CPRE

CONSORTIUM FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

Building District Capacity for System-Wide Instructional Improvement in Stamford Public Schools

WORKING PAPER

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GE Foundation
GE Foundation *Developing Futures*™ in Education
EVALUATION SERIES

December 2013

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*™ in Education program in Stamford Public Schools (SPS). The purpose was to closely analyze the district's capacity to support system-wide instructional improvement. To understand how SPS, one of the four *Developing Futures*™ districts that were examined, built capacity for system-wide instructional improvement, our study focused on a single, overarching question: to what extent has SPS central office adopted and institutionalized the seven core principles of *Developing Futures*™?

This executive summary provides a brief explanation of the findings from the SPS 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 19 stakeholders in SPS, including 12 central office staff members in leadership roles (including the superintendent), 4 principals, 1 board of education members, and 2 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 SPS principals, 16 completed the survey for a response rate of 80 percent.

We studied the districts' progress in scaling up and institutionalizing the seven core elements[1] of *Developing Futures*™:

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.

[1] 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*™ 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. SPS has created avenues for internal stakeholders, particularly classroom teachers, to have a more active voice in the district's initiatives and goals. At the same time, the relationship between the school board, the superintendent, and the Stamford Education Association remained an obstacle to improving overall internal constituency engagement among these stakeholders. The district has expanded its engagement with external constituents during the tenure of the grant, in part due to the monies available through the grant. The district adopted and implemented new science and mathematics curricula in nearly all grade levels. The extent to which each of these curricula was fully implemented with fidelity across the district varied, but the adoption of these curricula has helped to standardize teaching and learning expectations across the district. Along with the adoption of the new curricula, the district also invested in professional development for teachers to learn how to most effectively implement these curriculum programs. These efforts were initially supported at the school level through instructional coaching, though it was eventually discontinued amidst sustainability concerns. SPS has continued to implement new ways to collect and utilize data to inform their work, and this has included the formation of data teams at the school level. Both test-score data, data collected during administrator observations in classrooms, and other types of data have helped the district to evaluate ongoing initiatives.

It is clear that meaningful progress has been made in SPS in some important domains: establishing common curricula, articulating instructional expectations, and providing professional development aligned with those curricula and expectations. The emphasis on ensuring that all students are held to the same set of expectations, and the reliance on data to ensure that this is the case, shows a commitment to both high expectations and data-driven decision-making within the central office. Structures like the curriculum committee, PLCs, and data teams have helped to strengthen and institutionalize collaboration at both the school and district level.

Yet challenges remain. According to many central office staff and principals, common curricula and instructional vision have yet to translate to consistency of instruction across the system, and curriculum implementation fidelity remains a concern. Working relationships among the union, central office, and some school board members still appear to be frayed. Finally, district evaluation systems for teachers and principals have changed little over the course of *Developing Futures*™, despite significant changes to other parts of the instructional system. If widespread instructional improvement is to occur, the ways in which SPS evaluates its people, and the mechanisms it used to improve performance, must come in line with those systems.

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*™ in

Education program in Stamford Public Schools (SPS). 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*™? To answer this question, this evaluation assesses the Stamford Public School District's progress in scaling up and institutionalizing seven core elements of *Developing Futures*™.

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 SPS for each indicator and its component characteristics, along with qualitative and survey evidence illustrating and supporting the ratings. Overall, SPS implemented strategies to address each of the indicators discussed in this report: Internal Constituency Engagement, External Constituency Engagement, Curriculum & Instruction, Professional Development-Instructional,

Professional Development-Leadership, Management Capacity, and Evaluation. Progress in each of these indicators varied, with the district meeting with greater success in some areas than in others.

SPS has created avenues for internal stakeholders, particularly classroom teachers, to have a more active voice in the district's initiatives and goals. At the same time, the relationship between the school board, the superintendent, and the Stamford Education Association remained an obstacle to improving overall internal constituency engagement among these stakeholders. The district has expanded its engagement with external constituents during the tenure of the grant, in part due to the monies available through the grant. The district adopted and implemented new science and mathematics curricula in nearly all grade levels. The extent to which each of these curricula was fully implemented with fidelity across the district varied, but the adoption of these curricula has helped to standardize teaching and learning expectations across the district. Along with the adoption of the new curricula, the district also invested in professional development for teachers to learn how to most effectively implement these curriculum programs. These efforts were initially supported at the school level through instructional coaching, though it was eventually discontinued amidst sustainability concerns. SPS has continued to implement new ways to collect and utilize data to inform their work, and this has included the formation of data teams at the school level. Both test-score data, data collected during administrator observations in classrooms, and other types of data have helped the district to evaluate ongoing initiatives.

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 Stamford, including 12 central office staff members in leadership roles (including the superintendent), 4 principals, 1 board of education member, and 2 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 SPS principals in the spring of 2012. A total of 16 principals completed the survey—an 80 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

Interview and survey data suggest that SPS made significant headway in engaging stakeholders at all levels in planning and decision-making, leveraging fairly broad buy-in for reforms. Collaboration was also evident, though in a few instances strained. Table 1 shows specific sub-scores for this indicator.

Table 1. Internal Constituency Engagement	
Input is sought from internal stakeholders in planning and decision-making.	3
Internal stakeholders express ownership of or are "bought into" improvement projects or initiatives.	2
Horizontal collaboration (across departments) is evident.	2
Vertical collaboration (between levels) is evident.	3

Stamford Public Schools included input from internal stakeholders in planning and implementing district initiatives, particularly classroom teachers. SPS formed district curriculum committees at each level (elementary, middle school, high school) and subject area (mathematics, literacy, science, social studies) comprised of classroom teachers who had applied to be members of the committees. These committees allowed teachers to engage in the work of planning and implementing the district's initiatives. Once SPS administrators set the long-terms goals and direction for a particular project or initiative, the committees then planned and directed the implementation of those goals. The Elementary Math Committee, for example, worked to align the district's elementary mathematics curriculum to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), beginning in Grades K-2. The decision to begin this alignment work with Grades K-2 was made by district administrators, but the work of aligning the curriculum to the standards was then completed by the committee of teachers. One central office staff member described this process of decision-making.

