



CONSORTIUM FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

# Building District Capacity for System-Wide Instructional Improvement in Jefferson County Public Schools

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WORKING PAPER

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## Executive Summary

This report summarizes findings from one component of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education's (CPRE) evaluation of the General Electric Foundation's (GEF) *Developing Futures*<sup>TM</sup> in Education program in Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). The purpose was to closely analyze the district's capacity to support system-wide instructional improvement. To understand how JCPS, one of the four *Developing Futures*<sup>TM</sup> districts that were examined, built capacity for system-wide instructional improvement, our study focused on a single, overarching question: to what extent has JCPS central office adopted and institutionalized the seven core principles of *Developing Futures*<sup>TM</sup>?

This executive summary provides a brief explanation of the findings from the JCPS analysis that emerged from the study. The analyses presented in this summary are based on interview and survey data gathered between January and April of 2012. The CPRE research team conducted in-person interviews with 41 stakeholders in JCPS, including 15 central office staff members in leadership roles (including the superintendent), 20 principals, 3 board of education members, and 3 external partners.

To complement and support these qualitative data, a detailed survey was administered to principals in the spring of 2012. The survey focused largely on principals' perceptions of central office capacity, including clarity of vision, openness to collaboration, coherence and alignment of instructional supports, responsiveness to principal needs or concerns, and overall accountability. Of JCPS principals, 104 completed the survey for a response rate of 73 percent.

We studied the districts' progress in scaling up and institutionalizing the seven core elements<sup>1</sup> of *Developing Futures*<sup>TM</sup>:

1. **Internal constituency engagement.** The district engages stakeholders at all levels of the system, and establishes common vision and buy-in for improvement efforts.
2. **External constituency engagement.** The district engages partner organizations and institutions, parents and the community; and effectively communicates about reform efforts.
3. **Curriculum and instruction.** The district communicates and supports a system-wide vision for instructional improvement.
4. **Professional development for instruction.** The district delivers high-quality professional development on curriculum, instruction, standards, and assessment.
5. **Professional development for leadership.** The district delivers high-quality professional development on leadership or management.
6. **Management capacity.** The district collects and uses data, attracts and develops talent, and evaluates staff performance.

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<sup>1</sup> These seven reform elements were identified through a review of GEF program materials and documentation, and through a close analyses of each district's reform trajectory over the life of the grant.

7. **Evaluation.** The district monitors and evaluates reform efforts.

When we consider how the school system operated prior to the *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> in Education program—that is, when we focus on its growth and development rather than its performance relative to an absolute standard—the progress is evident. There is reason to be optimistic about the districts’ progress as a result of *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup>. At the time of data collection for this report, JCPS was amidst two major events: the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and an extensive curriculum management audit by Phi Delta Kappa (PDK). JCPS is a large district operating under site-based decision-making legislation, a characteristic that influenced the consistency of reform implementation. To this end, district leaders and the GEF steering committee utilized a shared decision-making approach to plan and implement reforms. Internal and external constituency engagement was strong overall. This paved the way for curriculum standardization across the district, which the adoption of the CCSS has reinforced. Attempted shifts in instructional practice are best described as movement away from “teaching the program,” and toward instituting instructional best practices. Respondents reported improvement in instruction, but with inconsistently implemented results, leaving much work still to be done.

JCPS has made significant progress in curriculum standardization, instructional vision setting, and formative assessment. Effort invested in cultivating ownership among stakeholders, internal and external, enabled progress and has cultivated a shared understanding of the new instructional expectations associated with the CCSS among central office staff, coaching staff, and principals. In particular, school-embedded instructional coaches have been instrumental for facilitating reform and bridging schools and central office.

Given the challenges inherent in implementing the CCSS before fully aligned state assessments are in place, it is not surprising that some are reluctant to fully embrace the CCSS if they are not held accountable for meeting those standards. As CCSS-aligned state assessments are brought online and implemented, commitment to instructional reforms may increase among teachers. Building coherence between curriculum, instruction, and assessment was a heavily communicated priority from the new superintendent. The superintendent’s vision for alignment would be aided by improvements in data systems, teacher assignment policies, central office organizational structures, and focused programming.

Preparing staff for the Common Core is different from effecting widespread changes in instruction. Data from JCPS reveal lingering concerns about both the consistency and quality of teaching practice within and across schools. Though there was widespread concern about ongoing funding for professional development, which is not primarily a problem of support, but rather stems from an absence of fully developed feedback loops. Through heavy investment in student data systems and training, JCPS has made progress in building capacity to differentiate between what is working and what is not (both at the classroom and program level). Too often, however, these analyses do not appear to produce decisions

and actions to address underperformance or to do more of what works and less of what does not. Using data to refine implementation of program and inform data are the next, critical step for JCPS as it seeks to prepare teachers and students for the Common Core State Standards.

## Introduction

This report summarizes findings from one component of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education's (CPRE) evaluation of the General Electric Foundation's (GEF) *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> in Education program in Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). As described in the CPRE proposal and research design, the purpose was to closely analyze district capacity to support system-wide instructional improvement. Specifically, this phase focused on a single, overarching question: to what extent has the district central office adopted and institutionalized the core principles of *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup>? To answer this question, this evaluation assesses the Jefferson County Public School District's progress in scaling up and institutionalizing seven core elements of *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup>.

1. **Internal constituency engagement.** The district engages stakeholders at all levels of the system, and establishes common vision and buy-in for improvement efforts.
2. **External constituency engagement.** The district engages partner organizations and institutions, parents and the community; and effectively communicates about reform efforts.
3. **Curriculum and instruction.** The district communicates and supports a system-wide vision for instructional improvement.
4. **Professional development for instruction.** The district delivers high-quality professional development on curriculum, instruction, standards or assessment.
5. **Professional development for leadership.** The district delivers high-quality professional development on leadership or management.
6. **Management capacity.** The district collects and uses data, attracts and develops talent, and evaluates staff performance.
7. **Evaluation.** The district monitors and evaluates reform efforts.

These seven reform elements were identified through a review of GEF program materials and documentation, and through a close analyses of each districts' reform trajectory over the life of the grant). Based on a thorough review of the research and evaluation literature, a set of indicators was constructed to allow the research team to determine the extent to which there was evidence of effective practice in each of these seven areas. Each area was decomposed into a set of more specific, observable characteristics. Research instruments were designed to elicit evidence of these characteristics in descriptions of central office processes, functions, or overall capacity. Ratings were then assigned to each characteristic based on the prevalence of available evidence using a three-point scale:

1. **Strong implementation.** The district has reached a majority of key actors within the system.

2. **Moderate implementation.** The district has reached a considerable proportion of key actors within the system.
3. **Weak implementation.** There is little evidence of institutionalization across the sample.

This report provides ratings for JCPS for each indicator and its component characteristics, along with qualitative and survey evidence illustrating and supporting the ratings. At the time of data collection for this report, JCPS was amidst two major events: the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and an extensive curriculum management audit by Phi Delta Kappa (PDK). JCPS is a large district operating under site-based decision-making legislation, a characteristic that influenced the consistency of reform implementation. To this end, district leaders and the GEF steering committee utilized a shared decision-making approach to plan and implement reforms. Internal and external constituency engagement was strong overall. This paved the way for curriculum standardization across the district, which the adoption of the CCSS has reinforced. Attempted shifts in instructional practice are best described as movement away from “teaching the program,” and toward instituting instructional best practices. Respondents reported improvement in instruction, but with inconsistently implemented results, leaving much work still to be done.

Professional development was designed to support these efforts, with school-based coaches being viewed as highly effective in their customized support, rapport with teachers, and support for principals. Professional development for leadership existed for principals, but the district lacked evidence of formal structures or systems to develop leaders. Furthermore, the allocation of instructional personnel to schools was reported to be problematic. Additionally, professional evaluations lacked alignment to current district priorities and were viewed as outdated.

Data use was emphasized in JCPS, to be used for instructional decision-making, but informational technology infrastructure may be preventing principals’ and teachers’ full engagement with the use of district data. In sum, reforms associated with the GEF grant laid the groundwork for standardization and improvement required by the CCSS movement. JCPS is in a position to capitalize on this while still working to deepen teachers’ instructional capacity and become more deliberate in its development of leaders that will sustain the work going forward.

