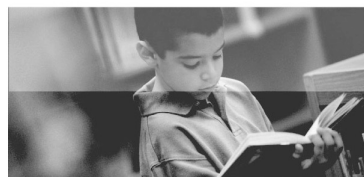# Anatomy of School System Improvement:
Performance-Driven Practices in Urban School Districts

By Lisa Petrides and Thad Nodine

with
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Foreword

By NewSchools Venture Fund

Over the last several decades, many organizations in the public, private and nonprofit sectors have discovered the importance of becoming a "learning organization," which Harvard Business School professor David Garvin describes as "skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights." These learning organizations have many of the characteristics of a curious student. They always want to know "why?" and "how did that happen?" They like to take things apart to see how the parts work together. They constantly question how their actions affect the results they observe. They regularly test basic assumptions and experiment with new ways of doing things—learning from their successes and failures so they can do better the next time.

It is both ironic and unfortunate that most public school systems—built for the express purpose of promoting learning among students—are not yet learning organizations. Although many schools encourage inquiry, creative approaches, and scientific experimentation among students, most have not yet embraced this practice of continuous learning by their own staff at the classroom, school, or district office level. NewSchools Venture Fund believes that making this change in public education is crucial for attaining and sustaining better educational outcomes for *all* students.

As such, "Anatomy of School System Improvement: Performance-Driven Practices in Urban School Districts" is the first report in a three-year effort to define how educators are beginning to embrace performance-driven practices in order to transform public education systems into learning organizations. We examine how this process of change is unfolding in 28 medium and large urban school systems, and illuminate the major barriers and needs that educators and school systems must overcome in order to create true performance-driven organizations.

Goals of the Report

In partnership with the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME), NewSchools set out to test a few hypotheses in the definition of performance-driven practices in public education and the state of their adoption among medium and large urban school systems.

The first of these hypotheses is that school systems—and the people within them—are in the midst of a massive cultural shift, from a compliance orientation that focuses on measuring inputs, toward a performance mentality that measures results. As public school systems grew larger and more complex, charged with serving millions upon millions of students, they developed "cultures of compliance" designed to monitor inputs: dollars spent, days of instruction, hours of teacher training, minutes of classroom time per subject, and numbers of students per teacher. Despite the best of intentions, it has become clear that this approach does not lead to adequate outcomes for students—particularly as we prepare an increasingly large and more diverse group of students for a complex information age.

Over the last decade, this realization has sowed the seeds of cultural change within schools. The standards movement established state-level norms for what students must learn in each grade and for graduation; the more recent push for accountability at the state and federal levels has included attempts to develop assessments that measure achievement of those standards, as well as interventions and sanctions for those schools that fail to demonstrate proficiency or close achievement gaps between different demographic groups. Combined with the pressure from parents and communities, the directive is clear: our schools must achieve better results for *all* of our students. This sharp focus on outcomes is one of the hallmarks of a performance-driven system.

The second hypothesis defines what a performance-driven public education system would look like in practice. Because every district is grappling with this challenge simultaneously, there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the emerging issues and practices involved in *becoming* a performance-driven school system. NewSchools started by defining the attributes of a performance-driven organization with the help of experienced advisors, including educators, foundation leaders and policymakers. With high achievement outcomes for *all* students as the guiding principle, NewSchools believes that a performance-driven school system looks very much like other high-performing learning organizations—it is one in which all members, at all levels of the organization, clearly understand the organization's performance goals and collectively support the common purpose of achieving those goals. Continuous improvement systems are in place to effectively measure performance against goals at frequent intervals, and all stakeholders confidently support the use of such systems. Performance results are then used to inform individual and organizational practices, policies, strategies and behaviors for the purpose of maximizing achievement throughout the system. A performance-driven culture in education, then, begins with high standards for *everyone* in the organization and a commitment to dramatically and continually improve achievement for *all* students.

Toward that end, we believe that people at all levels of a performance-driven school system engage in four types of practices that move them in that direction:

- **Setting clear, rigorous and measurable student achievement goals** – and aligning organizational processes and systems toward meeting those goals. In all schools, student achievement is the broad result that is being sought, but that must be broken down into specific, meaningful goals and measurable, actionable objectives. Just the initial step of thinking through what student achievement means, and agreeing to a framework for achievement goals, is an incredibly important process for a school system to go through. But it is equally critical—and even more demanding—for educators to take the further step of thoughtfully aligning all resources, processes, systems, and stakeholders in support of those goals.

- **Regular efforts to gather and assess information, especially information related to student achievement.** Goals are an endpoint, a direction toward which we work. But once those goals are set, agreed to, and disseminated throughout an organization, performance-driven organizations ensure that they are measuring progress toward them on a regular basis. In a school system, this translates into collecting relevant, timely information at multiple levels—individual student, classroom, grade, school site—and then analyzing that information to monitor what has been accomplished, what has not worked, and what remains to be learned.

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- **Analysis of ongoing performance, resulting in action plans designed to improve those results.** Gathering and assessing student information regularly is a positive step, but that process is most useful when it then feeds into new curricula, revised teaching strategies, improved professional development, or other instructional interventions aimed at filling the gaps in student learning. This often has ramifications not just at the classroom level but also at the school level and district level, where the analysis of performance information might point to a broader need for some specific type of professional development, a structural change in how the school is set up, or rethinking how district resources are allocated.

- **An ongoing feedback loop to evaluate programs and processes, with changes made as necessary.** Analyzing performance and making shifts based on that information is just the start of a continuous process. Leaders in a performance-driven system consciously build in the time to reflect and determine *whether* any new effort is actually working, *why* it is or isn't, and *how* to make adjustments accordingly. This is a process that must engage everyone in the organization, as those adjustments often require major changes in the structure of the school system and large-scale realignment of time, money and human resources.

With this definition in hand—vetted by a number of industry advisors—NewSchools and ISKME set out to gauge the current state of adoption of performance-driven practices among 28 urban school systems that had been identified as "leading the wave" of this transformation. We sought to understand both how school system leaders implement these practices over time, as well as what barriers were encountered, and how those barriers had been or could be addressed. Finally, in this first year we wanted to establish a baseline of practices against which to measure future years of study.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

NewSchools' belief is that over time and with the support of the public, private and nonprofit sectors, both educators and entire school systems can make this crucial transition from a culture of compliance to one built around performance. To best support school systems in this transformation, it is important to understand how far they have come. Because of our mission to transform public education for those students who are currently underserved, NewSchools elected to focus on the practices of school systems where a significant improvement in achievement will have a dramatic impact on underserved student populations. As such, this first year of the study began with a top-level view of 28 school systems, all of which are medium or large in student enrollment, located in urban areas and serving relatively high populations of low-income students and English language learners.

The specific school systems identified for this study were selected based on their perceived status as early adopters in a number of performance-driven practices such as a regular use of formative assessments, responsive professional development, and an emphasis on data to inform decisions. Still, it may come as no surprise that this report found that although individual educators are demonstrating great commitment to these practices, *school systems are still very early in their transition toward cultures of performance*—even those at the "leading edge." Not a single school system studied fully embodied all of the attributes of a performance-driven organization, although some are further along than

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others. As a group, these districts and their leaders appear to be embracing the first steps toward becoming performance-driven—setting clear goals and measurable objectives, putting in place mechanisms to gather and analyze performance results, making decisions based on concrete data – but most are stopping short of measuring progress against those goals or monitoring the results of new initiatives in an ongoing feedback loop. This is not just a matter of gathering and analyzing extensive amounts of performance data, although that is often a crucial component. Rather, it is most important that a continuous cycle of inquiry and improvement changes the way people undertake their daily work, and becomes embedded in the very culture of the organization.

Another high-level finding was that **there is no one right management structure for performance-driven systems**. In other words, this transition is not uniformly pulling districts toward centralized, top-down management or toward decentralized, site-based authority. There is a dynamic balance to be found between district oversight and full-blown decentralization—a balance that often shifts over time. It appears that as school systems work toward aligning everyone in the system toward improved student achievement, they often swing towards one of the two extremes before locating a middle ground on the spectrum. Once all the building blocks and support infrastructure are in place, we believe school systems will have autonomy at the school level that is set within a coherent framework of district-wide goals, anchored by accountability for outcomes and buoyed by appropriate support for schools and teachers.

The third major finding will be familiar to anyone with a history in education reform: because district change efforts start from so many different places, **the path toward performance-driven practices is unique for every district and is never linear**. The specific strategies and tactics vary not only by starting point but also by other contextual factors, including the leadership team's educational philosophy, mix of skills, and "diagnosis" of why student achievement is unsatisfactory. What is consistent across these districts is that regardless of which area districts start their change process in, performance-driven practices must quickly begin to permeate other areas of the organization in order for the transformation to be sustained and meaningful.

Over time, NewSchools believes that all districts will tackle a similar set of issues across departments as they become performance-driven—perhaps in a different order and with differing levels of complexity—because **the very nature of this transformation is that it affects all aspects of the organization**. Unlike many of the education reforms that have come before, the transition to a culture of performance requires a recognition that success comes not through the isolated implementation of individual programs or systems, but rather in ensuring that those elements work together coherently. In this way, performance-driven practices become a unifying framework for aligning the many facets of district reform—including finance, human resources, professional development, assessment, curriculum and instruction.

In a related finding, we found that **districts are beginning to reframe individual roles across the organization to reduce functional isolationism**, thereby refocusing all staff toward the goal of improving student achievement. In other words, job responsibilities are increasingly defined by their effect on school or student outcomes, rather than by the specific tasks involved. This means that the traditional lines between roles are being

blurred or moved altogether: a district's central office staff may be charged with delivering varying levels of support to principals and teachers; principals are wrestling more than ever with how to balance their work as instructional leaders with school management and operations. As school system leaders work through this redefinition of roles, it is often useful to ask the question, "What is the best way to use this person's time and skills in the service of improving student outcomes?" This question applies at every level of the system, from teachers and principals to district administrators and board members.

In many ways, this last finding is one of the most significant because of the incredible importance that school systems must continue to place on *people*. Getting the right people involved, preparing them adequately for their work and keeping them actively engaged in transforming the culture is as challenging as it is critical. This is what author Jim Collins refers to as getting "the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus," in his well-known book on organizational change, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't.* In his study of companies that went from doing a decent job to far outperforming their industries—and sustaining that performance over a period of 15 years—Collins found that "the executives who ignited the transformations from good to great did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. No, they *first* got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and *then* figured out where to drive it." So it is with public school systems, which after all are highly complex service organizations whose employees are charged with an important responsibility: ensuring that *all* children receive a high-quality public education. Finding, recruiting, supporting, and retaining outstanding personnel at all levels of the organization are and will continue to be the core responsibilities of district leadership.

Moving Forward

As we wrapped up this first year of our three-year research effort, we asked ourselves: what should be done in light of what we have learned, both in terms of future years of study as well as by other stakeholders in the education reform landscape?

At this point, it is worth noting one finding we could *not* ascertain from this first year of research. While we were able to collect extensive information about districts' practices through interviews with their cabinet-level leaders, we were unable to acquire useful achievement data to correlate these practices with changes in student outcomes. Given the variance in standards and assessment instruments, it is extraordinarily difficult to gather, analyze, and compare student achievement across districts in multiple states. Because we recognize that performance-driven practices mean little unless correlated with actual student performance gains, this is a challenge we are committed to resolving in future years of study. There are groups out there who are working to gather and synthesize student achievement and progress data across district and state lines, including the National Center for Educational Accountability (which collects and analyzes performance data for the Broad Prize for Urban Education) and Standard & Poor's. To truly differentiate which systemic practices have a disproportionately positive impact on student achievement, NewSchools would need to partner closely with groups like these to compare districts both above and below their expected achievement level, taking into consideration student demographics and other inputs. By analyzing the district practices across both of

these groups of school systems, we would begin to ascertain which practices or sets of practices are more prevalent among high-performing districts and are therefore behaviors that may lead to exceptional performance.

Another potential direction for future years of this study would be to use the framework of performance-driven practices from this report to create an instrument for measuring the adoption of these practices in a much larger set of districts across the country. This would provide a wide-lens snapshot of the adoption of performance-driven practices across the nation, potentially in a variety of district types—such as large versus small, urban versus rural, low-income versus mixed-income. Likewise, we could also use this instrument to drill much deeper into the districts we have already studied, to see how pervasive these practices are at the board, administrative, principal and perhaps even teacher levels. Over time, we would hope to determine which approaches, and in what order of adoption, led to a significant, sustained impact on student achievement over time.

After you have read the report, NewSchools would appreciate your feedback on the research direction you believe we should undertake for years two and three of this project—and beyond. Which direction do you believe would lead to the greatest addition to the emerging knowledge base on performance-driven practices in urban school systems? Which direction would lead to actionable and meaningful assistance to teachers and leaders pursuing this change in public education?

In the meantime, NewSchools is committed to using the analysis contained in this report to help accelerate the adoption of performance-driven practices among educators and school systems. Many of the groups involved in education reform—including teachers and other leaders in public school systems, higher education institutions, foundations, policymakers, and entrepreneurs—have a role to play in ensuring that this crucial transition occurs in a high-quality way.

- **Teachers and leaders in public school systems.** Educators bear the largest responsibility for ensuring that they make the transition to a performance-driven culture successfully, and so their task is to establish and promote broadly the core values of a performance-driven system throughout their organizations and the field of education. Superintendents and other leaders should relentlessly recruit and support performance-driven professionals throughout the district who are aligned with the focus on increasing student outcomes. This is a tricky transition to get right: like a sailor who must repair a ship while it is still on the open sea, so too must district leaders create infrastructure and culture for long-term change while still attending to short-term needs.

- **Higher education institutions.** Schools of education are charged with preparing teachers and leaders to take on the important work of improving student achievement. It is critical that these institutions equip future educators with the skills they need to thrive in a performance-driven environment. And because schools of education are the primary source of training for these educators, they should embrace performance-driven practices by tracking the careers of their graduates and monitoring the effectiveness of the teaching and leadership education they provide—not in terms of graduation rates or job placement, but in terms of their impact on student achievement in public schools.

Like a sailor who must repair a ship while it is still on the open sea, so too must district leaders create infrastructure and culture for long-term change while still attending to short-term needs.

- **Education foundations.** Because foundations often provide the only extra resources that are directly linked to system change, their values and priorities often have a disproportionate effect on district change initiatives. This creates an enormous responsibility for the leaders of education foundations to be torch-bearers for performance-driven change. As such, these funders should consider the goal of improved student performance as a determinant for the type of district efforts they fund, especially in areas like leadership development that require multi-year funding commitments to implement properly. Foundations may also invest in further research to identify best practices across districts and support entrepreneurial organizations that seek to address this transition, such as those developing better performance management tools. Perhaps most importantly, foundations should also model performance-driven behavior by establishing clear goals for the impact of their grantmaking on student achievement, setting measurable objectives, monitoring progress and ensuring accountability among their staff and grantees.

- **Policymakers.** In broad terms, policymakers can best support the transition to performance-driven public school systems by creating policies that are aligned with districts' attempts to prioritize student outcomes. This includes simple improvements such as providing districts with more timely results from end-of-year accountability tests and making district performance data more transparent to researchers. It also includes more complex measures such as releasing items from state tests for districts to use in creating formative assessments, encouraging districts to assess longitudinal growth in student performance (which requires such tools as state-wide unique student identifiers and value-added assessments). It is also worth exploring ways to create better tools for effectively comparing student performance across districts and states. Policymakers, districts, publishers, and entrepreneurs need to work together to create better assessments so that all stakeholders have confidence that we are measuring the advanced skill sets that we need our students to master. Policymakers must also re-evaluate bureaucratic requirements for teacher and principal certification to ensure that schools of education prepare teachers and leaders for this new performance-driven environment.

- **Entrepreneurs.** There are many opportunities for entrepreneurs to provide the tools and supports that educators need in their ongoing work to improve our schools. Districts are seeking innovation in how they manage their human capital—leadership, recruiting, professional development and ongoing support—in order to drive and reinforce change processes within districts. There is also a need for better tools that district and school staff can use to interact with data in productive and effective ways: to analyze performance, diagnose strengths and weaknesses, inform decisions, and monitor progress on a frequent basis. Finally, districts need a high-quality supply of results-driven programs and solutions—in areas such as special education, English language acquisition, advance placement, pre-school, drop-out recovery, and more—that will enable them to systematically close the achievement gap and ensure high student outcomes for all students. For our part, NewSchools will raise a fund to support promising entrepreneurial solutions that enhance the capacity of public school systems to become cultures of performance.

We hope that this emerging set of questions and observations will open up the dialogue among educators, researchers, foundations, policymakers, and entrepreneurs, and that it will help teachers and leaders navigate together toward creating systems of schools that create better outcomes for the students who deserve them.

NewSchools is extremely grateful to the 113 participants who took the time to speak at length—and openly—about their school systems and practices. The teachers and leaders in our public school systems are doing important and difficult work, and there is a wealth of knowledge embedded in their ongoing efforts. It is incumbent on all of us to learn how to tap into that knowledge continuously and in ways that enable us to collectively support efforts to improve learning outcomes for *all* of our students.

Executive Summary

Many recent efforts at educational reform at the national, state, and local levels share a common and unifying theme: holding districts responsible for their student achievement results. In short, the intentions of many of these accountability efforts are focused less on regulation and compliance and more on performance. Meanwhile, educational systems are facing two significant new challenges during the first decade of the twenty-first century: to educate an increasingly diverse population and to help *all* students attain higher levels of learning than ever before.

Within this context, many school districts are responding by seeking to adopt performance-driven practices that are explicitly directed toward increasing student achievement. Districts are embracing these practices in order to create both instructional and administrative change; they seek to improve the extent to which teachers, administrators, and staff—as well as organizational processes and systems—are focused on the district's ultimate goal, which is to increase learning outcomes for all students.

Performance-driven practices can be identified as those that encourage and build upon the monitoring of performance in order to change practice in ways that will improve outcomes. Within school districts, such efforts include promoting:

- **Clear and rigorous student achievement goals.** A clear understanding among all staff, teachers, and administrators of the district's performance goals concerning student achievement, and the alignment of organizational processes and systems to meet those goals.

- **Efforts to gather and assess information.** The implementation of processes and behaviors to discuss and effectively measure performance against those student achievement goals at frequent intervals.

- **Action plans based on performance results.** The use of performance results to inform organizational practices, policies, strategies, and behaviors to maximize student achievement and other district goals.

- **Ongoing feedback loop.** The ongoing evaluation of programs and processes to improve their effectiveness in increasing student achievement.

This study is the first in a series of three that seeks to examine how urban school districts across the country have begun to adopt performance-driven practices that aim to raise student achievement levels. Working on behalf of NewSchools Venture Fund, the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) studied 28 medium and large urban school systems. The districts selected all have relatively high poverty rates and relatively large populations of English Language Learners, and were identified by others in the education sector as having used performance-driven decision-making within their organizations. Thus, we deliberately sampled school systems that were perceived to be "ahead of the curve" in thinking about and implementing performance-driven practices, in order to get a sense of how public education can improve. The primary mode of data collection was through individual interviews with superintendents and three other senior-level administrators from each district (112 interviews total).

> Performance-driven practices can be identified as those that encourage and build upon the monitoring of performance in order to change practice in ways that will improve outcomes.

In exploring the cultural and practical shifts that these school districts have encountered in adopting performance-driven practices, this study found a wide range of significant patterns, promising practices, and barriers. We describe these findings in cross-functional ways (see Chapter 2, "Performance-Driven Practices Today: Overall Findings"), and then by functional area (see Chapter 3, "Findings by Function"). We then examine issues relating to organizational culture in light of gathering, monitoring, and analyzing information (see Chapter 4, "Becoming a Performance-Driven Organization"). Next, we explore three representative districts in depth in order to examine the kinds of challenges that specific districts have faced, the achievements and trade-offs they have made, and the processes they have embraced in adopting performance-driven practices (see Chapter 5, "Performance-Driven School Districts: Three Case Studies.") We offer a road map that summarizes the kinds of paths that districts have taken, by functional area, in adopting performance-driven practices (see Chapter 6, "Synopsis of Common Practices"). Finally, we suggest implications for school districts, recommendations for the broader policy community, and some next steps for research (see Chapter 7, "Conclusion: Implications and Recommendations for Change").

Overall Findings

This study confirmed our original hypothesis that the districts interviewed are in fact attempting to implement performance-driven practices in a wide variety of ways throughout their organizations—at varying stages of implementation and with varying degrees of success. Some districts are further along than others in this pursuit, and many have made great strides in specific functional areas, but all the districts still have much work to do in shifting their people, processes, and tools from a mode of compliance to one focused on performance.

In addition, the study identified six overarching findings about the adoption of performance-driven practices in the districts studied:

1. **Becoming a performance-driven organization has as much to do with managing people and processes—shaping the culture and practices of the organization—as it does with the particular goals, policies, and systems that the organization implements or has in place.** The key factor, in most cases, is how much districts know about and explore the effectiveness of their own practices.

2. **Adopting performance-driven practices is a district-wide effort, across functions and hierarchies**. The successful adoption of performance-driven practices in one functional or hierarchical area depends upon the eventual cross-functional adoption of performance-driven practices in other functional areas.

3. **Professional development is a crucial tool in the adoption of performance-driven practices, because it is the primary means that organizational leaders have to engage people in change.** Districts are transforming professional development from an activity centered on seat time to one that focuses on support—a transformation from a compliance-based to a performance-driven system.

4. **In adopting performance-driven practices, there appears to be a dynamic balance between district oversight and direction, and site-based leadership.** What is interesting about this phenomenon is that it appears not to be a simple

swing back and forth between centralized district control and decentralized, site-based fiefdoms. Rather, it appears to be a thoughtful move toward maintaining district oversight and direction, while infusing it with site-based participation and involvement.

5. **External factors—such as No Child Left Behind and state assessments—have had a role in encouraging many districts to focus more on student achievement outcomes, and in motivating them to reflect on their own practices to improve performance.** However, in many cases poor state management and inconsistency of state testing regimes have inhibited some districts' abilities to develop sustained performance-driven practices. The findings of this study revealed many examples that illustrated the extent to which districts have reflected on and shaped their own practices based on external influences.

6. **Districts face significant hurdles in adopting performance-driven practices.** For example:

   - Discontinuity of leadership imperils districts' progress in their reform.

   - Fragmentation and lack of coordination among functions and departments are commonplace.

   - Lack of technology infrastructure and lack of access to timely data inhibits the ability of well-intentioned administrators, staff, and teachers to effectively assess student achievement results.

   - The organizational culture of many school districts has not traditionally been geared toward the sharing and analysis of student achievement results in order to improve instruction and programs. Transforming this culture toward one that is more inquiry-based throughout the organization is difficult and complex—but crucial.

   - Fiscal constraints considerably limit the ability of districts to support their reform efforts.

Implications and Recommendations

There are many practical actions that school districts can take to adopt performance-driven practices throughout their organizations. These include:

- Developing and monitoring rigorous district-wide goals for student achievement.

- Matching financial and human resources to these goals.

- Promoting instructional leadership.

- Developing effective assessments and using student data to inform instructional decisions frequently (not just annually when test scores are posted) from classrooms up to administrative offices.

- Embedding professional development in everyday practices.

- Building an organizational culture that values inquiry and that is actively engaged in reviewing and improving performance through a variety of means.

The development of an organizational culture that values inquiry involves active monitoring of practices through systematic gathering, assessment, and use of information to improve results. It also includes using performance-driven evaluations and other means to promote ownership of outcomes.

If those in the policy community—including state elected officials, national and state foundations, education think tanks and business leaders—wish to support this transition to performance-driven practices, we offer the following recommendations:

- Use the budgetary process to leverage the adoption of performance-driven practices.

- Increase school districts' flexibility in managing financial and human resources.

- Offer support, consultation, and collaboration in the development of robust information systems at the district level.

- Design state assessment regimens to ensure compliance and facilitate improved performance.

- Provide school districts with the means to make data available and motivate educators to use it.

- Improve training of teachers and leaders around performance-driven practices, including the use of data.

One of the limitations of this study is the lack of available comparable student achievement data for school districts in different states. More work needs to be done at the policy level, with support from foundations, to investigate and establish methods for obtaining comparable student performance data across states, so that further research can determine whether these performance-driven practices are truly effective in improving student achievement, by comparing student achievement data over time. In addition, states and districts need to allow greater transparency and availability of existing student performance data, so that researchers can draw valid conclusions about the factors that contribute to student achievement.

The performance-driven practices identified in this report offer states useful insights as they engage in rigorous improvement efforts that are connected to statewide standards but are driven by local context. They offer school districts ways to engage their teachers, staff, and administrators in comprehensive yet targeted strategies to bring about improvement. They offer administrators a framework for aligning resources—such as programmatic interventions and professional development—to better meet student needs. And they offer teachers an approach for analyzing, understanding, and improving student learning.

The challenge of performance-driven practices, however, lies in the extent to which each district—and to some extent, each school—must work to create an organizational culture that evaluates its own performance, creates action plans, and assesses its own results regularly.

There are many teachers, principals, and district administrators seeking the means to create change within their districts. Providing these leaders and educators with the tools to do so will accelerate reform efforts and ultimately improve student outcomes.

