Dallas Independent School District
Core Practice Audit Report

Benchmarking Your Practices to Higher Performing School Systems

January, 2011

Submitted By:
National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA)
8701 North MoPac Expressway, Suite 200
Austin, TX 78759

Efrain Mercado, Director of Outreach
Phone: 512.320.1800
E-mail: emercado@nc4ea.org
# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 3
Research Base ......................................................................................................................................... 3
Audit Process .......................................................................................................................................... 8
Document Collection and Review ........................................................................................................ 8
Site Visit ................................................................................................................................................. 8
Analysis and Benchmarking ............................................................................................................... 8

Overview ............................................................................................................................................. 10

Review and Rating of Core Practices ................................................................................................... 12
Established Practices ............................................................................................................................. 15
Critical Action #1 ................................................................................................................................. 17
Critical Action #2 ................................................................................................................................. 18
Critical Action #3 ................................................................................................................................. 20
Critical Action #4 ................................................................................................................................. 21
Critical Action #5 ................................................................................................................................ 23
Critical Action #6 ................................................................................................................................ 24
Developing Practices ............................................................................................................................ 26
Leverage Points ..................................................................................................................................... 28
Recommendation #1 .............................................................................................................................. 31
Recommendation #2 .............................................................................................................................. 36
Recommendation #3 .............................................................................................................................. 40
Recommendation #4 .............................................................................................................................. 44
Recommendation #5 .............................................................................................................................. 50
Recommendation #6 .............................................................................................................................. 53
Recommendation #7 .............................................................................................................................. 58

Appendices ........................................................................................................................................... 59
Appendix A. List of District Documents Requested and Submitted ...................................................... 59
Appendix B. Site Visit Schedule ............................................................................................................ 64
Appendix C. NCEA Core Practice Framework Graphic ......................................................................... 66
Appendix D. Recommendations ............................................................................................................. 67
Appendix E. Status of Recommendations from 2005 Audit ................................................................ 75
Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a Core Practice Audit conducted by the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) for the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) during the first semester of the 2010-11 school year. The audit focused on the fundamental principles of teaching and learning as identified from the study of consistently higher performing school systems and represented in the NCEA Core Practice Framework.

The Core Practice Framework

While the Framework presents the practices of higher performing school systems at three organizational levels—district, school and classroom—the Dallas ISD audit focused on a study of the practices at the district level only.

Research Base

Five organizing themes within the Framework provided the primary structure for auditing the practices of the Dallas Independent School District. Built upon NCEA’s study of more than 550 schools, these themes capture the primary curricular and instructional activities undertaken by school systems and represent the major content areas in which practices of higher performing school systems differed from their average-performing counterparts.
Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals
This theme focuses on the learning target—what it is that we expect all students to know and be able to do by grade and subject. Higher performing school systems have clear academic targets from kindergarten through Grade 12. Principals and teachers understand the learning goals and understand that these goals are meant for all students and are non-negotiable.

Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building
This theme focuses on the selection and development of a school system’s most precious commodity—people. Once the academic goals of the system are clear, the leaders and teachers must be selected and developed to make these goals a reality for every learner in the system.

Theme 3
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies
This theme focuses on the “things” that higher performing school systems use (e.g., the arrangement of time, the instructional resources and materials, technology). Strong instructional leaders and highly qualified teachers need evidence-based tools and resources to reach high standards with every learner.

Theme 4
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data
After clearly identifying what is to be learned by grade and subject and ensuring that the schools are equipped with the staff and the tools to successfully deliver the curriculum, educators then ask and answer an important question, “How are we going to know if students learned what we said they would learn?”

Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment
The most important question of all follows the monitoring of student performance... “What are we going to do if students do not acquire the knowledge and gain the skills we said they would?” Higher performing school systems have pyramids of intervention that provide immediate and intense intervention at multiple levels when learning is interrupted.
The actions taken by educators at the three organizational levels—district, school and classroom—are summarized in the Framework by five practices at each of these levels, one in each theme. Each of the five practices for each organizational level is further detailed by specific Critical Actions describing each practice.

**Theme 1**
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

**District Core Practice**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool, and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders establish a written district curriculum—the academic objectives specifying what students are to know and be able to do by grade and subject.
- District leaders vertically align the district curriculum PreK-12 through a backwards mapping process anchored to the needs of successful graduates.
- District leaders provide detailed resources that clarify the district’s written curriculum.
- District leaders require that the district’s written curriculum is the taught curriculum in every classroom.

**Theme 2**
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

**District Core Practice**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.
- District leaders identify and develop internal candidates for leadership positions.
- District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.
- District leaders design focused professional development for new teachers centered on the district’s curriculum, instruction and assessment system.
- District leaders create the infrastructure for collaboration as a primary professional development strategy at the district, school and classroom levels.
- District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.
- District leaders focus professional development on understanding, teaching and assessing the district’s written curriculum.
Theme 3
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

District Core Practice
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.
- District leaders provide the necessary support and resources to implement each adopted instructional program.

Theme 4
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders provide an integrated data management system.
- District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district’s written curriculum.
- District leaders analyze student performance data regularly with principals.
Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

District Core Practice

- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.

Critical Actions for this District Practice

- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.
Audit Process

NCEA’s audit process includes three phases: 1) pre-audit collection and review of district documents; 2) district site visit; and 3) analysis and benchmarking.

1. Document Collection and Review

   The audit review team submitted a list of requested documents to the district approximately eight weeks prior to the site visit. The requested documents were intended to provide detail about the district’s systems and procedures in the five themes of the NCEA Core Practice Framework. District administrators submitted the vast majority of the requested documents. The audit team reviewed the documents in the week before the site visit, and they also referred to key documents during the post-visit analysis and benchmarking process.

2. Site Visit

   A team of NCEA auditors visited the district from September 20-24, 2010, to interview a number of district administrators involved in key operations in the district. NCEA personnel also interviewed executive directors of all six Learning Communities.

   During their week in the district, reviewers visited 21 elementary, middle, and high schools, which represented all Learning Communities and the full spectrum of school performance levels. At each site, reviewers interviewed the principal and conducted a focus group with core content area teachers. For each site visit activity, the audit review team used protocols developed and refined over 10 years of NCEA school research.

3. Analysis and Benchmarking

   Upon completion of the site visit, the audit review team examined data collected from interviews, focus groups, and district documents. Using this evidence, the team benchmarked the district’s practices against NCEA’s 20 Critical Actions of higher performing school districts.

   The review team placed each of the 20 Critical Actions in one of three categories:

   - EP Established Practices
   - DP Developing Practices
   - LP Leverage Points

   The Dallas Independent School District shows the highest development in the six practices listed as Established Practices. Further detail about these findings is presented in the Established Practices section of this report.
The seven Critical Actions placed in the Developing Practices category were practices that reviewers cited as under development. District leaders were actively developing the practices noted in this section, yet additional time is needed for the practices to be institutionalized. As a result, reviewers have provided less detailed information relative to these practices.

The seven Critical Actions cited within the Leverage Points section are the practices which the review team felt district leaders might consider in order to gain even greater traction on the district’s already upward achievement trend. By leveraging these practices at key points, reviewers would hope for district leaders to gain the greatest bang for the buck in terms of student achievement. Obviously, district leaders have already addressed the listed practices in many powerful ways. It was the intent to find Leverage Points where the already considerable development might be boosted forward.

The review team used three-point scoring rubrics, developed from NCEA’s extensive research into higher performing school systems, to look more closely at each of the Critical Actions in the Leverage Points category. Based on the rubric ratings, recommendations were developed for each of the seven Critical Actions in this category. These are NCEA’s recommended areas to leverage to attain even greater student achievement. Further details about the audit findings as well as all Recommendations are presented within the report.
Overview

First and foremost, leaders at the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) would like to commend the Dallas ISD leadership team for asking us to use the most strenuous review process available during the 2010 Core Practice Audit. Dallas ISD leaders chose to have our team benchmark their district practices against the practices of the highest performing school systems in the country. It is rare to find leaders willing to expose themselves and the district practices to this type of new scrutiny. NCEA leaders believe that this willingness is, in fact, one of the strongest indicators of a school system on the path to great results for students.

The National Center for Educational Achievement first audited the practices of the Dallas Independent School District in 2005. The 17 recommendations that resulted from the original audit helped form the basis for the ambitious set of improvement goals outlined in the Dallas Achieves strategic plan. Over the past five years, NCEA auditors have visited Dallas ISD each year to measure the district’s progress toward achieving the 17 recommendations presented in the original audit. The NCEA audit review team has been granted a front-row seat to observe the district’s successful work in developing a comprehensive, well-defined system for curriculum development, delivery, and support.

The district’s stated theory of action—managed instruction with earned empowerment—has served the school system well and should absolutely continue to drive all district practices. The district’s crowning accomplishment is the creation of an aligned, detailed written curriculum accompanied by instructional resources and formative assessments that clarify exactly what is to be taught and learned in each grade and subject. This curriculum is accompanied by an integrated, online data system that allows teachers and administrators to analyze student performance and use data to adjust instruction and tailor intervention programs.

The district is also continuing to develop promising new programs and initiatives designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence from this year’s audit suggests that implementation of certain new programs, such as the district’s leadership development programs, Aspiring Principals and UTCULP, is already very strong. Other new programs, such as the district’s Response to Intervention system, are still in the early stages of development and require more time and attention from the district leadership if they are to have a powerful impact on teaching and learning in district schools.

Overall, district leaders were slightly concerned that, after five years of implementing the district’s instructional plan, some of the enthusiasm and support for the district curriculum might begin to wane across the district. District leaders asked reviewers to search for any “loss of coherence” in how schools implemented the district curriculum. While the evidence collected during school visits suggests that the “loss of coherence” was not yet a problem across campuses and Learning Communities, the audit review team urges district leaders to remain vigilant for indications that the district curriculum is not being implemented with fidelity. In a large urban district such as Dallas ISD, it is essential for the highly mobile...
student population to receive access to the same curriculum at each campus; the efforts of district leaders to ensure this are highly commended.

