have been able to stretch their resources by increasing their purchasing power as a group and entering in to dual enrollment credentialing agreements. Such actions have allowed increased student access to more demanding coursework including STEM classes.

An example in Oklahoma of such collaboration among school districts to provide increased access to STEM curriculum is seen in Kay County. Five school districts within this county have combined district resources, personnel and finances to enhance instruction. Although many districts have made great strides in providing concurrent course work for some students via their partnership with local universities/colleges, this is sometimes limited to only one course directly related to STEM curriculum. Those courses available include Composition I, U.S. History, and Algebra. Encouraging universities to provide adjuncts in the STEM areas through the online connection would benefit all students. Additionally, reaching out to other districts such as to share credentialed teacher expertise in the areas of STEM would provide effective and efficient professional development.

Forming alliances with school districts is fundamental, but coupling this with industry partnerships and alliances would reach a pinnacle for growing the STEM curriculum. For example, in rural northern Indiana, the Rochester Telephone Company (RTC) focused on connecting the community; family to family, friend to friend, and business to business. Rural school districts within this area have been able to become early adopters of online learning and utilize the RTC telephone system to increase opportunities for student engagement in the STEM classes. When reviewing the nearest Chamber of Commerce list of businesses and industries, it is apparent that opportunities for a community to provide support to the local high school are optimal.

Challenges in STEM education come out of the impact of technology and science on every vocation. In order to address the challenges of STEM education in district leaders must rethink what STEM education is and how it can be related to the local community and culture. More

¹³ <http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/blog/2015/08/03/stem-education-in-rural-schools-challenge-opportunity/>

¹⁴ <http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/blog/2015/08/03/stem-education-in-rural-schools-challenge-opportunity/>

importantly, consideration must be given to rethinking the local delivery system. An examination of current priorities should be addressed with the possibility of reallocating resources in order to promote a STEM culture through recruiting and building teacher talent that would catapult any district's STEM initiative.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 2-6

Not all districts have processes and procedures to annually:

- evaluate instructional resources, software, enrichment, and remediation resources;
- review supplemental resources to determine alignment with OAS, student performance data, or relevant student need;
- evaluate programs to assess the selection, modification, and adjustment of all instructional resources;
- measure the overall effectiveness of curricular and instructional resources; and
- evaluate the impact of instructional resources on improved student achievement.

Across districts, there aren't always defined efforts to routinely collect data to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of instructional resources and the impact on student achievement. Consulting teams do not often find evidence of an evaluation process to determine how supplemental and remedial interventions, instructional strategies, and enrichment activities are aligned with student need. It is noted that much of the time teachers primarily work in isolation and select their own supplemental resources. There was no evaluation process to ensure current supplemental resources aligned with OAS.

Most federal and state instructional resource/programs require individual instructional resource/program evaluations. However, highly effective schools take the evaluation process to the next level and evaluate all locally implemented instructional resources/programs. This ensures instructional resources/programs work in concert and are effective for remediation or enrichment at each grade level and content area. An annual evaluation process ensures all instructional resources, programs, and software are not "busy work" but directly improve student learning. Likewise, an annual evaluation process determines if instructional resource materials are addressing student learning gaps or redundant and repetitive overlaps. All teachers need resources that are relevant, support curricula rigor, and most importantly, seamlessly align with state standards.

Without comprehensive instructional resource/program evaluations, schools risk getting into curricular and instructional traps. They continue doing what they have always done and serving students a number of instructional resources without focused intent and alignment to state standards and targeted student learning needs. Systematically collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative information regarding instructional resources provides district administrators and teachers with valuable assessment information.

Evaluations should measure and answer questions such as:

- Is there a need to improve, modify, or abandon the supplemental instructional resources?
- Does the resource yield the intended effect on improved student learning?
- Are the resource goals still relevant to student need and aligned to state standards?
- Do the resources render unintended outcomes?
- Is there a need to change or refine the implementation strategies and procedures?
- Are all the individual resource components valuable and effective in improving student achievement?
- Does the instructional resource/program have positive impact on students, teachers, school climate, and culture?¹⁵

Districts can then use the evaluation to make data-driven, informed decisions. The evaluation should guide the district to keep or abandon instructional resources/programs. Based on data, modifications, additions, deletions, or revisions to instructional resources/programs can be determined. Such information is crucial for aligning district funds and resources with new purchases that are effective instructional resources/programs and best practices. Without implementing a regularly scheduled evaluation system, districts position themselves to fund instructional resources/programs that are not meeting student needs or the intent behind their implementation. Most of all, there needs to be an assurance the district is not spending money and time on ineffective instructional resource/programs.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop and implement a plan to annually evaluate instructional resources, software, enrichment, and remediation resources.

High performing districts annually evaluate all instructional resource/programs, new initiatives, grants, and district processes. The combined data determines if there is need to eliminate components or discontinue the resource or instructional resource/program. The data should also provide evidence that the instructional resource/program positively:

- impacts improved student learning;
- contributes to the relevance and rigor of instruction and curriculum;
- meets the intended curricular and instructional purpose, and
- supports best instructional practices.

In the long term, instructional resource/program evaluations focus on improving student achievement. Evaluation is a guide to build upon successes and leads to ongoing improvement in practices and outcomes.

¹⁵ http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/pdf/REL_2014007.pdf

Superintendents, principals, and teachers should develop a list of all curricular and instructional resources they routinely use to supplement, remediate, or enrich their instruction, and support the curriculum. The evaluation process includes a rank ordering of total dollars spent on each implemented resource. The superintendent should then direct evaluation efforts to those with the highest costs and the strongest correlation to student performance data in the bottom quartiles.

The superintendent and principal must work with teachers to identify and abandon resources and materials that are no longer robust and relevant to the knowledge base students need for the next level of study and college and career-readiness. This evaluation and abandonment process must be simple, easily implemented, and directly focused on supporting improved student performance.

All materials can undergo a formative and summative evaluation. A formative instructional resource/program evaluation can be used in purchasing new instructional resources/programs and during the implementation of the resource. Such evaluation promotes close examination of instructional resource/program implementation, as to whether there were changes, adjustments, or improvements, and that it is adapted with fidelity. **Exhibit 2-10** presents examples of formative evaluation questions to explore.

Exhibit 2-10 **Formative Instructional Resource/Program Evaluation**

While the instructional resource/program is ongoing, these questions should be asked several times:

- Is the instructional resource/program being implemented as it was designed?
- Do the students understand the instructional resource/program's concepts?
- What are the misconceptions about the instructional resource/program?
- Are all DPS instructional resource/program implementers implementing the instructional resource/program in the same way?
- Is the instructional resource/program being implemented on schedule?
- Is there enough time to implement all aspects of the instructional resource/program?
- What aspects of the instructional resource/program do not seem to be working as well as you intended?
- Do instructional resource/program implementers need additional training on the instructional resource/program?
- Are there any negative outcomes surfacing?

Source:¹⁶

The following will assist districts with summative evaluation. Summative instructional resource/program evaluation takes place after the instructional resource/program has been implemented and is conducted at the end of each school year, or another logical time, such as the end of instructional resource/programmatic intervention. **Exhibit 2-11** presents examples of summative evaluation questions to explore.

¹⁶ http://www.janetwall.net/attachments/File/9_Step_Evaluation_Model_Paper.pdf

Exhibit 2-11
Summative Instructional Resource/Program Evaluation

- After an instructional resource/program has been implemented ask:
- What did the instructional resource/program accomplish?
- Did the instructional resource/program reach its goals and objectives?
- What impact did the instructional resource/program have on students?
- What were the outcomes?
- Who benefited from the instructional resource/program?
- How much was the benefit to improved student achievement?
- Was the benefit greater with this instructional resource/program when compared with another instructional resource/program?
- Did all types of students benefit from the instructional resource/program?
- What were the positive outcomes?
- What were the negative outcomes?
- What should be improved/changed in the instructional resource/program?
- Does the benefit of the instructional resource/program warrant the cost?

Source:¹⁷

In addition to asking the above evaluation questions, it is also important to make certain the instructional resources/programs align tightly with the OAS depth of knowledge (DOK) expectations, and Oklahoma’s expected student performance levels. Demographics such as poverty, mobility, ethnicity, and bottom quartile student test scores should also be taken into consideration for abandonment or retention purposes. Teachers cannot afford to implement instructional resources/programs and materials that do not have high impact on closing the achievement gap and improving student performance. There are many free resources available to gather additional information, including:

- https://www.cde.state.co.us/fedinstructional_resource/programs/designing-and-planningyour-instructional_resource/program-evaluation offers resources on designing and planning instructional resource/program evaluation;
- https://www.cde.state.co.us/fedinstructional_resource/programs/designing-and-planningyour-instructional_resource/program-evaluation is another resource for designing and planning;
- https://managementhelp.org/evaluation/instructional_resource/program-evaluation-guide.htm provides a basic guide to instructional resource/program evaluation; and

¹⁷ http://www.janetwall.net/attachments/File/9_Step_Evaluation_Model_Paper.pdf

- <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/sst/evaluationmatters.pdf> provides an evaluation matrix and template. Initially, existing DPS monies could be objectively and fairly evaluated using internal personnel.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources. However, federal guidance notes that districts should expect to spend between five and seven percent of the total funding of an instructional resource/program on evaluation. In time, it would be preferable to contract with an outside evaluation firm with credibility and expertise in statistical analysis. Using federal monies, the consulting team recommends that a minimum of \$10,000 per year be allocated to evaluation efforts.

Recommendation	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Evaluate all instructional efforts and initiatives.	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)

C. INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY & ASSESSMENTS

High-achieving districts have curriculum maps that clearly define standards and learning objectives for each subject and grade level so that teachers know the content expectations and instructional timelines for mastery of objectives. Making sure teachers deliver student-centered instruction takes instructional leadership. The director of curriculum, principals, and teachers, working collaboratively, are responsible for a consistent implementation of curriculum and high quality of student-centered instruction that results in successful student performance.

The College of Education at Washington University, Center for Educational Leadership, has developed a framework for instructional leadership. As stated on their website, the framework is not the sum total of the work of instructional leaders. Rather, it is a description of the most important aspects of instructional leadership that support curriculum and instruction. **Exhibit 2-12** describes the five core beliefs that drive the work in school leadership at the Center for Educational Leadership, and **Exhibit 2-13** describes the four dimensions of instructional leadership.



Exhibit 2-12
Core Beliefs – Center for Educational Leadership

Beliefs	
1	Instructional leadership is learning-focused, learning for both students and adults, and learning which is measured by improvement in instruction and in the quality of student learning.
2	Instructional leadership must reside with a team of leaders of which the principal serves as the “leader of leaders.”
3	A culture of public practice and reflective practice is essential for effective instructional leadership and the improvement of instructional practice.
4	Instructional leadership addresses the cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and learning diversity in the school community.
5	Instructional leadership focuses upon the effective management of resources and of people – recruiting, hiring, developing, evaluating – particularly in changing environments.

Source: <http://info.k-12leadership.org/4-dimensions-of-instructional-leadership>

Exhibit 2-13
Dimensions of Instructional Leadership

Dimensions	
Vision, Mission, and Culture Building	School leaders, committed to collective leadership, create a reflective, equity-driven, achievement-based culture of learning focused upon academic success for <i>every</i> student.
Improvement of Instructional Practice	Based upon a shared vision of effective teaching and learning, school leaders establish a focus on learning; nurture a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and public practice; and monitor, evaluate and develop teacher performance to improve instruction.
Allocation of Resources	School leaders allocate resources strategically so that instructional practice and student learning continue to improve.
Management of People and Processes	School leaders engage in strategic personnel management and develop working environments in which teachers have full access to supports that help improve instruction.

Source: <http://info.k-12leadership.org/4-dimensions-of-instructional-leadership>

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), from the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL), synthesized the body of research on the effects of leadership practices on student achievement. In their research, McREL identified 21 leadership responsibilities and 66 practices that are significantly associated with student achievement. These characteristics and responsibilities are now integrated into a Balanced Leadership Framework.¹⁸ Much of the

¹⁸<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED544245.pdf>

Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (TLE) evaluation process adopted for Oklahoma administrators uses this research.¹⁹

School administrators must have pragmatic knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools to positively lead and affect curriculum, and instruction, and improve student achievement. They must move their instructional leadership skill set past abstract and theoretical thinking to concrete, day-to-day practices to be effective leaders. Instructional leaders understand the need for multi-faceted strategies that enable them to know when, how, and why leadership action must be taken.

