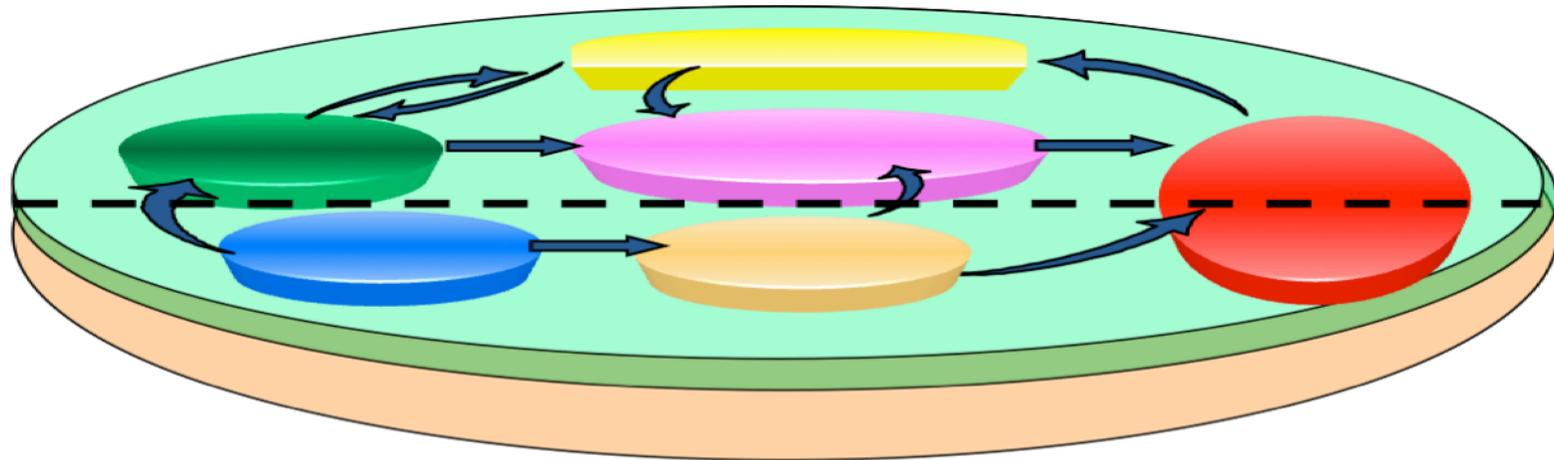


Forest Hills School System Assessment Feedback Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

The following system assessment feedback report was developed for Forest Hills Elementary School, Western Springs District 101, by the System Assessment Review Team of the Consortium for Educational Change.

Using the best practice criteria of a correlation between the Baldrige Performance Excellence Education Criteria and the Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities as a lens, the System Assessment Review Team reviewed information provided by the school and interviewed administrators, faculty, staff, students, and parents in order to identify strengths and opportunities for system improvement.



This feedback report was developed reflecting on the indicators described on the next few pages. It is a response to written information provided by the school as well as from information gathered from interviews. It is not intended to represent the perspective of all school administrators, faculty, staff, students, and parents. Its accuracy is dependent on the information presented and discussed by the external Review Team.

The criteria around which we conducted our visit are listed below. It is a synthesis of the research from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Criteria, the Correlates of Effective Schools, the Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities, and Standard Bearer. They represent the four best practice, continuous improvement frameworks. This school uses the Professional Learning Community Framework as the format.