> I put together a plan, show it to a group who's working down here which consists of the

> chief academic officer, the assistant superintendent for elementary, the director for literacy, and the director for research. So we sit together and talk about this plan, and making sure that, especially elementary, the math doesn't overlap with the ELA because they're the same teachers teaching those things. And then once that plan is finalized, we meet with principals and ask for input from them. And the alignment of the curriculum, or realignment of the curriculum, is done by teachers on a committee. (CO03)

A group of 20-30 teachers was also consulted on the district's adoption of a new science curriculum by reviewing several potential programs and offering feedback. Based on this feedback, district administrators made the final decisions regarding which curricula to adopt.

Despite the success of the committees in including teachers more in district planning and decision-making, some respondents felt that more opportunities for teachers to contribute were needed. One central office staff member explained:

> In the [a school], you say, "Oh, we've got a bright spot here and a bright spot there." If we could collectively have those people contribute to the development of curriculum and professional development, it would impact many more teachers across the district, than just celebrating those individual silos of greatness. (CO10)

SPS recognized that the curriculum committees included only a small subset of teachers and sought teacher feedback in other ways. One central office staff member described attempts to gain input from teachers regarding newly developed district assessments.

> We've asked for input on district assessments. Where we have this committee that puts together these assessments, but it never went beyond those 10 or 15 teachers who created it. So we said we're opening up to everybody. So once those were created, we sat down with every single math and science teacher, secondary, and said, "Look at this and provide input." (CO03)

Central office staff expressed a high level of buy-in for district reforms. "I take a lot of pride in this work. It's not somebody else's work, it's work I believe in," explained one respondent. (CO07) Principals suggested that the level of buy-in for the district's changes to curriculum and instruction, particularly among teachers, had continued to improve over time. Both central office staff and principals suggested that buy-in would improve along with district outcomes. One principal stated, "I think the level of buy-in at the school is growing, and the level of buy-in at the school level increases when you see the results of it." Speaking about the implementation of the district's new mathematics curriculum, one central office staff member said, "they have to see it for themselves. And the way they're going to see it for themselves is that they have to deliver the curriculum the way it's intended to be delivered, and then we'll start to see the change, and then we'll start to change their mindset." (CO03)

In addition to encouraging teachers to have a stronger voice, SPS also provided opportunities for both vertical and horizontal internal collaboration among its central office and principals. Of 16 principals surveyed, 14 reported that they felt like they had input into district plans. The central office created cluster teams which were comprised of staff from different departments and were designed to visit and consult with a small group of assigned schools on a weekly basis. The cluster teams provided a source of support for schools and included staff from a range of expertise areas including: pre-K, science, mathematics, special education, ELL, and learning needs. Described by one central office staff member as a "dichotomy of pressure and support" (CO10), these teams helped district administrators to better understand how schools responded to the district's initiatives, while simultaneously demonstrating support to schools.

> We're looking to see that these things are done because we put them in the curriculum and they have to be done when we're talking about stability, consistency, systemic work. But we're also here to hold you and support you as you go through this work. So, it's pressure and support that we provide, but I hope more support. (CO10)

Other examples within the central office of cross department collaboration included the writing of grants and the hiring process led by the human resources department. Depending on a grant's focus (in terms of content areas, or curriculum versus professional development, for example), the staff responsible for submitting the grant worked across the relevant departments. Human resources also made efforts to work across departments by attending other departments' meetings, including curriculum meetings, so that they were aware of what was required of prospective teachers. As one central office staff member explained:

> Our human resources department, their heads are not buried in the sand. They are readers. They ask us, they sit in on some of the curriculum and instruction meetings to find out what's going on. They're an integral part of the meetings we have monthly with administrators. (CO10)

Despite some success regarding internal collaboration, there are still groups within the district that continue to struggle to collaborate effectively. Some interview respondents claimed that divisions between members of the school board were apparent and that the debate over tracking students continued to be a point of contention between school board members. According to an individual with an external organization that had previously had a partnership with the district, the division among the school board made engaging in a partnership with SPS particularly difficult to manage.

Indicator 2: External Constituency Engagement

There was mixed evidence of external constituency engagement in SPS. While SPS sought input from external partners in planning, it did not appear to have formed strong working relationships with them beyond standard contracting or consulting relationships. The district was successful in securing

additional funding from the Panasonic Foundation, which complemented the work it pushed forward under *Developing Futures*™. Although GEF funds were obviously instrumental to the district's work, there was little evidence that other GE resources, such as in-kind support, were being tapped to support the district's work. Table 2 provides detailed ratings for external constituency engagement.

Table 2. External Constituency Engagement	
Input is sought from external stakeholders in planning and decision-making.	2
A communication strategy to communicate to the public about reform activities is in place.	*
The district has leveraged resources from external stakeholders (not including GEF) to support reform efforts.	3
School leaders have leveraged resources from external stakeholders to support reform efforts.	*
The district has leveraged resources from GE to support reform efforts.	1

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

The district partnered with non-profit organizations, attended national conferences, and contracted with curriculum publishers for professional development and support. Five SPS schools participated in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program, which provided teachers in those schools professional development from AVID in the form of workshops. The program focused on setting the expectation for traditionally underperforming student populations that they will attend college and providing support and skills to help those students meet that goal. One central office staff member spoke highly of the program's influence and noted that the district had tried to expand the ideas behind the AVID program to other schools in the district. "It kind of goes hand-in-hand with our work with efficacy, motivating students. Even though the class is five days a week, you can use those strategies in your reading class or your math class." (CO02)

Despite intensive efforts (supported by both GEF and the Panasonic Foundation) to improve the working relationship between SPS and its teachers union, this relationship appeared to be strained. "I think it's very poor. We have a very contentious relationship with the teachers union," one school board member remarked. "We have many, many grievances. We don't seem to be able to collaborate very well and this is an ongoing issue." (SB01)

During the early stages of reform, SPS developed a range of plans for community outreach and public relations. Some strategies, such as a regular newsletter, were launched but proved to be sporadic. The school board created a family and community engagement committee, which met regularly for a few years, but was recently disbanded after a change in board leadership. At the time of data collection, we did not hear of major initiatives underway focused on communicating to parents or the community, though it is important to note that our data on this topic were limited.