The challenge of performance-driven practices lies in the extent to which each district must work to create an organizational culture that evaluates its own performance, creates action plans, and assesses its own results regularly.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

After decades of public debate and criticism of public schools in the United States, school reform has become the rule rather than the exception in America's elementary and secondary school systems. A policy agenda for K-12 education that hardly existed prior to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 has now become commonplace. Nationwide, the recent history of school reform can be traced to the development of national education goals, statewide standards and assessments, a focus on literacy and math skills, the creation of charter schools, and refining of the federal role in K-12 education—to name but a few of the more significant trends.

These and other recent reform efforts in education have sprung from a wide range of problems and inadequacies in the schools, including perceptions about under-performing schools, low expectations for student achievement, uneven quality of teachers, poor management, and inefficient use of resources. Perhaps most troubling of all has been the realization that our public school system has not provided an adequate education to many students, particularly minorities and those in urban and rural areas. Parent and community demand to close this achievement gap has aligned with state and national policies to increase accountability for results.

The resulting reform efforts have used a wide range of approaches and policy tools in order to move public education. The federal government, for example, through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, is seeking to identify and raise student achievement levels for all groups of students in every school. In developing statewide standards and assessments and making performance outcomes available to a broad constituency, many states are seeking to raise the bar for student achievement by enabling parents, school boards, and community leaders to get comparative information about the performance of their schools. At the local level, charter schools are placing different kinds of fiscal, performance, and public relations pressures on public school systems to respond more effectively to parent needs.

Although recent educational reform efforts at the national, state, and local levels approach educational change in a variety of ways, many share a common and unifying theme, which is to hold schools and school systems more accountable for results. These efforts are focused less on creating new state codes that govern school district behavior, and instead emphasize raising achievement levels for students. Rather than prescribing and restricting the ways that school districts can act, the reform efforts are directed toward holding districts responsible for their student outcomes. In short, the intentions of many of these accountability efforts are focused less on *regulation and compliance* and more on *performance and student outcomes*.

Meanwhile, educational systems are facing significant new challenges during the first decade of the twenty-first century, some of the most pressing of which are to educate an increasingly diverse population, and to help *all* students attain higher levels of learning than ever before—including those students that have been traditionally underserved. In an information age that is requiring people to acquire increasingly complex skills in order to succeed in the job market, all students need access to quality educational opportunities if they, their communities, and their economies are to thrive.

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Within this context, facing a wide range of external pressures for improved performance, many school districts respond by adopting internal practices that are explicitly directed toward increasing student achievement. These performance-driven practices are being embraced in order to drive both instructional and structural change; they seek to improve the extent to which teachers, administrators, and staff—as well as organizational processes and systems—are focused on the district's ultimate goal: increasing achievement for all students.

Performance-driven practices can be defined as those that encourage and build upon the monitoring of performance in order to change practice in ways that will improve outcomes. Within school districts, such efforts include promoting:

- **Clear and rigorous student achievement goals.** A clear understanding among all staff, teachers, and administrators of the district's performance goals concerning student achievement, and the alignment of organizational processes and systems to meet those goals.

- **Efforts to gather and assess information.** The implementation of processes and behaviors to discuss and effectively measure performance against those goals at frequent intervals.

- **Action plans based on performance results.** The use of these results to inform organizational practices, policies, strategies, and behaviors to maximize student achievement and other district goals.

- **Ongoing feedback loop.** The continuous evaluation of programs and processes to improve their effectiveness in increasing student achievement over time.

The findings of this study—conducted by the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) for NewSchools Venture Fund—confirm that districts are seeking to implement these practices in a wide variety of ways throughout their organizations, at varying stages of implementation and with varying degrees of success. This study also reveals that the litmus test for the presence of performance-driven practices within a district is not so much *what* information systems or curricula the district has adopted or is in the process of implementing—though these are crucial decisions as well. Rather, the key factor in becoming a performance-driven organization concerns *how* the district knows about and explores the effectiveness of its own practices. Do teachers, staff, and administrators gather and analyze information about performance? Do they create action plans based on what they discover? Do they monitor programs and systems for effectiveness? When they implement action plans or other interventions to improve outcomes, do they follow up in seeking to understand their effectiveness over time? And do they tie these feedback loops back to the most important criterion of all—student achievement? As one chief of curriculum and instruction said, "Student achievement data is driving what's going on. Teachers can say that they're teaching, but we only know if kids have learned."

> The litmus test for the presence of performance-driven practices within a district is not so much *what* information systems or curricula the district has adopted or is in the process of implementing, but *how* the district knows about and explores the effectiveness of its own practices.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to document the cultural and practical shifts that medium-to large-sized urban school districts across the country have encountered in adopting performance-driven practices. This report represents the first year of a three-year research effort to identify, examine, and ultimately determine the effectiveness of the most promising performance-driven practices within school districts nationwide.

The initial pool of districts was selected by targeting districts serving high-need students. We considered demographics such as enrollment size of the district, number of schools, the percentage of students with limited English language proficiency, and poverty rates. In addition, the pool included districts identified as having used performance-driven practices within their organizations. We accomplished this by surveying several major foundation-funded reform efforts, as well as looking at leadership trainings and awards as a way to identify those districts that might be at the "front of the wave" in adopting performance-driven practices. We further narrowed the list to 35 districts by looking at their participation in national, regional, or other school-reform efforts. Therefore, it is important to note that this study does not attempt to paint an overall picture of the use of performance-driven practices in urban school districts, but instead attempts to learn from those that are actively engaged in these efforts, whether they have just begun to implement these types of practices, or whether they have been doing so for a number of years.

The primary contributions of this study were to identify promising performance-driven practices, examine the extent to which they have been adopted by those actively engaged in these efforts, and document the variety of efforts in this area and the barriers districts have encountered. In addition, the study makes recommendations to support districts as they seek to become more performance-driven, and otherwise establishes a baseline of data through which to track over the next several years the extent to which districts are shifting from a culture of compliance to one of performance.

An interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed to examine the awareness, attitudes, practices, and challenges that the districts faced, as well as the progress made in transforming their systems. A group of advisors (see Appendix B) provided feedback that was incorporated into the final design of the interview protocol. The protocol was pilot-tested in three districts. The instrument was composed of five key sections that were used to elucidate the participants' awareness, attitudes, practices, and challenges with regard to their district's policies, procedures, and systems. These areas focused primarily on the districts' goals, matching financial and human resources to goals, instructional practices, professional development and support, student assessment and evaluation, and information systems and technology.

The research team contacted a total of 35 district offices, first by phone and then by a follow-up email, requesting permission to conduct hour-long interviews with the superintendent and three other cabinet members, with the guarantee of anonymity for individuals as well as districts. Of these 35, seven districts declined, each citing time constraints of their senior-level staff as their reason for declining to participate. A summary of the demographic characteristics of the final 28 districts included in the study is provided in Figure 1.1. Two of the participating entities were a charter school management

organization and an educational management organization. Because the educational and administrative practices of these organizations, in terms of performance-driven systems, were not markedly different than the school districts, examples related to these organizations are included—rather than highlighted or distinguished—within the body of the report.

Figure 1.1 – Demographic Snapshot of Districts

% Free & Reduced-Price Lunch	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76%+	Total
Number of Districts	2	5	17	4	28
% Limited English Proficiency	0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31%+	Total
Number of Districts	11	5	8	4	28
% Minority (African American or Hispanic)	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76%+	Total
Number of Districts	1	5	11	11	28
District Size (Enrollment)	< 25 K	26K-50K	51K-75K	76K+	Total
Number of Districts	2	5	8	13	28

Source: 2002-2003 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Database for 25 districts; information for the remaining three systems was not posted on NCES and so was obtained directly from 2002-2003 district records.

Four senior-level cabinet members from each of the 28 school districts that agreed to participate were interviewed. The titles and overall duties of each of the participants that we interviewed varied, but included the superintendent, and the chief or most senior-level cabinet member in each of the following three areas: curriculum and instruction, finance, and human resources.[1] In order to maintain consistency throughout the report, we have standardized the naming convention for all participants: superintendent, chief of curriculum and instruction, chief of finance, and chief of human resources.

Over the course of three months, the ISKME research team conducted 112 interviews with four members of senior-level leadership from each of the 28 selected districts. The same protocol instrument was used for all interviewees in order to maintain uniformity. Interviews were conducted via telephone and varied in length from 45 to 90 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer explained to the participant that the subjects of the interviews and the districts themselves would remain anonymous, and that no statements would be attributed to specific individuals or districts. This condition was established in order to increase the likelihood that participants would be more candid when discussing issues that might be troublesome or problematic for districts. Interviewers transcribed interviews in real time, and used a qualitative data analysis software program, Atlas.ti, to code data for themes, analyze content, and derive simple quantitative measures and tabulations of key practices and patterns.

Finally, it is important to note one limitation of the study. Due to the difficulty of obtaining comparable student achievement data over time and across districts from different states, this study was not able to test the effectiveness of performance-driven practices through correlations of student achievement gains with the use of performance-driven practices. More work needs to be done to compare student performance across states, so that further research can determine the effectiveness of district practice through comparable student achievement data over time.

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[1] Many large districts have recently established cabinet-level heads of accountability, planning, or research. Those holding these positions were not interviewed because not all districts had these positions. However, people in these positions would have likely provided useful input on performance-driven practices.

Chapter 2
Performance-Driven Practices Today: Overall Findings

Across the country, there have been numerous efforts geared toward helping schools and school districts to improve the effectiveness of their organizational processes and systems. Many of these efforts have looked at the performance of the organization in relation to school-based management, planning, and budgeting. However, it is only recently that these efforts have begun to be directly linked to student achievement. With the advent of greater demand for accountability and the increasing availability of more sophisticated information systems, the opportunity to align organizational practices with instruction and assessment has grown exponentially over the past five years. However, little is known nationwide about how school districts have used, and are currently using, performance-driven practices to raise student achievement levels. What are the contours of performance-driven practices today? In addition, what opportunities for improvement do performance-driven practices promise, and what challenges persist?

This study, in seeking some preliminary answers to these questions, confirmed that many districts are indeed adopting a wide range of performance-driven practices to focus their systems, processes, and resources around the goal of improving student achievement. The study also found that some districts are further along than others in this pursuit; however, all districts still face significant challenges in getting all of their people, processes, and systems to shift from a mode of compliance to one focused on performance.

The overarching findings from this study are presented below, while subsequent sections of this report describe the more detailed findings of the study by functional area.

1. **Becoming a performance-driven organization has as much to do with managing people and processes—shaping the culture and actual practices of the organization—as it does with the particular goals, policies, and systems that the organization implements or has in place.**

   The business of running a school district is immensely complex. There are a wide variety of tools and systems that can affect the extent to which districts are able to monitor student achievement results and implement district-wide or site-based improvements. For example, the "Findings by Function" section of this report (Chapter 3) explores the kinds of district-wide goals, finance policies, technology infrastructure, human resource tools, student assessments, and professional development policies that districts have implemented as they have developed strategies to adopt performance-driven practices. The various sections within Chapter 3 identify many innovative ideas that districts will find useful as they work to adopt systems and policies that can improve their performance in raising student achievement levels. However, given the complexity and diversity of school systems and the uniqueness of their local and historical contexts, we found that the critical issues that school districts face as they seek to improve performance reach beyond the systems or programs that they have in place or are implementing. That is, we found that the pivotal questions are not so much what systems are in place, but rather *what* practices are used, *how* are they used, and by *whom*, to bring about improvement.

Seeking to adopt performance-driven practices involves more than implementing promising programs that may have been effective elsewhere—it involves engaging in a continuous feedback loop of gathering information and then discussing, analyzing and using that information effectively throughout the district to improve student results.

In exploring these questions, we found many instances of districts seeking to put new programs or processes in place to improve student achievement, but few instances of districts following through to find out whether the programs or processes were effective. For example, one district had implemented promising incentives for teachers to transfer to and stay at low-performing schools, but the district did not measure the effectiveness of those incentives. Similarly, several districts had implemented pay-for-performance systems, but none measured whether those systems had affected student achievement.

In other words, many districts were beginning to gather useful information about student achievement, but few were taking the next steps to monitor the results. Seeking to adopt performance-driven practices involves more than implementing promising programs that may have been effective elsewhere—it involves engaging in a continuous feedback loop of gathering information and then discussing, analyzing and using that information effectively throughout the district to improve student results.

In relation to this finding, the study identified five key components that can help districts assess their progress in adopting performance-driven practices.

- **Gathering data.** The practices that district staff and teachers use to gather and share data, including student achievement data as well as other organizational data.

- **Assessing outcomes.** The ways that districts provide context for the data that they gather and how people assess student achievement results. It involves the identification of curricular gaps through assessment results. It also looks at how district assessments are aligned with state standards and whether professional development is structured so as to better address curricular gaps.

- **Monitoring and feedback.** How districts monitor the effectiveness of specific programs or efforts, and what evidence is provided that shows how departments, different sites, or certain programs are performing.

- **Ownership of outcomes.** The ways in which people throughout the organization are held accountable for the performance of students. For example, this includes who analyzes current measures and assessments, who is responsible for the results, and how and what interventions are put in place. It also includes the processes for evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions, the incentives to achieve desired results, and evidence of an organizational culture that supports these efforts.

- **Building a learning organization.** Establishing the processes and behaviors necessary to support organizational structures and a performance-driven culture. It also includes working proactively toward aligning the district's resources to its goals, and then evaluating the fit between them on an ongoing basis.

It is important to note that these are not linear stages of development that every organization goes through in becoming more performance-driven, but rather actions that organizations may take as guides in designing and implementing specific processes and projects. These actions begin with more straightforward issues, and become increasingly complex and cross-functional.

2. **Adopting performance-driven practices is a district-wide effort, across functions and hierarchies.**

In this study, the successful adoption of performance-driven practices in one functional or hierarchical area depended upon the eventual cross-functional adoption of performance-driven practices in other functional areas. That is to say, part of the utility of performance-driven practices is based on the cross-functional nature of their implementation. There were several examples of this phenomenon: finance departments that considered student achievement to be within their purview were also more likely to be involved in helping sites review their budget priorities in line with that site's objectives for student achievement; human resources departments with information systems connected to finance systems could automate functions, and focus more of their attention on effective recruitment of teachers and staff; and districts that engaged principals in instructional leadership on their campuses were also more likely to have district goals connected to site-based objectives for student performance. In short, we found that as districts became more deeply engaged in performance-driven practices, their efforts were more likely to cross into several functional areas to include people across all levels of the organization.

In tracking how districts were adopting performance-driven practices, we found that the following approaches were promising and inevitably led to cross-functional interactions:

- **Aligning instruction and assessment more effectively with state standards**—for example, establishing high expectations throughout the organization for student outcomes and developing frequent assessments that can diagnose student needs early in the year.

- **Using student assessment results, as well as other data, to drive decision-making about effective practice**—for example, using information to manage performance at all levels of the system, developing meaningful systems for rewards and consequences based on performance, and developing effective and timely interventions.

- **Managing people effectively and providing them with incentives to achieve the goals of the system**—for example, providing effective professional development at all levels and aligning it with top instructional concerns, seeking to connect contracts and compensation to system goals and strategies, and balancing authority and flexibility in site management.

- **Allocating resources according to the system's goals and priorities**—for example, aligning fiscal resources, human resources, materials, and time to optimize student outcomes.

Much more than a collection of isolated programs or best practices, performance-driven practices enable districts to systematically connect many of the seemingly disparate elements of educational reform—for example, standards, assessments, curricular developments, and even information technologies and organizational culture—into an integrated whole that can drive improvement.

> Performance-driven practices enable districts to systematically connect many of the seemingly disparate elements of educational reform—for example, standards, assessments, curricular developments, and even information technologies and organizational culture—into an integrated whole that can drive improvement.

3. **Professional development is a crucial tool in the adoption of performance-driven practices, because it is the primary means that organizational leaders have to engage people in change.**

What is most provocative from our findings in this area is the extent to which administrators have transformed professional development from an activity centered on "seat time" to one that focuses on "support time"—a transformation from a compliance-based to a performance-driven system. Many districts have re-conceptualized professional development not as a pull-out function that takes teachers to remote locations to receive "training," but rather as an opportunity for meaningful interactions onsite among teachers and principals. This new on-site professional development includes: engaging teachers in dialogues about practice, providing mentoring opportunities with lead teachers and instructional coaches, and following through with real-time support afterward. These efforts were described as a way to "break down the walls" between classrooms, and engage teachers in change.

Although districts still have some days allocated for district-wide training, the energy and dollars appear to be directed much more toward investments in instructional coaches, mentor teachers, and subject specialists, who are assigned and available to schools to promote instructional leadership and improve teaching at the sites. The two pivotal positions around which professional development has been emphasized are principals and teachers. The focus on districts' mentoring and coaching for these two positions aligns with their efforts to engage principals and teachers in ongoing discussions about and analysis of assessment results, student performance gains and weaknesses, program results, and annual performance targets. As one chief of curriculum and instruction said, "We are a data-rich system, but the data analysis is poor. I think we need to do more training and professional development at the local level to look at their data and help them learn how to use data."

4. **In adopting performance-driven practices, there appears to be a dynamic balance between district oversight and direction, and site-based leadership.**

One of the first real steps that many districts have taken in adopting performance-driven practices is to establish district-wide goals focusing on student achievement. The next prevalent strategy is to begin discussions about the reality of aligning resources to those goals. In most cases, districts have sought to do this through adopting more centralized processes and limiting intensive site-based decision-making in relation to key district-wide goals. This has included districts seeking to improve decision-making around the adoption of programs and curricula for use throughout the district. For example, many districts have consolidated the number of literacy and math programs offered at the various sites. A few districts have withdrawn some categorical funding from site-level decision-making. And many have centralized professional development decisions, creating offerings based on the district's goals, new programs, and planned interventions. In many cases, these kinds of decisions have not been popular, as they have called into question previously accepted processes and organizational habits within the district regarding site-based decision-making and control.

Several of the districts that have been working to develop performance-driven practices for several years, however, have become more flexible in encouraging the participation of teachers and principals in this kind of decision-making. What is interesting about this phenomenon is that it appears not to be a simple swing back from centralized district control to decentralized, site-based fiefdoms. Rather, it appears to be a thoughtful move toward maintaining district oversight and direction, while infusing it with site-based participation and involvement. For example, those districts that were more successful in providing evidence that performance-driven practices have reached the classroom have involved teachers more integrally in the transformation process, such as bringing them together for collaborative work on district-wide curriculum and assessments.

"We just went through a period of deep centralization in this district, where we focused on coherence-building across the district, building K-12 curricular frameworks in key subject matters," explained one superintendent. "We used to have a few hundred reading programs in this district. We can't support that and we shouldn't. Now we are more focused in our approach to literacy. Now that we've been through five years of that, this past January we've taken a step toward greater flexibility; we've started down the road to giving sites more control of their resources, their budgets, within the framework of curricular coherence that we've built."

In professional development, having site-based mentors and instructional specialists can be seen as a flexible approach that is site-based yet also directed by the district. About one-third of the districts shared the responsibility for professional development between the district and sites. In these cases, the district set the parameters for professional development, and principals and school committees could select the kinds of professional development in accordance with their needs. As one chief of curriculum and instruction said, "We moved from a more centralized provider of professional development to school-based. It needed to be that way. The only way for schools to improve is to identify what they're struggling with." The juxtaposition between these two decision-making levels was also seen in the fact that those schools that shared professional development decision-making were also accorded some site autonomy in budget decisions as well.

5. **External factors—such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and state assessments—have had a role in encouraging many districts to focus more on student achievement outcomes, and in motivating them to reflect on their own practices to improve performance. However, in many cases poor state management and inconsistency of state testing regimes have inhibited some districts' abilities to develop sustained performance-driven practices.**

School districts are unique public entities that have intensely internal patterns of behavior and culture, but that are in turn influenced by a wide range of external factors—including laws, regulations, and public pressure. These external influences impact the attitudes and behaviors that guide and shape districts' performance-driven practices. The interviews provided many examples that illustrated the extent to which districts have reflected on and shaped their own practices based on these external influences. For example, a few districts credited state standards and assessments as being important influences in motivating their district to address the

needs of all students, particularly subgroups of students who had not been historically well served by their school system. Others criticized their states' assessments as inadequate to meet the needs of their students. For example, some said that state assessments did not provide them with robust data, while others said that assessment results were provided too late to affect decisions about promotion and retention.

It was also clear from interviews that state assessment efforts can have the opposite effect of that intended by lawmakers: instead of moving districts toward performance-driven systems, poor state planning and management can drive districts toward minimal compliance. For example, the most commonly cited criticism of state assessments was that they were constantly shifting. For those districts seeking to align district tests with statewide assessments and standards, the state's frequent changes had a detrimental effect on the district's internal efforts to promote coordinated educational planning. Based on these reports, districts may have been acting in the best interests of their students: saving resources by complying minimally, and waiting for the flood of change to pass, which is the opposite of what policymakers intend when they implement state assessments.

In relation to the federal NCLB act, most participants acknowledged that the law was having some impact on their school districts related to gathering student achievement data, disaggregating that data, and seeking to bring attention to student achievement—in particular across all groups within their student population. Several districts reported that the law had provided momentum within their states and their own districts to do a better job of tracking student performance. While districts reported that NCLB helped them to make the case for the development of performance-driven practices, the problem was that it required additional resources being committed to these goals—resources that were often unavailable within the districts themselves. However, a few districts noted that they had invested in better and more integrated information systems, so that they could track subgroups of students as required by NCLB.

6. **Districts face significant hurdles in adopting performance-driven practices.**

There are many challenges that districts face as they seek to improve their educational services. These vary by school system but may include burdensome state laws and regulations, insufficient parent participation, and poor coordination between departments. The list below focuses specifically on those barriers that districts faced as they moved toward adopting performance-driven practices.

- **Discontinuity of leadership** imperils districts' progress in any reform. High turnover in senior-level leadership is associated with delays in the implementation of reform plans, disruptive changes rather than productive ones, and inconsistency. It takes time and a consistent approach to implement major, system-wide efforts such as new information systems, incentives for teachers at low-performing schools, and principal evaluations that are tied to student achievement. Those districts with a strong superintendent who had been in place for several years had a much better track record in adopting performance-driven practices.

- **Fragmentation and lack of coordination** across functions and departments are both commonplace. Districts face significant challenges in getting bureaucratic departments to work cross-functionally to improve services in ways that can assist principals and teachers in improving student achievement. They face substantial obstacles in getting sites to work together toward common goals. And they face large barriers opening the doors into classrooms so that teachers can share what they know. Improvement plans must align various system components in coherent ways.

- **Lack of technology infrastructure and timely data** inhibits the ability of well-intentioned administrators, staff, and teachers to perform their functions effectively and to measure the results of their work. Principals, teachers, and central office administrators need access to relevant and reliable information in order to ground their decisions in the context of district and school needs. Districts' inability to provide technical resources, data, and analytical assistance critically affects decision-making at all levels of the system.

- **The organizational culture of many school districts** has not traditionally been geared toward the sharing and analysis of student achievement results in order to improve instruction and programs. Transforming this culture toward one that is more inquiry-based throughout the organization is difficult and complex—but crucial. A robust culture of inquiry—including a willingness to explore and improve upon mistakes and organizational weaknesses—can assist tremendously in making performance-driven practices pervasive rather than merely apparent or sporadic. Creating a culture that embraces inquiry and change requires the implementation of appropriate and effective incentives and systems of support.

- **Fiscal constraints** considerably limit the ability of districts to support their reform efforts. These fiscal constraints can serve to force districts to prioritize their most pressing needs. However, when fiscal constraints are too severe, they place districts in crisis mode and reduce their flexibility to allocate funding to significant reform-related issues, such as professional development, technical resources, the development of assessments, and student intervention programs. Many districts in this study reported that they are under acute fiscal stress.

CHAPTER 3
FINDINGS BY FUNCTION

This chapter, divided into several sections, provides a detailed analysis of the key findings of this project by functional area. In looking across the entire set of interviews, districts' efforts to implement performance-driven practices fell into five thematic areas:

- Goals and Governance (Section 3.1)

- Matching Goals to Resources (Section 3.2)

- Instructional Leadership (Section 3.3)

- Assessments (Section 3.4)

- Professional Development (Section 3.5)

It is worth remembering, however, that this work is complex and does not fall neatly into categories. Instead, effective performance-driven practices reach across these functional areas in an effort to achieve alignment among the different levels of the organizations and a coherent focus on improved student achievement.

Findings Section 3.1
Goals and Governance

To ascertain patterns and trends related to performance-driven practices and goal-setting, this study examined goal-setting strategies and how governance structures and processes supported these strategies. A district's goals and governance structures are often at the core of how the district designs and implements performance-driven practices, and the findings in this section emphasize the importance of having district-wide goals that cut across organizational hierarchies—from board members, to cabinet members, to principals, teachers, parents, and community members. This study found that the process of goal-setting varied widely from district to district. However, it is worth noting the various relationships between boards and district leadership and how this was connected with district goals, as well as the strategies by which different stakeholders were included in setting district goals.