Focus on Learning: We acknowledge that the fundamental purpose of our school is to help all students achieve high levels of learning and therefore we are willing to examine all of our practices in light of their impact on learning.	
<i>A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum</i>	
A.	We set student learning expectations for staff to build shared knowledge regarding common core state standards, district curriculum guides, trends in student achievement, and expectations for the next course or grade. This collective inquiry enables each staff member across a grade or department to clarify what all students must know and be able to do as a result of every unit of instruction. The curriculum is horizontally and vertically aligned.
B.	We expect that each teacher give priority to the identified essential learning targets in every unit of instruction to guarantee that each student has equal access to those learning targets in all classrooms for the grade level or course. Text and other resources are aligned to the essential learning targets. Pacing guides identify what should be taught during each grading period.
C.	We expect that every teacher is able to assist each student and their parents (families) know the essential learning targets so they can assist in monitoring performance in relationship to those targets.
<i>Formative and Summative System of Assessments</i>	
D.	We ensure there is a balance between common, formative assessment data to guide instruction and learning; and common, summative assessment data to reflect on teaching, programs, interventions, and periodic student progress reporting.
E.	We ensure there is frequent and timely feedback regarding the performance of our students on team, school, district, and state assessments.
F.	We expect each teacher to monitor the learning of each student on all common essential learning targets on a timely basis through a series of district-developed and/or school/team-developed common assessments that identify what each student knows and needs to learn next.
G.	We expect teachers to use assessment data aligned to the student learning targets to differentiate instruction and respond to students when they demonstrate they have not learned or have learned and are ready for more challenge.
H.	We regularly recognize and celebrate individual and collective student growth, mastery, and success aligned to goal accomplishments.
<i>School-Wide Systematic Interventions and Enrichments</i>	
I.	We expect Instructional activities are engaging and differentiated to meet individual and small group needs within the classroom.
J.	We ensure a system of interventions that guarantees each student will receive additional time and support for learning if he/she has not demonstrated mastery of grade level or course essential learning targets.
K.	We ensure that students are required rather than invited to devote the extra time and receive the additional support until they are successful in their learning
L.	We ensure teachers extend and enrich the learning of students who have mastered common essential learning targets so every student is challenged.
M.	We ensure staff has sufficient training and follow-up support to address the needs of all student subgroups through Response to Intervention systems.

Examine Policies and Procedures To Ensure a Focus on Learning	
N.	We expect all teachers to have a thorough knowledge of their subject matter, possess expertise in a wide range of effective instructional strategies, and demonstrate commitment to closing achievement gaps.
O.	We expect the learning environment of the school to be safe, respectful, engaging, and support a climate of high expectations for all students to be successful learners.
P.	We provide opportunities for teachers to examine homework, grading, discipline, recognition, etc. to ensure systematic and systemic implementation that supports and encourages learning.
Q.	We expect all teachers to clarify the criteria by which they will judge the quality of student work, and practice applying those criteria until they can do so consistently.
R.	We provide sufficient training and follow-up support to assist teachers with expectations in the alignment of essential learning targets, assessments, and instruction.
S.	We organize resources of people, time and money with a focus on learning as opposed to a focus on teaching.

Focus on Collaboration: We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose of learning for all students. We cultivate a collaborative culture through the development of high performing teams.

Building Shared Knowledge and Leadership: Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals	
A.	We have developed and deployed mission, vision, values (collective commitments) and goals to set clear direction. There is a process in place for school-wide improvement planning. The school improvement plan is focused on refining teaching practices to improve student learning. Action plans describe the steps to be taken toward attainment of goals.
B.	We expect that behaviors and actions of all staff support the vision, mission, values, and goals of both the school and the district. The improvement plan is put into action with fidelity.
C.	We set clear direction and communicate a "Big Picture" so that everyone sees how current and new initiatives connects to that direction and how those initiatives align with district direction. Everyone understands how this/her work contributes to school improvement.
High Performing, Collaborative Teams	
D.	We expect work to be done through collaborative teams in which members work together interdependently to achieve common goals. We have developed and adhere to team norms in conducting our work.
E.	We provide time during the contractual day and school year for teams to meet. We support both vertical and horizontal team collaboration. We address transition and articulation from elementary to middle to high and beyond.
F.	We expect teams to be accountable for the decisions they make. Teams expect all students to make substantial learning growth each year. Teams expect all students to express confidence in their ability to grow and improve each year. Teams monitor and report student learning results and make adjustments when appropriate. Structures and processes are in place for shared decision-making.
G.	We provide sufficient training and follow-up support for team members to have the skills, tools, and strategies to make teamwork efficient and effective. We monitor and report team effectiveness and efficiency on a regularly scheduled basis.
Creating Intentional Collaboration	
H.	We promote a culture/teaching environment of personal growth and high performance. Extensive communication and collaboration ensures that all stakeholders are a part of the decision-making process. There is evidence of a high level of trust, respect and morale throughout the school community.
I.	We create a safe environment to report and compare data so as to learn from one another and share best practices. We promote collaboration rather than competition. The school recognizes and celebrates individual, team, and school success aligned to its goals. There is evidence that staff satisfaction is high.
J.	We expect that team time to be used engage in collective inquiry on questions specifically linked to gains in student achievement. Each team is called upon to generate and submit products, which result from its work on its goals and targets related to student learning. Our work and the work of teams are focused on the four PLC questions.
K.	We ensure professional development is job-embedded and ongoing. It explicitly addresses the needs of staff and is focus on assisting staff to improve students' learning results. It has adequate resources, reflecting that ongoing, job-embedded professional development is a district priority.
Fostering Strong Partnerships	
L.	We foster collaborative partnerships between and among the district office and all schools to ensure decisions are made in the best interests of students.
M.	We foster a two-way communication system between and among the district office and all other schools that includes an exchange of essential information and feedback related to that information.
N.	We foster collaborative partnerships with parents (families) and the community to engage them in decisions about the progress of school, school and student goal attainment. There is evidence that parent (family) satisfaction is high.
O.	We foster a two-way communication system with parents (families) and the community that includes an exchange of essential information and feedback related to that information.
Examine Policies and Procedures To Ensure a Focus on Collaboration	
P.	We enforce district job expectations and provide meaningful evaluation systems so that each employee can self-assess as well as receive supervisory assessment of their strengths and opportunities for improvement in relation to district expectations. The evaluation system addresses new state and federal requirements.
Q.	We organize and allocate resources of people, time and money with a focus on collaboration.