In addition to GEF, the Panasonic Foundation funded reform work in SPS over a five-year period beginning in 2007. This work largely focused on encouraging collaboration between internal parties such as the teachers union, the administrators association, the superintendent, and the school board. Through collaboration, the partnership with the Panasonic Foundation focused on developing a system for implementing curriculum and improving teacher learning throughout the district, particularly in Mathematics and English Language Arts.

When SPS staff and partners spoke of resources from GE, they almost exclusively referenced foundation support through *Developing Futures*™. In contrast to other districts supported by the Foundation, there appeared to be little if any in-kind or volunteer support from GE corporate staff.

Indicator 3: Curriculum and Instruction

Through its involvement with GEF, SPS adopted and implemented standardized curricula in both mathematics and science. Prior to GEF's involvement, the district had no common curriculum in either subject. As one central office staff member commented specifically about mathematics, the district had "20 schools doing whatever they wanted, teaching whatever they wanted, and not even necessarily teaching what was tested on our state test. So with the monies that we were able to get from GE, we were able to put in a common curriculum." (CO03) The extent to which those curricula are being implemented with fidelity varied across schools. While the district also introduced a standardized approach to instruction for both mathematics and science, staff and principals suggested that there had been stronger implementation of the standardized curricula than of the common instructional expectations.

Table 3. Curriculum and Instruction	
Curricula are standardized across schools in mathematics.	3
Curricula are standardized across schools in science.	3
There is a common approach to mathematics instruction.	2
There is 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.	2
Formative assessments guide instruction.	*

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

SPS began the process of curriculum adoption and implementation shortly after beginning its partnership with the GEF. District and school staff began by investigating what content was being covered in mathematics at both the middle and high school level. They discovered that there was considerable overlap in the content teachers reported covering in Grades 6-9. Based on this assessment, a committee of district and school staff worked to standardize the curriculum across schools and grade levels to alleviate the overlap. *Everyday Math* was selected for elementary schools,

while Connected Mathematics Project (CMP) was chosen for middle grades. A three-year implementation timeline was created. At the elementary level, Grades K-2 implemented the curriculum in the first year, Grades 3 and 4 in the second year, and then Grade 5 in Year 3. At the middle school level, Grades 6, 7, and 8 each implemented the new curriculum in separate years. At the high school level, the district was in the process of working to align the different schools' curricula to one another. Previously, there were differences in how students progressed from Algebra—one high school went to geometry and the other went on to Algebra 2.

As new mathematics curricula were being adopted and implemented, a shift also occurred in the district's general approach to delivering mathematics instruction. The district emphasized a "workshop" (CO08) approach to mathematics, where there is "less teacher talk" (CO03) and where teachers take on more of a facilitator role. One central office staff member described the approach this way, "I think the idea is really to try and get classrooms to be more of a workshop approach, so that students are doing things guided by the teacher, but they're also working independently and/or in small groups." (CO08) This is in contrast to an approach that would emphasize the role of the teacher as a lecturer and conveyor of knowledge.

One elementary school principal added that this new approach has forced teachers and students to think more deeply about the processes they are learning about, "I think this approach forces teachers to ask themselves, and then ask their kids, the "Why?" question a little bit more. Whereas what may have just been in what we consider a traditional program, "Well, this is how you add two numbers and this is the answer." (P04) The instructional approach has also emphasized independent and small group work. The emphasis on small group allowed the district to eliminate tracking, because instruction was intended to be differentiated for all students, and because students could be broken up into different groups within the classroom.

An emphasis on having students use notebooks at the middle and high school levels has also represented a change in the district's approach to delivering mathematics instruction. One central office staff member explained:

> It's not a textbook that tells you how to do things. The notebook is a way for students to write down what's been discussed in class. That's where they do their examples in class, they write down vocabulary. Where before people were having students write things down on a piece of paper, they crumpled up the paper and threw it out and they left. (CO03)

Survey data indicate that the district has had some success in building a shared vision for instruction. Asked whether such a shared vision was evident in SPS, 56 percent of principals agreed and 19 percent strongly agreed. On the other hand, it appeared that there was also a lack of specificity with regard to what this approach should look like in practice. Survey data suggest lingering confusion about a system-wide approach to mathematics instruction. About 44 percent of all principals disagreed or strongly

disagreed with the statement that "the district's instructional policies give teachers clear information about how to teach." It may have been that the basic elements of the district's instructional vision were widely known to stakeholders, the specifics of how they were to be implemented were less clear.

Another factor that may have contributed to confusion over expectations was the impending shift to CCSS. The Elementary Math Committee made changes to the curriculum in order to better align it with the expectations of the CCSS, beginning with the curriculum for Grades K-2, with plans to align the remaining grades in the years that followed. While aligning to the Common Core was a priority for the district, it has proceeded cautiously. One central office staff member explained:

> None of us that are on this committee are writers of a math curriculum program. We don't have enough research and data and experience in us in terms of writing an entire curriculum that suggest that we should be the people to decide don't teach lesson 2, don't teach unit 4. (CO08)

Central office staff acknowledged that part of the challenge stemmed from the impending roll-out of the CCSS-related questions about expectations for students.