School boards played an important role in the governance processes in these districts. Most of the school districts (24) interviewed have elected school boards, although four districts reported having appointed school boards, two of which had been appointed by their local mayors. All of the boards or committees have basic fiduciary duties for the district, responsibility for establishing and monitoring overall policy, and direct oversight of the superintendent. The superintendents in these districts report directly to the board, represent the district to external bodies and communities, and are responsible for the overall effective operation of the district—fiscally, administratively, and academically.

Relationships between board members and the district's senior-level administrators differed greatly within our sample. Slightly more than half of the districts (15) spoke favorably about the board and its leadership, highlighting examples of the importance of the board in its role of fostering connections with the business and wider community. Less than a quarter of the districts (5) cited neutral relationships with their boards, while roughly the same number (6) described their boards as dysfunctional, contentious, counter-productive, or otherwise problematic, and often emphasized the extent to which board members had been partial to special interests, frequently split with each other on important decisions, or attempted to micromanage district matters. Interestingly, in the two cases of mayoral-appointed school boards, both districts spoke positively about the leadership of the board and its relationship with the administration and the district as a whole.

The vast majority of districts reported that their school boards were active participants in establishing district-wide goals, either through setting or approving them. However, school boards were much less likely to continuously review or monitor progress toward the goals. Less than a quarter of the districts (5) reported that their school board had reviewed the goals after they had been established, and an equal number (5) said that the board had monitored progress toward these goals. Because these boards are not routinely monitoring district progress against goals, they have a ways to go in becoming truly performance-driven.

There appeared to be only a very weak link between the board's relationship with district administrators and its involvement in setting or approving goals. However, there may be a connection between a positive and dynamic relationship between the board and cabinet members and a board that is active in monitoring progress toward goals. Of the five districts whose boards had been involved in monitoring district goals, four had dynamic

and interactive relationships between board members and senior-level administrators (see Figure 3.1.1 below). This suggests that those districts that did not report having a positive relationship between their boards may not be able to rely on the board to support the implementation of their desired performance-driven practices as they move toward the development of objectives to reach these goals.

Figure 3.1.1 – School Board: Relationships and Goal-Setting
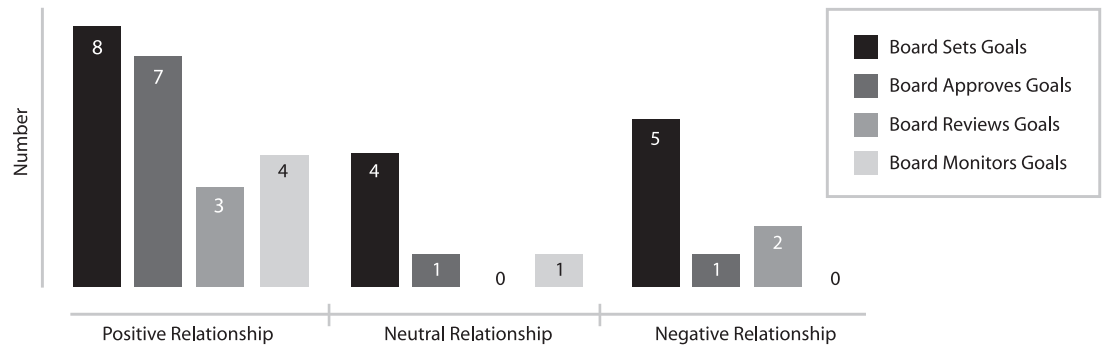
Note: The goal setting activities above are not mutually exclusive. Districts with inconclusive data are not included. Monitoring differs from reviewing in that monitoring involves analyzing progress made toward goals.

The adoption of clear and well-articulated goals was reported by all of the districts interviewed. Almost all participants articulated several goals that helped to focus the efforts of the entire system around student achievement. Participants emphasized the role of goals in providing a vision for the district as a whole, with the most important goal being to raise student achievement generally, and specifically around closing the achievement gap among various populations and underachieving groups. Additionally, many participants discussed more specific goals of student achievement, primarily focusing on math and literacy initiatives. Many participants also mentioned goals that were not directly focused on academic standards and achievement, such as improving teacher recruitment and retention, improving parent and community support, and improving business practices. However, all of the participants insisted that these functions and organizational issues were very important and affected student achievement.

Table 3.1.2 – Most Commonly Stated Goals

Goals	Number
Student Achievement	21
Literacy Initiatives	17
Math Initiatives	15
Increase Parent and Community Involvement and Support	11
Improve Teacher Recruitment and Retention	9
Focus on Minority Groups	9
No Child Left Behind	8
Improve Business Practices	7

Several interview participants also acknowledged the importance of external influences and factors in setting their goals. For example, many districts reported that state standards or performance goals for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act had influenced their district goals, particularly in expanding their emphasis on addressing the needs of all students. A few districts reported that the NCLB requirements fell short of their own goals, which meant that their district had not needed to significantly adjust their own goals. Nonetheless, some of these districts now feature NCLB's emphasis on reaching *all* students more prominently within their own goals. This suggests that districts are aware of reaching external as well as internal audiences when establishing their goals.

Superintendents and chiefs of curriculum and instruction emphasized the importance of explaining the relationship between their goals and the district's overall mission, and were clearly able to articulate these goals. Perhaps not surprisingly, the heads of human resources and finance were slightly less effective in conveying the details of the student achievement goals. Yet those chiefs of human resources and finance who had their own department's goals explicitly linked to the student achievement goals of the district, also saw their own work as directly connected to the student achievement mission. "I'm an owner of the goal related to student achievement," said one chief of finance. "My pay is related to student achievement." These particular efforts appeared to align student achievement more directly across the various operations and functions throughout a district.

Districts also involved various other stakeholder groups when setting goals and targets. While some districts solicited the input of parents and community members in this process, most did not. Nevertheless, in some districts, parents and community members were able to contribute to the goal-setting process during the writing of site-level plans (4), while in others they participated in setting district-level goals (3). Another way that school districts involved parents and community members was through community forums, which are general open meetings that some districts (5) held in order to solicit a variety of comments and concerns from parents and community members. As such, it appears that some districts are encouraging an increased level of involvement from parents and community members.

Although many school districts stated that increasing parent and community involvement was one of their top goals, these numbers suggest that they had yet to actually implement policies to reach these goals. In turn, it appears that parent and community involvement is not a necessarily main priority for districts when it comes to goal-setting and establishing targets and objectives. During goal-setting processes, some districts included teacher input more formally than that of parents and community members.

One major strategy for communicating goals to the districts' wider community—and driving them down from the district to the site level—focused on the role of the principal. In one-third of the districts (9), principals were reported to be the primary liaison for communicating goals and integrating teachers and the other stakeholders into the goal-setting process at the site level. Typically, this process involved principals meeting with academic and finance cabinet members about district-wide goals, and then being responsible for presentations to site staff and the community about the goals, or working with the site-based leadership teams on the site-based objectives. In terms of communicating goals and integrating and aligning them throughout the organization, principals appeared to be the primary conduit and nexus of this process.

One particular strategy that exemplified the focus on principals was the use of scorecards as a tool to link district-level and site goals. Scorecards are management tools that connect overall district goals with specific objectives and performance measures at the sites. Slightly less than a quarter of the districts (6) reported that they used scorecards to measure progress on student, teacher, and community goals, and/or to communicate the district's progress in a cohesive way. In these cases, cabinet members met with principals to discuss progress toward the goals on the scorecards; principals then met with teachers for the same purposes. This was reported to be an effective way to integrate all the various stakeholders around a common set of goals throughout the organization. For example, one district started from the bottom up, using school improvement plans to inform the district-level goals and objectives, as opposed to starting with district goals and then developing site-based objectives to meet those goals. Perhaps not surprisingly, this is a district where the board and the superintendent have forged a close relationship, and set aside retreat times that allow them to discuss and design these goals as part of an ongoing process.

The districts that used scorecards reported that they used them to better integrate goals across the various levels throughout the district. From district-level goals down to site-level objectives, scorecards helped to coherently translate these across all levels of the districts and across multiple groups of stakeholders. Moreover, scorecards appear not only to focus stakeholders around a common set of goals, they also serve as a measuring and monitoring function, to ensure that districts continually evaluate their progress toward their goals. The use of scorecards coincides with the focus on principals within this goal-setting structure; scorecards serve as a tool to connect principals to senior-level administrators, as well as site-level teachers and staff.

Conclusion

These findings emphasize the importance of having goals that cut across organizational hierarchies—from board members, to cabinet members, to principals, teachers, parents, and community members. Although our findings do not reveal a direct relationship between the actual processes of communicating goals and the goals themselves, it does highlight the importance of communicating goals and the need for a cohesive focus on a set of objectives. Part of this cohesion is the monitoring of these goals by all stakeholders to ensure that the district makes progress. As such, organizational unity and consistency over time appear to be an integral part of the governance processes, particularly as they relate to improving student achievement through performance-driven practices.

Promising Practices

- Districts that have positive relationships with their boards are better able to rely on their boards to support the implementation of their performance-driven practices. Additionally, those districts that maintain positive relationships with their boards appear more likely to have in place mechanisms to monitor their progress toward their goals.

- More and more, principals are becoming the primary liaison for communicating goals, and integrating teachers and other stakeholders into the goal-setting process at the site level. Typically, this process involved principals meeting with academic and finance cabinet members about district-wide goals, and then being responsible for presentations to site staff and the community about the goals, or working with the site-based leadership teams on the site-based objectives.

- The use of scorecards that monitor progress toward the district's goals help to focus stakeholders around a common set of issues. They also serve a measuring and monitoring function that ensures that districts continually evaluate their progress toward their goals.

> **Practices in Action**
>
> In developing school improvement plans, one district provided training in data use for both teachers and parents. This training allowed teachers and parents to make better sense of student performance data. This enabled them to more actively participate in the goal-setting process by helping to formulate data-driven targets and goals that were aligned with actual student achievement outcomes.

Areas of Need

Districts acknowledged the importance of having parents involved in goal-setting efforts. However, these efforts were more often focused on strategies for communicating with parents *after* the goals were in place, such as dissemination strategies aimed at gaining parental approval of goals, rather than involving parents directly in discussions *during* the goal-setting process. The exception to this was when there was a high sense of urgency in districts, such as the closure of under-performing schools, when greater efforts were made to galvanize parents to become involved in the goal-setting process.

Findings Section 3.2
Matching Resources to Goals

As districts developed strategies to align their financial, human, and technological resources to meet their goals, many participants revealed significant barriers and limitations to this process. Districts that were further along in adopting performance-driven practices discussed their attempts to support a wide range of services—from finance and human resources to teacher training and mentoring. In addition, these districts noted the extent to which they encouraged human resources and finance departments to become more customer-oriented in meeting the needs of all district and school personnel. This section examines how districts have worked to align their resources to their goals, and the extent to which they have monitored this process in systematic and ongoing ways—as well as the limitations to doing so, including the current financial climate, restricted funding, state and collective bargaining regulations, and inadequate information systems and tools.

Finance

Many districts reported that they were currently under acute fiscal stress and had limited flexibility in the use of their funds to achieve their overall goals. Two-thirds of the districts (18) described substantial budgetary challenges that their district was facing this year. This was particularly the case in districts in which state regulations or bargaining agreements strictly limit their staffing flexibility. Just under half of the districts (12) described bargaining agreement rules as problematic in limiting their financial flexibility, including regulations concerning staffing levels. However, most also reported that they were able to work within the requirements, use local and other sources of money, and otherwise problem-solve to balance their budgets—though it had ramifications for the educational programs their district was able to offer. One chief of finance explained, "We're on essentials only right now." And many districts had, in fact, made significant cost-cutting efforts—such as curtailing summer school or reorganizing grade levels to consolidate school sites—in order to bring expenses in line with revenues.

Aside from the direct educational impact, low funding and financial inflexibility appeared to inhibit districts from developing long-term fiscal planning and sustainable, customer-oriented support services. Many participants in charge of business and finance operations expressed a desire to improve the service function of their role. "Our role is the support role," remarked one chief of finance. "How can we make financial statements easier to file? How can they plan their budget easier? How can they make purchases easier? If you can make that easier for them, they can devote more time for education." But most districts reported that they did not have the staffing, resources, or systems in place to be able to plan, monitor, and streamline services. As a result, most were drawn into short-term strategies. "[We have a] year-to-year approach to life, in which all our energy goes into year-to-year budgets with negative repercussions. We need long-term budgets, with a range of long-term revenues," said another chief of finance.

In response to fiscal constraints, districts have also made a wide range of efforts to improve efficiency within the system, such as pooling categorical funding dollars. For example, several districts have consolidated the number of literacy programs or math curricula that they support in order to focus their funding more effectively on the

programs they believe to be most effective. These districts reported that this was often done without significant evidence or research about the benefits of one program over another, and in most cases, without a full assessment of the comparative costs of the programs. As such, financial decision-making authority has become increasingly problematic in the current fiscal climate.

Districts struggle with the desire to improve efficiency and maintain authority, while still providing local and site-level autonomy. On one end of the spectrum were those districts that had controlled budgets more tightly at the district level, allowing very limited flexibility at the sites to shift funding from one area to another. At the other end of the spectrum, there were a few districts that had granted the broadest budgetary authority to the sites; these districts were the least effective in aligning their financial resources around their district-wide goals. In these districts, funding was allocated to the sites through established formulas—based on staffing levels, student enrollment, and so on. The individual sites contributed noncategorical funding to that, and the principals and site committees had broad authority to determine the kinds of programs that were most effective at their sites, and could spend categorical and noncategorical funding to operate those programs.

A few districts (3) discussed a gradual transition in budget decision-making from the district to the site. During this transition, their central offices incrementally raised the percentages of budgets over which the schools had control. Before giving the sites full license over their budgets, the central office used this transition period to embed training for principals and teachers on a wide array of budgetary issues, so that they could develop improvement plans within the current financial conditions. Training included looking at issues such as data use, data interpretation, legal issues related to Title I monies, and metrics of costing. This dynamic process not only embedded training in everyday practice, but also served as one mechanism to help districts align goals at various levels of the district.

The vast majority of districts selected an approach somewhere between these two extremes. They sought to provide a budget and financial structure for the district as a whole, align resources with overall district goals, and align site-level objectives with those district goals—while significantly involving site leaders in this process. The tenuous balance between district-level authority and site-level autonomy becomes especially apparent in many of the financial decision-making processes within these districts. Several districts reported that they were working to better align their budgets to district goals, but with input and some authority from the school sites. Other districts reported that they were seeking to consolidate academic programming and professional development opportunities based on district goals as well as student achievement needs, and often did this by first identifying curricular gaps at the sites. Fewer than half of the districts (12) had processes in place that allowed district and site leaders to regularly review the cost-effectiveness of their academic and professional development programs.

However, these types of financial decision-making mechanisms require rigor and follow-through, both of which can be in short supply when other crises are imminent. For example, one district conducted a thorough analysis of the cost-effectiveness of its primary reading program, and as a result, decided to invest in a different reading program that did not require district-supported positions. When the district attempted to track the results of

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the program, it found that the schools had implemented the program in a variety of ways, thus making comparison nearly impossible. "Some had labs, some had intensive programs of targeted kids, some had every kid in school participate for twenty minutes," said the chief of finance. "We knew how much the lab costs were, but how many staff were related to it? That depended on how it was implemented." Rather than using this as an opportunity to bring teachers together from different sites, discuss the implementation of the program, and find out more about which approaches appeared to be working best, the monitoring function initiated by the finance department was discontinued.

Participants described many examples of programs that had been implemented with plans for monitoring in place, but by the time the cohorts reached an age where the effectiveness could be tested, the district energy had turned elsewhere. As one head of finance remarked, "That's one of the things about education, the response time is often protracted. Say you have a new reading program, then you get a new superintendent for instruction, and the reading program gets shifted, and then we don't have any way to measure the results." As indicated earlier, this monitoring is sometimes difficult in situations where schools control their own budgets. Another district reported that over a five-year period, they had turned over control of nearly 80 percent of their budgets to the schools. Over this period of time, they offered a series of workshops for principals that provided training on how to allocate spending and parameters for federal funding. The superintendent explained, "The schools can spend it pretty much any way they wish—in terms of hiring people, getting materials for programs. We have district offices that work with principals to say here are the test scores for you and your school, and see how your school improvement plan meets those goals. As you plan for the school, you can allocate money as you need to. We just want to make sure that they are addressing their needs."

The challenges that these districts face bring to light the importance of having processes in place that support long-term evaluation and monitoring. Financial decisions are better informed when supported by these mechanisms. However, this is contingent upon the district's ability to focus and target key achievement areas. Long-term monitoring and evaluation can help districts remain focused on their objectives, thereby promoting progress toward their goals.

Human Resources

The majority of districts interviewed face severe challenges in hiring and retaining enough qualified teachers, particularly in the areas of math and special education. Districts also reported facing substantial challenges in placing and retaining qualified teachers in their lowest-performing schools. Additionally, districts are attempting to balance issues of oversight, support, and management of personnel, with a limited number of the districts reporting that they have actively engaged with unions in this area. Finally, while several districts seek to reform human resources to bring about a more customer-oriented approach, actions taken toward this aim have been limited.

In meeting the challenges of hiring and retaining qualified teachers, several districts reported that they had revised or were in the process of reorganizing their recruitment strategies. In light of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), several chiefs of human resources reported that they were concerned about what it would take to meet the significant shortages of teachers in particular fields such as special education, math, and science—in terms of both recruitment and certification. Many districts had established partnerships with universities

to recruit new graduates, and provided teaching experience to students working on their teacher certification. In addressing some of these shortages, four districts reported that they were in the process of developing and implementing alternative certification programs at the local universities in order to better recruit those with undergraduate degrees in the critical areas of math and science. Under this plan, new hires were recruited and employed under emergency credentials, while receiving training toward certification at a local university. One district that implemented such a program saw a 70 percent drop in the number of teachers with emergency credentials who were not enrolled in a certification program.

Meanwhile, other districts created new positions or service centers dedicated to recruitment to streamline recruitment efforts and improve outreach to under-represented, minority, and other communities. Several districts had developed online application processes, and most of those who had not yet done so expressed the desire to be more Web-based in their recruitment and hiring process.

Yet while almost all of the districts were concerned about the recruitment of qualified teachers and reported that it was a high priority for them, only one-third of the districts (9) had developed recruitment strategies. One such district had established a goal of reducing teacher turnover to less than 10 percent; their efforts to achieve this goal included salary increases and mentoring programs. Another district that faced an acute shortage of special education teachers initially considered offering monetary incentives to improve retention. Yet a survey of teachers found that they preferred to see the money spent to improve working conditions through such means as decreasing class size, increasing networking among special education teachers, and providing additional coaching and support. The district changed its strategy toward this effort, although it had not yet determined whether or not this strategy was effective in retaining teachers—in part because the changes had been only recently implemented.

Less than half of the districts (12) had incentives in place to bring teachers or principals into low-performing schools and into critical needs areas. The most common type of incentive offered was financial, includings offerings such as signing bonuses, tuition reimbursement, or higher pay to those working in low-performing schools. In many cases, these bonuses were accompanied by longer working hours. However, even though participants discussed incentives for low-performing schools and the difficulties surrounding teacher retention in those schools, there were no examples of districts having conducted studies that determined whether or not such incentives were effective. A few districts reported problems related to high teacher transfer rates in low-performing schools. In response to this issue, one district that reported a teacher transfer rate of 50 percent in its low-performing schools was working to revise union rules to restrict the ability of all teachers—even those with seniority—to transfer from these schools to others in the district. Another district had a policy that prevented any teacher from transferring during their first two years of placement.

All districts, without exception, struggled with the balance between how to best manage and oversee teachers and other staff while remaining within state regulations and collective bargaining agreements. In one extreme case, site-based committees retained hiring rights for principals, which undercut the superintendent's authority to effectively manage the hiring process. Most districts interviewed, however, reported much more flexibility in being able to place, hire, and even fire principals based on their performance as measured through a variety of means, including student achievement levels.

On the other hand, the vast majority of districts have not been successful in establishing teacher contracts that allow the districts to take student performance data into consideration for teacher evaluation, although many had tried (for more detailed information about this concept, see Chapter 4, "Becoming a Performance-Driven Organization").

A much more common approach reported was to work within the union rules, rather than attempting to renegotiate union rules. For example, several districts said that they were conducting more rigorous reviews of teachers while they were in their probationary periods, which was allowed by union contracts. And in some cases, the dire needs of low-performing schools are bringing unions to the table to discuss the relaxation of certain requirements, such as allowing increased hours or duties, and the renegotiation of teacher contracts in limited cases.

Nevertheless, districts with unions discussed the barriers posed by collective bargaining agreements as significantly limiting their flexibility—financially, and particularly in human resources—in being able to take action to raise student achievement. While less than a quarter of the districts (6) did not have collective bargaining in their state, less than half of the remaining districts stated that their relationships with the teacher's union was positive, effective, and collaborative. Regardless of union-district relationship, most districts had successfully established joint committees and collaborative task forces to engage union and district leaders. Several districts had begun to work more closely with the union to revise current practices in low-performing schools; many also reported that this process had been very important in bringing the union to the table to discuss changes in collective bargaining agreements. In several cases, this has allowed them to implement performance-driven practices that would otherwise not have been able to be put in place.

Finally, many districts mentioned the need to bring a more customer-oriented approach to human resources, and in fact, several reported that they had begun to take incremental steps to begin this process. One district engaged in what was described as a top-to-bottom reinvention of human resources in order to make it more customer-friendly and directed toward results—that is, more nimble and responsive to the needs of principals and teachers, while at the same time directed more toward student achievement outcomes. The district created new positions for recruitment, developed service centers for new employees, and shifted substantial resources to create new positions for coaching, mentoring, and supporting teachers. At the same time that it was engaging in these recruitment and supportive efforts, the district was also in the process of increasing supervision of teachers in the classroom, renegotiating teacher contracts, and changing the focus of human resources from following union policies to meeting human resource goals, a shift which was described as difficult to do in a collective bargaining situation.

Information Systems

The importance of having reliable data was underscored across all districts. However, districts continued to be limited by information systems and data analysis tools that were insufficient to meet their needs. While a few districts reported that they use new student, financial, or human resource information systems, others reported antiquated technology infrastructure that left them with limited access to data or that required lengthy, cumbersome processes to retrieve data. Those districts that did have updated information systems reported that their systems were silo-based, meaning that each function throughout the

district relied on its own information system (human resources system, student information system, and so on), which could not be linked with the other systems—resulting in the inability to perform data queries across departments. Because access to data is one of the first building blocks in being able to monitor improvement and results on an ongoing basis, it is no surprise that districts generally did not have strategies in place to align these information systems with other performance-driven practices. Even in cases where some foundation was in place, the time and training necessary to conduct meaningful analysis of data in order to inform decision-making efforts had not been properly established, which led to a common theme reported by districts: they are "data rich, but analysis poor."

All of the twenty-eight districts studied had some type of basic information systems in place. Less than one-quarter of the districts (6) described at least one of their information systems as antiquated. A few districts (3) reported that they were planning on implementing new district-wide information systems, while slightly less than a quarter (6) were actively engaged in implementing such systems at the time of this study. Antiquated systems included processes such as using time cards that had to be keyed in by hand; creating budgets one at a time on Excel spreadsheets; completing purchase orders in triplicate; and providing teachers with rosters that were created manually. The inefficiencies of the district's existing information systems were most visible to those in human resources and finance departments. One chief of finance remarked, "The Gap store knows how many pink sweaters were sold in what location and it restocks accordingly. The data management system in public education is pathetic in comparison."

Less than one-quarter of the districts (5) reported that they had basic systems that automated some of the types of tasks listed above. For example:

- Time cards might be automated, but the human resources division could still not send routine letters to staff automatically.

- Payroll systems may not be connected to finance or human resources, so when new staff members are hired, all of their information must be re-entered by the payroll department.

- Requests for information have to go through a central office because district staff cannot directly query the student information system.

- Teachers receive printouts showing state test score results, but cannot disaggregate the data to meet their own needs.

Interestingly, the lack of automation regarding curriculum, instruction, and student information was reported less frequently as a problem for the districts, which may be because information systems are not yet used in the development of curriculum, assessment and analysis of student performance. This is not to say that the use of information systems in this area is less important, only that the need may be currently less apparent.

Two-thirds of the districts (18) reported that they had reliable information systems in one functional area only, even though that same district often had an information system in another functional area that was antiquated. For example, some of these districts had created data warehouses to store student information and made them available for querying by administrators. In some cases, building a data warehouse was a more expedient option than building an entirely new information system, since the data warehouse allowed districts to pull data from their old information systems and conduct analysis on them.

As such, it was a first step to gaining access to student achievement data. However, many districts reported that future planning would include moving toward an entirely new district-wide information system.

Slightly less than one-quarter of the districts (6) reported that superintendents had access to data that they could break down in meaningful ways from their desktops, while one-third (9) reported that top-level administrators had this capability, and even fewer districts had this capability for principals and teachers. A few districts (3) had developed dashboards—for top-level administrators, and in one case for principals—that provided links on their desktops to the most recent and pertinent information that provided a "one-click" option to get updated information on a specific area or issue.