Superintendents, directors, and principals form the core of educational leadership in school districts. Over the past two decades, the role of the school leader is no longer that of a building manager who makes sure that schedules are met, the school is maintained, and that discipline is properly enforced. Today, the educational leader is responsible for consistency of implementation of an aligned curriculum, the quality of instruction in the classroom, and student performance. Recent research contends that school leaders influence classroom teaching, and consequently student learning, by staffing schools with highly effective teachers and supporting those teachers with effective teaching and learning environments.²⁰ Effective learning environments begin with strong educational and instructional leadership and include the following components:

- **Instructional Vision**—ensures that instructional practices are guided by a common, research-based instructional vision that articulates what students do to learn the subject effectively.
- **Continuous Improvement of Instruction**—aligns resources (i.e., professional development, allocation of teacher time, budget decisions), policies, and procedures (i.e., school improvement plans, teacher evaluation) toward continuous improvement of instructional practice guided by the instructional vision.
- **High Expectations**—sets high expectations for all students academically, behaviorally, and in all aspects of student well-being.
- **School Culture**—establishes a safe, collaborative, and supportive school culture that places high priority on ensuring that students are successful in school and life.

FINDING 2-7

OEQA has conducted full performance reviews (all operational areas reviewed) for 63 traditional school districts. Of those 63 districts 29 (46 percent) had a student enrollment of less than 500 students. Many of these small districts must utilize their administrators for multiple roles within the school district. Serving in multiple roles can be challenging and may cause the instructional focus to be blurred if not diminished by these extra responsibilities.

¹⁹ <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/tle>

²⁰ http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Kappan_leadership.pdf

In small districts, leadership consists of the superintendent and one principal, while other districts' superintendent serves as the only administrator. Providing two instructional leaders has the potential of guiding a school toward continuous and sustainable school improvement. Although superintendents acknowledge the importance for providing strong instructional leadership, the effort is somewhat weakened and at times even negated when leaders also serve in other positions within the district. Roles the superintendent and the principal may have include serving as teachers, counselors and bus driver.

A study conducted in 2010 sought to identify and describe the roles and responsibilities of small rural school districts that were perceived to be the most important and the most challenging by the superintendent/principal. One of the strongest conclusions of this study was that dual role administrators must prioritize their time as a necessary precedent to effectively enact the role of instructional leader.¹³

Exhibit 2-14 provides a sampling of staff survey results from the 29 Community Groups G and H districts related to the perception of the superintendent and/or principal as instructional leader. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents *agree* that the principal and/or superintendent were effective instructional leaders while 16 percent *disagree* and 12 percent had *no opinion*.

Exhibit 2-14
Staff Survey Results Related to the Instructional Leadership

Survey Questions	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
The principal/superintendent is an effective instructional leader	73%	12%	16%

Source: OEQA Sampling of Archived Survey Results (2004-2017)

A study of 25 South Dakota rural school districts found that combining the superintendency with either the elementary or the secondary principalship was not an ideal arrangement. For the district and teachers, the most consistent disadvantages relate to inadequate instructional leadership. For the superintendents, the greatest disadvantage is sacrifice of personal and family time simply to keep the organization functioning.²¹

Another study conducted in North Dakota found that decreasing enrollments and financial problems led to considerable restructuring in rural schools. One form of restructuring was the creation of dual-role administrative positions combining two or all of the roles of superintendent, elementary principal, and secondary principal. Administrators holding such positions were asked to complete a survey (Most respondents held proper credentials for all positions). Survey results revealed the major problem with the dual role was lack of time to do all tasks adequately; when the superintendency was one of the roles, the principalship was likely to be neglected. Other problems included missing important professional meetings and workshops due to lack of a substitute, excessive supervisory responsibility, stress, and a somewhat weak job description regarding time allocation per area of responsibility.²²

²¹ Heath, J. A., & Vik, P. (1993). Stretched thin in rural America: A study of districts combining the superintendency and the principalship. *ERS Spectrum*, 11(2), 3–9.

²² Klein, R. E. (1988). Combination administrative positions in North Dakota schools. Paper presented at the Annual Conference

RECOMMENDATION

Evaluate the district’s administrative staff’s current duties to determine if re-assignment, reduced staffing, or abandonment of nonessential duties should be considered in order to prioritize the important role of an effective instructional leader/coach.

Much of the research on instructional leadership has been focused mostly on the context of urban or suburban school districts with “fatter” decision making structures.²³ There are few studies focused on the challenges of leadership in rural districts, specifically those districts where there is only one administrator serving in multiple roles. This problem is confounded by the fact that some of the mandates passed at the federal level and state level often do not consider this unique situation of rural educators. In assisting superintendents and principals in their unique roles, it is important to provide support in understanding which areas within the district need the most attention in a time of critical teacher shortage and financial crisis within the state of Oklahoma.

To improve the instructional leadership component, district administration should establish goals that are based on the results of this review then prioritize these goals according to most critical and attainability. This prioritizing activity may include abandonment of tasks or reassigning staff positions. As indicated in focus group comments from the staff in many of these small schools, mentoring/ coaching teachers proved to be a weak area within the instructional leadership component. Considering the state’s teacher shortage, mentoring/coaching should be marked as a high priority.

A snapshot sample (**Exhibit 2-15**) of a *Weekly Goals Calendar* focuses on the goal of “ensuring teacher retention by providing resources to build teacher capacity”. Measurable objectives for accomplishing that goal are written at the time the goal is set into the strategic plan for the new school year. Later, the *Actions for Achieving the Objectives, Targeted Time/Dates* and *Description of Outcomes* should be written into the calendar. This tool, if adopted, could be used for implementing the above recommendation (See full example in **Appendix D** – Chapter 2 Resources).

of the National Rural Education Association, Bismarck, ND. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED309010.pdf>

²³ <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning-Key-findings-from-wallace.pdf>

Exhibit 2-15
Prioritizing Instructional Leadership Role Using a Weekly Goals Calendar

WEEKLY GOAL(S) CALENDAR				
Measured Objectives to Reach Goal	Goal 1: Ensure teacher retention by providing resources to build teacher capacity.	Week of: <u>01-09-17</u>		
	Actions for Achieving Objectives	Supt = S Prin = P	Targeted Time/Dates	Outcomes
#1. Create a mentoring/coaching process before the start of the academic year.	a. Provide resources to carry out this objective; b. Form leadership team to develop process; c. Ensure process is attainable by increasing capacity of mentors through training; d. adopt or design tools to support the process (i.e., this calendar);	S: a P: b-d	a. July FY — b. July 25, 2016 mtg c. Training by OEQA TBA d. July 25, 2016	a. Title II a funds made available b/d. Completed during summer meeting c. OEQA/OEA training in Fall 2016

Source: OEQA's Toolkit (2015)

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

Instructional Delivery Practices at the School/Classroom Level

A considerable amount of research has been conducted over the years on what elements impact schools and classrooms to be considered effective. From this research a few common themes have emerged that suggests their culpability toward influencing student achievement. One of the most prominent studies was the Effective Schools Research (Edmonds, 1982)²⁴, which examined multiple elementary schools serving students from challenging backgrounds. From this and other studies (Lezotte, 1991) it was discovered that when certain correlates existed within these schools then gains in student achievement was a common outcome. Seven correlates were found that contributed to school and classroom effectiveness²⁵. Cotton's (2000) study reflected almost the same themes with a focus on attributes that were common among successful schools and classrooms²⁶. Finally, Marzano, (2011) conducted a study *What Works in Oklahoma Schools* with very similar results²⁷. These common themes/correlates highlighted in each study were integrated into the Teacher/Leader Effectiveness (TLE) Qualitative Evaluation System models that were adopted through legislation by the state of Oklahoma. **Exhibit 2-16** provides a synthesis of these common themes found in school improvement research.

²⁴ http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_197910_edmonds.pdf

²⁵ <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/edutopia.org-closing-achievement-gap-lezotte-article.pdf>

²⁶ <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED469234.pdf>

²⁷ <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/TLE-MarzanoWhitePaper.pdf>

Exhibit 2-16
Common Themes Contributing to Effective Schools & Classrooms

Themes	Effective Schools Research <i>Edmonds, Brookover & Lezotte (1982)</i>	The Schooling Practices that Matter Most <i>Cotton (2000)</i>	What Works in Oklahoma Schools <i>Marzano (2011)</i>
Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leadership	Strong Administrative Leadership	Leadership
Vision/Mission/Goals	Clear & Focused Mission	Primary Focus on Learning	Comprehensive & Effective Planning
Climate/Culture	Safe & Orderly Environment	Safe & Orderly School/Supportive Classroom Environment	School Culture
Expectations	Climate of High Expectations	X	X
Evaluation & Monitoring	Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	Monitoring Student Progress	Classroom Evaluation & Assessment
Parental/Home/School	Positive Home School Relations	Parent & Community Involvement	Student, Family, & Community Support
Protected Teaching/Learning	Opportunity to Learn & Student Time on Task	Clear & Focused Instruction; Maximizing Learning Time	Organizational Structure & Resources; Curriculum & Instruction

Source: OEQA Synthesis of School Improvement Research (2016)

Once the TLE was adopted, school districts were to select from the available models. A majority of the Oklahoma Public Schools chose the Tulsa Public Schools’ TLE Observation and Evaluation System (Tulsa Model) to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers specifically targeting their capacity for instructional delivery. The Tulsa model is divided into five domains with each domain having a designated weight within a 100-point system. Two of the domains with the highest weight are *Classroom Management* with 30 percent and *Instructional Effectiveness* having a weight of 50 percent.

As demonstrated in the distribution of weights, the effectiveness of instructional delivery at the classroom level is considered as having the most impact on a student’s success in school. Tucker and Strange (2005) linked the evaluation of teacher effectiveness with student achievement. It is now known, empirically, that effective teachers have a direct influence in enhancing student learning. Years of research on teacher quality support the fact that effective teachers not only make students feel good about school and learning, but also that their work actually results in increased student achievement. Studies have substantiated that a whole range of personal and professional qualities are associated with higher levels of student achievement. For example, verbal ability, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, ability to use a range of teaching strategies skillfully, and enthusiasm for the subject characterize more successful teachers²⁸.

²⁸ <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104136/chapters/The-Power-of-an-Effective-Teacher-and-Why-We-Should-Assess-It.aspx>



FINDING 2-8

A common theme found in most of the performance reviews of districts' instructional delivery system was that the schools' instructional staff had developed a strong bond with students and parents based on survey results, survey comments, and focus group dialogues. This culture of mutual respect and trust between the staff, students, and parents demonstrates one of the correlates for effective schools as seen in the previous exhibit. **Exhibit 2-17** (a sampling of archived student survey results) and **Exhibit 2-18** (a sampling of archived parent survey results) provide supporting evidence for this finding. A majority of parents agreed there was good communication between school and home and that the district staff was supportive and responsive to student and parent concerns. A majority of students agree that their teachers communicate regularly with parents while 29 percent disagreed, and 23 percent had no opinion. More students disagreed or had not opinion than those that agreed. Districts should be attentive to this rating and probe students further to understand student perception regarding teacher communications.

Exhibit 2-17
Student Survey Responses Regarding Accessibility & Communications Related to Student Progress

Student Survey Question	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
My teachers communicate regularly with my parents about my academic progress.	47%	23%	29%

Source; OEQA Sampling of Archived Survey Results (2004-2017)

Exhibit 2-18
Parent Survey Responses Regarding Accessibility & Communications Related to Student Progress

Parent Survey Question	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
District and school staffs are accessible to parents.	82%	10%	8%
I receive timely communications from my child's teachers regarding his/her progress in school.	78%	9%	13%

Source; OEQA Sampling of Archived Survey Results (2004-2017)

RECOMMENDATION

Districts should focus on building strong relationships with students and parents through positive communication and joint activities involving students as well as parents that will support the instructional delivery program.