> A: We are struggling with this whole notion of additional rigor, defining what rigor looks like.
>
> Q: Is this spurred by Common Core or something else?
>
> A: It is definitely. And I think it pushes us into a new evolution or a new era of looking at really what are we teaching and being very precise about the content, about the assessment of that content in the way of performance tasks, formative and summative benchmarks, and also the rigor, which we're still trying to define that work. Never had so much trouble with a five-letter word before. (CO10)

Perhaps due to a lack of clarity about expectations, central office staff expressed concerns about the fidelity of curriculum implementation, suggesting that teachers left out or changed components of the *Everyday Math* curriculum. Some staff suggested that schools were required to spend a fixed amount of time on mathematics, while others suggested that it was up to schools to decide. More generally, there were concerns that quality and approach to instruction in mathematics were still highly variable across the system. While expectations regarding curriculum and instruction were communicated from the central office to schools (often via curriculum associates), the principal was not required to follow these recommendations. For example, principals were given leeway in how much time they expected teachers to spend on mathematics and how hard they wanted to push on the instructional expectations laid out by the district. One central office staff member explained:

> The administrator [principal] does get to do—like, they're allowed to have their own

> creativity towards how they're doing things in their building. And like I said, we [central office] could have certain things that we send out here that we intend for the district, but then get their own spin because they're going to 12 buildings. (CO10)

One curriculum associate reported that they were instructed not to email principals. This dynamic made it difficult for the central office to maintain much authority over what happened in schools, and made district-wide consistency in terms of instruction and curriculum implementation a challenge.

Central office staff suggested that the district's limited authority to mandate compliance with instructional expectations impacted the extent to which mathematics was taught with a consistent approach across the district, and shifted the burden of responsibility to principals. "They're allowed to have their own creativity towards how they're doing things in their building," one staff member commented. "And like I said, we could have certain things that we send out here that we intend for the district, but then they get their own spin because they're going to 12 buildings." (CO08)

In science, the district went through a similar process as in mathematics to select and implement a new curriculum. At the elementary level, the district worked to outline the standards for elementary science and then sought out vendors with products that addressed those standards. The district adopted a series of kits and modules (FOSS and STC) to address the standards at each grade level. In addition to the modules, the district also provided teachers with a pacing guide. The modules and kits for each grade level were implemented gradually. Teachers did not implement a new set of modules and kits all in one school year. A central staff member explained:

> The K-5 adoption started in 5th grade with one unit and then the second year we did an additional unit in 5th grade, and then K-4 did a physical science unit. And then the next year we added earth science unit for everybody, and then the next year we added in life science. (CO11)

At the middle school level, the district adopted the SEPUP (Science Education for Public Understanding Program) curriculum. SEPUP is a hands-on, issue-based curriculum that includes performance assessments. A science curriculum did exist for middle school prior to the adoption of the SEPUP curriculum, but it was not issues-based and was more traditional in its approach. By being issues-based, the SEPUP curriculum is "anchored in real purpose" (CO12) according to one central office staff member. Each unit begins with a real-life issue, which then leads the class on an exploration of science concepts, eventually looping back to the original issue. The implementation of the middle school curriculum was phased in similarly to how it was done in the elementary schools.

Implementation of the science curriculum at the middle school level has continued to gain consistency. "For the most part we've got pretty good buy-in and every year we get more and more," remarked one central staff member (CO11). One thing that may have helped the level of buy-in among teachers is that the district, over time, has become less strict about following the curriculum exactly. For example, the

district encouraged teachers to submit ideas to the curriculum committee about how the curriculum might be improved. The central office staff member explained:

> If you think you have things better, write it up fully so Joe off the street could understand what it is, bring it to committee and we'll lay it out, and if we think it's indeed better than what we currently have, we'll make the substitution. (CO11)

One area of concern articulated by district staff was with the alignment of the SEPUP curriculum with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the final version of which had not been released at the time of data collection. A district administrator described the district's approach.

> We can't just take SEPUP off the shelf and say this is going to be it for good and we're set, because Common Core is really coming, it's here, and the Next Gen Science Standards are close on its heels. And we have to be, as a school district, and I think we are, aware of that and thinking about how we can serve the kids and the teachers by addressing that. (CO12)

Woven in with the implementation of the new science kits and curriculum were "embedded tasks" (CO11) designed to prepare students for state assessments in science. The tasks were process oriented and required a "higher level of thinking." (CO11) The state had released embedded tasks for schools to practice with, but the district also developed some of its own. These tasks were implemented within the curriculum, not as separate activities.

During the first year of implementation, middle school teachers received training on each unit prior to teaching it. A central office staff member who was teaching at the time found this support to be very helpful. "I was so excited to have an expert walk me through exactly what I was going to be giving a month from now and say, 'Here is where you want to be concerned about safety, or here is how you can enrich it.'"

Curriculum and pacing guides for science were developed and implemented at the high school level as well. According to one district administrator, the focus at the high school level was less on curriculum and more on instruction:

> Our biggest challenge with high school is not *are* they teaching the concepts, but *how* are they teaching the concepts. Is everything didactic, textbook-based, lecture-based, and cookbook labs, or is there room for some student-driven inquiry based things? That's a big challenge, and we've done some professional development around that, but there needs to be more with that too. (CO11)

As with mathematics, there was overall general concern from central office staff that science curricula were not being implemented consistently across the district, and that in general science instruction was

not as high of a priority as it should be. This concern arose partly from a lack of mandated instructional time for science during the school day, as well as from the recognition that there was greater accountability pressure around literacy and mathematics. As one central office staff member explained:

> I think that science is compromised in the schools in the sense that—they start to push on math and literacy, and I think that from a district perspective there needs to be a strong look and understanding of how the time is being utilized in the schools and not allow that be as up to the schools. So honestly, I think there are some schools that are skipping science here and there. Some are doing it. It depends on their literacy and math blocks and the priorities at the school. (CO06)

Another central office member agreed:

> I think there is better fidelity of implementation in math than there is in science because it's an AYP area. They have made district-wide policy that every school will have x number of minutes carved out for math every day and the principals have gone along with that. (CO11)

The district has also shifted its approach to delivering science instruction. One central office staff member described the shift as:

> moving more towards inquiry. Before people would just open a textbook and read what was in the textbook and then answer a few questions. What we have moved towards is actually students doing science. So they have all of these materials, they have animals, they have soil that they're playing with, and habitats that they're creating. And they're actually doing experiments with the materials rather than just reading about it in a book." (CO03)

Another central office staff member described the elementary science curriculum as "hands-on, with a literacy component":

> An example of that would be like Bartholomew and the Oobleck, which would be a Dr. Seuss book about a green slime; and then you would take cornstarch and water and make the green slime and talk about the states of matter. So, you would use literature to enhance the science lesson in those kinds of ways. (CO12)

An elementary school principal likened the shift in the district's approach to teaching science to the shift made in mathematics. "I think pretty much what we were talking about with the math curriculum we could kind of apply to the science curriculum." He continued, "Asking the "Why?" question. "Why does this happen? Why are we seeing this?" (PO04)

The new mathematics and science curricula adopted by the district required that instructional materials be purchased on an ongoing basis to implement the curriculum programs. In *Everyday Math*, for example, consumable materials, including workbooks, are purchased each year for students. The adopted science kits also required materials to continually be replenished. Lab assistants have been hired to help organize and replenish the kits at the elementary level. Materials included in the kits are books as well as materials for students to complete the activities such as live animals, magnifying glasses, or dirt. Since adoption of the curricula in both mathematics and science, the district has remained committed to providing teachers with all of the required materials.

Along with the adoption of common curricula and common expectations for instruction, the district worked to maintain alignment between its assessments and the expectations regarding curriculum and instruction by creating an interim assessment system. One central office administrator explained the rationale behind needing common district assessments. "If we understand what we want all kids to know and be able to do, then we need to assess that." (CO11) The district developed and implemented district-wide assessments that were given up to four times per year at the secondary level. Teachers were also given the opportunity to provide feedback about both the timing and content of the assessments. The curriculum committees that worked on revising secondary assessments were able to incorporate teachers' feedback into the revisions. One central office administrator explained:

> They [teachers] gave us great feedback on individual questions, or there is too much on this concept and not enough on that based on this year's—so they gave us wonderful feedback which came right back to the committee. (CO11)

The interim assessment system was not in place prior to the adoption of common curricula. There was some concern that assessments were not administered uniformly across the district. For example, the district tried to address the use of calculators during assessments. Some schools allowed them, while others did not. Another concern was the speed with which assessments results were fed back to teachers. Referring to science assessments, one principal explained:

> There are certain assessments that the grade levels are supposed to send; and what the teachers are saying is we don't receive them back or we don't receive them back in a timely fashion. That's the one thing that they're saying, which they're right, if your 5th-grade test is cumulative, you need that for an instructional focus. (P03)

Like many districts, SPS struggled with the tension between preparing for new standards and not fully knowing how those standards would be assessed. Central office staff suggested that they intended to design materials and professional development to better prepare schools for the Common Core, but how they would do so depended on how the assessments were designed.

> Knowing what's expected at the end, what the outcome should be, I should now be backwards planning. One of the outcomes that we need to know is what the

> assessments look like. So, not having the smarter balance assessments or a sense of what those assessments are, I'm holding my breath, teachers are holding their breath, principals are holding their breath, because we want to know what the assessment is going to look like so we can put those particular strategies, those particular tests strategies, content, everything that goes into students doing well into the curriculum that we are currently revising. So, there is a little hiccup there. (CO10)

In sum, for both mathematics and science, SPS made considerable progress in moving toward common curriculum, developed an overall vision for instruction in both areas, and created interim assessments aligned with the curriculum. Many challenges remained, however. Science lagged behind mathematics in implementation. There were concerns in both subjects about the fidelity of curriculum implementation and the overall consistency and quality of instruction. Lastly, due to factors outside of its control (the timetable for developing state assessments aligned with Common Core), central office staff felt limited in their ability to fully prepare for the new standards in the absence of information about how they would be assessed.

Indicator 4: Professional Development for Instruction

Professional development for instruction in SPS was closely aligned with the district's curriculum reforms. Centralized professional development was provided in conjunction with curriculum roll-out, with school-based support delivered by coaches and liaisons. While both central office and school-level supports were available to teachers, there were significant concerns about sustainability. The majority of centralized professional development in science and mathematics was provided by external consultants, raising questions of internal capacity to support sustained improvement. Similarly, budget constraints required the district to change the role of coaches, allowing them less time to work closely with colleagues. Ratings for professional development for instruction are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Professional Development for Instruction	
PD is aligned with district instructional priorities (content, pedagogical, data).	3
There are sufficient resources available to provide the needed PD.	1
School-based PD is available for teachers.	3
PD is ongoing.	3
PD is data driven.	3
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.	*

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

Professional development offered by the central office was closely aligned with district curriculum initiatives. In many cases, SPS contracted with the curriculum developers to provide professional development. Years after adopting the elementary mathematics curriculum, SPS continued to use

consultants from the *Everyday Math* program to provide professional development. Middle school mathematics teachers received professional development from consultants from CMP that were brought in for a full-day training prior to each unit. One central office staff member explained, "We said that for every single book that you're going to be asked to teach, you're going to have a full-day worth of training. So each grade level got 42 hours of training in a year. So we supported teachers." (CO03) CMP consultants were responsible for the majority of professional development received by middle school mathematics teachers according to the central office, spending roughly two days a year in each of the middle schools over a five-year period. Schools could determine how consultants' time for on-site professional development was used. "She can either model a lesson for teachers, she could co-teach with the teachers, or she can just sit back and provide them with feedback," according to a central office administrator. (CO03) In high school, where a variety of mathematics programs were in use, the district has worked with Capitol Region Education Council to help high school mathematics teachers become acquainted with performance tasks and mathematical practices in the CCSS.