A concern noted by the audit review team was the apparent shift in the role some board members were taking relative to the curriculum development and review processes. Board members becoming deeply involved in district practices rather than district policies is—at best—inappropriate.¹ As new trustees join the board, district leaders must continually educate the Board of Trustees regarding the importance of instituting a written and aligned curriculum districtwide. There is the need for a strong and united leadership team as well as a supportive board to ensure the curriculum is delivered to all students.

The Dallas Independent School District has made tremendous progress over the last five years in implementing many practices that are evident in higher performing school systems. As a result, district students have made great improvements in their achievement results. The audit review team urges the district leaders to sustain the work highlighted in the Established Practices section of this report and to consider using the recommendations outlined in the Leverage Points section to determine how they can most effectively continue their quest to reach high achievement results for all students. District leaders and staff cannot do this work on their own. Meaningful improvement will require hard work and commitment from all stakeholders—board members, school leaders and administrators, teachers, parents, and students. However, this work is necessary for Dallas ISD to provide a high-quality education to every student, in every classroom.

¹ For an outstanding resource on the distinct roles of board members and district leadership, see the TASB Board Effectiveness Audit, particularly the section on Oversight of Management (p. 27+).

http://www.tasb.org/services/lts/resources/archive_documents/audit_complete_07.pdf

Meaningful improvement will require hard work and commitment from all stakeholders—board members, school leaders and administrators, teachers, parents, and students.
Review and Rating of Core Practices

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

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

### Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Core Practice</th>
<th>Critical Actions for this District Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.</td>
<td>District leaders establish a written district curriculum—the academic objectives specifying what students are to know and be able to do by grade and subject. EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool, and layered professional development.</td>
<td>District leaders vertically align the district curriculum PreK-12 through a backwards mapping process anchored to the needs of successful graduates. EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.</td>
<td>District leaders provide detailed resources that clarify the district’s written curriculum. EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning.</td>
<td>District leaders require that the district’s written curriculum is the taught curriculum in every classroom. LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.
- District leaders identify and develop internal candidates for leadership positions.
- District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.
- District leaders design focused professional development for new teachers centered on the district’s curriculum, instruction and assessment system.
- District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.
- District leaders focus professional development on understanding, teaching and assessing the district’s written curriculum.

Theme 3
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.
- District leaders provide the necessary support and resources to implement each adopted instructional program.

(continued on next page)
Theme 4
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders provide an integrated data management system.
- District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district's written curriculum.
- District leaders analyze student performance data regularly with principals.

Ep: Established Practices
Dp: Developing Practices
Lp: Leverage Points

Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.

Ep: Established Practices
Dp: Developing Practices
Lp: Leverage Points
After interviewing district stakeholders and reviewing district documents, the audit review team found evidence that the Dallas Independent School District has most effectively established six of the 20 Critical Actions NCEA has identified in higher performing school systems. These Established Practices are the result of at least five years of work, beginning with the identification of 17 improvement recommendations outlined in NCEA’s first audit of the district in 2005. (Appendix E presents a list of these 17 recommendations, along with information about which of the 17 have been retired and which have been incorporated into the new Recommendations presented in this year’s report.)

The following section will describe the district’s accomplishments to date, as well as outline additional opportunities for leveraging even greater improvement where appropriate. The six Critical Actions discussed in Established Practices represent three themes in the NCEA Core Practice Framework: Theme 1—Student Learning: Expectations & Goals; Theme 2—Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building; and Theme 4—Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data. These Critical Actions are numbered within the context of the Framework below.

Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

(continued on next page)
**Theme 2**
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

**District Core Practice**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.
- District leaders identify and develop internal candidates for leadership positions.
- District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.
- District leaders design focused professional development for new teachers centered on the district’s curriculum, instruction and assessment system.
- District leaders create the infrastructure for collaboration as a primary professional development strategy at the district, school and classroom levels.
- District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.
- District leaders focus professional development on understanding, teaching and assessing the district’s written curriculum.

**Theme 4**
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

**District Core Practice**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool, and layered professional development
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders provide an integrated data management system.
- District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district’s written curriculum.
- District leaders analyze student performance data regularly with principals.

Established Practices: Critical Action #1

Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Critical Action
District leaders establish a written district curriculum—the academic objectives specifying what students are to know and be able to do by grade and subject.

Since NCEA’s first audit of the Dallas Independent School District in 2005, the district has developed and implemented a detailed written curriculum for all grades and subjects. The district Curriculum Planning Guides (CPGs) provide teachers with clear guidance about what is to be taught and learned. The quality of the district curriculum has increased each year, as the district has strengthened the curriculum revision and feedback processes and increased collaboration across departments.

When comparing this year’s findings with those of the 2009 Progress Report, the audit review team was especially impressed by the increased quality and quantity of joint curriculum development between the core-content departments and the Multi-Language Enrichment Program (MLEP) Department. The increased collaboration has led to the creation of curricular resources that better serve the needs of English language learners. In past years, some content directors noted that they struggled with determining structures for the joint curriculum planning process, but new leadership in the MLEP Department has led to greater clarification of roles and responsibilities.

Teachers and principals also noticed the positive change, with many explaining that they had seen much stronger parallelism between English-language and Spanish-language CPGs. “We have really noticed an improvement,” explained one teacher. “The content is much more aligned now than it used to be.” A principal observed, “My bilingual teachers feel

“Overall, there is much more cross-departmental collaboration. It keeps everyone on the same page. People have been very receptive, especially the content directors. Everyone understands now that core-content staff [members] are the content specialists, and MLEP [staff members] are the language specialists. And together our job is to serve campuses.”

–District Administrator
much less isolated now than they used to because now they are teaching the same content and going to the same trainings as the other teachers.”

Buy-in for the district curriculum is generally strong, with most principals and teachers describing curriculum implementation and CPG use as non-negotiable. In interviews, district leaders questioned how they might continue to ensure curricular cohesiveness and enthusiasm for managed instruction. The audit review team did not find compelling evidence of diminished support for the district curriculum among the teachers and school leaders interviewed. However, as the written curriculum must be the absolute bedrock of all instruction, the audit review team commends the district leaders for their sensitivity to early warning indicators.

**Established Practices: Critical Action #2**

**Theme 1**
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

**Critical Action**
District leaders vertically align the district curriculum PreK-12 through a backwards mapping process anchored to the needs of successful graduates.

Leaders in the district continue to use indicators for College and Career Readiness (CCR), rather than only the passing rates on the TAKS exam, to help set goals for curriculum development and alignment. A district administrator noted: “Everyone understands college readiness now. All the content areas are talking about it. In math, for example, the department really backwards maps a lot of [the] curriculum & CPGs from our standards that we want our high school students to meet in order to be college and career ready.” District leaders acknowledged, however, that full alignment of the curriculum to the needs of successful graduates is a work in progress, especially in English Language Arts. An
administrator explained that the English Language Arts department is currently working on increasing the rigor of writing assignments across grades by assigning longer, more complex tasks that will better prepare students to write papers in college. In addition, district leaders discussed the need to establish College and Career Readiness indicators that are not based on the TAKS. A district leader noted: “We are looking at how to use measurements of rigor beyond TAKS. Scores on AP, SAT, and the ACT are all possible indicators. It’s confusing when we tell our schools to look beyond TAKS and set more ambitious goals than TAKS passing rates, yet we still use TAKS commended rates and TAKS CCR rates to measure success. A 2300 (TAKS score) is not the only indicator of whether a student is college and career ready.”

In interviews, some AP teachers explained that the curriculum of the Pre-AP classes does not always align well with the AP curriculum; the lack of alignment leads to students entering AP classes without the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in more rigorous courses. Observed one teacher: “I think the district needs to put in place some more concrete teaching and learning standards for Pre-AP. Right now, some of the Pre-AP courses are not nearly rigorous enough to prepare students for AP.” District administrators explained that they understand these concerns and are taking steps to address them. For example, district administrators are sending Pre-AP teachers to training on College Board’s AP instructional strategies, while encouraging content staff at the district level to integrate such strategies into the Pre-AP CPGs.

In addition, district leaders indicated that they are working to strengthen alignment of teaching and learning across school levels and within feeder patterns. The district will be training Lead Principals throughout the year on PreK-12 vertical articulation and curriculum planning, beginning with science. An administrator explained: “Science gets lots of attention at the tested grades and not in other grades. We are going to show principals how to take a particular curricular strand and stretch it across grade levels.” Observed one district leader: “The Lead Principal role has been strengthened. There is much more collaboration within feeder patterns, and more focus and structure to this collaboration. The Lead Principal position was a missed opportunity in the past.”

Previous NCEA audit reports raised alignment concerns stemming from the fact that the curriculum for AP courses was developed by the College and Career Readiness Department, while the core-content departments develop the Pre-AP courses. The audit review team would recommend that district leaders continue to strengthen the alignment of Pre-AP to AP courses.
Established Practices: Critical Action #3

Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Critical Action
District leaders provide detailed resources that clarify the district’s written curriculum.

The resources available on the district’s Curriculum Central portal provide substantial guidance to teachers about what to teach. In the five years since the original NCEA audit, the district has continued to enrich the resources offered on Curriculum Central. The CPGs now include a wide variety of resources designed to help teachers deliver the written curriculum effectively, including model lessons and labs, multimedia resources such as links to video or audio presentations, formative assessments, and tiered intervention strategies.

Further curricular clarification is available to teachers through the new feedback mechanisms built into Curriculum Central. In the past, feedback on CPGs or other curricular resources were filtered through administrators of the website. Now feedback is submitted directly to instructional coaches and supervisors. Curriculum Central also includes online forums, blogs and other ways for content staff at the district level to answer teachers’ questions. These resources are new and not widely used across the district, but several teachers did express their appreciation for these new ways to interact with content specialists. The added communication and feedback opportunities may also prove to be especially useful for schools that have not been assigned instructional coaches by the district.

