

Minnesota Department of Education: Synthesis of World’s Best Workforce district summaries

This memo summarizes the 2015/16 Minnesota school district summaries for meeting Minnesota’s World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) legislation. The WBWF, passed in 2013, requires every school district to develop a plan that addresses the following five goals for supporting the future workforce: (1) all children are ready for school, (2) all third-graders can read at grade level, (3) all racial and socio-economic achievement gaps between students are closed, (4) all students are ready for career and college, and (5) all students graduate from high school. The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest team reviewed all five goals to better understand how districts are developing and supporting students. Findings from this review are intended to do the following:

- Increase the capacity of Minnesota’s districts to implement their WBWF plans.
- Increase the capacity of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to support its districts during implementation through enhanced knowledge of district goals and potential challenges.

To meet these aims, the REL Midwest team conducted a thorough review of a representative sample of 198 school district summaries.¹ For selection, districts were stratified using the following characteristics:

- Economic development region.
- District type (traditional or charter).
- District enrollment size.
- Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL).

Appendix A summarizes the characteristics of the districts in this review.

The REL Midwest team scanned the district summaries and entered them into qualitative data software (NVivo) for analysis. Coding the district summaries in NVivo allowed the team to capture significant information by assigning specific descriptors to data and organizing data into “containers” or “themes.” To ensure consistency in the coding process, we developed a codebook that provides guidelines on how to code and organize data. Once the data was coded, the REL Midwest team systematically analyzed data to look for similarities and differences in goals and strategies, and subsequently found the themes that are presented in this memo.

This review synthesis is organized by the five key areas in the district summary template: (1) stakeholder engagement; (2) goals and results; (3) needs based on data; (4) systems, strategy,

¹ Two hundred district summaries were randomly selected for this review. Two district summaries did not contain sufficient information, so they were excluded from this review.

and supports; and (5) equitable access to excellent teachers. Where this memo refers to “districts,” it means the 198 district summaries that were reviewed.

Summary of key findings

- **Section 1: Stakeholder engagement.** Districts held public meetings year-round, with more than half (56 percent) holding them in the fall. All districts reported that they had formed an advisory committee, which is made up of teachers, parents, support staff (such as administrators and district personnel), students, and community residents. Support staff made up the largest proportion of committee members, followed by teachers and parents.
- **Section 2a: All students are ready for school.** School readiness was commonly defined as demonstrating language and literacy skills (letter recognition, picture naming, rhyming, and alliteration). Other skills mentioned include math (identifying numbers and shapes) and social and emotional learning (listening, following instructions). Some districts indicated enrollment in preschool and participation in parent education classes as additional expectations of school readiness.
- **Section 2b: All students in third grade achieving grade-level literacy.** Two-thirds (62 percent) of school districts are using the MCA-III Reading test to assess literacy. Districts described their goals for literacy in two ways: (1) the total percentage of third-graders meeting or exceeding proficiency, or (2) the percentage increase of third-graders achieving or exceeding proficiency. Sample strategies to reach goals include: using formative assessments to design, implement, and monitor progress on reading interventions; providing additional literacy support through Reading Specialists, Reading Corps program, and Title I funds; and pairing in-class instruction with online literacy programs.
- **Section 2c: Close the achievement gaps among all subgroups.** Just over half of districts (56 percent) identified goals for closing the achievement gap. Over half of those districts (56 percent) did not mention subgroups when referring to achievement gaps, whereas 44 percent mentioned specific subgroups that they are targeting, most commonly FRPL students.
- **Section 2d: All students career and college ready by graduation.** Districts tied college and career readiness goals to gaining proficiency on the ACT and MCA (for example, increasing the number of students taking the ACT, increasing ACT scores, increasing proficiency in math and reading). Districts also specified some activities that they expect students to attend, such as participating in college and career readiness classes, developing personal plans that include college planning, going on college tours, job shadowing and more.
- **Section 2e: All students graduate.** All districts, except for two, that provided this data expected an increase in their graduation rate from the previous year. Districts identified a graduation goal ranging from 60 percent to 100 percent of students. The majority of districts (83 percent) are using the graduation rate to measure this goal.

- **Section 3: Identified needs based on data.** The top two identified needs are reading (61 percent of districts) and math (51 percent). Reading needs identified include: increased reading programs, increased staffing for intervention support, and improving data and tracking for reading proficiency. Math needs identified include: pinpointing math skill deficits, targeted interventions, and addressing achievement gaps between subgroups. Districts primarily used the MCA to identify needs (70 percent), followed by “other” data sources (37 percent) and local assessments (30 percent).
- **Section 4: Systems, strategies and support category.** Districts rely on the MCA to establish baseline academic proficiency levels, and monitor student progress using the same tool. Other strategies to monitor progress include: recurring districtwide staff development meetings and retreats; staff development and professional learning communities (PLCs); and classroom checkpoints. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of districts are reviewing disaggregated student data.
- **Section 5: Equitable access to excellent teachers.** Very few districts (6 percent) provided information on how they distribute teachers equitably. They frequently stated that a process existed for distributing teachers, but did not elaborate.

Goals and Results

Section 1: Stakeholder engagement

Annual public meeting

Districts reported the date of their annual public meeting(s), which were categorized into the calendar season in which they took place (figure 1). Districts held meetings year-round, with more than half (56 percent) holding them in the fall.