Focus on Results: We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams and schools seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement.

Developing SMART Goals

A. School, team, and individual staff goals are specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and timely (SMART). They address gaps identified through key data sources that focus

	improvement efforts.
B.	The school improvement plan and process serves as the centerpiece for examining how the school performs in comparison to district and state requirements.
C.	We align key data indicators and measures throughout the system—district to school to team/department/ to individual--- throughout the use of a systematic reporting system. The school's improvement plan goals align to the key data indicators and measures where performance is below expectations or requirements.
D.	Administrative performance goals align with district and/or school improvement plan and related SMART goals
E.	Teacher performance goals align with district, school, and/or team improvement plan and related SMART goals.
F.	Student performance goals align with assessment data and information that defines what they need to learn next (Common Core State Standards).
<i>Creating a Results Orientation</i>	
G.	We expect all staff to use assessment data to: a) identify students who need additional time and support for learning; b) discover strengths and weaknesses in their own job performance; c) measure and report progress toward goals, and d) define action plans.
H.	We create a safe data culture so students and staff feel comfortable sharing their results in an effort to learn from others;
I.	We view, monitor, and report progress to all stakeholders on a regular basis to identify what to celebrate and what to focus on next in terms of improvement.
J.	We expect staff to assist students take responsibility for their own learning by collecting data to monitor and track their performance compared to high expectations and performance results of others.
K.	All students know where they are in the progression of steps to meet their learning targets and what evidence will be required to demonstrate mastery of the next step.
L.	We collect, analyze, prioritize, and act upon student, parent, and staff satisfaction data to be certain it is addressing the needs and requirements of our stakeholders.
<i>Improving Results</i>	
M.	We have evidence to show our trend achievement results are improving compared to the past. Our achievement results include measures of growth.
N.	We have evidence to show our student cohort achievement results are improving from grade to grade. Our achievement results include measures of growth.
O.	We have evidence to show our achievement results are improving compared to others (state and other benchmark schools).
P.	We have evidence to show our results have narrowed or closed achievement gaps between groups of students.
Q.	Our school meets adequate yearly progress requirements as defined by federal and state legislation. Our students are ready for the next level (elementary to middle, middle to high school, high school to college/career readiness).
<i>Examine Policies and Procedures To Ensure a Focus on Results</i>	
R.	We examine policies and processes related to data collection, management and analysis to be certain they are effective and efficient. Data is easily accessible and user-friendly in its format.
S.	We benchmark our performance against similar and high performing schools.
T.	We organize and allocate our resources of people, time and money with a focus on results.

SYSTEM ASSESSMENT SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES:

The school responded to a set of questions aligned to the three areas listed above. The external review team reviewed the Professional Learning Community effective practices and identified school strengths and opportunities for improvement. The school self-assessed itself as to where they viewed their progress toward the criteria. The purpose of the visit was to provide the school with gap information in areas where the external review team did not agree with the self-assessment.

The external review team examined the information and data prior to the site visit. They developed a list of questions to explore as part of the site visit. The external review team interviewed all stakeholder groups. On the first day the team interviewed:

- Principal, Assistant Principal & Head Teacher
- Teacher Leaders, Union Representatives & Parent Organization Leaders
- Instructional Support Staff, Reading/Intervention/Enrichment Specialists & PE/Fine Arts
- School Self-Assessment Team
- Problem-Solving Team, Additional Student Opportunities & Non-Instructional Support Staff

On the second day, the team interviewed:

- Parents
- Students
- Teachers
- Classroom visits

Schedules were set by the school with guidelines that representatives interviewed should reflect the demographics of the school. Approximately 80 stakeholders were interviewed.