## **Methodology**

The analyses presented in this report are based on interview and survey data. In March 2012, the research team conducted in-person interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders in Jefferson County, including 15 central office staff members in leadership roles (including the superintendent), 20 principals, 3 board of education members, and 3 external partners. The interviews were divided into two parts. In the first part, respondents were asked to describe a high-priority project or initiative on which they were currently working. Follow-up questions focused on how the initiative became a priority, who was involved in its planning or implementation, how it was being implemented, and how progress was monitored and evaluated. The goal was to elicit evidence of the seven indicators *in the context of*

*current district priorities, practices, and routines.* For example, if district leaders described the introduction of a new elementary mathematics program as a high priority, the interviewer focused on the extent to which those efforts were collaborative, how they were communicated and supported, what the intended goal was, and how progress was measured.

All interviews were professionally transcribed. Transcripts were then coded using a deductive framework (that is, one that is derived from the research literature rather than being emergent from within the data themselves) based on the characteristics aligned with each characteristic. This allowed for transcript data to be sorted by indicator and specific characteristic. Finally, a participant matrix was constructed to generate ratings for each characteristic. For each participant and characteristic, the analyst indicated whether the characteristic was evident in the data, whether it was not evident in the data, or if no determination could be made based on the data. Characteristics that were evident in 80 percent or more of interviews for which sufficient data were available were scored a 3, and classified as *strong implementation*. Those that were evident in 50-79 percent of the interviews were scored a 2, and classified as *moderate implementation*; while those that were evident in less than half of the interviews were scored a 1, and classified as *weak implementation*. Occasionally, there were instances in which there was insufficient data across the interviews to make a determination about the prevalence of a given characteristic. In these cases, applicable qualitative data are described but no rating is assigned.

To complement and support these qualitative data, a detailed survey was administered to all JCPS principals in the spring of 2012. A total of 104 principals completed the survey—a 73 percent response rate. The survey focused largely on principals' perceptions of central office capacity, including clarity of vision, openness to collaboration, coherence and alignment of instructional supports, responsiveness to principal needs or concerns, and overall accountability. The survey offered a less detailed but broader view of principal perceptions of the district. In the sections that follow, survey findings are reported alongside qualitative data for each indicator.

### **Indicator 1: Internal Constituency Engagement**

Respondents reported high levels of internal constituency engagement overall, indicating that district stakeholders were solicited for input into district planning and decision-making. Stakeholders' ownership of reforms was evident, though more principals conveyed a slightly higher level of ownership than central office staff members. Due to their experiences with teacher collaboration within their buildings, and their own collaboration with other principals, more principals reported horizontal collaboration (cross-department or peer) than central office staff did. Large majorities of principals and central office staff reported that vertical collaboration between levels of the system occurred. Table 1 shows specific scores for this indicator.

<b>Table 1. Internal Constituency Engagement</b>	
Input is sought from internal stakeholders in planning and decision-making.	1
Internal stakeholders express ownership of or are “bought into” improvement projects or initiatives.	1
Horizontal collaboration (across departments) is evident.	1
Vertical collaboration (between levels) is evident.	1

Ownership of the initiatives to improve mathematics and science instruction in JCPS schools, and more recently those associated with implementation of the CCSS, was mostly present. Central office staff commitment to reforms, in the form of long hours and despite limited resources and staff, were motivated by the desire to fully support teachers. The resources that schools received to support reforms (e.g., staff developers) were valued by principals and contributed to their support and enthusiasm for reform. Seventy-seven percent of principals surveyed viewed themselves as a key component of the central office’s effort to improve student achievement. This sense of ownership and accountability was clearly articulated by one principal:

I’m the instructional leader. So, if a teacher is not performing well in my building, I can have the District send somebody out to work with him, but it’s my job as the instructional leader of that building to get in that classroom, do walk-throughs, talk with the kids, get in that classroom, see what the teacher is doing. (P10)

Principals generally spoke highly of the central office’s role in rolling out instructional initiatives. Three main factors were cited as drivers of the successful roll-out. First, the district was highly collaborative in both planning and implementing reforms. “We live in an environment where school-based [staff] have the authority to choose their curriculum,” one district partner explained. “So you have to sell rather than tell. And I think the collaborative way we did it helped the acceptance and the implementation to be a lot better.” (XTP01) Describing recent efforts to roll out the Common Core, a principal described district efforts as a “two-way street,” adding, “I think that is working well, to help teachers have their voices heard.” (P06) Echoing the importance of teacher buy-in, another principal suggested that even more was needed. “I would like to see a little bit more input in terms of from the teachers, because they are the ones in the trenches. They are the ones out there. They’re in the classroom everyday teaching this.” (P10)

Second, the new reforms were accompanied by a high level of support from the central office. As one principal summarized:

It’s well communicated, it’s staffed to work, materials are provided, the professional development is supported and has been provided. If it’s not rolled out well in a school, I think that it has a lot to do with the leadership in the school and the motivation of the staff to do it. (P12)

A third factor supporting implementation of instructional reforms was evidence of impact, which helped to overcome some initial resistance to the reforms. “I remember going into it thinking it’s a two or three year process to get everybody involved,” one principal explained. “And we’re now hitting the two or three year stage where we’re seeing results.” (P16) A similar pattern was evident in the district’s approach to roll out the CCSS. Teachers initially appeared reluctant to serve on a curriculum mapping committee. Principals suggested that the work required to learn the CCSS, such as addressing gaps between the curriculum and the CCSS through the writing of units, was challenging for teachers, even if they favored the adoption of the CCSS. As reforms continued resistance decreased, especially as teachers saw success with their students. “I think the more that they have tried and they have used it, the more they realize how much more interesting their class is,” remarked on principal. (P12) Another reflected:

With teachers I’ve had, they at first took the approach of, ‘I’ve never done it this way, so maybe it’s not’ — But then they took the approach of, ‘Wow. There are other teachers that are doing this and successful.’ (P14)

Despite principals’ commitment to reforms, there remained some concern about the amount of pressure exerted by the central office on schools, and the priorities that were communicated. “I feel like we’re pretty top heavy as far as everything is trickle down. Stuff is not trickled up like I would like,” one principal explained. “I do think people are working very hard...Sometimes I don’t know that we’re working on the right work.” (P09)

Another area of concern was a lack of clear communication about district focus and priorities. While 80 percent of principals agreed that the district conveyed an overall vision effectively, 54 percent also indicated that district policies and procedures change frequently, and just 65 percent reported that district leaders share consensus on priorities for school improvement. Voicing frustration with the range of initiatives schools were expected to implement, one principal remarked that what was needed the most was to “just protect the schools and narrow the focus, these are the things that are important to us right now as a district, and this is all we want you to worry about right now.” (P06) “We are so overwhelmed,” another principal explained. “Sometimes I don’t even know what’s a priority and what’s not.” (P09) One principal went so far as to shield his staff from district mandates:

There were no less than eight different initiatives for high schools. And I told my folks, ‘We can’t do all of these...You’re going to hear about this many things. I am your evaluator. I am only evaluating you on these two. So if they don’t like that you’re not playing ball over here, tell them to come see me.’ And that has given some folks room to then feel more confident in bringing in their own voice and saying, ‘This is what is important.’ (P13)



There was considerable evidence of horizontal collaboration, both among teachers within schools and among principals. Collaboration within schools happened in a context of professional development, support, and problem solving. Principals and district staff suggested that the work of teaching could be accomplished more efficiently and thoughtfully when planned with other teachers, especially in light of the new work with the CCSS. The increased emphasis on collaboration with peers through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiative supported this aim. “We have what I call really good instructional conversations, and that’s something that I’ve seen refined and changed over the last probably four to six years much more,” one principal reflected. (P09) A central office staff member gave a specific example of the type of focused, instructional conversation that grew out of the PLCs:

And they say, ‘Okay, all the Algebra I teachers meet. Okay, I got 10 kids that don’t know this standard, 10 that don’t know this. Tomorrow, we’re going to switch kids. I’ll take all the ones that don’t know this standard, and you take all the other ones’—And they switch off kids and they trade off in the way they work with them. (CO07)

Significant increases in test scores have been attributed to the prioritization of PLCs, which was spawned by turnaround strategies being implemented in the district. They were viewed as a way for schools to tap into local teacher expertise to develop in-house capacity and give teachers an opportunity to have professional conversations that foster collegiality.