A similar pattern was evident in science, though it appeared the district was seeking to more explicitly build capacity in this area. The district brought in consultants to work with teachers on the middle school science curriculum, SEPUP. Plans were also underway to send three teachers to the SEPUP leadership institute to become trained as leaders in understanding the curriculum and implementation. Those teachers will then come back and provide professional development within the district to other teachers. At the high school level, professional development focused differentiated instruction, as classes that were once leveled became heterogeneous. It was unclear from the interview data who provided this professional development.

In addition to mathematics and science training, a subset of schools in the district received extensive professional development from AVID, also funded through GEF. The five participating schools sent teachers to a summer institute where they learned strategies to implement in their classrooms in different subjects. One central office staff member explained, "So if you go to the institute, if you're a math teacher, you go and you learn the math strategies that you can use in your mathematics classroom. So you learn Cornell notes. In the science class they have interactive notebooks which they do." (CO02) In addition to the Institute, the district also brings consultants from AVID into the district during the school year.

For the 2012-13 school year, central office staff reported that implementing the Common Core would be the focus of the district's professional development, beginning with curriculum alignment. Additionally, the district planned to bring in consultants from *Everyday Math* to work with K-2 teachers on changes to the curriculum and assessments in preparation for the new standards.

The extensive use of external consultants to provide professional development has both advantages and disadvantages. Such trainers are obviously expert in specific curriculum, and can thus assist schools and teachers to understand its design and implementation. Using consultants also allows for close alignment and sustained focus. On the other hand, relying so heavily on outside entities does little to build

instructional leadership capacity within the system, raising questions of sustainability. It is unclear whether SPS would be able to continue to contract for so much of its professional development in the absence of outside funding like that provided by GEF.

To support the mathematics professional development provided by developers, SPS created positions for school-based coaches in the early years of the project. Mathematics coaches were employed full-time in nearly every building during the implementation of the new mathematics curricula, modeling lessons, observing, and facilitating PLC (Professional Learning Communities) discussions. As implementation of the curriculum and instructional expectations became more solid, the question of sustainability arose regarding the coaches, as they had initially been funded through *Developing Futures*™. The district decided that the mathematics coach initiative would end because curriculum implementation was deemed mostly complete, and because the district did not see a way to sustain the initiative once GE funding was gone. The coaches that were retained were required to teach two classes a day, leaving two class times for attending PLC meetings or meeting individually with teachers. One central office administrator explained:

> So I guess what happened was the decision from the district was that we've implemented the middle school math curriculum, people have been trained, that hopefully the point was to build capacity, and that we'd done that. And GE said that we'll give you the money to pay for these people but the idea, and rightly so, was sustainability. So how are you going to sustain these positions once the grant is gone? And so what happened was with the whole budget issue, I guess, that how do we make sure that we keep coaches? And can we afford to keep coaches? And the idea was that it was expensive, and that maybe people have had coaching for the last four or five years, maybe it's time to kind of wean people off of things. So what happened was instead of them being full-time coaches where they had the flexibility during the day to go into different classrooms and help whatever grade level needed help, it was now that they had to teach at least two classes. (CO03)

This dilution of the coaches' role raised concerns about whether that role could be fulfilled effectively. One central office administrator suggested that they did not have sufficient training to support classroom teachers effectively, arguing that intensive summer professional development was needed.

> If there were summer institutes we would have expert-level people come in, we're there as district people to keep the district vision going…We could say these particular coaches are strong when they're talking about pedagogy—these particular coaches have what it takes when it comes to do problem solving in this particular area. (CO10)

Some functions formerly performed by coaches were assumed by central office staff. For instance, one staff member reported spending a significant amount of time sitting in on PLC meetings and modeling

lessons in classrooms. But with one staff member covering a number of schools, such supports were spread far more thinly.

Another school-level resource for supporting professional development was PLCs. PLCs have taken on a range of tasks, including examining assessment data to monitor the effectiveness of mathematics curriculum and instruction. One principal also mentioned the use of peer observations in mathematics. "Peer observations around *Everyday Math*, which has really taken hold in helping people understand not just how to implement the curriculum, but how to implement best instructional practices in their own classrooms." (P04)

Survey data paint a mixed picture of principals' views of district professional development. Around 69 percent agreed or strongly agreed that district professional development efforts "have been sustained and coherently focused," and nearly 88 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the central office "presses principals to implement what they have learned in professional development." On the other hand, more than half of all principals (56 percent) disagreed with the statement that "professional development is well coordinated between schools and the central office in this district." They also reported that district data systems were not particularly useful in helping them plan professional development. Around 64 percent reported that district systems were "not useful" or "a little useful" for targeting specific teachers for professional development; 56 percent said the same for identifying areas for professional development for school staff.

Indicator 5: Professional Development for Leadership

Interview data suggest that both school and central office staff had access to professional development that was closely aligned with the district's instructional priorities. What was less clear was the extent to which they also received training explicitly focused on management or leadership, and the systems or processes SPS used to identify or develop leaders. Table 5 shows indicator scores for professional development for leadership.

Table 5. Professional Development for Leadership	
A plan is in place to establish a pipeline for developing leadership within the district.	2
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.	3
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).	3

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

The district established a clear process for providing professional development to district and school leaders. A monthly meeting time was been established for all district administrators, both at the district and school level, to receive professional development. One principal described these meetings:

> Having the opportunity to have conversations with your colleagues about real things that are affecting real buildings, and real kids in those buildings, and see and talk about and try to tackle the different things or different strategies that other people are using in their buildings to get from point A to B is always, that's always good development. (P04)

Prior to the start of the school year there was also a three-day intensive professional development for principals that includes book studies. Other workshops, including one addressing Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and special education law, were also made available to administrators throughout the year.

Principals were also given the opportunity to attend trainings alongside classroom teachers. One central office staff member explained, "we have asked principals to come into the training with their teachers so they hear what their teachers are being told. That doesn't always happen." (CO03) This administrator went on to explain that while the district couldn't force principals to attend these sessions, many chose to do so. If a school had an assistant principal in charge of mathematics, for example, they would attend professional development with the mathematics teachers.