The student survey indicates that students may not be involved in the communication process between their teachers and their parents/families. Ways for teachers to approach home-school communication is rapidly changing through the dynamics of technology. This change has created a plethora of communication strategies that will involve students and improve their perception of

teacher/parent communications. Some effective options for parent-communication can be seen in **Exhibit 2-19**.

Exhibit 2-19
Infographic of Ways to Communicate to Parents and Families



Source: KathleenMorris blog²⁹

²⁹ <http://www.kathleenamorris.com/2019/01/15/communicate-parents-2019/>

Many schools have now initiated a school app for teachers to use to communicate with their students and parents. An example is the Class Dojo, which allows students to create their own icons and create portfolios while sending class photos and comments to parents anytime. The app is free for teachers to use.³⁰

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 2-9

It was observed that some districts had limited processes of accountability to monitor and ensure that all Oklahoma Academic Standards (formerly PASS) are taught and tested with fidelity. There is no evidence to indicate all curricula are paced with the blueprints and presented in an expedient approach.

The consulting teams found that most districts requested teachers to submit their lesson plans electronically or hard copy to the principal. In some cases, teachers were required to document when OAS objectives were taught. However, input from interviews and focus group discussions indicated lesson plans most generally were not monitored consistently to assess fidelity. It appears that more feedback of lesson plans could provide teachers with clear directions regarding curricular adjustments based on assessment.

Lesson plans can be the tool for monitoring and ensuring all standards are taught. In addition to lesson plans the teacher evaluation process, (TLE), is a primary tool for monitoring the OAS. The Instructional Effectiveness Domain requires that the “teacher understands and optimizes the delivery focus of current state standards and the expectations derived from same on student learning and achievement”. Evidence was limited or not presented to indicate how this was effectively implemented.

Without a system in place to monitor with consistency whether teachers are delivering instruction based on the state’s adopted standards and prescribed blueprints, students will struggle on state assessments. When reviewing a district’s Profile Report (OEQA) over the past three years (see Exhibits in the Student Performance section of this chapter), it appears that many students in grades 3-8 are below proficient in the core subjects of math and reading. Ensuring that critical standards and objectives, as indicated on the blueprints, are introduced and taught to mastery will strengthen student performance on end of the year assessments.

RECOMMENDATION

Implement an accountability process to ensure all OAS objectives are taught, tested, and paced with fidelity.

School principals should monitor and set expectations that all instruction is based on OAS

³⁰ <https://static.classdojo.com/docs/TeacherResources/PrincipalPD/2018-PrincipalPD.pdf>

objectives. Since in many districts the curriculum is primarily textbook driven, all teachers need to be fully aware of information within their texts that is not aligned with state standards. If teachers are using textbook-published tests, it is important that these tests mirror state assessments. Students need regular exposure to testing questions with depth-of-knowledge and state writing expectations.

Teachers should provide documentation of the date each OAS objective is taught and tested. The documentation and lesson planning process should become a simultaneous process where not more is given to the teachers “to do list”, but relevancy and easy application is provided through OEQA’s *Pacing Calendar/Lesson Plan Template* (as shown previously in Exhibits 2-6 and 2-7). These plans need to be monitored to assure teachers are routinely identifying and teaching OAS and when the standard is tested for mastery. The principal can use not only this tool to convey the importance of adhering to the state’s standards/blueprints, but also through discourse during staff meetings and PLCs.

A tool the principal could use to convey the importance of adhering to the state’s standards/blueprints and monitoring students’ progress of mastery is the use of the *Monitoring Student Progress Template* as seen in **Exhibit 2-20** (Also see **Appendix H** – Resources). This graph represents students’ performance on each objective that has been assessed with a formative assessment. Teacher copy should have student’s initials if objective has not been mastered. Students mastering objective first time are shaded green. Students mastering objective with Tier 2 Intervention are shaded yellow; students mastering objective with Tier 3 Intervention are shaded hot pink.

Exhibit 2-20
Monitoring Student Progress Template

5	JC	JC	JC	EM
4	EM	EM		JC
3		DR		BH
2		LN		KS
1				SL
Objective # →	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1a
Date:	9/12	10/5	10/20	11/4
# Tested	10	10	10	10
% Passing	80%	60%	90%	50%
% Passing after T² T³	100%	90%	100%	90%

Source: OEQA - 2014

Documentation provides the teacher and the administrator with data to refer to when state assessments are received. Objectives with a high pass rate can be tracked to see the frequency and pacing of when the objective was taught. Likewise, failed objectives can also be tracked for pacing and frequency. Teachers can also reflect on the instructional strategies used to teach each objective and to adjust the curriculum map and pacing calendar template.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 2-10

Not all classrooms provide structured transitioning environments that ensure maximized learning time and optimal student engagement. During onsite visits, the consulting teams noticed a lack of focused structure in transitioning at both primary and intermediate levels, but more specifically to be the most distracting at the intermediate level where students are in departmentalized classrooms.

Providing structure in a departmentalized environment that focuses on maximizing learning time is critical for student success. Procedures and expectations must play a major role for ensuring that time is not wasted during transitions. Teachers must have classroom management skills in addition to their content-area expertise.

Research provides evidence that there are also risks associated with departmentalization:

High poverty students are particularly vulnerable in departmentalization. More than anything else in a classroom, they need the safe, secure support of a trusted teacher. When students change teachers several times a day, they may not relate to any of their teachers as well as they would when they have one teacher. The little research that does exist on departmentalization suggests that this type of program has negative effects for elementary children. Several studies have found elementary students in departmentalized classrooms show lower levels of achievement than children in self-contained classrooms³¹.

There was little evidence presented in some districts comprehensively implemented best practices required for successful departmentalization. The longitudinal test scores, student demographic data, and the state's A-F Report Card indicate the need for change in transitioning practices.

RECOMMENDATION

Maximize learning time by instituting best practices for improving transition efficiency and effectiveness of departmentalization.

School leaders along with staff involved in departmentalized grades should review current practices that are used for transitioning students from class to class with a focus for improving those practices. Some ideas to discuss and to possibly integrate include:

- Successful departmentalization takes organizational structure and planning.

³¹ Canady, R., Retting, M. (1995). *The power of innovative scheduling: productive use of time and space*. *Educational Leadership*. November.

- Simultaneously teachers must continually monitor students’ progress, emotional needs, and behavior issues and communicate with parents.
- Organization in daily routine is also crucial.
- Daily routines are kept consistent in all classrooms.
- Consistent rules, discipline procedures and organizational strategies must be common among all teachers.
- Behavior expectations and standards must be the same throughout all classrooms.
- Assignment calendars are necessary, so all teachers know the homework load of students³².

The critical outcome of “lost time” for instruction is the focus for the improvement effort recommended here. One of the best investments a district could make for its teachers’ professional learning focus would be to purchase the *Tools for Teaching* book or E-book³³. This book is filled with excellent strategies for teachers to implement in reducing wasted time and increasing instructional time. One such concept from this book follows:

For students, no matter how much time you give them for a lesson/class transition, they will need more. There is no reason to hustle. Students know that as soon as the lesson transition is over, you will put them back to work. They have a vested interest in dawdling. For that reason, lesson transitions are one of the great sinkholes of lost learning time in the classroom. A typical lesson transition takes about five minutes. If students were to hustle, the transition could be accomplished in 30 seconds. During the course of a day, the difference between dawdling and hustling adds up to a lot of lost learning time³⁴.

The author (Jones, 2014) suggests giving students a time allowance as compared with a parent giving an adolescent a money allowance. This allowance is earned and it provides a great motivator for students to use their time wisely.

Since many of the districts reviewed by OEQA serve a large percentage of students from poverty, it is imperative to reduce factors that might prevent students from succeeding in school. Research indicates that self-contained classrooms allow students to become well acquainted with their teacher. Many of the small district schools have an advantage in that there are only a few (2 or 3) teachers (with additional time with special education teacher for some students) for students to be accustomed to, thus this risk factor is minimized.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources. However, the cost of the suggested E-book is provided below.

³² Burts, D., Charlesworth, R, Hart, C. (1997). *Integrated curriculum and developmentally appropriate practice: Birth to eight*. (pp.42-46). Albany: State University of New York Press.

³³ <http://www.fredjones.com/#!tools-for-teaching/cx3>

³⁴ http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/columnists/jones/jones035.shtml

Recommendation	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Maximize learning time with instituting best practices for improving efficiency and effectiveness of departmentalization	\$17.95 per copy x 3 (\$53.85) ³⁵	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

FINDING 2-11

Typical instructional delivery in the district does not promote student engagement. Student engagement is a critical component of learning. As students are now inundated with technology and access to global information at all times, classroom instruction must evolve to involve students in innovative tasks and activities that move beyond the traditional method of lecturing and providing direct instruction.

During onsite visits, many classrooms included lecture-based instruction or individual student tasks where students read or worked in isolation to complete a task. Interactive whiteboards and other devices were in existence, but not used to the maximum potential within the classrooms. Students provide a powerful message in explaining what constitutes a good lesson. One student explains:

Reflecting on my various classroom experiences, here are three things I have found to be essential in developing an engaging class for students:

- 1. We can tell if our **teacher is engaged** with the content they teach. If they don't find it exciting, we won't either.*
- 2. It makes a huge difference when teachers try to **engage ALL the students** in the room, even when students represent a diverse array of learning styles and interests.*
- 3. We love it when teachers **go beyond giving us a lecture**. I recognize that there are specific principles teachers must teach, but it helps us learn those standard concepts when we can see how they work in the real world³⁶.*

Highly engaging teaching and learning include a variety of components. When looking specifically, at instructional practices, **Exhibit 2-21** provides an overview of five key strategies that are effective in creating engaged learning environments.

³⁵<http://www.fredjones.com/#!tools-for-teaching/cx3>

³⁶<https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2013/12/04/student-playlist-engaging-lessons/>

Exhibit 2-21 Engaged Learning Environments³⁷

Indicator 1: Communicates Explicitly and With Clarity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates what students should know and be able to do—goal or objective • Communicates the agenda or specific tasks or steps that will be accomplished • Refers to the learning goal/objective (what students should know and be able to do) • Communicates directions and procedures clearly and anticipates confusions • Provides opportunities for students to set learning goals and monitor their growth.
Indicator 2: Engages Students in Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops students' background knowledge • Activates student knowledge and thinking • Makes connections and integrates new learning with previous learning • Models and thinks aloud the thinking and learning processes • Provides opportunities for students to use and create graphic organizers to facilitate their learning before, during, and after instruction • Uses instructional materials that appeal to diverse backgrounds and cultures • Provides opportunities for students to apply complex concepts and processes • Provides opportunities for students to reflect upon and summarize their learning • Checks for understanding in a variety of ways and modifies instruction to meet student needs • Provides opportunities for all students to think and discuss their ideas with other students • Integrates a variety of technology tools and applications into instructional design and implementation • Uses a variety of techniques that provide for total student response to learning.
Indicator 3: Questions, Probes, and Facilitates Discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks questions that arouse curiosity and interest • Asks questions to ascertain student knowledge and understanding • Asks questions that require creative and critical thinking and analysis • Uses clear, precise language when posing questions to students • Uses wait time to allow students to process their thinking • Provides opportunities for students to elaborate and build upon ideas and contributions of others • Provides opportunities for students to question and challenge each other's ideas • Checks for understanding • Uses prompts and cues to probe student thinking
Indicator 4: Provides Feedback to Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides explicit, constructive feedback in response to student learning • Provides feedback that clarifies misconceptions and confusion • Provides feedback that is timely • Provides equitable feedback • Provides opportunities for students to give feedback to one another.
Indicator 5: Uses a Variety of Grouping Structures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses whole group instruction to introduce and/or model new learning • Meets with small groups of students to address specific learning needs of students • Plans for flexible and responsive student grouping to maximize student learning • Uses a variety of grouping structures such as reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning.

*Source: Recognizing Rigorous and Engaging Teaching and Learning*³⁸

RECOMMENDATION

Enhance instruction through the use of student engagement strategies and innovative practices.

