The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s
Model District Initiative

Year 1 Evaluation Results

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Year 1 Evaluation Results

BACKGROUND: THE CREATION OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In the year 2000 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced a $350,000,000 funding commitment to education. “The Foundation’s three-pronged investment strategy reflects a commitment to growing successful models that help all students achieve at high levels.”1 The approach includes: (1) recognizing and encouraging high achievement schools and school districts; (2) promoting professional development to enhance district, school and classroom leadership; and (3) helping remove financial barriers to higher education through targeted scholarship programs. Major grants have been awarded in each of these three areas since that announcement.

The foundation awarded eleven five-year district grants in the state of Washington as part of the School and District Grants strategy. The grants, given to ten public school districts and the Yakima Diocese, ranged from $486,000 to $25,900,000 depending on the district student enrollment, and were intended “to demonstrate that it is possible to help all students achieve by improving teaching and learning and enhancing access to technology for students.” The requirements of the grant included the allocation of 80 percent of the funds to “school grants,” “adopting or developing a research-based instructional model, and providing access to one computer for every four students (or better) along with appropriate staff training.” A limit of 20 percent of the funds could be used for district level projects.

Prior to announcing the district initiative, foundation personnel consulted with over 600 education experts from around the country, “representing a broad range of roles and interests to gain perspective and information on the state and future of education.” The goals of the district grants were based on a synthesis of this information, and provided a vision of education with clear outcomes in four areas. A strategy of the foundation was to identify districts already moving in these directions, and to provide additional resources and assistance to increase the likelihood of developing successful

1 Quotations in this section, the contents of Table 1, and the descriptions of the district grantees initial plans for the grants are taken from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation website, education division. http://www.gatesfoundation.org/learning/ed/default.htm
district models in which all schools in the district are high achieving. When announcing the awards the foundation personnel believed that, “All grantees have a demonstrated commitment to four areas: ensuring students are focused on clear expectations; improving teaching and learning; embodying the seven identified attributes of high achievement schools and districts.”

Foundation personnel developed a list of characteristics or attributes for students and teachers, and for schools and districts based on months of consultation and research. In many ways, these attributes have become grant goals as the districts and schools seek to change their practices, or reinvent themselves, along these lines. These attributes are shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1. ATTRIBUTES OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS**

**Students Focused on Clear Expectations**
Successful schools focus on literacy and a few other important learning goals such as those articulated by Hugh Price of the National Urban League. Students should be:

- **Literate**: capable of demonstrating a working command of reading, writing, and speaking in English.
- **Mathematically competent**: have command of the basic computational skills required in the modern workplace and in everyday adult life.
- **Problem solvers**: eager to seek out information, discover answers, and apply their skills in reasoning and critical thinking to solving problems.
- **Scientifically literate**: capable of appreciating nature and the environment, familiar with the scientific method and the role of science in modern life, and cognizant of the uncertainties of the scientific method.
- **Good citizens**: well-grounded in the forces and values that have shaped this nation historically, culturally, demographically, politically, and economically with an appreciation for the relationship of the United States to the rest of the world and this country’s role in the world.
- **Technologically advanced**: comfortable with technology and capable of using computers and related technologies in the normal course of everyday work and learning.

**Teachers Focused on Improving Teaching and Learning**
The foundation’s education grant programs are predicated on three essential components of powerful teaching and learning (adapted from *How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice*, National Research Council, 1999) in a standards-based technology-enabled environment:

- **Active Inquiry**: Students are engaged in active participation, exploration, and research; activities draw out perceptions and develop understanding; students are encouraged to make decisions about their learning; and teachers utilize the diverse experiences of students to build effective learning experiences.
- **In-Depth Learning**: The focus is competence, not coverage. Students struggle with complex problems, explore core concepts to develop deep understanding; and apply knowledge in real world contexts.
- **Performance Assessment**: Clear expectations define what students should know and be able to do; students produce quality work products and present to real audiences; student work shows evidence of understanding, not just recall;
assessment tasks allow students to exhibit higher-order thinking; and teachers and students set learning goals and monitor progress.

Attributes of High Achievement Schools
The growing numbers of schools that are successfully helping diverse groups of students achieve at high levels exhibit the following attributes:

- **Common Focus:** In high achieving schools, the staff and students are focused on a few important goals. The school has adopted a consistent research-based instructional approach based on shared beliefs about teaching and learning. The use of time, tools, materials, and professional development activities are aligned with instruction.

- **High Expectations:** In high achieving schools, all staff members are dedicated to helping every student achieve state and local standards; all students are engaged in an ambitious and rigorous course of study; and all students leave school prepared for success in work, further education and responsible citizenship.

- **Personalized:** In high achieving schools, the school is designed to promote powerful, sustained student relationships with adults where every student has an adult advocate and a personal plan for progress. It is vital that schools are small, intimate units of no more than 600 students (less than 400 strongly recommended) so that staff and students can work closely together.

- **Respect and Responsibility:** In high achieving schools, the environment is authoritative, safe, ethical, and studious. The staff teaches, models, and expects responsible behavior and relationships are based on mutual respect.

- **Time to Collaborate:** In high achieving schools, staff has time to collaborate and develop skills and plans to meet the needs of all students. Parents are recognized as partners in education. Partnerships are developed with businesses in order to create relevance and work-based opportunities and with institutions of higher education to improve teacher preparation and induction.

- **Performance Based:** In high achieving schools, students are promoted to the next instructional level only when they have achieved competency. Students receive additional time and assistance when needed to achieve this competency. Data-driven decisions shape a dynamic structure and schedule.

- **Technology as a Tool:** In high achieving schools, teachers design engaging and imaginative curriculum linked to learning standards, analyze results, and have easy access to best practices and learning opportunities. Schools publish their progress to parents and engage the community in dialog about continuous improvement.

Attributes of High Achievement School Districts
While few districts have attained a high level of achievement, evidence indicates that systems of schools with the following attributes create a high performance context:

- **Distributed Leadership:** The school board, administration and employee representatives share a goal of helping all students achieve. They place top priority on literacy, encourage continuous improvement of teaching and learning, focus visits, correspondence, and meetings on student learning, and engage parents and community members in an ongoing conversation about helping all students achieve at high levels.

- **Performance Accountability:** The district establishes clear expectations and accountability:
  - Grade level standards and pre and post standards-based assessments in core academic areas guide teaching and learning. Policies that guide promotion and school funding provide the time and assistance students need to meet performance expectations.
• Staff members are evaluated on skill and performance.
• Low performing schools receive assistance and when necessary the district takes responsibility to create better options for students.

• **Effective Governance:** Schools make hiring, budget and program decisions. Parents and students can choose schools and have access to alternative delivery systems. Following is a resource regarding governance: [http://www.ecs.org/](http://www.ecs.org/)

• **Shared Values:** The school board, district administration and employee representatives articulate and model shared values. District leaders seek regular feedback from students, staff members, and parents regarding the learning climate.

• **Learning Partnerships:** Parents are recognized as the first teachers and are involved in instructional decisions. Business partnerships support high expectations and provide work-based learning opportunities. Community communications builds support for the improvement agenda.

• **Staff Development:** Districts invest at least 5% of their resources in adult learning and leadership development. Learning opportunities for staff members include school-based professional development and time for the instructional staff to analyze data, target efforts and solve problems. Partnerships with schools of education improve teacher preparation and induction.

• **Technology Infrastructure:** Every staff member and student has access to high-speed networks, quality content, powerful learning and communication tools, and technical support. Teachers have access to on-line standards, activities, content, assessment, and management tools.

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**THE DISTRICT GRANTEES**

The districts selected to receive grants are diverse in terms of size, student populations served, and geographic location. The grantees include the largest district in the state and urban (Seattle, 48,000 students) and a small rural district in central Washington (Mabton, 900 students). A listing of the demographic, financial, achievement and other district characteristics is provided in Appendix A.

During the application process school district personnel identified current areas of strengths and weaknesses, and developed a plan for use of the foundation funds. Therefore, in one sense, each district had its own specific set of goals for the grant. At the same time, all of the districts were expected to focus their efforts on the student, teacher, school and district attributes, thus giving a common set of goals to all of the grants. A brief description of the grantees unique district foci and initial plans for the grant are presented below.

**Bellingham School District**
10,400 students – grant amount: $4,492,800

This northwest Washington district has been working for over eight years to ensure that its classrooms are places where every student learns. With active, engaged parents and community members, and strong district leadership, Bellingham has successfully adopted
a strategic plan that embraces the key attributes of high achievement districts.

The foundation’s grant will support three core instructional strategies to accelerate the district’s current work: improving student literacy; engaging students in the learning process; and enhancing communication with parents. Developing and implementing these models will be made easier through improved access to technology. The district will continue to focus on building a technology-rich, assessment-based instructional model, creating school-based adult advocates for older students, and expanding school-to-home communication and involvement.

**Enumclaw School District**

5,300 students – grant amount: $2,289,600

In the far southeast corner of King County, stretching among the Cascade foothills, Enumclaw School District feels far removed from the urban Puget Sound area. But the district’s commitment to helping all students achieve has attracted notice far and wide.

Enumclaw will use the foundation’s grant to enhance and expand current efforts. The district’s working strategic plan will be broadened to more effectively distribute ownership and leadership of student learning. Everyone will be responsible to help all students achieve. Funds will support the development and implementation of a data-driven, competency-based learning system to help teachers more efficiently monitor student progress. Existing literacy-based partnerships with organizations like the chamber of commerce and city government will be expanded. District leadership will work with teachers and staff to develop a network-based “training on demand” system, allowing anyone, anytime, anywhere access to quality information. And the district will be able to establish a solid technology infrastructure with accompanying technical assistance and training.

**Evergreen School District**

21,538 students – grant amount: $9,304,416

Located in one of the fastest growing parts of the state, Evergreen School District has been engaged in reinventing the educational process for over ten years. With community support and input, they have built their success around the ABC’s: active, continuous learning; the basics; and a caring culture. The focus of the staff work has been to implement standards-based, assessment-driven, research-proven programs to ensure student achievement.

The foundation’s grant will help support a reexamination of the district’s secondary schools. Evergreen will outreach into the community, gather input, and develop and implement a plan to redesign the district’s high schools. Individual school plans will reflect these conversations and adhere to a common vision that includes a strong data system, accountability at all levels, differentiated instruction, real-world connections, and flexible scheduling.
**Hockinson School District**  
2,126 students – grant amount: $918,432

This small, rural district in southwest Washington is on the cusp of major change. Currently a K-8 district, it plans to open a new high school in the fall of 2003. This presents an amazing opportunity to build on its current success and expand its commitment to high quality teaching and learning to a new level. The community surrounding the Hockinson School District has actively promoted this new high school, and will remain critical to its success for the next few years.

The foundation’s grant will support the development and implementation of research-based instructional models, staff training, and improved access to technology for both the existing K-8 system and the future high school. Starting from scratch, with community input and research at the core, Hockinson has the opportunity to build a model small high school.

**Kennewick School District**  
13,520 students – grant amount: $7,300,800

Kennewick School District is on a mission to increase reading proficiency for all students. That simple goal has been at the core of the south central Washington district’s success for over three years now. The district has used this literacy focus both to develop a strong performance accountability system (that has been a model for many districts around the state) and to involve the community in helping all students achieve.

The foundation’s grant will support and accelerate the district’s ongoing efforts. Particular emphasis will be placed on expanding professional development opportunities in areas from literacy to technology, creating smaller units within high schools, broadening existing partnerships, and strengthening the district’s technology infrastructure. Each school will implement its own plan based on these common principles and aligned with the attributes of high achievement schools.

**Mabton School District**  
900 students – grant amount: $486,000

Located in the lower Yakima Valley, Mabton School District serves one of the more rural, low-income and isolated communities in the state. But these statistics have not stopped the district. For five years, Mabton has been following a strategic plan that emphasizes that everyone can learn, that families provide the foundation for learning, that technology is essential in education, and that high expectations will improve achievement.

Foundation funding will support these ongoing improvement efforts, as well as provide the time and resources for a broadening of the work. The district will build on its already strong staff development system, conducting research and using the data to further hone instruction in the classroom. Though strong community support is evident in the high
passage for a recent levy, expanding outreach efforts and building more partnerships will
be central as the district moves forward. The district will use a portfolio model, allowing
ongoing custom analysis of the progress to ensure continuous high achievement by all
students.

**Nooksack Valley School District**
1,800 students – grant amount: $972,000

Nestled between the Canadian border and the Cascade foothills, Nooksack Valley School
District has spent the last seven years quietly moving forward with an ambitious
improvement plan. Based in research and best practices, the district has embraced a
standards-based system and created a climate – both within the district and throughout
the community – that helps all students achieve.

The foundation’s grant will build on these successes, and target five specific areas:
accountability; instructional/reform models and staff development; technology; parent
and community engagement; and time, schedule and calendar. Fundamental to all of
these areas are the time, resources, and technical support that the grant will provide. For
example, the district will be able to study and more effectively use successful
instructional models with more time for staff research and planning; with improved
access to training, instruction and support, the district can implement a comprehensive
and much-needed technology infrastructure.

**Port Angeles School District**
5,143 students - grant amount: $2,700,000

The pride Port Angeles residents have in their community and their commitment to their
schools is reflected in the school district’s vision: “quality education in a quality
community.” The Port Angeles School District was chosen as a model district because of
its current strengths and past accomplishments in helping all students achieve. With help
from the private sector, the community is being wired and technology is being integrated
in all sectors, including education. The district’s developing technology infrastructure, as
well as its strong leadership, performance accountability, and learning partnerships were
all key factors in its selection.

The foundation grant will be phased in over three years using a “feeder-school” pattern of
planning and implementation. The 2000-2001 school year will be the start of the
planning phase for five Port Angeles schools: Dry Creek Elementary, Hamilton
Elementary, Stevens Middle School, Choice Alternative School and Port Angeles High
School. Planning will include time for teachers to improve instruction, implement
technology, and shift from competitive to cooperative teaching and learning
environments. By the 2005 school year, all Port Angeles schools will go through the
same planning, implementation and evaluation process to ensure a cohesive and
successful district of like-minded schools.
**Seattle School District**
48,000 students – grant amount: $25,900,000

As the City of Seattle continues its decade-long resurgence, schools take center focus. Seattle Public Schools, in partnership with the Alliance for Education, received a $25.9 million grant to improve teaching and learning, increase access to technology, and build stronger home and community partnerships. The grant supports each of the district’s 97 schools with planning, technical assistance, staff training and the purchase of technology resources. The district will use funds to help develop a district-wide “Academic Operating System” to serve as the infrastructure for all instructional technology and electronic productivity functions (student records, grades and portfolios, human resources, etc.) at the district, school and classroom levels.

**Spokane School District**
30,500 students – grant amount: $16,470,000

Eight years ago, the largest district outside of the Puget Sound area recognized that its system was not responsive enough to students, teachers or the community. It worked hard to adopt new policies and change structures so that students and teachers were the focus. Today the Spokane School District is recognized as a leader for its commitment to academic excellence at all levels.

Having laid the groundwork, the district will be able to use the foundation’s grant to expand, accelerate and share its successes. Grant funds will support outreach to educational experts to help develop a comprehensive district reinvention plan, one that allows for increased flexibility at the building level and recognizes the importance of community collaboration and partnerships. As the district strengthens its technology infrastructure, students will be engaged, both as technical support and as active learners able to use technology to assess and guide their own learning. Teachers, too, will benefit from these changes, with a new teacher electronic instructional support system providing more effective means for tracking student performance. Professional development opportunities as a whole will be expanded and modified to reflect staff and student changing needs.

**Diocese of Yakima Catholic School District**
2,184 students – grant amount: $1,362,816

The Diocese serves a diverse population of students and is comprised of eight geographically dispersed schools located in six separate cities throughout the Yakima Valley.

The grant will be used to: develop a comprehensive staff development model that enables teachers to advance environments of active learning and inquiry enhanced by technology; accelerate the implementation of a teacher electronic instructional support system;
develop and implement a framework for intervening and assisting at sites that are not meeting achievement and research expectations; and design an improved secondary school organization, including innovative alternative program models.

EVALUATION DESIGN

A Theory of Change for Creating High Achievement School Districts

In contemporary American education there are examples of excellence, that is, where all students achieve at high levels. In some cases, these examples are high achievement classrooms that are part of a larger unit—the school. These classrooms of excellence have sometimes been successful with the aid of the overall school functioning, and sometimes in spite of the school bureaucracy and environment. In fewer instances entire schools are high achieving. They, also, are part of a larger unit—the district. These high achievement schools have sometimes been successful because of the way the district functions as an institution, and sometimes in spite of the way the district functions as an institution. It is not uncommon to have both high achievement and low achievement classrooms within a single school. Similarly, it is not uncommon to have both high achievement and low achievement schools within the same district.

Many grant initiatives have focused on the school as the unit of change, attempting to modify school functioning to facilitate the creation of a high achieving learning environment throughout the school. In fact, the foundation’s Washington State Model Schools projects and the national grants for creating smaller, personalized high school environments expect the school to be the unit of change. However, the Gates Foundation Model District Initiative is attempting to create high achieving learning environments in which the district is the unit of change. Can a district reinvent itself to foster, encourage, and promote excellence and high achievement in all of its schools? Can a district be created where all schools in the district are high achieving? These questions are at the heart of the Model District grants.

Central to the work of the foundation is the desire is to create schools that are “reinvented”—to create qualitatively different institutions that greatly improve student outcomes such as student learning, school completion, and post-secondary success. To accomplish this goal there must be institutional changes that are seen as incremental enabling factors important for success. The nature and degree of institutional changes reflect the national movement of the last two decades of moving school reform to restructuring to reinvention; the latter, a term used by the foundation, “helping schools reinvent themselves.” The rationale for change follows this sequence:
To increase both the quantity and quality of student learning and to improve other student outcomes, students must be focused on new, clear learning expectations in improved learning environments.

To have students focused on new clear learning expectations and to improve other student outcomes, teachers must be focused on improving teaching and learning through the development of improved teaching strategies and learning environments.