Few districts had linked human resources and payroll systems to finance and budget systems, and even fewer had linked student information systems to these other systems as well. Some districts had developed automated systems for teachers to enter or scan student results on district-wide assessments, the results of which could then be immediately aggregated or disaggregated in various ways. However, it is important to note that none of the districts had implemented all of these elements, and most had only a few in place. Many chiefs of finance reported that they had systems in place that would automatically prevent sites from overspending in certain areas, but they called this a "rear-view mirror" approach to finance. Those that were further along in establishing systems for monitoring spending with data said that what they needed most was a way to look forward at both projected costs and opportunity costs, which appeared to be a long way off.

Finally, it is also important to note that there was widespread dissatisfaction in the available information systems for the education sector more generally. Across the board, participants reported that they had not been able to find effective solutions to the problem of linking human resources, finance, and student information systems. Those that had attempted to do so had developed labor-intensive home-grown adaptations.

As is discussed in later sections of this report, the availability of data is an important step in districts implementing performance-driven practices. However, it is only one part of the problem; how people are trained to use data is just as crucial. It is worth noting that those participants who had at least some access to data regularly reported that district-level and site staff were not trained on what kind of data to gather—particularly in terms of student achievement data—nor on how to analyze it or how to modify administrative processes or instructional practices as a result.

Conclusion

Across these three key areas, districts attempt to match their available resources to their goals, to the best of their ability. Current fiscal conditions do not allow districts much flexibility in how they allocate their funds, which in turn severely constrains their budgets and imposes additional problems around financial decision-making. In the area of human resources, although district members have expressed a desire to reformulate human resource operations to be more customer-oriented, evidence of strategies and actions that demonstrate this are not readily apparent. Furthermore, the effectiveness of current incentive structures for the recruitment and retention of teachers remain unclear,

while state and union regulations make it extremely difficult for districts to exercise full authority in hiring and firing decisions. Meanwhile, inadequate and fragmented information systems as well as the lack of data analysis tools curtail effective long-term monitoring and cross-functional data sharing.

These challenges reinforce the need for long-term evaluation and monitoring over time. As districts cope with the current fiscal climate, long-term evaluation and monitoring of programs and services can help districts focus and target key leverage areas. Evaluation and monitoring can also support informed financial decision-making, allowing districts to monitor their budgets over time and ensure that districts are dedicating their resources in a way that keeps them on track toward their goals. Furthermore, ongoing evaluation is required to assess incentives in place for recruiting and retaining teachers in order to determine the effectiveness of these efforts. The importance of these performance-driven practices implicate and reiterate the need for more robust information systems that operate cross-functionally—that is, providing data that is easily shared between the human resources, finance, and curricular areas—as well as meeting the need for tools that can be used to conduct meaningful data analysis.

Promising Practices

- Facing difficult fiscal conditions, many districts are seeking to prioritize their key initiatives. Typically, this involved working within departments, and in some cases across departments, to determine their most pressing needs. This included taking steps to assess the effectiveness of their efforts to raise student achievement.

- Site-based budgeting that incrementally shifts decision-making authority from the district level to the site was shown to be a dynamic approach, operating as an alignment mechanism as well as helping districts to match resources to goals across all levels of hierarchy throughout the district. Districts that engaged in this form of site-based management had embedded extensive principal and teacher training into everyday practice. They also provided a system of support for site leaders along the whole spectrum of budgetary concerns.

- Many districts are seeking to develop a more customer-friendly and results-oriented approach to human resources—that is, one that is more nimble and responsive to the needs of principals and teachers, while at the same time directed more toward student achievement outcomes. This includes supporting new positions for recruitment, developing service centers for new employees, and shifting substantial resources to create new positions for coaching, mentoring, and supporting teachers. This also includes renegotiating teacher contracts with the focus on meeting human resource goals, a shift which was described as difficult but not impossible to achieve within the context of collective bargaining.

> The importance of these performance-driven practices implicate and reiterate the need for more robust information systems that operate cross-functionally— that is, providing data that is easily shared between the human resources, finance, and curricular areas—as well as meeting the need for tools that can be used to conduct meaningful data analysis.

Practices in Action

In providing incentives to bring teachers to low-performing schools, one district paid for teachers who taught in the lower-performing schools to earn their master's degree, in exchange for a two-year teaching commitment after earning their degree. This kind of program solves two problems at once by improving the qualifications of teachers at low-performing schools and retaining them.

- Numerous alternative certification programs are being implemented in order to address the shortages of teachers in the subjects of science and math. Some programs are developed and implemented in conjunction with the districts' local universities; others programs are created entirely within the districts, but with state approval.

Barriers and Areas of Need

- While fiscal constraints sometimes help districts to focus and prioritize, they often limit the ability of districts to allocate funding for technology infrastructure and training, professional development, student assessments, and student intervention programs. This, in turn, significantly undermines the ability of districts to evaluate and monitor performance-driven reforms.

- Collective bargaining agreements create challenges for districts that are trying to implement performance-driven reform efforts. This is due to restrictions on the types of incentives that can be offered for those positions in high-demand areas and in low-performing schools. Almost all collective bargaining agreements in these districts prevent differentiated pay based on performance, which limits the ability of districts to establish monetary incentives for raising student achievement scores. In turn, this limits the districts' ability to recruit and place outstanding teachers in high-need areas.

- Many districts pointed specifically to the lack of technology infrastructure that makes data collection, extraction, and analysis very labor-intensive. Part of the problem is that districts do not have the necessary information on what technology is available, its costs and limits, and how it can be used to change current work patterns. Furthermore, many of the districts sought tools that could help them conduct analysis, rather than just add more data to what they already had.

Even those districts that had resources available for improving their technology infrastructure described the difficulty of purchasing information systems that could meet their needs in linking human resources, finance, and student information. Those districts that had attempted to do so had developed labor-intensive home-grown adaptations.

Findings Section 3.3
Instructional Leadership

As examined in the previous section, "Matching Resources to Goals," districts that are farther along in adopting performance-driven practices are seeking to improve administrative practices by making them more customer-oriented and by aligning their resources more effectively to support instruction. For these districts, the practice of teaching students—that is, the quality and outcome of the teacher-student encounter—is the crucial interchange of ideas and knowledge that drives all other improvement efforts. As districts discussed their more specific efforts to improve instruction and curriculum, we found three overall areas of emphasis:

1. Efforts to invigorate instructional leadership on school sites,

2. Efforts to understand and use assessments to monitor learning and improve instruction, and

3. Efforts to redefine and revitalize professional development.

This section focuses on the first area: instructional leadership. The second and third areas—the use of assessments to monitor learning and improve instruction, and efforts to revitalize professional development—are discussed separately in the next two sections.

Instructional Leadership at School Sites

Promoting instructional leadership at the site level is a crucial component of performance-based improvement efforts for several reasons. As shown in the section 3.1, "Goals and Governance," strong leadership at the sites can help to connect district-wide goals to site-based objectives. As this section discusses, strong instructional leadership at school sites can also help to break down the walls between classrooms, promoting discussions about improving curriculum and instruction among teachers. In addition, strong site leaders can help to motivate everyone at the school, from secretaries to assistant principals, to focus on student achievement—and to accept more responsibility for student achievement results.

Almost all of the districts in this study sought to foster and invigorate instructional leadership on campus. This was emphasized not only by superintendents and chiefs of instruction and curriculum, but also in interviews with chiefs of human resources and finance, many of whom characterized their own roles as providing administrative support so that principals (and teachers) could focus more on instructional issues. The most common element featured efforts to redefine principals as instructional leaders. However, those districts farther along in establishing instructional leadership at the sites sought to engage teachers in this process as well.

As one approach to establish principals as instructional leaders, many districts reported strategies to get principals into the classroom much more frequently. One chief of curriculum and instruction explained, "We embrace and support the principals to be in the classrooms most of the day, doing work directly focused on teaching and learning." To support principals in this effort, some districts realigned resources to provide more administrative support for principals, either at the site or the district level. However, there was little evidence that this support had been sufficient to free up principals' time for more in-class oversight and participation.

Strong site leaders can help to motivate everyone at the school, from secretaries to assistant principals, to focus on student achievement—and to accept more responsibility for student achievement results.

A second prominent approach in encouraging principals to be more engaged in instructional issues involved districts' reliance on principals to be the primary means for assessing needs for professional development and delivering it at the site. As part of this effort, many districts tailored trainings specifically for principals, and four districts provided leadership academies for principals. Districts also described a strong principal role in providing new types of professional development at school sites. For example, a great deal of site-based professional development was reported to revolve around small-group discussions among teachers about instructional issues. As will be described in greater detail in section 3.5, "Professional Development," many districts have attempted to transform staff meetings from routine discussions of administrative matters to staff development around instruction. Often, principals have been expected to lead these discussions, to encourage practical exchanges of ideas and strategies for teaching, and, in those areas where teachers needed particular expertise, to bring in instructional specialists. Principals were also being trained to analyze assessment data, and engage teachers in discussions about using assessment results to improve instruction.

Third, principals were also being encouraged to view all of their other roles—such as hiring and firing, budgetary planning, managing people, and community relations—in relation to supporting instructional leadership and improving student achievement. In this sense, districts were seeking to provide principals with greater authority in a wide range of areas, and then hold them accountable for student achievement results. It is important to distinguish these efforts to empower principals from more traditional efforts to decentralize authority from the district to the sites. Several districts reported already having a history of strong principal authority on school sites; in one case, schools were described as "fiefdoms." In these cases, however, the principals had little or no accountability for reaching district-supported outcomes. In contrast, the districts that reported that they were engaged in enhancing instructional leadership at the sites were also seeking to give these principals more responsibility for reaching student achievement goals.

For example, 11 districts described procedures that they had established, or were in the process of adopting, for removing principals who were under-performing. Four of these districts had developed or were in the process of developing accountability plans with benchmarks for principal performance that included school-wide and/or student sub-group achievement gains. The common stages in such plans included an evaluation in several areas of performance, a probationary period during which the principal received additional training and support, a re-evaluation of the principal's performance, and then either moving off of probation or allowing the principal some time to look for another job. This process was described as taking, typically, from one to three years. The other seven districts, by contrast, referred to more informal processes that were in place for removing principals who were under-performing. These processes also typically included the use of student performance data. Many districts said that they had experienced severe principal turnover as they had tried to ratchet up the district's focus on student achievement. One district reported a principal turnover rate of 90 percent over the last six years.

Of the ten districts that said they already had procedures for removing principals for low performance, six indicated that they had dismissed under-performing principals. Two indicated that principals had chosen to resign because of the process the district had in place. One district indicated that they had not removed any principals so far, and one district was not specific about how many principals had resigned or had been removed.

Many interview participants suggested that the role of the principal reached beyond instructional leadership to include managerial and administrative leadership as well. That is, instructional leadership was seen as a key weakness of the school sites, one that had been overlooked for too long by principals and by districts, and that therefore needed to be emphasized. However, those districts that had been engaged in the process of encouraging principals to be instructional leaders for several years were also seeking to motivate principals to become better leaders of people and resources—that is, to engage others in the process of instructional leadership as well. This approach builds on the concept of the principal as a manager and facilitator rather than as an authority figure at the site. As one chief of human resources said, "We have to think about leadership teams in a building, not just a principal. . . It's too complicated to manage for one person. That's why we're looking for principals who can delegate. We need a principal who can inspire and create partnerships rather than command through their status." Some districts reported that lead teachers and teacher mentors played an important role in these efforts to share the responsibility for instructional leadership. Other important elements included making instructional coaches and specialists available to sites.

A few districts that had engaged in the process of motivating principals to become instructional leaders looked for ways to be flexible in this process without undermining it. These districts emphasized the need for principals to be managerial as well as instructional leaders. "If that means scaling back a little of the time commitment to instructional leadership without losing intensity, that may be what we need," said one superintendent. "That's what leadership truly is, it's a balancing act. As you're balancing on the tightrope, you need to be moving forward."

Although this tipping of the scale back toward managerial duties hardly reflects an overall trend in this area, it speaks to the larger issue of districts working to solve complex problems and understanding that the solution rarely involves an either–or approach. This could also be indicative of an increasing professionalization of the principalship, in which managerial roles are perceived as complementary to and supportive of instructional leadership. That is, instructional leadership, in focusing principals and sites on student achievement, demands attention to managerial responsibilities as necessary to obtain the appropriate systems and infrastructure to support student achievement gains.

As one superintendent said, "We start with the proposition that the key person is the principal. That's how change is accomplished. Our job, their job, is to manage and lead people. The principal is the key to that." Another district's chief of human resources referred to the challenges this presented to principals: "The most important person in the building is the principal. They've got a hard job. They're like business owners, entrepreneurs in the field. I think it's an overwhelming job."

Teacher Involvement

In recognition of how difficult it can be to engage teachers in instructional improvement efforts, it is not surprising that early efforts toward adopting performance-driven practices include centralizing some decision-making around district-wide goals. This can include realignment of resources that might result in eliminating certain instructional programs that a district no longer supports, pulling categorical funds from site decision-making, or adopting new curricular materials and assessment approaches. In this study, however,

districts that were more successful in providing evidence that performance-driven practices had reached the classroom reported that they had involved teachers more integrally in the transformation process. Additionally, the recent emphasis on assessments can be seen as an effort to share performance results outside of classroom walls and to engage teachers in discussions with each other about instructional approaches, curricular improvements, and other issues related to the quality of the student-teacher interaction.

Many districts began to realign resources by centralizing some decisions, and then gradually became more flexible in engaging teachers as a way to promote buy-in. There was no set pattern in how this was accomplished, as the successes have been too limited to suggest overall patterns. Some districts said that they had been successful in promoting buy-in among teachers by engaging them along the way in the development of pacing guides, creating new approaches and strategies, witnessing firsthand the improvements in the classroom, and seeing the gains in student outcomes. Other districts have focused more heavily in engaging teachers in their low-performing schools, since there was more general agreement about the pressing needs there, as well as external pressure imposed by the requirements of NCLB.

However, there is no doubt that one of the barriers to improving performance involves the isolation of teachers in the classroom. The extreme version was described by a chief of curriculum and instruction, "Teachers have this culture of not telling anybody anything…There's a culture of silence." In many ways the push for instructional leadership on campus can be seen as an effort to bring the discussion of instructional issues outside of the classroom and into the school as a whole—through principal visits into the classroom, invigorated staff meetings, teacher and principal access to instructional specialists and coaches, and other professional development on site.

Almost all districts in this study have invested in professional development to engage teachers in instructional change and improvement, a topic that will be explored at legth in the section that follows. As in other areas, the difficulty of reaching past the barrier of classroom isolation to engage teachers in change speaks to the irony of having centralized goals: as districts seek to improve performance to meet the goals they have set, they must engage teachers to improve their practices in the classroom. Districts reported that effective instructional leadership on campus was one way to do so.

Conclusion

Having strong instructional leadership among principals and teachers at school sites is crucial for developing performance-based systems for several reasons. Effective leaders who are responsive to district needs can help connect district-wide goals to site-based objectives. At the sites, strong instructional leadership can help to break down the walls between classrooms, promoting discussions about curriculum and instruction among teachers. Strong site leaders can help to motivate everyone at the school—from secretaries to assistant principals—to focus on student achievement. And strong leaders can be held accountable for student achievement results.

The recent emphasis on assessments can be seen as an effort to share performance results outside of classroom walls and to engage teachers in discussions with each other about instructional approaches, curricular improvements, and other issues related to the quality of the student-teacher interaction.

Promising Practices

- Districts employ strategies to foster and invigorate instructional leadership on campus by redefining the role of principals as instructional leaders. Those districts that are farther along in establishing instructional leadership at the school sites seek to engage teachers in this process as well.

- Districts are developing strategies to get principals into the classroom much more frequently, and as such, they rely on principals as a primary means for delivering professional development at the school site, through activities such as facilitating small group discussions about instructional issues among teachers.

- Several districts have developed, or are in the process of developing, accountability plans with benchmarks for principal performance that include school-wide and/or student subgroup achievement gains.

Areas of Need

- Despite general agreement that instructional leadership is a critical skill, few districts provided evidence of having in place in-depth training for principals and teachers to take on this role. Many districts do not appear to have organized programs to help their leaders develop the necessary skills. And most districts did not provide evidence of having teachers involved in decision-making activities such as design of professional development, setting goals, and developing district-wide curriculum. For example, training programs could include formal training in examining student achievement data with peers. It could also include creation of support groups for new principals and teachers, and leadership training seminars for principals and teachers.

> **Practices in Action**
>
> The chief of curriculum and instruction at one district reveals the steps the district pursued over several years as a way to shift the emphasis of principals' work from managers to instructional leaders:
>
> "We began to focus on principals . . . First we involved them as district trainers, we started using principals as our trainers. To have a high school principal, with their experience in the classroom, show you a strategy that every teacher can use, that's very powerful to teachers. We changed our staff meetings from administrative trivia to staff development and instructional development, and the use of data in that. Then the conversation changes to, 'These are the strategies that people are using.' It's what we're having everybody do. So we moved from district kinds of things, to training principals, and then they [in turn] train the campus."

Findings Section 3.4
The Use of Assessments

Strong instructional leadership at school sites can help drive district-wide goals to the site level (see section 3.1) and promote discussions about and action toward improving student achievement (see section 3.3). This section examines the use of statewide and district-wide assessments to understand student achievement levels, identify curriculum gaps, and inform instruction.

We found that those districts that were farther along in adopting performance-driven assessment practices were doing two notable things:

- Using assessment results that were already available to them to engage administrators, principals, and teachers in discussions about and improvement of educational practice, and

- Working to establish a more balanced assessment regimen that would provide administrators, principals, and teachers with the information necessary to address student needs.

However, many districts had not yet begun to use assessments in these performance-driven ways. For example, although most districts viewed state assessments as important for external accountability, few took the additional step of using the results of state assessments to engage district and site leaders in discussions about broad student needs or strategies to address them. Still, many districts had adopted or were in the process of adopting district-wide assessments to improve the quality, breadth or timeliness of student assessment results available to them; some are also beginning to use those results to engage in change.

The Use of State-Mandated Assessments

Student assessments come in a variety of formats and serve a wide range of purposes, from fulfilling demands for district- and state-level accountability to understanding how best to meet the needs of individual students in the classroom. The most common assessments are state-level assessments. All districts reported that their states had adopted state-level assessments; however, the states varied in terms of:

- Types of assessments they required of districts (for example, norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, or a combination of the two);

- Specific intent of the assessments, such as establishing a minimal bar for performance or identifying broad instructional needs;

- Length of time the assessment regimen had been in place, including the tools used and how they connected to state standards; and

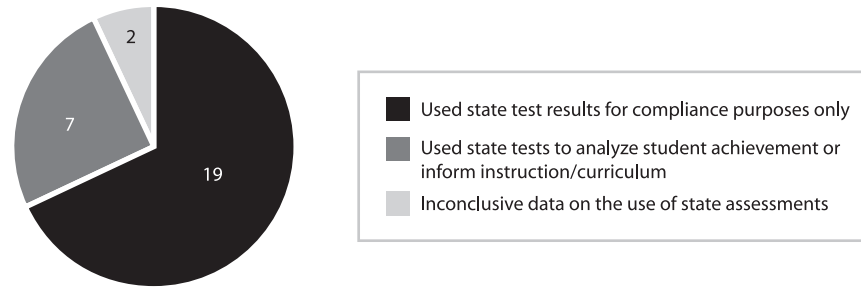- Timeliness with which results were shared with districts.

State guidelines and regulations concerning state standards and assessments had a strong influence on school districts' understanding of student achievement, and their practices for improving it. A few districts credited state standards and assessments with motivating them and their staff to work systematically toward better addressing the needs of all their students, particularly groups of students that had not been well-served historically. One chief of human resources reported that the state's accountability system helped the district shift its efforts away from results like SAT scores for top achievers, toward a focus on the state assessment results of a wider range of student demographic groups.

Many participants acknowledged the importance of statewide standards and assessments in pushing forward educational reform and improvement. However, several participants reported that because the state assessments had changed frequently over the past several years, it was not only very difficult to track changes in student achievement over time, but also expensive to respond effectively each time the state came out with a new series of standards or a new assessment. One superintendent reported that the state had switched assessment tools three times in five years. For those districts seeking to align district assessments with statewide tests and standards, the state's frequent changes had a detrimental effect on efforts to promote coordinated educational planning. Principals and teachers would work hard one year to align district curriculum with state standards, only to find that they needed to do so again the following year when the state contracted with a new assessment vendor.

Other participants reported that their state's assessments did not return the test data in a useful or timely manner, limiting the district's ability to respond productively to test results. As an example, broad performance categories (e.g., below basic, basic, or proficient) reported only at the subject level were insufficient in helping the district to understand gaps in curriculum and learning. It was also problematic for districts to use state assessment results because of the slow turnaround time in getting the data back to the districts. One-quarter of the districts (7) reported that a lack of timeliness in receiving results kept them from using state test data to create meaningful change within the district. One chief of human resources pointed out this delay "doesn't provide an opportunity for teachers to see the data and work with the children to prepare for the next grade." A superintendent echoed this sentiment when he referred to the summative approach of state-mandated assessments as "assessment by autopsy."

Because of these state-level challenges, most districts viewed state-mandated tests as external measures of performance and did not use the state assessment results to improve performance. Over two-thirds of the districts (19) considered state testing mainly an issue of compliance and did not actively use results from these tests as sources of data for evaluating the effectiveness of district curriculum and practices (see table 3.4.1). Just one-quarter of the districts (7) reported that they used state assessment results to assist in analyzing performance of student populations, identifying curricular gaps, and/or targeting instructional practice or interventions to specific groups of students. Typical practices in this category included offering state tests in the beginning of the school year so that gaps in performance could be identified in time to modify instruction. For example, one district offered the required state test in the fall as a diagnostic assessment, and then administered the test again at the end of the year as an indicator of student progress.

Figure 3.4.1 – Districts' Use of State-Mandated Assessments

- ■ Used state test results for compliance purposes only
- ■ Used state tests to analyze student achievement or inform instruction/curriculum
- ■ Inconclusive data on the use of state assessments

The Use of District-Wide Assessments

Districts that seemed to have adopted more performance-driven practices had taken steps to develop district-wide assessments in specific subject areas in order obtain more detailed, robust, and timely student performance results. Among the districts in this study, the role and use of district-wide assessments fell along a continuum ranging from infrequent and summative tests given at the end of the year, to more diagnostic assessments that were implemented quarterly or by semester in selected courses, and that were targeted to specific sets of skills.

For those districts that had conducted district-wide assessments, it was most common to start with assessments in language arts and math first, followed by tests in science and social studies. Districts typically began with several key grade levels—such as third, sixth, eighth, and tenth—and expanded to other grades, and often started with end-of-year summative tests before considering more frequent intervals for diagnostic testing.

Three-quarters of the districts (21) had already implemented or were in the process of developing district-wide assessments (see table 3.4.2). Of these 21 districts, 14 reported practices in which they used or planned to use these tests to assist in analyzing student performance, identifying curricular gaps, and/or targeting instructional practice or interventions to specific students. Several districts reported that site-level assessments were used to better understand and impact student performance. Because these assessments were not used district-wide, they are not included here.

Figure 3.4.2 – Use of District-Wide Assessments
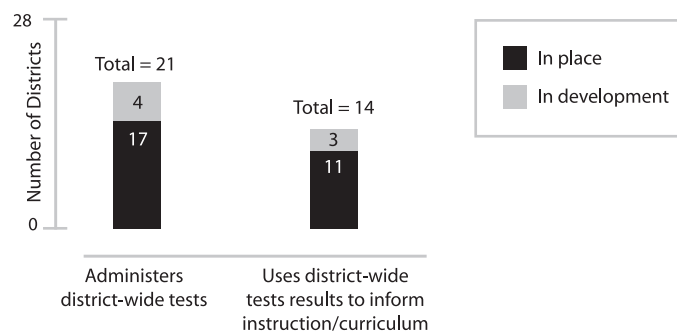
Note: These tests include summative (i.e., end-of-year) as well as more frequently administered assessments that were used in diagnostic and/or formative ways. They include norm-referenced as well as criterion-referenced tests.

The findings presented in tables 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 suggest that, among those in this study, districts were much more likely to use district-wide (rather than state-mandated) assessments to analyze and inform their curricular and instructional practices. Reasons for this included:

- Districts had greater control over the development of district-wide assessments, thereby generating greater trust among district administrators, teachers, and staff concerning the results;

- District assessments were designed in ways that were more specific to identifying student needs, rather than primarily for state accountability;

- Districts could tailor the presentation of assessment results in ways that met their own unique needs;

- Districts could schedule their own assessments in ways that made sense for their annual calendars; and

- The results of district assessments could be provided more quickly than statewide assessment results.

Nonetheless, Tables 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 also show that there is a significant gap between the implementation of assessments and the use of assessment results to improve practice. The majority of districts did not appear to be using state assessment results to assist with understanding student needs and analyzing the effectiveness of district practices, but a greater percent appeared to be doing so with district-wide test results. Of those districts (17) that had implemented district-wide assessments, only about one-third (6) did not report to be using the district-wide assessment results to inform district practice. In fact, many districts reported that they needed additional assistance in this area.

A Closer Look at the Use of Diagnostic Tests

The previous segment focused on districts' use of state-mandated and district-wide assessments as a way to understand their effectiveness in meeting broad student needs. This segment examines in greater depth the extent to which districts have adopted and used assessments for diagnostic purposes to assist them in identifying the needs of individual students and in tracking and improving their progress throughout the year. Districts used a variety of tools to understand and track student progress, but those that were more performance-driven were more likely to have in place systematic procedures to bring together teachers, principals, and administrators to analyze assessment results in order to understand and improve student performance (see Chapter 4, "Becoming a Performance-Driven Organization").