Districts should provide additional support for teachers to implement strategies to support student engagement and innovative practices. Some examples include the use of effective models that incorporate engagement strategies. Examples of videos from the Teaching Channel include:

Learn by Leading shows students who are invested in what they are doing, and it is evident how integral the teacher's role is in this engagement. Rather than sitting at her desk while students work on their project, she asks them questions that help them better understand the material. Also, the project provides an example of a strategy for helping students learn the content using a hands-on approach.

Differentiating with Learning Menus shows how a teacher can find ways to engage all of the students in the room. The learning menu represents a creative way to try and address the learning styles of all students. A complex lesson will inevitably reach some students in certain ways, while other students will respond to different methods and approaches of teaching the same information. The menu style helps with this challenge. The students also have positive reactions to the learning menu, which provides evidence that the strategy is effective.

Making DNA Concrete & Comprehensible uses an engaging lesson strategy showing how the teacher taught a complex subject in such a fun way. This video provides an example of the way in which two teachers can teach the exact same lesson but in different ways, and the outcome can be completely different.³⁸

School leaders should lead a discussion and include reflective questions to help teachers analyze the impact of the engagement strategies. Examples may include:

- What evidence of student engagement did you observe?
- How might you utilize one of the strategies in your classroom?

Additional professional development that focuses on effective teaching strategies and innovative practices with students could further enhance instruction. Some examples of free professional development available to Oklahoma educators include:

- K20 Innovative Learning Institute;³⁹
- Oklahoma State Department of Education conferences; and

³⁸ <https://www.teachingchannel.org/>

³⁹ <http://k20center.ou.edu/index.php/programs/ili/>

- EdCampOKC.⁴⁰

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 2-12

According to student survey responses, school libraries do not meet the needs of *all* students. **Exhibit 2-22** shows that that 25 percent of students *disagree* that the school library meets their needs for books and other resources while 52 percent *agree*, and 24 percent have no opinion.

Exhibit 2-22 Student Survey Results Regarding the School Library

Survey Question	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
The school library meets my needs for books and other resources.	52%	24%	25%

Source: OEQA Sampling of Archived Surveys (2004-2017)

It was found in many of the schools that the library had limited hours available to students if the media specialist also served as grade-level or content area teacher. Onsite interviews indicated that the library might be open for the first three hours of the day for check-in and check-out purposes, but not open for full service throughout the day. This could possibly lead to the perception of students that the library is not meeting their needs. Other sites have full-time library assistants to help with library duties, but do not have the training to ensure appropriate resources are available and/or sufficient supply of resources on hand.

RECOMMENDATION

Improve Library resources and services to meet the needs of students and staff by increasing staffing hours and employing existing and emerging technologies to access, evaluate, and disseminate information for integration into instructional programs.

Further investigation using student focus groups to discover what the students' needs or desires are for improving the library is certainly a first step. Also, a review of best practices for school libraries could contribute to enhancing the current library sources.

Effective libraries and media resources support a strong instructional program. As noted on the SDE website:

School libraries launch students into a world of new knowledge by providing instant access to exciting books, online resources, and emerging technologies. They provide equal opportunities to all students for learning⁴¹.

⁴⁰ <http://www.edcampokc.org/>

⁴¹ <http://ok.gov/sde/library-media>

The Oklahoma accreditation standards (210:35-7-74 p.63) outline what should be included in annual expenditures for library resources:

In establishing a balanced print and nonprint collection...the following may be included: books, periodicals, pamphlets, manuscripts, reports, prints, posters, microforms, multimedia packages or kits, specimens, realia, models, audio and video recording, online databases, slides, computer disks, films, compact discs, video discs, and computer software.

Schools need a broader coordination and use of library resources and materials within all classrooms, particularly the upper grades. The PLC process, implemented with fidelity, could provide the librarian/library assistant with the vehicle to coordinate with classroom teachers and synchronize the library resources with classroom curriculum and instruction.

Grant programs such as the Innovative Instruction Grant provides for the purchase of many new learning resources. Read 180 is a scholastic program included in the grant. It will support the library and teaching staff with materials that enhance the curriculum. Not only does Read 180 provide resources, it does so through the following components:

- Whole-Group instruction – teachers begin the class by facilitating systematic instruction in reading skills and strategies, academic vocabulary, writing, and grammar to the whole class.
- Instructional Technology – students work independently on the *READ 180* Software where they follow an individualized learning path that allows them to work within their zone of proximal development.
- Small Group – students receive individualized, data-driven instruction that meets their unique learning needs while building meaningful relationships with their teacher.
- Independent Reading – students engage with complex, content-rich literature, and informational texts that they can read with success and apply their newly acquired vocabulary and comprehension skills⁴².

Students grow academically and learn from experiencing integrated instruction as described. The link between the classroom and the library can become the tipping point for turning students on to learning. The teamwork between the librarian and classroom teachers enables students to locate resources, design research, and integrate instructional technology into learning activities. Students can broaden their personal interests and generate the desire to read and to learn. The library can be the driving force for keeping students engaged in learning.

⁴² <http://www.scholastic.com/read180/read-180-experience/3-models-of-blended-learning.htm>

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with grant resource.

Instructional Delivery & Local Assessments

Assessments include everything from statewide accountability tests to district benchmarks or interim tests to everyday classroom tests. In order to contend with what some feel to be an over use of testing, educators should frame their view of testing as an opportunity to gain valuable information related to student learning of the content that has been taught. The more information we have about students, the clearer the picture we have about achievement or where gaps may occur. The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) explains that “in a balanced assessment system, both summative and formative assessments are an integral part of information gathering”⁴³.

Summative assessments are given periodically to determine at a particular point in time what students know and do not know. Summative assessment at the district/classroom level is an accountability measure that is generally used as part of the grading process. Below are some examples of summative assessments:

- State assessments (OCCTs, EOIs)
- District benchmark or interim assessments (STAR, Study Island...etc.)
- End-of-unit or chapter tests/ semester exams
- Scores that are used for accountability for schools (A-F Report Cards) and students (report card grades).

Formative Assessments are a critical part of the instructional process. Such assessments inform teachers about student understanding at a point when timely adjustments can be made before it is too late. When integrated into daily practice formative assessments provide the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. These adjustments help to ensure students achieve targeted standards-based learning goals within a set time frame. AMLE gives an excellent frame of reference for formative assessments:

There are many classroom instructional strategies that are part of the repertoire of good teaching. When teachers use sound instructional practice for the purpose of gathering information on student learning, they are applying this information in a formative way. In this sense, formative assessment is pedagogy and clearly cannot be separated from instruction. It is what good teachers do. The distinction lies in what teachers actually do with the information they gather. How is it being used to inform instruction? How is it being shared with and engaging students? It's not teachers just collecting information/data on student learning; it's what they do with the information they collect⁴⁴.

⁴³ <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/286/Formative-and-Summative-Assessments-in-the-Classroom.aspx>

⁴⁴ Ibid

FINDING 2-13

Some districts have no system-wide processes for effective use of formative assessments for frequent monitoring of student academic achievement. In the past some have relied upon various vendors' benchmark assessments, which provided a great deal of direction and positive impact on instruction and student achievement for students in grades 3-8 and high school. However, no intentional or formalized processes for implementing formative assessments were observed or shared during several onsite reviews. In order to implement the Teacher Evaluation framework with fidelity, teachers need a foundational knowledge base and an extensive repertoire of best practices in the use of formative assessments.

Input from interviews and focus group discussions indicated the teaching staff is not clear in the expectations and use of formative assessment. Some teachers referred to giving summative tests for grades at the end of a teaching segment and then moving to new content. Teachers were aware of the state's Blueprints, but there was little dialog to indicate how these documents were used to pace the content or use formative assessments to determine mastery. Formative assessments do not have to take an inordinate amount of time. Most are quick and easy to incorporate into daily practice. The time it takes teachers to formatively assess students can reduce the time it takes for such things as re-teach, remediation, do-overs, ineligibilities, and course recovery.

RECOMMENDATION**Implement procedures to ensure a sound knowledge base and application of formative assessments.**

As the instructional leader, principals can deepen the formative assessment knowledge base through the use of dialog and discussion during staff development days, staff meetings, PLC collaborative meetings, and book studies. Leaders should set clear and explicit expectations for implementing formative assessments. They must help teachers understand how formative assessment interfaces with the teacher evaluation process. Leading teachers to resources that will support their efforts in implementing this recommendation is critical. Cyberspace is saturated with videos, free ideas, and practical activities and resources for teachers.

If the district implements Professional Learning Communities with fidelity it can also be an effective vehicle for supporting widespread use of formative assessment. Greater implementation of formative assessment and use of the data it generates is an important step in continued movement to student-centered classrooms and improved student achievement. **Exhibit 2-23** provides an example of the plethora of formative assessments teachers can incorporate into teaching segments.⁴⁵

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<http://images.pcmac.org/SiSFiles/Schools/TN/GreenvilleCity/GreenvilleHigh/Uploads/DocumentsCategories/Documents/formative%20assessment.pdf>

**Exhibit 2–23
Formative Assessment Examples**

Example	Implementation
Make a Connection	After a mini-lecture, class discussion, text reading, video, or PowerPoint, have students make their own connections and share with the class. Compare two characters, two books, two authors’ styles; note a sequence; predict a future outcome; recognize a cause or effect; make a text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world connection; or, suggest a character’s motivation.
Turn and Talk	This strategy encourages student conversation about what they are learning. It calls for students to listen for ten minutes to the teacher’s presentation and then to discuss for two minutes with a partner their notes and understanding about the topic. This can be repeated several times during a lesson. During the last few minutes of the class, the teacher brings all the students back together; students summarize key understandings, and the teacher sorts out misconceptions.
Stop n Jot	Stop n Jot can be a very useful strategy in order to monitor text that you are reading. Have students take one of the sentence stems listed below and finish it off with their own thoughts. I think... I predict... If I was (character), I would... I can picture... I understand... This reminds me of ... I wonder... I don’t get... I hope...
One Minute Essays	The One-Minute Essay can be used at the beginning (or end) of a class to help students focus. Ask them to summarize the main point of the last class (providing a bridge to the current lesson) or summarize a reading. The point is to get them writing/thinking immediately. Have them exchange their One-Minute Papers with a partner and ask for a follow-up quick-write that synthesizes the views. Ask for a few randomly selected samples and discuss them. Look for accuracy, precise language, and conciseness. At the end of class, they can be used to summarize the information learned.

Source: OEQA resources ^{3/}

FINDING 2-14

Regardless of size or location, some districts have not incorporated the best practice of requiring the implementation of benchmark assessments. Criterion-referenced formative assessments are limited and sporadic. Teachers use insufficient benchmark measures to determine student mastery or the need for remediation or reteaching. The benchmarks do not measure student performance against a fixed set of predetermined learning standards (i.e., OAS - teachers lack timely, ongoing, formative data to adjust instruction for reteaching and reviewing content). Periodic benchmark testing is randomly used by teachers to determine if students are progressing on grade level and mastering the state standards.

During interviews and focus groups the consulting team found no uniform expectations for all teachers to administer benchmark assessments to monitor student progress. In focus groups and interviews, teachers expressed limited knowledge regarding a defined process for benchmarking. The teachers did not clearly understand the process for how benchmark data translate to instructional design and curricular adjustments. Interviews also found that teachers have marginal understanding of how benchmark data are used to identify small group learning arrangements and remediation strategies. There are no benchmark data to align curriculum and inform pacing and instructional design. Use of benchmark assessment results as feedback for both parents and students was minimal. Overall, no comprehensive evidence was presented to indicate there are clear directions, district-wide expectations, and consistent accountability for teachers to administer criterion referenced benchmark assessments. Criterion-referenced

benchmark assessments yield formative data. Criterion-referenced assessments test student knowledge and performance against a fixed set of content or a state standard. By using benchmark results teachers learn what needs reviewing with individual students, as well as which students have attained mastery and need to be challenged. Benchmarking also helps students keep track of their grade level success and their progress to mastering standards⁴⁶. With a plethora of benchmark assessments to choose from, there are districts who have selected Study Island for most tested subjects and testing grade levels. It is quite prevalent that high school teachers in these districts, have chosen to use their own teacher created assessments that are supported by the released items from the state department of education⁴⁷.