There was some evidence of a professional development system in place to school leaders. New school administrators (principals) took part in the Stamford New Administrators Program (SNAP) facilitated by the Connecticut Center for School Change. According to one principal, this provided new principals with useful professional development for four hours every month. The group looked at research, best practices, and had access to supervision. This was described by one central office staff member as "a mini administrative and supervision course." (CO10) The program was designed for building administrators, including both principals and vice principals.

There appeared to be few avenues through which classroom teachers could grow into other leadership roles. One central office staff member suggested that joining one of the curriculum committees was a good way to become familiar with what was happening at the central office. Two other programs mentioned by respondents were the Administrators Aspirant Program, which was run by Cooperative Educational Services, and the Urban Leaders Fellowship Program. Previously, the district had an administrative intern program, but that was discontinued for budgetary reasons. From the perspective of one external provider to the district, only certain teachers were selected for opportunities for growth, while other teachers are never even made aware of such opportunities, "It's either you are in the favorite eye of the principal and you have opportunities, or you're not." (XTP01)

Staff at the central office offered conflicting views about the availability of professional development for central office leaders. Some suggested that these opportunities were rare. One staff member commented, "a lot of times the professional development for us is that we go out and find things during our vacation times or weekends or whatever. We aren't necessarily trained, but we are expected to train other people." (CO03) Another added, "If I'm doing something solely for the district, it's probably because it was required. Any other learning I do on my own." (CO06) On the other hand, staff reported attending conferences and meetings that influenced their thinking about the district's work. One central office staff member referenced attending the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) conference and also a meeting in Connecticut with a group of other districts that were using the *Everyday Math* curriculum. Both of these experiences had influenced this staff member's thinking about the work embedded in the CCSS. Another reported a similar experience attending the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) annual meeting.

Indicator 6: Management Capacity

In general, interview data suggest positive views of management capacity in SPS. The data infrastructure in the district continued to expand, with specific emphasis on making data more available and useful to school-level staff. More importantly, there was evidence that data was an important part of planning and decision making at both the district and school levels. While there were some concerns about the process of selecting staff for newly created district positions (such as coaches), in general respondents suggested that the central office was effective in attracting good candidates for SPS schools. And in most cases, interview and survey data suggested that staff evaluation systems were fair.

As indicated in Table 6, sufficient data were not available to provide ratings for characteristics focused on the alignment of evaluation systems and instructional expectations. In this area, however, there is some reason for concern. Staff suggested that evaluation systems in SPS remained largely unchanged over the past decade—this during a time when instructional expectations had shifted significantly. This suggests that alignment between these systems may be a problem.

Table 6. Management Capacity	
IT infrastructure to collect data is in place.	3
IT infrastructure makes data accessible for use.	2
There is a systematic or strategic approach to allocating resources.	2
HR infrastructure identifies talent effectively.	2
Central Office is effective in attracting strong candidates to teaching positions.	3
There is a system in place that fills in open positions in a timely manner.	*
Teacher evaluations are aligned with instructional expectations	*
Principal evaluations are aligned with instructional expectations.	*
Central office evaluations are aligned with instructional expectations.	*

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

Like many districts, SPS has a data basic infrastructure in place that allows them to disaggregate student performance by subgroup. There district was also bringing online new systems to both facilitate data use at the school level and to make more data available. For example, the district worked on putting in place a system to allow for the electronic calculation of grades in mathematics. One central office staff member explained that this will ease the process for computing grades and aligning assessment results to the domains of the Common Core. The system will allow teachers during PLC meetings to identify the types of questions with which students are struggling and allow administrators to track teachers' progress in administering the assessments.

Two data systems were in the beginning stages of implementation. One is Student Tracker and the other is Star Student. Student Tracker allows the district to track information about where their recent graduates are attending college. The Star Student system allows the central office to access information such as how many kids are in a particular class and class schedules for students. These are new systems, giving the district access to data they haven't had previously.

There was widespread awareness among central office staff of the value and importance of data for planning and decision-making. This was thrown into sharp relief by the district's recent (and controversial) decision to de-track, which central office staff explained and justified based on district data. Referring specifically to the prior policy of creating "self-contained" classes for lower performing students, one central office staff member explained:

> We're giving them worksheets and then talking about nothing. And yet they were happy and weren't bothered by other kids. They also got dumber. You know, and when we looked at that data, we started looking at data and said, "Oh my God, in the sixth grade they scored this on their DRP, and in the eighth grade they scored—whoa, what happened to these kids?" (CO07)

The cluster teams from the central office that spent time in schools during the year met regularly to discuss what they saw in the schools and to discuss implications. One central office member described that this was a different type of data than the district was more accustomed to using. The staff member, in talking about increasing rigor in order to address the CCSS, said that the central office needed to find a way to make use of qualitative data, "It's not only going to be a quantitative analysis. It is also going to have to be qualitative, and we do less with our qualitative measures. We get the numbers. We're good with the hard data, very good with the hard data, and that's a challenge that we have." (CO10)

At the school level, data teams have been established. During the 2010-11 school year, data teams were trained using the Connecticut Accountability Learning Initiative (CALI) out of the Connecticut State Department of Education. The district used trainers and modules from the program to train teachers and principals on how to use and make sense of date to inform instruction. A consultant from CALI continued to work with the district and individual school data teams during the 2011-12 school year. In

recent years, the work of the data teams has merged, and become more central to, the work of PLCs. One principal explained the progression:

> People understand what PLCs are there for. Obviously there's a structure in place where all teachers have opportunity to meet in PLCs once a week for an hour. And then within that… last year was a training year for data teams for our school, and data-driven decision making…So we really focused in on getting people the training on how to use data, and how to make sense of data to make the best instructional decisions. So this year there's been more of a focus on using that model within PLCs and within their classrooms to effect change at a grade level or, you know, specifically in a classroom. (P04)