Figure 1. Seasons of annual public meetings (N = 198)

Season	Fall (Sept-Nov)	Winter (Dec-Feb)	Spring (March-May)	Summer (June-Aug)
Number of Districts	112	50	19	17
Percentage of Total	56%	25%	10%	9%

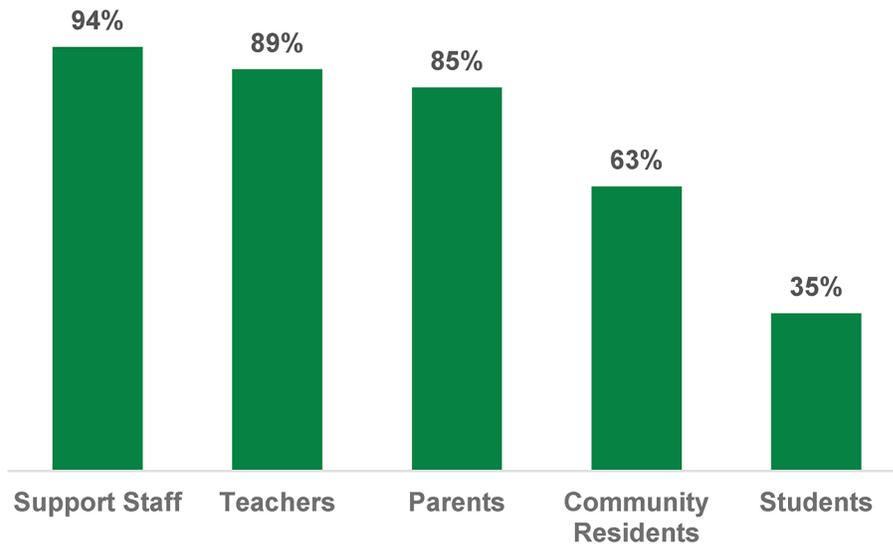
Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

District advisory committee

All districts reported that they had formed an advisory committee; all except for eight districts provided information on the composition of their committees (figure 2).

Advisory committees may include any or all of the following individuals: (1) teachers, (2) parents, (3) support staff (such as school counselors, administrators and district personnel), (4) students, and (5) community residents (such as city employees, government officials, and local business leaders).

Figure 2. Percentage of districts that include subgroups on district advisory committee (N = 198)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

Section 2: Goals and results

This section synthesizes the five goals presented in the district summaries, each of which includes a review of common themes. Additional information about type of assessment, student input/participation, student groups, whether goals are quantifiable and/or rigorous, and the type of data used to assess progress are presented—when available—in appendix B.

80 percent of districts provide early childhood education programs to promote kindergarten readiness.

2a. All students are ready for school

Districts defined school readiness in a wide variety of ways (figure 3).² Some districts defined readiness as the achievement of a set of skills and competencies in children. Others defined it as attainment of social and emotional learning skills. The following are the most common skills and expectations that districts identified in their summaries:

- **Language and literacy skills.** Just under half (48 percent) of districts specifically mentioned language and literacy as skills needed for school readiness. School districts typically defined school readiness by students’ language skills, including but not limited to identification of upper- and lowercase letters, and identification of short and long vowel sounds. Other skills mentioned include phonological awareness, picture naming, and rhyming and alliteration. Districts are using a wide range of assessments and measures to assess school readiness. The Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) assessment (7 percent of districts), the AIMSweb assessment (4 percent), and the Individual Growth for Development Indicators (IGDIs) assessment

² Of 198 districts, 162 (82 percent) provided information in this area.

(4 percent) were most frequently cited by school districts. Lastly, a handful of districts crafted their own local assessments based on the state’s early learning standards.

- **Math skills.** Approximately 15 districts (12 percent) indicated that they expected preschoolers to know math skills including counting, and naming and identifying numbers and shapes. A subset of these districts specifically identified achievement targets for math skills. One district, for example, reported that it expected preschoolers to reach an aggregate score of 80 percent in math standards.

Sample practice: Kindergarten readiness

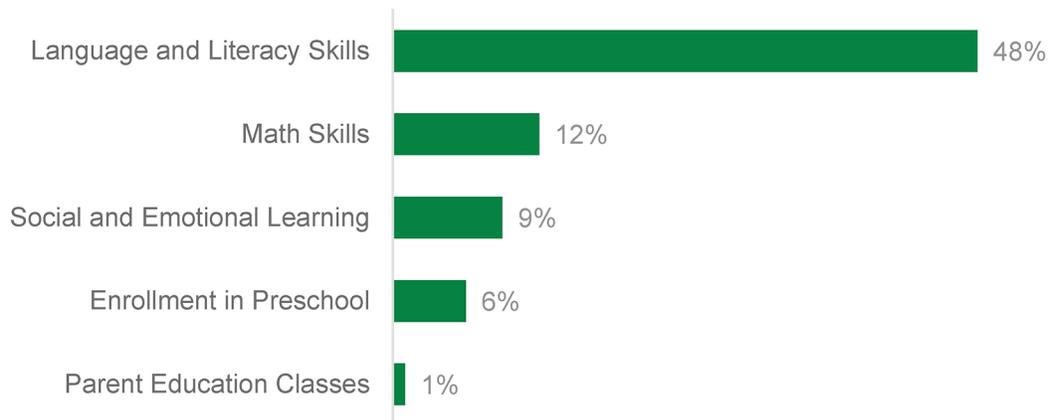
- **Minisinaakwaang Leadership Academy** plans to enhance literacy and technology skills of all kindergarten students using a reading and writing program delivered through online curriculum which allows the tracking of students’ word acquisition and reading comprehension.
- **Parnassus Prep Charter** will help families prepare to enter Prima (kindergarten) by offering New Family Orientation meetings, social events, and sending summer learning packets to all incoming Prima students and their families.

