

Audit of 15 key SPPS academic initiatives

Written by

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Last week Saint Paul Public Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva and Dr. Douglas Reeves of the Leadership and Learning Center (LLC) shared summary findings of an Implementation Audit of 15 key SPPS academic initiatives. The Audit will help SPPS determine both the extent to which the initiatives are implemented at the school and district level, and also the extent to which the initiatives are linked to student achievement.

The purpose of the Implementation Audit™, according to the LLC, is to neither criticize nor recommend a particular program, but rather to reveal the actual level of implementation and impact on student achievement so that system-level leaders can make wise decisions about the allocation of time, energy and money.

This is the first time SPPS has conducted such an extensive and thorough review of academic initiatives. The audit will provide information to the district in order to help focus, and ultimately reduce, initiatives to those with the best chance of improving student achievement. The goal, as part of the 2010-11 budget process, is to re-align district resources to the areas most likely to help improve student achievement.

Among the key findings in the audit:

- SPPS needs to focus on fewer initiatives with greater depth.
- SPPS senior leadership has a clear and specific vision.
- Principals and teachers are clearly focused on achievement and equity.
- District leaders and school principals need to clarify and specify expectations for instructional coaching.
- SPPS is rich in data, but more principals and teachers could use the data in specific and detailed ways to improve instruction and make leadership decisions.
- Time requirements for initiatives need to correspond to capacity and needs.
- Professional development needs to more carefully match specific teacher and administrator needs.
- The relationship between implementation of initiatives and gains in student achievement is generally low-due to fragmentation of support and multiple initiatives happening at once.
- High degrees of implementation of several SPPS initiatives are related to gains in achievement. Audit results for five initiatives-Writer's Workshop, Everyday Math, Content-Focused Coaching, Professional Learning Communities, and Language Skills Block-indicate a strong positive correlation between higher levels of implementation and substantive increases in student achievement. Other audited initiatives need further analysis.

Next steps regarding the audit include fully reviewing and analyzing the information contained in the report. Very shortly, the district's Senior Leadership Team will appoint an audit to the project team to fully analyze findings and prepare a report with preliminary recommendations to the Superintendent by January 29, 2010. The project team is expected to include a combination of central administrative staff, principals, and teachers, and to use a non-biased expert facilitator.

The district's Center for Professional Development, the Office of Accountability and school executive directors will provide support to school principals in early January for the analysis of

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local school data contained in the audit. Between mid-January and early March, district leadership will be working to align the draft audit recommendations to the budget development process while also gathering input for both.

Shortly after winter break, staff, families and community members can expect a number of communications about engagement opportunities related to the combined budget and audit recommendation process. The Superintendent plans to make decisions on specific initiatives and approaches, within the context of the district-wide budget and priority-setting process, by March 5, 2010, so that items requiring action by the Board of Education may be forwarded to the Board well before final decisions on the budget are required.

The executive summary of the report is available on the SPPS Website: <http://www.spps.org/>