Level 3 Districts: key themes and challenges

Attachment #7: Level 3 Summary Analysis

Overview

In the spring of 2010, the *Center for District and School Accountability* in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducted reviews of eight (8) Level 3 districts, identified at that time as "districts with one or more schools in corrective action or restructuring status under federal accountability regulations." To document and better understand the systems and practices being used by Level 3 districts and the challenges they face, ESE commissioned an independent analysis[1] of the district reviews, with the goal of distilling key themes, practices and challenges to inform the ongoing work of the Department and contribute to district efforts to continually improve systems of support for all students.

District Standards and Indicators

ESE's *District Standards and Indicators* provide a research-based framework for organizing district practices and understanding the complexity of district systems. Organized by the six District Standards, the report begins with an overview of key themes observed across multiple districts that cut across the standards. Some of the identified themes have implications for how ESE provides support to districts and schools. The implications are framed as "Questions to Consider." Following the thematic overview and questions, the report describes key challenges facing Level 3 districts, organized by Standard. The report concludes with a summary of key challenges.

A Caution

The identification of key challenges is based first on the triangulated information collected by review teams as they relate to the districts' current capacity to meet the District Standards. Review teams observe classrooms, analyze data, review documents, and interview district staff, school committee members and municipal officials. Please note that statements about practices and challenges rarely refer to all of the participating districts or to all Level 3 districts. The themes and challenges suggest support needed for Level 3 districts. However, we caution the reader to avoid "quick fix" approaches or the assumption that one specific solution or strategy will solve the issues faced by Level 3 districts. The challenges they face are complex.

---

[1]This document was prepared by the Center for District and School Accountability of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with Brett Lane, President of the Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning (INSTLL), serving as co-author and independent research analyst.

Attachment #7: Level 3 Summary Analysis

Context

In the spring of 2010, ESE's Center for District and School Accountability conducted comprehensive accountability reviews of eight districts identified in 2009-2010 as Level 3 districts because each had one or more schools designated as schools in "corrective action" or "restructuring" under the federal No Child Left Behind education law. When selected for review in 2009, student achievement in these eight districts was also at low levels either in absolute terms or in terms of showing little improvement in MCAS test performance relative to districts within their region. Display 1 describes the size and demographics of each district. For comparison, the table includes percentages for the state.

Display 1. Level 3 Districts Reviewed in 2009-2010

District	Size	# of Schools	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Low Income	LEP	SPED
Dracut	4,107	7	2.8%	85.7%	5.3%	4.9%	14.2%	1.0%	11.7%
Gardner	2,600	5	3.8%	80.7%	11.2%	2.1%	45.5%	3.7%	18.8%
Haverhill	6,845	15	4.1%	71.1%	22.7%	1.7%	42.4%	6.7%	20.8%
Holbrook	1,161	3	12.2%	72.5%	6.7%	3.7%	32.1%	2.2%	21.0%
Orange	840	3	1.1%	91.0%	4.5%	1.2%	49.4%	0.0%	14.6%
Pittsfield	6,072	12	10.5%	76.3%	7.9%	1.5%	49.7%	3.8%	15.8%
Saugus	2,866	6	2.9%	84.1%	8.0%	3.6%	19.9%	2.4%	14.9%
Westfield	6,100	12	1.2%	85.9%	10.7%	1.3%	29.5%	3.5%	19.0%
Total	30,591	63	1,439	24,374	3,540	699	10,844	1,134	5,305
Total Pct			4.7%	79.7%	11.6%	2.3%	35.4%	3.7%	17.3%
State Avg			8.2%	68%	15.4%	5.5%	34.2%	7.2%	17.0%

In terms of size and geography, the eight districts are broadly representative of the Commonwealth's districts, excluding the ten largest and poorest urban centers. At least one district from each of the Commonwealth's six regions participated in the Level 3 reviews: Berkshires (Pittsfield, Westfield), Central (Orange), Greater Boston (Saugus), Northeast (Dracut, Haverhill), Pioneer Valley (Gardner) and Southeast (Holbrook). They vary in size. Three are small cities serving approximately 6,000 students. One is rural and serves 840 students. Together, the eight districts educate 30,591 students in 63 schools. Three districts have twelve or more schools; two have three schools. One in three students (35.4%) is low income, while four of five are white. While more than 10% of students in Gardner, Haverhill and Westfield are Hispanic, only in Holbrook and Pittsfield are more than 10% of students Black. Overall, few students have been identified as English language learners (3.7%). There is a substantial range among the eight districts in terms of percentage of students identified with disabilities: over 19% in Haverhill, Holbrook and Westfield; less than 12% in Dracut.