Professional Learning Communities have helped a lot, because we tap into our own in-house resources; because teachers have a lot to offer if we just allow them to share what they know and give them the opportunity to have their own discourse, professional discourse. (P07)

Not surprisingly, PLCs were widely viewed as a primary mechanism for supporting the district’s Common Core work. As one principal explained, both the routine of meeting and the close focus on instruction made them an ideal vehicle.

Luckily I started with PLCs a year ago that meet weekly, daily, all the time, so we could infuse that Common Core right from the very beginning. Because if I didn’t have that, I mean I can’t imagine schools that don’t have that structure, they wouldn’t be meeting and discussing it all the time. (P14)

Collaboration among principals was both widespread and highly valued. Ninety percent of principals surveyed said that the central office supports principals’ collaboration with one another. “When I think about developing, growing as a leader, I think of the ways I can engage in collaboration first off with my peers,” one principal reflected. (P20)

Monthly district principal meetings and School Based Administrative Team (SBAT) meetings provided opportunities for principals to learn from one another and share strategies. Principals described these conversations as informal and social, but also extremely valuable. “It is social because we’re eating and talking and informal, but it’s the best PD,” one principal explained:

It is where as a new principal you can go and just really say, okay, I think I screwed this up, or help me, I don’t know what to do next. And again, it’s not evaluative. It’s just we’re trying to look out for each other. (P09)

In addition to emerging questions or challenges in their schools, principals also used the SBAT meetings to develop strategy around new district initiatives or requirements. For example, one principal described how the SBAT devised a strategy for responding to changes on state tests. In another case, a principal reported forming a professional learning community in which principals visited each other’s schools. Vertical collaboration was encouraged in JCPS. The central office invited coaches and teachers to participate on district committees. Coaches played a particularly important boundary-spanning role. They relayed vision and messages to schools, and feedback to central office leadership, increasing the presence of school voices in the central office.

For example, if an assessment comes out and the teachers feel that a question isn’t relevant or doesn’t match what they want us to be teaching, they let that be known to the staff developer, and the staff developer goes back and they have those conversations. And either it is tweaked, changed, or a rationale is given as to why that question was out there. So, I think that they are listening. (P02)

Despite these efforts, interview and survey data paint a complex picture of school-central office relationships, with principals essentially split. For instance, 70 percent of principals surveyed agreed that the central office utilized committees for sharing responsibility for certain policy decisions. However, only 62 percent reported that principals and central office staff collaborate to make the district run effectively, and 45 percent disagreed that there was close communication between central office and school leaders. Seventy percent reported that their opinions are valued at district meetings, but only 45 percent said that they have opportunities to provide input/feedback on district plans. In interviews, perspectives from principals on their relationship with the central office ranged from complete confusion to highly connected. “There is no contact with principals,” one principal explained. “I have no clue what they are talking about and felt out of the loop on what’s going on. There is just a lot of confusion.” (P18) Another told a very different story, remarking that “the content specialist and I are in constant communication...because she is invested with our school and with me... She knew what I was doing there all the time, because we meet informally, formally.” (P02)

For their part, central office staff seemed to think they had a fairly collaborative relationship with the schools. “I know all the principals and APs and counselors,” one staff member recounted. “And because I

know my colleagues and have been, if you will, one of them before, they have no problems with emailing me directly, and I ask them to do it. I ask teachers to do that, too.” (CO03)

The apparent inconsistency in principals’ views of the central office may be explained in part by the high level of decentralization in JCPS. Principals have considerable autonomy in their buildings, as well as different needs. It is possible that principals’ perspectives of their relationship with the central office were a function of their expectations, while the central office sought to use a consistent process for working with all schools.

**Indicator 2: External Constituency Engagement**

JCPS’s engagement with external constituents appeared to be strong. Most respondents felt that the district sought input from external stakeholders for planning and decision-making and that the district had successfully leveraged resources from external partners, including the GEF. Individual schools partnered with external groups more variably. Respondents were open to working with external partners to improve JCPS, who provided advisement and resources. Table 2 shows specific scores for this indicator.

<b>Table 2. External Constituency Engagement</b>	
Input is sought from external stakeholders in planning and decision-making.	3
A communication strategy to communicate to the public about reform activities is in place.	2
The district has leveraged resources from external stakeholders (not including GE Foundation) to support reform efforts.	3
School leaders have leveraged resources from external stakeholders to support reform efforts.	3
The district has leveraged resources from GE to support reform efforts.	*

\*Note. \*indicates insufficient data to make a determination about the prevalence of the given characteristic.

Central office staff described the district as having several close partners in government, business, higher education, and in the community. As one school board member explained:

Our chamber of commerce here has been very, very engaged. The mayor’s office has always been very engaged. Louisville is a community where everybody knows what the school system is doing. It’s not just this thing over here. It’s something that’s very much front and center, from the United Way to churches, to the temple, and everybody is willing to be involved and engaged. (SB03)

One critical role for external partners was to provide the district with feedback. Describing recent Common Core work, one central office staff member noted the important role played by universities, the state education office, and a national non-profit organization.

We're also asking anybody that would—you know, our university colleagues, our state colleagues—give us feedback on what you're seeing. We've asked Student Achievement Partners to really look at this, give us some feedback if you could, and we're learning and trying to glean everything we possibly can from them to help us understand better. (CO03)

The emphasis on developing external partnerships served multiple purposes. It leveraged resources in support of reform efforts and tapped into expertise and capacity outside of the system. It also helped to engage a wider set of constituents and the general public, which helped the community understand the district's reform agenda. A school board member explained the importance of communication with the public:

People...don't understand the complexity of what happens in public education. So I think that it's critical that the more people that we bring in and explain to them what the district looks like, and I think sometimes people think that it's always showing the good news stories, but you have to show the reality of what education is truly about...So I think that educating our students in the public schools is a community project. It's bigger than a district project. (SB02)

District communication with external constituencies occurred through channels like the internet, direct mail, community summits by the superintendent (invites community members in to discuss topics), school showcases, and television. Schools were also expected to communicate with parents. Additionally, the district conducted a survey of parents and the community every year about their attitudes toward the school system. School board members receive input from their constituencies. As one external partner mentioned, "I believe that there are many opportunities for the community to provide input to the district" (XTP03).

Numerous partnerships with organizations were reported by central office staff and principals, including Greater Louisville, Inc., the University of Louisville, the Urban League, Vanderbilt University, and the Kentucky Department of Education. Principals reported partnerships with organizations such as the Kentucky Center Fund for the Arts, the Toyota Family Literacy program, Louisville Metro Parks, and local manufacturing companies. Magnet schools appeared to have had the most active external engagement. In one example, a school's relationship with a local company resulted in financial support, engineers co-teaching with teachers, new technology, and a robotics program for students. In this case, the relationship was initiated by the principal. According to the superintendent, the district makes external partnerships and resources available to the schools and principals decide whether to engage them. Principals were open to partnerships, but cautious about embarking on partnerships that were not aligned to their schools' priorities.

I think the district also needs to [take the approach that] just because you can doesn't mean you should. Folks might bring you money, and sometimes you have to turn it down to say, 'That's absolutely necessary, but we're not there yet. Please give it to somebody else and then come see us in five years.' That's hard to do. (P13)

One of the strongest relationships between JCPS and an external organization was with Greater Louisville, Inc. (GLI, the local Chamber of Commerce). GLI has been an active partner with JCPS for decades. For example, GLI provided input on materials that helped JCPS to message and provide information to the community about the newly implemented CCSS. The superintendent meets with business leaders from GLI on a regular basis.