To have teachers focused on teaching and learning, schools must change how they are organized and function by developing practices based on seven school attributes.

To change how schools function, districts must change how they are organized and function by developing practices based on seven district attributes.

While it has been demonstrated that individual schools can be high achievement schools, that is, where all or most students are successful, high achievement districts are thought to be rare. Consequently, grants have been given to districts in Washington with the expectation that these districts will change practices to come more in line with the seven district attributes and work with and enable the schools to change their practices to come more in line with the seven school attributes. This should enable teachers to teach differently and to enhance student learning both qualitatively and quantitatively. The district and school attributes, therefore, are seen as intermediary or enabling goals illustrated graphically in Figure 1.

To facilitate these institutional changes, the foundation has also given a series of grants designed for “capacity building” and/or “technical assistance.” For example, in addition to the funds from the grant, the districts and schools have access to a wide range of consultants and experts to consult in the district where needed. Grants are also being given for the development of alternative assessment and on-line assessment procedures for these schools to better measure the improved student learning that is expected, and that may not be measured by traditional standardized tests.

Figure 1
Thus, the foundation’s High Achievement District Grants are far-reaching and are intended to change the very nature of the schooling experience for many students by creating or reinventing district, school and classroom practices with the intent of improving or changing public school output. A graphic illustration of the complete Theory of Change for Standards-Based Technology-Enabled Environment is shown in Figure 2.

This theory of change model explains the grant program’s activities and resources in relation to the intermediary outcomes and ultimate program goals. The ultimate program goals, improved student and post-secondary outcomes on the far right of the diagram, are believed to be most directly affected by improved classroom level instruction consisting of active inquiry, in-depth learning, and performance assessment, but also affected by the nature of the entire school environment. The school environment is also seen as an instrumental factor in promoting or allowing teachers to improve their instruction. The creation of small schools is a specific tactic that the foundation believes is vital for the creation of the educational environments described by the seven attributes. In the model it is recognized that schools are part of a larger institutional entity called the district, and that this institution, through its policies and expectations, can facilitate and encourage the reinvention of the schools, can prevent or block the reinvention of the schools, or can serve a neutral role through a type of benign neglect. This model suggests that the district can work to further school reinvention if its policies and practices are in line with the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts.

The driving force for change and reinvention may have multiple sources within any given district, but the arrows on the far left of the diagram suggest that for all of these districts there are at least three common sources. The first is the foundation grant program that has brought a high degree of visibility to the reinvention efforts. The second driving force, however, is the initiatives underway in these districts already. Grants were given to districts that have “worked hard to adopt the attributes of high achievement districts,” and the grants were designed to “support ongoing efforts in these areas, as well as allow for expansion and enhancement in areas of particular interest to each district.” State directives and initiatives in Washington are the third force driving the changes in the districts. These directives are not specific on district and school practices, but are rather mostly focused in the area of student outcomes with the implementation of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning and new graduation requirements for high school students. While there may be some tension among these three forces, the belief is that they are in general alignment with one another.
Figure 2. Theory of Change for a Standards-Based Technology-Enabled Environment

District Level
- Implement Attributes of High Achieving Districts
  - Distributed Leadership
  - Performance Accountability
  - Effective Governance
  - Shared Values
  - Learning Partnerships
  - Staff Development
  - Technology Infrastructure

School Level
- Implement Attributes of High Achieving Schools
  - Common Focus
  - High Expectations
  - Personalized
  - Respect and Responsibility
  - Time to Collaborate
  - Performance-Based
  - Technology as a Tool
- Create Small Schools

Classroom Level
- Implement Components of Powerful Teaching and Learning
  - Active Inquiry
  - In-Depth Learning
  - Performance Assessment

Student Outcomes
- State Learning Goals for Elem., Middle & High School
- Certificate of Mastery
- High School Completion
- College Track Courses Taken
- Attendance
- Reduced Dropout Rates
- College Entrance Exams
- Career Preparation

Post-Secondary Outcomes
- College Attendance
- College Success
- Job Placement
- and success for non-college students

Contextual Factors
- Community
- School Board Directions
- Funding Levels
- Parental Support
- District/School Leadership Changes
- Teachers’ Union

Foundation Technical Assistance District & School Professional Development
To facilitate the reinvention process, considerable attention is being given to “building capacity” within the districts. These efforts include external technical assistance (bottom of the diagram) in the form of project “coaches” with expertise in a variety of areas, and regularly scheduled collaborative meetings and networking for district personnel attempting the reinvention process. Initially, much of the work of the project coaches will be at the district level with the intent that the districts will bring their district and school funded professional development activities in line with the foci of the grant at the school and classroom levels. Additionally, the schools may use their grant money for professional development activities based on the needs of an individual school.

Finally, these districts exist in a much broader environment than can be captured by a single diagram. Therefore, many contextual factors must be considered during the change process and in evaluating the degree to which these districts can or have been successful. A few of the contextual factors that must be considered and perhaps addressed are shown in the lower left corner of the diagram, with the recognition that no such list could be complete and will vary from district to district.

Levels of Evaluation

The grants awarded to the ten districts and the Yakima Diocese are based on a theory of change that is near all-encompassing for a school district, requires multi-level changes (student, classroom, school, district) and is longitudinal in nature (five years of grant implementation and following years for sustainability). A common evaluation design has been developed for all 10 districts receiving grants, using common methods, procedures, and measures. A modified version of the design will be used for the Yakima Diocese at the district level.

The scope of the reinvention efforts provides an almost limitless number of possible evaluation and research questions to be addressed. The evaluation design includes common areas of focus across the districts determined a priori, while at the same time includes a dynamic component that is evolving as the reinvention process proceeds. The change process, in general, will be studied in all ten districts throughout the life of the grant. However, each district has unique contextual factors from which new evaluation questions are emerging. For example, in three of the ten districts there will be new superintendents during the second year of the reinvention process. In another district there has been a bond levy failure that will provide very specific economic challenges to the reinvention efforts. In yet a fourth district there has been discussion of a teacher strike. Each of these developments is providing evaluators with the opportunity to study the possibilities of district reinvention under difficult circumstances, but within the common evaluation focus and activities.

The evaluation activities for all district grants focus on four main areas.
I. **District, school, and classroom practices in the areas of the district, school, and classroom attributes.** Each district will participate in a longitudinal study over the five-year period of the grant focusing on the degree to which districts, schools, and classroom teachers have changed their practices and “reinvented” themselves along the lines of the attributes. Baseline data have been gathered in the first year using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data collection will be repeated in the third and fifth years. This information will serve as formative feedback for the districts throughout the life of the grant. An important focus of the evaluation is the role that the technical assistance and district network play in the capacity building efforts in the districts. The unique contextual factors of each district will serve as the basis for the later development of specific research questions. Follow-up studies in later years will determine the degree to which these changes are sustainable over time.

II. **Student Outcomes.** Over the five-year life of the grant student outcomes will be monitored in the areas of student achievement, including traditional measures of standardized test scores and grades, graduation rates, discipline rates, attendance, course-taking patterns, college enrollment rates, and other appropriate outcomes. Improved student outcomes are viewed as longer-term grant goals and as the result of several years of student involvement in the new learning environments.

III. **The role of the grant in facilitating district and school change.** Districts chosen to receive grants have a number of initiatives already under way in their districts, and separating the effects of the grant from other district improvement efforts will prove difficult. Nonetheless, attempts are being made to monitor and record the role that the grants are playing in the overall district efforts at improvement and reinvention. Self-reporting in the form of quarterly grant activity/compliance reports, and then verification of accuracy by external evaluators through the use of interviews, focus groups and survey instruments are being used as a main source of information.

IV. **Special studies of educational reform in Washington State.** Research studies of limited scope have been commissioned by the foundation to look at specific areas of interest. For example, two teams of University of Washington researchers are looking at school spending patterns and leadership styles among grantee and non-grantee districts. Public Agenda has been contracted to conduct broader studies in the state to include both grantee and non-grantee districts on educational topics pertinent to the reinvention efforts. These types of studies will continue throughout the life of the grants.

**Research and Evaluation Questions**

**Process Questions.** Throughout the life of the grants the attributes and the change process will be a major focus of the evaluation. The RFP for the grants stated, “Proposals should include the following: A plan for full alignment with the Attributes of High Achievement Districts.” Each district is charged with developing a school grant process by which schools in the districts submit proposals for district funding. Those “Proposals should include the following: Demonstration of planned alignment with the Attributes of High Achievement Schools.” These guidelines suggest five general process questions directing the evaluation:
1. Are the districts making satisfactory progress toward district reinvention?
2. What activities or strategies are the districts pursuing in their reinvention efforts?
3. What role is technical assistance playing in the reinvention process?
4. What contextual factors are helping or hindering the reinvention process?
5. Can the changes within the districts be sustained over time?

Questions with more specificity will undoubtedly emerge over the next few years as the reinvention process proceeds. Each of the district and school attributes is a potential area of inquiry. Examples of the types of process to be addressed are listed below.

- What activities/strategies is the district pursuing to enhance its distributed leadership?
- What planning or steps are being implemented to increase school and individual performance accountability?
- What progress is being made on developing the technology infrastructure of the district?
- What district level changes have taken place that enact/address the seven attributes?
- What factors are at work that are preventing the needed changes from taking place?
- What role are parents and the public playing in the reinvention process?
- What are the expertise/assistance needs encountered by the districts during the year, and have those needs been met?
- What planning or steps are being implemented to increase a performance-based system that is data driven?
- What progress is being made on integrating technology as a tool in the learning environment?
- To what degree have the district’s actions created schools with the attributes of High Achievement Schools?
- What activities/strategies are the schools employing to develop or strengthen their common focus on a few important goals?
- What district level changes have taken place that allows district schools to focus on successful attributes and on improving student learning?
- How has classroom instruction in the schools changed?
- What are the expertise/assistance needs encountered by the schools during the year, and have those needs been met?

**Product Questions.** The purpose of the district reinvention grants is to create learning environments that are substantially different than those created by the traditional district and schools, with the ultimate goal of improved student outcomes. This is reflected in the following product questions:

1. How have the districts and schools changed over the course of the five years?
2. Have the districts and schools been successful in creating learning environments reflecting the attributes?
3. Are the changes related to improved student outcomes?
**Additional Questions.** The nature of the reinvention grants provide the opportunity to study school reform and to pose a variety of questions that do not fit precisely in the process/product categories. Generally, these questions pertain to the broader questions of school reform and implied cause and effect. Sample questions include:

- What district strategies for encouraging school reinvention were most successful?
- Was the size of the district an important factor for successful reinvention?
- What forms of technical assistance and capacity building had the most effect?
- What is the relationship between the changes in teacher and student technology skills and student achievement?
- What is the effect of the technology enhancements on the classroom climates?
- What is the effect of the program on teacher and student technology skills and teacher instructional techniques?
- Has the creation of smaller learning units improved the overall school climate? (high schools)
- Has the creation of smaller learning units improved attendance and dropout rates? (high schools)
- Has the creation of smaller learning units improved student achievement? (high schools)

**Measures and Data Collection Methods**

I. District and school practices in the areas of the district and school attributes.

- **District Questionnaire.** Administered to central office personnel and principals. Focuses on district practices related to the district attributes and developed specifically for this project. (30 items, 6 factors: Technology Access, Distributed Leadership, Performance Accountability, Learning Assistance, Professional Development, Constituency Involvement) See Appendix B.

- **Teacher Perspectives Questionnaire.** Focuses on both district attributes and the teacher’s individual school practices related to the school attributes. It also asks questions about the classroom and teaching practices in the individual teacher’s school. Sections were developed specifically for this project, while other sections were taken from an instrument used in an earlier educational reform study in Washington. (90 items, 9 factors: Constructivist Teaching, Standards-based Teaching, Personalization, Technology Access, Environment, Partnerships, Teacher Input, Quality of Education, Distributed Leadership) See Appendix C.

- **Student Perspectives Questionnaire.** Focuses on school attributes, classroom practices, and school environment and is used in grades 6, 8, 9, and 11. Sections were developed specifically for this project, while other sections are based on sections of the Communities That Care survey. (60 items) An analysis of the questionnaire results will be conducted during fall, 2001.

- **TAGLIT** (Taking a Good Look At Instructional Technology). An online questionnaire developed at the University of North Carolina with support from SAS, the Bell South and
Gates Foundations. The questionnaire focuses on the status of educational technology at
the school and provides information on the technology plan, technology literacy of the
students and teachers, and the degree to which teachers and students are able to integrate
technology into the teaching and learning process. There are 5 forms of the
questionnaire—one each for elementary students (grades 4-6), secondary students,
elementary teachers, secondary teachers, and school technology leaders. The TAGLIT is
being used nationwide over the next two years by most states, providing a national database
for comparison purposes. (15 to 50 items) (Available at http//www.taglit.org)

- **Classroom Observations.** Classroom observations will be conducted during Year 2 of the
  projects in a selection of schools from the ten districts. The purpose of the study will be to
  establish baseline data on the nature of classroom instruction and to verify the
  Constructivist Teaching factor of the Teacher Perspectives Questionnaire.

- **One-on-one interviews.** External evaluator interviews with random selections of central
  office personnel and district school principals focusing on district practices related to the
  seven attributes and focus of the grant activities are being conducted at scheduled intervals
  throughout the life of the grant.

- **Focus groups.** External evaluator led focus groups with random selections of central office
  personnel, district school principals, and teachers focusing on district practices related to
  the seven attributes and grant activities are being conducted at scheduled intervals
  throughout the life of the grant.

- **District self-evaluations.** Districts are required to file quarterly grant reports that include
  district activities related to the district attributes and on-going self evaluations. Verification
  of accuracy is provided by external evaluator end of year interviews and focus groups
  focusing on report contents.

II. **Student Outcomes.**

- 3rd & 6th grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS); 9th grade Iowa Test of Educational
  Development (ITED).
- 4th, 7th & 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test results.
- Other standardized assessments used by the individual districts.
- Alternative assessment results, such as on-line testing, as they become available.
- State and school data on expulsion/suspension rates, attendance patterns, high school
  completion rates, student attitudes, and other pertinent measures.

III. **The role of the grant in facilitating district and school change.**

- **District Questionnaire** – questions to be developed and added in year 3.

- **Teacher Questionnaire** – questions to be developed and added in year 3.
• **One-on-one interviews.** External evaluator individual interviews with random selections of central office personnel and district school principals focusing on district practices and the role of the grant in district and school improvement activities.

• **Focus groups.** External evaluator led focus groups with random selections of central office personnel and district school principals focusing on district practices and the role of the grant in district and school improvement activities.

• **District self-evaluations.** Districts are required to file quarterly grant activity/compliance reports that include district activities related to the district attributes and on-going self-evaluations. Verification of accuracy is provided by external evaluator end of year interviews and focus groups focusing on report contents.

The data collection schedule for the evaluation is presented in Appendix D.

**Evaluation Activities, 2000-2001**

Grant contracts required each district to appoint an employee as a district evaluation coordinator to facilitate the activities of the external evaluators throughout the year. In addition, each school in the district was to appoint an on site building-level evaluation coordinator to facilitate evaluation activities at that school. Grant funds could be used for reimbursing the costs of these coordinator positions if necessary. This arrangement resulted in excellent district cooperation and very smooth and efficient data collection throughout the year in 10 of the 11 districts.

**August On-Site Visits.** Evaluators visited each of the grantee districts in August 2000 to explain the evaluation design, process, and data collection schedule. External evaluator and district and building evaluation coordinator roles and expectations were clarified.

**District Quarterly Reports.** Each district evaluation coordinator was responsible for filing a quarterly report with the external evaluators describing the district reinvention activities, progress, and areas of need. Four reports were received from each district throughout the year. The guidelines for the quarterly district reports and a sample report are provided in Appendix E.

**Fall On-Site Visits.** External evaluators conducted on-site visits to all of the districts except the Yakima Diocese during the fall 2000. There were four major purposes for the visits: (1) to determine the degree to which district personnel understood the grant requirements; (2) to determine the degree to which the reinvention concept had permeated the organization; (3) to verify the activities/accomplishments reported in the first quarterly report; and (4) to conduct base-line assessments of district functioning in relation to the *Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts*. Data collection methods during this visit included interviews with the superintendent and all or a representative sample of central office personnel, interviews or focus groups with all or a representative sample of building-level administrators, and analysis of appropriate district written materials. The results of these activities and initial baseline assessment of the *Seven Attributes* are reported in the January 2001 *Washington State District Grant Projects: Preliminary Evaluation Reports* (see below).
District Questionnaires. In October and November 2000 all or a representative sample of district central office personnel and building administrators completed a questionnaire focusing on district functioning in relation to the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts. These results were synthesized with the information obtained from the fall interview and focus groups and reported in the January 2001 Washington State District Grant Projects: Preliminary Evaluation Reports (see below).

January 2001 Washington State District Grant Projects: Preliminary Evaluation Reports. A mid-year or preliminary evaluation report was prepared for each district based on data and information gathered from the district questionnaire and the fall on-site evaluator visits. Each district received a copy of the report to be used as formative evaluation for future planning. Copies of the report were also provided to the foundation and the project coaches. The reports included an overview of the grant activities in the district to date, an evaluation of the degree to which district personnel understood the full intent of the grant, and an evaluation of district practices in relation to each of the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts. These reports served a formative basis for the districts, and also as a baseline evaluation for grant goals for district reinvention. A sample copy of one of these reports is provided in Appendix F.

Winter On-Site Visits. Visits were made to the districts in January at which time the evaluators presented the results of the district questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups, and summarized the written January report (Washington State District Grant Projects: Preliminary Evaluation Reports) to district personnel. Districts were encouraged to use this data as formative evaluation for district planning.

Teacher Perspectives Questionnaires. In January and February all or a representative sample of teachers in nine of the ten public school districts completed a questionnaire that focused on their school in relation to district, school, and classroom components of the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts. In the Yakima Diocese all teachers completed the questionnaire by June. In the tenth district all or representative sample of teachers in 51 percent of the schools had completed the questionnaire by July. The scale scores derived from these questionnaires provide baseline data for the schools and will be provided back to the schools by September 2001.