In terms of student achievement as measured by MCAS in 2010, most of the districts had relatively low achievement levels with annual rates of student growth on the low end of moderate. Display 2 shows the percentage of students in each district earning proficient or advanced scores on the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics MCAS. It also shows the median student growth percentile for students in grades 4-8 and 10 for both ELA and math. Median student growth percentile scores between 40 and 60 are considered moderate.

Display 2. District Performance as Assessed by 2010 MCAS Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentile

District	Size	# of Schools	2010 ELA and Math		2010 Median Student Growth Percentile	
			ELA (Prof/Adv)	Math (Prof/Adv)	ELA (Growth)	Math (Growth)
Dracut	4107	7	68%	50%	43	39
Gardner	2600	5	64%	48%	47	47
Haverhill	6845	15	54%	42%	43	45
Holbrook	1161	3	65%	52%	56	57
Orange	840	3	60%	49%	50	45
Pittsfield	6072	12	62%	57%	47	51
Saugus	2866	6	66%	53%	45	50
Westfield	6100	12	66%	48%	45	40
State			68%	59%	50	50

Display 3. District Performance as Shown by MCAS Composite Performance Index and Change From 2008-2010

District	ELA				Math			
	2008	2009	2010	Incr/Decr	2008	2009	2010	Incr/Decr
Dracut	85.4	86.7	86.8	1.4	75.8	75.7	75.2	-0.6
Gardner	82.6	84.0	85.1	2.5	70.0	73.1	74.7	4.7
Haverhill	80.7	81.5	80.0	-0.7	71.7	71.3	71.1	-0.6
Holbrook	81.4	83.9	85.5	4.1	71.2	71.3	76.6	5.4
Orange	80.5	79.5	83.4	2.9	73.4	71.6	77.5	4.1
Pittsfield	81.5	84.1	85.5	4.0	73.2	77.6	80.4	7.2
Saugus	82.5	83.9	87.1	4.6	74.3	74.1	78.2	3.9
Westfield	84.5	85.7	86.3	1.8	73.5	74.1	74.4	0.9
State	85.2	86.5	86.9	1.7	77.7	78.5	79.9	2.2

Display 3 shows that over the period from 2008 through 2010, MCAS Composite Performance Index (CPI) scores statewide inched upward. With the exception of Dracut in ELA, all of the Level 3 districts performed below the statewide CPI in 2008. However, most made progress closing the gap between their performance and the statewide average over the course of the next two years. One (Pittsfield) now exceeds the state CPI in mathematics and one (Saugus) exceeds the state CPI in ELA. Two declined over the period, however: Dracut in mathematics and Haverhill in both ELA and mathematics.

Cross-Cutting Theme #1

Districts continue to struggle to build upon existing curriculum and assessment systems to implement an aligned and consistently well-taught curriculum

Some districts have developed curriculum maps and pacing guides to support teachers. Even if they have developed written, aligned curricula, however, the consistency of the *taught curriculum* varies considerably across schools. When resources are limited and staff reductions occur, districts tend to choose to cut back efforts to refine and expand the curriculum. Most districts and schools are using formative assessments, although these assessments are not necessarily used consistently across schools, and assessments benchmarks are not always established to help teachers assess how well students are mastering the curriculum and to implement tiered instruction to address student weaknesses. Despite the variability in how assessments and data are used across districts and across schools within a given district, there is evidence that formative assessments are being administered at some grades, and that districts realize that teachers need access, time, and support in looking at data—even if resources are not directed accordingly. Too often, teachers are not afforded sufficient time to look at data together and determine how to use it to make frequent adjustments to instruction.