So when called upon, we're [GLI] there. When we see things going on, we ask. We want to help out. We are truly engaged with Jefferson County Public Schools from a business community perspective. We were actively involved in the superintendent search. We're actively involved in working with the school board for the school board's governance. (XTP02)

The Kentucky Department of Education has also played an important role in supporting district reform efforts, providing the central office with guidance on curriculum mapping as part of the state's support network for districts. The state has also provided professional development through teacher networks and leadership networks, and monthly meetings that target teacher leaders and coaches. A central office staff member pointed out the close working relationship they had with the state, saying,

We're all on each other's speed dials. I can pick up the phone and call them just right now if I need to ask them, 'Help, I need to know more about this.' And they'll call me the same way. (CO03)

Finally, there was evidence that JCPS leveraged paid vendors to develop internal capacity. The district hired Math Solutions to provide mathematics professional development for middle school coaches, which "helped us to really be thoughtful about where we wanted to focus and very descriptive plans so that I could pick that up and study that and try to deliver in the same fashion" (CO06). Similarly, the district commissioned a curriculum management audit, which was conducted by PDK in early 2012. The large-scale, comprehensive evaluation explored organizational workings and uncovered organizational inefficiencies and over 800 programs being utilized across the district. Their recommendations have shaped central office reorganization.

In our retrospective analysis of early-years implementation of *Developing Futures*<sup>TM</sup>, we noted that outside of activities directly supported by Foundation funds, there had been relatively little corporate engagement from GE in JCPS, with partnerships focused on a handful of schools. For this analysis, while there was not enough evidence to generate a rating on GE engagement, it is notable in light of past

findings that there were no instances in which GE corporate support (such as technical assistance or volunteering) was described by either central office staff or principals.

Overall, JCPS has developed some strong relationships with community organizations and has found ways to leverage expertise, resources, and opportunities in a way that benefits the district long-term. The benefits from the partnership with the GEF, in particular, were pervasively salient in interviews with stakeholders.

**Indicator 3: Curriculum and Instruction**

Most respondents indicated that mathematics and science curricula are standardized across schools in JCPS. Principals perceived more standardization than central office staff. Teachers’ access to instructional materials was particularly strong. However, less consistency in *instruction* across the district was reported. Both principals and central office staff indicated that common approaches to mathematics and science instruction were lacking and were concerned about the lack of alignment between standards, curricula, and state tests resulting from the district’s early adoption of the CCSS. Table 3 shows specific scores for this indicator.

<b>Table 3. Curriculum and Instruction</b>	
Curricula are standardized across schools in math.	2
Curricula are standardized across schools in science.	2
There is a common approach to math instruction.	1
There is a common approach to science instruction.	1
Teachers have instructional materials (books, kits, lab space) they need to carry out instruction.	3
Summative assessments are aligned with curriculum and standards.	1
Formative assessments guide instruction.	2

Sixty percent of principals surveyed said that there is coherence between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Approximately 60 percent also said that district math and ELA assessments are aligned with the curriculum and 75 percent for science. Efforts were underway to build coherence and consistency.

The process is just ongoing leadership to get everyone, to get all those independent thinkers on the same page, using the same materials, going to training together, starting to work together as a learning community. And it takes effort and it takes prodding and encouragement and you have to work with people, and you can’t give up, you’ve just got to keep doing it. (P12)

The central office provided strong curricular support to schools through their website, email communication, and instructional coaches. For example, bridge documents that translate the CCSS were

housed on the website for teachers to access and download with ease. Despite evidence of strong curricular support, some reported an inconsistency in instructional expectations depending upon school characteristics such as student demographics and performance.

We have schools that are 20 percent free and reduced lunch and we have schools that are 99 percent free and reduced. And so, I think you're going to see a difference in the math instruction school to school, in how programs are utilized, how much of the inquiry-based instruction is going on. So I do not believe that there is—I believe there's consistency in the standards and in the district, looking at the district curriculum map and trying to follow it, because our students in this district are so mobile, so we want to make sure that, as they move school to school, the topics have been covered over about the same amount of time in the school year. But as far as true instruction within schools, school to school, that's an area I think we need to improve in. (P06)

The instructional approach in JCPS can be described as having shifted from “teaching the program” to standards-based, inquiry-oriented instruction, which is “not really about the program....it's about good teaching” (CO06). In both science and mathematics, respondents consistently articulated the district's approach to mathematics and science in this way. The district was also working to align this instruction with the CCSS. Respondents stressed the importance of teachers knowing the standards so that lessons and instruction align to those standards.

[We are] helping the teachers know what do you have to actually have to make sure your kids know as far as this particular standard. So, now teachers with that knowledge are very efficient. They need to know this, this and this no matter what. You've got to go back and intervene and hit it hard because they need to know this. But they don't have to know it just by you standing up and telling them. You have to let them learn on their own with some guidance and some support...But then from there, kids need to be able to learn and discover on their own with guidance...And so moving away from the desk and rows or the worksheets and the workbooks, but actually involving the learner. (P07)

Notably, principals overwhelmingly articulated a common understanding in new approaches to mathematics and science instruction, indicating that these departments have done an adequate job of reaching teachers. For example, one principal said, “Of all the subjects, I would say mathematics is the strongest in its communication with schools and with teachers” (P20).

### ***Mathematics: Standards, Curriculum, and Instruction***

Work in the central office mathematics department this year revolved around implementation of professional development, curriculum maps, and assessments that support CCSS implementation.

Respondents expressed urgency around implementing CCSS because Kentucky's federal waiver required JCPS to implement and assess within the 2011-2012 school year.

The stress is coming from adopting Common Core Standards, learning the standards, implementing the standards and being assessed in a nine-month window, and keeping teachers who love to teach motivated and not feel overwhelmed or stressed out. (P07)

Still, 95 percent of principals said they felt fairly or very well prepared to implement the CCSS in their schools. The general outlook on CCSS implementation was that the system will move forward the best that it can, but that it requires a lot of change in a short amount of time. Respondents indicated that the work done so far with mathematics reform in JCPS has been successful.

When you're not fully funded and supported in changing something, it's not going to happen effectively. And what has happened with math is it has been funded and supported, and I've seen more cohesiveness in this than in anything in 23 years that I've been an educator, honestly, I can say that honestly. (P12)

This improvement may have laid the foundation for a more successful CCSS implementation. The mathematics department developed curriculum unit maps in six-week cycles, which allowed them to make course corrections based on feedback from teachers who were implementing the units. Shifts in grade-level expectations because of the standards.

So now, the high school teachers worry, and in fact for good reason, because if the middle school teachers didn't get the three or four chapters, then you come in...You have to have certain skills, certain fluency, before you go to the next level. So we have to depend on each other much more in math, and that's very, very difficult when you have different people working with different grade levels, very difficult. We are a little shy on vertical alignment now...And so, and we have to depend even more now with the new standards because there's no redundancy in the standards. (CO07)

Finding time for training and collaboration for teachers so that they can effectively teach the standards and the alignment of the assessments associated with these expectations was a challenge. The development process for teachers to be able to effectively integrate standards into their instruction requires knowledge of the standards and how to convert them to learning targets and subsequently compile them into tasks and units. Then teachers need to know how to critique and amend tasks by looking at student performance. The work required to develop these skills in teachers was formidable. Therefore, principals made decisions about digestible amounts of reform for their schools, creating a buffer between their schools and central office or state expectations. Schools were also relying heavily on the instructional coaches and the curriculum maps to facilitate implementation.



So, my decision based on what I thought, not what the district suggested, was we would focus first on math, because I felt like we had heard she was there and she could help us get familiar with them. So, we are probably more with the math standards than we are ELA, because we didn't start really digging deep, deep, deep into them as a staff until January, after we came back from [winter break]. And again, that might be a horrible instructional decision, but I just thought you just can't process it all. You just cannot do it. So, that's the route I decided that we would go. (P09)

Respondents were remarkably consistent in the way they described the district's approach to math instruction as hands-on, problem-based, rigorous, and student-centered. There was less confidence in the degree to which these elements were being incorporated in JCPS classrooms overall.

### ***Science: Curriculum and Instruction***

Before the GEF grant, JCPS adopted a science kit curriculum, which aided in building consistent science instruction across the district. Because they have been around for so long, teachers are familiar and comfortable with them. The kits are popular with teachers, students, and parents and align to assessments. They helped teachers who were weak in teaching science, but also helped strong teachers who were able to build and extend off of them.