Student Perspectives Questionnaires. In March through May samples of students in grades six, eight, nine, and 11 had completed a questionnaire focused on school environmental factors, student attitudes, and student outcomes. The information derived from these questionnaires provides baseline data for the schools and will be provided back to the schools by September 2001.

TAGLIT. Taking a Good Look at Instructional Technology, the series of on-line student, teacher, and school technology leader questionnaires, was available for schools during March, April, and May. Participation in the surveys was limited to those schools with on-line capabilities, and the student questionnaire was limited to students grade 4 and above. Generally, all schools in the districts with on-line capabilities participated at high levels. An on-line summary report was available for each school in May and June, and was to be used for their
technology self-assessment and planning purposes. These assessment results serve as baseline data for the district and school technology attributes. A summary of this assessment is provided in Appendix G.

**Spring On-Site Visits.** External evaluators conducted on-site visits to all of the districts during May and June 2001. There were six major purposes for the visits: (1) to determine the progress of grant activities in the district; (2) to further identify contextual and historical factors within the district affecting the reinvention; (3) to verify the activities/accomplishments reported in the February, April, and June quarterly compliance/activity reports; (4) to identify the district “plan of action” or reinvention strategy for the next year; (5) to identify the perceived value of the technical assistance provided to the district; and (6) to update assessments of district functioning in relation to the *Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts*. Data collection methods during these visits included interviews with the superintendent and all or a representative sample of central office personnel, interviews or focus groups with all or a representative sample of building-level administrators, visits to select schools or programs, and analysis of appropriate district written materials. The results of these activities are reported in the July 2001 *Washington State District Grant Projects: Year One Evaluation Reports* (see below).

**Interviews with Project Coaches.** Evaluators contacted project coaches from each of the districts to determine their role in the districts’ reinvention processes and to obtain their perspective on the progress of the grant activities. In addition, the evaluators also reviewed the end-of-the-year reports prepared by the project coaches. The information obtained from these activities was synthesized with other information and included in the July 2001 *Washington State District Grant Projects: Year One Evaluation Reports* (see below).

**Attendance at Periodic District Network Meetings.** Throughout the year the evaluation team members attended various district network meetings as observers of the process and content of technical assistance.

**July 2001 Washington State District Grant Projects: Year One Evaluation Reports.** An end-of-the-year evaluation report was prepared for each district based on data and information gathered from the spring on-site visits, the interviews with project coaches, and the district quarterly reports. These reports are an update and supplement to the mid-year reports prepared in January 2001. The reports include an overview of grant activities and progress to date in the district, the district contextual factors that are influencing the reinvention process, an update of district functioning relating to the *Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts*, the district’s plan of action for the coming year, and the role technical assistance has played in the reinvention process. Each district has received a copy of the report to be used for formative evaluation purposes. Copies of the report were provided to the foundation and the project coaches. These reports will be produced each year and serve as documentation of the reinvention process employed in each of the districts. A sample copy of one of these reports is provided in Appendix H.

**School and Classroom Baseline Data.** Data obtained from the Teacher Perspectives Questionnaire and the TAGLIT online survey were analyzed and summarized in graph or table
format for each school in the districts that participated in data collection. The graphs and tables create a school profile around the school and classroom attributes, and can be used by each school for formative evaluation purposes. Districts received these individual school summaries by September 2001. These school profiles serve as baseline data for the five-year evaluation process.

**District and School Student Outcomes Baseline Data.** Student outcome data for 2000-2001 has been collected from the districts to establish a baseline for project student outcomes. These outcomes include student test scores, student attitudes, graduation rates, technology usage, expenditures for instruction, dropout rates, course taking patterns and discipline expulsion and suspension rates.
SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS, 2000-2001

Year 1 Grant Related Activities

Nine of the 10 district grants were announced in spring, 2000. Port Angles and the Yakima Diocese grants were announced in the late summer and fall of 2000, respectively. The grant announcements were high profile events, with newspaper articles and television coverage around the state. While each district had prepared a grant proposal, those proposals and resulting grant plans often did not reflect the all-encompassing intent of district reinvention. In the months immediately following the announcements and then well into the 2000-2001 school year, considerable energy was devoted to clarifying the nature of the grants. The development of the understanding of grant expectations proceeded throughout the year at differing rates among the districts. In some cases the understanding came quite quickly, while in other districts the understanding evolved over the entire year and needed to be facilitated by visits by the foundation program officers to the district to pointedly clarify expectations. By the end of the year the expectations had become clear to the key leadership people in the districts. However, the concept of district reinvention is understood down through the district to varying degrees.

Throughout the first half of the year, considerable energy was devoted to clarifying the nature of the grants. At the end of the first year, the concept of district reinvention is understood down through the districts to varying degrees.

District grant leadership teams attended periodic meetings throughout the year during which time they participated in a variety activities to help “build capacity” within the district for change. External speakers were invited to the sessions to help develop the vision of what a reinvented district and school might look like. Sessions were devoted to specific topics of interest or need, such as leadership training in the district or creating small learning environments in the high schools. Networks and communication strategies among the districts were established for mutual assistance. The meetings ranged in content from the abstract “vision” to “how to do it.” In January the districts sent teams to San Diego to meet with the national grantees for similar purposes. In addition to the regular periodic meetings, many districts took advantage of other professional development opportunities provided by the foundation. Districts sent representatives to the High School Reinvention Conference in Washington State designed to answer the question, “Why change?” Many districts sent people to the Harvard Leadership Institute and to the Small Schools Conference sponsored by the Small Schools Project at the University of Washington.

The foundation contracted and assigned “project coaches” to each district. Tony Wagner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education led these efforts. The coaches were to provide assistance in a variety of areas at the district level, such as group facilitation and change strategies. The work of the coaches was intended to facilitate district processes to enable and to encourage school reinvention to take place. The intent during the first year was to limit the work of the coaches to the district level to help the district to become self-sufficient in the change process. The intent was not to have the project coaches providing professional development to
the schools at the teacher level. The coaches were active in the district to varying degrees during the first year, and did not always limit their involvement to district-level activities.

**Year 1 Evaluation Focus**

During the first year of the grant, evaluation activities focused on four tasks: clarifying and articulating the foundation’s Theory of Change, establishing baseline data bases of student outcomes, establishing baseline assessments of the district, school and classroom attributes in each district, and conducting case studies on the grant reinvention process in the 10 public school districts. Because the Yakima Diocese did not begin the reinvention process until well into the 2000-2001 school year the evaluation process did not begin until spring, 2001 and those results are not included in this report. The specific evaluation findings for each district in the last two areas are contained in the January 2001 and July 2001 evaluation reports (see above, pages 18-19). The summary that follows is based on a synthesis of those reports and focuses on process evaluation questions 1-4.

1. **Are the districts making satisfactory progress toward district reinvention?**
2. **What activities or strategies are the districts pursuing in their reinvention efforts?**
3. **What role is technical assistance playing in the reinvention process?**
4. **What contextual factors are helping or hindering the reinvention process?**

In addition, the summary below includes aggregate and individual district baseline data derived from the various instruments used in the evaluation process.

**Overview of Grant Progress in the Districts**

The districts receiving the grants are diverse in size, student populations, resources, support infrastructure and level of community involvement. They accepted the reinvention grants with differing understandings of the grant expectations, and began the reinvention process from a variety of starting points. Nonetheless, they faced similar challenges and the progress of the grants followed a similar pattern. The initial task was to develop an understanding of the all-encompassing nature of the grant, followed by developing an understanding and acceptance within the district of the vision of reinvented education identified by the foundation. In a number of districts it then became necessary to align the vision and grant expectations with existing district initiatives and long range plans. Once the grant expectations became clear, districts had to establish grant activity procedures and guidelines for school reinvention efforts. Finally, district personnel had to begin to build capacity within the districts to facilitate, encourage and require change. These tasks were not necessarily independent of each other or absolute in their sequence. Yet, all districts faced these tasks during Year One of the grants.

**Understanding the Nature of the Grant.** When the grants were awarded in late spring 2000, there was a genuine excitement about the opportunities the grants provided. The awards were received in a number of the districts with considerable fanfare and publicity. Early evaluator conversations with district superintendents and other district personnel, and
observations at the early district grantee meetings revealed that there was only a very vague understanding of the grant expectations in most districts, and in a few districts there was a complete misunderstanding. The lack of understanding became even more apparent during the August on-site visits by the evaluation team to explain the evaluation process. During the fall on-site visits interviews with district personnel revealed that many of them were only beginning to grasp the magnitude of “district reinvention” and all that it entailed, and in a few districts there was still very little understanding at all of the grant requirements.

Consequently, the district reinvention and grant expectation idea was one that gradually became clarified to central office personnel at varying rates over the next several months. Once the grant expectations became clear to district central office personnel, the task became one of having the vision filter down through the district to the school and classroom level. During this first year this was accomplished in the districts at varying rates and to varying degrees. By the spring on-site visits the all-encompassing nature of the grant and the concept of district reinvention and school reinvention leading to changes in classroom instruction was generally understood by school level personnel in nine of the ten districts.

**Understanding and Acceptance of the Vision of Reinvented Education.** Understanding of the foundation’s vision of reinvented education has been a developmental process during this first year in all of the districts. The earliest district network meetings were devoted to the transmission of this vision to district personnel. The “need to change” was an important part of this message. By the time of the spring on-site visits it appeared that in most of the districts the central office personnel, principals and grant leadership teams had a good understanding of the vision and had it accepted to varying degrees. In some of the larger districts however, some of the central office personnel appeared to be operating on the periphery of the grant activities and conducting “business as usual.” In a number of districts there was growing realization that not only were schools and classroom teachers being asked to change their method of operation, but that the central office personnel were also being asked to examine and perhaps change how they conduct business within the organization.

As understanding and acceptance grew throughout the year district grant leadership teams began to recognize that the ultimate success or failure of the reinvention process was going to be determined by the principals and teachers at the school level. They began to provide multiple opportunities for teachers and principals to be involved in activities designed to help them “catch the vision.” Before long, a common concern emerged: “How can we get our high schools to catch the vision?” Many districts encouraged teams of high school teachers and administrators to attend a statewide small schools conference. One district replicated the Small Schools Conference for all of the high schools in the district. Other districts sent their high school teachers and administrators to various model schools throughout the country. During the spring
on-site visits a number of “discussions” were taking place in the schools. It is clear that the “vision” is only being explored or discussed at many of the schools, but they are discussions that have seldom taken place before. It is clear that in many schools there is a long way to go before reinvention will take place; but there has been a start and there is reason for some optimism. As one teacher stated: “We have come a long way. There has not been a radical change of direction, but Gates has made us more intentional and accountable.”

This task is central to the success or failure of the grant and reinvention efforts in virtually every district. As teachers become more and more involved in the process and are asked to alter their relationships with colleagues and students, to restructure their courses and schedules, and to change their classroom instruction, it will become more and more important. The degree to which school boards, parents, and other community groups understand the nature of the grant expectations varies considerably from district to district. Undoubtedly there will be on-going struggles in a number of districts as the reinvention process moves forward.

Aligning the Vision and Grant Expectations with Existing District Initiatives. Districts receiving the grants were selected, in part, because of the direction in which the districts were already moving. Most districts had some type of district strategic plan and/or school improvement plans already in place, along with other grant funded activities for school reform. Once the full magnitude of the grant expectations became understood, district personnel, and particularly superintendents, were faced with the challenge of integrating the Gates grant to show cohesion with the current district strategic or school improvement plans. In fact, in some districts school people began to complain that the Gates grant was just one more layer of activities placed on top of their existing learning improvement plans, curriculum development activities, and so on. This was compounded by the problem of the attribute terminology used by the foundation, which was often just different enough from the district’s strategic plan language that employed terminology for describing a successful or effective school. However, as the year progressed and as understanding of the grant expectations grew, most districts were able to successfully align the grant with existing strategic plans, and began to encourage schools to see the Gates grant as a resource to implement learning improvement activities they were going to do anyway. In a few districts, the Gates grant and attributes replaced existing strategic plans and became the framework for district planning and progress.

Establishing Grant Activity Procedures and Guidelines for School Reinvention Efforts. The grant guidelines stipulated that 20 percent of the total amount of the money given to the district may be spent on district wide initiatives, and that 80 percent of the money must pass down to the schools in the form of school grants. In addition, the expectation was that schools must apply for the grant and meet certain criteria, and that no school was to be guaranteed a grant. Districts were expected to develop procedures for application and criteria for use of the funds. District personnel are expected to monitor and hold schools accountable for the use of the grant funds. District understanding of these requirements varied, and in a few districts they were
Building Capacity for Change. All district personnel involved in the grant leadership appear to be very cognizant of the difficulties they face in reinventing their districts and schools. Much of the effort in the first year was focused on “how do we do this?” Leadership issues emerged early as key elements that will need much attention. Vision-building within the schools and the identification of institutional structural factors limiting change also became a focus. In many regards, the first year of the grant was one of planning and discussions rather than implementation. Districts have identified areas of need and professional development including, leadership training, the change process, collaboration, group process and consensus building, and data driven decision-making. More specific technical needs are emerging at each school, and the districts are charged with facilitating school reinvention through technical assistance and intervention. There are formidable challenges in these areas and the work has only begun. In every district a start has been made, but actual changes at the school level have been few. One elementary principal summed up the progress to date: “random acts of improvement.”

District Attributes Baseline Assessment

Baseline assessment of the district attributes was based on interviews, focus groups, and survey results from the District Questionnaire. The initial assessment took place the fall 2000, with supplemental information added during the spring 2001 on-site visit. Initial assessments in the districts of the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts revealed that there was diversity among the districts on these characteristics.

In October and November 2000 all or a representative sample of district central office personnel and building administrators completed a questionnaire focusing on district functioning in relation to the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts. The questionnaire was constructed using items very similar or identical to the wording the foundation used in defining or delineating the seven attributes. A factor analysis of the responses from 341 administrators from the 10 districts was used to identify factors. Those factors, items and alpha reliability values are provided in Appendix B. Three of the six factors, Distributed Leadership, Performance Accountability, and Technology reflect the definitions and names of three of the seven attributes. The Professional Development factor and the Constituency Involvement factor, while not identical, reflect a number of the ideas in the Staff Development and Learning Partnerships attributes respectively. The Learning Assistance factor consists of items from several of the attributes. The Effective Governance attribute is not directly reflected in the factor analysis results.

The response format for the questionnaire was 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 representing “strongly disagree” with the item, 3 representing a “neutral” response, and 5 representing “strongly agree.” Mean factor scores were calculated and district profiles were created based on these six factors, and are shown in the figures below. This information was synthesized with the information obtained during administrator interviews and focus groups during the fall on-site visits to the districts and included in the January 2001 Washington State District Grant Projects: Preliminary Evaluation Reports.
**Distributed Leadership.** In all but one or two districts this attribute has been reasonably well developed prior to receiving the grant. Most administrators in these districts believe that constituencies are working to improving student learning, and this is reflected in the high scores in Figure 3. However, how this manifests itself in the districts can be quite different.

**Figure 3**

![Graph showing administrators' perception of distributed leadership across grantee school districts.](image)

1.00 2.00 3.00 4.00 5.00

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Grantee School Districts

**Performance Accountability.** Performance accountability, or at least increasing expectations, for principals is present in most districts. In some districts this is viewed as part of a supportive environment, but in a few districts it creates some element of fear or anxiety. Few, if any, of the districts have formalized an accountability system for teachers or that guide student promotion. The degree to which low performing schools are perceived to receive the necessary assistance also varies between and within districts. The *Performance Accountability* attribute is one of the least developed in the 10 grantee districts (Figure 4).

An important component of a performance accountability system is the amount or nature of the support provided to enhance the opportunity for success. In the case of schools, a viable performance accountability system will be dependent on district policy and actions that provide assistance where needed. The Learning Assistance factor scores are the lowest of the six factors (Figure 5) and the items making up the factor are important elements for reinvented schools as envisioned by the foundation. Districts will need to expend considerable efforts in these areas over the next four years.
Figure 4

Administrators' Perception of PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

1-3 range = low degree present
4-5 range = high degree present

Grantee School Districts

Figure 5

Administrators' Perception of LEARNING ASSISTANCE

1-3 range = low degree present
4-5 range = high degree present

Grantee School Districts
Technology Infrastructure. Most of the districts have been working on the needed technology infrastructure for several years, but a few still have considerable distance to go. A few districts made substantial process on this attribute during the first year of the grant. All but one or two of the districts recognize the need for technical support and training for the teachers. Administrator scores on this factor are shown in Figure 6.

Learning Partnerships. Qualitative data from the districts revealed that there is a wide variation in the degree to which districts have entered into learning partnerships with various community organizations, businesses, and universities. For some districts it has been a conscious effort with formalized agreements, and for others the partnerships are more informal and without coordination. Overall involvement of other constituencies reflected by the items in the Constituency Involvement factor, appears relatively low (Figure 7).

Staff Development. A number of districts have decentralized staff development activities to the building level, resulting in a wide variety of approaches. It appears that many of the buildings are learning to focus staff development activities around specific building needs, and in some districts this is required. In other districts, it is less clear how it is being organized. Two areas of need that emerged from several districts include training in analyzing and using data in decision-making and leadership training for principals and site teams. The scores on the Professional Development factor (Figure 8) indicate that there is room for improvement in this area.
Figure 7

Administrators' Perception of CONSTITUENCY INVOLVEMENT

1-3 range = low degree present
4-5 range = high degree present

Grantee School Districts

Figure 8

Administrators' Perception of PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1-3 range = low degree present
4-5 range = high degree present

Grantee School Districts
Effective Governance. Generally, in most of these districts the principals view the central office as working to facilitate the efforts of the people in the schools, rather than making things more difficult for them. However, there are one or two districts where this is not the case. Similarly, there are generally good lines of communication between the central office and schools, but again, there are exceptions. There is an ongoing tension in many of the districts between site-based management ideals and the desire for a common district-wide focus and coordination, which can appear at times to be “top down.” In some cases receiving the grant has accentuated this tension.