Perhaps due to the current climate of accountability in schools, many districts were taking steps to assess student progress toward defined goals several times during the year, so as to improve achievement levels by the end of the year. For purposes of this study, we defined this particular use of assessments as benchmarking—that is, those tests that were administered at least quarterly at the district or site level to evaluate students against established benchmarks of student performance (such as grade-level state standards). The objective of these assessments was to allow teachers and administrators to evaluate gaps in curriculum, identify high-need instructional areas, and target services to specific students while there was still time in the school year to adjust.

Districts used a variety of tools to understand and track student progress, but those that were more performance-driven were more likely to have in place systematic procedures to bring together teachers, principals, and administrators to analyze assessment results in order to understand and improve student performance.

Two-thirds of the districts (18) provided examples of diagnostic benchmarking assessments that evaluated students at least quarterly, as a way of gauging their progress toward mastering state standards for their grade level at the end of the year. Three-quarters of them (14 of the 18) already had these practices in place in at least some sites or grade levels, while another 4 districts reported that they were planning or beginning to implement them.

Figure 3.4.3 – Frequent Diagnostic Assessments Used for Benchmarking
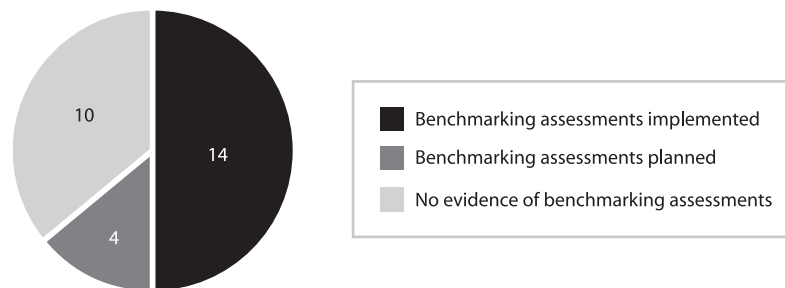
Note: These tests are administered at least quarterly and used to gauge student progress toward state standards for the grade level by the end of the year. These assessments include district-wide and site-level tests.

Less than a third of districts (8) offered evidence of administering these benchmarking tests more frequently than quarterly, in order to assess student progress on specific sets of skills and to inform teachers about specific instructional needs. Another three districts were in the process of developing such short-cycle assessments. These formative tests were typically built around pacing or scope-and-sequence guides that districts developed. Most of those who had adopted such assessments had done so in math or English language arts, and the purpose tended to be helping teachers to understand how well students had learned topics covered recently and to adjust instruction accordingly.

Those districts that reported having adopted such frequent, formative assessments said that they were a powerful tool in actually driving improvement in the classroom. These assessments provided teachers up-to-date information about skill levels of their students, information that could be easily organized and analyzed to address different student groups. As one superintendent said, "We also have mini-assessments. We have a very prescriptive approach as to what teachers are expected to do with students. Some of those are every three weeks, whatever amount of time it takes to teach that cluster of skills."

However, many participants expressed a need for more of these types of assessments, particularly those aligned with the curriculum and with state standards. Districts also reported a need for assistance in training teachers how to use the results of formative (as opposed to summative) assessments to drive instructional improvement, suggesting that many districts have significant work to do to implement formative assessments and then use the results effectively to promote instructional improvement. One superintendent described the difference between summative and formative assessments as follows: "State test data is like learning your weight on the scale. It doesn't help you lose weight. It just tells you whether you did. The data that helps is the calories and amount of exercise. That's what the short-cycle assessments do; they tie [testing] to the process of actually learning."

Some districts cautioned that these assessments should be considered as just one of several possible ways to understand student achievement. As one chief of curriculum and instruction said, "You want to use it as a barometer and then develop rich instruction from it." Others emphasized the importance of developing curriculum first, and then engaging teachers in the process of developing district-wide assessments later. In either case, however, assessments were described as a means of gauging weaknesses and strengths in performance, which could lead to a better understanding of curriculum and instruction needs.

Conclusion

The development of state standards and assessments appears to have helped many districts to address the needs of all students, particularly groups of students that had not been well served historically. Those districts that were farther along in adopting performance-driven practices were using assessment results that were available to them to engage administrators, principals, and teachers in discussing and improving educational practice. In addition, these districts were taking steps to establish a more balanced assessment regimen that could provide them with the data they needed to advance student progress, including more frequently administered district- or site-based assessments for diagnostic and formative uses. Most districts acknowledged that state-mandated tests were important as an external measure of performance, but not as a source of important data for evaluating perform-ance—due in part to the depth and timeliness of the state results. On the other hand, many districts were using district-wide or site-level assessments for benchmarking of student needs and identifying of curricular gaps during the year, though they faced several challenges in doing so (see "Areas of Need," below). Less than a third of districts had adopted more formative, short-cycle assessments tailored specifically to guide instruc-tional practice, and many described this as a high-need area.

Promising Practices

- Eleven districts reported using district-wide assessments to evaluate overall student achievement levels and improve curriculum. For example, one district indicated that they used monthly assessments, aligned with state standards, to monitor student progress. "We know exactly where every student is every month," said the director of curriculum and instruction. The district administered assessments in reading, writing, and math, and was in the process of developing an assessment for social studies and science.

- A few districts provided evidence of having multiple indicators (such as attendance, classroom participation, formative and summative assessment results, and student portfolios) in place to assess student achievement on an ongoing basis across the district. The main point of this practice was to monitor student progress in a variety of ways toward intended goals. Multiple assessment indicators are particularly important in monitoring and understanding the needs of under-performing students.

Areas of Need

In developing performance-driven practices to improve instruction and assessment, districts emphasized the following areas of need:

- Access to diagnostic and formative assessments that are aligned with the curriculum and state standards, and that can guide instruction.

- Technological systems that provide real-time student achievement data to teachers as well as principals and district office administrators in understandable, actionable ways.

- Comprehensive training and tools to measure and evaluate ongoing formative assessment data to diagnose specific student learning gaps.

- Assistance in helping teachers to think analytically about using assessment results to inform their instruction.

- Guidance in how teachers and principals should select the appropriate instructional strategies to address the identified needs.

Findings Section 3.5
Professional Development

Professional development is one of the primary means that school system leaders are using to engage administrators, principals, and teachers in change. This study found that performance-driven practices in professional development represent a commitment to a more customer-oriented and data-driven approach, connected to district goals, informed by student achievement results, and directed toward staff needs, the quality of the teacher-student interaction, and curricular gaps at the sites. What is perhaps most provocative from the findings in this area, however, is the extent to which administrators have transformed—or are seeking to transform—professional development from an encounter centered on *seat time* to one that focuses on *support time*. In an approach centered on seat time, teachers take a course and get credit for their attendance and efforts. In a support-time model, professional development comes to the teacher at key moments, through individualized means, such as increasing meaningful interactions among teachers and principals, engaging teachers in dialogues about practice, providing mentoring opportunities with lead teachers and instructional coaches, and following through with real-time support after the development interaction. These efforts can be seen as a way to metaphorically "break down the walls" between classrooms, and engage teachers in change.

Professional development was reported as one of the most important factors in improving student performance. As one superintendent said, "Professional development is the critical path for us. The surest route to improve student achievement is to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom." Another superintendent explained the importance of tying professional development to student achievement goals, "In terms of professional development, you have to narrow and focus it around one thing. We have done that, and it is a huge change…We have redesigned all of our professional development so that anybody that gives it has to have a protocol and development that are approved. A committee has to look at it and see how does it tie to student achievement. That alone has uncovered some ungodly bad practices."

Professional development efforts center around two pivotal positions: principals and teachers. In working with principals, many administrators described efforts to engage them as instructional leaders and facilitators on their school sites, provide them with experience in gathering and using student data to identify curricular weaknesses and plan interventions, and improve their managerial skills in both overseeing and supporting teachers. Professional development efforts with teachers, on the other hand, were more content-oriented and more focused on the practice of instruction, although they also used student assessment data to revise instruction.

As in other functional areas, many districts in the early stages of developing performance-driven practices were engaged in processes of centralizing the professional development function, and aligning its overall aims with the specific student achievement goals of the district. As one superintendent said, "The role of the district has been to find coherence and to build frameworks that are K-12 in nature. With old site-based governance, they were just all over the place." Several districts reported district-led efforts to provide professional development in literacy development, math instruction, standards-based efforts (including scope, sequencing, and differentiation of instruction), specific program

This study found that performance-driven practices in professional development represent a commitment to a more customer-oriented and data-driven approach, connected to district goals, informed by student achievement results, and directed toward staff needs, the quality of the teacher-student interaction, and curricular gaps at the sites.

implementations and issues regarding fidelity of implementation of such programs, and particular school reform efforts adopted by the district. Due to the wide range of professional development efforts, many participants expressed a desire for a more narrow and focused professional development, which would allow districts to better identify where students were having problems and zero in on gaps in curriculum and student achievement.

At the district level, professional development was generally in the purview of either the department of curriculum and instruction, or the department of human resources. Nearly half of the districts (12) typically delegated issues of professional development to their department of curriculum and instruction, while several others (4) reported that professional development was housed in their department of human resources. One-third of the districts (8) shared, in some capacity, the responsibility for professional development between the district and site levels. In these cases, the district-level decision-makers set the parameters and foci of professional development, and in turn, principals and school committees selected the specific professional development pieces in accordance with their needs.

Even districts that have been involved in increased professional development for several years are still searching for the right balance between district- and site-level decision-making in this area. While participants have expressed the need to align professional development with both district-identified needs and site-level improvement plans, many districts that are centralizing their professional development have found that a top-down approach is not particularly effective in reaching teachers and motivating them to improve instructional practices. For some districts this means involving teachers in these discussions, in order to give them a stake in organizing strategies for their own professional development. According to one superintendent, "Teachers feel very excited about improvements when they have a sense of ownership in it. That's a fine line you have to walk, making sure you're moving things forward, but also keeping people involved." For example, districts described professional development efforts to engage teachers in developing and assessing instructional guidelines in language arts and math, and, in some cases, science.

However, limitations on how much staff development districts can require for teachers pose barriers to professional development. These limitations include those defined by collective bargaining agreements, funding, and teacher time. In other cases, the inadequacies of financial resources also served to constrain professional development. One chief of curriculum and instruction reported that moving toward site-based professional development during staff meetings was partly a function of not having enough money to pull teachers out of the classroom for professional development days. In another district, budget cuts had forced the district to cut professional development for staff members. The chief of finance explained, "There is no ongoing professional development for the non-instructional side. It's one of the casualties of the budget constraints." Due in part to these financial limitations, many participants expressed a desire for improved systems and tools that could be used to help monitor the costs of professional development, as well as to help them understand the effectiveness of professional development training.

A New Model of Professional Development: Just-in-Time Support

District after district in this study described professional development activities that were no longer about seat time, but about ongoing support time for teachers as an integral part of what they do from day-to-day. This support for teachers and principals was referred to as "coaching," "real-time training," "at-elbow support," "peer support," and "just-in-time training." In many ways, this approach can be seen as parallel to the developments in human resources and finance that are seeking to make those departments more customer-oriented. It can also be seen as a practical way to provide district-supported training in ways that are very responsive to site-based needs.

For example, two districts described innovative efforts to use instructional coaches to monitor teacher effectiveness in areas of literacy and math. In both districts, coaches provide training in an ongoing fashion, embedding this practice within teachers' day-to-day jobs. In one case, the role of the coaches was primarily one of support. However, since they were in the classrooms frequently, they had come to play a role in assisting the principals in evaluation. In the other case, the district took steps to hire instructional coaches who were not union members and whose primary duties would be to assess teacher effectiveness. In both cases, the instructional coaches bridged differences between principals and teachers by helping to mediate disagreements and facilitate curricular consistency across the district, as well as helping teachers to hone their teaching skills.

Although participants were initially asked about the number of professional development days that their district set aside annually, several responded by discussing a new shift away from the traditional model of required professional development days and toward more embedded training. These districts still have training days; however, more energy—and professional development dollars—appear to be directed toward investments in instructional coaches, mentor teachers, and subject specialists who are assigned and available to schools to promote instructional leadership and improve teaching at the sites. These coaches typically come from within the ranks of master teachers in the districts. Two-thirds (18) reported this type of approach to professional development. One chief of instruction and curriculum emphasized the level of investment the district had made, "We have three teacher-leaders at each school in each of four subject areas. That's 12 times 30 schools or 360 total." The teacher-leaders provide instructional support to other teachers, help to lead staff in meetings about instructional issues, and provide problem-solving approaches to assessment and instruction.

One district's chief of curriculum and instruction emphasized the resources that instructional coaches brought to schools, "They know their data and schools and the comprehensive school reform design and can give teachers professional development and support." Another district's chief of finance explained, "There is a staff-development teacher in every school. There are also math content coaches and reading trainers. We are developing ongoing training rather than pulling out teachers from the classroom. We want the support to be there all the time, not just when a teacher is new or failing."

Using Data and Information to Improve Teaching

With an increased emphasis on student assessments, the need to train and motivate principals and teachers to use data and data analysis has become increasingly important. Many districts focused their professional development in these areas as a way to help principals and schools make better use of assessment analysis to improve student performance. The reported emphasis on districts' mentoring and coaching makes sense in conjunction with the districts' efforts to engage principals and teachers in ongoing discussions about and analysis of assessment results, student performance gains and weaknesses, program results, and annual performance targets. As one chief of curriculum and instruction said, "We are a data-rich system, but the data analysis is poor. I think we need to do more training and professional development at the local level to look at [local] data and help them learn how to use data."

A few participants further emphasized that even though they might be able to put additional resources into data-focused professional development, it would still be insufficient because the most important policy levers for improving teacher expertise and training lie in programs that train and certify teachers for the classroom. They criticized these programs for not providing teachers with practical skills in analyzing student achievement data and understanding assessments.

Still, most districts (24) reported that they provided training for principals in how to access and use data, while two-thirds (18) reported that they provided this kind of training for teachers. Districts varied in the sophistication of data-use training they provided. While some districts focused their professional development on basic issues of data access and assessing student and program performance, other districts provided more sophisticated training in how to use data to change practice. Of those districts that have data-use training for teachers or principals, about one-third (9) described basic training in using the technology, while less than half of the districts (11) reported that they had developed or were in the process of developing training in using data to change classroom practice. In four districts there was no evidence of data-use training provided.

Figure 3.5.1 – Districts That Provide Data-Use Training
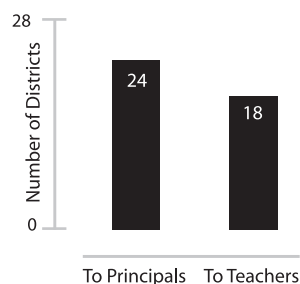
Some districts described monthly meetings with the principal and site leadership team to review data about their school's performance, make adjustments, and track progress. In some cases this involved data from state assessments; in others it involved district-level, site-level, or classroom-level results. A few districts described a series of meetings with principals, teachers, and instructional coaches or content specialists—disaggregating data, identifying strengths and weaknesses, mapping out strategies for improvement, and coming back together to look at the results. Several districts described teams that went

into low-performing schools to help teachers diagnose specific student achievement challenges, map out an action plan, provide coaching and additional professional development to meet that plan, and assess results over time. Participants reported several approaches that connected student performance results to an intervention strategy that involved professional development. One chief of curriculum and instruction said, "We analyzed all teachers whose [student performance] scores were below the district level. We immediately hired subs, took the teachers out and trained them with strategies in their classroom, to work with those kids. We did that as just-in-time training, as a result of quarterly tests, analyzed at the student level and the teacher level."

In assessing district efforts to improve student achievement through professional development, those districts that were further along in adopting performance-driven practices tended to be engaged in a more customer-oriented and data-driven approach—steered by district goals, informed by student achievement results, and directed toward staff needs and curricular gaps at the sites. Not surprisingly, these district leaders placed a great deal of importance on this kind of district-led (but site-based) approach, as it connected teachers and principals both to the specifics of student achievement measures, as well as to overarching district goals.

Most importantly, professional development served as the districts' primary tool for fostering intrinsic responsibility for—as opposed to mere compliance regarding—educational outcomes and district goals. As one chief of human resources said, "Professional development is probably the most important strategy that can be used to impact students. That is why our district tries to use every possible resource to impact that variable, and every possible delivery system."

Conclusion

Many districts have modified their models of professional development, from a seat-centered approach to a service-centered strategy that provides ongoing and embedded support. Very often these new approaches to professional development include a strong emphasis on data-use training for principals and teachers. However, this new customer-oriented and data-driven approach is not without its challenges; even when there is access to data, district and school employees often do not have the skill set to draw conclusions about the data that would enable them to change practices in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, this has not deterred districts from strongly asserting the importance of approaching professional development from the perspective of data-driven decision-making, connected to district goals and informed by student achievement results.

Promising Practices

- Districts that are farther along in adopting performance-driven practices tended to be engaged in a more customer-oriented and data-driven approach—steered by district goals, informed by student achievement results, and directed toward staff needs and curricular gaps at the sites.

- Districts are searching for a balance between district- and site-level decision-making about professional development, balancing the trade-offs between the need to align professional development with district-identified needs versus site-level improvement

In assessing district efforts to improve student achievement through professional development, those districts that were further along in adopting performance-driven practices tended to be engaged in a more customer-oriented and data-driven approach—steered by district goals, informed by student achievement results, and directed toward staff needs and curricular gaps at the sites.

Practices in Action

One chief of curriculum and instruction conducts monthly meetings with groups of principals in order to help them gain practical experience with quarterly data, discuss what each school is doing with the results, and what changes they are making in response to the results. They devote the entire meeting to analyzing the data together, modeling how quarterly data is handled, and coming up with strategies to determine three or four things that they are going to do differently because of the data when they go back to the school.

plans. For example, while many districts are moving toward a centralization of their professional development, they have found that a top-down approach is not particularly effective in reaching teachers and motivating them to improve instructional practices.

■ Professional development activities are less about seat time and more about ongoing support for teachers and principals. This includes the use of teacher-leaders to provide support, help lead staff meetings, and help develop problem-solving approaches to assessment and instruction. This also includes regular meetings with site-level leaders to review student data, develop strategies for improvement, and follow up on results.

Areas of Need

■ Alignment of professional development with specific district-identified areas of need and school improvement goals, such as targeted professional development to better identify where students are having problems and then addressing these gaps in curriculum.

■ Improved systems to help monitor the costs of professional development, as well as the effectiveness of these efforts.

■ Flexibility in determining the type and amount of professional development that is required of teachers.

■ Principals and teachers who have prior graduate school training and practical skills in analyzing data, understanding assessments, monitoring program effectiveness, and using assessment results to revise instructional practice.

Chapter 4
Becoming a Performance-Driven Organization

This chapter focuses on the various practices that districts adopt as they move toward the goal of becoming performance-driven organizations. Their experiences reveal the complexities of organizational culture and structure, and their effect on these performance-driven efforts. In this sense, the concept of being a performance-driven organization has as much to do with people and underlying processes as it does with goals, finance policies, technology infrastructure, human resource tools, assessments, and teacher training. The critical questions surrounding performance-driven practices reach well beyond what systems districts have in place, and include the practices that are used, how are they used, and by whom, to bring about improvement.

The findings from this study indicate a progression of actions that districts take in adopting performance-driven practices. Since the sample of districts in this study were purportedly at the "front of the wave" in implementing performance-driven practices, it is perhaps not surprising that all of the districts interviewed reported that they have made at least some initial progress in becoming more performance-driven. While there were many examples of efforts that districts had made to gather better information, there were fewer examples of districts using that information to effectively make changes based on that data. Some are at the initial stages of this process—in terms of years, actions taken, and practices in place—yet the vast majority have been purposefully moving in this direction for less than five years. Only a few districts have been working on developing performance-driven practices for more than seven years.

We have identified five actions that districts take to develop systematic strategies for implementing performance-driven practices (see Figure 4.1):

- **Gathering data.** The practices that district staff and teachers use to gather and share data, including student achievement data as well as other organizational data. This includes how data are gathered, data sources, the timeliness of data, and the relevance of the data.

- **Assessing outcomes.** The ways that districts provide context for the data that they gather and includes what people bring to the table as they assess student achievement results. It involves the identification of curricular gaps through assessment results, and also considers how district assessments are aligned with state standards and whether professional development is structured so as to better address curricular gaps.

- **Monitoring and feedback.** How districts monitor the effectiveness of specific programs or efforts, and what evidence is provided that shows how departments, different sites, or certain programs are performing.

- **Ownership of outcomes.** The ways in which people throughout the organization are held accountable for the performance of students. For example, this includes who analyzes current measures and assessments, who is responsible for the results, and how and what interventions are put in place. It also includes the processes for evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions, the incentives to achieve desired results, and evidence of an organizational culture that supports these efforts.

The critical questions surrounding performance-driven practices reach well beyond what systems districts have in place, and include the practices that are used, how are they used, and by whom, to bring about improvement.

- **Building a learning organization.** Establishing the processes and behaviors necessary to support organizational structures and a performance-driven culture. This also includes working proactively toward aligning the district's resources to its goals and then evaluating the fit between them on an ongoing basis.

As districts move toward being more performance-driven, they are faced with the need to re-evaluate many of the organizational and cultural practices already in place that may impede the effective implementation of these processes. As such, performance-driven practices are predicated upon ongoing inquiry. This requires an environment in which senior-level administrators, principals, and teachers interact and provide each other with clear, frequent, open and ongoing feedback about the process. The path toward being more performance-driven also requires districts to examine organizational hierarchies in order to facilitate the internal relations that become more apparent once districts begin taking action to build a learning organization.

Figure 4.1 – Actions to Implement Performance-Driven Practices

Gathering Data and Assessing Outcomes

Among the districts we studied, one of the first steps in the process of becoming a more performance-driven organization was recognizing the importance of using data. Specifically, this required taking action to gather and analyze information about student achievement and other organizational outcomes, as opposed to relying solely on state assessments and other external compliance mechanisms for feedback about how the district was performing. This shift toward internal practices for gathering information and assessing results is at the heart of transforming from a compliance- to a performance-driven organization. This transformation requires awareness among the leadership—and eventually throughout the district—about the role of information and monitoring to drive change.

In this study, all of the districts provided examples of gathering and analyzing data in order to assist in decision-making—a process often referred to as data-driven decision-making. While some districts were just beginning this process, others had already found some degree of success in having driven the process through several levels of the organizational structure. The most common reasons provided for gathering and analyzing data were as follows:

- Two-thirds of the districts (18) provided evidence of gathering data to **support curriculum decisions or guide instruction**. In these cases, districts provided the data necessary for principals and teachers to improve instruction. There was an expectation that teachers would make changes in instructional practice based on the findings of the data, and that the principal's role was to follow through and ensure that achievement gaps were decreasing. However, there was typically little follow-through from the district on these issues. Nonetheless, it appears that this type of practice does encourage periodic monitoring of students' progress.

- Over half of the districts (15) used some type of data to **track progress of specific groups of students** over time, including specific ethnic groups, English Language Learners, specific grade levels, and groups of under-performing students.

- Half of the districts (14) said they considered student achievement data and teacher surveys when **determining professional development needs**.

- Slightly less than half (12) discussed data that they used for **program evaluations**, to determine how a program is working, and whether it has made a difference in student performance.

In addition, one-third (9) said that they used supplemental, subjective information gathered through periodic on-site reviews, such as instructional walk-throughs and classroom observations, to evaluate the consistency of program implementation, student engagement, and teacher performance.

Many administrators described difficulties in gathering information in systematic ways. Participants reported that their districts did not have the ability to retrieve data, the data they received was not accurate, or that they had no way to track whether or not there were improvements over time. Other participants, particularly those who had previously worked in the business sector, emphasized the difficulty they had in knowing exactly what education outcomes to measure, and how to ensure that people who worked for them at the district and school sites could make those judgments. For example, one chief of finance said, "We don't have a system in place yet where we have program managers who understand how to identify what they need to measure in their program and how to gather data… It's not exactly like in business where the outcome is bottom-line driven; it's more nuanced than that. It's about, how do you measure what it is you are contributing?"

Many participants also discussed the difficulties of analyzing information and taking action based on the results. For example, one superintendent said, "Ninety-seven percent of the schools don't know what to do with the data, even if they have it. There are lots of efforts to get data into schools. In most cases, that data is residing in people's desks." In about half of the districts, principals did not have access to student achievement data on a regular basis during the year. In more than half of the districts, teachers are not provided with such information about their own classrooms.

Those districts that are further along in adopting performance-driven practices described processes for getting assessment results out to principals and teachers. Those districts gave examples of the ways teachers came together in staff meetings with principals to problem-solve student achievement challenges in their classroom, and how principals and teachers checked in with teams of colleagues about monthly benchmarks for reaching year-end goals. These districts also reported teachers and principals who were well-versed in information

about their school and its student achievement goals. As one chief of curriculum and instruction said, "A good principal will tell you about data when you ask how your schools are doing. If they can't tell you off the top of their head, they'll have it on paper on their desk with a plan."