And the hands-on, you know, shifting into that, whereas when you're textbook-based and you don't have all those materials, to pull those together when you're teaching eight different subjects for a teacher, it just wasn't getting done. The kits allow teachers, at least you have the materials. Yes, it still takes time to set up those experiments, but you've got them there with you. So, I think there's been a huge shift in science instruction. (P06)

As with mathematics, respondents were quite consistent in their descriptions of the district's approach to science instruction. This approach was described as hands-on, inquiry-based, student-centered, and exploratory. While the kits were widely implemented with success, some respondents were concerned about how consistently kits were being taught in an inquiry manner.

Are we doing direct instruction or are we doing inquiry? Or do we have inquiry-based materials that are being implemented using a classroom instructional framework that's built on direct instruction? And if so, should we rethink? (XTP01)

I have probably six science teachers that they are doing the modules, and you walk in their room and it looks great, and they've got all the kids and the kids are up at the bugs and they're picking at the little trees, and they're doing all the stuff that they're supposed to be doing. But when you start asking the kids, 'Why? What did you learn?'

What are you doing?’ They want to retell the activity. (P18)

Eighty percent of principals surveyed agreed that the central office provides adequate resources, facilities, and equipment for science investigations. Principals and teachers wanted more aligned resources as they implement Common Core in their schools. At the time of data collection, a project was underway to develop a website that houses curriculum maps, and assessments, “leaving the center part of that work for teachers to use their professional judgment to support the needs of the kids in their classroom” (CO03).

### **Assessment**

Foremost on many respondents’ minds were the impending rigorous state assessments that will be used in the accountability system. It was expected that students would do poorly on the assessment because they had not been exposed to this new version of rigorous instruction. Previews of state assessments caused alarm because of the high degree of rigor.

[Teachers] are feeling pretty overwhelmed and they’re scared because we know our State assessment—we’re the only [state] in the whole United States that’s going to hold people accountable for how our kids perform in two months in Year One—and everybody is really nervous...We saw what happened last year when we had just some sample items on there, and our kids, it was nothing they had been exposed to. (P09)

An emphasis on improving formative assessment in JCPS has been underway for several years. According to one principal, “it’s becoming more formalized and we’re getting a lot more training, it’s a lot more focused, principals understand more of what’s happening...and can pass it on better to teachers” (P06). Improvements in formative assessment have increased the monitoring of academic progress in individual students. The district provides benchmark assessments that provide data to schools to use formatively. These assessment results aid both school and central office staff in monitoring student learning in relation to the standards.

So when they take the assessment, if they don’t know those standards, can’t demonstrate level proficiency, then we intervene with them ... And we continually assess them... We talk to them. We have them show us what they’re doing. We look at their homework; we look at their class work. We watch them in class and we look for evidence that they do know the standard. (CO07)

Principals received monthly training on looking at assessment results for their schools. They have been taught to look at grade- and classroom-level data and determine how to intervene. Data was used formatively by principals to spur conversations with teachers or to be used in PLCs, and then to provide formative feedback to students.

My boss calls me and will say, ‘Wow, great job;’ or, ‘Did you notice this one group of third grade didn't do so well?’ So, someone is overseeing, and I mean, I do the same things with my teachers...We look at them, okay, these five kids, what's going on; or everybody is great, what's different this time than last time? So, we have what I call really good instructional conversations, and that's something that I've seen refined and changed over the last probably four to six years much more. (P09)

To conclude, significant improvements in curriculum standardization, instituting an instructional vision for mathematics and science, and deepening formative assessment practices have taken hold in JCPS. The uncertainty around state assessments that is associated with the transition to the CCSS challenged teachers’ and leaders’ confidence in how prepared students will be for more rigorous expectations. The degree to which new models of mathematics and science instruction have been actually implemented in classrooms remains unclear. Indications of some superficial and inconsistent implementation were present.

**Indicator 4: Professional Development for Instruction**

Overall, professional development occurred alongside and supported the shift in instruction from program and materials-based to a data-based inquiry model. Much of the PD in the last several years focused on new instructional approaches to math and science, and more recently, on learning and using the CCSS. Almost 90% of principals surveyed said the district has provided teachers with PD on the CCSS. Success in this area is widely attributed to school-based instructional coaches.

<b>Table 4. Professional Development for Instruction</b>	
PD is aligned with district instructional priorities (content, pedagogical, data).	3
There are sufficient resources available to provide the needed PD.	2
School-based PD is available for teachers.	3
PD is ongoing.	3
PD is data-driven.	2
PD is aligned with standards and curricula.	3
There is a common understanding of roles played by schools and central office with regarding to PD.	3

The JCPS central office saw professional development as the primary strategy for bringing about widespread instructional improvement. In particular, staff noted that the transition to new standards meant getting teachers to rethink long-held notions of rigor and idea of what constitutes high quality instruction. Principals were keenly aware of just how much teachers were being asked to change. “They are starting to have that paradigm shift from, ‘What I did’ to ‘What the kids understood.’ And that is huge for teachers.” (P18) Another observed: “I don’t think they even knew how to translate these type of tasks of inquiry-based, because...when you teach inquiry it’s a whole new way of teaching.” (P14) Principals both welcomed the district’s focus on instructional improvement and wished that teachers

had more time to engage thoughtfully in the work.

I think if we had more time for the teachers to really delve into [the standards] and get used to them...We have got all these standards that we have to teach deeper than ever before, and we don't know exactly what it's going to look like. (P03)

Funding through *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> was instrumental in bringing high quality, embedded professional development to JCPS. In part because this training was viewed so favorably, there remained a sense among principals that more was needed, and some concern about how these supports would be sustained beyond the life of the grant.

At the district level, professional development focused primarily on two cohorts: principals and teacher leaders. Principals received their most valuable and consistent professional development in monthly district principal meetings and SBAT meetings. In recent years, this professional development has focused on mathematics and science instruction and included activities such as analyzing scope and sequence documents, developing learning targets, and developing formative assessment tools. There has also been strong encouragement for principals to develop skills in using data to make instructional decisions down to the classroom level. Principals viewed these sessions as a welcome opportunity to further their own professional growth. "I have to keep learning as an instruction leader in the building [and] I have to keep pressing and moving and reading," explained one principal. "So, it just keeps me up on trends and things that are going on, and it makes me a better principal." (P10) These sessions allowed principals to network, and to share information about common challenges and responses. They also helped to ensure consistency of approach across schools. "Principals having a monthly time to meet and talk about all of the issues that we are dealing with helps us tremendously to stay on the same page," explained one principal. (P12)

Principals were trained to recognize instructional practices that their teachers have been trained on, bringing it into close alignment with district instructional priorities. "We're not the teacher, so we don't only need what the teachers are getting," explained one school leader. "But we need some sessions that are specifically tailored to our needs in terms of leadership in those areas." (P16) For instance, demonstration sessions helped principals know what they're looking for in classrooms. One principal described in detail a session focused on mathematics.

We had professional development as principals on what would a really high- quality math lesson look like—what are the look-fors? And they would have videos for us to watch, and we would script their lessons, and then we would talk with other principals, and try to get more of a consistency on what does a math quality lesson look like? And then we would analyze the level of the task. If a teacher is asking—they would have like six tasks, and we would have to look at the task in math and see whether this was high rigor, low rigor, those kinds of things. And then we would even see video examples of

how this task, which looks on paper to be high rigor, how a teacher watered it down so much that it became very low and non-rigorous, and lowered the expectations that she would have had of the kids. And how the flip side of that, what could she have done different? And we talked about that. And that was really helpful, because I'm not a math person, and to kind of gain an understanding of what it was that they wanted us to see in classrooms. (P18)

Because limited staffing resources coupled with the large size of the district made reaching all teachers challenging, the central office focused on providing direct training to a smaller cohort of "teacher leaders." Teacher leaders from each school attended training at the central office, and served as conduits of information between central office and schools. During training sessions they shared their tools, lessons, and learnings. A central office staff member reported, "What we hear is...their greatest learning is hearing how others are adapting and adjusting and making changes." (CO09)

GEF support has enabled strong support for many schools. It was "staffed to work" from principals, to coaches, to central office (P12). Principals described instructional coaches instrumental to reform, yet these coaches were not available in all schools. Those principals who did not have them desired them.