Shared Values. Most administrators believe that the various groups in their districts share values about the importance of student learning and desire to see improvements in the schools. While the values may be shared, it is also evident that there are a variety of views about how these values should be enacted in a given district.

School and Classroom Baseline Assessments

In January and February all or a representative sample of teachers in nine of the ten public school districts completed a questionnaire that focused on their school in relation to district, school, and classroom components of the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts. In the Yakima Diocese all teachers had completed the questionnaire by June. In the tenth district all or representative sample of teachers in 51 percent of the schools had completed the questionnaire by July. Items 7 through 56 of the questionnaire were constructed using items very similar or identical to the wording the foundation used in defining or delineating the attributes and classroom teaching.

A factor analysis of items 7 through 56 was conducted based on the responses of 3,964 teachers from the ten public school districts. The resulting factors, items and alpha reliability values are provided in Appendix C. The Distributed Leadership factor is identical to the factor obtained on the District Questionnaire and reflects the district Distributed Leadership attribute. The first factor, labeled Constructivist Teaching, consists of 12 items taken from the foundation’s explanation of the classroom attributes of Active Inquiry, In-depth Learning, and Performance Assessment. Rather than three separate constructs, this sample of teachers viewed these actions as all part of one overall classroom teaching approach. The remaining seven factors only generally reflect the Attributes of High Achievement Schools as delineated by the foundation. However, elements of each of the attributes as defined by the foundation are present in each of the factors.

The response format for the items was a 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 representing “strongly disagree” with the item, 3 representing a “neutral” response, and 5 representing “strongly agree.” Mean factor scores were calculated and school profiles were created based on the nine factors. Each school received their factor scores in graph format compared to the average factors scores for all grantee district schools. The mean factor scores for the district grantee schools are shown Figure 9.
In March through May samples of students in grades six, eight, nine, and eleven had completed a questionnaire focused on school environmental factors, student attitudes, and student outcomes. The data from these questionnaires are scheduled to be analyzed during fall, 2001. The information derived from these questionnaires provide baseline data for the schools and will be provided back to the schools.

Figure 9

GATES DISTRICTS 2000-2001

School and Classroom Attributes

- All Elementary Schools (n=133)
- All Jr.High/Middle Schools (n=31)
- All High Schools (n=35)
The Role of Technical Assistance

**Periodic Grantee Meetings.** Leadership teams from the districts met seven times throughout the year for learning and support. The meetings were directed by the Change Leadership Group at Harvard University, and covered a range of topics from “The Political Context,” “Doing the Work,” and role-alike sharing time. Overall, the meetings engendered mixed reactions from the district people involved. Many participants saw the early meetings as lacking a clear purpose, or being “lectured at too much.” As one superintendent stated about the meetings: “too many presentations and no new messages.” As the year went on, however, the meetings became more focused and the participants began to value sharing with their colleagues from other districts. As the district people took more of a role in setting the agendas, they became more positive about the value of the meetings.

**Project Coaches.** In the fall of 2001, project coaches were assigned to each district. The stated purpose of the coaches was to “assist the Gates grantee districts in building cultures that will enhance the learning of every student and adult within our schools.” The work of the coaches is intended to develop capacity within the district for change. They met as a group monthly for the purpose of sharing and learning from each other about enhancing their role in the district reinvention, and are using the conceptual framework of the Change Leadership Group at Harvard as a way to think about the work in the districts. At the beginning of the year, the districts were given the following information about the coaches and the role they were to fill.

We come from diverse backgrounds and represent a broad range of skills, yet we share some fundamental values that will guide our work with you. To more fully develop the attributes of high achievement schools and districts, we believe:

- That a sense of urgency resulting from a deep understanding of the need for every student to have new skills in a changing world must inform our work;
- That schools and districts must develop a shared vision of what every student needs to know and what is effective teaching;
- That ongoing dialogue with students, teachers, administration, parents and the community is essential to developing this vision and creating effective strategies;
- That this process requires relationships of those working and learning within our schools to be built on candor, respect, and trust.

Our task is to help you to clarify and think more deeply about your change process as you go about the challenge of creating a system that meets the learning needs of both students and adults. Our goal is to model and facilitate adult learning as a means to the end of raising levels of achievement and opportunity for every student. You can expect us to be:

- *Inquiry based*— asking good questions rather than providing answers.
- *Facilitative*, rather than directive. This is your work and belongs to your community.
- *Collaborative* as we model leadership practices that nurture learning and creative inquiry.
We call this work "reinvention" because there are very few models of districts where all students develop the skills now needed for work and citizenship. We will be creating new knowledge together. Thus, our work with you will be driven by essential conversations engaging all stakeholders in discussions of the important questions and reflecting on deeply held assumptions about learning. We believe that it is this kind of adult learning that creates the conditions needed for sustainable school change.

There is nothing evaluative about our charge. Our goal is to be “coaches” who offer honest observation and feedback in a respectful atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. Ultimately, we see our "clients" as neither the district nor the Gates Foundation, but rather the students. We strive to be advocates for quality learning for every student.

The coaches worked in the districts throughout the first year of the grant in a variety of roles attempting to “facilitate adult learning” about the change process and school reinvention. A number of districts reported that the coaches were a valuable support and served the role of facilitator and trainer, particularly for district office personnel. One district described the coach as a “sidekick; critical friend.” Another district described them as an “excellent resource,” and in a third district they were seen as a “filter for personal dynamics among district leaders,” with the primary task to “facilitate a meeting of the minds” among administrators. Specific functions included leading design team training, helping staff to develop their strategic plan and leading administrator/leadership retreats.

The project coaches were seen as a valuable resource in a majority of the districts, but there were exceptions. In a few districts the coaches were under utilized, or not utilized at all. This appears to have happened for one or a combination of reasons. First, most coaches were assigned to the districts very early in the process, and the personnel in the districts were unclear as to what their role was to be and how to best utilize their skills. In the majority of the districts this problem was rectified as time went on, but in at least one district it was stated: “We need training in how to use project coaches.” Second, there was a perception that the skills of the project coaches sometimes did not match the perceived need within the district. Finally, a few district leaders did not believe the coaches were needed or wanted in their district. Therefore the coaches’ were greatly limited or completely excluded from participation in the district reinvention process.

Overall, the technical assistance in the form of project coaches has been a positive, if uneven, addition to the district reinvention process. The coaches themselves appear to be developing a clearer understanding of their roles, and most of the districts are using them in a constructive manner. As district plans for reinvention move forward to the implementation stage, the challenges facing the districts and project coaches will, undoubtedly, become more difficult.
The Districts’ Plans of Action

The districts face two broad tasks in their reinvention efforts. The first task is to compel the reinvention of each school within the district and to develop a structure for that process. The second task is to develop district capacity to facilitate school reinvention and to remove those district policies and practices that may impede the change efforts. These tasks are not independent of each other, but do provide a convenient framework to describe district plans for reinvention.

School reinvention. A general approach for the school reinvention task is delineated in the grant requirements. As part of the agreement with the foundation, each district must allocate 80 percent of the funds to building level “grants” for school reinvention efforts. Therefore, most of the districts have established some type of structure within the districts for schools to apply for these grants, and requirements for schools to meet before the money is released. The overall strategy is one of setting broad expectations for the schools to reinvent themselves focusing on the school and classroom attributes. Each school is responsible for developing its own plan for making this happen. Most districts established some type of grant steering committee to develop qualification criteria for awarding of the school grants. Districts are expecting the schools to begin implementation of the school plans for reinvention during the second year, although there are some schools in a number of districts that will not be ready for implementation until a later date. Districts have also attempted to “streamline initiatives” to avoid both duplication and staff burnout. The plans in most of the districts include the following interrelated components.

- **Increased emphasis on professional development.** During the first year, considerable attention was given to “vision-building” within the districts, and addressing the question, “Why change?” In most, if not all of the districts, a heavy emphasis is now being made on “adult learning” through various activities, including building time for collaborative learning experiences, traveling to visit other schools both within and outside the state, hosting special conferences, and pursuing specialized training in a variety of areas. Two areas of particular need are leadership training and the use of data in decision-making. A number of districts have sent teachers and administrators to the Harvard Leadership Institute, and several districts are planning on expanding this participation. Several of the districts have relied on the project coaches to provide leadership training and will continue to do so in the future. One district has instituted an extensive leadership training program for all of the Building Leadership Teams in the district with the expectation that these people will be instrumental in the school reinvention efforts. Most districts have indicated a need for training in the use data, but clear plans in this area are evident in only a few of the districts. All of these efforts are designed to build capacity for change within the schools.
Special attention to high schools. District leadership in all but one or two of the districts has indicated that the high schools will be the most difficult to reinvent. Consequently, technical assistance in the form of special conferences for high schools have already taken place, with other conferences planned in the future. Professional development travel for high schools staff to visit model schools is also a common activity. Special activities designed to inform the community about “Why Change?” the high schools are being planned in several districts. One large district has announced plans to study and modify the graduation requirements for all of the district’s high schools to coincide with the reinvention efforts.

Increased efforts at public engagement. Several districts have increased their attention to the arena of public engagement. Strategies vary, but the educators recognize that community support for reinvention is vital. One district has scheduled a large-scale public engagement evening entitled, “The Future of America’s High Schools: A Local Conversation.” The purpose is to engage staff and community in a broad-based public platform from which the district’s reinvention efforts will be launched. Another district conducted a series of Town Hall meetings held throughout the year.

Reinvention of District Practices. Several districts have begun and will continue a review of district policies and practices that are needed to encourage reinvention, and a review of those that need modification to allow reinvention to take place. For school reinvention to succeed, this process will need to continue throughout the life of the grant. The degree to which district personnel understand and are committed to district level changes varies from district to district, but in most places this type of policy review has begun and will continue at some level. Districts who understand this need are currently approaching it one of two general ways. In some districts this is taking place as the need arises, that is, as district level policies and practices inhibit school efforts at reinvention. In one district, for example, district personnel recognized that student bus schedules and transportation arrangements needed to be changed permanently when a school attempted to make alterations in the school day. In a second district, district personnel reviewed district policies as schools submitted their school reinvention plans. In a third district, in anticipation of needing to provide support to the schools, the central office personnel and resources were reorganized around the reinvention needs. These types of actions have happened to varying degrees in the districts and as the school implementation phase proceeds, the need will become greater, but the changes will become more difficult (see Contextual Factors, District and Schools Structures and Policies, below).

Contextual Factors: Challenges in the Future

There are unique circumstances in every district that have and will continue to provide challenges for the reinvention process. Throughout the year evaluators identified the contextual factors within each district that are most likely to affect the reinvention process. The factors that have emerged during this first year are not atypical in districts throughout the country. The process of reinvention is dynamic, as are the environments in which these districts function. Over the next several years a number of additional factors will undoubtedly emerge to challenge
the educators attempting to reinvent education in their communities. During this first year, some of those challenges are listed below.

**Changes in Leadership.** In three of the ten public school districts there will be new superintendents during the second year of the grant. Given the average tenure of superintendents, it is probable that there will be additional superintendent turnover in grantee districts over the next four years. These changes have the potential to interrupt continuity, disrupt momentum, or alter the direction of the reinvention efforts throughout the life of the grants.

**District and School Structures and Policies.** Each district has existing policies, practices, and procedures that serve the functional purpose of supporting and reinforcing the traditional educational bureaucracy and learning environments. The roots of these practices run deep in many districts and will be difficult to change. For example, in at least one district teacher transfer is based on seniority. This policy has the potential to greatly limit school reinvention efforts, and is a right that the teachers’ union may not be willing to give up. As one principal put it: “I have several teachers who have transferred to my building that I would not have chosen.”

Similarly, policies greatly limiting student choice of schools in some districts may prove problematic as some schools begin to look quite different than they do currently. School structural issues pertaining to music and sports programs at the high school level will demand careful attention as high schools work to create smaller learning communities and schedules that are different than they are now. These types of policies are the basis for long-established practices that are important to many people and will not be changed easily. In fact, these issues have already begun to emerge. In several districts building level administrators and teachers are questioning if the district and district personnel really mean what they are saying about school reinvention. One frustrated principal told evaluators:

“We were moving ahead to change our schedule and set up to group and regroup students, but were not allowed to carry the plan out because it interfered with music, library and PE people shared with other schools.”

A second principal told of delaying the reinvention effort because, “We just don’t want to be disappointed and told we can’t do something after we make all our plans.” In other places school level educators “are waiting to hear from district people about the level of commitment before moving too far forward.”

These concerns are particularly true regarding the breakup and reinvention of high schools. Many high school people are wondering the degree to which the rhetoric can become reality. One high principal summed up the concerns of the faculty:
“Will the community support a radical change to re-engineer our schools? And to what extent will the district office support high schools that may look different in the future and from each other?”

District personnel are not unaware of these concerns, and in fact several have already or will sponsor a variety of community engagement activities to inform and educate the public around the issues of “Why change?” But even if the community supports change, time honored district structures, policies and practices must be addressed to allow reinvention to occur.

**Parental and Community Support.** During the first year of the grant districts did not report any substantial parental or community opposition to the reinvention efforts. However, in most districts the first year was dedicated to planning, and implementation of new practices has not actually begun. The degree to which parents and the community understand the implications of “reinvention” and the types of changes that are being discussed varies from district to district. However, as this understanding grows and as changes that substantially alter long-standing practices in the districts and schools are actually implemented, parental and community support will become much more important. An educator in one district summed it up this way:

> “The real work will be the community. Even if we get to the point where we want to change, the community will likely resist the change. The parents who care the most and who are the most vocal are the parents that are satisfied with the popular success of their children. How do you change when the loudest, most powerful people like it the way it is?”

A second educator put it more succinctly: “We have a high performing school and parents don’t want it to change.”

School reform around the country has been challenged by a variety of citizen groups, and there is no reason to think that this will not happen in one or more of these districts as the full intent of reinvention becomes clear. There are indications that a number of these districts are very much aware of this and either began full public engagement campaigns during 2000-2001, or are planning to begin or expand their existing efforts during the second year of the grant. Reform efforts from around the country have shown that the success or failure of these efforts will play a determining role in the reinvention outcome.

**Community Economic and Cultural Factors.** The districts are quite diverse, and include small districts in rural areas, districts in mid-sized towns, and large urban districts. During the evaluation interviews and focus groups, educators in each of the districts talked about the “unique” challenges they faced because of the community or communities they serve. In one district, language barriers exist between the educators and many of the parents of a large number of Hispanic students, thus making it difficult to ensure parental support and involvement. Several districts are located in areas

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Educators in each of the districts talked about the “unique” challenges they faced because of the community or communities they serve.
of economic stagnation or decline because of changes in the lumber, fishing or agricultural industries, and school funding through bonds is seen as tenuous at best. In the urban areas, there is considerable variation within the districts in terms of ethnicity and economics. Meeting the individual needs of such a diverse population of students is sometimes seen as an overwhelming task. Unanticipated or unexpected developments in each of these communities have the potential disrupt or redirect energies away from the reinvention efforts.

**School Boards.** Educators in the districts have made concerted efforts to help school board members understand the nature of the grant and all that reinvention entails, and feel there is general support. One board is even described as “outspoken advocates of state reform.” However, just as a change in the superintendent has the potential to interrupt the reinvention process, a change in school board membership may prove to be just as disruptive. Educators in several districts noted during the spring evaluation visit that one or more board member positions were up for election in the coming year.

**Teacher Culture.** The ultimate success or failure of the reinvention process will be determined by the degree to which classroom instruction becomes more effective over the next four years. For this to happen the vision of reinvented education will have to be accepted by teachers in the classrooms. During the first year of the grant, “Why Change?” was a focus of many professional development activities, but there are many teachers in the districts who are yet to understand all of the reinvention expectations, particularly what is implied for their own teaching. As one teacher commented during a focus group session, “Something is stirring.”

The inclination for change among teachers is determined in part by the existing teacher culture within the district or school—a culture that has developed over many years and influenced by many historical developments. The willingness and ability of teachers to change differs from district to district, from school to school, and from teacher to teacher. Yet, evaluators found indications that the challenge will be greater in some districts than others, and greater in some schools than others. A number of teachers seemed genuinely supportive and excited as their comments reflect:

- “Staff meetings are less about management, and more about learning.”
- “We are looking harder at what it takes for kids to succeed.”
- “We have found our voice.”
- “People are really beginning to realize these things might come about!”

While there is evidence of support among some teachers, there are also many teachers who remain unconvinced. One superintendent estimated that in his district about one-third of the teachers “do not want change.” A quote from one of the district’s *Year One Evaluation Report* holds true for a number of the districts to varying degrees: “The tendency of the ‘old Guard’ to slow down school improvement efforts is an existing problem and most evident on the secondary level.” During the end of the year focus groups, a number of teachers themselves spoke to this issue:

- “There is a fair amount of skepticism.”
“There’s talk about giving Gates money back—getting on with business as usual.”
“The district needs to clarify the entire process and bring us on board.”

There appears to be a commitment to move forward among most administrators and some teachers in spite of the resistance. One principal stated that in the district the Gates initiatives are considered “the catalyst to move against complacency and tradition.” There is also some level of optimism, as expressed by another principal: “The Gates name makes it credible for staff and the public. It’s real, it’s tangible, and has resources attached that will allow this to happen. This feels different.” A teacher summed up the magnitude of the challenge ahead in this area: “The revelation has hit that it is huge to make significant change. It’s a more difficult process than we had anticipated.”

**Teachers’ Union.** District and school reinvention have the potential for impacting working conditions for teachers and therefore must involve the teachers’ union and the collective bargaining agreement. This impact is and will continue to be evident in two major areas: (1) the work involved in the process of reinvention, and (2) the outcomes of the reinvention that alter teacher workloads, schedule, responsibility, evaluation, and accountability. Considerable time and energy have already gone into reinvention on the part of some teachers, and as the implementation phase of the process begins, the time demands will increase. Grant money has and will continue to be used to purchase release time and for supplemental pay for the efforts, but the adequacy and distribution of those funds are being questioned in some districts. As the time and work expectations involved in the process become clearer, union cooperation will become more important. District leaders have made attempts to “bring the teachers’ union on board,” and generally, relationships have been positive. However, contract issues are just below the surface in places. In one district many of the principals identified contract issues “as hindering decision-making and reform,” and there are reports of strike discussions in at least one of the districts. While the strike issues have more to do with overall salary concerns than reinvention, a strike would certainly divert energies from reinvention and cause delays in the process. The morale effects of teacher strikes can linger for years in a district posing serious long-term challenges to collaboration for reinvention purposes.