While in previous years, many of the district’s portable classroom buildings did not have Internet access, the district administration seems to have finally addressed this technological gap. In focus groups, teachers in portable buildings reported full Internet
connectivity, and said that they can access district curriculum resources and data tools throughout the school day. In addition, iPhone and iPad applications developed by the district provide teachers with mobile access to Curriculum Central.

**Established Practices: Critical Action #4**

**Theme 2**
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

**Critical Action**
District leaders identify and develop internal candidates for leadership positions.

After studying best practices nationwide, district leaders introduced the Aspiring Principal Program in the summer of 2010. Aimed at current assistant or associate principals, the new 14-month program includes two intensive sessions in the summer and a year-long residency. District administrators explained that the program focuses on offering participants experiential learning. One administrator explained, “In the first summer intensive program, aspiring principals work in a simulated school environment, designed to help create the muscle memory needed for future school leadership.” In the subsequent school year, participants will attend twice-monthly professional development sessions and complete a residency where they work with a mentor principal. Mentor principals are selected by the Learning Community Executive Directors and receive four days of summer training. During the second summer intensive program, participants will receive support and coaching to help them successfully apply for district principal positions. In a focus group, Aspiring Principal participants shared with the audit review team again and again that the program’s coursework was the most valuable training that they had ever received because it was immediately applicable to the needs of district campuses. District leaders are to be highly commended for this programming.

During the 2009-2010 school year, district leaders suspended the Team 1 Dallas Program and spent the year re-thinking their approach to internal leadership development. This decision came from a recognition that Team 1 Dallas was not offering program participants the rigorous training and support needed for successfully competing with external candidates for principal positions.
The first cadre of 20 Aspiring Principal participants was selected through a rigorous interview process that included several performance-based measures of, for example, applicants’ ability to analyze school data and present improvement suggestions, and their ability to offer constructive feedback on a teacher’s classroom performance. Applicants also submitted a portfolio with a resume, letters of recommendation, and leadership artifacts. Applicants had to receive approval from the principal at their current school in order to be considered.

To further develop the district’s leadership pipeline, teacher-leaders can participate in the University of Texas Cooperative Urban Leadership Program (UTCULP). UTCULP is a two-year master’s degree program in educational administration through the University of Texas at Austin. The program was designed collaboratively by school and district leaders in Dallas ISD and education professors from UT-Austin. There are 15 Dallas ISD teachers who just completed the first summer. According to a focus group of UTCULP participants, the program is successfully preparing participants to become secondary school principals in Dallas ISD with its focus on urban school leadership. In time, UTCULP should produce a steady stream of well-prepared school leaders with a strong sense of commitment to Dallas ISD.

District leaders’ work in the area of leadership development represents stronger progress than past efforts to “grow their own” principals. If the quality of the work is sustained in the years to come, these programs will help the district place skilled instructional leaders in all schools and keep talented staff from seeking employment in neighboring districts. One current Aspiring Principal participant noted: “I live in the suburbs, and I drive through lots of other school districts every day to get to Dallas ISD. But after joining this program, I know that I am committed to working in this district for the long term.”
Established Practices: Critical Action #5

Theme 4
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data.

Critical Action
District leaders provide an integrated data management system.

Over the last two to three years of site visits in Dallas ISD, the NCEA audit review team has continued to be impressed by the depth and quality of the tools available in the integrated system of Curriculum Central and MyData Portal. Across the schools visited, teachers and principals described frequent use of data to monitor student progress, adjust instructional strategies, develop intervention plans, and identify school improvement goals. It is clear that after several years of focused work, district leaders have succeeded in institutionalizing a culture where data analysis informs decision-making at the district, school, and classroom levels. For the 2010-2011 school year, the district’s data dashboards have an additional set of resources that administrators, teachers, and counselors can use to monitor a student’s college-readiness indicators. For example, one Learning Community Executive Director explained that she asked counselors in her schools to use the dashboards to look at achievement data and determine if each student was enrolled in the most rigorous courses possible.
**Established Practices: Critical Action #6**

**Theme 4**

**Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data.**

**Critical Action**

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

In previous years, teachers expressed concerns about the quality and curricular alignment of district benchmarks, despite the fact that district-level content-area staff members were confident of strong alignment. The district has continued to encourage teachers to access the benchmark blueprints on *Curriculum Central*, which show how each test item corresponds to particular sections of the *CPGs*. When conducting focus groups, the audit review team found that teachers who were familiar with the blueprints were the most likely to report strong alignment between the benchmarks and the district curriculum. As district administrators continue to encourage teachers to review the blueprints, alignment concerns will likely be addressed.

In addition to the benchmark blueprints, district leaders provide rich data tools on *MyData Portal* to allow teachers and school administrators to analyze results from formative assessments and to use these results to improve instruction and tailor interventions. These data tools include summary information such as item analysis and templates that group student results by curricular expectation. The district also provides tools that allow teachers to track a student’s performance on particular objectives over multiple grade levels.

The 2009 audit report raised concerns regarding discussions among district leaders about whether the benchmarks should test the district curriculum or readiness for the TAKS exam. As the audit review team explained in the 2009 report, “This debate perplexed the district is piloting a set of *Solution Manuals*, currently available for core curriculum benchmark assessments in Grades 3 through 8, which gives detailed information about each test item and explains why a student might have picked an incorrect answer. Teachers at some of the elementary and middle schools visited mentioned that *Solution Manuals* were extremely helpful for the task of analyzing their students’ benchmark results.
reviewers, as the apparent conclusion was to establish a false dichotomy between the possible goals of the benchmark program, and to situate the district’s assessment program squarely at one end. In reality, the objectives tested on the TAKS represent a sub-set of the curriculum, not a completely separate set of learning goals." District administrators indicated that correcting this perceived false dichotomy is still a work in progress, but one that is clearly a priority among district leaders. “We have convened a working group of principals, teachers and executive directors to discuss and clarify the purposes of the benchmark,” noted one administrator. “I think that this might be the year when we really get a handle on this issue. Our Chief Academic Officer really wants to focus on this.”
Developing Practices: 7 Critical Actions

The seven Critical Actions highlighted below, and on the following page, represent the Developing Practices in the Dallas Independent School District. Developing Practices include those Critical Actions where evidence suggested that the district’s practices were under development. District leaders are actively developing the practices noted in this section, yet additional time is needed for the practices to be institutionalized. As a result, reviewers have provided less detailed information relative to these practices.

Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

(continued on next page)
Theme 4
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

District Core Practice

- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool, and layered professional development.
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning.
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students.

Critical Actions for this District Practice

- District leaders provide an integrated data management system.
- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders analyze student performance data regularly with principals.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.

Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

District Core Practice

- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool, and layered professional development.
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning.
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students.

Critical Actions for this District Practice

- District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district's written curriculum.
- District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district's written curriculum.
- District leaders provide diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the district's written curriculum.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.
Leverage Points: 7 Critical Actions

As noted previously, the audit review team focused most intensely on district practices that were identified as possibly containing valuable Leverage Points. Therefore, in the following section of the report, the review team provides more detailed information organized by Critical Action.

Each Critical Action in this section is further defined by a number of rubrics. Each rubric contains a three-point scale representing the practices that are the farthest from higher performing school systems to the practices that are the closest to higher performing school systems. For the practices in the Leverage Points category, rubrics have been included and will be used to structure the report findings. The rating that the reviewers assigned by rubric is highlighted. Recommendations for action are based on these ratings.

Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals
**Leverage Points: Critical Action #1**

**Theme 1**
**Student Learning: Expectations & Goals**

**Critical Action**
District leaders require that the district's written curriculum is the taught curriculum in every classroom.

**Rubric #1**
**Expectations**

**Findings:** In general, the audit review team found that the district sends a clear message that the written curriculum must be taught in all district schools. In interviews, district leaders asked reviewers to determine if any Learning Communities had begun to diverge from the district's curriculum in small aspects.
While reviewers did note slight curricular sequencing differences from the district-established implementation calendars in some Learning Communities, it is important to note that Learning Communities are still committed to the district's curriculum.

If the district’s benchmark assessment system is indeed tightly aligned to the district curriculum, then any divergence from the curriculum scope and sequence should be immediately evident in benchmark results. The audit review team urges district administrators to closely monitor benchmark results for these early warning indicators, and to intervene when evidence suggests that a particular Learning Community or school is teaching the written curriculum out of sequence.

**Rubric #2**

**Accountability**

**Findings:** When executive directors have fully bought into the importance of delivering the curriculum as written, the structure of Learning Communities helps to create accountability for curricular implementation. Learning Community Executive Directors frequently visit classrooms to check for curricular implementation and discuss any questions or concerns with principals. In interviews, executive directors were able to describe how they monitor curriculum implementation in their schools. For example, one executive director explained that he brings the *Curriculum Planning Guides* with him when he visits classes, to ensure that the written curriculum is being implemented as intended. Another executive director shared: “I expect to see the *Curriculum Planning Guides* being used in all classrooms. I expect principals and teachers to be familiar with upcoming CPGs, not just the ones currently being taught, and I monitor this very closely.” Executive directors also explained that they were quick to meet with principals when they saw evidence that the curriculum was not being implemented correctly.

However, as mentioned, these monitoring processes will serve the intended purpose only if the executive directors are fully committed to thorough implementation of the district’s written curriculum in every school and classroom.
Recommendation #1

Critical Action
District leaders require that the district’s written curriculum is the taught curriculum in every classroom.

• Continually build the commitment of all Learning Community Executive Directors and district staff to a laser-like focus on the district’s written curriculum. Based on NCEA’s extensive research, one thing is absolutely certain: If all students in the Dallas Independent School District are to achieve high standards, district leaders must provide a highly cohesive, laser-like focus on a written curriculum that is completely supported through all instructional programs and materials. The complete support of a written curriculum requires a prerequisite that only few large urban district leadership teams have been able to address: overcoming philosophical differences, political and personal ambitions, and individual agendas; developing a fierce collaboration across district leaders that refuses to allow adult differences to interrupt student learning; and accepting that, despite true personal or philosophical differences, student learning can only ultimately be best served by a united, stable, and transparent leadership team.