So I guess if I had a wish list, having a [coach] position...I want to get help into teachers' hands, because that's where the learning takes place in the classroom. ...I'm trying to arrange that staff for myself this coming year. I don't know that I'll be able to staff it in the vision I would like it in. (P12)

External partnerships like those with Vanderbilt University and Math Solutions (see External Constituency Engagement section) allowed the district to leverage resources to increase the district's capacity to provide high-quality professional development with less money.

Professional development at the school level was provided through instructional coaches. Coaching support received overwhelming praise from principals. Instructional coaches (i.e., staff developers or resource teachers) were important catalysts in helping some principals shift their teachers' instructional practices. As one principal said, "they have done a really fine job of training the staff developers in the standards. I mean, the content that she brings directly to the teachers is very focused" (P02). Change has been easier when principals "have someone dedicated to the effort. If every school had someone dedicated to the effort, they would move." (P12) Coupled with professional development for principals on the CCSS and data use, schools were set up with school-based support that could shepherd them through the change. Coaching activities included unit planning, modeling, working with teachers one-on-one, and joining them in common planning time. One principal summarized the different ways in which coaches proved valuable:

With the help of the staff developer and the literacy resource teacher, I see great impact within the classroom in that they work side by side with the teachers, they model

lessons with the teachers...They are able to have full discussions within the grade level in the subject area of what is going on in the classroom, and I am a part of those discussions. We have scheduled embedded PD once a week where we can have those conversations of what are our next steps. We know what we've done in the classroom; we are looking at the student work. 'Here are our concerns.' And with particular kids, 'What are our next steps?' (P02)

Coaches helped differentiate professional development, and were especially valuable for helping new teachers. "A brand new teacher, they think they know when they come in, but they've got a lot to learn," one principal remarked. "So they support them." (P03) Because coaches were connected to the central office, the professional development they provided to teachers was aligned to the academic priorities of the district. Coaches stayed in one school, allowing them to develop the rapport and trust needed to guide teachers into new ways of instructing. This effectively extended principals' reach into classrooms without the threat of evaluative consequences.

What it has done is given me another person to talk instruction in the building. I'd like to do it, six of the six hours, 40 minutes of the day; it's not realistic. But what she can do is she can in many ways be my mouthpiece and do it in a non-evaluative way so it doesn't feel threatening. (P09)

Coaches also played a critical role in "translating" between central office and the schools around instructional expectations. "We have a phenomenal math resource teacher who lives in anguish trying to balance sometimes the realities she sees, the capacity that she assesses, and the district agendas that exist," recounted one principal. "And she does a phenomenal job translating both directions." (P13) Coaches were directly connected to both the central office and to the teachers they worked with on a daily basis, providing them a uniquely valuable vantage point on the progress of district reforms at the classroom level.

[The coach] comes to the PD days here on Friday, and so she really has a good grasp on what the district is doing...she is so versed in what the district is promoting, but then also she knows our school very well. And...she is able to kind of help the teachers mesh that together and make that work. (P16)

Overall, principals gave the central office high marks for professional development support. "They'll come any time we ask," one principal remarked. "They'll arrange for PD at schools or with one of our small principal groups" (P09). Survey data showed that most principals agreed that the central office supported their efforts to provide professional development in mathematics (82 percent) and science (70 percent). However, only half of survey respondents agreed that professional development was well coordinated between schools and the central office. Many principals interviewed saw themselves as the

primary responsible party for teachers’ professional development compared to the central office (i.e., “Gheens”).

Well, I will tell you that I feel that it’s 100 percent my responsibility to make sure that my teachers get the training that they need. And it’s not because the district doesn’t offer things, but regardless of what they offer I think it’s 100 percent my job to make sure that it’s a match for what we’re doing in our school and the direction that we’re moving for state testing and within the district. (P16)

In sum, despite limited resources and some concerns about sustainability, professional development appeared to be an area of considerable strength in JCPS. Instructional coaches, the primary driver of school-level professional development, were widely seen as effective. And principals, who played a major role in supporting PD for their teachers, felt both well-trained and supported in meeting the needs of their teachers.

**Indicator 5: Professional Development for Leadership**

While principals and central office staff spoke extensively about professional development related to instruction, interviews yielded far less data about leadership professional development in other domains, or about the systems employed by the district to identify and develop leaders. As a result, few ratings (Table 5) were assigned for this indicator, though the qualitative and survey data remain instructive.

<b>Table 5. Professional Development for Leadership</b>	
A plan is in place to establish a pipeline for developing leadership within the district.	*
A system is in place for identifying and developing leaders in the central office.	*
A system is in place for identifying and developing leaders in the schools.	*
School staff receive training on critical leadership skills (planning, strategy, data use).	3
District staff receive training on critical leadership skills (planning, strategy, data use).	*

*Note.* \*Indicates insufficient data to make a determination about the prevalence of the given characteristic.

Both principals and teachers had opportunities to develop leadership skills. There was also some evidence of a system for formally identifying and developing leaders. “I think it’s one of the strongest things that we have had and continue to have in our District,” explained one principal.

I do think that the district has shown their commitment for developing leaders, and there is opportunity within the local school level for people to get that nod. Of course, there is national Board Certification if you do not want to move out of the classroom. So, I have several teachers that I work with now that don't want to leave the classroom, but there are five at my school that are nationally Board Certified, so they sort of got

that blessing, and that's great. But then I also have a couple of people that are administrative trained and certified and they have utilized our district resources for that, doing things like a program called Principals for Tomorrow and internships. Many of the local universities have classes too, cohorts that you can be part of. (P09)

Informally, there was evidence that some principals recognized potential leaders and worked to cultivate them.

My staff, they are wonderful teachers, absolutely wonderful teachers. And what is nice about having those exceptional teachers is you can ask them to do just about anything and they will do it. They will rise to the occasion, help man something, help head something. And so, otherwise, sometimes they want to look at another position, and I encourage people to do that. For example, with our staff developer, she is one of those exceptional teachers, and her expertise is so needed to show other teachers how to get students to that level. And so, encouraging people to look for positions that will help spread the wealth of knowledge. (P02)

Principals received a significant amount of training in leadership skills for their current positions, particularly concerning data-based decision making. In fact, approximately 90 percent of principals surveyed agreed that the central office takes an interest in the professional development of administrators. It appeared that this training leaned heavily toward instructional leadership, with less emphasis on management. For example, within the past two years, a large majority of principals reported participating in training about a) observing and monitoring classroom instruction (75 percent); b) using data to inform decisions (89 percent); c) what students should know and be able to do in mathematics (88 percent), English (86 percent), and science (70 percent); and, d) the Common Core Standards (88 percent). A much smaller percentage reported participating in training on a) articulating a clear school vision (40 percent), b) conflict resolution (24 percent), c) consensus building and negotiation (28 percent), d) adult learning (37 percent), or e) understanding the change process for individuals or organizations (46 percent).

For example, assistant superintendents worked with their principals in a PLC style format to develop their skills in data use. One central office staff member described the kinds of questions asked in these conversations. "Look at each of your grades. What's going on in that classroom, how can you make that change or adjustment? What kind of support do you need?" (CO09). Principals described these cadres as particularly useful for sharing problems and solutions specific to their schools. Professional development for principals also helped them keep up to date with trends and research.

The [PD cohort] has been refreshing to me...It just gets me to also look at my professional development that I have to keep learning as an instruction leader in the building that I have to keep pressing and moving and reading. We're given assignments



and I've got to do this additional reading. So, it just keeps me up on trends and things that are going on, and it makes me a better principal. (P10)

Principals desired more frequent opportunities to collaborate with one another because they found the collegiality so helpful.