Many districts across Massachusetts are struggling to leverage the building blocks of standards-based education (aligned curriculum and assessments) to develop an aligned, consistently well-taught curriculum. *These district reviews suggest that Level 3 districts are struggling to develop systems that contribute to the development and consistent delivery of a high-quality curriculum.* Explanations for the struggles faced by Level 3 districts include the focus of the central office on other matters, leadership capacity (e.g., reduced district staff, leaders without necessary skills, or a reduction in coaches or coordinators) or ineffective guidance or support provided by the district to its schools. For instance, districts may not provide to schools a clear understanding of what "good, effective instruction" looks like or what good student work looks like, or may not provide the necessary leadership to arrive at a district wide system that includes formative as well as summative assessments. Similarly, districts too often lose the opportunity to focus staff efforts on improving instruction through the accountability levers of the supervision and evaluation process for principals and teachers. Lack of common planning time or effective structures or support for common planning time detract from the development of curricula and the improvement of their delivery. These examples are just a few of the ways in which district systems can hinder, rather than enhance, the ability of schools and teachers to implement an aligned and consistently well-taught curriculum.

<u>*Questions to Consider:*</u>

- *How can the soon-to-be- developed ESE model educator evaluation system provide incentives for leaders and teachers to improve the consistency and quality of the <u>taught</u> curriculum?*
- *How can the regional DSACs support more districts to use the most effective ESE-developed tools and protocols to build instructional quality and improve the consistency of instruction, e.g., coaching models, learning walks?*
- *How can the DSACs help districts share their best practices for building instructional capacity in schools and classrooms?*

Cross-Cutting Theme #2

The story of the Level 3 districts is one that demonstrates the clear necessity to develop district systems that support schools through an effective managerial and supervisory relationship.

The relationship between the district and its schools can be *defined by the direction, guidance and support given to schools to deliver curricula, improve instructional quality, provide sufficient time for student learning and teacher collaboration, staff the school with effective and qualified professionals and support staff, and support adult learning and growth*. In some cases, districts provide little direction, guidance or support; in other cases they provide direction and guidance but little support; other cases districts provide only guidance but little direction or support to help schools meet expectations.

Several of the Level 3 districts do not set clear expectations for instructional quality and performance. As a result, schools are engaged in multiple initiatives and there is wide variability in curriculum, instructional practice, and how data is used within and across schools. Inadequate direction or guidance contributes to inconsistent practices and limits capacity to improve performance. When districts fail to fulfill core district functions well (e.g., aligning curriculum and developing an assessment system), schools are on their own to improve; some do and others don't. In several districts district leadership teams have functions that do not support the instructional core or principal leadership. For example, a barrier to improvement for most of the districts is that school leaders have inadequate tools or guidance to support effective teacher supervision and evaluation.

<u>**Questions to Consider:**</u>

- *How can ESE help districts ensure that their systems and practices are highly effective in ways that actively support schools in meeting student needs?*

- *How can ESE give districts feedback based on the question: "How, and for what purpose, is the district designing systems for:*

  - ✓ *Communication?*

  - ✓ *Developing and refining curriculum and assessments?*

  - ✓ *Identifying and sharing best practices and removing practices that are not working?*

  - ✓ *Teaming and professional learning?*

  - ✓ *Monitoring and supervision?*

  - ✓ *Evaluating administrator and teacher performance?*

Cross-Cutting Theme #3

Districts are facing challenges in maintaining capacity to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs in the face of reduced funding and rising expenses.

Many of the eight Level 3 participating districts have experienced inadequate funding increases that do not keep pace with rising costs. As a result, districts have *eliminated, often through attrition, multiple district- and school-level administrator positions* in an attempt, not always successful, to avoid eliminating teaching positions. Also, districts have *dramatically reduced support staff, student services, enrichment programs, time for teacher collaboration, and professional development activities*. Eliminating administrator positions has added responsibilities and duties to remaining staff, resulting in self-reported reduced productivity and an inability to fulfill basic district functions. For instance, district officials report having to postpone efforts to refine curriculum and engage in long term planning and having to reduce critical professional development. Some of these districts have decreased capacity to fulfill certain core district functions such as curriculum development and instructional coaching needed to engage in systemic improvement efforts. Small district size intensifies these impacts. Display 4 shows per pupil spending for each district and the change in that spending between 2007 and 2009.