• Build the skills and capacity of all district leaders to collaborate. This facet of the recommendation is included here (as opposed to within Theme 2) because it is very difficult to establish high fidelity in ensuring the written curriculum is the taught curriculum in a large district when the communication and collaboration skills of district leaders are not exceptional. Leaders in higher performing school systems ensure that structures are in place to continually work through the differences to reach a united position for the district. This type of collaboration among very strong leaders is rare and requires enormous commitment and targeted training to strengthen the leaders’ skills to engage collaboratively.
Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

District Practice
Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development.

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development.
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning.
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students.

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.
- District leaders identify and develop internal candidates for leadership positions.
- District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.
- District leaders design focused professional development for new teachers centered on the district's curriculum, instruction and assessment system.
- District leaders create the infrastructure for collaboration as a primary professional development strategy at the district, school and classroom levels.
- District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.
- District leaders focus professional development on understanding, teaching and assessing the district's written curriculum.

Leverage Points
#2
#3
#4
Leverage Points: Critical Action #2

Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Critical Action
District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.

District Core Practice

Critical Actions for this District Practice

Rubric #1
Recruitment Process

Findings: In interviews, district administrators noted that finding qualified principal candidates, especially for the district’s high schools, remains a challenge. This is true for school systems across the country. District leaders may want to organize efforts to actively recruit candidates with proven student performance outcomes, either from within or outside the district. The Human Resources Department posts all open positions, and the Learning
Community Executive Directors work with campuses to develop a Principal Profile and detail the selection criteria. By adding formal processes to recruit applicants from higher performing schools outside the district, district leaders can enhance this practice.

**Rubric #2**
Selection Process

**Findings:** After applicants for principal positions go through an initial screening, the selected candidates are invited to interview with a panel that includes the Learning Community Executive Director, a representative from the district teaching and learning staff, a school leadership representative, a Human Resources representative, parents, school staff members, and community members. The district-developed interview process asks applicants to prepare a 45-minute presentation to the panel, addressing the school’s data and profile. The interview process also includes the completion of an in-basket activity that asks the candidate to engage in problem-solving, in addition to a standard question-and-answer session. Applicants submit a writing sample as part of their initial application.

**Rubric #3**
Selection Process

**Findings:** District leaders are not the ones developing a standard principal interview protocol that is used for all open positions. Instead, members of the interview panel develop their own questions and evaluate candidates based on a principal profile that is developed at the school level, based on district-provided guidelines. The profiles must identify the
school’s specific needs in the areas of instructional leadership, fiscal management, personnel management, organizational management and procedures, professional growth and development, school climate, student management, and school and community relations. Principals are asked to discuss their thoughts on standards-based instruction only if the topics appear on the school profile. The audit review team encourages district leaders to create a common core set of questions for interviewing and selecting principals that includes examination of candidates’ knowledge of standards-based instruction. These core questions can then be supplemented by the current process.
Recommendation #2

Critical Action
Critical Action: District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.

• Begin to develop a robust system for recruiting top principal candidates for the district. Examine all of the possible ways to identify new candidates for leadership positions (in addition to developing your own internal candidates). Consider contacting and recruiting principals from across the state, or even across the nation, who are achieving stronger results with similar student populations. Most candidates will be extremely flattered by the attention, and the geographical location of the district is certainly a plus. Remember that the single strongest recruitment tool, however, is the district’s reputation for supporting and developing leaders. Leaders in the highest performing urban districts in the nation often report attracting very strong applicant pools for the principalship because aspiring leaders seek to learn from the best.

• Measure each candidate’s knowledge of and experience leading standards-based instruction. For example, ask each candidate to explain the following statement: *Clear and specific standards aligned with appropriate assessments forge the foundation for all school improvement work.* You could also ask the candidates to discuss the primary benefits of standards-based instruction. (Remember to listen for mention of benefits related to teacher collaboration such as teachers knowing exactly what students need to learn, where they need to improve, and what they should work on with colleagues.) While the Interview Summary Form currently used by district leaders for principal interviews provides some structure for feedback, it is extremely general at best. We would strongly encourage district leaders to provide interviewers with carefully vetted questions that are tightly aligned with highly detailed rubrics relative to each specific question.
Leverage Points: Critical Action #3

**Theme 2**
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

**Critical Action**
District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.

**District Core Practice**

- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development.
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning.
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students.

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**

- District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.
- District leaders identify and develop internal candidates for leadership positions.
- District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.
- District leaders design focused professional development for new teachers centered on the district’s curriculum, instruction and assessment system.
- District leaders create the infrastructure for collaboration as a primary professional development strategy at the district, school and classroom levels.
- District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.
- District leaders focus professional development on understanding, teaching and assessing the district’s written curriculum.

**Rubric #1**
Recruitment Process

- District leaders publicize openings for teaching positions.
- District leaders have a traditional recruitment process (e.g., host district job fairs) to identify teachers for listed openings.
- District leaders employ a well-structured, aggressive recruitment process (e.g., attend college job fairs nationwide) to develop a talented teacher pool for school openings.

**Findings:** Based on a review of interviews and the district’s teacher-recruitment calendar, the audit team determined that human resources staff search throughout the country, as well as internationally, to fill vacant teaching positions. District administrators recruit teachers at job fairs throughout the United States and conduct interviews at multiple university placement centers within Texas. In addition, district administrators travel to Puerto Rico and Mexico to recruit bilingual teachers.
Rubric #2
Recruitment Process

Findings: The audit review team encourages district leaders to actively recruit teachers from higher performing schools and establish teacher recruitment as the responsibility of everyone in the district rather than simply the job of the Human Resources Department. A district leader explained that the district currently faces a shortage of highly skilled and highly effective teachers. Again, this problem is present for virtually all school leaders in the country.

Rubric #3
Recruitment Process

Findings: In addition to working with the Teach for America program to fill hard-to-staff teaching positions, the district maintains its own alternative certification program. Dallas ISD’s alternative certification program provides participants with the training required for teaching certification. Participants complete an intensive summer program and serve as intern teachers during their first year, while they complete the certification process. In interviews, several principals reported that they were very pleased with the content knowledge and teaching skills demonstrated by the teachers who came to their schools through the district’s alternative certification program.
Rubric #4
Recruitment Process

Findings: According to district documents, for the 2010-2011 school year, Dallas ISD received a total of 2,822 applications for approximately 740 teaching positions. Job fair attendees accounted for 1,730 of the received applications, and online applicants accounted for the remaining 1,092. This represented a sizeable increase over the 2009-2010 school year, when the district received a total of 694 applications. District administrators explained that their applicant pool was larger for 2010-2011 due to the weak economic climate, which greatly increased the number of job seekers.

Rubric #5
Authority to Select

Findings: Normal district procedures grant principals considerable input into teacher selection. Teacher candidates go through a district-level pre-screening, and district administrators submit a list of approved candidates to principals. Principals select candidates to interview from this list and choose which candidate to hire, as long as the selected candidate passes the district’s background check. However, due to recent staffing adjustments at campuses, the district administration has had to maintain a pool of current district teachers without a placement.
Recommendation #3

Critical Action
District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.

* Expand current recruitment efforts with very targeted actions. The audit review team commends the district’s current efforts to recruit a talented teacher pool, most notably the effort to recruit bilingual teachers internationally. Reviewers recommend that the HR Department now focus all efforts on supplementing these recruitment practices with targeted actions designed to attract particularly well-qualified candidates. Even very small steps toward this end can pay high dividends. For example, begin to establish contacts with professors at the top ten colleges of education in the country. Set the goal of recruiting one of the strongest students from each of these colleges to Dallas ISD each year. Or, identify the highest performing comparable schools in ten additional states (lists of higher performing schools are easily accessible through state departments of education) and establish contact with team leaders in one school in each state. Use this contact person to identify and reach out to outstanding teachers for potential recruitment. Leaders in higher performing systems typically observe, “The very best candidates for most of our positions are teachers who are not necessarily looking for jobs.” While the examples above may not be the best fit for Dallas ISD, the point is that extensions of current district practices should be targeted and intentional.

* Build Dallas ISD’s reputation for providing intense development and support for teachers. This long-term investment is certainly the district’s best recruitment strategy. Leaders in higher performing districts state that candidates are attracted by the district’s reputation for a commitment to excellence for students and for helping all teachers assist students in reaching this level of achievement. Teachers in higher performing districts are regularly positive about the role of the district in developing their skills. The audit reviewers recommend that district leaders in Dallas ISD collect data relative to new teachers’ opinions and perceptions regarding district practices as a way to evaluate future programs and practices.

* Consider potential programs for current teachers who are in placement pools. Dallas ISD leaders do not have control over requiring that principals select teachers from current non-placed teachers (rather than allowing principals to select from an open candidate pool). What leaders may have more control over is how to make that non-placed teaching pool more attractive to building principals. Explore the possibilities of offering non-placed teachers rigorous and selective (perhaps voluntary) professional development opportunities for high-needs instructional areas within the district.
Leverage Points: Critical Action #4

Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Critical Action
District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.

Rubric #1
Resource Allocation

Findings: As outlined in the district’s “Leading and Learning: Systems of Support” plan, the district has established an instructional coaching model that provides the greatest volume of support to schools with the greatest academic needs. As a result, higher performing schools in the district do not have regular access to instructional coaches.
Several Learning Communities have explored creative ways to expand access to coaching support, and district leaders may want to consider adopting some of the methods districtwide. For example, in one elementary Learning Community where over one half of the schools are not assigned coaches, instructional coaches lead after-school “Curriculum Planning Guide Institutes” every three weeks. Teachers and coaches use these sessions to review upcoming curricular units and plan effective instructional strategies to deliver the curriculum. The Institutes are held only at the schools without assigned coaches, but teachers at every school in the Learning Community are invited to attend.