Following interviews, the external review team reviewed its findings and prepared an oral report to give the school a preview of overall strengths and opportunities for improvement aligned to the framework and vision.

The week following the visit, the team communicated electronically to prepare the final written feedback report. This final report was sent to the school within seven days of the visit.

CEC is available to assist the school in any way it chooses to follow up with suggested next steps. The school has committed to use the information to update its improvement plans. It also has committed to allow at least one staff member to serve on an external review team for another system assessment visit.

This report summarizes the strengths and opportunities aligned to the continuous improvement criteria.

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SUMMARY OF OVERALL STRENGTHS

Among all of the strengths within each category and for all core values, the assessment team finds these strengths to be highest in priority. It is hoped that recognizing and celebrating these strengths will showcase past investment of resources in improving performance results.

Focus on Learning Strengths:

- + **Students come first. There is a focus on learning as opposed to a focus on teaching.** The school as a “place where all children thrive” represents the “Big Picture” glue that unites staff around its commitment to children and learning. Teachers demonstrate a thorough knowledge of content and use a wide range of effective instructional strategies, which is demonstrated through student achievement. They are proactive rather than reactive.
- + **Assessment data is used throughout the school to drive interventions and enrichments.** A systematic problem-solving process and analysis of data guide entry into, exits from and the assignment of research-based remedial & enrichment interventions. Teachers ensure that student’s needs are met through differentiation. Tiers 2 & 3 receive additional time during the school day (30 min. Tier 2, 60 min. Tier 3) to address identified areas of need. All teams and teachers develop SMART Goals aligned to school and District goals.
- + **Extensive common assessments are used.** AIMS Web fluency tests and M.A.P. Tests inform instruction. Fountas and Pinnell running records guide grades 1 &

2 reading instruction. The Reading/ Language Arts curriculum binder contains common summative assessments. The school uses unit tests and R.S.A.s for math formative and summative assessments. Formative diagnosis for math is done primarily through MAP's Descartes and through unit tests.

- + Professional development opportunities are directly related to student learning and aligned to District/school goals and priorities. Strand training is contractually required of each teacher every two years. Examples of aligned training include Danielson rubrics, PLCs, SMART Goals, SEL, diagnostic teaching & interventions.**

- + The school and District are beginning to align targets, assessments and pacing guides to the Common Core standards. Language Arts Common Core is being piloted with pacing guides, grade level-based learning targets, and summative assessments this year. Common formative assessments are under development this year.**

- + The SEL program is extensive (commonly taught and reinforced school-wide), systematic and requires student analysis of inappropriate behaviors. The school uses the "bees" to recognize students being respectful, responsible and safe. It recognizes students through an end-of-year awards assembly, the district Writing Anthology, teacher-created awards and a sign-up sheet in the office to recognize individual classrooms.**

Focus on Collaboration Strengths:

- + Home/school communication is a priority and is successful.** Teachers, staff and parents are partners in ensuring success in learning. There is continual, daily communication – both formal and informal – between teachers and parents around the student’s academic and SEL progress. Parents are engaged through emails, curriculum night, newsletters, conferences and PowerSchool. Pupil progress is reported through PowerSchool and student report cards. The district has annual parent climate surveys that show annually positive levels of parent satisfaction.
- + There are high-performing collaborative grade level teams.** There is trust, respect, mutual commitment and support among teachers that translate to a school-wide commitment to “do whatever it takes” to make the school a place where all children can thrive. Grade level teams work closely together and testimony was universal that collaboration is high for teams at every grade level. Most staff members testify that team collaboration time is used effectively. Meeting goals are accomplished based on agenda items.
- + There are many opportunities to collaborate around data.** Classroom teachers have common team planning time 3x/week. Staff ensures alignment by collaborating through creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals and regularly reviewing data. Monthly horizontal and twice-annually vertical articulation meetings are scheduled. The problem-solving team meets weekly. Staff collaborates both horizontally and vertically to problem-solve for students who haven’t yet

mastered targets. Through assessments and progress monitoring, interventions and enrichment opportunities are included in daily instruction.