There needs to be leadership Professional Learning Communities that exist through the whole year. So, principals talking about implementation of how we work this Common Core. And we do it a little bit, but I'm talking about true discussion, we meet every Tuesday, that kind of rigor. 'We're going to meet every Tuesday, Skype from 3:30 to 4:30...And we're going to talk about this.' (P16)

Every principal had a growth plan, developed in conjunction with their supervisors (assistant superintendents) and revisited throughout the year within their principal cadres. These growth plans were meant to align with school and district priorities, yet allow flexibility for individual choice. The assistant superintendents worked with principals to see where they should be focusing, and where professional development and support were most needed.

There was also evidence of leadership development opportunities for teachers. This primarily occurred through the creation of "teacher leader" positions. While a primary role of these positions was to serve as liaison between schools and the central office, principals also suggested that they served as a training ground for teachers interested in leadership.

I think it's one of the strongest things that we have had and continue to have in our district. When I went through it was different, but I do think that the district has shown their commitment for developing leaders, and there is opportunity within the local school level for people to get that nod. (P09)

One principal noted that developing teacher leaders required an explicit focus on working effectively with adults—a skill set that teachers have little opportunity to develop. "They are not used to that part, of being a team leaders...And so, training them how to lead a team, keep a team focused, use a protocol to look at student work and data." (P06)

### **Indicator 6: Management Capacity**

The management capacity indicator captures the extent to which district systems and structures support the work of the classroom. In particular, this section focuses on information technology (IT) infrastructure, resource allocation, talent recruitment and retention, and performance evaluation systems. Approximately half (54 percent) of principals surveyed agreed that central office systems work well to support the needs of their schools. The infrastructure to collect and report data is in place in JCPS, but needs improvement in accessibility and reliability. Material resource allocation appears to be

aligned with district priorities. However, principals often are constrained in their access to the teachers they want to hire. Only about 65 percent of interview respondents (both principals and central office staff) indicated that the central office is effective at attracting strong teacher candidates. The alignment between teacher and principal evaluations and instructional expectations was also particularly weak. Table 6 shows specific ratings for this indicator.

<b>Table 6. Management Capacity</b>	
IT infrastructure to collect data is in place.	*
IT infrastructure makes data accessible for use.	*
There is a systematic or strategic approach to allocating resources.	2
HR infrastructure identifies talent effectively.	*
Central Office is effective in attracting strong candidates to teaching positions.	2
There is a system in place that fills in open positions in a timely manner.	*
Teacher evaluations are aligned with instructional expectations.	1
Principal evaluations are aligned with instructional expectations.	2
Central office evaluations are aligned with instructional expectations.	*

*Note.* \*Indicates insufficient data to make a determination about the prevalence of the given characteristic.

The importance of data use has been stressed over the years in JCPS. Principals are expected and trained to make use of data in their planning. On the survey, 90 percent of principals agreed that the central office expects them to explain their decisions using data, and 90 percent said that the central office helps them collect and analyze data to be used to identify needs. Furthermore, 94 percent of principals felt prepared to use data to inform decisions.

There is a huge emphasis on the actual student achievement data itself to demonstrate that the schools are doing what they are supposed to be doing to accomplish student achievement...I believe that is to everyone's benefit to use the data to drive the decision making...And therefore having a system in place that is monitoring that what we're doing [and] is getting kids where they need to be [is important]. (P20)

Assistant superintendents monitored student data at schools in their jurisdiction and conversed with principals about their findings. As part of both the SBAT and PLC initiatives, principals were expected to input and analyze data and identify areas needing additional support. A challenge for principals was finding the time to analyze data more deeply, and that is where coaches were especially useful.

So, [the coach] has been good about being able to keep that data organized at least and print it off; and we'll do a preliminary summary so that I don't have to study it, she can study it for me, which helps her to know which standards we need some help with and which classrooms. (P09)

Coaches also supported teachers in their use of data. One principal reported that data is a neutral starting point for engaging teachers in instructional improvement plans. “If I have a direct conversation with you and we both are looking at the same set of data, then we both know where we're coming from and what the goals are.” (P09)

While it was clear that there was an emphasis on data-based decision-making, the data about IT infrastructure to support data use was more mixed. Principals found the strongest utility in formative assessment data about student learning (68 percent). About half of principals said data systems were useful for curricular adjustments, teacher-led formative assessment, resource allocation to support instruction, and identifying professional development needs for staff. Notably, the least useful aspect of data systems was their ability to help with teacher evaluation (to be discussed more in the next section). Table 7 displays how useful principals found data systems in JCPS for various activities.

<b>Table 7. Principal Views of the Utility of JCPS Data and Systems</b>	
<b>How useful are data systems in your district for:</b>	<b>% useful/ very useful</b>
Analyzing student learning on an ongoing basis.	68%
Guiding curricular adjustments.	55%
Helping you to evaluate teacher performance.	35%
Helping teachers to tailor instruction to meet student needs.	54%
Informing resource allocation to improve instruction (e.g. which students receive which programs, which staff work with which students).	50%
Identifying areas for PD for school staff.	48%

One reason why there may have been mixed views about the utility of district data systems was concern about the reliability of the data system currently in place (Cascade).

One principal reported frustration in using it:

I guess the thing that I, as well as my teachers, like the least is our ...in-house assessment system where the district assessments are scanned there and scored in this assessment clearinghouse or whatever...we don't really ever know how truly accurate or valid or reliable the district assessments are because [it is] always having hiccups. It's a technology issue...a lot of us are looking at other ways to have diagnostic assessments because the district-wide assessment system as far as the technology piece and giving us feedback to know where our kids are is not reliable. (P07)

As Table 7 shows, roughly half of all principals suggested that district data systems were useful for informing resource allocation decisions. Resources appeared to be allocated partly based on school needs (i.e., needier schools get more resources). “The district can’t send every resource the same to every school,” one principal explained. “They have to send where the crises are.” (P09) The PDK audit identified inefficiencies in salaries and programs and suggested a cost-benefit analysis of programs to be included in evaluations. Principals talked most about the ways in which personnel allocation affected schools. They felt it was problematic that new, rather than experienced, teachers were routinely assigned to lower performing schools. Additionally, they felt that coaching should be expanded so that all schools have a dedicated coach.

If every elementary school had an instructional coach, whether it was someone they've developed in-house or able to hire that GE supplied, that would be a tremendous help to the 90 of us. It depends on your money if you can have your own. I had my own until GE came in, because the year that I ran out of money to have my own we had applied for the grant. So, it was perfect. So, I'm already thinking, what am I going to do next year with my staff developer, when the funding is gone? But having that in-house person that's a direct liaison between the District curriculum and instruction coming back to my building, versus me trying to keep up with all of the different departments telling me what my teachers need has been tremendous. (P07)

A system-wide strategy for allocating resources was not visible. According to the survey, 74 percent of principals reported that they had “some” to “a great deal” of influence over planning how discretionary school funds should be used. Principals adjusted their budgets to meet needs in their buildings in a context of scarcity. One principal reported spending out of their budget for PD for teachers to make up for deficiencies in professional development from the central office. Another principal hired substitute teachers to work with teachers in the classroom, saying:

I think it’s creativity, innovation, leadership. I think you have to prioritize what are your priorities at your school. If you have 10 custodians and you only need nine, why can’t you use that additional funding to cover substitutes? Substitutes don’t cost that much, and you’re essentially—I can get five or six substitutes for the same price of a teacher, and you’re talking about six impact points. It’s huge. (P14)

Eighty-five percent of principals surveyed said they have “some” to “a great deal” of influence over hiring teachers and other instructional staff, but over 70 percent principals said that the district’s personnel policies and practices make it difficult to hire staff with the qualifications and skills needed to improve their schools. Principals generally reported having a strong teacher candidate pool from which to choose new hires, and suggested that it was their job to put new staff in a position to be successful.

So I think overall HR does a pretty good job of getting us pools of candidates, but then we also have to look at the way in which we lead and manage schools to make sure that those candidates get to the right spots with the right environment support systems to really grow into the profession that they have selected. (P13)

The district's human resources office also appeared to be effective in identifying and retaining high-performing student teachers. Pre-service teachers were observed regularly with the goal of identifying high performers early, offering them contracts before they might begin searches in other school systems.

