

Transcript of CEC Audit Findings - Part 2 Learning Podcast

Hello this is Dr. Lori Heinz, District 64 Superintendent. As my opening podcast stated, I'm a true believer in continuous improvement. By now many members of the staff and community have heard me state, "While we may be good or even really good we can always get better." It is because of that strong belief that I hired an external group, the "Consortium for Educational Change," to help us identify baseline information in terms of how we compared with other high-performing organizations.

CEC focused its work in three critical areas; learning, collaboration and results. For each area the CEC team offered feedback on specific criteria for continuous improvement. Strengths, opportunities and suggestions for next steps. If you haven't done so already please consider listening to my introductory podcast for more information about the CEC process and to hear about the compelling broad themes we think are going to inspire many conversations in the coming months.

In this podcast we will focus exclusively on CEC findings in the area of student learning. The CEC report hopes that recognizing and celebrating these strengths will showcase the investment of resources in improving performance results.

Here are the areas they identified as strengths. First and foremost, regarding our school culture, District 64 students enjoy school. They feel their teachers care about them. They feel their teachers are approachable and will help them learn and grow. There is high student satisfaction. Students feel safe and secure in their schools.

In terms of curriculum the CEC team noted that the district is transitioning to standards-based instruction and to the requirements of the Common Core State Standards. Classroom teachers are beginning to experiment with instructional strategies to differentiate instruction within the classroom, such as using guided reading, guided math and the seven strategies of assessment for learning.

To support students, CEC noted that the district provides a strong system of support through curriculum specialists, reading specialists, library media specialist, technology integration specialists, instructional coaches, team leaders, resource and self-contained special educators and a problem solving team to name just a few. CEC also noted that high quality teacher assistants are available to support students and teachers.

Looking at providing specialized services, CEC reported there is a vast array of special education services available.

They also noted that students within the Channels of Challenge program feel challenged and parents interviewed are satisfied with the program's rigor.

Reviewing the depth of District 64 curriculum, CEC noted our strong emphasis on fine arts and physical education, and that students in 7th and 8th grade have choices and electives to enrich their core studies.

CEC also noted that District 64 has a one-to-one technology initiative and provides a Chromebook to each student beginning in grades 3 to assist them in integrating the use of technology to accelerate their learning. Teachers use technology to enhance both learning and teaching.

The CEC team also identified opportunities for improvement. Identifying items they believed to be the highest priority and that will yield a high future return on investment of resources in improving performance results.

Please keep in mind that the CEC feedback report was developed reflecting on continuous improvement indicators. It is based on a representative sample of almost 1,000 stakeholders interviewed as well as a detailed self-study. However, it is not intended to represent the perspective of all school administrators, faculty, staff, students and parents.

Here are the opportunities that the CEC identified for improving learning for our students. CEC reported it has identified inconsistencies within the district in clearly defining learning outcomes based on state standards so that students and their families can identify what learners should know and be able to do at the end of each unit.

Regarding assessments, although the use of formative assessment is occurring in places throughout the district inconsistencies regarding alignment of assessments to unit learning outcomes were found. Standardizing formative assessments so students and their families can identify what each student has mastered and what is next to learn should be addressed. This type of assessment data is critical to differentiating instruction through flexible grouping.

Additionally, there's little understanding that student performance on unit assessments should be a predictor for performance on NWEA MAP, and that performance on MAP should be a predictor of performance on the new PARCC assessment. All should be aligned to college and career readiness standards.

Finally, regarding assessments, teachers are concerned with the number of assessments given and the impact to the loss of instructional time they may present. There is a lack of clarity regarding why certain assessments are administered and if the data provided is critical to teaching and learning. A federal requirement is to hold high expectations for all children and share a belief that all students can learn.

CEC reported that a need exists for equal access to learning opportunities to assure each learner will be college and career-ready. An example given, parents of students not in the Channel of Challenge program need assurances that their students are being appropriately

challenged.

CEC noted though that it is difficult within the current schedule to provide additional time and support for students who are struggling, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics.

In terms of special education, CEC found it unclear if students with disabilities are meeting the least restrictive environment special education requirements.

The CEC team also offers some suggestions for next steps that could be taken to address key opportunities for improvement. These next steps are framed by the experiences and opinions of the assessment team. For learning the CEC team members suggested two next steps. First, Developing with stakeholders, clear district-wide expectations regarding what each student needs to know for every unit of instruction. For example, CEC recommends that every unit of instruction would follow this outline; identify what each student is to know and be able to do, assess each student to determine what he or she already knows and still needs to learn, organize staff to work together, to meet the needs of students who have not mastered expectations, as well as those who already have and need additional challenges.

A second suggestion is that the district cultivates a learning environment where students, staff and families are responsible and accountable and are committed to monitoring progress and reporting results of these expectations.

That wraps up the strengths, opportunities and next steps offered by the CEC team, surrounding learning in District 64. To learn more about their review of the two other areas, collaboration and results, please view my other podcasts focusing on those topics. As always I welcome your comments and questions. Thank you for viewing and for your investment in District 64.