- **Social and emotional learning skills.** A small percentage of districts (9 percent) expected students to demonstrate social and emotional development skills for school readiness, such as listening, interacting positively with others, taking turns, sharing, seeking assistance from adults, following routines, and showing concern for others.
- **Enrollment in preschool.** Only a few districts (6 percent) described enrollment in preschools as a necessary condition for school readiness. Some of those districts went further to specify that students needed to attend preschool *and* show proficiency on assessments, such as Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Alden Conger Preschool Assessment, the Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) assessment, Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) reading assessment, and others.
- **Participation in parent education classes.** A very small number of districts (1 percent) specifically mentioned that parents participate in parenting education classes as a condition of school readiness. These classes are offered through local early childhood and family education centers, with the aim of identifying families new to the district and communicating with parents the supports that the district provides.

Sample goal: Social and emotional learning

All incoming kindergartners at the **Renville County West (RCW) School District** that have participated in the RCW Early Childhood programs during the 2015/16 school year will demonstrate school readiness skills, including, but not limited to, learning how to behave in a school setting; be able to follow a routine; listening and following two- to three-step instructions; ability to dress and go to the restroom independently; can recite the alphabet; can hold a pencil and can cut with scissors appropriately; participates in activities to develop language, premath, and prereading skills; is curious and receptive to learning new things; uses art, dramatic play, and music to express creativity; and can demonstrate socialization and cooperation with peers with an 85 percent proficiency rate using a district-created formative assessment.

Figure 3. How districts define school readiness (N = 129)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

2b. All students in third grade achieving grade-level literacy

To measure grade-level literacy, nearly two-thirds of school districts (62 percent) are primarily using the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment III (MCA-III) in Reading.³ Districts also reported using the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR), FAST, and AIMSweb assessments to measure progress toward this goal. Public school districts were more likely to report using the MCA-III and the STAR assessment than were charter schools.

Districts’ goals for achieving grade-level literacy by third grade were typically defined by (a) the *total percentage* of third graders meeting or exceeding proficiency on reading assessments, or (b) the *percentage increase* of third-graders achieving or exceeding proficiency on reading assessments between the 2015/16 and 2016/17 school years.

³ Of 198 school districts, 175 (88 percent) provided information for this goal.

Across the 90 districts that defined goals around *total percent proficiency*:

- The average proficiency goal reported by districts was 75 percent of students achieving or exceeding levels of proficiency.
- The minimum level of proficiency identified was 25 percent (i.e., 25 percent of third-graders will achieve grade-level literacy).
- The maximum level of proficiency was 100 percent (i.e., all third-graders will achieve grade-level literacy).

Across the 70 districts that defined goals around the percentage increase of third-graders meeting or exceeding proficiency:

- The average percent increase goal was a six percent increase in proficiency scores.
- The minimum goal identified was a one percent increase in proficiency.
- The maximum goal was a 22 percent increase in proficiency.

Although the district summaries reviewed identified percentage-based goals, they also provided information on how districts plan to measure their progress toward these goals. For example, some districts outlined goals on achieving higher levels of grade-level proficiency than the state average or comparable school districts. Others offered disaggregated achievement goals by student population, such as special education or FRPL status. Several districts also defined third grade literacy goals as students either maintaining current growth rates, remaining proficient, or achieving a score within a specific percentile.

Sample practice: Achieving grade-level proficiency in literacy

Districts offered the following sample strategies on how to achieve proficiency in literacy:

- Use formative assessment data to design, implement, and monitor student-specific reading interventions.
- Provide students additional literacy support through a Reading Specialist, the Reading Corps program, and Title I funds.
- Pairing classroom instruction with an online literacy program to develop vocabulary and reading comprehension.

2c. Close the achievement gaps among all subgroups

To measure their progress toward this goal, 49 percent of districts are using the MCA-III.⁴ Other assessments or measures cited by districts include: the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment, MDE Growth Model, Multiple Measure Rating system (MMR), and the graduation rate.

Districts varied in how they reported their goals for closing the achievement gap.

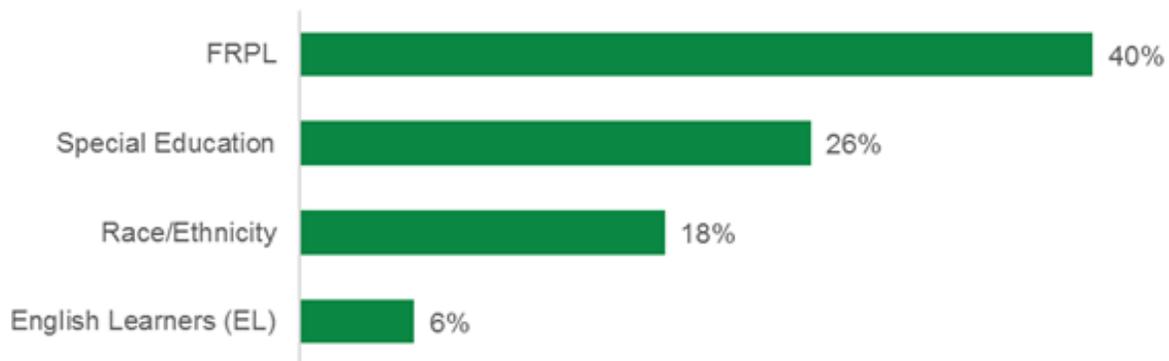
⁴ Of 198 school districts, 192 (97 percent) provided information for this goal.