**Rubric #2**

**Instructional Coach Selection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District leaders are concerned that teachers might be uncomfortable if some teachers were identified as coaches of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District leaders select the best instructional coaches who apply for posted positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District leaders recruit instructional coaches based on proven student achievement results in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings:** The audit review team did not discern that coaches are hired based on proven student achievement results, and opinions expressed about coaching quality and expertise were mixed. One Learning Community Executive Director observed, “Coaches have a vast array of experience and expertise levels, and some of them are too weak in their content knowledge.” However, other executive directors were confident of their coaches’ effectiveness and were disappointed that the coaches were not available to more schools.

**Rubric #3**

**Instructional Coach Selection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District leaders encourage principals to tell teachers to share what they learn with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District leaders encourage instructional coaches to share what they learn with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District leaders train instructional coaches to increase knowledge sharing about curriculum and instruction within and across schools and at the district level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: The district’s instructional coaching model includes some feedback loops which ask coaches to share their experiences and suggestions with teachers, school leaders, and district administrators. In addition, some executive directors described how they bring together all the coaches in their Learning Communities to share their experiences and ideas.
Recommendation #4

Critical Action
District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.

• Allocate the resources to provide all schools access to instructional coaches in core-content areas. Understanding that teachers often learn best from other teachers, leaders in higher performing systems carefully craft the position of instructional coach to ensure maximum impact. District leaders must ensure high-quality coaching across all schools. Have instructional coaches from all buildings meet centrally to develop the position. Clarify that instructional coaches will work directly with teachers – modeling and monitoring lessons, clarifying the curriculum, analyzing data, and studying instructional strategies. It is very important to communicate through this position that every teacher in the district is to be a learner – coaches are not focusing only on teachers who are experiencing difficulty in the classroom.

• Recruit instructional coaches based on proven student achievement results in the classroom. Providing instructional coaches for teachers is an important step toward providing meaningful, job-embedded professional development for teachers. Ensuring that the chosen instructional coaches have both credibility with their peers and the capacity to help those peers develop their own instructional strategies is absolutely essential. Make “a proven track record of student achievement gains” part of the instructional coach’s job description.

• Train instructional coaches to enable them to increase knowledge sharing about curriculum and instruction within and across schools as well as at the district level. The heart and soul of a professional learning community rests on the ability to share openly and honestly regarding all aspects of the teaching-learning process. In average-performing schools, leaders and teachers often mistake cooperation for collaboration. The latter requires strong skill development – often greatly facilitated by instructional coaches. Are teachers openly discussing their student performance data and engaged in reflective inquiry with peers about how student performance can be improved? Do teachers easily share strategies and techniques without worrying that they may be seen as bragging? These are just a few of the indicators coaches can monitor to ensure real collaboration is developing.
Theme 3
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

District Practice
Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students.

District Core Practice
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

Critical Actions for this District Practice
- District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.
- District leaders provide the necessary support and resources to implement each adopted instructional program.

#5  #6
Leverage Points
**Leverage Points: Critical Action #5**

**Theme 3**
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

**Critical Action**
District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.

**District Core Practice**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.
- District leaders provide the necessary support and resources to implement each adopted instructional program.

**Rubric #1**
Effectiveness Review

**Findings:** All new textbooks, instructional programs, and materials are evaluated by district content-area staff, teachers, school administrators, and the Chief Academic Officer prior to adoption or approval. District documents outlining the review process for both textbooks and supplemental instructional programs and materials show that one of the criteria examined is the use and success of the product in other school districts.
Rubric #2
Effectiveness Review

Findings: For districtwide textbook adoptions in core content areas, such as the new elementary reading materials adopted during the 2009-2010 school year, the district has a well-developed review process that includes significant teacher feedback. All content teachers are asked to serve on a Campus Textbook Committee for each applicable adoption for each campus. The committees have the opportunity to study potential new programs, discuss the programs with their peers, and vote on the final selection. Campus votes are forwarded to a Content Advisory Subcommittee and then the Districtwide Textbook Adoption Committee. According to district documents, the Textbook Adoption Committee “considers the districtwide votes of the Campus Textbook Committees, recommendations of the Content Advisory Subcommittees, and all public testimony, written or oral… If the Districtwide Textbook Adoption Committee should vote to recommend a text other than the one receiving the majority of the affected teachers’ voting tally, then the Districtwide Textbook Adoption Committee shall present written documentation justifying its selection to the Board of Trustees.”

District leaders explained during interviews that the Curriculum Advisory Council was repurposed for the 2010-2011 school year to focus entirely on the African-American Success Initiative. However, Content Advisory Subcommittees within the Curriculum Advisory Council remain in place to review instructional programs. Teachers are nominated by their principal to serve on these committees.

For instructional programs and materials to be used as supplemental or for enrichment and intervention purposes, all recommendations must be reviewed and approved first by the appropriate content directors and specialists before the recommendations are submitted for feedback to the district’s Curriculum Advisory Council, which is comprised of teachers, campus administrators, and district academic leaders. Final approval is required from the Chief Academic Officer.
Rubric #3  
Alignment Confirmation

Findings: The formal process to review and select instructional materials for supplemental, enrichment, or intervention purposes involves content directors and specialists who check for alignment with the district curriculum and the current district strategic plan. As always, changes in leadership in key positions may challenge the best-developed processes. The Teaching and Learning Department's current leaders explained that they were strongly committed to restoring the integrity of the review process.

Rubric #4  
Alignment Confirmation

Findings: As the review process for districtwide textbook adoptions involves Content Advisory Subcommittees and Campus Textbook Committees at each campus, district leaders provide questions to guide the evaluation process. One of the guiding questions asks for evidence that the textbook “addresses the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), supports district curriculum, aligns with Campus Improvement Plan strategies/activities, etc.” It was not clear to the reviewers whether the Content Advisory Subcommittees or the Campus Textbook Committee truly evaluated each program in-depth to confirm alignment.

For supplemental, enrichment, and intervention programs, content directors and specialists
look at each program’s alignment with the district curriculum and the district strategic plan, and ask for further feedback from the relevant Content Advisory Committee.

**Rubric #5**
Alignment Confirmation

**Findings:** The *Curriculum Planning Guides* developed for each six weeks of instruction link district learning standards to activities in the adopted textbooks. Each *CPG* includes a column labeled “Written Curriculum” side by side with a “Taught Curriculum” column that outlines how district instructional resources should be used to teach specific learning standards.
Recommendation #5

Critical Action
District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.

- **Add deep quality checks to current extensive textbook adoption practices.**
  The NCEA reviewers noted the inclusive and extensive process used to adopt all new textbooks in Dallas ISD. Some concern was also noted, however, relative to whether the adoption procedures are more heavily weighted toward process than content. In other words, while almost everyone is involved in the review and approval process, it was difficult for reviewers to identify the necessary and objective components upon which program selections are made (e.g., hard evidence of improved achievement with comparable student populations, or more importantly, hard evidence from pilots of the proposed program within the district itself). As a result of being based on somewhat loosely directed, albeit massive input, the adoption process appears much more susceptible to being influenced by agendas other than student achievement (e.g., one district leader may interpret alignment more loosely than another).

- **Study and select the methodology for piloting textbooks and instructional programs in Dallas ISD.** Many strong urban districts (e.g., Boston Public Schools, Long Beach Unified School District) have established comprehensive piloting procedures prior to the selection of any new instructional program or textbook. The rigor of the piloting procedures and extensive student performance evidence of the results bring high degrees of credibility across staff and parents to the selection processes. The NCEA reviewers recommend that leaders in Dallas ISD select two or three higher performing districts to investigate relative to these practices.
**Theme 3**  
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

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

---

**Rubric #1**

Findings: One major new instructional program adoption in the district for the 2010-2011 school year was the reading program for the elementary grades, and district administrators were quick to admit that initial introduction of the program was problematic. While the district did provide training, teachers across the elementary campuses visited noted that they would like even more professional development relative to the new program.
Rubric #2

Findings: District administrators explained that they realized that the initial training for the new elementary reading program had not been adequate to ensure successful implementation. One administrator noted: “The paradigm shift this program represents is huge. The old reading program used a workbook and used much more of a ‘plug & play’ approach. Now, with the new program, it’s not as packaged. Teachers will have to plan more and collaborate more to successfully implement the program.” District leaders indicated that introducing the new program required content-area staff members to visit numerous schools and train teachers at length about successful implementation. The recognition of this need led to staffing changes in the Reading/English Language Arts Department, although replacement staff had not yet been hired at the time of the audit site visit.

Rubric #3

Findings: Teachers at elementary campuses reported that the district had provided them with resources to help them implement the district’s new reading program. However, in some cases, teachers wished that these resources were more extensive, especially those resources related to the Writer’s Workshop and Daily 5 sections of the program. A teacher observed, “I think that the Writer’s Workshop and Daily 5 have the potential to be really useful, but the district has not explained how to implement them, and the CPGs don’t seem to have many resources showing how to integrate these activities into the classroom.”
Recommendation #6

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

• Provide extensive training for all teachers when new instructional programs are adopted. Leaders in higher performing districts ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about and comfortable using all new instructional materials. To accomplish this, they state that they provide training before the teachers leave for the summer or in an early-summer extended contract. Teachers in average- to low-performing systems often complain that they get new materials when they return for the start of the new school year.

• Provide ongoing support throughout the school year to ensure the successful implementation of new instructional programs or materials. Leaders in higher performing school systems often indicate that they schedule a district training every three to six weeks throughout the year to provide detailed and interactive sessions for teachers using the materials. These sessions are typically organized by teaching unit and show exactly how the materials can be used most effectively to teach the academic objectives of the district’s written curriculum.
Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

District Practice
Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to increase learning for all students.

**District Core Practice**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district.
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets.
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance.