The outcomes of the reinvention process also are potential conflicts with the union. For example, the *performance accountability* attribute to be developed in many districts has direct implications for teacher evaluation and renewal. Once a majority of the teachers in a school has decided on a plan of action and develops a common focus based on a specific educational philosophy, transfer policies for teachers not in agreement with the decisions will need to be worked out in many districts. These and other issues are areas of future disagreement that can affect the success of reinvention.

**State Initiatives and Regulations.** There are current discussions in the state of Washington around several pertinent issues that can impact the reinvention efforts. Three of critical importance are the future of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), school accountability, and more stringent high school graduation requirements.

The WASL, administered in grades 4, 7, and 10, is a performance assessment of reading, writing, math, and listening. The content of the test is taken from the state’s Essential Academic...
Learning Requirements (EALRs) and has forced many schools to refocus their curricula and teaching efforts away from local district curricula and toward the state EALRs. A school’s passing rate on the WASL is being carefully scrutinized, and although no formal accountability system was passed by the state legislature in 2001, discussions will continue in this area for the foreseeable future. Although there is currently no formal state accountability system, there is certainly political and community pressure within the districts and from parents and school boards for schools to continue to improve their passing rates.

In the Theory of Change model presented earlier, the forces for change in the districts represented by the arrows on the far left hand side of the diagram were said to be in general agreement, and indeed at the present time that is the case. The state learning expectations (EALRs) generally require the type of learning outcomes described by the foundation’s Clear Expectations for students (Table 1), and best taught by teachers who use Active Inquiry, In-Depth Learning, and Performance Assessments. District personnel, for the most part, have not seen major inconsistencies between the types of learning required by the state and described by the foundation’s model. However, among some in the state there has been an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with WASL and efforts made to eliminate it from use. At the present time this seems unlikely. However, should this happen and the state return to traditional tests of basic skills on which to base an accountability system, district and school personnel may find themselves in the difficult position of being held accountable for content and the results of tests that are at odds with the foundation’s model.

Over the next year new high school graduation requirements in the state are expect to be adopted. Discussions of these requirements include a requirement to pass the 10th grade WASL and a certificate of mastery. These changes are not inconsistent with the foundation’s model or goals for high schools, and in fact, may serve to clarify the reason to change the schools. Nonetheless, the final outcomes of the decisions regarding graduation requirements may play a significant role in determining the nature of high school reinvention efforts.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded eleven five-year district grants in the state of Washington as part of the Model School and District Grants strategy. The districts selected to receive grants are diverse in terms of size, student populations served, and geographic location. The purpose of the grants is to develop successful district models in which all schools in the district are high achieving. To accomplish this task, districts are expected to “reinvent” themselves by developing seven district attributes, and to support the district’s schools as they also reinvent themselves by developing seven school attributes. This provides a common set of goals for all of the grants, while at the same time allowing for district personnel to focus on specific areas of need within the district. The foundation’s High Achievement District Grants are...
far-reaching and are intended to change the very nature of the schooling experience for many students by creating or reinventing district, school and classroom practices with the intent of improving or changing public school output.

To facilitate these institutional changes, the foundation has also given a series of grants designed for “capacity building” and/or “technical assistance.” For example, in addition to the funds from the grant, the districts and schools have access to a wide range of consultants and experts when needed. Grants are also being given for the development of alternative assessment and on-line assessment procedures for these schools to better measure the improved student learning that is expected, and that may not be measured by traditional standardized tests.

The evaluation plan for the grants is based on a theory of change model that explains the grant program’s activities and resources in relation to the intermediary outcomes and ultimate program goals. The ultimate program goals are improved student and post-secondary outcomes. However, there are intermediary or enabling goals at the classroom, school and district levels derived from the Seven Attributes of High Achievement Districts that allow for a multi-level evaluation over time. The evaluation plan also includes consideration of the role of technical assistance and capacity building in the district, as well as the influences of a variety of contextual factors. Both qualitative and quantitative data are being used for the evaluation of the projects. During the first year of the grants the following four questions provided the framework for the evaluation activities.

1. Are the districts making satisfactory progress toward district reinvention?
2. What activities or strategies are the districts pursuing in their reinvention efforts?
3. What role is technical assistance playing in the reinvention process?
4. What contextual factors are helping or hindering the reinvention process?

Considerable attention was given to assessments of the district, school and classroom attributes in each district districts, and conducting cases studies on the grant reinvention process.

The evaluation process has revealed that the districts began reinvention from a variety of starting points, and with quite differing understandings of the nature of the Gates grant. While each district had prepared a grant proposal, those proposals and resulting grant plans often did not reflect the all-encompassing intent of district reinvention. In the months immediately following the announcements and then well into the 2000-2001 school year, considerable energy was devoted to clarifying the nature of the grants. The development of the understanding of grant expectations proceeded throughout the year at differing rates among the districts. In some cases the understanding came quite quickly, while in other districts the understanding evolved over the entire year. By the end of the year the expectations had become clear to the key leadership people in the districts. However, the concept of district reinvention is understood down through the district to varying degrees.

During this first year the districts faced similar challenges and the progress of the grants followed a similar pattern. The initial task was to develop an understanding of the all-encompassing nature of the grant, followed by developing an understanding and acceptance within the district of the vision of reinvented education identified by the foundation. In a number
of districts it then became necessary to align the vision and grant expectations with existing district initiatives and long range plans. Once the grant expectations became clear, districts had to establish grant activity procedures and guidelines for school reinvention efforts. Finally, district personnel had to begin to build capacity within the districts to facilitate, encourage and require change. These tasks were not necessarily independent of each other or absolute in their sequence. Yet, all districts faced these tasks during Year One of the grants.

To facilitate the reinvention process and to build capacity within the district for change technical assistance was provided to the districts in the form of periodic grantee meetings and project coaches. Leadership teams from the districts met seven times throughout the year for learning and support, with mixed reviews as to the value of the meetings. However, responses to the meetings later in the year were much more positive. Project coaches worked in the districts throughout the first year of the grant in a variety of roles attempting to “facilitate adult learning” about the change process and school reinvention. A number of districts reported that the coaches were a valuable resource, while in other districts they were under utilized, or not utilized at all.

In every district a start has been made, but actual changes at the school level have been few. One elementary principal summed up the progress to date: “random acts of improvement.”

The districts face two broad tasks in their reinvention efforts. The first task is to compel the reinvention of each school within the district and to develop a structure for that process. The second task is to develop district capacity to facilitate school reinvention and to remove those district policies and practices that may impede the change efforts. The plans in most of the districts for dealing with the schools include an increased emphasis on professional development, special attention to high schools, and increased efforts at public engagement. Plans for the reinvention of district-wide practices generally include a review of district policies and practices that are needed to encourage reinvention, and a review of those that need modification to allow reinvention to take place.

Each district faces its own unique circumstances impacting the reinvention process. The factors that have emerged during this first year are not atypical in districts throughout the country. These contextual factors include changes in leadership, existing district and school structures and policies, varying degrees of parental and community support, community economic and cultural factors, changing school board memberships, existing teacher cultures, labor and union issues, and state initiatives and regulations.

Recommendations

The mid-year and end-of-the-year reports for each district contain recommendations for that district. The recommendations below are for those individuals working with or for the foundation in the overall management of the Model District Initiative.
1. The regularly scheduled meetings of district leadership teams should be continued. Responses to the format and design used for the April and May 2001 meetings were very positive and those meetings should serve as models for future meetings.

2. Continue to provide training and common meeting times for the project coaches. Training for district personnel, or at least focused discussions with district personnel in some districts, on how to make the best use of these resources is strongly recommended.

3. Clarify with the districts the expectations regarding the school size issue. There is confusion on the degree to which this expectation is part of the grant requirements.

4. There is the need for very specific or focused technical assistance in some of the districts, such as in the area of data driven decision-making. A collective effort to identify appropriate resources is needed, either through the foundation or through the efforts of the districts themselves and their regularly scheduled meetings.
## Appendix A  District Grantee Demographic and Achievement Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WA State Average</th>
<th>Bellingham</th>
<th>Enumclaw</th>
<th>Evergreen</th>
<th>Hockinson</th>
<th>Kennewick</th>
<th>Mabton</th>
<th>Nooksack Valley</th>
<th>Port Angeles</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Spokane</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Enrollment (00-01)</td>
<td>3,394</td>
<td>10,398</td>
<td>5,201</td>
<td>21,650</td>
<td>1,379</td>
<td>13,629</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>1,862</td>
<td>4,866</td>
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<tr>
<td>% African American Enrollment</td>
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<td>0.02%</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
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<td>5.55%</td>
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<td>7.23%</td>
<td>0.87%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>2.01%</td>
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<td>2.87%</td>
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<td>% Hispanic Enrollment</td>
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<td>3.25%</td>
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<td>1.89%</td>
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<td>14.07%</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
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<td>% Native American Enrollment</td>
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<td>0.23%</td>
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<td>7.40%</td>
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<td>Total % Non-White Enrollment</td>
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<td>5.93%</td>
<td>13.15%</td>
<td>2.92%</td>
<td>21.10%</td>
<td>90.29%</td>
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<td>% White Enrollment</td>
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<td>77.12%</td>
<td>87.22%</td>
<td>39.96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenditures Per Student</td>
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<td>$6,663</td>
<td>$6,791</td>
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<td>$7,134</td>
<td>$7,134</td>
<td>$8,512</td>
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<td>$8,617</td>
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<td>Computers per Staff</td>
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<td>1.69</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>5.29</td>
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<td>Computers per 10 Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduation Rates (98-99)</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>10th Grade WASL</td>
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</table>
Appendix B  District Questionnaire Items and Factor Analysis Results
## Appendix B  District Questionnaire Items and Factor Analysis Results

### Technology (alpha = .92)
**Items:**
1. Every staff member and student has access to basic software applications (i.e. word processing, data base, presentation).
2. Every staff member and student has access to Internet connection.
3. Every staff member and student has access to computer hardware.
4. Every staff member and student has access to technical support.
5. Every staff member and student has access to training and instruction.

### Learning Assistance (alpha = .77)
**Items:**
1. Low performing schools receive assistance as needed.
2. Policies that guide school funding ensure appropriate time and assistance that students need to meet performance standards.
3. The district creates options for students who are having academic difficulty.
4. Policies that guide promotion ensure appropriate time and assistance that students need to meet performance expectations.

### Distributed Leadership (alpha = .79)
**Items:**
1. District leadership places top priority on literacy.
2. District leadership encourages continuous improvement of teaching and learning.
3. The school board, administration and employee representatives share a goal of helping all students achieve.
4. District leadership focuses the topic of visits, correspondence and meetings on student learning.
5. District leadership engages parents and community members in an ongoing conversation about helping all students achieve at high levels.

### Performance Accountability (alpha = .79)
**Items:**
1. Pre and post standards-based assessments in core academic areas guide teaching and learning.
2. Grade level standards in core academic areas guide teaching and learning.
3. The district establishes accountability for certificated employees concerning student learning.
4. The district establishes clear expectations for certificated employees concerning student learning.
5. Staff members are evaluated on skill and performance.

### Professional Development (alpha = .67)
**Items:**
1. Learning opportunities for staff members include school-based professional development.
2. The district invests appropriate resources in adult learning and leadership development.
3. Learning opportunities for staff members include time for the instructional staff to analyze data, target efforts and solve problems.
4. Partnerships are developed with institutions of higher education to improve teacher preparation and instruction.

### Constituency Involvement (alpha = .61)
**Items:**
1. District leaders seek regular feedback from students, staff members and parents regarding the learning climate.
2. Parents are involved in instructional decisions.
3. Business partnerships provide work-based learning opportunities.
4. The school board, district administration and employee representatives model shared values.
Appendix C  Teacher Questionnaire Items and Factor Analysis Results
## Appendix C  Teacher Questionnaire Items and Factor Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructivist Teaching (alpha = .92)</th>
<th>Personalization (alpha = .76)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Student work shows evidence of understanding, not just recall.</td>
<td>1. The school is designed so that every student has an adult advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assessment tasks allow students to exhibit higher-order thinking.</td>
<td>2. The size of this school allows staff and students to work closely together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students apply knowledge in real world contexts.</td>
<td>3. Students have a personal plan for progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students are engaged in activities to develop understanding.</td>
<td>4. The school is designed to promote student relationships with adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Students are presented with a challenging curriculum designed to develop depth of understanding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teachers utilize the diverse experiences of students to build effective learning experiences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students present to real audiences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The learning focus is competence, not coverage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Students are engaged in active participation, exploration, and research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Students produce quality work products.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Teachers and students set learning goals and monitor progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Clear expectations define what students should know and be able to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards–based Teaching (alpha = .80)</th>
<th>Technology (alpha = .91)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The school has adopted a consistent research-based instructional approach based on shared beliefs about teaching and learning.</td>
<td>1. Every staff member and student has access to: computer hardware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The staff and students are focused on a few important goals.</td>
<td>2. Every staff member and student has access to: basic software applications (i.e., word processing, database)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The use of time, tools, materials, and professional development activities are aligned with instruction.</td>
<td>3. Every staff member and student has access to: internet connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Data-driven decisions shape structure and schedule.</td>
<td>4. Every staff member and student has access to: technical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers design curricula linked to learning standards.</td>
<td>5. Every staff member and student has access to: training and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Staff members are dedicated to helping every student achieve state and local standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personalization (alpha = .76)</th>
<th>Technology (alpha = .91)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The school is designed so that every student has an adult advocate.</td>
<td>1. Every staff member and student has access to: computer hardware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The size of this school allows staff and students to work closely together.</td>
<td>2. Every staff member and student has access to: basic software applications (i.e., word processing, database)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students have a personal plan for progress.</td>
<td>3. Every staff member and student has access to: internet connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The school is designed to promote student relationships with adults.</td>
<td>4. Every staff member and student has access to: technical support</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology (alpha = .91)</th>
<th>Environment (alpha = .84)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Items:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Every staff member and student has access to: computer hardware</td>
<td>1. The school is an ethical environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Every staff member and student has access to: basic software applications (i.e., word processing, database)</td>
<td>2. The staff teaches, models, and expects responsible behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Every staff member and student has access to: internet connection</td>
<td>3. Relationships are based on mutual respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Every staff member and student has access to: technical support</td>
<td>4. The school is a safe environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Every staff member and student has access to: training and instruction</td>
<td>5. The school is a studious environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Partnerships (alpha = .78)

**Items:**
1. Parents have many opportunities to get involved with school programs.
2. The school engages the community in discussion about continuous improvement.
3. Parents are recognized as partners in education.
4. The school makes learning results readily available to parents.
5. Partnerships are developed with businesses in order to create work-based learning opportunities.
6. Partnerships are developed with institutions of higher education to improve teacher preparation and instruction.

Quality of Education (alpha = .86)

**Items:**
1. All students leave school prepared for success in work.
2. All students leave school prepared for further education.
3. All students leave school prepared for responsible citizenship.
4. The school is known for its academic excellence.
5. All students are engaged in a rigorous course of study.

Teacher Input (alpha = .80)

**Items:**
1. Staff have sufficient input on decisions about school programs.
2. School leaders try to solicit input from staff on how to improve the instructional program.

Distributed Leadership (alpha = .86)

**Items:**
1. District leadership encourages continuous improvement of teaching and learning.
2. District leadership focuses the topic of visits, correspondence and meetings on student learning.
3. District leadership engages parents and community members in an ongoing conversation about helping all students achieve at high levels.
4. District leadership places top priority on literacy.
5. The school board, administration and employee representatives share a goal of helping all students achieve.
Appendix D  Data Collection Schedule
## Data Collection Schedule

### 2000-2001 Baseline Year

**I. Student Outcomes.**
- 3rd, 6th & 9th ITBS
- 4th, 7th & 10th WASL
- Other standardized assessments used by the individual districts.
- State and school data on discipline rates, attendance high school completion rates, and other measures identified in Spring 2001.

**II. District and school practices**
- One-on-one interviews. (Autumn)
- Focus groups. (Autumn)
- District Questionnaire. (Autumn)
- Teacher Perspectives Questionnaire. (Winter)
- Student Perspectives Questionnaire. (Winter)
- TAGLIT (Spring).
- District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)

### 2001-2002

**I. Student Outcomes.**
- 3rd, 6th & 9th ITBS
- 4th, 7th & 10th WASL
- Other standardized assessments used by the individual districts.
- State and school data on discipline rates, attendance high school completion rates, and other measures identified in Spring 2001.

**II. District and school practices**
- Classroom Observations. (Autumn)
- District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)
- One-on-one interviews. (Spring)
- Focus groups. (Spring)

### 2002-2003

**I. Student Outcomes.**
- 3rd, 6th & 9th ITBS
- 4th, 7th & 10th WASL
- Other standardized assessments used by the individual districts.
- State and school data on discipline rates, attendance high school completion rates, and other measures identified in Spring 2001.

**II. District and school practices**
- One-on-one interviews. (Autumn, Spring)
- Focus groups. (Autumn, Spring)
- District Questionnaire. (Autumn)
- Teacher Perspectives Questionnaire. (Winter)
- Student Perspectives Questionnaire. (Winter)
- TAGLIT (Spring).
- District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)

### 2003-2004

**I. Student Outcomes.**
- 3rd, 6th & 9th ITBS
- 4th, 7th & 10th WASL
- Other standardized assessments used by the individual districts.
- State and school data on discipline rates, attendance high school completion rates, and other measures identified in Spring 2001.

**II. District and school practices**
- District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)
- One-on-one interviews. (Spring)
- Focus groups. (Spring)

### 2004-2005

**I. Student Outcomes.**
- 3rd, 6th & 9th ITBS
- 4th, 7th & 10th WASL
- Other standardized assessments used by the individual districts.
- State and school data on discipline rates, attendance high school completion rates, and other measures identified in Spring 2001.