- About half of the districts reported goals for closing the achievement gap (56 percent). Among these districts, just over half of them (56 percent) reported goals for decreasing the achievement gap for all students, without mention of specific subgroups (e.g., by increasing test scores on state accountability tests such as the MCA), while 44 percent of these districts identified goals for reducing the achievement gap among specific subgroups, such as students who are classified as FRPL, special education, American Indian, and English learners (EL).

49 percent of districts are using the MCA to measure progress toward closing the achievement gap.

Among those districts that identified subgroups targeted for closing the achievement gap, the most common students of focus were FRPL students, followed by special education students, students from a specific race and ethnicity (for example, American Indian, African-American, Hispanic, or White students), and EL students (figure 4). Traditional public school districts were more likely to focus on students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and students in special education than were charter school districts. Public school districts also were more likely than charter districts to report that they are focused on reducing the achievement gap between students participating in FRPL and students who are not eligible for the program.

Figure 4. Percentage of districts identifying subgroups to target to close the achievement gap (N = 192)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

* Subgroups are not mutually exclusive

Districts also reported goals on the percentage by which they seek to reduce the achievement gap. This percentage ranged from a one percent to 59 percent reduction of the achievement gap between subgroups and/or among all students in the district.

Sample practice: Closing the achievement gap

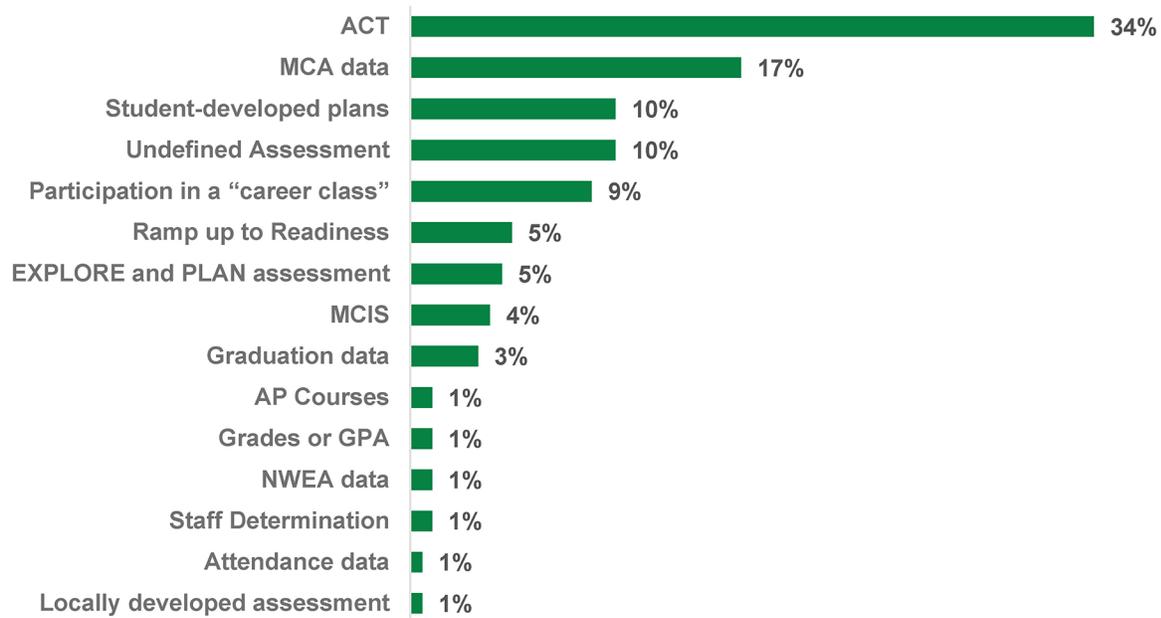
- **Caledonia Area Public Schools** plans to close the achievement gap by increasing scores on the proficiency index data for math and reading by 10 percent each year. It will do this by continuing to have interventions, increasing motivation through course offerings, credit recovery, and equal opportunities for all courses.
- **Chokio-Alberta Public Schools** plans to use its established intervention system to identify struggling reading and math students for kindergarten through grade 8, provide the proper interventions needed for those struggling students, and monitor the struggling students' progress to close the achievement gap.
- **North Lakes Academy** plans to close the achievement gap by creating Math and Language Plus classes for at-risk students as defined by MCA and MAP test scores in grades 5–8.

2d. All students career and college ready by graduation

Districts cited a variety of assessment methods to measure student readiness for career and college (figure 5).⁵ The largest percentages of districts relied on ACT and MCA data (34 and 17 percent, respectively). Charter districts, smaller districts (with less than 500 student enrollment), and the highest-poverty quartile districts (as measured by FRPL eligibility) were all less likely to use the ACT. Some districts described using more than one assessment method, such as the ACT in conjunction with the EXPLORE and PLAN assessments.

⁵ Of 198 districts, 175 (88 percent) provided information about this goal.

Figure 5. Assessment methods for career/college readiness by percentage of districts (N = 175)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

Of the districts presenting career and college readiness goals, 64 percent offered measurable, quantifiable goals tied to the assessment methods above—most frequently to ACT and MCA data sources.

Career and college readiness goals tied to the ACT were typically related to one of the following:

- Increasing the number/percentage of students taking or “participating in” the ACT.
- Increasing the number/percentage of students achieving ACT career and college readiness benchmarks.
- Increasing average composite ACT scores.
- Achieving a targeted ACT score or percentage increase (for example, in relation to past years’ scores or in relation to state average).