Benchmark assessments are not summative (e.g. end of the year assessments) nor are these assessments formative. The Assessment and Accountability Policy Center (AAPC) defined benchmark assessments as follows:

Benchmark assessments are assessments administered periodically throughout the school year, at specified times during a curriculum sequence, to evaluate students' knowledge and skills relative to an explicit set of longer-term learning goals. The design and choice of benchmark assessments is driven by the purpose, intended users, and uses of the instruments. Benchmark assessment can inform policy, instructional planning, and decision-making at the classroom, school and/or district levels⁴⁸.

Benchmark assessment operates best when it is seen as one component of a balanced assessment system explicitly designed to provide the ongoing data needed to serve district, school, and classroom improvement needs. The National Research Council (NRC) defines a quality assessment system as one that is (a) coherent, (b) comprehensive, and (c) continuous (NRC, 2001)⁴⁹.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop and implement district-wide processes and procedures for administering criterion-referenced benchmark assessments to monitor progress and ensure mastery of OAS.

District leadership and teachers must embrace the mindset that benchmark assessments are a key part of the learning process. Criterion-referenced benchmark assessments are an ongoing check for student progress and mastery of content and standards. The assessment results guide teachers in decision-making about future instruction. The principal should use staff meetings, PLC meetings, and one-on-one dialogue to articulate expectations and raise awareness of the importance of administering benchmarks.

The district could purchase software that generates benchmark tests assessing OAS. Teachers can also create their own benchmarks using SDE resources. Several websites offer practical information and examples of formative assessment. This will help administrators refresh teacher

⁴⁶ <https://www.edglossary.org/criterion-referenced-test/https://www.edglossary.org/criterion-referenced-test/>

⁴⁷ [http://sde.ok.gov/sde/documents/2013-09-05/blue-prints-plds-item-specs#Released Items](http://sde.ok.gov/sde/documents/2013-09-05/blue-prints-plds-item-specs#Released%20Items)

⁴⁸ https://www.cse.ucla.edu/products/policy/R1_benchmark_polbrief_Herman.pdf

⁴⁹ National Research Council. (2001). *Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

awareness and understanding of the benefits for administering benchmark assessments.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources initially. If it is determined necessary, the district could contact an external firm to provide assistance.

D. STUDENT PERFORMANCE & DATA ANALYSIS

Oklahoma School Testing Program

Student assessment is an integral part of measuring student performance. The Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) continues implementation of the current standards-based tests that students must take during the school year. The OCCT consist of Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) designed to measure student attainment of skills established for core subjects. The OCCT helps monitor student and school performance relative to the OAS. The OSTP program uses a phase-in process to increase tested grades and subjects. CRTs are currently administered in 3rd through 8th grade. Exams are administered for selected grades and courses in this manner:

- third grade: Reading and Mathematics;
- fourth grade: Reading and Mathematics;
- fifth grade: Reading, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Writing;
- sixth grade: Reading and Mathematics;
- seventh grade: Reading, Mathematics, and Geography; and
- eighth grade: Reading, Mathematics, Science, US History, and Writing.

Beginning in 2019, students enrolled in 11th grade are given the Oklahoma College and Career Ready Assessment (CCRA), which will consist of two parts. For part one, each district administers either the ACT or SAT, including the writing section. Part two consists of Science Content Assessment which is aligned to the OAS for Science, and U.S. History Assessment which is aligned to the OAS for U.S. History. Historically, Oklahoma districts have administered either the ACT or SAT in 11th grade, as well as tested 10th grade students in science and history.

All students in the tested grades and subjects participate in the OSTP. The test results are for all students who attend a Full Academic Year (FAY). Current administrative rules define FAY as any student who has enrolled by October 1st. The SDE uses performance level descriptors

(PLDs) advanced, proficient, basic and below basic in reporting student test scores. Also, test scores are reported in one of the following four categories:

- Advanced – Student demonstrates superior performance on challenging subject matter;
- Proficient (called Satisfactory prior to 2009) – Student demonstrates mastery of appropriate grade level subject matter and is ready for the next grade, course, or level of education, as applicable;
- Limited Knowledge – Student demonstrates partial mastery of the essential knowledge and skills appropriate to his or her grade level, course, or level of education, as applicable; and
- Unsatisfactory – Student does not perform at least at the limited knowledge level.

To assist teachers and districts in teaching OAS and preparing students for the mandated assessments, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (SDE) provides a variety of resources on its website. These resources include the following:

- OAS by subject and grade level;
- test blueprints for each grade level and subject area test that show what percentage of the test each skill will represent;
- test/item specifications highlight important points about the items’ emphasis, stimulus attributes, format, content limits, distracter domain, and sample test items;
- released test questions;
- writing samples;
- a list of words, called the academic vocabulary that are used on each test; and
- depth of knowledge (DOK) levels and percentage weights for all OCCT test questions in test specifications.

Test Results

Exhibits 2-24 reflects five years (2011-12 to 2015-2016) of the State’s Average Math results on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT). The 2016-17 assessments were not included since the assessments were based on the new adopted Oklahoma Academic Standards. In review of the five-year data chart, there were few changes in the percentage of students scoring proficient from grade to grade. The only exception is seen in the percentage of students’ scoring proficient in seventh grade Math as compared to how many of these students scored proficient in during eighth grade. As noted in the table there was 10 to 12 percentage point decrease from seventh grade to eighth grade math proficiency.

Exhibit 2-24
State Average Trend Data in Math for Students in Grades 3-8
(2011-12 to 2015-16)

Grade	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
	State	State	State	State	State
3 rd	74%	75%	75%	71%	75%
4 th	77%	78%	74%	79%	77%
5 th	74%	75%	75%	76%	79%
6 th	74%	77%	76%	76%	76%
7 th	73%	74%	74%	76%	76%
8 th	71%	72%	63%	64%	64%

Source: OEQA database

Exhibits 2-25 reflects five years (2011-12 to 2015-2016) of the State’s Average Math results on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT). The 2016-17 assessments were not included since the assessments were based on the new adopted Oklahoma Academic Standards. In review of the five-year data chart, beginning in 2011-12, students in grades 3-7 made continuous improvement in Reading as they progressed into the eighth grade. The 2012-13 third grade cadre is the only group that did not show continuous improvement in reading proficiency.

Exhibit 2-25
State Average Trend Data in Reading for Students in Grades 3-8
(2011-2012 to 2015-16)

Grade	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
	State	State	State	State	State
3 rd	75%	78%	80%	81%	82%
4 th	68%	74%	76%	80%	78%
5 th	73%	75%	76%	77%	82%
6 th	69%	72%	75%	74%	74%
7 th	75%	77%	81%	82%	82%
8 th	81%	82%	82%	86%	86%

Source: OEQA database

FINDING 2-15

Not too many districts had a uniform process for analyzing student performance data and specifically OCCT data. There is no formalized process to assist teachers in breaking down the data and applying it to instructional pacing and adjusting curriculum and instruction. There is no process to use student performance data to vertically align and pace curriculum. There was isolated reporting of teachers using item analysis to find trends and patterns in student learning. Teachers may independently review the data but have limited knowledge and expectations for using those reviews to plan instruction and remediation.



There are no district-wide procedures or software to assist teachers in using OCCT data to inform targeted instruction and form flex groups for targeted remedial instruction. There are no standardized methodologies for disaggregation of data and looking for vertical learning gaps. Random evidence was presented to indicate how student performance data collected at the end of each grading period were used to plan re-teach, remediation, or maintaining mastery. There is no district-wide use of student performance data to close skill gaps or reoccurring curricula redundancies. Across the district, student performance data are not commonly used to plan, adjust, pace, and design instruction and close skill gaps throughout the school year.

One of the longest-standing bodies of research is the “effective schools” research. One of the original correlates of effective schools’ research is the “frequent monitoring of student progress.” As stated by the University of Oklahoma’s research in effective schools:

The effective school frequently measures academic student progress through a variety of assessment procedures. Assessment results are used to improve individual student performance and improve instructional delivery. Assessment results will show that alignment must exist between the intended, taught, and tested curriculum.⁵⁰

More recently, effective schools research was conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). NAESP published best practices for schools and reported how the use of student achievement data must be included in instructional decision-making. In a white paper, NAESP provided five recommendations to help principals put student achievement data to the best possible use:

- make data part of the ongoing cycle of instructional improvement;
- teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals;
- establish a clear vision for school-wide data use;
- provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school; and
- develop and maintain a district-wide data system.²²

RECOMMENDATION

Implement a district-wide process for analyzing student performance data throughout the school year and use the analysis results to adjust curriculum and instruction.

The purpose of teachers analyzing classroom data is to determine what the students have learned, what they need help to learn, and how teachers plan instruction to ensure that they all do learn. The use of student performance data is essential to identify skill gaps in student learning. The learning and skill gaps must be addressed through re-teaching or remediation. The use of data also guides improvements in the rigor, pacing, and vertical articulation of curriculum and instruction. As teachers monitor performance data, patterns of teaching and individual student learning successes and challenges become evident. It is essential for teachers to have ongoing formative data to measure learning at the end of each instructional segment. This allows teachers to make informed, collaborative decisions to address potential problems.

⁵⁰ http://ces.ou.edu/7_correlates_effectiveness.html

Working with the teachers, the administration should develop a timeline that details which student assessment data are required throughout the school year. Using this timeline, the superintendent and principal should hold PLC meetings for analyzing data. Meetings should focus on determining the strengths and weaknesses of the students and how the results impact the district in pacing instruction. Reviewing formative benchmark test data throughout the school year allows timely feedback on student performance, the effectiveness of teaching strategies, and any needed adjustments and alignment to the curricula.

A helpful resource for administrators and teachers to use is found in an article published in *Educational Leadership*, *Developing Data Mentors*. The authors say that “gathering student assessment data is not enough. Administrators and teachers must learn to analyze the data and apply this information in the classroom.”

The district process should examine classroom data and ask key questions;

- Which content standards is the teacher assessing?
- What percent of students demonstrated proficiency? • What implications does that have for instruction?
- Which students have not demonstrated that they can master content standards?
- What diagnostic information did an examination of student work provide?
- Based on individual student performance, what do teachers need to do next to move the student to proficiency?
- Based on the class performance, what re-teaching needs to be done?
- After re-assessing, did students demonstrate proficiency?
- Is re-teaching or other interventions resulting in improved student performance?
- When comparing performance by subgroups, are any groups not performing as well as the whole group? If so, what’s being done about that?
- Are there students who are not attaining proficiency across standards?
- What diagnostic information do we have about them to inform instruction?
- What interventions have we tried? What interventions do we plan to try next?⁵¹

Superintendents, principals, and teachers should consider regularly graphing data. A visual depiction of the information often yields additional insights. Another way for teachers to get a quick visual picture of who needs additional support is to color code the data recorded in the grading process. For example, if three categories are used to define student performance in the grade book (e.g., basic - B, proficient - P, and advanced - A), each could be assigned a different color. This would allow teachers to quickly determine who was progressing and who needed additional support.⁵² Parents as well as students need consistent and clear communication regarding ongoing student performance data. Through use of one-on-one conversation or electronic communication, they can monitor daily assignments, homework, and student test data.

⁵¹ Nichols, B. W. & Singer K. P. (2000). *Developing data mentors*. *Educational Leadership*, 57(5).

⁵² <http://mdk12.msde.maryland.gov/instruction/progress/using.html>

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources. However, if an external consultant is needed there are consultants available to guide teachers through the data analysis process. A short-term consulting engagement would cost approximately \$3,000.