**II. District and school practices**
- One-on-one interviews. (Autumn, Spring)
- Focus groups. (Autumn, Spring)
- District Questionnaire. (Autumn)
- Teacher Perspectives Questionnaire. (Winter)
- Student Perspectives Questionnaire. (Winter)
- Classroom Observations. (Winter)
- TAGLIT (Spring).
- District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>III. The role of the grant in facilitating district and school change.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>• One-on-one interviews. (Spring)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline Year</td>
<td>• Focus groups. (Spring)</td>
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<td>• District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)</td>
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<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>• One-on-one interviews. (Spring)</td>
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<td>• Focus groups. (Spring)</td>
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<td>• District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>• One-on-one interviews. (Spring)</td>
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<td>• Focus groups. (Spring)</td>
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<td>• District self-evaluations. (Activity-compliance reports, quarterly)</td>
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<td>• District Questionnaire – questions to be developed and added in year 3.</td>
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<td>• District Questionnaire – questions to be developed and added in year 3.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher Questionnaire – questions to be developed and added in year 3.</td>
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Quarterly Progress Report Guidelines
for DISTRICT Evaluation Coordinators

Due Dates

November 1, 2001   April 1, 2002
February 1, 2002   June 1, 2002*

* to include end of year summary paragraph and ’plan of action’ for the upcoming year.

Format

Heading

• District Name
• Prepared by (name of evaluation coordinator)
• Report Date (i.e. due date)

Length

• 3 pages maximum—(an addendum may be attached to further clarify a specific reported activity.)

Style

• 12-point New Times Roman font; single-spaced
• footer to include district name, report date, page number
• Present information in sections II and III within the format of a bulleted list of statements.

Text of Report

I. Opening Summary Paragraph

Open with a paragraph noting overall progress toward grant goals including highlights, successes, and challenges.

II. ‘Bulleted’ Statements organized in the following contexts:

• Provide an update on specific grant-related activities.
• Explain how the district is moving forward in relation to each of the Seven Attributes of High Achievement School Districts.
• Explain how plans are proceeding to involve district schools.
• Note planned activities for the next two months (all reports).

III. ‘Bulleted’ Statements to Describe:

• ‘Here is where we are doing well…’
• ‘Here is where we need support…’
I. Opening Summary
In the third quarter of the Gates Grant Project, two distinct efforts have served to advance the planning phase as noted below.

1. There has been a noticeable increase in the intensity of investigation and data analysis at the school level. Using a variety of collaboration methods including substitute release time, after school meetings and the state in-service day, principals and Design Teams have orchestrated whole school and/or department dialogue around understanding current student achievement data and what that information means relative to staff development and school improvement. Principals are very serious about engaging the staff and Shared Leadership/Design Team members in creating meaningful school improvement plans and a broadly shared vision.

2. The second effort has been focused around the needs for professional development and support for principals and instructional leaders. _________ and _________ have gathered data from principals regarding leadership support needs, and the Instructional Planning Team has reviewed possibilities for providing professional development that is both structured and long-term for school leaders. _________ is coordinating the effort, and plans are being made for a full day of inservice for principals and instructional managers with Rick DuFour, in June. The focus of the inservice will be “Developing Professional Learning Communities.” In preparation for this event, each principal has received a copy of DuFour’s book of the same title, purchased with Gates Grant funds. We see the fundamental foundation for school improvement couched in DuFour’s simple philosophy of shared vision and shared responsibility for student learning.

II. Specific Progress

Tasks Accomplished
- Professional Development Profiling tools for Reading, Writing and Mathematics, to be used as baseline data, as well as for coordinating staff development.
- Meetings with small principal groups for sharing Gates Grant activities.
- Regular Design Team meetings at each school, Advisory Committee meetings and Evaluation Coordinator meetings, meetings with Principal Councils and Curriculum Council—attempting to build cohesiveness and broader understanding of the anticipated outcomes of the project. Keeping a focus.
- Final input phase of the Strategic Planning process; School Board ready to set goals that will guide the district during the 5 years of the Gates Grant Project.
- Continued dialogue with Hewlett-Packard around creating a high tech high school, in collaboration with other business and higher education partners.
• Applied for “Lead Partner” role in Public Agenda/PBS public engagement event, telling the story of American Public Education.

Where We Are Doing Well
• Increasing the dialogue among principals about what it will take to change classroom practice—research-based active, in-depth learning and performance assessment. Next fall, plan to bring in Jeff Fout’s [Foundation’s Lead Evaluator] with presentation for principals, Evaluation Coordinators and Design Team members.
• Superintendent __________’s leadership with high school principals in conversations around High School Reinvention. We now have agreement on the data profile elements, and the next step is to determine who/what methodology is needed to gather the data for each high school and the district.
• Set a meeting time with the team who attended the High School Reinvention Conference to develop a public engagement plan.

Where We Need Support
• Raising awareness around the need for change at middle/high schools.
• Training/exemplary models on “personalization” for middle and high schools.
• Developing principal and teacher confidence that all students can meet standards.

Planned Activities-Next Two Months
• High School Reinvention Public Engagement Plan finalized, to begin in August.
• Engage business leaders, student leaders, teacher leaders in assisting with Public Engagement event around high school reinvention.
• Begin the process of developing student voice around need for high school change; work with [project coach names].
• School Reinvention Grant Criteria/Application finalized for Design Teams.
• Spring evaluation visit by Dr. Shirley Riley [external evaluator]
• Develop training video for Reading, Writing and Mathematics—Professional Development Profiling.
• Finalize Database for project management—train Evaluation Coordinators.
• Decision: Hold off on Technology Fair for Design Teams—Not ready yet!
• Continuation of a partnership with WSU-V around teacher preparation.
• Decisions regarding alternative program choices for high school students and homeschool families including high quality internet curriculum offerings.
• Study of expanded community learning offerings through StepStar Network curriculum for family side-by-side learning and adult literacy, in partnership with Clark County System of Care providers.
• School Board update on Gates Grant Project activities and progress, May 8.
• Professional development for principals/instructional leaders: Rick DuFour on June 5.
• Graduate Follow-up Study Request for Proposals.
• Gates Grant Web-page.

Specific Statements: Update on Progress Toward Attributes

A. Attributes of High Achieving Schools
Each school has completed the School Progress Chart with the staff and parent leaders. This data will serve as baseline data on the Attributes of High Achieving Schools. A summary will be included in the Final Report, 2001. [central office personnel] have purposefully been “teaching” the concept that improving student learning through research-based instruction and performance based assessment will increase school proficiency on the “Attributes.”

B. Attributes of High Achieving Districts

Distributed Leadership: April 10-11, the School Board sets Strategic Planning Goals. The Superintendent and Cabinet will be put together “Action Planning Teams” who will develop the objectives, the timeline and action plan for each goal. This broadly shared process is expanding the leadership capacity of the district.

Performance Accountability: Last fall the Assessment Manager, hired two assessment specialists. Their work has been instrumental in expanding the “data dialogue” at the school level. They have given customized presentations to school staff and departments, unveiling both state and district assessment data in a way that is user friendly for teachers.

Effective Governance: The district already has in place the Shared Leadership Team process, which effectively involves community and parents in school planning. In addition, a Shared Leadership Team member sits on the Gates Grant Design Teams, which include representatives of staff, parents/community. Both of these structures serve as effective governance vehicles.

Share Values: The input phase of the Strategic Planning process was intended to gather insights for the School Board on critical issues facing the district in the next 3-5 years. The unexpected benefit was the opportunity for dialogue among staff and parents that revealed common beliefs and shared values. The impact of that dialogue resulted in some very clear direction for the School Board.

Learning Partnerships: We are becoming more aware that the success of student learning is a community responsibility, and we are committed to nurturing current partnerships and building new ones that will clearly benefit students.

Staff Development: The __________ District has a long-standing commitment to on-going professional development. The new Professional Development profiling tools will allow us to be even more intentional in expanding the expertise of staff.

Technology Infrastructure: A district committee is currently reviewing a strategy for maintaining a technology infrastructure on limited funds.
_________ School District has an enrollment of 13,801 students. There are three high schools, a vocational school, four middle, and fourteen elementary schools. On October 16 and 17, thirteen administrators were interviewed. While the focus group was scheduled for six, only two participants showed up. The final sample of 15 (41%) consisted of 5 central office and 8 building administrators from all levels. All administrators completed a questionnaire with a 97% return.

**Grant Overview**

_________ School District intentionally integrated grant-related activities into existing goals that make up the district’s strategic plan. This was done to streamline the process of school reinvention and promote staff involvement. A district-level Gates Steering Committee was formed and an evaluation coordinator designated. The focus has been to develop a framework for the overall project, collect data to inform direction, and communicate with principals about the attributes and grant opportunities for individual school.

The Steering Committee designated first year efforts at the building level as ‘Planning to Plan.’ Each school in the district has formed a Design Team to facilitate the process, and teams have participated in district training on the Attributes of High Achievement Schools. Almost half of the school ‘Plan to Plan’ grant proposals have been submitted and all have been approved. To address the attributes of High Achievement School Districts on the district level, the superintendent and steering committee selected performance accountability and staff development as areas to explore in detail during the first year of grant support.

_________’s continuous improvement efforts associated with the grant and strategic plan address a variety of areas including literacy, the creation of smaller units in high schools, and broadening district partnerships. Technology plans are geared toward improving infrastructure and expanding staff development to include integration of technology. The district has a clear grant-related process and is moving forward according to an organized and well-communicated timeline.

**District Self-Report of grant-related activity provided by District Evaluation Coordinator**

As part of the ongoing evaluation process, designated evaluation coordinators in each district are expected to submit reports on a quarterly basis. The following reflects highlights with regard to progress, activities, and perceived support needs acquired from _________ School District’s first self-report submitted November 15, 2000.
Reported progress to date:
- The grant is consciously integrated with the district’s Strategic Plan and progress regularly reported to the community. It has been presented as a resource to help focus and support efforts related to building expectations in line with the Strategic Plan.
- Design Teams were developed in August. Building teams were advised to spend the first year preparing ‘Plans to Plan.’ The emphasis was to ‘go slow to go fast’ to meet building needs/goals (i.e. gathering/analyzing data, identifying strengths, developing focus).
- New district level Steering Committee meets regularly and will review building plans.
- As of November, 8 of 22 schools had presented plans and received committee approval.
- Gates Support Team was formed to disseminate grant-related information and better support buildings in making informed decisions with regard to the attributes.
- High school teams attended the Gates High School Conference in November.
- At the district level, indicators within each of the seven attributes were identified to help focus district efforts. The selected attribute areas, which will serve as the focus during the year one, are Performance Accountability (i.e. reading and math standards) and Staff Development (i.e. using data analysis and literacy instruction to achieve high standards).

Efforts that are going well:
- Efforts are led by an outstanding Steering Committee.
- The individual school ‘Plan to Plan’ process is well underway.
- Discussion at high school level is focusing more on students, rather than on adult issues.

Areas where support would be welcomed:
- Models and ideas from school sites that are ‘thinking out of the box’ would be helpful.
- Technical assistance is needed to help initiate and sustain the change process with staff.
- Models and ideas would be welcomed in the area of creative staff planning time.

Upcoming activities (Dec-Jan):
- The Gates Steering Committee will continue to meet regularly to evaluate Plans to Plan.
- A Spring Technology Fair is in the initial planning stages.
- Workshops for School Design Team are planned to train teams on long-term planning.
- District-generated and Gates evaluation data will be used to assess progress.
**Distributed Leadership**

Well-defined student learning goals are in place and every administrator interviewed was able to clearly articulate them. The overarching goal is student academic growth, and all principals and central office administrators identified a “shared focus on literacy.” The district employs standards to guide progress toward goals. Most administrators interviewed describe district goals as driven by the school board.

The strategic plan is widely perceived as having given focus to expressed goals. Central office administrators view the plan as a work in progress, and define it as “guiding the ship.” Principals view the strategic plan as the district guide that “filters to buildings” for their implementation. Governance is site-based in terms of how to translate district goals into action, so “each building personalizes the vision and puts their own stamp on it.” While the primary focus is on literacy, strategic planning goals encourage building attention to alignment of EALRS, accountability, and safe and orderly classrooms. The Strategic plan is reviewed each year with input from principals and teachers, as well as the community by way of a yearly Harris survey.

While principals are highly supportive of having a strategic plan, four of eight interviewed perceive the plan as “highly explicit and getting in the way of the creative ‘how’ in buildings.” They perceive the strategic plan as “often too explicit,” so view it more as a district mandate than a plan. The Superintendent is considered “a great leader, and was described as highly respected by twelve of thirteen interviewed (the Superintendent was the thirteenth). However, without rancor, the majority of principals expressed a “slight perception of micromanaging.”

- A high percentage of central office (100%) and building administrators (95%) agree the school board, district leadership and staff share goals related to student learning.
- 100% of central office administrators and principals agree the school board, district leadership, and staff place top priority on literacy.
- 100% of central office administrators and principals agree the school board and district leadership encourages continuous improvement in teaching and learning.
- Central office administrators (86%) and principals (81%) believe parents and community members are engaged in helping all students achieve at high levels.

**Performance Accountability**

Data driven decision-making is consciously applied throughout the district. Data supports the development of curriculum and assessment, is used to inform district and building direction, and measure long-term progress. Interviews revealed twelve of thirteen administrators support data as a useful tool, and believe the focus has helped make school personnel more “results oriented.”

Administrators provided examples how data is used throughout the district. Functional level testing is the most comprehensive indicator. Designed to measure growth, this in-
house developed diagnostic system allows staff to keep running longitudinal data in math and reading (K-10.) Elementary schools are presently focused on a goal that 90% of third graders will read at grade level by the end of the school year. The district and school board support a competency-based system in the middle school. While resources were identified to support low achieving students, questionnaire data indicates many administrators feel resources are just adequate. High schools are presently engaged in developing a standards-based system.

One central office administrator expressed, “Accountability is very tangible now.” Schools are held accountable for growth as measured by functional level testing, WASL, and ITBS scores. Principals make yearly presentations to the school board using data to demonstrate efforts toward growth. Two principal performance goals are tied to accountability. Several administrators expressed a growing number of teachers are beginning to see the benefit of ongoing assessment.

- Central office administrators (86%) and principals (82%) agree grade level standards guide teaching and learning.
- A high percentage of central office administrators (93%) agree, and a more moderate response (59%) from principals show standards assessments guide teaching and learning.
- Central office administrators (93%) and principals (86%) agree there are clear employee expectations with regard to student learning. However, there is little agreement that staff evaluation is tied to student learning (central office response: 36% agree, 36% disagree; principal response: 32% disagree—supporting perceptions of the “union as a barrier.”
- Low responses from central office administrators (58% agree) and principals (59% agree) that students not reaching standards receive adequate support.

**Effective Governance**

Governance in the district is based on a site-based approach, with some perceived variations in the definition of “site-based.” One central office administrator describes individual schools in the district as “essentially independent cottage industries.” For the most part, principals consider themselves autonomous in hiring, budget and staff development decisions. However, strong principal perceptions about district governance surfaced. The superintendent describes governance as “top down and bottom up,” a description also expressed by several administrators. The approach is described by one administrator as based on “non-negotiable” decisions made “at the top” before filtering to buildings. While in agreement that initiatives must reflect the strategic plan, by the time they arrive in buildings they are “often so explicit regarding indicators” they are perceived as “mandates.” Principals perceive this as limiting building flexibility, making it difficult for innovative shared-decision making to work.

There exists a perception that too much is imposed on principals, the “operational leaders who put the tasks to work.” Three of eight principals interviewed believe the district relies too much on principals, and six of eight suggested the district redesign the central
office to redistribute tasks to streamline the system and allow the site-based system work more efficiently. In terms of a widely perceived barrier to effective governance, most administrators identified the union as hindering effective practices, particularly hiring practices.

- Central office administrators (71%) and principals (68%) agree that schools make most hiring, budget, and program decisions.
- 8 of 13 administrators identified the union as a barrier toward effective governance.

**Shared Values**

Interviews reveal the school board and district administration in _________ share a vision, have a common mission and approach it with solidarity. They are well supported and respected by building administrators: “The district exudes a lot of trust in people down the line.” Interviews reveal the barrier toward effectively articulating and modeling shared values in _________ is the union. Perceived as the “weak link in the district,” union politics are perceived as impeding effective governance and demonstration of shared values. Eight of thirteen administrators identified an extremely “tight contract” as a barrier to re-invention.” Questionnaire results show a relatively low area of agreement that shared values are demonstrated across the district.

The most visible demonstration of shared values in _________ is the conscious attention to and use of data to guide student achievement efforts. Interview results reveal that since the introduction of in-district assessments six years ago, using data and the strategic plan to inform building direction has become a common habit. “Accountability has given a sense of solidarity.”

- Central office administrators (71%) and principals (68%) agree the school board, district administration and employee representatives model shared values.
- Central office administrators (86%) and principals (96%) agree district leadership seeks feedback from students staff and parents about the learning climate.

**Learning Partnerships**

The district benefits from intentional community-based alliances. Most administrators interviewed specifically mentioned the strong role played by the superintendent in developing community connections over the past several years. Ongoing alliances include Parent Network, District Mobility Task Force, crisis teams and Safe Town (to address civility and safety). Several administrators said the district has “done a good job” developing faith partnerships.

Examples of business partnerships include committee involvement and work-based learning opportunities for students, as well as “typical job shadowing and booster club” support. While parents volunteer in classrooms, are involved in PTA and Site Councils, one principal pointed out the parents who volunteer are “not necessarily the ones we need
to have.” Conscious public relations efforts have kept the community informed about the Gates grant and the attributes. One principal expressed the need for the district to also make conscious effort to engage the public in the area of assessment, as “parents do not necessarily feel good about all the accountability.”

The most frequently mentioned roles for community participation included Site Councils, Reading Foundation and PTA. Each year a Harris survey is distributed to the community, and results are used to inform the strategic plan. However, questionnaire results show relatively low levels of agreement across the board that parents and community have authentic involvement in instructional decisions.