Career and college readiness goals tied to the MCA were typically related to increasing the percentage of students reaching math proficiency levels, and/or increasing the percentage of students reaching reading proficiency levels. Some sample districts specified increases in relation to state proficiency averages on the MCAs in math, reading, and science. Only a few districts provided targeted MCA increases broken down by student subgroups (for example, by race/ethnicity or FRPL status). Although the MCAs were the most common state accountability test cited in career and college readiness goals, districts commonly cited MCAs in conjunction with others, such as the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS).

Sample practice: Achieving career and college readiness

- **Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg Public Schools** promotes college and career readiness by having all ninth-grade students take the EXPLORE assessment, complete a personal academic plan, and participate in daily Ramp-Up-to-Readiness planning activities.
- **Browns Valley School District** requires all eighth-grade students to complete Career Information System activities, which include a Career Cluster survey, the IDEAS Interest Assessment, and online portfolios and career planning.

Apart from state-level assessments, districts' career and college readiness goals often centered on students participating in a career/college readiness class or curriculum (with Ramp-Up-to-Readiness being particularly common), and in various career/college readiness components and opportunities.

One particularly common component was the creation of students' personal plans (for example, a specific career and college readiness plan, or an individual learning plan that includes career and college planning preparation). These plans are maintained in the district career center or on the Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS). Other components of districts' career/college readiness preparation goals included the following: job fairs and job shadowing opportunities, college visits, meeting with guidance counselors, completing career interest inventories and readiness assessments, establishing MCIS accounts, creating a senior portfolio or project, and taking a college-credit course before graduation. Several sample districts also pinned career/college readiness goals on postsecondary acceptance or enrollment rates. Lastly, districts did sometimes specify quantitative targets for the career/college readiness classes and opportunities above, though they often were about securing 100 percent student participation.

Sample goals: ACT and MCA career and college readiness goals

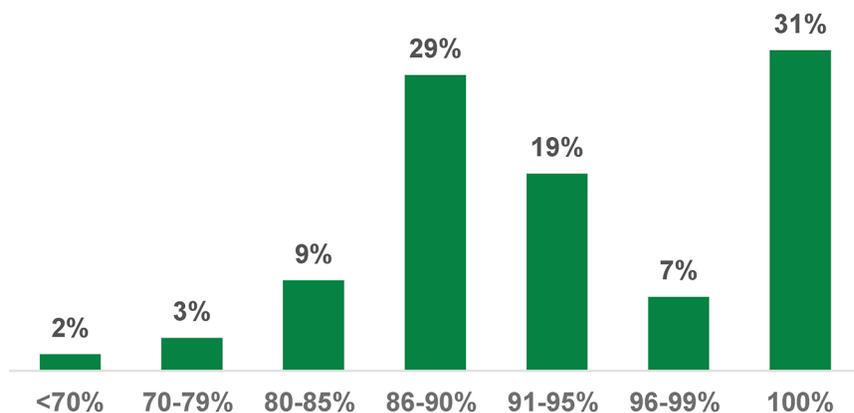
- **Brooklyn Center.** "The percentage of students in Grade 12 at Brooklyn Center Secondary meeting at least one ACT college-ready benchmark (reading, English, math, science) at Brooklyn Center Secondary will increase from 31% in 2015 to 34% in 2016."
- **Pillager.** "One hundred percent 11th grade Pillager High School students will participate in the ACT."
- **Sartell-St. Stephen Independent School District 748.** "Increase the percentage of students meeting all four college readiness benchmarks from 43% in 2015 to 48% over the next three years as measured by the ACT to ensure career and college readiness by graduation."
- **Frazee-Vergas.** "Students will meet or exceed the state proficiency average on the MCS in math, reading, and science."
- **Discovery Public School.** "By 2016, 45% of all students in grades 6-12 enrolled by October 1 will achieve proficiency in math as measured by annual MCA tests."

2e. All students graduate

The majority of districts that provided information for this goal (97 percent) reported using their district's high school graduation rates (figure 6) to measure this goal.⁶ A few other measures cited by districts include: benchmark scores on the ACT subject-area tests, student attendance, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Growth Target, and the MMR reports.

All districts that provided graduation data reported that they expected an increase in graduation rates from the previous year. The exception is two districts that reported that they expect to maintain their graduation rate goal, which was 95 percent at one district and 100 percent at the other.

Figure 6. District high school graduation rate goals (N = 125)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World's Best Workforce Summary.

Section 3: Identified needs based on data

School districts were asked to describe the key needs they identified at the start of the 2015/16 school year, as well as the data sources that informed those needs.⁷

70 percent of districts rely on the MCAs as a data source to identify key needs.

Data sources used

The most common data source used by districts to identify needs was state accountability assessment data—primarily from the MCAs. More than three-quarters (77 percent) of districts relied on state accountability data, and 70 percent specifically used the MCAs.⁸

⁶ Of 198 districts, 159 (79 percent) provided information for this goal.