FINDING 2-16

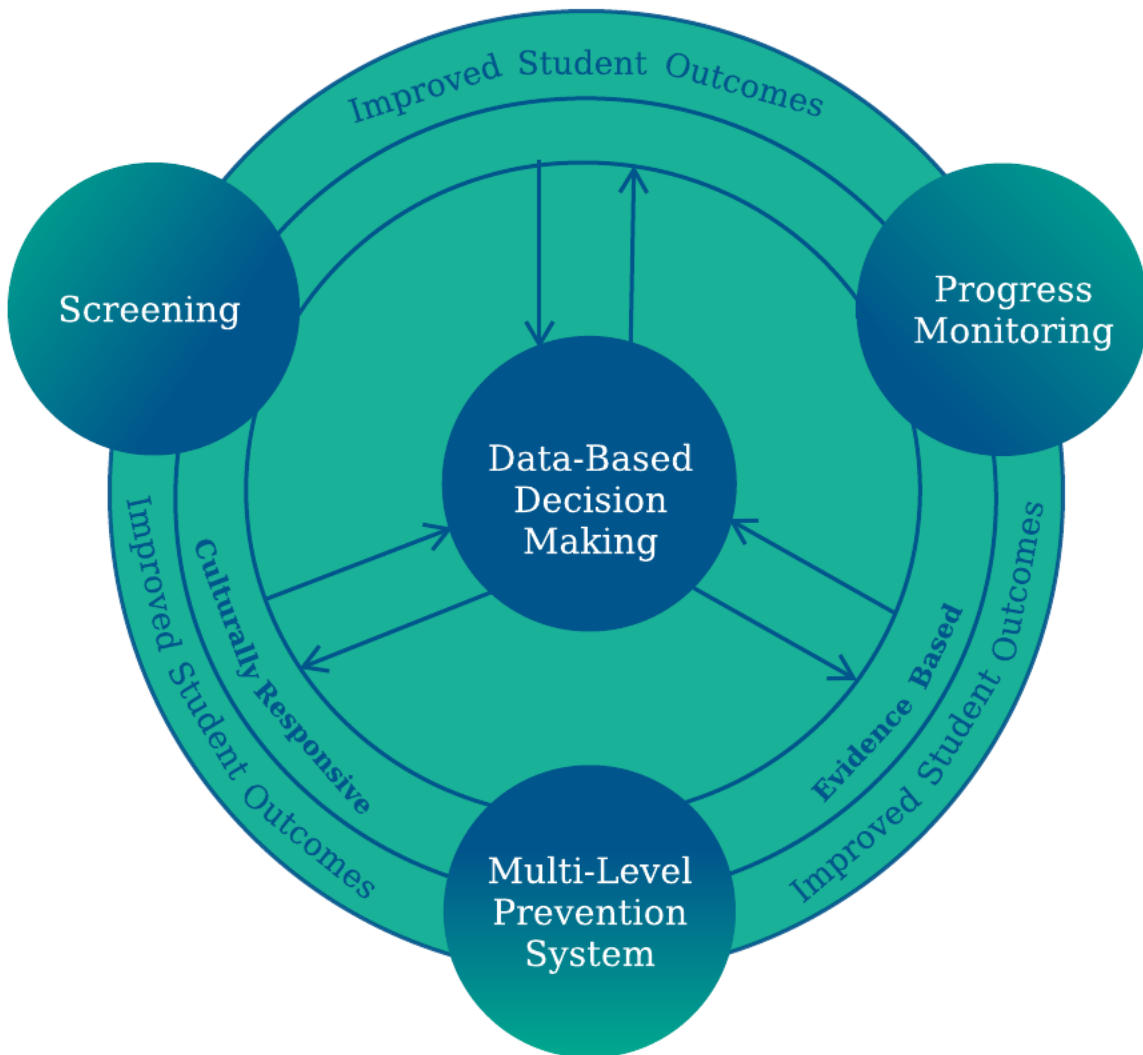
There is no clearly defined early intervention system for struggling students. Teachers provide interventions, but there are inconsistencies regarding appropriate strategies, how to differentiate instruction, and determining the level and intensity of interventions.

The consulting team noted in focus group and interviews there was no clear understanding of the implementation of tiered interventions. District administrators and teachers expressed awareness of the need to address these concerns and refine procedures to more effectively meet the needs of struggling learners.

Districts are committed to meeting the needs of all students but have no comprehensive continuum of multi-layered or multi-tiered systems of prevention/intervention services. At the elementary level, there is usually a reference to tiered intervention and flex grouping. The consulting team found that some teachers were providing data based interventions. However, others were vague and inconsistent in articulating how struggling learners are identified, how intervention strategies and support structures are selected, and how the interventions are evaluated as appropriate and helpful to meeting student need.

Several districts implement both the academic and behavioral components of Response to Intervention (RtI) using the Oklahoma Tiered Intervention Support System (OTISS) model. However, the consulting team found that many teachers did not have a clear understanding of how the district envisions implementing RtI components. The teachers need clarification and support in how to implement RtI with fidelity. **Exhibit 2-26** provides the essential RtI components.

Exhibit 2-26
Essential RtI Components



Source: <http://www.rti4success.org/essential-components-rti/data-based-decision-making>, re-created by Prismatic, March 2016

It is also important for the staff to have a deeper understanding of what RtI looks like when successfully implemented across all grade levels. The research behind RtI implementation with school-wide fidelity indicates that staff will see:

- a valid and reliable assessment system in place;
- curriculum that is evidence-based and includes grade level components across tiers;
- instructional practices are evidence-based and follow set parameters;
- staff following clear data-based decision-making rules;

- predetermined fidelity checks are applied routinely;
- integration and sustainability practices are followed, and
- staff regularly communicate using the same vocabulary.⁵³

A district implementing RtI successfully has clearly defined procedures, techniques, feedback loops, and decision-making processes within each component. The district's plan will:

- clearly define responsibilities of specific persons (coaches, teachers, administration);
- create a data system for measuring operations, techniques, and components;
- link fidelity data to improved outcomes data;
- approach instructor observation in a positive manner emphasizing problem-solving; and
- create accountability measures for noncompliance.⁵⁴

RtI provides structure for lesson planning and instructional delivery. **Exhibit 2-27** summarizes the essential questions teacher teams need to address in lesson planning and planning for delivering instruction.

⁵³ http://www.rti4success.org/sites/default/files/FidelityImplementation_10-20-09_FINAL.pdf

⁵⁴ Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008

**Exhibit 2-27
RtI lesson Planning and Instruction**

Adherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well do you “stick to the plan?” • How well do you stay true to the intervention and not drift from the core elements? • Did you make sure all pieces of the intervention have been implemented as intended?
Duration/Exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often does a student receive an intervention? • How long does an intervention last? • In elementary schools: Providing 90 minutes of reading instruction five days a week? Progress monitoring a minimum of every two weeks.
Quality of Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well was the intervention or instruction delivered? • Were good teaching practices used? • Is teacher enthusiasm evident? • Is there adequate time for student questions and exposure to differentiation? Student groups and transitions effectively managed?
Program Differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well do you differentiate one intervention from another? • How well do you avoid inserting pieces from other interventions?
Student Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How engaged and involved are the students in this intervention or activity? • Amount of time students spend on task? • Levels of enthusiasm for activity? • Extent students feel they learned what was expected? • Number of students meditating with their eyes closed and heads on their desks?

Source: http://www.rti4success.org/sites/default/files/FidelityImplementation_10-20-09_FINAL.pdf, March 2016

RECOMMENDATION

Explore options for standardizing a tiered system of early interventions for struggling learners.

The superintendent, central office administrators, building principals, and select teachers should review how to refine and improve the RtI program or adopt a hybrid approach to tiered intervention for struggling learners. The review process should focus on how to increase the effectiveness of tiered interventions. If needed, external consultants are available to assist in the process.



The guide *Considering Tier 3 Within a Response-to-Intervention Model* can serve as a resource to understand the RtI process.⁵⁵ The *RtI Essential Components Integrity Rubric* and the *RtI Essential Components Integrity Worksheet* are useful appraisal tools.⁵⁶

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

E. SPECIAL PROGRAMS

School districts offer educational services to students through a variety of programs including regular education programs and special programs. Special programs are designed to provide quality services for student populations such as those in Gifted and Talented Education and Special Education programs.

Special Education

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B* is the federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities ages three through 21. The major purposes of *IDEA* are:

- to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free, appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living;
- to ensure that the rights of children and youth with disabilities and their parents are protected; and
- to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

Oklahoma statutes require that each school district provide special education and related services for all children with disabilities who reside in that district in accordance with *IDEA*. This duty may be satisfied by:

- directly providing special education for such children;
- joining in a cooperative program with another district or districts to provide special education for such children;
- joining in a written agreement with a private or public institution, licensed residential child care and treatment facility, or day treatment facility within such district to provide special education for children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, children who are blind or partially blind, or other eligible children with disabilities; or

⁵⁵ <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tier3/consideringtier3>

⁵⁶ <http://www.rti4success.org/resource/essential-components-rti-integrity-rubric-and-worksheet>

- transferring eligible children and youth with disabilities to other school districts pursuant to the provisions of the *Education Open Transfer Act*.

Districts must develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for each child receiving special education services under *IDEA*. The IEP must include input from the parent and regular education teachers and be aligned with education plans for children in regular education classrooms.

IDEA requires districts to provide educational services in the “least restrictive environment” and to include students with disabilities in state and district assessment programs. Instructional arrangements for students may include:

- all instruction and related services in a regular classroom in a mainstreamed setting;
- a resource room where the student is removed from the regular classroom less than 50 percent of the day;
- a self-contained classroom where the student is removed from the regular classroom more than 50 percent of the day; or
- a separate “self-contained” classroom for those whose disability is so severe that a satisfactory education cannot take place for any part of the day in a regular classroom.

Under *IDEA*, a school district can only place a student in a more restrictive setting such as a day treatment program or residential treatment placement if the student’s needs and educational program cannot be satisfactorily provided in the regular classroom with supplementary aids and services.

The reauthorization of *IDEA* in 2004, which went into effect in 2005, includes provisions significantly changing the way learning-disabled students are identified. One change in the law addresses early intervention services and creating opportunities to determine a student’s Response to Intervention (RtI). This approach was adopted in 2010 by SDE. With RtI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes; monitor student progress; provide evidence-based interventions; and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness. Based upon the results of these interventions, the district may need a referral for additional testing to determine if there is a specific learning disability.

IDEA now allows a school district to use up to 15 percent of its *IDEA* allocation to support services to students who have not been identified as needing special education services, but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment. Funds may be used for professional development in scientific research-based interventions, literacy instruction, and the use of adaptive or instructional technology. It also permits use of funds for educational and behavioral assessments.

An effective special education program is defined by *IDEA* as having the following elements:

- pre-referral intervention in regular education;

- referral to special education for evaluation;
- comprehensive nondiscriminatory evaluation;
- initial placement through an IEP meeting;
- provision of educational services and supports according to a written IEP;
- annual program review;
- three-year re-evaluation; and
- dismissal from the special education program.

Exhibit 2-28 shows comparison data on the state average percentage of special education students and the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in special education for the past five years. The state average indicates that although ADM declined slightly, the number of special education students per FTE experienced a substantial increase. Additionally, the percentage of students identified for special education services increased by 5.3 percent. The drop in Special Education Teachers FTE status reflects the ongoing teacher shortage crisis especially in special education.

Exhibit 2-28
Students and Teachers in Special Education Programs, 2012-13 to 2016-17

Five-Year State Average Percentage	ADM	Special Education Percentage of All Students	Special Education Teachers FTEs	# of Special Education Students per FTE
2012-13	1,271.1	15.0%	8.5	22.4
2013-14	1,292.2	15.1%	8.6	22.7
2014-15	1,299.4	15.4%	8.5	23.5
2015-16	1,305.4	15.6%	8.6	23.7
2016-17	1,267.0	15.8%	8.2	24.4
Change	(0.3%)	5.3%	(3.5%)	8.9%

Source: Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, Profiles Database

FINDING 2-17

Not all teachers clearly understand the special education student identification process. This results in premature requests for identification and services before implementing appropriate interventions. Staff reported unclear and inconsistent understandings regarding the order of steps to follow with the current identification process.

Most all districts' referral process follows the state and federal guidelines. However, there are differing understandings of which personnel are involved in the process, what data to use, and

timeframes for interventions. Across the district there is no clearly defined and understood pre-referral process.

Oklahoma moved to a new special education data and eligibility/IEP process system beginning July 1, 2015. Entitled the OK EdPlan™, the online system guides users through the identification and referral process. The program assists special education staff and administration through the latest changes to the eligibility and IEP process.⁵⁷

RECOMMENDATION

Train all teachers in a clearly defined special education identification process.