One area of significant concern was the effect of school transfer and staffing policies on human capital distribution across the system. Principals received a list of transfer candidates for open positions and were required to select personnel from that list. Higher performing schools in more desirable neighborhoods tended to get more transfer requests than needier schools. Veteran teachers tended to request these schools, leaving other schools with an overall younger, more inexperienced teaching force. Several low-performing schools have been re-staffed as part of their turnaround process and this has also contributed to the inexperienced staff at struggling schools. The end result was a highly inequitable distribution of teachers, with the schools most in need of expert staff least likely to get them. "The best teachers should be placed in the most needful schools. That's just how we should operate. And our transfer system completely flies in the face of that philosophy," one central office staff member lamented. (CO10) As one principal explained, the net effect of this was not simply the most sought-after candidates going to high-performing schools. The reverse was also true:

The re-staffing model has been very damaging district-wide, because when a school re-staffs, obviously they are going to pick and choose the best staff, I mean that's what it's all about, and those staff members who are not chosen to stay have to be placed elsewhere, they do not lose their jobs. So then other schools have no choice of who they take, whether the person fits the building or whether the person fits the program. And so that's really kind of sent a wave out into other buildings. (P12)

Overall, respondents indicated that the evaluation systems in place for teachers and principals were transparent, and that staff understood what is expected of them. Eighty percent of principals surveyed agreed that the central office makes clear how staff performance will be evaluated. Principals were supervised by a group of assistant superintendents who helped them develop growth plans and review their work both formatively and summatively. While this system was well understood by principals, it appeared that its summative aspects weighed more heavily than the formative ones. Only 44 percent of surveyed principals indicated that they feel comfortable talking with their superiors about job-related challenges they are having. Conversely, conversations with peer cadres were frequent and supportive in nature.

I think getting to visit each other's schools— we're set up in cadre groups, and we go and visit each person's school in our cadre, and so it's supportive and it's also informative about what other people are doing. And, of course, we tie it in with all the standards that we're working on. (P16)

For teachers, principals said they communicate expectations about what they would be evaluated on clearly at the beginning of each school year. The evaluation tool, however, was limited. The teaching standards upon which it was based had not been changed in decades, and were described as ambiguous and having little utility. The tool itself was a checklist, requiring little narrative. Due to the vagueness of the instrument, it was subject to variable interpretation across principals. Furthermore, the checklist lent itself to an inflation of teacher performance in which large swaths of teachers were labeled as meeting and exceeding expectations across all 10 standards and sub-indicators, and teachers at different schools being held to inconsistent standards. Some principals said they did more than the tool required to make it a more useful and formative process. One principal described the ways that a professional development experience changed the way they conducted their evaluations, making them more “intentional” and “thoughtful” about teachers’ practice and the questions to ask during evaluation conversations.

I just had a post-observation conference this past week. Probably, in the past I might have asked two or three questions. I had nine questions written down just about that particular lesson that I was trying to find out about, what the teacher was thinking; or why did you do this; why did you approach it that way; somewhere about classroom management. I think they appreciate it more in terms of it's a lot more in depth. I think they can see I'm really a lot more focused on their individual classroom instruction. (P10)

The formal teacher evaluation system requires annual summative evaluations for non-tenured teachers and summative evaluations every three years for tenured teachers. In addition to these formal evaluations, most principals described their additional ways of monitoring teacher practice through more frequent cycles of observation and feedback. For some schools, the shorter “walk-through” method was employed (one principal said the district strongly encouraged this approach). Other principals made a point for all teachers to receive at least two full observations and feedback sessions every year, regardless of tenure. As one principal said, “it doesn't have to be a regimented lockstep. It's more about the regularity and conversation regarding instruction that matters.” (P13) Both processes were described as being oriented toward dialogue, growth, and support.

Survey data indicated that principals felt well-prepared to distinguish between different levels of quality of mathematics, science, and ELA instruction, overall. They also felt prepared to provide high-quality feedback to individual teachers about their instruction in these areas. Most principals said that they first

provide as much support to struggling teachers as possible before initiating a disciplinary process.

We give them as much opportunity too, because I've chosen them as a teacher in my building. So I'm investing time and money in you. I want you to be the very best teacher that you can possibly be. And if I don't give you help and if just automatically say, 'I'm going to write you up,' how is that going to help? (P10)

When confronted with more severe teaching performance issues, principals felt that their ability to remove ineffective teachers was constrained by an inefficient and burdensome teacher deficiency process.

It is very difficult, because the paperwork involved with it is very time-consuming, very time-consuming, and just the amount of time that you're in that classroom, doing those observations, in addition to making sure that all the support pieces are in place for the teacher. So, it is very time-consuming. (P06)

In sum, it appeared that many of the characteristics or practices associated with strong management capacity—a culture of data use, a focus on matching resources with needs, identifying and recruiting high-performing staff, providing meaningful feedback on performance—were in evidence in JCPS. It also appeared, however, that the basic systems employed by the central office, from IT to staffing to evaluation, lagged significantly behind those practices.

**Indicator 7: Evaluation**

According to about 65 percent of principals surveyed, the central office regularly evaluated instructional programs and actively monitored the quality of instruction in JCPS. Principals were more likely than central office staff to indicate that metrics were identified for major district initiatives, but overall, indicated that they exist. Furthermore, similar proportions reported monitoring progress on initiatives using these indicators. Scores for this indicator appear in Table 8.

<b>Table 8. Evaluation</b>	
Specific metrics or indicators are identified for major district initiatives.	3
Progress on initiatives is regularly monitored through these indicators (even if data is not produced).	3
District decisions about stopping, continuing, or expanding initiatives are based on evaluation.	*

*Note.* \*Indicates insufficient data to make a determination about the prevalence of the given characteristic.

As mentioned in a previous section, the PDK audit provided extensive evaluative feedback that the district is using to focus programming and restructure central office departments to better align with

district goals.

I think the audit was a good way of seeing where the gaps were, the deficits, and what was going well in the district. So restructuring is there. I think that with the audit of instruction, the programs are going to be very carefully looked at and weighted as to what needs to happen next. I think there is a lot of changes that we are going to be making over the next few years. And I think people are very okay with it. They are ready for it. They are absolutely ready for it. (P02)

The PDK audit revealed over 800 programs in place in schools across the district. They recommended that the research and evaluation office review each for a cost-benefit, alignment analysis to determine the worthiness of keeping such programs. In the past, programs were difficult to eliminate in the face of champions who advocated for them despite a lack of evidence of impact. Respondents were consistently aware of this finding and in agreement that action was needed.

Proficiency and diagnostic assessments served as primary sources of data for central office and school leaders to monitor progress on CCSS implementation. However, evolving benchmark assessments have created confusion among principals and teachers about the trustworthiness of assessment data.

I think our scores are improving, I think our adjustments. I mean, the target has moved too, but I think we have been able to focus on balance. Our kids are becoming better prepared for college, they're becoming better prepared citizens, they're learning how to learn, so I think that is the major adjustment. Unfortunately in accountability you've got a moving target, and it's like, 'How do I fit that target?' But I think with inquiry and with the push of math and science, you're never going to walk away from that for innovation and you always can have that model. (P14)

In the absence of reliable student assessment data, leaders were staying focused on the models of instruction emphasized by the district.

## **Conclusion**

JCPS has made significant progress in curriculum standardization, instructional vision setting, and formative assessment. Effort invested in cultivating ownership among stakeholders, internal and external, enabled progress and has cultivated a shared understanding of the new instructional expectations associated with the CCSS among central office staff, coaching staff, and principals. In particular, school-embedded instructional coaches have been instrumental for facilitating reform and bridging schools and central office.

Given the challenges inherent in implementing the CCSS before fully aligned state assessments are in place, it is not surprising that some are reluctant to fully embrace the CCSS if they are not held accountable for meeting those standards. As CCSS-aligned state assessments are brought online and



implemented, commitment to instructional reforms may increase among teachers. Building coherence between curriculum, instruction, and assessment was a heavily communicated priority from the new superintendent. The superintendent's vision for alignment would be aided by improvements in data systems, teacher assignment policies, central office organizational structures, and focused programming.