- + **The school has a mission, vision statement, values and goals that align to the District's strategic plan.** School goals are determined using assessment data. Common school goal-based themes seem to be common outcome assessments, ELA targets, and meeting growth targets in both reading and math. District goals drive school goals, which drive principal goals, team goals and teacher goals. Teachers report this overall goals alignment has improved professional practice because now everyone is working on and supporting common efforts.
- + **Parent partnerships and support are strong and parents feel positive about sending their children to this school,** reporting both teachers and principal are approachable, supportive and responsive to their needs. Parents feel welcome, and there is a high level of parent participation in academic events and extra-curricular activities. Students enjoy coming to school and know their teachers and principal care about them.

Focus on Results Strengths:

- + The school shows ample evidence of high academic achievement and is currently meeting AYP requirements in all subgroups and all subjects.** Evidence shows consistently high levels of student achievement and measureable growth. ISAT scores are among the best in the State. MAP scores are consistently above national norms. All subgroups perform at AYP levels or higher. This is a very high achieving school by any set of measures.
- + SMART Goals are used for school improvement goals evidence and are aligned from the District to the classroom.** Teachers review data to develop SMART Goals. While aligned to team and school goals, teacher goals can be specific to the needs of that teacher's students. Staff use the SEL pyramid, testing results, climate surveys, and teacher and student SMART Goals. There are common expectations, classroom goals, and self-analysis checklists/rubrics used.
- + Data is timely, accessible and user-friendly and there is an extensive, school-wide use of data to inform instruction and improve learning.** Common data are collected and assessed throughout the District. In addition to data review, the school uses common assessments to collaborate in staff, team, and problem-solving meetings. Teachers are very comfortable sharing achievement results with their grade level colleagues. At a team level, there is a trusting data environment, and team members are open to learning from each other through data-based results.

- + **There is a system in place for making data accessible to those who need it.** Internally, results are shared through Google Docs, PowerSchool, and grade-level/administration data sharing. Teachers testify that data through Google Docs is readily available as needed and user-friendly. Externally, results are shared through student report cards, school report cards and PowerSchool.

SUMMARY OF OVERALL OPPORTUNITIES

Among all of the opportunities for improvement within each category and for all core values, the assessment team finds these opportunities to be highest in priority. It is hoped that addressing these opportunities will yield a high future return on investment of resources in improving performance results.

Focus on Learning Opportunities for Improvement:

- △ **There is a significant imbalance between common formative and summative assessment usage,** with *common* summative assessment use far more prevalent than *common* formative assessment use. Common formative assessments for Language Arts are “under construction” this year. Though pretests from the math textbook series are used, their use has not been consistent or systematic across the grades. There are no formative common assessments in any other subject area.

- △ **Alignment to the Common Core is only in the beginning stages.** Language Arts alignment to the Common Core is just beginning this year, with the use of pacing guides, targets and summative assessments only at the piloting stage. Piloting the math Common Core for full implementation is still two years away. No other subject areas are aligned or in the process of being aligned to the Common Core.
- △ **Students are not responsible for their own learning.** Student – as opposed to instructional - learning targets are unclear. There are no essential learning goals to drive student involvement and understanding in what is expected of them to learn. Many students know what the day's lesson will be but not what they themselves need to learn. Most students can't state their learning goals, do not collect data on such learning goals and there is no common school-wide expectation that they do so.
- △ **The school is more leveraged for academic achievement than it is for student growth.** Fundamentals for a student growth emphasis – essential learning targets; individual student goal-setting, data tracking and analysis; common formative assessments to drive individual diagnosis and instruction; a better common command of the MAP Descarte data possibilities – are not in place. PLC's Four Critical Questions are not systematically applied toward ongoing individual student growth analysis. The school is only beginning to address measuring and tracking student growth through a first-time District growth goal. There is no SIP to guide them in this effort.

Focus on Collaboration Opportunities for Improvement:

- △ **Relationships regarding “tough” conversations need to improve.** Concerns about potentially hurt feelings sometimes interfere with needed discussions beyond the team level about what should be “tight” (expected of all) and what can be “loose” (individual choice or options). This reluctance to have the tough conversations has resulted in compromising legitimate potential celebration opportunities, making data-based sharing beyond grade level teams less likely, causing occasional relationship difficulties with administration and the district office, and suggesting a possible reason for the failure of previous school Building Leadership Teams to survive.

- △ **There are missing structures for collaboration that could improve overall building collaboration and communication.** While there are school meeting norms, there are no norms for individual teams. There was no evidence of systematic team effectiveness monitoring or overall team function expectations. Outside of the annual PLC training for those who attend, staff members feel there is little professional training on teamwork and how to function as a team to guide them.