District superintendents, central office administration, principals, director of special education, and select special education and general education staff need to clearly outline the pre-referral and referral process. The training should define each step in identifying students and the qualifications for special education services. The director of special education and staff should hold annual briefings with the principals and all teachers to review the referral process. This is particularly important with the elementary principals and staff. These communications should include *IDEA* changes and time for questions from current and new staff members.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 2-18

Special education teachers lack sufficient time to communicate and plan with general education teachers. Districtwide, general education teachers lack a deep understanding of modifying and adapting curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities. There is no scheduled time for special education teachers and classroom teachers to plan and deliver instruction in concert.

There is no dedicated time for teachers to review the adaptations and modifications students require. There is still a prevailing mindset for pull out and resource room services over mainstreaming and inclusionary practices. There is apprehension among some general education teachers about how to provide students with least restrictive environment (LRE) in the classrooms.

The central office administration recognizes the importance for special education teachers to meet with general education teachers and plan for instructional and curricular modifications. Focus group and interview discussion also indicated it is difficult for teachers to begin to view IEP students as “our” students. There is no process in place that gives teachers time to plan, make shared instructional decisions, curriculum modifications, and how to assess student learning.

Collaboration between special education and general education teachers calls for commitment by the teachers who will be working together. They must have support from building administrators

⁵⁷ <http://ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/EdPlan%20Q%26A.pdf>

and central office staff. This involves allocating time, procuring resources, monitoring, and, above all, persistence. The biggest issue is time – time for planning, time for curriculum and instructional development, and time for evaluating.⁵⁸ Collaborative planning is a responsibility at the district, building and classroom level.

Walther-Thomas and her colleagues (1996) found that five planning themes were identified by co-teachers who considered themselves to be effective co-planners:

- confidence in partner’s skills;
- design of learning environments for both the educators and students that require active involvement;
- creation of learning and teaching environments in which each person’s contributions are valued;
- development of effective routines to facilitate in-depth planning; and
- increased productivity, creativity, and collaboration over time.

Participants in collaborative programs agreed that the time required for planning does not decrease during the year, but the quality of instruction continues to improve.⁵⁹

RECOMMENDATION

Implement ongoing, regularly scheduled times for teachers to corporately plan curriculum and instruction based on student IEPs.

Although limited, research on the relationship of special education and PLCs reveals that special education teachers’ classroom practices, like those of their general education counterparts, often change in a positive direction as a result of their participation in PLCs. Research findings (Little, 2003) revealed that the interactions of members of the groups studied supported teacher learning and improvement of practice as evidenced by allocating time to talk about problems in their practice, revealing their dilemmas to each other, exploring their problems openly, and sharing specific classroom materials, such as student work, to find solutions.⁴³ Another important implication of PLC research for special education is the natural occurrences of conflict, tension, and disruptions. Successful PLCs go through cycles of learning and in doing so are able to repair the problems the community experiences.

District superintendents, principals, and special education director need to schedule release time for special education and general education teachers to work collaboratively. The administration must establish guidelines and expectations for the planning sessions so times are viewed as priority for both teachers. The teachers must determine or select the students who will be part of the collaborative planning process. At all grade levels, the administrators and counselors must

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

work with teachers to keep balanced proportions of regular students, at-risk students, and IEP students.

Planning for secondary students is more difficult as required courses may dictate which class students must attend. Ideally, weekly planning times work best. However, bi-weekly and monthly can also serve the collaborative planning process. The purpose of the teacher collaborative planning is to combine expertise and meet student needs with IEPs.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 2-19

Districts primarily serve special education students through a resource room. Students receive initial instruction from the classroom teacher and then have the option of transitioning to the resource room for additional help. Although transition times may appear orderly, the transition time interrupts instructional learning time.

Some districts have several students with more complex needs, but most are categorized with speech and specialized learning disabilities. There are no inclusionary classrooms where general education and special education teachers work together in a co-teaching arrangement. Through interviews, focus groups, and observations, consulting teams noted a high level of professionalism among special education teachers and classroom teachers. Their informal collaboration and focused intent to effectively serve students with IEPs was apparent.

The regular classroom teachers attend IEP meetings and implement the detailed student modifications for learning. The special education teachers and regular classroom teachers work collaboratively at serving the needs of identified students. Co-teaching instruction works well in school cultures such as districts. Co-teaching arrangements interface well with students identified with specific learning disabilities. In *What Every Principal Needs to Know to Create Equitable and Excellent Schools*, the writers contend: When co-teaching happens, it is most important that all teachers involved utilize their strengths, share roles, and are both seen as leaders in the classroom. Teachers should maximize the benefits of reducing the student-teacher ratio by using co-teaching models, such as parallel instruction, station teaching, and teaming, and minimize the one-teach one-assist model.³⁷

One of the co-teaching benefits for the teachers is they acquire a greater understanding and increased competence in their colleagues' areas of expertise. Special education teachers expand their content area knowledge when co-teaching, while regular education teachers learn new behavior management techniques and ideas for curriculum adaptation. In co-teaching classrooms where teachers share the role of circling around the room and assisting whoever needs help, the support for all students is increased. Another benefit is that special education teachers hear the regular education teachers explain content material. Subsequently, when the special education teachers assist IEP students, they can reinforce the vocabulary and instructional expectations required by regular education teachers.

When teachers work together to establish equitable roles and duties, all students in a co-taught classroom benefit from the presence of two teachers that can support their learning. Research and educational literature speak of varying types, models, and approaches to coteaching. The literature also addresses some specific requirements for successful co-teaching. Across 32 studies, teachers repeatedly stressed the importance of several elements in creating strong co-teaching partnerships (**Exhibit 2-29**).

EXHIBIT 2–29
Research-Based Requirements for Successful Co-Teaching

Area	Requirements
Administrative support; particularly support from the school principal	A supportive administrator can ensure that teachers have the resources needed to make co-teaching a success (e.g., classroom space, planning time, and training).
Voluntary participation in co-teaching and a choice of co-teaching partner	If a teacher is forced into co-teaching or paired with someone he or she has no desire to work with, the results can be disastrous.
Compatibility of teachers	Teachers spoke frequently of the importance of personal compatibility between co-teachers as well as similar philosophies toward teaching and students. Compatibility requires more than simply two teachers who are willing to be partnered as co-teachers. They have to share a motivation to make the partnership work and an agreement about how the class will be structured and each person's role in teaching, planning, and behavior management.
Adequate planning time	Teachers consistently reported the lack of enough planning time for co-taught classes. In one study, teachers had about 45 minutes of planning time a week but felt they needed almost three times that amount. Co-teachers also expressed concern that their planning periods often did not match up, requiring them to find moments between classes, at lunch, or after school to plan together.
A minimum level of academic and behavioral skill needed by students in the class	Some study participants who had witnessed or been part of unsuccessful co-teaching arrangements reported that the failure was directly attributable to one or more students who continually disrupted the class and required constant attention.
Training	Teachers reported receiving little training to prepare them for co-teaching. Many of them would have liked training in collaboration, co-teaching models, communication skills, and inclusive practices to help them work together and in each other's areas of expertise (e.g., content area instruction for special educators and information on various disabilities for general educators).

Source: www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/abstract81

According to SDE, collaborative implementation for co-teaching includes regular and special education teachers completing the following activities:

- participate in professional development regarding selecting appropriate approaches to coteaching and applying them to classroom instruction;
- deliver co-taught lessons and assessments incorporating Universal Design for Learning and differentiation strategies;
- ensure instruction and assessments provide access to general education curriculum with appropriate accommodations to meet individual student needs;
- implement data collection procedures for established outcomes;
- address barriers to implementation;
- demonstrate shared accountability for planning, instruction, assessment, and progress of all students that exhibits shared understandings of student instructional needs;
- document shared communications with parents; and
- integrate technology in instruction, progress monitoring, and assessment processes.³⁸

RECOMMENDATION

Strengthen services to special education students through implementing more inclusionary classrooms and co-teaching practices.

The superintendent, principal, special education teachers, and select classroom teachers should pursue an in-depth study of the co-teaching process to determine implementation processes and procedures. The following links provide additional information to assist in determining options for expansion and improvement of their current practices. time should be spent in observation and visiting schools successfully implementing co-teaching arrangements. Fiscal impact this recommendation can be implemented with existing special education resources

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing special education resources.

FINDING 2-20

Districts strive to meet all state and federal requirements in the special education programs, but there is room for improvement. Staffing loads, the identification process, and inclusionary and least restrictive environment practices need review. In the recent past, there have been no in-house quality control reviews or program evaluations.

In many districts, there is a need to profile the behavioral characteristics, examine the distribution of categorical disabilities, assess instructional settings for effectiveness, and

determine staffing needs. Discussions pointed out that student behaviors and discipline measures need review. The district would also benefit from reviewing procedural safeguards, transitions, and improving target percentages on the State’s Performance Indicators.

RECOMMENDATION

Evaluate the special education program.

Districts must review and refine all components of the special education program. As the state continues to implement the OK EdPlan™, there are training sessions, webinars, and training videos available for staff. In addition to participating in the OK EdPlan™ state efforts, continuous dialog and discussion are needed to understand how the state information systems translates locally to the IEP referral processes.

The director of special education, principals, and select teachers need to review all aspects of the special education program for quality, consistency, and best practice. There are sources available from the Oklahoma State Department of Education to support administrators and teachers. The review process should examine such things as the policies to be followed and legal practices required, the fundamental expectations for inclusionary classrooms, the pre-referral, referral, and placement procedures. It is important to review discipline issues, and the suspension policies and guidelines for students with disabilities.

The New Hampshire Department of Education has a special education program approval and improvement process that might be a useful resource.⁶⁰ Another resource to peruse is the Virginia Department of Education self-assessment process for special education program improvement.⁶¹

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

Gifted and Talented Education

Chapter 8 Article VII, Section 904 of the Oklahoma School Code (OSC) defines Gifted and Talented children as “those children identified at the preschool, elementary, or secondary level as having demonstrated potential abilities of high performance capabilities and needing differentiated or accelerated educational services.” The definition includes students who scored in the top three percent on any national standardized test of intellectual ability or who excel in the areas of creative thinking ability, leadership ability, visual performing arts ability, and specific academic ability.

OSC Section 910 requires each school district to provide Gifted and Talented educational programs and to serve those identified students who reside within the school district boundaries. The local School Board of each district is required to submit a plan for Gifted and Talented

⁶⁰ http://education.nh.gov/instruction/special_ed/improvement_process.htm

⁶¹ http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/program_improvement/index.shtml

programs to the State Board of Education and to provide annual program reports to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (SDE).

Required components for Gifted and Talented education programs are as follows:

- a written policy statement which specifies a consistent process for assessment and selection of children for placement in Gifted and Talented programs in grades one through 12;
- a description of curriculum for the Gifted and Talented educational program, demonstrating that the curriculum is differentiated from the normal curriculum in pace and/or depth, and that it has scope and sequence;
- criteria for evaluation of the gifted child educational program;
- evidence of participation by the local advisory committee on education for Gifted and Talented children in planning, child identification, and program evaluation;
- required competencies and duties of Gifted and Talented educational program staff;
- number and percentage of students identified by the district as Gifted and Talented children pursuant to “subparagraph g” of paragraph 2 of subsection B of Section 18-201 of this title; and
- a budget for the district’s Gifted and Talented educational programs.

Exhibit 2-30 shows the state average for gifted and talented identification rate. The National Association for Gifted Children notes that between five and seven percent of students should be identified. The state’s average was well above this standard for each of the five years examined. However, overtime there has been a 2.0% decrease in the state average of G&T identification.

Exhibit 2-30
Trend in Percentage of Gifted and Talented Education Students

Entity	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Change
State	14.8%	14.2%	14.2%	14.2%	14.5%	2.0%

Source: Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, Profiles Database

FINDING 2-21

Districts have developed a gifted plan, identified students, and designated teachers to work with students. However, in many cases there is still a need for greater intentional and purposeful effort to deliver enriched and challenging learning opportunities.