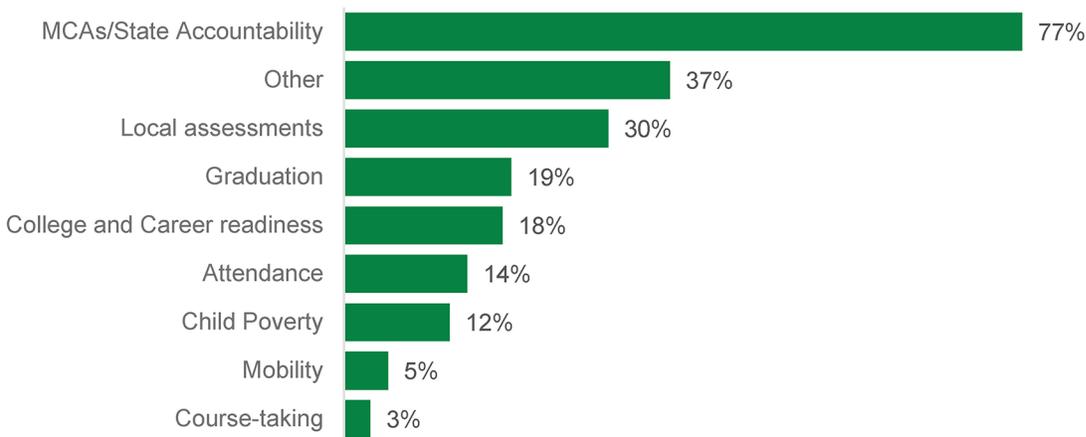
⁷ Of 198 districts, 198 (100 percent) provided information in this area.

⁸ Although MCAs were the specific state accountability assessment data most frequently cited, districts referenced others as well, including NWEA (22 percent of districts), MAP (16 percent), and STAR (14 percent). However, it is not clear whether sample districts actually are using these other sources to inform their needs.

Districts also reported using nonstate data sources to understand student needs, including local assessments (30 percent of districts) and other data sources (37 percent), such as classroom teacher reports, behavior incidents, and school culture data. Local assessment data sources included references to local math assessments and local reading assessments.

Figure 7 that follows shows the percentage of districts using various data sources, including those discussed above, as well as graduation rates, college and career readiness scores, attendance data, and child poverty data.

Figure 7. Types of data used to establish needs by percentage of districts (N = 198)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

High school graduation data was used to determine variation among student subgroups. ACT scores were used as the primary college and career readiness data source; of the districts that cited this data source, a majority (86 percent), were public (noncharter) schools and 40 percent were those with enrollments between 5,001 and 10,000 students. Attendance data was based specifically on attendance rate and, less often, on enrollment data to evaluate students at all levels. A large percentage (87 percent) of districts relying on child poverty data sources specifically used FRPL data. Much less frequently, districts utilized mobility (5 percent) and remedial course-taking (3 percent) data sources.

Identified needs

The two most common specifically-identified needs were reading (61 percent of districts) and math (51 percent of districts). Examples of identified reading needs include increased programmatic opportunities in reading, increased staffing for reading intervention support, and improving data and tracking for reading proficiency. Examples of identified math needs include pinpointing specific math challenge areas, such as algebra skills, targeted individual interventions, and addressing achievement gaps between student subgroups, such as FRPL status.

Just over a quarter (26 percent) of sample districts identified special education (SPED) supports as another student need, based at least partly on achievement gaps between SPED and non-SPED student assessment data.

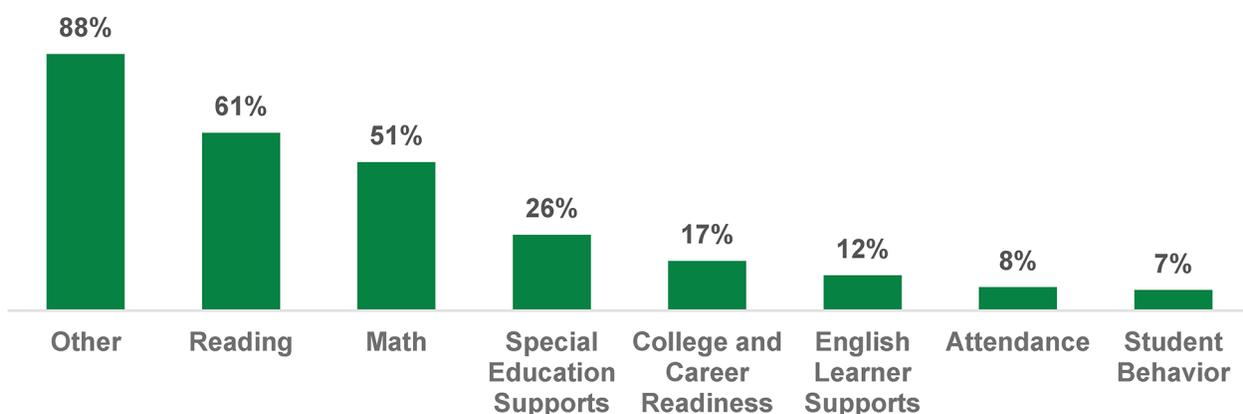
Sample practice: Identifying student needs

- **Discovery Woods Montessori School** reviewed STAR data in the spring and the MCA-III Reading data in late June, through which it discovered that it needed more support for students who are still in reading interventions. The school increased its Title I Reading position to full time so it can more adequately provide support to all students who need it.
- **St. Paul City School** looked at its primary literacy supports to monitor and refine their process for ensuring students were reading by third grade. It also developed a system for tracking their A100 reading benchmarks and math interim assessment data, paying special attention to the needs of student subgroups.
- **The Global Academy** reported that its academic coordinators in math and reading review the scores of each student in the school in order to determine which students might need additional support in the form of small-group or targeted individual interventions.