Display 4. Per Pupil Spending and Change Between 2007 and 2009

	In-district			Out-of-district			All pupils		
District	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*
Dracut	8,009	8,731	9,149	28,373	24,959	24,838	8,536	9,203	9,606
Gardner	9,135	9,672	10,808	13,822	16,363	15,834	9,532	10,153	11,250
Haverhill	10,392	10,889	11,100	14,928	15,362	12,381	10,702	11,203	11,302
Holbrook	9,941	10,141	11,611	26,801	34,088	31,921	10,850	11,536	13,212
Orange	10,312	10,531	11,277	15,705	17,669	14,373	10,554	10,785	11,441
Pittsfield	11,558	12,027	12,390	9,970	10,138	9,193	11,487	11,930	12,200
Saugus	10,078	9,793	10,270	28,788	25,080	23,253	10,825	10,608	11,079
Westfield	11,063	10,580	12,178	20,493	24,364	29,786	11,349	10,888	12,530
State Average	11,433	11,979	12,527	19,341	20,494	20,925	11,858	12,448	13,006

These Level 3 districts typically spend 5% to 15% less per pupil than average spending statewide. Holbrook and Dracut are exceptions, with Holbrook spending 2% above the state average of $13,006 in 2009, and Dracut spending only 74% of the state average. All districts saw their per pupil spending increase between 2007 and 2009, several by double digit percentages.

Display 5 illustrates the range of funding levels across districts, measured by the percentage the town and district allocates above the required net spending level. Three communities have historically limited school spending to required net school spending levels: Dracut, Gardner, and Haverhill. Others have traditionally exceeded net school spending requirements. Three saw substantial increases in the percent above the required minimum in 2009: Holbrook, Saugus and Westfield. District officials in such districts as Westfield, Gardner, and Saugus reported that adequate funding was a significant challenge, leading to reduced staffing, support services, or arts, physical education, and advanced classes. Other districts reported challenges in managing funds, which hindered efforts to track the use of funds and explore potential cost savings. In some districts, strong leadership and careful attention to accounting practices has minimized challenges related to funding. Contentious relationships among district, administrators and municipal

officials or among school committee members in some communities contribute to funding challenges. When all officials shared a similar vision for improving public education in the community, there was greater likelihood that budget issues could be resolved or minimized.

Display 5. District Spending as Percentage above Required Net Spending (in order of percentage above NSS)

			Percentage Above Required Net Spending				
Site	**Size**	**Schools**	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Holbrook	1161	3	10%	15%	9%	19%	19%
Saugus	2866	6	6%	11%	4%	10%	12%
Westfield	6100	12	9%	7%	4%	12%	6%
Pittsfield	6072	12	8%	6%	7%	6%	6%
Orange	840	3	8%	7%	6%	9%	1%
Dracut	4107	7	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Haverhill	6845	15	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Gardner	2600	5	-1%	-3%	-3%	0%	-1%

Questions to Consider:

- *Because some districts have stronger district systems of support that give them greater capacity to respond to funding challenges, how might ESE make districts more aware of those systems and support districts to develop them?*

- *How can ESE and DSACs encourage and support districts to make more extensive use of regional approaches to secure and/or deliver services in order to a) identify and eliminate inefficiencies, b) achieve economies of scale and/or c) meet needs for which, alone, the district lacks sufficient capacity and/or technical expertise?*

- *Is ESE's district review process robust enough in the areas of student support and financial management to detect the impact of tightening resources on districts' capacities to respond systemically to non-academic barriers to learning?*

The following pages of this report describe in more detail common findings within each of the six District Standards made through the comprehensive district accountability reviews.

District Standard #1: Leadership and Governance

District leadership matters. The direction provided by the superintendent, and carried out by administrators, results in a district system of support for schools that is either strengthened or eroded by the quality of the district infrastructure and the degree of coordination and alignment of efforts. Governance and political leadership also matter, as municipal officials and school committees can lay the foundation for the district's success or failure. Friction between municipal and school district officials can compromise support for school improvement initiatives. School committee practices can contribute to the staff's lack of clarity about district mission and/or affect their ability to focus efforts without unnecessary distraction.

Challenges faced by some Level 3 Districts
- **Decreased district leadership capacity and an erosion of district infrastructure and capacity to fulfill core functions**, such as curriculum delivery, assessment, anticipating and addressing school and student needs, and supervising and monitoring schools and programs.
- **District and school improvement plans that are not aligned**, not communicated to stakeholders, and are not being used to guide improvement efforts.
- **Insufficient support and guidance for schools**
    - Schools are sometimes left without clearly articulated expectations for performance
    - Districts may provide inadequate support and direction, leaving schools struggling to solve district-wide issues on their own
- **School Committee governance practices** and **tensions between municipal and school officials** can distract attention from district improvement and result in budget decisions that do not serve school and student needs.