At this initial stage, one of the key issues is the reconceptualization of the meaning of data and its use. Rather than a static and compliant approach, performance-driven data gathering and outcomes assessment require a cultural shift that focuses on internal practices, embracing organizational re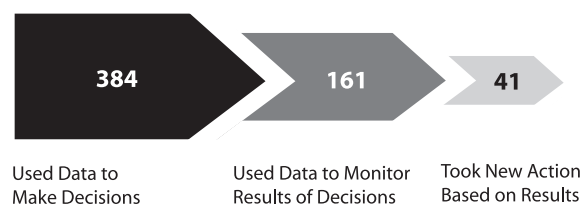flectiveness across all levels of the district. This cultural shift is also contingent upon data and results that are meaningful and readily accessible, not only to administrators but also to principals and teachers.

Monitoring and Feedback Loops

Many districts reported that they gathered data and sought to analyze it for specific decision-making purposes. However, there were fewer reported instances of district staff (administrators, principals, or teachers) monitoring outcomes regularly, taking action based on the data gathered, and then collecting new data to examine the extent to which the interventions had been successful—a process known as a feedback loop. Whereas the interviews elicited 384 instances of data-based decision-making, they elicited less than half that many examples (161) of regular monitoring or feedback loops, and even fewer instances (41) of action taken based on new information. This suggests that the prevalence of data use did not directly translate into monitoring the effectiveness of interventions or other programs, and then making appropriate adjustments based on the new data. This is not to say that half as many districts engaged in this behavior, but rather that they engaged in it much less frequently. Many districts offered 10 or more examples of gathering data and considering it in making decisions, while typically offering only 2 to 5 examples of monitoring, and 0 to 2 examples of taking action based on the findings and again assessing the results.

Figure 4.2 – Uses of Data In Practice
Number of instances cited in interviews

384	161	41
Used Data to Make Decisions	Used Data to Monitor Results of Decisions	Took New Action Based on Results

Therefore, although data-based decision-making may now be a more common practice in school districts, the districts in this study continue to struggle with moving past the simple day-to-day data issues to more ongoing and continuous improvement and change. In this study, monitoring helped districts move from simply using data on a case-by-case basis to using it to help establish a more collective and continuous knowledge-base for examining their own progress.

The most common areas of regular monitoring and feedback loops were as follows:

- Three-quarters of the districts (20) reported that they had put in place specific district-level **interventions as a response to identification of weaknesses at school sites through data analysis**. For example, these interventions included student programs and teacher and principal professional development training.

- Slightly more than half (15) provided evidence that they **used data to make decisions regarding human resources**, such as using data to support recruitment decisions, monitor teacher turnover, and look for retirement trends.

- One-third (10) provided evidence of at least one process at school sites to **monitor individual student progress, intervene when necessary**, and assess results regularly.

- One-third (10) described regular efforts to **perform cost-benefit studies** of programs to determine whether or not to continue funding them. These districts had taken corrective action through eliminating programs.

- Just over one-quarter (8) provided at least one example of p**rincipals and teachers analyzing results regularly**, revising instructional practices, and following up with further analysis.

- Less than a quarter (5) provided at least one example of being **able to respond rapidly to identified weaknesses** by providing immediate support to teachers or student intervention programs.

- Two districts provided evidence that they **regularly compared their student performance data against other districts' data** with similar student populations as a way of validating their progress and learning from other systems.

Some districts described a relatively rigid structure of top-down monitoring of state exam results and yearly progress indicators, yet were not particularly familiar with opportunities for teachers to be involved in interpreting data and making curricular adjustments. As with data-gathering efforts, however, those districts that were farther along in the process of monitoring student achievement regularly and taking actions based on the results were doing so by engaging staff at the site level. These districts typically described circumstances in which district staff, instructional coaches, and others sat down with principals at low-performing schools every month to six weeks for reviews of performance data. In some districts, teachers had entered the assessment data themselves into online systems and were actively involved in the discussions, while the schools determined which data to collect in conjunction with district goals. In other districts, this data would be supplemented by walk-throughs of classrooms. Based on the data, the team would determine an action plan for the next month based on something that needed improvement, such as attendance objectives or math instruction, and then results would be analyzed each month to track improvement on an ongoing basis. As one chief of finance said, "We problem-solve everything. We use total quality management: plan, do, study, act. We put together the plan, we do something about it, we study the results, we act on what we find out. It sounds like overkill...But believe me it's not."

None of the districts expected that the activity of building a culture of inquiry—in which teachers share and analyze student performance information with principals and administrators—would happen overnight. In fact, several participants emphasized that it

remained a struggle to make it more pervasive. Nevertheless, the practices of those districts that were more performance-driven reinforced the importance of interactions and discussion that transcend organizational hierarchies. The practices of these districts further demonstrate how monitoring and feedback mechanisms promote dialogue throughout the organization, while further harnessing practices in support of a culture of inquiry.

Ownership of Outcomes

Promoting ownership of outcomes at school sites and at the district level is another way to encourage the monitoring of progress toward improved student achievement. There were many ways that districts motivated people to take an active role in meeting organizational goals (including participation in the development of such goals and support in reaching them). Two particularly salient ways were the extent to which people were provided with additional pay for improved student achievement, and the extent to which their evaluations were tied to student outcomes.

Several districts (4) reported that they provided a bonus to schools based on the school's performance in reaching student achievement and other performance targets. In some cases these bonuses were shared by teachers and staff at the schools (based on allocations determined by site-based committees); in others, they were added to the site's budget. Eight districts said that they provided teachers with bonuses based on student achievement and other performance measures. The amount of money provided to teachers was as high as $3,000, but more often it was closer to $1,000. Four districts said that they provided principals with such bonuses; these bonuses reached as high as $15,000. Two districts said that they provided district-level administrators with performance-based bonuses. Seven districts stated that they would like to adopt or expand pay-for-performance programs. Two of these districts are negotiating with unions to put such a program in place.

However, the impact of these financial incentives remains uncertain. In one district, 90 percent of teachers reportedly qualified for the bonus. Said their chief of finance, "I don't know if it makes that much difference. I have a hard time thinking they work harder because of this. But they sure like it, getting these incentives. It probably makes it more likely you'll go the extra mile, if you've gotten this before. For those that have never gotten it, maybe it doesn't work as well for them as an incentive." Another chief of finance said, "I think they like it. It's been successful. But if I were to guess, probably the ones that are successful would have been successful without it. But it's probably a good idea to reward that achievement." Nevertheless, none of the districts provided evidence that they had evaluated the effectiveness of their pay-for-performance systems.

While a few districts reported that they had recently begun to use student achievement data in the performance evaluations of teachers, principals, and district administrators, the vast majority had not done so. Only three districts reported that they were using student achievement results to evaluate teachers. According to the superintendent of one of these districts, their evaluation process, which was developed in cooperation with the teacher's union, sought to shift the culture of accountability from blame to support. "We had teachers who wanted to be able to say 'I don't know,' but they didn't want to do that in front of an evaluator. Administrators said that they didn't have time [to help with] extensive evaluations. So we have teachers who are selected through a process to go in and help with evaluations," another superintendent said. "We have weeded out poor performers.

That's seen as a joint responsibility with the unions. We base it on student performance data, we slice it 25 different ways."

One-quarter of the districts (7) said that they were evaluating principals based on student achievement results in their schools. As an example, one district evaluated principal performance through a "portfolio process" every three years. In this case, 60 percent of the principals' performance was based on student achievement and attendance. If principals did not reach a specific score, then they were placed on an annual rather than a three-year cycle for review, with probationary and other consequences if they continued to fail in meeting the goals.

Almost all districts indicated that they had a system in place to evaluate their teachers and principals. The evaluation criteria used to determine teacher and school administrators' quality varied from district to district and could include supervisor and peer review, classroom observations, student achievement data, or a combination of these methods. Classroom observations were often conducted by principals or other trained teaching colleagues who had the role of teacher-evaluator. These observations focused, for example, on teacher-student interactions, evidence of implementation of professional development, and evidence of addressing the standards. Most of the districts indicated that evaluations were being completed in order to identify those educators who needed support.

Six of the districts also indicated that they had conducted evaluations of senior-level district administrators. In these districts, the cabinet members were held accountable to the school board and other central office administrators by demonstrating success in reaching established goals.

Building a Learning Organization

Building a learning organization requires a systemic process in which the organization engages people in a culture of inquiry and change, and looks for new ways to solve complex problems by developing a set of strategies and practices that allow the organization to make the best use of its resources on an ongoing basis. The actions outlined in this subsection are essentially the building blocks of becoming a learning organization. The findings from this study show that there are multiple ways to put these blocks together, although each action builds on the one before it. In one sense, this makes strategies for supporting a learning organization that much more complex. However, it also suggests that there may be a concrete set of practices that can be implemented along the way, given the appropriate context and conditions.

One chief of curriculum and instruction described how the district linked data to accountability in the development of performance-driven practices:

> "How did we get here? I can't tell you that the annual targets were welcome. Once the data came out, though, [the district] knew they couldn't hide the data. The change was hard at first. It wasn't just about holding people accountable … I think we got there by first seeing the data and training people around best practices. When they could see positive outcomes of their work, they started buying in. It caused them to want to know where the children were, how they were doing, so they didn't have to wait to the end. Now they're creating rubrics, evidence of

performance standards, demonstrating what they know. They're understanding what they're going to install first, and then start going through the process. When adults start achieving success, then they themselves are willing to start new things."

In this way, the district looked for ways to engage people with data, and then supported them with professional development. Another superintendent made a well-publicized commitment to never needlessly gather data: "We made a commitment to our staff that anything we collect will serve a purpose. We will never ask for it and not use it."

Many participants described their district's culture as being insular. For example, organizational culture was described as being focused on itself or comprised of people who had come up through the ranks and did not have experience with how other districts managed challenges or found solutions. Others shared that theirs was not a culture that analyzed information well, or one that looked favorably upon those who brought shortcomings to light. A few noted that their organizational culture was team-oriented, where, for example, teachers pulled together to help each other meet objectives for student achievement goals. For all of these participants, organizational culture, whether seen as a barrier or strength, was perceived as a given—something you work with, around, and through.

At the same time, organizational culture was also perceived as something that could be shifted or changed—and in many cases needed to be changed. Many described issues that had not traditionally been part of the culture of schools: for example, understanding how assessments interact with instruction, and talking about how student achievement data can drive interventions. Said one superintendent, "This is about training from top to bottom in the organization. This is not a world that grew up accountable for results." Further, bringing teachers along in this process is one of the key challenges in making any of the other reform efforts effective. As one superintendent explained, "People are afraid of data because they will be evaluated by it… How do you know what to fix if you can't pinpoint what it is? You can't fix a car without knowing what is wrong."

The difficulties associated with creating a culture of inquiry and improvement were described by several of the study's participants. "The hardest challenge is to get people in a new mindset. Anybody in the helping profession has a hard time thinking analytically about their work," said one superintendent. "What you know at the end of the day after working hard is that you helped your clients. But it doesn't lead you to think about whether it was the best way to help your clients." This speaks not only to the difficulties in promoting this type of change, but also to the type of barriers that are likely to be encountered. Several of the participants discussed the need to be "thick-skinned" and willing to take the unpopular risks to put performance-driven practices in place. Said one superintendent, "Anyone who embarks on large-scale school reform who expects it to be done without agitation is deceiving themselves. If you don't have the agitation, then you know you aren't making much progress."

Several of the participants described the strategies necessary for buy-in. One chief of human resources who was describing attempts to support these efforts through professional development explained, "Not everyone is as open to change. In order for professional development to work, teachers have to recognize that there is a need for change and adjustment. We can't just come up and superimpose the use of student data. The teachers have to buy into this. We are going to have to sell it to them. We have to make sure that

they agree and see the value. It isn't mandatory professional development, so how can we get them to take part?" Thus, buy-in was reported to be one of the steps necessary to obtain proactive support for these types of changes.

Also underscoring the importance of the building block approach, one district reported how it managed to not only build the demand for using data for decision-making, but also to implement a fully executed and ongoing feedback loop as part of the process. "Centrally, every month we have an account review, which includes a district-level academic head and the curriculum coordinators assigned to those schools. We track about fifteen metrics including benchmark assessment data, plus other data as well," explained the school system's chief of finance. "At each meeting we want to know: what does it tell us?...What do we know based on the soft evidence and hard data that tells us we need to do something different? Not next month or next year, but now? Then next month we go over it again, with a fresh look at the data and that whole process cycles through."

Equally important was the need for district leaders to convey the importance of the inter-connection of these performance-driven practices throughout the district, and the impact of such practices on student achievement. Said one superintendent, "Are the work orders accomplished on time? Are the principals and site personnel having to wait to get something done? Why? That impacts the environment for learning. It doesn't matter if you're the bus driver or the maintenance worker, we all support student learning."

Building a culture that values inquiry becomes more important as a district adopts performance-driven practices, since developing a robust culture of inquiry helps lay the foundation for these practices. Trying to embed this cultural shift more pervasively throughout the organization was described as difficult, but when it did begin to happen it was reported to be a marked change from how decisions had traditionally been made within a district. In the few cases where individuals with the district increasingly engaged with one another in order to think critically about their work and its role within the organization, districts shifted from a culture of blame to one of support, and to one that promoted a sense of engagement and ownership across all levels of the organization.

"The hardest challenge is to get people in a new mindset. Anybody in the helping profession has a hard time thinking analytically about their work," said one superintendent. "What you know at the end of the day after working hard is that you helped your clients. But it doesn't lead you to think about whether it was the best way to help your clients."

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CHAPTER FIVE
PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS: THREE CASE STUDIES

This chapter provides a case study analysis of three of the twenty-eight districts in the study, in order to illustrate the complexity of the challenges that districts have faced, the achievements they have had, and the processes they have embraced in adopting performance-driven practices. The findings are based on interviews conducted with four senior-level administrators in three of the twenty-eight districts, which were selected for closer analysis based on two overall criteria. First, these three districts represent the diversity of the twenty-eight districts interviewed in terms of geographic location (one in the eastern, one in the central, and one in the western United States), size (medium to large, in terms of budget and student body), and stage of implementation of performance-driven practices. Secondly, the districts were selected because their achievements, challenges, and processes were broadly representative of the twenty-eight districts interviewed.

This case-study analysis demonstrates the difficult tasks that districts face as they strive to adopt more performance-driven practices. It illustrates the varied cross-section of activities that districts implement, and sheds light on how and why some districts are further along in one functional area (i.e., professional development or curriculum) than in another. Also, there are some similar patterns in the stages of development that districts go through in developing performance-driven practices in each of the functional areas. These patterns may be relevant for other districts at each of these stages—whether they have new senior-level leadership in place, or have been working for many years on transforming district culture into one that is focused on outcomes. Additionally, it appears that external accountability requirements (for example, the development of state assessments) have had some effect on motivating districts to move toward performance-driven practices.

District 1

District 1 is in the early stages of adopting performance-driven practices. Three of the four cabinet members interviewed have been in their positions for less than a year. While all four of the cabinet members are experienced educators, two of the four, including the superintendent, were recently hired from out of state and the other two had been promoted up through the district over time. District 1 is a large urban district located in a large central city. As shown in Table 5.1, the student enrollment is predominantly African-American. About three-quarters of its student population is on free or reduced lunch.

Table 5.1 – District 1 Demographic Data

Student Enrollment	75,000 +
Number of Schools	75 +
District Budget	$700 million +
Locale	Large Central City, Eastern US
Free/Reduced Lunch	50% to 75%
Limited English Proficiency	0% to 10%
Minority (African-American or Hispanic)	75% +

Note: Ranges are provided in order to maintain the anonymity of the district.

According to the superintendent, District 1 embraced a reform agenda in the mid-1990s, adopting such programs as Success for All and Little Red Schoolhouse. The superintendent at the time initiated this reform well before the implementation of state standards and assessments. However, the appointment of a new superintendent in the late 1990s coincided with the state development and implementation of assessments. The new superintendent abandoned the existing reform agenda, returning to a more traditional model. This was partly a result of state testing at the time, in which a large number of the schools in District 1 were identified as low-performing, causing many to believe that the reform agenda had failed. However, the district did not have baseline data for student achievement prior to the adoption of the earlier reform agenda. Therefore, because the district had not gathered systematic data concerning student achievement prior to the implementation of the statewide assessments, there was no way to confirm the perceived failure of the reform agenda of the early 1990s with the use of data. This superintendent remained in the position for only three and a half years.

Against this backdrop, at the time of this interview the district had only recently hired the current superintendent. The superintendent described the inherited district as one that gave out resources to the schools with no means of monitoring the effectiveness of the funds, provided minimal guidance in instruction, and required little or no accountability for results. There were school improvement plans in place, but there was little district attention given to whether or not the schools followed through on their objectives. District 1 was organized into geographic regions, but there were no coherent goals for elementary, middle, or high schools across the district. The district had a strong retention policy, so there were many over-age children, particularly in the middle and upper grades, with no coordinated intervention strategies in place to help them progress. These examples reveal a district with little alignment between state standards, district goals, curricular strategies, and state assessments. It is also a district that reportedly did not have experience with developing organizational policies and practices built around improving student achievement.

The four participants from District 1 identified several steps that the district was taking to improve student achievement, all of which can be described as moving toward performance-driven practices. As the top two priorities, District 1 is focusing both on personnel and organizational structure—that is, developing leadership at the sites and establishing district-level processes for improved quality response. In terms of leadership development, District 1 is investing extensive time and resources in recruitment, selection, and support of principals, with the goal of shifting the culture to one that is focused around improved achievement for all students. The leadership approach is focused on performance-driven student achievement. Structurally, the superintendent is promoting systematic processes that are directed toward understanding whether or not the system is working at all levels.

For example, the district has brought together teachers and administrators to form a new curriculum and instruction team that is working in two primary areas. First, they are seeking to develop central areas of focus across the district. The team selected literacy as the first and foremost challenge, due to the fact that literacy rates had made only negligible improvement over time, and more than two-thirds of children were not reading at grade level in the third grade. The district-appointed curriculum and instruction team is working with the finance department to redirect resources into literacy development programs,

and focusing on professional development to ensure that teachers have training in this area. Secondly, the curriculum and instruction team has led the district to examine how the curriculum is aligned with both state standards and the state assessment.

In finance, nearly 90 percent of the district's general fund is tied up in payroll, leaving very little flexibility for other budgetary needs that could be used to better align resources to the district's goals. However, the district is pressing forward in this direction, by pursuing cross-functional initiatives, including a joint effort by the finance department and the curriculum and instruction team that is moving toward more flexibility of resources. At the same time, the chief of finance is relying on an information system that is not even able to provide the most basic information on the costs of specific district-wide programs. While the current system has the capacity to provide online purchasing, the district has not been able to afford the software that would allow it to do so. As a result, this district expends resources on a less efficient system, without accounting for the lost opportunity costs.

The chief of human resources, who had been in the district less than six months at the time of the interview, is in the process of developing a benchmarking system to track a basic set of quality indicators in human resources, such as teacher hires, date of hiring, and so on. The chief of finance is also seeking to establish a more efficient system for hiring teachers earlier in the year. At the same time, though, this district is also still dealing with an information system that relies on paper timesheets.

The district has a handful of schools that have been identified for state takeover, and four times as many that have been identified by the state as in need of corrective action. This external accountability is providing a much-needed lever that has brought the union to the table to renegotiate teacher issues in those particular schools. In the schools requiring takeover by the state, all principals will be replaced, and teachers will need to reapply for their positions or seek employment at another school. However, the negotiations have not extended beyond the rights of teachers to stay on the job. There have been no proposals to tie student achievement results to teacher evaluations or performance reviews, or for extended days or additional professional development for teachers. Currently, 60 percent of the criteria in principal evaluations are tied to student achievement and attendance. Tenured teachers are evaluated every three years, but student achievement data are not taken into account in those evaluations.

District 1, in short, is taking steps to become more performance-driven, but still faces significant challenges. The district has put in place a team of district leaders seeking to strengthen the district's focus on student achievement, both through leadership and improved organizational structures. Like many districts who are in the early stages of developing performance-driven practices, District 1 is taking steps to reinvest in principals as instructional leaders at their sites, seeking to establish a district-wide instructional focus on learning (particularly in the early grades) and taking steps to align resources accordingly, including through the use of professional development. It is working to improve finance, human resources, and information services, with only incremental success thus far. While this district has lacked continuity in leadership at the cabinet level, there has been a tremendous amount of change that has taken place since the arrival of the new superintendent. Only time will tell if these recent changes in personnel and the new emphasis on shifting culture will be accepted over time, and what type of difference it will make.

District 2

District 2 began its strategic implementation of practices focusing on student achievement outcomes with the hiring of a new superintendent just over five years ago. Hired from the business sector, the superintendent was specifically brought in to stimulate change within the district. This superintendent's top-down mandate for change, however, has not been supported unanimously across the district. The hiring of the superintendent was made by a split decision of the board, a situation that remains contentious (the board has about half union representation and half business representation). Under these circumstances, it has been difficult to move forward because of persistent disagreements and thin margins of consensus on the board.

The chiefs of finance and of curriculum and instruction have worked in the district for at least 20 years each, and the chief of human resources, although new to the position, has been employed in the district for almost a decade. Compared with most of the districts studied, this district has had continuity of leadership at the senior administrative level.

District 2 is a large school district located in an urban corridor. Its student population is varied and diverse, while just over a quarter of these students are English Language Learners. District 2 is currently facing multi-year budget deficits and has a hiring freeze.

Table 5.2 – District 2 Demographic Data

Student Enrollment	75,000 +
Number of Schools	75 +
District Budget	$700 million +
Locale	Large Central City, Western US
Free/Reduced Lunch	50% to 75%
Limited English Proficiency	20% to 30%
Minority (African-American or Hispanic)	50% to 75%

Note: Ranges are provided in order to maintain the anonymity of the district.

District 2 has been engaged in performance-driven practices for several years and has made efforts to revitalize principals as instructional leaders of their sites. However, the district has taken an additional structural step of creating several instruction-leader positions to which the principals directly report. These upper-level administrative positions, each of which oversees many school sites, have both a monitoring and support role. They are charged directly with being in the schools and in the classrooms, having detailed knowledge of the student achievement data about each school, meeting with the principals on an ongoing basis, and evaluating the principals. The creation of these positions is an example of moving past the implementation of an approach—principal leadership, in this case—to the challenges inherent in getting buy-in and support for it.

This new organizational structure has affected the district in several ways. It has created more contact and exchange within classrooms. Principals are expected to spend at least three hours per day in the classroom, and peer coaches and instruction-leaders are also called in to observe classrooms. A second effect of this new structure is that principals are now evaluated by administrators who know them and their schools well. Student achievement results are included in these evaluations. Also included are comments about

the principals' oversight of teachers, including the use of professional development—for example, a principal calling in peer coaches when a teacher's performance suggests that coaching is needed.

Issues of centralization and control have also played a prominent role in the recent history of the district. The superintendent of District 2 introduced a series of steps that consolidated control and decision-making authority at the district level. This included decisions about professional development, budgeting, human resources, and curriculum and instruction. For example, in instruction, the district adopted literacy and math as central focus areas, and significantly consolidated the number of literacy and math programs that the sites could implement with district support. They also adopted district-wide diagnostic assessments in reading and math that are given three times per year.

The district is, most recently, seeking to balance centralized decision-making authority with the advent of site-based decision-making. Budget decisions are being made at the sites, although principals are bound by state regulations and collective bargaining agreements in terms of staffing levels. Human resource decisions are also being made at the sites; however, principals are quite limited in their ability to fire personnel who are under-performing. Professional development decisions for the site are now largely under the control of the principals, and are used as part of the principals' evaluations. In instruction, the district has not determined exactly what site-based decision-making will look like, but it is beginning to engage teachers in creating benchmarks for math that teachers can use throughout the year, as well as K-12 curricular maps for English. At this point in time, the district plans to use benchmarks and curriculum maps to provide teachers at the sites with assessments about the particular unit being studied, with the sites then developing the units of study that will be used to address those assessments.

District 2 also appears to be moving toward performance-driven practices in professional development, which all four cabinet members in the district emphasized as a key focus for improving student achievement. As site-level involvement in professional development planning increases, the district has moved away from professional training offered by the curriculum office (though that is still provided in limited ways), and has instead adopted peer coaching and other on-site support systems. These newly adopted approaches center the activity in and around the classroom, engage teachers in activities directly relevant to their teaching, and bring transparency to what happens in the classroom. The district also offers principals and teachers training in using data to make decisions.

District 2 has achieved some successes, albeit inconsistent, at the early grades, but less so in the upper grades. The district has not yet taken action to implement adjustments to its early approach in this area, but it is looking to implement smaller high schools—either subdividing existing high schools or creating new stand-alone entities—and is beginning to study the financing involved in taking those steps. As the instructional side researches new academic models, the finance department is looking at how to establish common support services that can bring economies of scale to these smaller schools, such as common libraries or cafeterias.