Support for English learners was identified as a need by 12 percent of districts, mainly in Economic Development Regions 6 and 11. Just under a quarter (24 percent) of these sample districts had between 76 and 100 percent of their student populations qualifying for FRPL.

The specifically identified categories of student need are shown in Figure 8.⁹

Figure 8. Identified needs by percentage of districts (N = 198)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

⁹ REL Midwest created the “other” category of identified needs. Some of the most frequent needs in this broad category include: closing achievement gaps between subgroups, more high-quality learning opportunities, increasing programmatic opportunities, increasing test scores, reviewing math curriculum and interventions, redesigning targeted services at the elementary level, and professional development for teachers to become qualified teachers.

Section 4: Systems, strategies, and support category

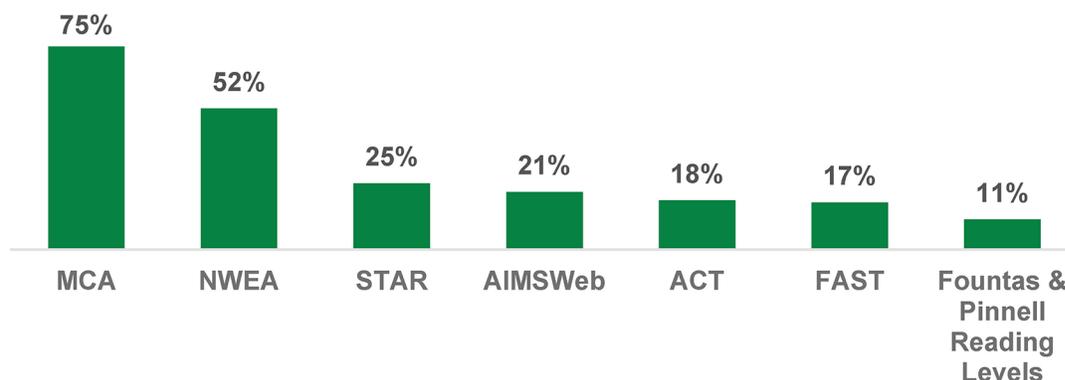
With regard to focus areas for the 2015/16 school year, districts were asked to describe the process for assessing and evaluating student progress toward meeting state and local academic standards, as well as the process for disaggregating data by student group.

Districts also were asked to describe (1) systems for reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction, curriculum, teacher evaluations, and principal evaluations; and (2) district practices around high-quality instruction and rigorous curriculum, which integrate technology and collaborative professional culture.

4a. How districts are assessing students

Districts that reported student assessment rely primarily on the MCA (75 percent of districts) and NWEA (52 percent) to establish baseline academic proficiency levels and then monitor student progress (figure 9).¹⁰ Districts also cited STAR testing (25 percent), FAST (17 percent), ACT (18 percent), Fountas & Pinnell reading levels (11 percent), and AIMSweb (21 percent) as ways of assessing students' academic progress. Those districts that use formalized testing points through MCA, NWEA, AIMSweb, STAR, and FAST typically do so on a quarterly basis.

Figure 9. Assessments used for student academic progress by percentage of districts (N = 126)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World's Best Workforce Summary.

Almost half (46 percent) of districts referenced local assessments, including the Optional Local Purpose Assessment, IGDIs, and academic progress reports/report cards. These districts noted that local assessments are used to track incremental student progress.

¹⁰ 126 out of 198 districts (64 percent) provided information in this area.

Opportunities for analyzing student progress toward academic standards typically occur in three ways: (1) at reoccurring districtwide staff development meetings and annual retreats (which district administrators and personnel often attend); (2) at staff development and professional learning community (PLC) meetings; and (3) during classroom checkpoints, where teachers use localized testing data and curriculum-tied assessments.

46 percent of districts use local assessments to track student progress.

Sample practice: Assessing student progress toward meeting academic standards

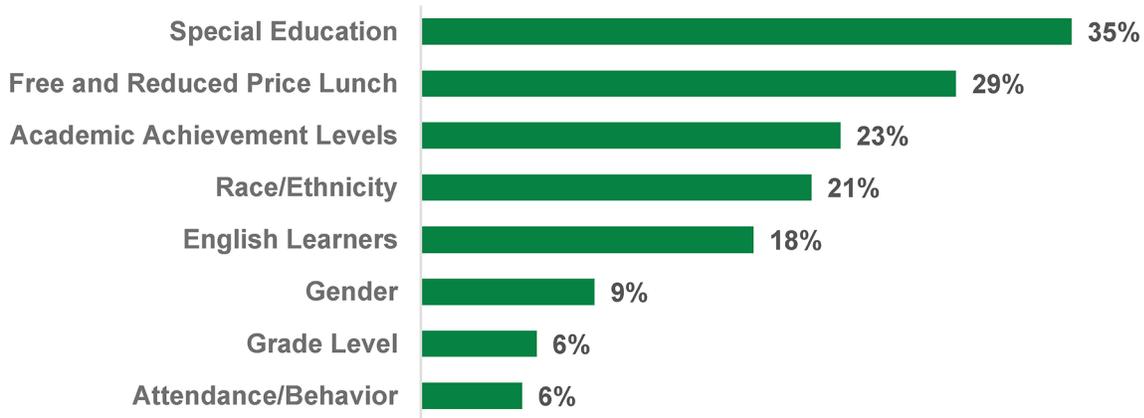
- **Littlefork-Big Falls School District** uses MCA, ACT, and local assessments to monitor students' progress in meeting academic standards set forth by the state and local district. Substrands and benchmarks from these assessments are also used to guide specific instruction and curriculum.
- **DaVinci Academy** gives pretests prior to each academic unit in all subject areas so that teachers can map out their instruction based on the strengths and struggles of individual students and the class as a whole. More formal assessments are conducted three times per year so that everyone involved with the student can monitor progress.
- **Twin Cities International Elementary School** reviews student assessment data and analyzes it weekly during 50-minute grade-level data meetings that are facilitated by the Data Coordinator. Teachers track progress toward goals using the ACCESS database (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (for ELs), organized by specific math units and by literacy targets. Instructional plans are designed based on the data reviewed at the weekly meetings.