District Standard #2: Curriculum and Instruction

Some districts have documented curricula at all levels that are aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. Others have not developed complete aligned curricula, and curricula remain as patchworks dependent on the work of teachers or groups of teachers working independently. Even where documented their curricula, districts are struggling to ensure that the written curriculum is implemented consistently across schools and classrooms so that instruction – the taught curriculum – aligns with the written curriculum.

Challenges faced by some Level 3 Districts
- **Lack of coordinated curriculum leadership for developing and reviewing the written curriculum.**
- **Difficulty sustaining efforts to refine and improve curriculum, resulting from:**
    - Lack of a standing curriculum committee or other teaming structures responsible for refining curriculum.
    - Curriculum coordinators being given additional responsibilities that take focus away from curriculum work.
- **Varied and inconsistent implementation of curriculum and instructional practices, resulting from:**
    - School-level autonomy with little or no district oversight.

- o Lack of a shared district-wide understanding of effective instruction and exemplary student work.
- o Insufficient supervision and monitoring of classroom practice, e.g., limited observations or learning walks.

- **Ineffective use of teacher common planning time, resulting from:**
  - o Lack of an effective structure for common planning time.
  - o Lack of sufficient time for meaningful collaborative work

District Standard #3: Assessment

The purpose of an assessment system is to enable staff to make real-time decisions based on accurate and timely information. For the most part, decisions about the allocation of resources and the continuation of initiatives are not sufficiently informed by meaningful assessment, mostly due to a lack of district capacity and a system for doing so. Districts and schools do tend to provide diagnostic and formative assessments at the elementary school level, especially in the early grades, allowing teachers to determine what to reteach and to use data to group students for targeted instruction in reading. However, diagnostic and formative assessments are less consistently used in mathematics or for students in higher grades. Further, there is considerable across-school variance in how teachers and leaders use data to make decisions, and even in the types of formative assessments used to assess student performance. In most districts, the lack of a coordinated and district wide assessment system—and in some, the lack of a complete, written, aligned curriculum to base assessments on—is hindering school-level improvement efforts, and school staff are left to identify, select and/or develop assessments on their own—without training or guidance.

Challenges faced by some Level 3 Districts

- **Lack of a coordinated, balanced assessment system.** Some districts do not have a sufficient number of formative assessments. Even when they do, districts do not usually have a coordinated assessment system so schools are left to develop their own strategies for analyzing data and deciding how to use data to improve instruction.

- **Administrators and teachers lack sufficient skill and/or time to use data effectively.** In some districts, teachers report that they struggle to use data other than MCAS data on a regular basis, and that sufficient time is not devoted to learning to use and analyze data.

- **Districts do not use data adequately to determine which programs and services are working well.** District-wide data on student and teacher performance is not effectively aggregated to analyze the impacts of programs, services, staffing, professional development, or budget decisions.

District Standard #4: Human Resources and Professional Development

Most districts are engaged in relatively traditional approaches to human resources and professional development. There is little evidence of innovative approaches to develop human capital, such as incentive programs to recruit and retain the strongest candidates, the use of rigorous teacher selection processes, or partnerships with regional associations, collaboratives or universities. Principal and teacher evaluation systems are not typically used to contribute to educators' growth and improvement or hold staff accountable. In general, practices related to human resources are adequate to ensure staff are hired to fill open positions and maintained as employees, but not well developed to ensure the best qualified candidates are identified and recruited, or to ensure that existing staff are mentored, coached, and supported to meet high professional standards. , Supervision and evaluation systems rarely target the improvements necessary to increase the achievement of the students in the district.

Attachment #7: Level 3 Summary Analysis

Challenges faced by some Level 3 Districts

- **Inability to maintain or expand valued programs.** Some districts have had to eliminate or cut back on valued teacher mentoring programs as the result of financial restraints.

- **Ineffective and underutilized supervisory and evaluation systems**. Principal and teacher evaluations are not generally used to hold teachers accountable or to improve instruction. Too often, inadequate time and attention is dedicated to effective supervision, evaluations are not regularly conducted and supervisors do not provide suggestions for growth, and few distinctions are made along the range of professional practice, from novice to exemplary (rather, principals and teachers are consistently and routinely rated "satisfactory" on annual performance evaluations).

- **Uncoordinated professional development activities**. Professional development is often a potpourri of opportunities without regard to focused district priorities or teacher needs.