**Leverage Points**

© 2010 by ACT, Inc. All rights reserved.
Leverage Points: Critical Action #7

**Theme 5**
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

**Critical Action**
District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.

**District Core Practice**
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to accelerate learning for all students

**Critical Actions for this District Practice**
- District leaders study and share the most effective instructional practices in the district
- District leaders quickly identify and assist schools that are not reaching their academic targets
- District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level
- District leaders adjust curriculum and instructional resources based on student performance

**Rubric #1**
Timely Support

**Findings:** The district offers a summer school program for elementary students at risk of being retained, summer TAKS Academies for fifth- and eighth-grade students who have repeatedly failed the TAKS exam, and summer credit recovery programs for middle and high school students. The district also offers an Early Start program for entering sixth-grade and ninth-grade students, targeting specifically Title I comprehensive high schools. Students
in the *Early Start* program received additional instruction in the hard-to-master objectives, concepts, and content taught during the first six weeks of the district curriculum in the core content areas. Program attendance was voluntary and not restricted only to students who had performed at low levels during the preceding school year. However, an internal district evaluation of the high school portion of the *Early Start* program, conducted during the course of the 2009-2010 school year, found that participating ninth graders were more likely to be lower achievers prior to participation.

The results of the district evaluation suggest that these support programs should not be limited only to the summer months. At the end of the first six weeks of the 2009-2010 school year, student participants were passing core content courses at rates near or above their ninth-grade peers. Unfortunately, by the end of the first semester, the participants’ passing rates were consistently below those of their peers. *Early Start* participants were less likely to pass both the Math and Reading TAKS than their non-participating peers. The evaluation indicated that program impacts could be extended if participants were able to continue previewing upcoming district curriculum content over the course of the school year, perhaps by adding after-school or weekend sessions to *Early Start*.

**Rubric #2**

*Aligned and Layered Support*

---

**Findings:** According to a district administrator, the 2010-2011 school year marks the district's first year of using a comprehensive *Response to Intervention (RTI)* model. He explained: "We presented our district *RTI* plan at the 2020 Dallas training [for principals] this fall. We have defined all three tiers of intervention for principals, though the intervention strategies we’ve developed are very general right now. Our focus for interventions this year is really on getting our formative assessment and feedback systems strengthened, and on providing multiple entry points for high-level tasks, so that the tasks are accessible for all students."

Learning Community Executive Directors indicated that they are beginning to use the *RTI* model to help their principals develop their own intervention plans. "As a system, we are just starting *RTI*," explained one executive director. "Our principals started working on their *RTI* plans last spring, and they’re due to the district on September 21, 2010." Another executive director noted: "Principals are generally very good at collaborating and sharing their schools'
intervention plans with me and with other principals in the Learning Community. After the first benchmark results come back, I’m planning to review results and discuss data with my principals. I want to make sure that students are selected for participation in interventions based on data.”

**Rubric #3**
Aligned and Layered Support

**Findings:** District administrators include tiered intervention strategies in the CPGs. In interviews, teachers observed that they had reviewed and sometimes used the interventions included in the CPGs, but they also noted that the interventions tend to be repetitive, with the same strategies suggested across multiple CPGs. The audit review team reviewed the CPGs, and on the whole found that the district-provided intervention were repetitive.
Recommendation #7

Critical Action
District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.

- Provide ongoing district-level support for below-grade-level students beginning in the first week of the school year or the first week of any new course. Reviewers are highly supportive of the findings from the district’s internal evaluation of the Early Start program. These findings led to the recommendation that Early Start add after-school or weekend sessions. This recommendation is, in fact, strongly consistent with the practices observed in higher performing school systems.

Beyond the efforts to create powerful summer-school experiences, develop customized learning opportunities based on the specific gaps students have in prerequisite knowledge and skills as they enter the school year. These types of targeted, just-in-time interventions can occur through after-school programs, Saturday school, or online academies. By offering these sessions to students districtwide, district leaders provide a valuable service to students while meaningfully supplementing the intervention efforts at the classroom and school levels. It is also noteworthy that NCEA researchers have found that, in higher performing systems, extended learning opportunities are rarely voluntary—but almost exclusively required—for students who are performing below grade level.

- Provide much greater structure and direction for the use and development of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. The development and/or selection of a structured intervention model—including pyramids of intervention—is a strong and positive step on the part of Dallas ISD leaders. District leaders must continue developing the strong and consistent district training and support for the use of the model to ensure it provides the type of well-organized and layered interventions that lead to real changes in student achievement. NCEA reviewers encourage leaders in Dallas ISD to determine exactly what type of support would provide both executive directors and building principals with the knowledge and skills to make the district’s intervention practice exemplary.
# Appendices

## Appendix A. List of District Documents Requested and Submitted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>District Documents Requested</th>
<th>Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Learning:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations &amp; Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current District Strategic Plan and/or District Improvement Plan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current central office organization chart</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written district curriculum for all grades in core subjects or link to location on district website</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full list of all supporting materials developed by the district to help teachers implement the written curriculum, with at least one sample of each kind of support material (or link to online location). These materials may include:</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pacing calendars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information on curricular alignment across grades and subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Documents showing how the district curriculum aligns with state standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specified learning outcomes for each grade and subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information to help teachers prioritize amongst state standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standards-aligned model lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of training sessions used to orient new teachers and school leaders to the district curriculum, including training agendas and copies of training materials distributed to teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any handouts, websites, or other materials used to communicate with parents about the content of the district curriculum, and their child’s desired learning outcomes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation related to the curriculum development, review, and revision process. Documents may include:</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedule or cycle for review in each subject areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agendas from curriculum review meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• List of district personnel involved in curriculum development, review, and revision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Criteria used to evaluate curricular effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District high school graduation requirements</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of any district programs designed to increase college and career readiness amongst its students</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>District Documents Requested</td>
<td>Submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Selection, Leadership,</td>
<td>Principal recruitment plan, including information about where and how new principals are</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Capacity-Building</td>
<td>recruited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents related to the principal interview and selection process. These documents may</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>include:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Principal interview protocols, including descriptions of any performance-based components</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• List of those involved in the interview and selection process (i.e. district administrators,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teachers, parents)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List of current principals in the district, length of time they have served in the position,</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and the job they held immediately before becoming principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of any district leadership training programs (i.e. those designed to help</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>promising staff members earn administrative certification.) Documentation may include:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Selection criteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program curriculum and completion requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Statistics about the number of staff members who have passed through the program and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>then earned certification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Statistics about staff members who have successfully completed the program and been</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hired as principals in the district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents related to the teacher recruitment and selection process. These documents may</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>include:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• List of places the district recruits (job fairs, etc.) and/or description of recruitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Criteria used by the district to select candidates for interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview protocols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Size of applicant pool and number of teacher openings each year, for the last 2-3 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of any alternative teacher certification process offered by the district, along</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with statistics detailing the number of alternatively-certified teachers hired in the last</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>few years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>District Documents Requested</th>
<th>Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity-Building | Documents related the district’s professional development plan for teachers and administrators. Documents may include:  
  - District PD calendars  
  - Descriptions of district-mandated training for teachers, school administrators, and district administrators  
  - Description of all PD activities required for new teachers  
  - Descriptions, agendas, and sample materials from district-sponsored professional development sessions  
  - Descriptions of any follow-up activities that occur after a PD session is complete, designed to measure whether the new materials and/or strategies taught are actually being implemented in the classroom  
  - Copies of any evaluations, internal or external, commissioned by district leaders to measure PD knowledge transfer and overall effectiveness  
  
  Documentation of the district’s instructional coaching program(s). These documents may include:  
  - District-developed Coaching Model  
  - Detailed instructional coach job description, written by district administrators  
  - Interview protocols used when hiring new instructional coaches  
  - Description and agendas for training provided to instructional coaches  
  - Instructional coaches’ assignment list for the 2009-10 school year. Should contain detail about the amount of time spent by each coach per campus  
  
  Description of any district-mandated collaborative time, including sample master schedules, showing when and how often (e.g. daily, weekly) teachers are able to collaborate during the school day | X         |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>District Documents Requested</th>
<th>Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Tools: Programs &amp; Strategies</strong></td>
<td>List of all district instructional programs currently mandated districtwide</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents related to the process for selecting, approving, evaluating, and adjusting instruction programs. Documents could include:</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Description of the steps of the selection process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Agendas of selection committee meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• List of selection committee members, by role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• List of criteria used by the team to make adjustments to programs currently in use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documentation developed by the district showing how instructional programs currently in use align with the district’s written curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copies of resources provided to teachers to assist with implementation of instructional programs. District can provide hard copies, or a link to their location online.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, &amp; Use of Data</strong></td>
<td>Detailed description of district’s student data management system, including a temporary login/password for the district’s online data system, if applicable</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of state assessment reports provided to school administrators and teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of student data reports provided to teachers by the district</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of the district’s benchmark testing program. Documents may include:</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• District benchmark testing schedule (all applicable grades &amp; subjects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sample of a district benchmark assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examples of how benchmark results are reported to school leaders and teachers, along with timeframes for distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guidance or instructions provided by the district to school leaders and teachers about how to use benchmark test data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Alignment documents or maps distributed to teachers, explaining how benchmark tests align with the curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diagnostic assessment procedures for students new to the district</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District guidelines for the school improvement planning process</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal/school evaluation instruments</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher evaluation instruments</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of district leadership team meeting agendas</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>District Documents Requested</td>
<td>Submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition, Intervention, &amp; Adjustment</td>
<td>Observation protocols used by district administrators for classroom visits</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of district intervention programs for low-performing schools</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample of intervention plan currently in effect of a low-performing district school, if available</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of district intervention programs for struggling principals</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of district intervention programs for struggling teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of district intervention programs for struggling students. Documents may include:</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Template for written intervention plans for individual students who are below grade level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Curriculum and planning documents used for student intervention programs (e.g. Saturday School), detailing what is taught and how the material aligns with the district curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B. Site Visit Schedule