Finally, District 2 has moved toward adopting performance-driven practices in its development of new information systems. The district has, for the past several years, been implementing a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to connect the various

systems in finance, human resources, and student information. The new system, which went live in fall 2003, has not yet achieved full functionality. Part of the problem was that in adjusting the ERP system to meet the reporting requirements of the state, the system lost key functions, including several automated functions. As a result, the district has had difficulty in completing basic administrative tasks, such as paying bills on time. Another key barrier has been that because the new system connects the information systems of several departments that had previously worked in silos, the departments now have to agree upon work practices and information-gathering objectives so that the information systems will track the appropriate data. This has required revising work processes, which, in turn, has involved retraining staff, many of whom are loath to change.

Despite its many steps in implementing performance-driven practices, District 2 still faces several challenges. These include, as mentioned above, challenges in finding the right balance between monitoring and supporting principals, between site-based and district-level control, and between departmental, district-level, and state information needs. The district's split board may be indicative of divisions within the teaching ranks of the district itself, for there were many concerns reported with this decision. On one hand, this suggests that the reform efforts the district is making may be genuine and are having some effect. On the other hand, it suggests that there is work to be done in bringing the culture of the organization along in the process. What is clear, however, is that the district appears to be at the beginning stages of engaging teachers in curriculum development, and considering what greater site-based authority and responsibility means in terms of building coherence between classroom instruction, district assessment, and state standards.

District 3

District 3 has been engaged in well-articulated performance-driven practices for over a decade. As with many districts studied, the district began to focus in this area as a result of the implementation of statewide, standardized assessments in the 1990s. Each of the four top cabinet members has been in the district for at least fourteen years; all have moved up through the ranks to their current positions. The superintendent, who also moved up through the ranks within the district, has been in place for three years.

District 3 is located on the urban fringe of a large city. This district has a diverse student population, and more than half of the students are Hispanic. About three-quarters of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and about a quarter are English Language Learners.

Table 5.3 – District 3 Demographic Data

Student Enrollment	50,000 to 75,000
Number of Schools	25 to 75 schools
District Budget	$400 million +
Locale	Urban Fringe of Large City, Central US
Free/Reduced Lunch	50% to 75%
Limited English Proficiency	20% to 30%
Minority (African-American or Hispanic)	75% +

Note: Ranges are provided in order to maintain the anonymity of the district.

According to the cabinet members, this district has a well-functioning board that is highly motivated to meet student achievement objectives. The district has established practices to create instructional leadership on campus, partly through principals, and partly through teachers, although district personnel do not emphasize this approach. It focuses on professional development through peer coaching, instructional specialists, and the like—although the four cabinet members interviewed did not frame professional development in the district as being revitalized or transformed. The district's information system has the ability to disaggregate data, but it does not easily connect and automate functions.

District 3 has developed a continuous learning approach that identifies district-wide goals for student achievement as well as other areas, and establishes measurable objectives for meeting those goals. The district has been using and refining this approach for about a decade. Staff and faculty have been trained to use an objectives-based approach to their work, and they have gained direct experience in doing so through their usual tasks. That means that they have experience using data to better understand performance in the areas of instruction, finance, and human resources. Every department and every site is charged with developing strategies and specific objectives to help the district achieve these goals, with student achievement as the first priority.

At the site level, principals are required to establish objectives for their schools through a site advisory committee that includes teachers and parents. These objectives are then connected to the district's overall objectives. Teachers organize their classes so that students are able to track key objectives about themselves, such as their own class attendance and performance in various areas. Each of the sites and each of the teachers create competitions and other means to focus not only principals or teachers, but also students, on working together to improve student achievement rates. It is an approach that helps to drive a shared responsibility for site leadership, from the principal and teacher all the way to the student.

In the area of curriculum and instruction, teachers have met together by grade level and across grade levels to establish common curriculum and pacing guides for math, science, reading, language arts, and social studies. Because the district has a high rate of mobility among its students, there is a priority to pace classes the same way throughout the district, so that students who leave one school and join another will have a smooth transition. The teachers have broken down the curriculum into two-week units, and established benchmarks that students must reach along the way. At the end of the two weeks, the teachers give an assessment and the class, as a whole, tracks how well they are doing.

The district has developed common assessments at the end of each grading period for pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, and sometimes more frequently throughout the year. The common assessments for all grade levels include math, science, reading, and language arts, with an additional assessment for social studies in high school. To further illustrate, in elementary school, students take a common science test every nine weeks and a common math exam every twelve weeks. These tests are directly aligned to benchmarks for what students need to know in order to reach state standards by the end of the year. The two-week unit tests are created and monitored at the site level. This assessment system began in 1999, first in reading and math, and then later expanded to other subject areas. Because District 3 is able to monitor how many students missed certain questions on district assessments, it is able to discuss specific strategies and interventions to improve students' understanding of those issues. The district is not yet able to conduct

item analysis of district assessments, in which it would have access to summarized information detailing how many students missed particular questions by selecting a certain incorrect response, such as answer A or C. Having such information would enable teachers to more closely target teaching strategies to the specific difficulties that students were having. The district wants to be able to move in this direction.

In terms of finance, the overall goal is to create as efficient a system as possible in order to focus resources on raising student achievement, with the activities of the finance department linked to students and student achievement in several ways. First, the district allocates resources to school sites based on the number of students at the site and the particular population the sites serve. If the district receives additional categorical funding for certain students, then those funds follow the children to the sites. Second, the finance department is providing the sites greater authority in establishing their own budgets for their sites, and is trying to reach an appropriate balance between site-based budgeting and district-level oversight. For example, if the site determines that it needs an additional math teacher and one less social studies teacher, the site administrators can move in that direction, as long as the state requirements are met. Third, as part of its regular processes for those sites that are not reaching their objectives, the finance staff visits the site to provide an analysis of how they can better align resources around their most pressing needs, as identified by student performance data.

As with all departments, the finance department benchmarks its own results against other districts, both nearby and throughout the state. Through software the district has purchased, the chief of finance has desktop access to financial data for all districts in the state, which provides data on the average pay for principals, the number of students per principal, cost breakdowns by function, and other key data. This enables the finance department to be able to benchmark with other high-performing districts to determine, for example, if their district is in line with how much it spends on transportation, how much it should spend for sports or extracurricular activities, and ultimately, whether there is a relationship between test scores and such spending levels.

Communicating and integrating the goals of the district to the site level also has a direct impact on professional development. Through the student performance data that is gathered, the district targets staff development around student needs. For example, the district found that its high school students were performing well on assessment questions related to summarizing information, but not as well in synthesizing and analyzing it, which are higher-order skills. A professional development plan was developed to focus teachers in selected subjects on imparting analysis skills to students. Second, principals are trained to provide professional development at their sites, and to bring in specialists to do so. But perhaps the most important component of professional development is the consistent practice for teachers to use student performance data to drive discussions about instruction, curriculum, and assessment. Teachers meet regularly to discuss lesson plans, compare their students' results on unit tests, and reflect on their lesson plans, all while regularly tracking the site's results in meeting its objectives.

District 3's overall goal for human resources is to maintain a strong teaching force with incentives for improvement. The district, which is located in a state that does not have strong unions or negotiated bargaining agreements for teachers, has an incentive plan for all district employees. Each site receives a bonus for each teacher whose students perform

at established levels. For example, if the students achieve at 90 percent of the required level, then the site receives 90 percent of the bonus, up to a level of $1,100 annually. The site committee determines how to divide this money among all staff members at the site; the bonus is usually available before the end of the calendar year. In addition, teachers who teach in critical-needs areas can receive additional annual pay of up to $3,000. This process is also used to help identify those teachers whose students are not reaching their objectives; about 10 percent of teachers do not receive the bonus each year. The district works with these teachers by creating a growth plan for improvements they must make.

In adopting these kinds of practices, District 3 appears to be supporting a culture within its sites and classrooms that is focused on raising student achievement. There is a high level of coherence among the various components and its systemwide focus on student achievement. Also, to a large extent, District 3 has been able to ensure that teachers and staff are responsible for outcomes through professional development, experience in the use of assessment data to inform classroom practice, and fiscal incentives. Administrative staff are also engaged in seeking ways to improve student achievement through their ongoing job performance. Parents are involved in the decision-making process at the sites through the creation of an advisory board that focuses on district goal-setting. And perhaps most importantly, the process reaches down to the students themselves, who, in learning to track objectives about their own performance, are given the tools to understand the key areas that affect their own overall progress.

Analysis: A Comparison of Districts

A comparison of these three districts reveals that they have somewhat different approaches in adopting performance-driven practices, based on their own history, the resources they have available, and the rules and regulations by which they are governed. At District 3, all top cabinet members rose up through the ranks, but this is a district that had already made strides in its performance and created systems that were perceived as successful. Though District 1 and District 2 are clearly at different stages in developing performance-driven practices, new superintendents were brought in to both districts to stimulate change. In the former, the superintendent came from another state, and in the latter from outside the education sector entirely. However, like District 2, District 3's senior-level administrators have been in the district for a longer period of time.

All three districts are actively engaged in developing leadership at the school sites. District 1, with its emphasis on recruitment and selection of principals, is at the early stages of this. District 2, with its creation of instruction-leaders that directly oversee principals, is further along. Yet District 3 has taken a somewhat different approach, investing instead in a systematic and rigorous process of translating district goals to the site level. This approach has involved teachers and whole classrooms of students, as well as principals, in finding solutions to problems and motivating each other to reach the site's objectives.

District 1 has begun to look at literacy as an area of instructional focus across the district, and is studying how the district's curriculum is aligned with state standards. District 2 has selected both math and literacy as areas of district focus, has adopted diagnostic assessments in both areas, and is now seeking more site-based approaches (that have not yet been identified), partly to promote teacher participation in district-wide efforts in

A comparison of these three districts reveals that they have somewhat different approaches in adopting performance-driven practices, based on their own history, the resources they have available, and the rules and regulations by which they are governed.

these areas. District 3 has established district assessments in several subject areas beside math and literacy, and has brought teachers together to identify common curricula by grade level (with benchmarks and site-based assessments every two weeks).

In relation to finance, District 2 appears to have the least general fund resources per student. The district's enrollment is more than 20 percent higher than District 1, but its general fund budget is roughly the same size. Not surprisingly, District 2 is facing multi-year budget deficits and currently has a hiring freeze. Nonetheless, District 1 faces fiscal challenges of its own: a significantly higher percentage of District 1's resources are tied up in payroll, indicating that it likewise has limited fiscal flexibility. District 3, with a student population of fewer than 75,000 students and a budget of less than a half million dollars, is one of the smaller school districts in our study, and does not appear to be facing as many fiscal pressures as Districts 1 and 2.

District 2's recent history with centralization and control is representative of districts that have engaged in performance-driven practices for several years. For example, the super-intendent of District 2, who was brought in just over five years ago, introduced a series of steps that consolidated control and decision-making authority at the district level. Both District 2 and District 3 are engaged in moving budget decisions to the site level. As in District 2, the finance department in District 3 is striving to reach an appropriate balance between site-based budgeting and district-level oversight—though District 3 is farther along in this process due to the drilling down of objectives at the sites. District 1, which is beginning to align resources with district goals, is working in the opposite direction: centralizing some resource decisions. District 3 is the only district of the three whose finance personnel appear to directly connect their work to student achievement objectives at the sites, though District 2 has taken some steps in this direction.

In human resources, District 1 is in the early stages of developing a basic benchmarking system related to the process of hiring teachers. District 2 is working to provide more authority to principals in hiring and firing decisions, though it is limited in doing this through state rules and collective bargaining agreements. District 3 is the only district that has developed clear incentives—through bonuses—for reaching student achieve-ment goals, and for teaching in critical needs areas. It is worth noting that it is also the only one of these three districts without collective bargaining.

District 2 is currently engaged in an intensive process of implementing an integrated information system that automatically performs routine tasks, and increases the ability of teachers and administrators to get the information they need. However, it has not yet reached that stage, in terms of either system functionality or actual use. District 1, on the other hand, has an antiquated system that is preventing it from achieving some efficiencies of work processes, and that may prevent its staff from moving to the next step in being able to access and use information in all areas. District 3 has not invested as much as District 2 in its information system, but has adapted it along the way to meet its most pressing needs.

In professional development, District 1 is beginning to consolidate its authority over professional development, in order to refocus efforts in the district around literacy. District 2 is investing heavily in professional development, through site-based means such as instruction-leaders for principals, and instructional specialists and peer coaches

for teachers—an approach that is in line with its shifting of decision-making to the site level. District 3 is directly tying professional development to gaps in student achievement, while also training principals to lead professional development efforts at the sites.

Finally, in terms of organizational culture, it appears from our interviews with district administrators that District 3's systematic approach in drilling down and monitoring its objectives at the site—and even classroom—level has created a pervasive culture of inquiry that is actively engaged in the challenges of raising student achievement. District 3 may be assisted in this effort by not being bound by collective bargaining agreements that the other two districts face. On the other hand, it appears that District 2, with its divided school board, faces substantial challenges in creating a culture within schools and classrooms that is directly engaged in meeting overall district objectives for student achievement. District 1, meanwhile, is only just embarking on this path.

Table 5.4 provides a summary of the most prominent challenges that these districts have faced during their reform efforts. The table, combined with the foregoing analysis, reveals that while District 3 is farther along in adopting performance-based practices and creating a culture willing to embrace inquiry and improvement, all three districts face challenges. That is, the table illustrates the complexity and range of challenges that can affect a district's ability to move forward on performance-driven reform. For instance, District 1 is challenged by financial constraints and frequent administrative changes. The district's lack of financial resources prevents it from effectively aligning resources to goals, three of the four top administrators are new to their posts, and it will take a period of time for them to accomplish the changes that they want to make within the culture of the organization. In contrast, although District 2 faces similar financial problems, its cabinet members have been in the district for a longer period of time, and the district has been engaged in performance-driven practices for several years. However, the lack of support from the school board, the need for more integrated information systems, and the reticence of principals and teachers to change prevents District 2 from being as far along as District 3 in adopting performance-driven practices. Compared to Districts 1 and 2, District 3 has worked in this area for many years, the cabinet members have been in the district for fourteen years or longer, they have a positive relationship with their board, and their employees are very supportive of the district's efforts to become even more performance-driven. Interestingly, District 3 does not have a sophisticated information system, but unlike the other two districts, it has been able to work around this obstacle because it does not face the additional challenges the other two districts face.

Table 5.4 – Comparative Challenges of the Three Case Study Districts

District Challenges:	District 1	District 2	District 3
Fiscal Constraints	General fund primarily tied up in payroll, limits ability to align resources to goals.	Facing multi-year deficits and currently has a hiring freeze.	Does not face significant financial barriers.
School Board	Had a contentious relationship with previous superintendent, but is now working with new superintendent to review district goals and make changes.	Characterized as dysfunctional and divided on most issues.	Well-functioning and has a strong focus on student achievement.
Principals and Teachers	Working to change culture of staff to become more performance-driven. Currently, achievement results are not tied to teacher performance.	Accustomed to working in silos, and reticent to work in a more collaborative fashion. Student achievement results tied to principals' evaluation.	Trained to use data and teachers are responsible for outcomes.
Information Systems	Current system is antiquated and district cannot afford new systems.	New system in place, but not yet fully functional.	Relatively basic system in place.
Superintendent	New to the district. District has had three superintendents over five-year period.	New to district, has been in position for five years and does not have a strong mandate by the board.	In position for three years; previously chief of curriculum and instruction in the district.
Other Three Cabinet Members	Two have been in district for sixteen years or longer, one for less than six months.	Three have been in the district for a decade or longer.	Three have been in the district for fourteen years or longer.
Union Relationship	Possible state takeover of several schools has brought union to the table to renegotiate teacher issues in those schools.	Decision-making is made difficult by a school board that is evenly split between union and business.	No collective bargaining unit in the state.

CHAPTER SIX
SYNOPSIS OF COMMON PRACTICES

Based on the 28 districts in this study, the following table describes some of the common practices and stages of development that we found as districts adopted, or sought to adopt, performance-driven practices. As such, it provides a synopsis of the types of efforts that districts have made in this area. More importantly, it also helps to illuminate the ways in which districts are adopting performance-driven practices.

From left to right, along each row, the chart presents common practices and activities that were identified from initial analysis of the data. It is important to note that these practices and their order within the district are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. Further analysis demonstrates that these practices vary in terms of both complexity and depth within each organization. From our perspective, these activities appear to build upon one another; however, this cannot be fully determined without additional research specifically into the relationships between practices at each of these stages. Nonetheless, based on this initial study, the practices on the right side of the chart typically connote more complex practices, involving more cross-functional and collaborative efforts, and also tend to be more deeply entrenched within the organization.

It is important to note that districts do not necessarily engage in these practices in a linear and sequential fashion, from one stage to the next. Instead, the arrangement of these practices along a four-stage continuum is done merely to indicate the varying levels of complexity and depth within the districts as reflected in the practices that we found. As such, districts can concurrently embark on practices at a variety of stages at any given time within one functional area—striving to make headway in several stages at the same time, depending on their own historical context, the needs they face, and the opportunities they see before them. Likewise, a district can be—and usually is—farther along in some functional areas (for example, finance or teacher and principal support) than they might be in others (for example, linking assessments to instruction).

The frequency of these practices throughout the districts of our study can be seen in the numbers within each cell. Some districts explicitly stated that they did not engage in some of these practices; other districts simply did not demonstrate evidence of these identified practices. Consequently, these data suggest that further investigation of these practices within a larger pool of districts is needed before we can have a comprehensive assessment of the prevalence of these practices. However, these numbers do provide a preliminary insight into the current efforts of these districts in becoming performance-driven organizations.

Table 6.1 – Matrix of Performance-Driven Practices Across Districts

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Goals				
Monitoring Goals	District-wide goals are based on high expectations of achievement for all students. (23)	There is widespread agreement in district and community on district-wide goals. (21)	District-wide goals are drilled down effectively to site-level objectives. (9)	District-wide goals and site-level objectives are monitored regularly and effectively. (6)
Matching Resources to Goals				
Finance	District makes efforts to align fiscal resources with district-wide goals. (27)	Finance information systems support a customer-oriented approach to both operations and instruction. (18)	Finance and budget decisions are shared between district-level chiefs and site-level principals to better address school needs. (13)	Finance information system is used to assess the cost of instructional programs and district goals. (4)
Human Resources	District makes efforts to identify strategies that enable them to align human resources with district-wide goals. (28)	District has systems in place to identify and predict trends in HR needs. (18)	Integrated human resource information systems are used to systematize recruitment, hiring, and support. (10)	Principal and teacher recruitment, hiring, and firing are closely aligned to district goals, and active assessment and monitoring is in place to meet goals. (2)
Information Systems	Information systems are antiquated, with silo-based functions. There is little or no ability to conduct analysis between the various systems. (10)	Information system can track and monitor progress on district-wide goals, related to measurable student achievement outcomes. (8)	System accommodates longitudinal studies, providing data in real time, as well as through drill down and disaggregation. (10)	Student information system is aligned with other information systems (HR, finance) in the district and is readily available to multiple levels of users. (1)
Access and Use of Data	Access to data is through a centralized research office only. (14)	Data is regularly used by senior-level administrators for goal-setting and resource allocation. (14)	Data is widely available and is regularly used by principals, and new data are collected as new issues arise. (8)	Data is widely accessible on desktops and used for decision-making by administrators, staff, and teachers. (6)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of districts whose practices fit the description.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Assessment and Improving Instruction				
Assessments	Tracking and monitoring of student progress on annual state assessments for compliance and district reporting. (22)	District-wide assessments in language arts and math are given two or three times a year, and used to benchmark within state or district. (21)	District-wide assessments in language arts, math, as well as other content areas, are given at frequent intervals, and are also used to inform professional development. (15)	Teachers are engaged in developing, revising, and improving district assessments, which are used to drive curriculum changes, professional development, and classroom-based practice. (2)
Linking Assessment to Instruction	District offers support and coaching for principals in analyzing assessment results. (25)	Action plans connect assessment results to district-wide curriculum and instructional practices in the classroom (e.g., pacing guides, coaching). (12)	Ongoing support and coaching are available for teachers in analyzing assessment results and improving practice. (13)	Teachers are engaged (in their own classroom and with other teachers) in changing instructional practice based on assessment results. (2)
Fidelity of Program Implementation	District-wide goals are tracked and monitored through measurable student achievement outcomes. (18)	Instructional programs and materials are assessed and revised to better meet district-wide goals. (16)	Teachers are engaged in this decision-making process related to instructional programs. (10)	District employs methods to assess fidelity of instructional program implementation in the classroom as a way to scale successful interventions and programs. (6)
Professional Development				
Teacher and Principal Support	A district-led professional development curriculum focuses on district goals and the district's approach to those goals. (26)	Mentoring and coaching are embedded as a part of professional development. (22)	Professional development topics are selected based on student performance outcomes as well as teacher surveys. (17)	Site-based needs related to student achievement results, as well as district-wide needs, are addressed by professional development. (15)
Learning Organization				
Performance Evaluations for Senior Administrators	Superintendents have clearly stated responsibilities to improve student achievement. (14)	Senior administrators are responsible for ensuring that cross-functional goals related to student achievement are made. (7)	Cabinet members have part of their performance evaluation tied to student achievement outcomes. (8)	Performance evaluations are used to establish action plans, and, if needed, to make personnel changes. (1)
Leadership and Ownership of Outcomes at the Sites	Principals have a significant role in personnel and placement decisions, and are given real instructional rather than purely administrative leadership roles at the school sites. (24)	Principals are held responsible for and get support for using student performance data to make a wide range of administrative and instructional decisions. (7)	Principals' evaluations and/or salary take into account student performance results. (14)	Principals' evaluations include extent to which they evaluate teachers so as to make the teachers accountable for student performance results. (6)
Focusing on Improvement of Student Achievement Outcomes	District has adopted centralized systems to promote monitoring of student achievement and feedback to appropriate levels. (15)	Has involved principals integrally in processes for planning curricular, program, classroom, and student interventions. (10)	Has involved teachers integrally in processes for planning curricular, program, classroom, and student interventions. (5)	Performance results reveal student achievement gains and serve as basis for change and improvement. (7)

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

This study has identified a wide range of opportunities for change and improvement by motivating and assisting school districts in adopting performance-driven practices. This section identifies implications from the findings of this study for school districts interested in adopting performance-driven practices. It also outlines several broad recommendations for the policy community concerning the improvement of student achievement through the promotion of performance-driven practices within school districts. Finally, this section also highlights several areas in which further research and investigation could assist in these efforts.

Implications for School Districts

Considering that the financial resources of school districts will most likely remain constrained in the foreseeable future, districts with a real commitment to performance management must reallocate resources today as they work to adopt performance-driven practices, rather than wait for promises of additional resources tomorrow. In fact, performance-driven practices can provide districts with a promising means for seeking efficiencies during periods of fiscal constraint.

There are many practical steps that school districts can take to adopt performance-driven practices throughout their organizations. The specific steps that districts can and should take will depend upon the context, history, and leadership of the district, as well as the practical opportunities for change and improvement. However, Chapter 3, "Findings by Function," provides many examples of the kinds of practices that districts have adopted as they have sought to become more performance-driven. For example:

1. Developing and monitoring of broadly supported, rigorous district-wide goals that feature high standards for student achievement, and the drilling down of those goals to site-level objectives (see Section 3.1, "Goals and Governance");

2. Matching financial and human resources to those goals, through the adoption of a service-oriented approach to providing central services and the effective development and use of information resources to promote improved planning and more rigorous monitoring of information and results (see Section 3.2, "Matching Resources to Goals");

3. Promoting instructional leadership at the site level, through principals and teachers, to increase discussions about and to otherwise improve instructional practice (see Section 3.3, "Instructional Leadership");

4. Developing effective formative and summative assessments, as well as analyzing assessment results, and using those results and other information frequently to identify curricular gaps, improve instructional practice, plan student interventions, evaluate and monitor programs, and inform professional development (see Section 3.4, "The Use of Assessments"); and

5. Aligning professional development offerings with student achievement gaps, and the embedding of professional development within everyday site-based practices, through mentoring, coaching, and other means (see Section 3.5, "Professional Development").

In addition, Chapter 4, "Becoming a Performance-Driven Organization" emphasizes the importance of building an organizational culture that values inquiry. An inquiry-based organization is one that engages in active monitoring of its own practices through systematic gathering, analysis, and use of information to change practice in order to improve results. This can also include using performance-driven evaluations and other methods to promote ownership of outcomes among teachers, staff, and administrators.

For further examples of the kinds of steps that school districts can take to become more performance-driven, Chapter 6, "Synopsis of Common Practices," contains a matrix that describes the types of practices that districts in this study have adopted. As the matrix reveals, making progress toward the adoption of more performance-driven practices requires an organizational culture that can adapt to processes and work patterns that are more cross-functional in nature, and that seek to balance district-wide direction and cohesiveness with site-based leadership and involvement.

One of the key findings of this report is that becoming a performance-driven district has as much to do with managing people and processes—shaping the culture and actual practices of the organization—as it does with the particular goals, policies, and systems that the organization implements or has in place. In relation to this important finding, districts should be actively engaged not just in *creating* new programs or systems, but also in monitoring and promoting the *use* of such systems by teachers, staff, and administrators. This inevitably involves efforts to shift the culture of the district toward one that is more inquiry-based, whereby people feel comfortable gathering and analyzing information about student achievement, creating appropriate action plans as a result, and re-examining the effectiveness of the practices by gathering additional data in an ongoing way.