District Standard #5: Student Support

Review teams found the Level 3 districts provide a range of programs in the attempt to support academic and social-emotional needs of their students. However a continuum of supports is lacking to provide an adequate safety net for high-needs and at-risk children. Districts tend to lack a methodology to determine the effectiveness of these supports, so all too often, support programs and services are among the first to be cut when resources are dwindling. Further, the reliance on grants—to fund support programs and services—results in a churn of these programs and a non-strategic collection of programs rather than a systematic and systemic approach to student support services.

There are instances of districts having difficulty meeting the needs of one or more groups of students. At least one district is struggling with:

- Increased dropout rates and the identified need to develop 9th grade academies and programs to support at risk students.

- Providing support to English Language Learners in the face of district-wide staffing reductions.

- Providing academic enrichment to talented and gifted students.

- Developing inclusive classroom support for special education students when professional development and schedules of general and special education teachers are uncoordinated

- Addressing the needs of a significantly rising population of homeless students.

District Standard #6: Financial and Asset Management

As detailed in the third theme in this report, *districts are struggling to maintain capacity to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs in the face of reduced funding and rising expenses.* Many districts reviewed report fiscal crises resulting from reductions in state aid, existing town and city debt, or loss of funds stemming from participation in the district choice program. When funds are scarce, districts struggle as much as possible to maintain sufficient numbers of classroom teachers, but programs and services are severely reduced or eliminated. Districts have difficulty determining what financial decisions to make to reduce impacts to children, especially since they often lack the ability to assess the effects of their initiatives, programs, services, and staffing on student performance.

In some instances, contentious relationships among district, school committee, and/or municipal officials makes it difficult to engage in the types of discussions needed to solve difficult issues about the allocation of funding across the city or town. The experience of Level 3 districts suggests that developing positive relationships among municipal, district, and school committee leadership is essential for moving forward. Further, conversations about budgets and resource allocation can be complicated by incompatible accounting and financial management systems used by the city/town and the district.

Attachment #7: Level 3 Analysis Summary of Key Challenges

Leadership and Governance

- **Decreased district leadership capacity and an erosion of district infrastructure and capacity to fulfill core functions**, such as curriculum development, assessment, monitoring, budgeting.

- **District and school improvement plans that are not aligned**, not communicated to stakeholders, and are not being used to guide improvement efforts.

- **Insufficient support and guidance for schools**. Districts may provide inadequate support and direction, leaving schools struggling to solve district-wide issues on their own. Further, schools are sometimes left without clearly articulated expectations for performance.

- **School Committee governance practices** and **tensions between municipal and school officials** can distract attention from district improvement and result in budget decisions that do not serve school and student needs.

Curriculum and Instruction

- **Lack of coordinated curriculum leadership for developing and reviewing the written curriculum.**

- **Difficulty sustaining efforts to refine and improve curriculum and improve classroom instruction**, stemming from lack of focus or reduced capacity.

- **Varied and inconsistent implementation of curriculum and instructional practices**, stemming from the lack of a district-wide definition of effective instruction and insufficient supervision and monitoring of schools and classroom practice.

Assessment

- **Lack of a coordinated assessment system**. Some districts do not have a coordinated assessment system and leave schools on their own to struggle in developing strategies for analyzing data and deciding how to use data to improve instruction.

Assessment (continued)

- **Ineffective availability and use of common planning time**.

- **Administrators and teachers lack sufficient skill and time to use data effectively**. In some districts, teachers report that they struggle to use formative student assessment data on a regular basis, and that sufficient time is not devoted to learning to analyze and use data.

- **Districts do not use data adequately to determine which programs and services are working well.**

Human Resources and Professional Development

- **Inability to maintain or expand valued programs.** Some districts have had to eliminate or cut back on valued teacher mentoring programs as the result of financial restraints.

- **Ineffective and underutilized supervisory and evaluation systems**. Principal and teacher evaluations are not generally used to hold teachers accountable or to improve instruction. For example, principals and teachers are consistently rated "satisfactory" on annual performance evaluations.

- **Uncoordinated professional development activities**. Professional development is often a potpourri of opportunities without regard to focused district priorities or teacher needs.

Student Support

- **Districts are having difficulty meeting the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners, at-risk students, and/or advanced students.**

Financial and Asset Management

- **Districts are struggling to maintain capacity to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs in the face of reduced funding and rising expenses.**