- △ **There are important, immediate topics to address, making the need for school-wide discussion and collaboration essential for the school’s continued improvement efforts.** There is a need to more frequently and *systematically* celebrate individual student growth – both academically and socially – as well as the accomplishments by teachers and staff together, as a full school team.

There is an immediate need to establish and pursue a School Improvement Plan (SIP) and collectively agree on a shared mission, vision and common commitments. There is a need to collaboratively set school goals and to address frequent staff comments about feeling overwhelmed by initiatives. There is a need to share data and data-based results more openly and regularly among the entire staff. A new BLT is mandated for January, but past BLTs have failed because of a lack of willingness by some to engage, making this an immediate need for the school staff to address. There is a need to address how staff can have tough conversations and still care for and support each other.

- △ **Communication can be more proactive and less reactive with families.** Not all parents are clear about how to understand the achievement information they receive and not all are knowledgeable of the SEL program. Some parents expressed a desire to have parents a part of a School Leadership Team or a Parent Advisory Team.

Focus on Results Opportunities for Improvement:

- △ **The data picture is not yet complete.** While school academic goals have appropriate stretch (ex. - setting *Exceeds* targets for ISAT), the learning culture goal for this year seems already to have been attained based on the most recent culture survey data. Recognizing that this is a challenge for such a high-achieving school, there was nevertheless no data-based evidence noted of continual academic improvement. Academic growth targets are now required by 2016, but there was no evidence as to how the 50%+ District-wide “exceeds”

target will be addressed. It is not clear how, or if, benchmark data (Lyons Township feeder schools and Hinsdale schools) impact decisions or planning. The school lacks adequate satisfaction data – school-based satisfaction data was not available and the percentage of staff participation in the District’s culture survey was low. SEL does not have a formal tracking system around data. The school has no School Improvement Plan (SIP).

- △ **The SMART Goal format used dampens the SMART goal’s impact and effectiveness toward sharing accountability and engaging student responsibility for his or her own learning.** School, team and classroom SMART Goals lack Indicators. Action steps are used in place of Indicators. Measures act as Indicators and action steps as strategies. As a result, goal statements are not tightly aligned to targets and goals are not always clear. The school is in the process of creating current SMART Goals for this school year; as a result, some staff members stated they are not aware of what SMART goals are. Last year’s team and teacher SMART goals were not consistent in being measurable.
- △ **The volume and complexity of data is difficult to manage.** School-wide use of Descarte is not uniform and the volume of Descarte data, in particular, can be overwhelming, causing some staff to avoid its use. Staff expressed a desire for more training around using data, especially Descarte. Some stated concerns over the balance between assessment data and the time taken from instruction to obtain it, though they acknowledge the positive impact of the availability of such data.

NEXT STEPS

While this report is not intended to be prescriptive, this section provides some suggestions for addressing key opportunities for improvement. It provides suggestions that could serve as next steps. The strengths and areas of opportunity are based on set criteria framed by continuous improvement research. The priorities are not listed in any order. Each is equally important. Next Steps are framed by the experiences and opinions of the assessment team.

Priority: Focus on Learning

This school's challenge is to convert your school from one leveraged for high student achievement to one that emphasizes individual student growth. SMART goals need to be written to be SMARTer and more focused on student growth. Essential learning targets, linked to the Common Core in all subject areas, need to be established and common formative assessments to support them need to be as robust as are the common summative assessments presently used. PLC's Four Critical Questions need to drive an emphasis on making students truly responsible for their own learning.

Priority: Collaborative Culture

Address the "tough" questions issue as a staff, openly and together, and celebrate your victories – large and small. Revisit your school meeting norms to see how they can help you. Consider team norms and more team training to make group communications more consistent. Address some important topics to further improvement efforts: the need for a SIP, more all-school data sharing, establishing a lasting Building Leadership Team, commonly prioritizing and committing to initiatives, and dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed by initiatives. You are adept at recognizing accomplishments more so than celebrating them. Take time to recognize the exceptional things you are doing. Finding time for celebration is a priority for any

successful organization.

Priority: Results Orientation

Look at your SMART Goals usage to challenge yourselves around how to make them more prescriptive and accountable. Use this as leverage to think about how you will be accountable for growth goals by 2016. Take advantage of the SMART goal training that is taking place right now as one of your strand offerings. Tighter use of SMART Goals will help you address issues cited here around common formative assessments, learning targets, students taking responsibility for their own learning, and how to manage all of the data.