- 3 of 5 central office administrators, and 5 of 8 principals agree parents are involved.
- 3 of 5 central office administrators, and 6 of 8 principals agree business are involved.
- Questionnaire results in response to parent involvement in instructional decisions show low levels of agreement, as only 50% of principals and 36% of central office administrators agree (36% remained neutral).

Staff Development

The perception of central office administrators and principals is that staff development services are “fragmented and in need of focus.” One administrator describes current efforts as having “no specific mandate.” More than half the principals identified the need for a more “efficient” system that would align services. Most agree that the majority of offerings reflect the district-wide literacy focus, but are only “loosely tied” to the strategic plan and building initiatives. Several administrators suggested that if the district were to “raise the bar” of staff development, the attributes could provide a guiding framework.

Seven of eight principals say there are good financial resources available to meet staff development needs. The current system involves a teacher in each school who serves as professional development coordinator. School personnel then make selections from a “multiplicity of offerings.” While principals overwhelmingly agree they have autonomy and flexibility in how to approach staff development, the general feeling is that it is “hard to do building work, and a district-wide focus would allow more to be done.”

- Central office administrators (64%) and principals (55%) agree the district invests appropriate resources in adult learning and leadership development.
- Central office administrators (93%) and principals (100%) agree learning opportunities include school-based professional development.
- Central office administrators (71%) and principals (68%) agree staff development involves time to analyze data and target efforts.
Technology Infrastructure

Six of thirteen administrators interviewed stated the need to update technology in buildings, and one mentioned “funding tension” toward accomplishing that. Most notable during interviews was a lack of evidence of a district-wide vision for technology. The Superintendent stated, “We want people to look at technology as an ally.” However, urgency was not expressed during interview sessions regarding the current state of technology in the district, nor were comments made about the impact of infrastructure needs on teachers or students. One principal commented, “The barrier isn’t the machines, it’s the attitude.” Little discussion emerged regarding technology integration. One administrator expressed the need to reorganize the technology service department and “remove the decision-making authority from network people” who are not educators. Questionnaire results demonstrate an indication of training needs, yet few mentioned that during interviews. The most frequent comments about technology referred to “pockets of success” throughout the district. Former participants in the Smart Tools Academy, and twelve Teacher Leadership Project teachers are described as “great models.”

- Central office administrators (86%) and principals (91%) agree adequate software is in place; 86% and 86% respectively are in agreement that basic hardware is in place.
- Central office (64%) and principals (64%) agree training is available.
- 6 of 13 interviewed agree current technology infrastructure is in need of work.
- Central office (64%) and principals (57%) agree there is access to technical support.

Summary

Questionnaire data and interviews confirm the district is a comprehensive and cohesive system guided by a well-respected superintendent and strategic plan. Among the strengths of the district are clarity of goals centered on student achievement with a solid focus on literacy, and strong and intentional community alliances. The district’s strategic plan is renewed yearly, and while viewed by building administrators as overly directive, serves as a working guide for district schools.

The highlight of the district is its working emphasis on the use of data across the district. Data appears to provide a philosophical and practical context for all decisions. _________ could serve as a model for other districts in the area of performance accountability; in particular the district developed functional level testing for ongoing assessment of math and reading goals.

While there are clear areas of strength, some concerns surfaced. Staff development services are in need of “refocusing.” They are perceived as fragmented and not efficiently aligned with district and building needs. While appreciative of the funding and autonomy they have in this area, most administrators feel professional development could be greatly improved as a resource.
Principals expressed desire for more flexibility with program decisions. While supportive of strategic planning goals, concern emerged that initiatives are frequently “mandates.” Principals are overwhelmed and believe redistribution of tasks within the central office could create a more efficiently run system and allow them “to do the good job they want to do” in their buildings.

Technology did not emerge as a high priority. Connecting technology with curriculum on the district level is seen as a necessary next step. There does not appear to be a vision for technology.

The teachers union and contract is perceived as an overwhelmingly barrier to school re-invention.

**Recommendations**

- Technical assistance to reorganize fragmented staff development services.
- Models of successful alignment of technology and curriculum at the district level; technical assistance in developing a district vision for technology.
- Encourage district to continue working with teachers/union regarding re-invention.

August 9, 2001

Washington School Research Center
This report summarizes the findings from data obtained through the TAGLIT (“Taking a Good Look at Instructional Technology”) online data-collection system, which primarily addresses the use of technology in teaching and learning. The analyses are designed to augment related data collection efforts on the School and Districts projects of the WSRC. Since the repository of all the data is comprised of initial Project findings, it will serve as the baseline for comparison to data collected at later points in the multi-year history of the project evaluation. The TAGLIT analyses will provide an examination of changes in teaching and learning in the area of technology during the targeted period of the projects, but will not constitute an overall evaluation.

Description and Approach

Summarizing TAGLIT information is no small task since data are collected online from five separate instruments designed for different grade levels of students, teachers, and school technology leaders. In addition, many items on the instruments are worded differently for students and teachers, even though they are designed to elicit the same information. The strategy for the current analysis was to analyze TAGLIT data separately for the District and School projects in order to observe any differences that might exist at the beginning of the evaluation.

Data analyses are based on five separate data files (Elementary Students, Elementary Teachers, Middle/HS Students, Middle/HS Teachers, and School Technology Leaders). The table below lists descriptive information for both of the projects:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>District Project</th>
<th>School Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Teachers (n)</td>
<td>2086</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High School Teachers (n)</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High School Students (n)</td>
<td>17790</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Students (n)</td>
<td>4625</td>
<td>806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Leaders (n)</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average school enrollment</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average instructional staff per school</td>
<td>36.52</td>
<td>23.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average support personnel per school (at least ½ time)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours (per week) of technology support</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>10.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As is apparent from Table 1, the School project is on a much smaller scale than the District project, and includes smaller schools. While the difference in the numbers of teachers is proportionate to the school size differences, the average support personnel (at least ½ time) per school substantially favors the schools in the School project. This advantage does not appear to affect the hours of technology support available to teachers on a per capita basis, however.

For the reasons discussed earlier, it was very difficult to create strict comparisons of the responses of the various groups to TAGLIT items. The key focus was on the response patterns emerging from the item analyses, which often included assimilating findings from several different data sources (i.e., different TAGLIT respondent data files).

Limitations

1. The analyses were conducted on data provided by SAS, the responsible agent for the accuracy and integrity of the data.

2. The findings of the study are not intended to generalize beyond the individual respondents of the TAGLIT instruments. Because respondents were not selected as a representative group, it cannot be assumed that non-respondents (teachers, students, and technology leaders) share similar characteristics or opinions of respondents.

3. This is a cross-sectional analysis, designed to focus on a particular set of data at one point in time, and does not constitute an overall evaluation of the project.

4. A strict comparison of items on the TAGLIT instruments between teachers and students was not always possible due to the different wording on the instruments.

Findings

While the TAGLIT data could be analyzed in a variety of ways, this report addresses the areas of technology skills, use of technology in the classroom, impact of technology on teaching and learning, access to technology and instructional support, and professional development. Each of the sections presents an analysis of key TAGLIT items. The following overall themes emerged and could represent the general findings of the analyses taken together.

1. Teachers and students in both projects report similar skill levels with various technology applications, however the Middle/High students in the School Project are slightly less confident than their counterparts in the District project on their technology skills in communication and research tools.

2. While teachers report that they integrate technology into their lessons, students report that it is not used frequently (especially with some applications).
3. Teachers (especially those in the School project) are generally more confident than the students about the impact of technology on how the classroom works.

4. Teachers are markedly dissatisfied with access to technical and instructional support, a finding that does not appear to be mitigated by differential funding available for District and School project schools.

5. Although students in both projects have roughly equivalent access to computers (including those with internet capability), teachers in the School project enjoy greater access than their counterparts in the District project. Schools in the School project spend approximately four times more on hardware for students than District project schools, and over eight times as much for software.

6. Teachers in the School project report greater levels of professional development activities than their counterparts in the District project, which may be due to differential funding levels.

**Technology Skills**

Elementary and Middle/High School students report strong skills in word processing, using email, and using the world wide web, but are not as confident with spreadsheets and the use of presentation software.

Teachers (both Elem. and Middle/High) reveal similar patterns with various technology applications. Elementary teachers report decidedly less confidence in their skills with presentation software than their Middle/High School counterparts, or students. Middle/High students are much more confident of their skill with presentation software than teachers of any level.

For the most part, teachers and Elementary students in the Districts project rate their technology skills with various applications equivalent to those in the Schools project. Middle/High School students in both projects indicate similar response patterns to most items. However, the Middle/High students in the School Project are a bit less confident than their counterparts in the District project on their technology skills in some areas. For example, 51% of the Middle/High students in the Schools project indicated the highest category of confidence in using email to send and receive messages (“I can teach others to do this”) compared to 71.6% of the students in the Districts projects. The Schools project (Middle/High) students also are less confident in their use of search engines to find information on the World Wide Web than the District project students (41.3% and 56.8% in the highest category of confidence, respectively).

**Using Technology in Class**

The reported difference in skill levels are not surprising since the students report that teachers do not often require the use of certain technologies in their classes. Word processing is required most often (compared to other applications), with spreadsheets, presentation software, and email very rarely used in class.
According to Table 2, about 63% of Middle/High student respondents in the District project report that technology is used once a week or less in their courses. (Responses of the Middle/High students in the School project are virtually the same on this item.)

Table 2

Overall Technology Use in the Classroom by Middle/High School Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the class where you use technology the most often, how often do you use it?</th>
<th>% Respondents (Middle/High School Students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost Never</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Once a Month</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Once a Week</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than Once a Week</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slightly over half (53.8%) of Middle/High School teacher respondents (and only 40.6% of Elementary teacher respondents) in the District project report that they integrate technology in their lessons, but there is no indication of the frequency with which students are required to use it. Responses are similar by teachers in the School project.

Impact of Technology on the Classroom

This section addresses the part of the TAGLIT that discusses how technology works in the classroom. Respondents were asked to indicate how the use of technology in teaching and learning affected several aspects of the classroom. Since respondents are both teachers (Elementary, and Middle/High School) and students (Middle/High School), this provides an opportunity to compare the perceptions of both on how technology has impacted the classroom.

A strict comparison of teacher and student responses on the TAGLIT is not possible, however, since in many cases the items are worded differently, or the response categories are not the same. This is due to the fact that there were different forms of the instrument designed for different response groups. The interpretation of the resulting data is therefore to be done with caution, and should focus on descriptive information for each group (student and teacher).

District Project Findings

Of the eight items in this section, students and teachers exhibited similar response patterns to the following:

Cooperative Learning
Interdisciplinary Activities
Giving/Receiving Extra Help  
Assessment of Student Work  

The following table on cooperative learning illustrates a case in which both teachers and students (Middle/HS) believe that cooperative learning is occurring as a result of technology in teaching and learning. Generally speaking, 57% to 61% of the teachers indicated that technology encouraged cooperative learning either quite a bit or very much, whereas a similar pattern was revealed in the Middle/HS student responses.

Table 3  

Cooperative Learning (Middle/High Teachers and Students, and Elementary Teachers)  
Teachers: As a result of your use of technology in teaching and learning, are you more inclined to involve students in cooperative, not competitive learning?  
Students: In your class where technology is used the most, do students interact with each other, learning from and with each other?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Middle/HS Students</th>
<th>Middle/HS Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Sometimes</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Somewhat</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Most of the Time</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Quite a Bit</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, All the Time</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Very Much</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>17790</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>2086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two things are evident from the findings presented in Table 3. First, the teachers and students have about the same perception of the impact of technology on encouraging cooperative learning. Second, a sizeable percentage of the respondents (48% of students, and 38%-42% of teachers) still do not indicate that the use of technology in teaching and learning strongly affects cooperative learning.

On many of the items in this section (Use of Technology in the Classroom), however, the Middle/HS students have quite a different perception of the impact of technology on class than do teachers (either Middle/HS, or Elementary). An illustration of this difference is in the area of how engaging the work is to students.
Table 4

Nature of Schoolwork (Middle/High Teachers and Students, and Elementary Teachers)

Teachers: “As a result of your use of technology in teaching and learning, are you more inclined to involve students in activities that they find engaging?”

Students: “In your class where technology is used the most, do students show interest in schoolwork?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Middle/HS Students</th>
<th>Middle/HS Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Sometimes</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Somewhat</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Most of the Time</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Quite a Bit</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, All the Time</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Very Much</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17789</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>2086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions are worded a bit differently, but both relate to how engaging the class work is in connection to technology. As noted in Table 4, students are less likely than teachers to indicate that technology is connected to being engaged with schoolwork. Almost 60% of the students responded “no,” or “yes, sometimes,” to this question, which does not strongly endorse the view that students show interest in schoolwork in classes where technology is used the most.

Another of the areas that indicates differences between students and teachers is in the area of “higher thinking skills.” According to Table 5, the student responses indicate that the work in classes utilizing technology does not appear to have an impact on the “higher order” thinking involved. Over 60% of the Middle/HS students who responded indicated that these classes either did not call for complex and analytical thinking, or that it only occurred sometimes. This is quite at variance with teachers’ responses that indicated much stronger effects of the use of technology on higher level thinking involvement.
Table 5

Higher Thinking Skills (Middle/High Teachers and Students, and Elementary Teachers)

Teachers: As a result of your use of technology in teaching and learning, are you more inclined to involve students in activities that require higher level thinking skills?

Students: In your class where technology is used the most, do students solve complex problems, analyze and evaluate information, and form opinions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Middle/HS Students</th>
<th>Middle/HS Teachers</th>
<th>Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Sometimes</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Somewhat</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Most of the Time</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Quite a Bit</td>
<td></td>
<td>17790</td>
<td>2083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, All the Time</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Very Much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the response patterns in this area of the TAGLIT indicate that teachers are generally more positive about the effects of technology on teaching and learning than are the students. Students more often agree with teachers that grading is changing, learning is cooperative and more interdisciplinary, and that getting extra help when needed is occurring more often. However, they are not as likely as teachers to believe that there is greater interest in schoolwork, or that the work is more complex or analytical.

District vs. School Project Findings

Middle/High teachers in the Schools project were more confident than the District teachers that technology was having an impact in the classroom on the following dimensions: involving students in cooperative learning, interdisciplinary learning, engaging activities, and assessing student achievement. Middle/High teachers in the School project also were much more confident of the impact of technology on the classroom (on all the dimensions described) than Middle/High students in the School project.

Access to Technology and Instructional Support

Based on the responses to the TAGLIT, teachers in the District project report sufficient access to the “basic tools” of word processing, database and/or spreadsheet applications. The majority of teachers also report at least “somewhat adequate” access to communication tools (e.g., email), and research and problem-solving tools (e.g., www). Middle/High teachers in the Schools projects were more satisfied than those in the
District projects with access to basic tools for instructional technology (e.g., word processing, database, and spreadsheet).

Teacher respondents are markedly less satisfied with access to technical and instructional support, however. Over 75% of teachers in the District project report “not enough” or “barely enough” time that support personnel are available to set up, maintain and repair hardware, and to teach individual staff members how to use technology. Although there are no established norms established for sufficient technical support, the Technology Leaders’ responses (District project) indicate that the yearly expenditure for technical support per instructional staff member was approximately $40.

Like teacher respondents in the District project, School project teachers are markedly dissatisfied with access to technical and instructional support. For example, over 70% of all School project teachers report “not enough” or “barely enough” time that support personnel are available to set up, maintain and repair hardware. The dissatisfaction does not appear to be mitigated by higher expenditures of funds for technical support, however. The Technology Leaders’ responses in the School project indicate that the yearly expenditure for technical support per instructional staff member was approximately $492 – over ten times that spent in District schools.

Technology Leaders reported the following ratios relating to access to different technology elements. Although students in both projects have roughly equivalent access to computers (including those with internet capability), teachers in the School project enjoy greater access than their counterparts in the District project. Schools in the School project spend approximately four times more on hardware for students than District project schools, and over eight times as much for software.

Table 6

Ratios of Technology Availability by District and School Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average computers per instructor</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average computers per student</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average computers w/internet access per instructor</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average computers w/internet access per student</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hardware expenditure per student</td>
<td>$41.88</td>
<td>$159.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average software expenditure per student</td>
<td>$5.35</td>
<td>$42.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional Development

From 72% to 75% of teachers in the District project reported that they participated in 14 hours or less of technology-related professional development activities in the past school
year. Technology Leaders indicated that an average $71 of technology funds was spent on professional development per instructional staff member for the year. Taken together, this is quite a meager investment (both by teachers, and in funds expended) in preparation for integrating technology in teaching and learning.

The amount of time per year devoted to (technology-related) professional development activities by Elementary teachers in the School project differed quite markedly from those in the District project. Over 64% of the School project Elementary teachers reported at least 15 hours of professional development activity the past year, in contrast to about 25% of the District project teachers. Middle/High teachers in the School project indicated much greater levels of professional development than those in the District projects as well.

Leaders’ responses in the School project indicated that $371 per instructional staff member was spent on professional development, compared to the $71 spent on teachers in the District project. Perhaps the increased funding levels promoted more professional development activity.