At the elementary level, the norm across districts is to provide differentiated instruction with special activities or events for those who have been identified as gifted and talented. The middle school counselor normally assists gifted students by enrolling them in Pre-AP classes. At the



high school, the gifted students are served through AP coursework or enrollment in concurrent courses.

Exhibit 2-31 is a sampling from archived surveys. The exhibit reports staff responses to gifted services. Only 51 percent *agree* the gifted and talented students are appropriately served. The consulting team found that districts’ gifted plan are not always implemented with fidelity. There is minimal focus on meeting the academic needs of the identified students and seeking ways to personalize and enrich curriculum and instruction.

Exhibit 2-31
Staff Survey Responses Regarding Gifted and Talented Programming

Survey Statement	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
The needs of the gifted and talented are being met.	51%	33%	16%

Source OEQA Sampling of Archived Surveys (2004-2017)

Often, gifted and high achieving students are reported to be unchallenged and bored in the regular classroom. However, research shows there is more to meeting the students’ needs than just giving them a challenge in classrooms:

Gifted programming positively influences students’ futures. Several longitudinal studies have shown that gifted programs have a positive effect on students’ post-secondary plans. For example, studies found that 320 gifted students identified during adolescence who received services through the secondary level pursued doctoral degrees at more than 50x the base rate expectations.⁶²

Gifted students need challenging educational programming because in many cases the “general education program is not yet ready to meet the needs of gifted students” (p. 9) due to lack of general educators’ training in gifted education and the pressure classroom teachers face to raise the performance of their struggling students.⁶³

RECOMMENDATION

Strengthen the Gifted and Talented Program.

In small schools where it is difficult to offer a variety of electives, the gifted and talented program is often the hook that keeps those students committed to learning. The curriculum director, principals, and select teachers should examine the current program for improvement.

⁶² Lubinski, D., Webb, R. M., Morelock, M. J., & Benbow, C. P. (2001). Top 1 in 10,000:

<http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/why-are-gifted-programs-needed#sthash>

⁶³ Hertberg-Davis, H. L., & Callahan, C. M. (2013). Introduction. In H. L. Hertberg-Davis & C. M. Callahan (Eds.), *Fundamentals of gifted education* (pp. 1–10). New York, NY: Routledge.

The SDE offers ideas on its website that districts can explore to expand services to students (**Exhibit 2-32**). Some of these ideas may already be in use, but they need to occur with more frequency, intention, and design.

Exhibit 2-32 **Oklahoma Public Schools Enrichment Programming Options for Services**

Enrichment in the Regular Classroom: Experiences provided in regular classrooms that are supplemental to the established curriculum and which are purposefully planned with the needs, interests, and capabilities of particular students in mind. Appropriate enrichment experiences are NOT a repetition of material.

Seminars/Convocations: Special short-term sessions where students focus on one area of study.

Mentorships: A program which pairs individual students with someone who has advanced skills and experiences in a particular discipline and can serve as a guide, advisor, counselor, and role model.

Summer Enrichment Programs: Enrichment classes or courses offered during the summer months. Saturday Enrichment Programs: Enrichment classes or courses offered on Saturday.

Creative/Academic Competitions: Organized opportunities for students to enter local, regional, state, or national contests in a variety of areas.

Differentiated Curriculum: Curriculum designed to meet the needs of high ability students and differentiated according to content, process, and product.

Learning Centers: A designated area or portable center designed to enrich and/or accelerate students' interests in a given content area.

“Great Books” and “Junior Great Books”: Discussions of great literature led by an adult discussion leader using a prepared question guide.

Source: <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/gifted-and-talented-education-programming-options>

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

D. STUDENT SERVICES

Student services are comprised of counseling, health services, and social services in most Oklahoma districts. Services provided include:

- college and career counseling;
- health education and services;

- substance abuse and psychological counseling;
- social services; and
- graduate follow-up.

Student services are evolving into a more powerful tool to assist students who will continue to grow. They are becoming increasingly more valuable in providing needed support and guidance for students' college questions, career options, and individual needs.

Guidance and Counseling

Oklahoma State Board of Education Accreditation Standards for guidance and counseling are:

- *Accreditation Standard 6.02.* The counseling staff, parents, administrators, and others shall provide guidance and counseling program direction through involvement in assessment and identification of student needs.
- *Accreditation Standard 6.04.* The school shall develop a written description of a guidance and counseling program with special provisions for at-risk students. The program shall address assessed needs of all students, including those who are identified as at-risk and shall establish program goals, objectives, and evaluation.
- *Accreditation Standard 6.06.* Each school shall provide an organized program of guidance and counseling services that include: counseling services available to students; a planned sequential program of guidance activities that enhance students' development; appropriate referrals to other specialized persons, clinics, or agencies in the community; and coordinated services.
- *Accreditation Standard 6.08.* Each counselor shall follow a planned calendar of activities based upon established program goals and provide direct and indirect services to students, teachers, and/or parents.

The SDE publishes *The School Counselor's Guide: Developing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program Using Accreditation Standard VI*. This publication is designed to assist school districts in strengthening existing programs or developing new ones. The major components of the defined guidance curriculum include Guidance Curriculum Domains (Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal/Social Development); Student Competencies; and Guidance Curriculum Delivery.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) states:

School counseling programs are collaborative efforts benefiting students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the overall community. School counseling programs should

be an integral part of students’ daily educational environment and school counselors should be partners in student achievement.⁶⁴

ASCA recommends that school counselors divide time between four components:

- **Guidance Curriculum** – The guidance curriculum is structured with developmental lessons designed to assist students. The guidance curriculum is infused throughout the school’s overall curriculum and presented systematically through K-12 classrooms.
- **Individual Student Planning** – School counselors coordinate ongoing activities designed to assist students individually in planning.
- **Responsive Services** – Responsive services are activities meeting individual students’ immediate needs that may require counseling.
- **Systems Support** – School counseling programs require administration and management.

Time allocated for each program component should depend on the developmental and special needs of the students served. While each district determines time allotments, ASCA recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent of their time in direct contact with students. Oklahoma high schools and middle schools are required to have one full-time counselor for every 450 students. At the elementary level a counseling and guidance program is required, but does not have to be delivered by a certified counselor.

Exhibit 2-33 provides the trend in counselor staffing over time. The state average in counselor staffing had a 3.3 percent decrease in 2016-17 after maintaining a three-year staffing level of 3.1. However, this was next to the smallest percentage decrease compared to the community groups. The smallest percent change or decrease was Community Group C2 while Community Group H2 maintained the same staffing level over time. Community Group G2 experienced the largest percentage decrease in staffing level within the five-year period.

Exhibit 2-33
Trend in Counselor Staffing Over Time

Entity	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Percent Change
Community Group B2	43.1	42.0	40.8	40.9	40.5	(6.0%)
Community Group C2	15.7	14.9	15.4	14.7	15.2	(3.2%)
Community Group D2	7.9	7.7	7.9	7.9	7.3	(7.6%)
Community Group E2	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.2	3.0	(11.8%)
Community Group F2	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.5	(6.3%)
Community Group G2	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	(12.5%)
Community Group H2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.0%
State Average	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	(3.3%)

Source: Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, Profiles Database

⁶⁴ <http://www.ascanationalmodel.org/>

FINDING 2-22

As presented in the previous exhibit, most districts have decreased counseling staffing levels over the past five years. This staffing reduction prevents districts from providing a comprehensive counseling program that is coordinated PK-12. As a result, student needs are not addressed across grades, and services are not coordinated for at-risk students.

Most districts categorized in a Community Group 2 designation offer only limited counseling services to the elementary and middle schools. These districts' poverty level and number of special education students create a large population of at-risk students in need of counseling services. Insufficient counseling leaves teachers and administrators providing many of the counseling services.

Interviews with counselors indicate there are no processes, procedures, or policies currently in place for a Pre-K–12 counseling program in their schools. The defined roles and responsibilities of a district's counselors are not driven by a job description that clearly defines their counseling responsibilities. However, interviews and focus group dialog with teaching staff also revealed that the counseling staff often has responsibilities and roles outside the realm of counselor.

Exhibit 2-34 reports the sampling of survey results regarding counseling. 55 percent of the staff agree that their district/school has adequate counseling services. Only 29 percent of high school students agree they received sufficient college/career counseling.

Exhibit 2-34
Survey Responses Regarding Counseling

Survey Group	Survey Statement	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Staff	The district provides students with adequate counseling services.	55%	28%	17%
Students	I have received sufficient college and/or career counseling.	29%	32%	36%

Source: OEQA Sampling of Archived Surveys (2012-2017)

School counseling programs have significant influence on discipline problems. Baker and Gerler reported that students who participated in a school counseling program had significantly less inappropriate behaviors and more positive attitudes toward school than those students who did not participate in the program. Another study reported that group counseling provided by school counselors significantly decreased participants' aggressive and hostile behaviors.⁶⁵ Two other

⁶⁵ Baker, S. B., & Gerler, E. R. (2001). Counseling in schools. In D. C. Locke, J. E. Myers, and E. L. Herr (Eds.), *The Handbook of Counseling*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Omizo, M.M., Hershberger, J.M., & Omizo, S.A. (1988). Teaching children to cope with anger. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 22, 241-245.

studies found that elementary guidance activities have a positive influence on elementary students' academic achievement.⁶⁶

Comprehensive school counseling programs ensure equitable access to opportunities and rigorous curriculum for all students to participate fully in the educational process.⁶⁷ As defined by ASCA, a comprehensive curriculum consists of K-12 “structured lessons designed to help students attain the desired competencies and to provide all students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills appropriate for their developmental level”.⁶⁸

RECOMMENDATION

Provide a comprehensive counseling program that is coordinated PK-12 and communicates the role of the counselor to staff, students, and parents.

The school counselor's primary role is to design and implement a comprehensive district-wide program that promotes student achievement and personnel well-being. The program is preventive in design and developmental in nature.

The ASCA framework identifies the four key components of an effective program:

- foundations;
- delivery;
- management; and
- accountability.

Effective counseling programs need measurable data to analyze and determine how students are different because of counseling services. Student achievement in population subgroups and genders needs focus and attention. Student attendance patterns, discipline and behavioral referrals render data for program evaluation. Districts would benefit from a comprehensive assessment and review of the existing counseling services. Based on input from all school staff, administration, students, and parents, a Pre-K–12 program needs to be implemented.

Districts should define a program and plan for delivering counseling services to all students. Through the development and implementation of comprehensive policies, procedures, and processes that drive the counseling program counselors can increase their efficiency and effectiveness. Board policy needs to articulate processes and procedures for the counseling plan. The plan's design should clearly outline the vision, scope, and job responsibilities of the

⁶⁶ Hadley, H.R. (1988). Improving reading scores through a self-esteem prevention program. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 22, 248-252. Lee, R.S. (1993). Effects of classroom guidance on student achievement. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 27, 163-171.

⁶⁷ <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/>

⁶⁸ Bowers, J., & Hatch, T. (2005). *The ASCA national model: a framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria VA: American School Counselor Association.

district’s counselors. The basis of the comprehensive plan should be driven by a focus to promote and enhance learning for students.

District leaders may consider joining school administrators and counselors from across the state who participate in the SDE Counseling Consortium. This group of educators focuses on counseling programs and school issues that are related to students. The Consortium meets to discuss issues regarding Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) implementation, standards-based grading, use of technology to enhance instruction, the pyramid of behavioral and academic interventions, professional learning communities, and more. Group members network with peers to collaborate on what is working and what is not.

The superintendent, principals, and counselors should provide coordinated leadership. They should take the lead in the planning process, communicating the program and services to students, and ensuring the program is implemented across the district. They should consider the following program components when developing a counseling program:

- establishment of a teacher advisement program;
- adoption of research-based, federally approved curriculums for bullying and drug use prevention;
- creation of a district-wide personal safety, social, and academic skill development program;
- establishment of strands for crisis intervention and group and individual counseling for at-risk students; and
- adoption of a schedule for the principal and teachers to meet on a regular basis to evaluate and refine the comprehensive counseling program and services.

As the comprehensive plan is implemented across all levels, the administrative staff should work with all stakeholders to evaluate and refine the program components. The plan should be published, adopted by the board of education, and shared with all faculty, parents, and students.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.