Trying to shift the culture of an organization to become more inquiry-based is difficult and a marked change from traditional practice within school districts. As districts seek to move in this direction, there are three fundamental organizational areas to consider—and to move along together—in developing an inquiry-based culture: people, practices, and tools. The following list provides examples of ways to promote the development of an inquiry-based culture that will, in turn, be more likely to accept and adopt performance-based practices.

People

- Consistent, continuous, and effective leadership at the district level to ensure coherence of planning and implementation.

- Convening cross-functional groups from different parts of the hierarchy (for example, principals, instructional coaches, and teachers; or different grade-level teachers) to discuss and analyze student performance and other data, plan instructional and other changes, and monitor results.

- Willingness to discuss weaknesses and mistakes at all levels of the organization with an emphasis on improvement rather than blame.

Districts should be actively engaged not just in *creating* new programs or systems, but also in monitoring and promoting the *use* of such systems by teachers, staff, and administrators. This inevitably involves efforts to shift the culture of the district toward one that is more inquiry-based, whereby people feel comfortable gathering and analyzing information about student achievement, creating appropriate action plans as a result, and re-examining the effectiveness of the practices by gathering additional data in an ongoing way.

- Professional development that is timely as well as relevant to the skills needed (e.g., curriculum cohesion, data use and analysis, assessments, and standards).

- Participation of teachers and other staff in seeking to achieve district goals.

- Developing incentives that can promote sharing of information and responsibility for results.

Practices

- Human resource and finance functions that are service-oriented, streamlined, and aligned to promote student achievement.

- Centralization of decision-making, yet with active participation of teachers and principals, regarding such areas as academic programs, curriculum, and professional development.

- Frequently administered, formative assessments in place for key subject areas and all grade levels (to guide instructional decision-making), with results shared with teachers, principals, and administrators.

- Policies that require the regular evaluation of district-supported programs.

- Regular assessment meetings to discuss results and strategies for improvement (that is, embedded feedback loops).

- Professional development for teachers and principals on data analysis and action planning, creating a cycle of inquiry around data use through professional development.

Tools

- Student achievement and other performance data available that is accurate, reliable, up-to-date, and understandable.

- Information systems integrated across district functions that facilitate sharing of information and make data queries easy from one system to the next, particularly integration of finance, human resource, student, and achievement data.

- Technology support to enable the delivery and analysis of formative assessments within the classroom.

- Data access at desktops for all members of the district (teachers, principals, and administrators).

Change is difficult for any organization. However, by working toward these kinds of practices in all three of these areas, districts can make progress in a balanced and systematic way to transform their organizational culture to one that is more dynamic and willing to engage in inquiry-based activities.

Policy Recommendations

The recommendations in this section are provided to assist state elected officials, other state leaders, national and state foundations, education think tanks, business leaders, and others in considering how to motivate school districts to adopt performance-driven practices to improve student achievement.

1. **Use the budgetary process to leverage the adoption of performance-driven practices.** While the current economic climate within states and across the country makes it difficult to anticipate opportunities for increased funding for schools, small increases, even if on the margins, offer state legislators opportunities to provide fiscal incentives for districts to improve student achievement—through accountability mechanisms, performance-based budgeting, and other means. At the same time, states that look past their one-size-fits all approach to enrollment funding may consider providing additional financial incentives for districts to seek out and cultivate those performance-driven practices that work best to improve student achievement. Statewide efforts that account for the needs of students and that help to focus districts on raising student performance may, in turn, motivate districts to adopt performance-driven practices.

2. **Increase school districts' flexibility in managing financial and human resources.** One important step in improving school districts' ability to adopt performance-driven practices is to increase their flexibility in using financial and human resources to meet the needs of students. The majority of districts cited the lack of financial flexibility as limiting their ability to progress toward more performance-driven practices. In particular, this could include providing more general fund dollars rather than categorical funding to school districts, and relaxing regulations concerning how funding is spent in cases where improved performance has been demonstrated. It could also include adopting state budgets on time, so that school districts can perform effective budgetary planning, or easing state regulations regarding human resources, in the interest of making human resource departments more service- and goal-oriented rather than burdened by regulatory requirements. For example, are state regulations regarding the hiring and firing of administrators, principals, and teachers balanced appropriately to safeguard the employee but also to ensure quality service? Are requirements for employee notices timed appropriately with state and local budgetary decision-making? In each state, it may make sense to perform a regulatory audit—including discussions with, at the least, state leaders, district superintendents, and union leaders—to determine which regulations are hindering, and which are promoting, the use of performance-driven practices within public school districts. Such audits not only identify areas where change is needed, but also exert pressure on all parties to find solutions to move the state forward in promoting performance-driven practices.

   In addition, the requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act regarding qualified teachers point to a national dilemma that reaches beyond the means of individual school districts to resolve. The lack of qualified teachers is a tremendous concern across districts, particularly for math, science, and special education. Several districts have created alternative certification programs to certify and place teachers in high-need areas, but they need assistance in evaluating, refining, and supporting these efforts. States and other policymakers may also want to reconsider work rules and other policies that inhibit districts from providing incentives to highly qualified teachers to work in critical-need areas.

3. **Offer support, consultation, and collaboration in the development of robust information systems at the district level.** School districts are burdened with antiquated information systems that prevent them from engaging in effective fiscal planning, tracking and understanding human resource needs, and, most importantly, accessing and analyzing student performance data. Many tasks that should be routinely automated are still performed by hand. These processes prevent the departments and functions—for example, finance, human resources, and instruction—from sharing information effectively with each other, which ultimately prevents them from reaching their potential. Additionally, there appear to be limited choices of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems for districts, and most available systems cannot be implemented without considerable tailoring to specific district needs. Districts need access to expertise and support in aggregating their collective demand for more robust information capabilities, so that they can become more performance-driven in their approach. It is worth considering whether states or others should step in to help aggregate school districts' technological demands, so that school districts would not have to reinvent the wheel in this area. This could also put collective pressure on technology companies to develop better solutions for school districts.

4. **Design state assessment regimens to ensure compliance and facilitate improved performance.** The development of statewide standards and the implementation of state assessments can be crucial steps in motivating school districts to pay greater attention to the achievement of all students. This study has shown that statewide standards and assessments have had that effect in some districts. Most districts in this study consider state assessments, including NCLB's requirements, as a means for ensuring compliance but not as a tool for improving performance. This suggests that states need to consider the needs of both the state (to ensure accountability) and the district (to manage schools toward improvement) in order to improve their assessment regime. The creation of state standards and assessments establishes a statewide accountability system to gather and evaluate data at the state level—which is important but not sufficient. The more difficult tasks remain: to improve the way these assessments are implemented by the state and the results provided to districts; and to motivate districts to use more formative assessment results to improve performance. Recommendations in each of these areas are provided below.

States should improve their own feedback mechanisms for reviewing the effectiveness of their assessments in driving performance at the district level. Some states are not very far along in adopting coherent, transparent assessment regimens. In fact, this study found that some state practices around assessments actually inhibited districts from developing performance-driven practices. Just as districts should regularly review and evaluate their programs, states should actively involve local and national educational leaders in reviews of their assessments. Such reviews should include, among other issues, the content and timing of assessments, the timing and format of the dissemination of results, the disaggregation of data, the consistency of data from one year to the next, and the ability to use results for longitudinal studies. For example, states could adopt systems for unique student identifiers so that students could be tracked from one school year to the next. States could release sample test questions during the year so that districts can assess students' progress in reaching

state standards prior to the end-of-year test. States could also provide access to software that will disaggregate student data for teachers the following year—so that teachers and districts can identify (on the first day of school) students needing the most assistance in a particular area, and can even identify the kinds of assistance they need.

States and other bodies should assist districts in developing and using district-wide assessments to improve performance. In this study, those districts that used state assessments to improve performance also had in place other, more formative assessments that they tracked district-wide. In each of these cases, it was the more formative assessments that provided the most useful data in assisting district personnel—teachers, principals, and administrators—in changing instructional practice or implementing programmatic interventions to improve student performance. States and other bodies should consider assisting districts in developing, purchasing, and using district-wide formative assessments during the year.

5. **Provide school districts with the means to make data available and motivate educators to use it**. Providing increased access to student achievement data can, in itself, be a compelling motivator for change. While access to timely data about student achievement does not ensure its use to create improvement, lack of access to timely data certainly guarantees the reverse. For example, those teachers and principals who have access to student performance results—and begin to use it—can and do raise the bar for others, through everyday interchanges, discussions at staff meetings, and professional development opportunities. To be effective, data should be:

   - *Easy to access*—available through data dashboards, Web portals, weekly staff meetings,

   - *Gathered in a variety of ways*—state assessments, district-wide tests, classroom exams, and student portfolios,

   - *Provided in a variety of formats*—tables, charts, and narratives,

   - *Disaggregated in a variety of ways*—by student population group, by teacher, by grade level, and longitudinally, and

   - *Provided to all levels within school districts and the community*—depending on confidentiality requirements and need to know.

6. **Improve training of teachers and leaders around performance-driven practices, including the use of data**. The districts in this study were developing promising approaches in providing professional development to teachers. However, they were also overwhelmed by the task of training teachers, for example, to understand and use assessment results to improve instructional practice. Compared to the resources that districts have at their disposal for professional development, the resources that schools of education could bring to bear on this challenge are enormous. However, schools of education do not regularly provide prospective teachers with the necessary skills to interpret assessment results, and to then adjust instructional practice accordingly. These tools need to be an integral part of teacher preparation programs.

This report also found that the role of principals is changing significantly. Principals are expected to be instructional leaders first, but also entrepreneurs, administrators, managers, and community and school leaders. Considering these raised expectations and the importance of site-based leadership in driving change, there is a growing need to develop leadership training opportunities for principals. Districts should evaluate their own leadership and staff to ensure that they have the commensurate training to provide the support and services to this new breed of principals.

Critical Research Needs

Much work remains to be done to better understand—and affect—the opportunities and challenges that school districts face as they seek to shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of performance. Most importantly, we need reliable, comparable information about student performance, so that over time, we can analyze and understand the effectiveness of district practices and curriculum. The following recommendations are directed toward the research and policy communities, and describe critical research needs involving the availability of student performance data.

1. **Establish methods for obtaining comparable student performance data across states.** One of the drawbacks of this study derives from the lack of available comparable student achievement data for school districts in different states. Because education governance has been organized in this nation as a state and local issue, it follows that accountability and standards are determined at the state level with local feedback and implementation. At the same time, many of the children in urban areas across the country face similar challenges in their public schools. Many children from various public school districts go to the same colleges. They participate in local and state economies that are linked to a national economy. While there is a compelling need to set standards and accountability structures by state, there is a parallel need for researchers to be able to compare student performance across districts in different states. More work needs to be done at the policy level, with support from foundations, to establish ways of comparing student performance across states, so that further research can determine the effectiveness of performance-driven practices by tracking related student achievement over time.

2. **States and districts must allow greater transparency and availability of existing student performance data.** This report initially sought to compare student performance results among the 28 districts studied. Yet we found that student performance data were not readily available and required special requests that included elaborate processes, even though the data were not broken down in ways that threatened students' privacy. States and districts need to adopt policies to make student performance data more accessible so that researchers and policymakers can more effectively analyze the impact of performance-driven district practices across states. Researchers must be able to disaggregate and track these data longitudinally in order to draw valid conclusions about the factors that contribute to student achievement.

Next Steps

The previous section, "Critical Research Needs," called for greater comparability of and access to student achievement data by district. Several additional questions also arise from this research project.

1. **Develop a better understanding of the extent to which performance-based practices are being used throughout the districts.** In order to identify promising practices and barriers that districts have faced in adopting performance-based practices, the research team for this study interviewed a total of 112 senior-level leaders in 28 districts (four administrators per district). To gain a more complete picture of these issues, teachers and principals may need to be included in the study—through surveys, interviews, and/or representative case studies.

2. **Expand the research to develop a model for the development of performance-driven practices, and test it through surveys with a wide range of school districts.** This study has identified some of the opportunities and challenges that districts have faced as they have adopted performance-driven practices. In particular, it has identified a number of common practices and stages of development as districts adopted performance-based practices (see Chapter 6, "Synopsis of Common Practices"). These stages of development present a hypothesis of provisional stages of development of performance-driven practices. A promising next step would involve developing a model and testing it through surveys with a wide range of school districts across the country. This could also include the development of a self-assessment model for districts interested in knowing how far along they are in adopting of performance-driven practices—and what their next steps might be.

Conclusion

In exploring the cultural and practical shifts that medium- to large-sized urban school districts across the country have encountered in adopting performance-driven practices, this study has found a wide range of significant patterns, promising practices, and barriers. We have described these findings in cross-functional ways (see Chapter 2, "Performance-Driven Practices Today: Overall Findings") and by function (see Chapter 3, "Findings by Function"). We have examined issues related to organizational culture in light of gathering, monitoring, and analyzing information (see Chapter 4, "Becoming a Performance-Driven Organization"). We have explored three representative districts in depth in order to reveal the kinds of challenges that specific districts have faced, the achievements and trade-offs they have made, and the processes they have embraced in adopting performance-driven practices (see Chapter 5, "Performance-Driven School Districts: Three Case Studies"). We have provided a road map that summarizes the kinds of paths that districts have taken, by functional area, in adopting performance-driven practices (see Chapter 6, "Synopsis of Common Practices"). Finally, we have suggested some implications and recommendations for school districts, the broader policy community, and researchers.

The performance-driven practices identified in this report offer states some useful tools to motivate districts to engage in rigorous improvement efforts that are connected to statewide standards, but that are driven by local needs. They offer school districts ways to engage their teachers, staff, and administrators in comprehensive yet targeted strategies to bring about improvement. They offer administrators a framework for aligning

resources—such as programmatic interventions and professional development—to better meet student needs. And they offer teachers an approach for analyzing, understanding, and improving student learning.

The challenge of performance-driven practices, however, lies in the extent to which each district—and to some extent, each school—must work to create an organizational culture that is comfortable evaluating its own performance, creating action plans, and assessing its own results regularly. We need to find ways to make this easier—through better processes, more effective tools, and better-trained people. There is significant research work yet to be done to test, validate, and shape the direction that districts are taking as they adopt performance-driven practices. Yet the practices and strategies identified in this report offer a first step toward assisting districts that are interested in moving in this direction.

There are teachers, principals, and administrators in virtually every district in the country who would like access to better strategies to increase student achievement. In this nation's drive for accountability in education, performance-driven practices offer ways to build on that energy—both from the ground up and the top down—to bring about lasting and genuine educational reform.

The challenge of performance-driven practices lies in the extent to which each district—and to some extent, each school—must work to create an organizational culture that is comfortable evaluating its own performance, creating action plans, and assessing its own results regularly.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Intro

1. Length of time at current district?

2. What would you say makes your district unique from others?

3. What are the most significant student achievement challenges for your district?

Goals

1. What are your district's top 2-3 goals over the next few years?

2. What is the role of your school board in setting these goals?

3. Do principals participate in the creation of these goals and objectives? Teachers? Community? Parents?

4. How are these goals communicated to others within the organization?

5. Are parents aware of and supportive of these goals?

6. [CASE*] How do you monitor your district's progress against your goal(s)? Give example of one goal.

7. What are the main issues that impact your spending? What flexibility does the district have to allocate resources where they're most needed to meet goals?

8. What flexibility is there at the school level to allocate resources where they're needed most (site-based)?

Information Systems and Data

1. What infrastructure is in place to support and/or enable effective decision-making practices? How effective is it?

2. What type of information management systems do you have in place?

3. Are there any particular information tools or systems that you find particularly useful or problematic?

4. What information technology tools and programs do you use for data/ assessment/ instructional management? How effective are they?

5. How do you use these systems to monitor student performance?

6. [CASE*] Give an example of when you used student data in order to make a decision. What issue or problem were you trying to address? What data did you need? How did you go about getting it? Obstacles in accessing the data? Did this assist you in resolving the problem? What did you do with the data? How did this inform the decision you made? Was there other information that would have been useful to you in addressing the problem?

7. What do you wish you could find out about student performance and/or program efficacy that you can't easily find out today?

Assessment

1. What assessments are currently in place in your district?

2. What types of student assessment (outcome data) do you collect (grade level, frequency of testing, length of time assessment has been in place, alignment with standards)?

3. How is test data collected? Timeliness of dissemination?

4. How do you get this student performance information? Are you able to directly view student assessment information? What tools, what formats?

5. Does the district produce reports of assessment results? How are results of assessments shared/communicated and to whom (reports, meetings, or otherwise)?

6. [CASE*] How are results on these assessments or other outcome measures connected to intervention strategies?

7. What are the current barriers or obstacles in using data for these types of interventions and/or decision-making? Examples?

8. Has NCLB impacted your use of data (including data collection, analysis, reporting, etc.)?

Instruction

1. What types of expectations are there for the improvement of student learning?

2. What are the problems associated with raising those expectations or standards?

3. [CASE*] How do you identify curricular gaps (or quality of instruction)?

4. Would you say that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with academic standards? How so?

5. How do you determine the types of instructional strategies necessary to meet the different needs of students throughout your district (i.e, challenges and opportunities of charter schools or private schools)?

Professional Development

1. How does professional development tie back to your district school goals? Who receives professional development?

2. What district-wide courses are there, how are topics chosen?

3. How many staff development days do you have per year (number of days devoted to district required courses)?

4. What training is there for principals in using data to make instructional decisions? For teachers?

5. Do you and your direct reports have specific student achievement objectives?

6. Are principals and teachers responsible for your district's outcomes? Accountable for student outcomes? Are there incentives/rewards? If so, what are they?

7. [CASE*] How do you know if a principal is ineffective or underperforming?

8. [CASE*] How do you know if teacher is ineffective or underperforming?

9. Who has the final say over hiring decisions in schools?

10. What type of interventions do you have in place for your lowest performing schools?

11. Are teacher and administrator contracts and compensation aligned with system goals and improvement strategies? How so: annual performance or salary reviews? Role of union?

For each CASE question listed above, prompts were used obtain the following information: frequency of occurrence, monitoring and feedback, action taken, evidence of continuous improvement, embedded processes for this, and barriers and obstacles.

Appendix B: List of Advisors

Anthony Bryk
Professor, School of Education and Graduate School of Business, Stanford University

Libia Gil
Senior Fellow, American Institutes for Research

Lynn Liao
Director, The Broad Foundation

Ted Mitchell
President, Occidental College

Linda Roberts
Former Director, Office of Educational Technology, U.S. Department of Education

Andrew Rotherham
Director, 21st Century Schools Project, Progressive Policy Institute

Jim Shelton
Program Director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Mike Smith
Program Director, Education, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Deborah Stipek
Dean, Stanford University School of Education

Scott Thompson
Assistant Director, Panasonic Foundation

Tom Vander Ark
Executive Director, Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Appendix C: About NewSchools Venture Fund

NewSchools Venture Fund™ is a national venture philanthropy fund working to transform public education for underserved children by supporting education entrepreneurs who create high-quality education ventures, and by providing thought leadership across traditional education boundaries to ensure that results-oriented, systemic change is accomplished. Founded in 1998, NewSchools has invested $30 million in both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Our current investments focus on facilitating the growth of nonprofit charter school systems and enabling school districts to become performance-driven systems. NewSchools also works with a bi-partisan community of education, nonprofit, policy, and business leaders to accelerate the process of education reform.

About the NewSchools Report Team

Kim Smith, Co-Founder & CEO

Kim Smith is co-founder and CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund, which she established in 1998 to transform public education by supporting education entrepreneurs. In NewSchools, Kim created a new "hybrid" approach to investing in social entrepreneurs. NewSchools uses grants, loans and equity investments to support a portfolio that includes nonprofit and for-profit entrepreneurs who are building sustainable, scalable education ventures. Kim began her career as a consultant specializing in business-education partnerships. In 1989, she became a founding team member of Teach For America (TFA). She then put her TFA experience to work in the post of founding director of BAYAC AmeriCorps, a consortium of nonprofits in the San Francisco Bay Area working to develop young leaders in education. Kim's background includes marketing experience with Silicon Graphics' Education Industry Group, where she focused on the online learning industry, and her role as the founding director of a trade show venture. Kim holds a bachelor's degree in political science and psychology from Columbia College and an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Joanne Weiss, Partner and COO

Joanne Weiss is Partner and Chief Operating Officer at NewSchools Venture Fund, where she focuses on investments and management assistance to portfolio ventures in the Performance Accelerator Fund, and oversees the organization's operations. Prior to joining NewSchools Venture Fund, Joanne was CEO of Claria Corporation, an e-services recruiting firm that helped emerging-growth companies build their teams quickly and well. Before her tenure at Claria, Joanne spent twenty years in the design, development, and marketing of technology-based products and services for education. Joanne has a passion for education, and has spent much of her career pioneering innovative ways of using technology to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. She holds a degree in biochemistry from Princeton University.

Jim Peyser, Partner

Jim Peyser is a Partner at NewSchools Venture Fund, where he brings to bear a strong hybrid background in education policy, charter school development and business management. He leads NewSchools' East Coast initiatives, working with both Charter and Performance Accelerator Fund ventures. He also serves as Chairman of the

Massachusetts Board of Education, on which he has served since 1996. Prior to joining NewSchools, Jim served as Education Advisor to two Governors of Massachusetts, where he helped shape outcomes-focused policy at the state level on standards, charter schools and school accountability. He also spent more than seven years as Executive Director of Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, where he supported public education innovations, including early charter schools. Jim holds a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School (Tufts University) and a Bachelor of Arts from Colgate University.

Harris Ferrell, Associate Partner

Harris Ferrell is an Associate Partner at NewSchools Venture Fund, where he focuses on investment strategy and management assistance to portfolio ventures in the Performance Accelerator Fund. Prior to joining NewSchools, Harris was the Director of Product Management at SchoolNet, Inc., a technology company that helps school districts utilize data strategically to drive decision-making in instruction, planning, and management. Harris began his career as a sixth grade teacher in Houston, TX through the Teach For America program. His class was the first sixth grade class at the school to exceed district averages on state-mandated standardized test—a 75% improvement over the previous year. Harris received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics at Yale University writing his thesis on the rise of for-profit education management companies in the public school sector. He earned his master's degree in Business Administration from Harvard Business School.

Emily Rummo, Analyst

Emily is an Analyst at NewSchools Venture Fund, where she focuses on investment strategy and management assistance to portfolio ventures for both the Charter Accelerator Fund and the Performance Accelerator fund. Prior to joining NewSchools, Emily worked as an analyst at the strategy consulting firm Dean & Company, based in Washington, D.C. Emily's experience at Dean included developing operational and strategic plans for both well-established and start-up telecommunications providers and performing extensive due diligence for a private equity client. In addition to her work at Dean, Emily served as a volunteer teacher at KIPP DC KEY Academy where she coached soccer and taught creative writing to middle school students through KIPP's Saturday School program. Emily holds a B.A. in English from Dartmouth College. While in school, Emily co-founded a teen mentoring program, Teen DREAM, which pairs college mentors with at-risk youth.

Julie Landry, Communications Manager

Julie Landry is the Communications and Special Projects Manager at NewSchools Venture Fund, where she oversees publications strategy, and writes/edits newsletters, research papers, articles and other materials in support of the fund's network and intellectual capital development. Prior to joining NewSchools Venture Fund, Julie spent three years as a writer at *Red Herring Magazine*, a business and technology magazine, where she covered venture capital as well as a range of other beats, including education, entrepreneurs and startups. In 2001, she was named one of the "30 Under 30" business journalists in the country by TJFR, for her online and print writing at Red Herring. Julie graduated from Vanderbilt University with a bachelor's degree in English, and was awarded a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

Appendix D: About the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education

The Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) is a non-profit educational think tank that conducts research and offers resources with the goal of helping education institutions increase their capacity to use data and information to improve student and institutional success. ISKME's research helps institutions strengthen information-based decision-making to support day-to-day operations and long-term planning in administration and management, learning and instruction, assessment and quality standards, and information management.

About the Authors

Lisa A. Petrides, Ph.D., ISKME founder and president, is a former professor at Columbia University, Teachers College, where she coordinated the EdD-MBA joint degree program in Education Leadership and Management offered by the Educational Administration Program and the Columbia Business School. Her publications include a new book, *Turning Knowledge into Action: What's Data Got to Do With It?*, "The Challenges of Using External Accountability Mandates to Create Internal Change," in *Planning for Higher Education*; "Costs and Benefits of the Workaround: Inventive Solution or Costly Alternative," in *International Journal of Education Management* , "What Schools Have to Teach the Corporate World," in *KM Review, Knowledge Management in Education: Defining the Landscape*, a monograph produced by ISKME, and "Knowledge Management for School Leaders: An Ecological Framework for Thinking Schools," in *Teachers College Record*.

Thad R. Nodine, Ph.D., senior writer and editor at ISKME, has over a decade's experience in education and higher education policy, from research and analysis to writing, editorial management, and strategic communications. Most recently, he is co-author, with Lisa Petrides, of *Knowledge Management in Education: Defining the Discipline*, and "What Schools Can Teach the Corporate World: Balancing People, Processes and Technology in Education," in *KM Review*. He has been managing editor of several publications, including *Measuring Up 2004: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education* and *Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of Higher Education*. Previously, he was communications director at the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.