**Technology Factors**

An exploratory factor analysis on the elementary and middle/high school teachers files yielded four factors (the same for both data files): Technology Impact, Technology Skills, Technology Access, and Technology Support. Tables 6 and 7 summarize the items comprising each factor. Because these factors identify common items, they can be used to represent those items in subsequent data analyses procedures. (A comparison of these factors for each school with the total sample of schools is available under separate cover.) Table 8 presents the average factor values for aggregated schools and the Elementary and Middle/High teachers in both School and District projects.
Table 6

Summary of TAGLIT Items for Varimax Orthogonal Four-Factor Solution – Middle/High Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Coefficients</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1: Impact of Technology on the Classroom (α = .93)</strong></td>
<td>&quot;As a result of your use of technology in teaching and learning, are you more inclined to:&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>involve students in cooperative, not competitive, learning?</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>involve students in activities that require higher level thinking skills?</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>involve students in interactions with the world outside of school?</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>involve students in interdisciplinary activities?</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>involve students in activities that they find engaging?</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>find the time to work with students who need extra help?</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>serve as coach, not lecturer or whole-group discussion leader?</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assess student achievement based on products, progress, and effort?</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2: Technology Skills (α = .77)</strong></td>
<td>&quot;How far along are you in learning to:&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use a word processor to create documents?</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use a spreadsheet to enter and calculate numbers?</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use presentation software to create a presentation?</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use email to send and receive messages?</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use a search engine to find information on the www?</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3: Access to Technology (α = .82)</strong></td>
<td>&quot;In light of your school's instructional technology goals, how would you characterize access to:&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>basic tools (e.g., word processing, database and/or spreadsheet)?</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communication tools (e.g., email, web page authoring, etc.)?</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research and problem-solving tools (e.g., CD-ROM, www ...etc.)?</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 4: Technology Support (α = .74)</strong></td>
<td>&quot;In light of your school's instructional technology goals, how would you characterize the amount of time that support personnel are available to . . .&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>set up, maintain and repair hardware?</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teach individual staff members how to use technology?</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 2133
Table 7

Summary of TAGLIT Items for Varimax Orthogonal Four-Factor Solution – Elementary Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1: Impact of Technology on the Classroom (( \alpha = .94 ))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;As a result of your use of technology in teaching and learning, are you more inclined to:&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involve students in cooperative, not competitive, learning?</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involve students in activities that require higher level thinking skills?</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involve students in interactions with the world outside of school?</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involve students in interdisciplinary activities?</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involve students in activities that they find engaging?</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find the time to work with students who need extra help?</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serve as coach, not lecturer or whole-group discussion leader?</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assess student achievement based on products, progress, and effort?</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2: Technology Skills (( \alpha = .80 ))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;How far along are you in learning to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use a word processor to create documents?</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use a spreadsheet to enter and calculate numbers?</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use presentation software to create a presentation?</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use email to send and receive messages?</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use a search engine to find information on the www?</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3: Access to Technology (( \alpha = .85 ))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In light of your school's instructional technology goals, how would you characterize access to:&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic tools (e.g., word processing, database and/or spreadsheet)?</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication tools (e.g., email, web page authoring, etc.)?</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research and problem-solving tools (e.g., CD-ROM, www . . ,etc.)?</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4: Technology Support (( \alpha = .75 ))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In light of your school's instructional technology goals, how would you characterize the amount of time that support personnel are available to . . .&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>set up, maintain and repair hardware?</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teach individual staff members how to use technology?</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( N = 2230 \)
Table 8
Comparison of Average Factor Scores for Schools and Teachers in School and District Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Technology Skills</th>
<th>Technology Impact</th>
<th>Technology Access</th>
<th>Technology Support</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Project Schools</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Teachers</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High Teachers</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Project Schools</strong></td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Teachers</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High Teachers</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This report is a supplement to preliminary findings presented in the baseline report of January 2001. It is based on the information gathered during the site visit on April __, 2001, for the purpose of determining the progress of the grant and to verify activities noted in the quarterly reports submitted by the district throughout the year. The site visit included a representative focus group of principals, a representative focus group of nine teachers, an hour long interview with the Superintendent, an interview with the evaluation coordinator and member of the Gates Steering Committee, and four school visits to verify selected self-reported activities.

This report also includes discussion of the context in which change is taking place, identifies specific attribute areas in which efforts are proving successful or challenging, delineates the current role and perception of technical assistance, and puts forward __________ School District’s plan for continued progress in the second year of the grant.

__________ School District has an active Gates Steering Committee. First year efforts concentrated on building leadership capacity throughout the district. This has included ongoing leadership training for principals and individual school ‘design teams.’ Each school staff was encouraged to design improvement plans within the context of their needs while still reflecting district goals. Evaluation activity results confirm principals perceive district leadership as supportive in terms of clarity of expectations, encouragement, budget, and staff development. The steering committee has approved comprehensive Plans to Plan developed by all twenty-one schools. A district developed long-range planning template was distributed to guide implementation of plans this fall.

Data collection has continued since January. District personnel cooperate fully with all evaluation activities. The district evaluation coordinator has successfully facilitated data collection and ensured an evaluation coordinator is at each school to assist in the process. A random sample of 386 teacher questionnaires was distributed with an excellent return rate of 97 percent. An outstanding 98 percent of the requested sample of 1440 student questionnaires was completed. Results of data analysis related to teacher and student questionnaires, and on-line technology assessments will be presented separately.

District Context

School improvement efforts in __________ are progressing steadily within a highly data driven environment and guided by remarkably clear and measurable goals. Nine collaboratively developed anchor goals comprise a well-communicated strategic plan that
clearly “guides the ship.” The plan embodies district goals and is continually refined by district staff and the wider community. Academic standards, assessment, and accountability are at the heart of the strategic plan. While district goals are defined as “non-negotiable,” each school staff may decide how to reach those goals within the context of their school. Gates grant efforts are intentionally woven directly into the existing strategic plan, allowing a singularity of purpose.

The current superintendent has led the district for seven years and is well respected by staff and community. His predecessor was in place for five years. Prior to their combined tenure, a long-term superintendent presided over the district from a time when enrollment numbered just three thousand. ________ School District has grown extensively in the past two decades and is presently comprised of 14,000 students and over a thousand staff.

Composition of the ________ community is generally white (80%) middle class, somewhat professional, but mostly blue-collar workforce. There is a smaller percentage of Hispanic rural farm workers, and an even smaller representation of other ethnic groups. The community is routinely involved with the district. A decade long school and business partnership of twenty-five members began as a focus group to deal with drug and alcohol issues. Partnerships evolved to address school safety, crisis response plans, and learning improvement efforts, particularly those related to literacy.

The six-member school board has undergone little change in recent years. The active board meets weekly, including three work sessions at different school sites each month. Board members share fundamental beliefs that are embedded in the goals of the strategic plan, guide governance of the district, and determine accountability and assessment practices in ________ schools. Among these guiding beliefs is a commitment to shared decision making as common practice, and the conviction that for learning to take place, the district must first ensure a safe and orderly environment.

The paramount concern of the school board is literacy. The use of data to inform teaching and learning is fundamental to how the district does business. The origin for the routine use of assessment began with the realization that if students cannot read, they cannot achieve. The emphasis on data, assessment and accountability emerged five years ago when an increasing number of high school students were earning failing grades. The board resolved to discover the reason, and data guided that exploration. Their research led to recognition that Language Arts grades determine other core academic grades. The superintendent stated, “We realized our students were not reading very well. That was a light bulb moment.” The immediate response was intense teacher discussion and a new board goal. To provide students with a foundation for success, the board determined that ninety percent would reach reading level by third grade. This, and the use of data to achieve the goal, became the pivotal focus of the strategic plan.

Growing success with research-based decisions led to the emergence of assessment and accountability as a tangible force in _________. In 1995, efforts toward incorporating longitudinal data across all levels met with staff resistance. However, with low student performance on WASL as an impetus, district leadership encouraged the development of
an in-house diagnostic assessment. Functional level testing was developed—and used. “Suddenly, people started to want more data.” District leaders recently realized the extent to which assessment is now common practice when in the fall of 2000 groups of teachers across the district asked for more data, and “hoped” to conduct pre-tests with students at the start of the school year.

_________’s central office staff consider their comprehensive assessment system as “the biggest thing we have going for us.” Quantifiable goals are evident at every level. Principals speak of “the power of data.” The elementary level is committed to the third grade 90% reading goal, middle schools have strict accountability standards, and promotion standards are adhered to in elementary and middle schools. A high school goal is that at least 85% will pass WASL when required by the state. _________ is a model district in terms of accountability and widespread use of assessment tools. District goals are quantifiable, assessment is ongoing, data is used to measure growth and determine curriculum, and staff uses data as common practice.

The superintendent contends all improvement efforts “must be within the context of our community.” That statement reflects the philosophy of the board. Community participation in the strategic planning process includes site councils in three-quarters of the schools, a Parent Network and Advisory Council, and input obtained from a Black-Harris community-wide survey administered every other year. The superintendent indicates results from “polling our customers” convinces staff that promotion standards would be supported by the community (95% of parents, 97% of the wider community). The expectation is that principals will use Black/Harris data to measure progress and design future plans. Principals demonstrate clear understanding of that expectation.

_________ School District is not without challenges. Existing pressures include a union agreement that has hindered change and “does not allow for organizational stability.” Most of the current contract was developed prior to the current superintendent’s predecessor, who then “went head to head with the union for five years.” A contentious strike was the result—and a new superintendent. Most _________ administrators identify contract issues “as hindering decision-making and reform.”

Tension related to union issues was identified as an area of concern at the beginning of the evaluation process. While the superintendent indicates there is some improvement, those who “do not want change” may include as many as a third of the teaching staff. His hope is that the planning year results in a realization that change can make a difference for students; that “conversations will always be about kids and learning, not adult issues.”

A new district challenge emerged from recent data analysis. The results of data analysis point to sixth grade as “down time” when little academic growth takes place. Middle school issues have taken the forefront, and the district is focusing on that transition year. Teacher teaming to potentially aid in that transition is under exploration.

District personnel have identified a need to “do a better job with ESL students.” They
have begun to explore ways of addressing this issue to meet the needs of those students.

Leadership changes for the upcoming year are minimal in the central office; however, several key high school principal positions need to be filled. The strategic plan and school improvement efforts and expectations will play a central role in the hiring process.

**Attributes**

Many of the characteristics of a High Achievement School District were effectively in force in _________ prior the Gates grant. However, the superintendent indicates efforts related to the grant have “brought the focus into greater clarity.” Initially, anxious principals expressed concern the grant required yet another layer on top of existing expectations. “We have gradually realized the attributes can be used as a framework.” Principals now view the attributes as “the horsepower to keep us going.”

Performance accountability is a highlight characteristic in this district. Attention to assessment, accountability, and data are common practice. Although considered a model district in terms of assessment practices the superintendent indicates they continue to “refine the area of performance accountability.” The use of data is such an integral part of the system, it has become a dynamic factor as better ways to measure and inform student learning are continually explored at all levels.

Distributed leadership, effective governance, and learning partnerships continue as areas of particular strength. There is a clear literacy focus, student support systems are in place, principals express confidence that autonomy exists at each site, and the wider community is regularly solicited for feedback on school-related issues.

Despite effective district functioning within the context of these attributes, a stumbling block generated by long-standing union issues sporadically materializes. Ensuing focus on adult concerns rather than student-learning issues is an impediment to progress in the area of shared values. The tendency of the “old guard” to slow down school improvement efforts is an existing problem and most evident on the secondary level. This was demonstrated in discussions with the teachers during the recent evaluation visit. The negative perspective was represented in the focus group and clashed with teachers immersed in and excited by school improvement efforts.

Staff development is falling into place as the central office works to meet expressed site needs. The district’s staff development committee, with the support of project coaches, is developing a strategic plan for adult learning. Adult learning opportunities are perceived as less of a menu of options as each school refines their needs. Principals indicate increased satisfaction with the level of response from district staff development.

The district technology infrastructure is gradually coming together. Teachers will soon have access to an assessment database. An increased number are involved in TLP and Intel trainings. Informed by input from the Gates sponsored ISTE report, a district level
position was created for an Executive Director of Information Technology. The degree of use and effectiveness of technology in teaching and learning continues to evolve.

Much of _________ School District’s success within a broad spectrum of the Attributes of High Achievement School District can be attributed to clarity. District direction is extremely well delineated. Literacy is a clear district-wide focus. Collaboratively developed K-12 goals are embodied in the strategic plan. Goals are clear to the entire school community, are attainable, and provide a guiding framework for school efforts. While the expectation is that schools move in the same direction and reach district goals, there is autonomy in determining the way in which they will do so.

Plan of Action

The superintendent sees his role in the process as twofold: (1) providing support to schools in the change process, and (2) ensuring the strategic plan is the guiding framework for improvement plans. The first year was designated as a planning year. The message was: “Go slow to go fast.” The initial step was to develop and communicate a clear process, then focus on building capacity for change within each school.

Principals were first to engage in the process. “We eventually realized the district was not telling us what to do. They were saying they want to support us doing it.” Project coaches have provided ongoing leadership training for principals and design teams. Leadership opportunities will continue this summer as a team accompanies the superintendent to Harvard. While teachers are not involved in that training, the assumption is principals will use the experience to plan staff retreats in August.

Design Teams were formed at each school to develop well-researched Plans to Plan to refine and implement in the second year. The Gates Steering Committee has now approved plans from all twenty-one _________ schools. Schools are now to engage in long range planning, and move toward actual implementation. A district-developed planning template will support that work. Plans will be reviewed each year.

District support has included resources for each school staff to meet. “This forced administrators and teachers to dialogue in powerful conversations. There was time to talk about the real stuff.” One elementary teacher expressed, “We used to have ideas, but no money, so it was hard to identify and focus.” Another interjected, “Gates has invented time!” Collaborative meetings, study groups, and planning sessions have been ongoing.

Principals and the majority of the representative group of teachers are aware of the Attributes of High Achievement Schools, and use them as a context for improvement plans. The extent of knowledge of the attributes varies from site to site. However, elementary teachers appear to have incorporated them and welcomed the potential of change to a greater extent than have secondary teachers. The superintendent confirmed this in response to a question posed as a semantic differential regarding the level of readiness at each level. He indicated elementary schools are well on their way, but middle schools and high schools hover at the mid-point between ‘embryonic stage’ and ‘ready to
Middle school principals, and potentially staff, appear in particular need of support in developing a clear vision for school improvement at the transitional middle school level.

The superintendent also expressed emerging concern regarding how to effectively filter change to the classroom level and encourage people to work in teams. Principals also express concern about how to get teachers to change practices. Gates initiatives are considered “the catalyst to move against complacency and tradition.” Union leadership has been supportive to date. In terms of the level of penetration of the vision to teachers, while more frequently positive, attitudes at the present appear mixed. Contrary views are demonstrated by sets of teacher responses that surfaced in the teacher focus group:

- “Right now it’s about the principal and the design team.”
- “There’s talk about giving Gates money back--getting on with business as usual.”
- “There is a fair amount of skepticism.”
- “Everything is so mandatory.”
- “Someone is getting paid…”
- “We have found our voice!”
- “Everyone is involved—it’s exciting!”
- “Lots of brainstorming.”
- “We are looking harder at what it takes for kids to succeed.”
- “We now have a lot of focus.”

The depth of penetration to the classroom appears dependent on principal and design team leadership. The extent to which classroom practice is addressed in Plans to Plan remains to be seen as long-range plans are translated into action. One teacher indicates a sense of hope: “People are really beginning to realize these things might come about!”

Role of Technical Assistance

Information contained in the Gates Foundation January 2001 Evaluation Report have been used by the district as a resource to inform future planning efforts. Recommendations were well considered.

Project coaches are considered “an excellent resource.” Although they were assigned, the superintendent indicated they are “very lucky.” To date project coaches have primarily been involved with district leadership training and elementary staff team building. The plan is to expand their role in the upcoming year. Tony Wagner conducted a workshop for all administrators, and will return for the August leadership retreat.

Technical assistance offered through monthly gatherings engenders mixed reaction. “I have left with more questions than answers.” When presented with the vision of change as posed by Thomas Vander Ark, the superintendent is confidence they are on track, “…yet when listening to some of the others, I get the impression the belief is that the only
solution is size.” The opportunity to exchange ideas with other teams is seen as the primary value of Foundation sponsored grantee meetings.

Summary

This report supports the assessment of a principal who stated with confidence, “We are well on course.” _________ School District is well on course. Emphasis on assessment and accountability contributes to the district’s success. The use of data continues to provide a philosophical and practical context for decisions. District practices are effective, a guiding strategic plan is in place, goals are stated in clear and measurable terms, and there is firm focus on literacy. Intentional connections with community are routine, creating a strong foundation of support. Clarity of purpose and clarity of process with regard to school improvement efforts characterizes progress to date.

Principals express a new sense of solidarity with district leadership. Change efforts are well aligned with the strategic plan, creating a more centered sense of purpose. “We have come a long way. There has not been a radical change of direction, but Gates has made us more intentional and accountable.” Their former perception of the highly respected superintendent as a ‘micro-manager’ has shifted dramatically. Principals feel they have autonomy and characterize district leadership as extremely supportive. However, there is less evidence of collaboration among the principals. Most responses are in the context of relationship between individual schools and the district. While a strong and positive sense of autonomy exists, a less positive aspect is the perceived isolation of schools. Collaboration between principals can be powerful force, and an effective support system.

The superintendent identifies the Theory of Change Model as a valuable resource that helped “clarify our direction.” He has customized the template and used it with the school board and at each school as a framework to demonstrate “what we are about.” All Plans to Plan have been approved. In the fall each school will commence long range planning. Because district leadership encouraged design teams to “Go slow to go fast,” not all are at the implementation stage. The process is moving them in that direction.

Although one principal stated, “People have reevaluated their guiding beliefs,” not all personnel are supportive of school improvement efforts. Lingering union issues remain a potential hindrance to success. Shared values clearly characterize the school board, administrators, much of the community, and many teachers. What the superintendent and principals identify as a significant number of “the old guard” underscores the challenge of managing union issues while continuing to move forward. Because of those issues and the complacency of some staff, principals and the superintendent share concern about how to effectively filter school change to all teachers and into classroom practice.

This summary is reflective of the mid-year baseline report, with some encouraging exceptions. Staff development is perceived as less fragmented and more supportive. Technology did not emerge as a critical area of focus in conversations with principals or teachers. District personnel are engaged in developing a vision for technology. In a district committed to using data, results of the TAGLIT on-line assessment will likely be
considered in those efforts. Infrastructure improvements and recent creation of a dedicated leadership position indicates enhanced attention to technology.

Recommendations:

- Provide focused support to middle school leadership and staff in developing clear vision for middle level improvement plans.

- Continue attentiveness to manage and balance union issues to best ensure success as school improvement plans reach the level of implementation.

- Provide ongoing support and training to assist principals, design teams, and teachers in exploring how to penetrate change at the classroom level. Ensure long term plans in each school adequately address classroom practice.