#### Monday, September 20, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Auditor 1</th>
<th>Auditor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m.-9:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Jacqueline Landry, Executive Director for Professional Development</td>
<td>Jennifer Parvin, Director of School Leadership and Administrative Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 a.m.-10:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Lisa Deveaux, Executive Director of the Northeast Elementary Learning Community</td>
<td>Robert Edison, Social Studies Director/Acting Director of English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 a.m.-11:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Camille Malone, Mathematics Director</td>
<td>Robert Edison, Social Studies Director/Acting Director of English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Craig Welle, Enrichment Director</td>
<td>Angela Pittman, Executive Director for Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15 p.m.-2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Paul Sugg, Science Director</td>
<td>Claudia Rodriguez, Executive Director for Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15 p.m.-3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Shirley Ison-Newsome, Executive Director of the Southeast Elementary Learning Community</td>
<td>Elizabeth Casas, Executive Director for Multi-Language Enrichment Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 p.m.-4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Leslie Williams, Executive Director of the Central Secondary Learning Community</td>
<td>Cynthia Goodsell, Executive Director of the West Secondary Learning Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 p.m.-5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Ivonne Durant, Chief Academic Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Tuesday, September 21, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Auditor 1</th>
<th>Auditor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m.-8:45 a.m.</td>
<td>JoAnne Hughes, Teaching and Learning Grant Manager</td>
<td>Liliana Valadez, Executive Director for College and Career Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Auditors 1 and 2: Dr. Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 a.m.-11:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Gilbert Gonzalez, Executive Director of the Southwest Elementary Learning Community</td>
<td>Arnold Viramontes, Chief of Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 p.m.-1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Regina Jones, Executive Director of the East Secondary Learning Community</td>
<td>Dorothy Gomez, Executive Director of the Northwest Elementary Learning Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Auditors 1 and 2: Dr. Donna Micheaux, Chief Administrative Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on next page)
**Wednesday, September 22, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Auditor 1</th>
<th>Auditor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m.-9:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Junkins Elementary School</td>
<td>Arcadia Park Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 a.m.-11:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Kahn Elementary School</td>
<td>Starks Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 p.m.-1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Anson Jones Elementary School</td>
<td>Weiss Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Charles Rice Elementary School</td>
<td>Kimball High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thursday, September 23, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Auditor 1</th>
<th>Auditor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m.-9:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Roosevelt High School</td>
<td>Soto Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 a.m.-11:15 a.m.</td>
<td>O.M. Roberts Elementary School</td>
<td>Gill Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 p.m.-1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Reinhardt Elementary School</td>
<td>Vincent Reyes, Executive Director for Core Curriculum and Instructional Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Rusk Middle School</td>
<td>Spence Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Friday, September 24, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Auditor 1</th>
<th>Auditor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m.-9:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Lagow Elementary School</td>
<td>Booker T. Washington High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 a.m.-11:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Lang Middle School</td>
<td>Jackson Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 p.m.-1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Focus group with participants in the <em>University of Texas Cooperative Urban Leadership Program (UTCULP)</em>.</td>
<td>Focus group with <em>Aspiring Principals</em> participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Seagoville High School</td>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Auditors 1 and 2: Wrap-up interview with Ivonne Durant, Chief Academic Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C. NCEA Core Practice Framework

The Core Practice Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
<th>Theme 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning: Expectations &amp; Goals</td>
<td>Staff Selection, Leadership, &amp; Capacity Building</td>
<td>Instructional Tools: Programs &amp; Strategies</td>
<td>Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, &amp; Use of Data</td>
<td>Recognition, Intervention, &amp; Adjustment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**High-Quality Instruction**

**Classroom Core Practices**
- Teach the district’s written curriculum to the specified level of mastery
- Collaborate in teams focused on student learning
- Use evidence- and standards-based instructional tools to support rigorous learning for all students
- Analyze student data to guide curricular and instructional decisions
- Motivate students through immediate and individualized responses to learning needs

**School Core Practices**
- Set expectations and goals for teaching and learning based on the district’s written curriculum
- Select and develop teachers to ensure high-quality instruction
- Develop a culture of academic rigor anchored by the district’s instructional tools
- Enhance teacher performance and student learning through the use of rich data systems
- Keep academic expectations high by creating a responsive learning environment

**District Core Practices**
- Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master
- Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool and layered professional development
- Provide evidence- and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students
- Develop student assessment and data monitoring systems to promote student learning
- Develop a strategic menu of responses designed to increase learning for all students

**District’s Clear, Prioritized Academic Objectives**

**State Standards**

© 2010 by ACT, Inc. All rights reserved.
Appendix D. Recommendations

The seven Critical Actions reviewed in the Leverage Points section of this report are contained within four of the five themes in the Core Practice Framework: Themes 1, 2, 3, and 5. These seven Critical Actions are presented in the order that they appear in the Framework, not in a recommended order of action for Dallas ISD. That said, Theme 1 is viewed as the foundation for all actions within the Framework; therefore, we would recommend that any Leverage Points Critical Actions within Theme 1 be addressed first.

### Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

**District Practice**

Provide clear, prioritized academic objectives by grade and subject that all students are expected to master.

District leaders in the Dallas Independent School District have worked hard to develop a detailed written curriculum, aligned to rigorous standards. There is ample evidence to suggest that the leaders have accomplished this development task and are in the process of continually revising and strengthening the curriculum. However, as with any implemented system, the real effort is often found to be in protecting coherence and planning for sustainability.

**Recommendation #1**

**Critical Action**

District leaders require that the district’s written curriculum is the taught curriculum in every classroom.

- Continually build the commitment of all Learning Community Executive Directors and district staff to a laser-like focus on the district’s written curriculum. Based on NCEA’s extensive research, one thing is absolutely certain: If all students in the Dallas Independent School District are to achieve high standards, district leaders must provide a highly cohesive, laser-like focus on a written curriculum that is completely supported through all instructional programs and materials. The complete support of a written curriculum requires a prerequisite that only few large urban district leadership teams have been able to address: overcoming philosophical differences, political and personal ambitions, and individual agendas; developing a fierce collaboration across district leaders that refuses to allow adult differences to interrupt student learning; and accepting that, despite true personal or philosophical differences, student learning can only ultimately be best served by a united, stable, and transparent leadership team.
• **Build the skills and capacity of all district leaders to collaborate.** This facet of the recommendation is included here (as opposed to within Theme 2) because it is very difficult to establish high fidelity in ensuring the written curriculum is the taught curriculum in a large district when the communication and collaboration skills of district leaders are not exceptional. Leaders in higher performing school systems ensure that structures are in place to continually work through the differences to reach a united position for the district. This type of collaboration among very strong leaders is rare and requires enormous commitment and targeted training to strengthen the leaders’ skills to engage collaboratively.
Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Decision Making

District Practice
Provide strong principals, a talented teacher pool, and layered professional development.

The next three recommendations—Recommendations 2, 3, and 4—deal with district practices relative to the recruitment, selection, and assignment of skilled principals, teachers, and instructional coaches.

Recommendation #2

Critical Action
Critical Action: District leaders recruit and select principal candidates with proven student performance outcomes.

- Begin to develop a robust system for recruiting top principal candidates for the district. Examine all of the possible ways to identify new candidates for leadership positions (in addition to developing your own internal candidates). Consider contacting and recruiting principals from across the state, or even across the nation, who are achieving stronger results with similar student populations. Most candidates will be extremely flattered by the attention, and the geographical location of the district is certainly a plus. Remember that the single strongest recruitment tool, however, is the district's reputation for supporting and developing leaders. Leaders in the highest performing urban districts in the nation often report attracting very strong applicant pools for the principalship because aspiring leaders seek to learn from the best.

- Measure each candidate's knowledge of and experience leading standards-based instruction. For example, ask each candidate to explain the following statement: Clear and specific standards aligned with appropriate assessments forge the foundation for all school improvement work. You could also ask the candidates to discuss the primary benefits of standards-based instruction. (Remember to listen for mention of benefits related to teacher collaboration such as teachers knowing exactly what students need to learn, where they need to improve, and what they should work on with colleagues.) While the Interview Summary Form currently used by district leaders for principal interviews provides some structure for feedback, it is extremely general at best. We would strongly encourage district leaders to provide interviewers with carefully vetted questions that are tightly aligned with highly detailed rubrics relative to each specific question.
Recommendation #3

Critical Action
District leaders aggressively recruit a talented teacher pool from which principals are given the authority to select teachers.

- **Expand current recruitment efforts with very targeted actions.** The audit review team commends the district’s current efforts to recruit a talented teacher pool, most notably the effort to recruit bilingual teachers internationally. Reviewers recommend that the HR Department now focus all efforts on supplementing these recruitment practices with targeted actions designed to attract particularly well-qualified candidates. Even very small steps toward this end can pay high dividends. For example, begin to establish contacts with professors at the top ten colleges of education in the country. Set the goal of recruiting one of the strongest students from each of these colleges to Dallas ISD each year. Or, identify the highest performing comparable schools in ten additional states (lists of higher performing schools are easily accessible through state departments of education) and establish contact with team leaders in one school in each state. Use this contact person to identify and reach out to outstanding teachers for potential recruitment. Leaders in higher performing systems typically observe, “The very best candidates for most of our positions are teachers who are not necessarily looking for jobs.” While the examples above may not be the *best fit* for Dallas ISD, the point is that extensions of current district practices should be targeted and intentional.

- **Build Dallas ISD’s reputation for providing intense development and support for teachers.** This long-term investment is certainly the district’s best recruitment strategy. Leaders in higher performing districts state that candidates are attracted by the district’s reputation for a commitment to excellence for students and for helping all teachers assist students in reaching this level of achievement. Teachers in higher performing districts are regularly positive about the role of the district in developing their skills. The audit reviewers recommend that district leaders in Dallas ISD collect data relative to teachers’ opinions and perceptions regarding district practices as a way to evaluate future programs and practices.

- **Consider potential programs for current teachers who are in placement pools.** Dallas ISD leaders do not have control over requiring that principals select teachers from current non-placed teachers (rather than allowing principals to select from an open candidate pool). What leaders may have more control over is how to make that non-placed teaching pool more attractive to building principals. Explore the possibilities of offering non-placed teachers rigorous and selective (perhaps voluntary) professional development opportunities for high-needs instructional areas within the district.
Recommendation #4

Critical Action
District leaders allocate resources to ensure that proven instructional coaches are available to all schools.