A collaborative process was in place to help the district effectively identify talent, with central office staff members helping to screen interviewees. Teachers, parents, and principals became then involved in the interview process after initial screening. Administrators spoke highly of the human resources department and their general ability to identify and recruit strong talent. One central office administrator said, "With the leadership in our human resource department, there is a better understanding of what's needed today with our teachers." (CO10)

The district faced some challenges in finding the right people for new roles, especially those in the central office. All jobs (including those to be a part of curriculum committees) were required to be posted and applied for; the central office could not hand pick people for specific roles. One administrator also suggested that the teachers union played a role in this process. "Sometimes you can say to teachers we would like you to apply. But at other times there's the union saying well this person needs to be on it." (CO03) Another difficulty in hiring the right people for central office positions was the negative connotation of the work of the central office. For example, there was some concern raised by a central office administrator that not all of the coaches in the district had been hired solely on their merits. "What we've done is we've taken coaches on a principal's recommendation. We have weak coaches and we have strong coaches, and some of our weak coaches are not going to get any better as a result of the PD," explained a central office administrator. (CO10)

At the time of data collection, the SPS system for rating teachers had been in place for a decade, and followed a traditional format. Teacher evaluations were conducted by building principals; the frequency of the observations depended on tenure status. Formal observations from principals involved a pre- and post-observation meeting. Nearly two thirds of principals (63 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the system for evaluating teachers in SPS was fair. At the same time, they were aware that changes at the federal and state level would likely change the teacher evaluation system. "Everyone obviously is anticipating to see what kind of laws and policies get put in place at the state level to see how evaluation is affected in the future," remarked one principal. (P04)

Regarding their own evaluation, principals referenced setting goals with their supervisor at the district office by specific domains, such as building capacity in their schools or professional development. Principals then met with supervisors to provide evidence that the school was taking steps to address and meet those goals. "I think it's fair and equitable right now," one principal remarked. (P03) On the survey, over 81 percent of principals agreed that the way in which they are evaluated is fair.

While survey data suggest that principals viewed staff evaluation systems in SPS as generally fair, they also indicate that there may be a disconnect between performance and accountability. Roughly 75 percent of principals disagreed that there were clear consequences for low performance for teachers, and half disagreed about the same thing for principals.

Indicator 7: Evaluation

Central office staff at SPS were able to describe a clear process for monitoring school progress through the school improvement planning process, and also used qualitative processes such as focus walks to monitor instructional quality. Yet survey data suggest that principals question the extent to which the central office actively monitors the instructional program, and there was limited evidence that

Table 7. Evaluation	
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.	3

SPS implemented a few different strategies to evaluate its initiatives. Much of the district's evaluation plan is dictated by the Strategic District Improvement Plan (SDIP) and the goals and indicators contained within that plan. A component of the evaluation plan involved an end-of-the-year survey for teachers that asked about what was referred to as "adult practice." (CO10) One central administrator explained, "It's around professional development they've had, what they feel they need more in, the quality of the professional development and their expectations and performance of it." (CO10) The results of the survey, along with other information from school data teams, are then presented to a monitoring team from the state. Survey data suggest that principals may have been less sanguine about the district's evaluation efforts. Given their generally high regard to the district's approach to data, a surprising number (44 percent) disagreed that the central "regularly evaluates instructional programs" and "actively monitors the quality of instruction" (56 percent).

Because the district has made changes to curriculum and instruction, they implemented focus walks for principals so that they were informed about what was happening inside of classrooms. The district's pacing and curriculum guides have helped principals remain aware of what they should be seeing in classrooms as they observe. In addition to principals spending more time in schools, central administrators have also been doing so. The Cluster Teams, comprised of central office administrators,

consult with schools on a weekly basis. Besides the Cluster Teams, administrators also observe classrooms using the AVID observation form. These observations were part of the process for keeping the schools AVID certified, but also served to help keep administrators aware of what was happening in schools. At the school-level, data teams were implemented to help each school monitor its progress on meeting the goals of their school improvement plans. "They are supposed to be the pulse of the building, making sure that every teacher understands what the plan represents." (CO09)

School board members and administrators also talked about the use of assessments to monitor the district's progress and the effectiveness of its initiatives. One administrator mentioned that the SDIP does drive much of the district's accountability focus, but that there also needs to be assessments. "You have to have some type of assessment in place. You have to use a formative assessment to gauge are we actually making an impact." (CO09)

While there was a strong emphasis on monitoring and data use relative to school improvement planning, it was less clear that evaluation was built into the planning and decision-making process. On the one hand, the de-tracking initiative represented a deliberate decision to stop a set of policies and practices, based on large part on evidence. It was also clear that the benefit of the initiative was being closely monitored, primarily in the form of test scores for lower achieving students. On the other hand, this was really the only specific initiative that seemed tightly coupled with evaluation measures. Other major reforms, while intended to ultimately produce test score gains, did not appear to have specific performance metrics attached to them. Similarly, beyond de-tracking, there was little evidence that the district had discontinued specific initiatives based on evaluation feedback.

Conclusion

It is clear that meaningful progress has been made in SPS in some important domains: establishing common curricula, articulating instructional expectations, and providing professional development aligned with those curricula and expectations. The emphasis on ensuring that all students are held to the same set of expectations, and the reliance on data to ensure that this is the case, shows a commitment to both high expectations and data-driven decision-making within the central office. Structures like the curriculum committee, PLCs, and data teams have helped to strengthen and institutionalize collaboration at both the school and district level.

Yet challenges remain. According to many central office staff and principals, common curricula and instructional vision have yet to translate to consistency of instruction across the system, and curriculum implementation fidelity remains a concern. Working relationships among the union, central office, and some school board members still appear to be frayed. Finally, district evaluation systems for teachers and principals have changed little over the course of *Developing Futures*™, despite significant changes to other parts of the instructional system. If widespread instructional improvement is to occur, the ways in which SPS evaluates its people, and the mechanisms it used to improve performance, must come in line with those systems.