- Allocate the resources to provide all schools access to instructional coaches in core-content areas. Understanding that teachers often learn best from other teachers, leaders in higher performing systems carefully craft the position of instructional coach to ensure maximum impact. District leaders must ensure high-quality coaching across all schools. Have instructional coaches from all buildings meet centrally to develop the position. Clarify that instructional coaches will work directly with teachers – modeling and monitoring lessons, clarifying the curriculum, analyzing data, and studying instructional strategies. It is very important to communicate through this position that every teacher in the district is to be a learner – coaches are not focusing only on teachers who are experiencing difficulty in the classroom.

- Recruit instructional coaches based on proven student achievement results in the classroom. Providing instructional coaches for teachers is an important step toward providing meaningful, job-embedded professional development for teachers. Ensuring that the chosen instructional coaches have both credibility with their peers and the capacity to help those peers develop their own instructional strategies is absolutely essential. Make “a proven track record of student achievement gains” part of the instructional coach’s job description.

- Train instructional coaches to enable them to increase knowledge sharing about curriculum and instruction within and across schools as well as at the district level. The heart and soul of a professional learning community rests on the ability to share openly and honestly regarding all aspects of the teaching-learning process. In average-performing schools, leaders and teachers often mistake cooperation for collaboration. The latter requires strong skill development – often greatly facilitated by instructional coaches. Are teachers openly discussing their student performance data and engaged in reflective inquiry with peers about how student performance can be improved? Do teachers easily share strategies and techniques without worrying that they may be seen as bragging? These are just a few of the indicators coaches can monitor to ensure real collaboration is developing.
Theme 3
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

District Practice
Provide evidence and standards-based instructional tools that support academic rigor for all students

Recommendation #5 and Recommendation #6 address ways that district leaders can develop stronger practices for the selection and implementation of high-quality instructional programs.

Recommendation #5

Critical Action
District leaders review the effectiveness and confirm the alignment of each instructional program prior to implementation.

- Add deep quality checks to current extensive textbook adoption practices.
  The NCEA reviewers noted the inclusive and extensive process used to adopt all new textbooks in Dallas ISD. Some concern was also noted, however, relative to whether the adoption procedures are more heavily weighted toward process than content. In other words, while almost everyone is involved in the review and approval process, it was difficult for reviewers to identify the necessary and objective components upon which program selections are made (e.g., hard evidence of improved achievement with comparable student populations, or more importantly, hard evidence from pilots of the proposed program within the district itself). As a result of being based on somewhat loosely directed, albeit massive input, the adoption process appears much more susceptible to being influenced by agendas other than student achievement (e.g., one district leader may interpret alignment more loosely than another).

- Study and select the methodology for piloting textbooks and instructional programs in Dallas ISD. Many strong urban districts (e.g., Boston Public Schools, Long Beach Unified School District) have established comprehensive piloting procedures prior to the selection of any new instructional program or textbook. The rigor of the piloting procedures and extensive student performance evidence of the results bring high degrees of credibility across staff and parents to the selection processes. The NCEA reviewers recommend that leaders in Dallas ISD select two or three higher performing districts to investigate relative to these practices.
Recommendation #6

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

• **Provide extensive training for all teachers when new instructional programs are adopted.** Leaders in higher performing districts ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about and comfortable using all new instructional materials. To accomplish this, they state that they provide training before the teachers leave for the summer or in an early-summer extended contract. Teachers in average- to low-performing systems often complain that they get new materials when they return for the start of the new school year.

• **Provide ongoing support throughout the school year to ensure the successful implementation of new instructional programs or materials.** Leaders in higher performing school systems often indicate that they schedule a district training every three to six weeks throughout the year to provide detailed and interactive sessions for teachers using the materials. These sessions are typically organized by teaching unit and show exactly how the materials can be used most effectively to teach the academic objectives of the district’s written curriculum.
Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

District Practice
Provide a strategic menu of responses designed to increase learning for all students.

The final recommendation addresses district practices relative to supplying pyramids of intervention that provide immediate and intense intervention at multiple levels when learning is interrupted.

Recommendation #7

Critical Action
District leaders supplement school- and classroom-level interventions with targeted support for students who are below grade level.

• Provide ongoing district-level support for below-grade-level students beginning in the first week of the school year or the first week of any new course.

  Reviewers are highly supportive of the findings from the district's internal evaluation of the Early Start program. These findings led to the recommendation that Early Start add after-school or weekend sessions. This recommendation is, in fact, strongly consistent with the practices observed in higher performing school systems.

  Beyond the efforts to create powerful summer-school experiences, develop customized learning opportunities based on the specific gaps students have in prerequisite knowledge and skills as they enter the school year. These types of targeted, just-in-time interventions can occur through after-school programs, Saturday school, or online academies. By offering these sessions to students districtwide, district leaders provide a valuable service to students while meaningfully supplementing the intervention efforts at the classroom and school levels. It is also noteworthy that NCEA researchers have found that, in higher performing systems, extended learning opportunities are rarely voluntary—but almost exclusively required—for students who are performing below grade level.

• Provide much greater structure and direction for the use and development of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. The development and/or selection of a structured intervention model—including pyramids of intervention—is a strong and positive step on the part of Dallas ISD leaders. District leaders must continue developing the strong and consistent district training and support for the use of the model to ensure it provides the type of well-organized and layered interventions that lead to real changes in student achievement. NCEA reviewers encourage leaders in Dallas ISD to determine exactly what type of support would provide both executive directors and building principals with the knowledge and skills to make the district’s intervention practice exemplary.
Appendix E. Status of Recommendations from NCEA’s 2005 Audit

In December, 2005, an NCEA research team conducted a school system audit of the Dallas Independent School District that focused on district practices, with a special eye toward the practices surrounding curriculum development, delivery, and support. That audit resulted in a report that included 17 recommendations and was delivered to the Dallas ISD Board of Trustees on Wednesday, December 7, 2005. Since then, NCEA has conducted four reviews of the progress the district had made toward the initial 17 recommendations. Of these 17 recommendations, nearly half (8) were rated a 4, the highest rating, in the most recent progress report completed in 2009. To supplement the new recommendations presented in the current audit, the audit review team studied the 17 original recommendations and retired 5 recommendations that had received consistently high ratings in recent years. The issues raised in the remaining 12 recommendations are addressed in other sections of the current report, as listed below. For some recommendations, the reviewers found that practices had improved since last year’s findings, and discussed that improvement in the Established Practices section of the audit. Other recommendations have yet to be fully implemented, and are discussed in the Leverage Points section of the audit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Progress Report Rating (1-4)</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Define clear, specific, and rigorous academic objectives by grade and subject, beginning in the core content areas (Math, Reading/ELA, Science, and Social Studies), that are aligned from 12th grade to Early Education to prepare all students for advanced work in high school.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 Ensure that principals and teachers know the specific knowledge and skills to be taught and learned at each grade and in each subject.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Ensure that all students learn the same curriculum by monitoring principal and teacher use of district curricular documents for all grades and subjects.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 Create and implement a curriculum development plan to include continual review and refinement of district curriculum by the Curriculum Advisory Council and Pre-K-12 vertical teams of teachers, organized by subject.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 Breakdown silos of communication that exist throughout Dallas ISD to improve/broaden access to principals by district administrators.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 Structure principal evaluations to emphasize the importance of the time principals spend observing classroom instruction to monitor the instructional program.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 Develop internal principal candidates to maintain program consistency.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Progress Report Rating (1-4)</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#8 Build the instructional leadership capacity of principals and district administrators through differentiated, engaging, and rigorous professional development that is focused on specific academic goals and tied to student achievement needs.</td>
<td>3 3+ 4 4</td>
<td>Recommendation retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 Organize use of instructional coaches to ensure co-accountability for learning by maximizing contact with teachers in schools with the greatest need to ensure that evidence-based teaching strategies are being implemented effectively in every classroom.</td>
<td>3 3+ 3+ 3+</td>
<td>Discussed in Leverage Points: Critical Action #4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 Ensure that all professional development activities, especially the use of consultants, are tightly aligned to demonstrated student need and the stated district academic goals.</td>
<td>2 4 4 4</td>
<td>Recommendation retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 Focus role-specific staff development on the core process of teaching and learning, as opposed to simply requiring seat time, and build collaborative work time into the structure of the school day.</td>
<td>2 3 4 4</td>
<td>Recommendation retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 Select instructional resources that are proven effective with similar student populations, aligned to district academic objectives, and thoroughly supported with district resources to ensure fidelity of implementation.</td>
<td>3 3+ 3+ 3</td>
<td>Discussed in Leverage Points: Critical Action #5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 Require that schools use district-selected materials when student achievement does not reach determined goal levels while providing flexibility to high-performing schools (as measured by campus Exemplary status and a high percentage of students reaching the Commended standard) to continue successful practices that may differ from others in the district.</td>
<td>2 3+ 4 4</td>
<td>Discussed in Leverage Points: Critical Action #5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14 Fully implement Bilingual Education Program and staffing plan.</td>
<td>3 3 3+ 3+</td>
<td>Discussed in Established Practices: Critical Action #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15 Monitor student learning beginning in the early grades with a comprehensive, coherent district assessment system that includes district benchmarks to supplement state and standardized tests.</td>
<td>2 3 2 2+</td>
<td>Discussed in Established Practices: Critical Action #6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#16 Develop the capacity to translate the wealth of Dallas ISD data (TAKS, ITBS, district benchmarks, ACP, CEI, SEI, etc.) into actionable information that will impact instruction for teachers.</td>
<td>2 3 4 4</td>
<td>Discussed in Established Practices: Critical Action #5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Progress Report Rating (1-4)</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006 2007 2008 2009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#17</td>
<td>2  3  3  3</td>
<td>Discussed in <em>Leverage Points</em>: Critical Action #7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an intervention plan that targets support and expert assistance to Tier 1 and Tier 2 schools and provides additional instructional time and resources to ensure that all students master the stated curriculum rather than lowering the expectations for some students.</td>
<td>2  3  3  3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>