Disaggregating Data

Districts may choose to disaggregate data by subgroup to better understand student outcomes.¹¹ Sample districts are most frequently disaggregating data to look at special education and FRPL students. Figure 10 shows that sample districts are most frequently disaggregating data by specific factors.

¹¹ Of 198 districts, 127 (64 percent) provided information in this area.

Figure 10. Factors of disaggregation by percentage of districts (N = 127)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Summary.

For the eight districts that do not disaggregate data, it was often because of the small size of the district or the relative uniformity of the study body (for example, in terms of race/ethnicity or poverty level).

Sample practice: Disaggregating data

- **Global Academy** disaggregates the MCA-III data by different subgroups: grade level, African American, White, FRPL, English learner student, male, female, and SPED status. The disaggregated data is used to improve instruction and drive program changes.
- **City Academy** has a small student body and cannot easily disaggregate data by subgroups. It uses the information from the Minnesota State Report card to examine subgroup trends.

4b. Teachers and principals

Districts described employing a variety of strategies to evaluate *instruction*, most notably regular PLC meetings (21 percent of districts), but also faculty and staff classroom observation, advisory committee meetings, and the use of external consultants. Districts also reported administering formative and summative assessments to determine instructional effectiveness, as well as using survey data from students, teachers, and parents. It is common for districts to form advisory committees, often comprised of teachers and administrators, to facilitate the process for reviewing instruction.

Sample practice: Instruction, teacher and principal evaluation, and curriculum review

- **Hinckley-Finlayson Public Schools** reviews instruction regularly, using assessment data, data from needs assessments, and observations as a guide. The district also uses peer coaching. Recently, the district requested that staff write SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound) goals for how they would like to improve their teaching using a PLC model. Principals observe teachers using a combination of the Marzano and Danielson models. Feedback is provided in a timely manner with areas of strength and areas of growth. If deemed necessary, the principals direct the 21st Century Learning Director to work with a teacher in planning or in instructional coaching models.
- **Alden-Conger Public School District** conducts principal evaluations using a report card completed by a cross-section of teachers involving components from the Minnesota K–12 Principal Competencies. There is also a self-evaluation by the principal and evaluation by the superintendent. After all the information is gathered, the principal and superintendent meet to construct a professional growth plan very similar to what the teachers are required to do.
- **Bemidji School District** reports that the district curriculum review process brings teachers together from all schools, grades, and special education to examine their standards, align curriculum to the standards, survey teachers, and select materials. To determine the effectiveness of the curriculum, teachers complete surveys about how well it meets the academic standards.
- **Bloomington Public Schools** reports that curriculum is reviewed through a five-phase process, which includes prioritizing standards, unpacking standards into learning targets, reviewing and selecting appropriate instructional materials, and generating common assessments aligned to standards.

Districts evaluate *curricula* through an established and cyclical audit of specific subject areas. Audit teams may include administrators, teachers, parents, and superintendents.

Districts reported utilizing a mix of tools for *teacher evaluation*, in effect creating their own unique assessment practices. Common elements of teacher assessment are as follows: (1) an external framework model (most notably the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching); (2) evaluation conducted through a formal assessment and observation by a principal or other supervisor; (3) individually-developed goals against which a teacher is assessed through a formal, reoccurring evaluation process that often involves peers; (4) integration of Quality Compensation law (Q Comp¹²) planning; and (5) an advisory committee made up of peers, administrators, and/or parents.

For the *evaluation of principals*, some of the more common practices reported by districts include using a rubric such as the Marzano School Leader Evaluation Model or iObservation (more commonly indicated among traditional public districts than charter). Districts reported that

¹² Q-Comp is a voluntary program that allows local districts and exclusive representatives of the teachers to design and collectively bargain a plan that meets the four components of the law. The four components under Q Comp include Career Ladder/Advancement Options, Job-embedded Professional Development, Teacher Evaluation, and Performance Pay and Alternative Salary Schedule.

principal evaluation is conducted by either or both the superintendent and school board as the primary evaluator, with the evaluation process overseen by an advisory body.

4c. District

Technology. Common reported strategies for integrating technology into instruction and curricula are: (1) general upgrades to school infrastructure; (2) upgrades to school equipment or school practices specifically targeting device access for all students (such as allowing students to use personal devices for classroom assignments and activities, often referred to as one-to-one device initiatives); (3) teacher training/collaboration to develop new strategies for instruction that incorporate technology, such as integration of Google applications; and (4) utilizing campuswide Wi-Fi.

Sample practice: Integrating technology into instruction

- **North Branch Area Public Schools** reported that media and technology integrationists support classroom teachers through districtwide, building-level, and co-teaching staff development opportunities. Teachers are trained on how to use digital devices to promote collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity skills.
- **Kato Public Charter** uses Google Apps for Education to promote greater collaboration, sharing of instructional content with other teachers, and assessment.

Collaborative professional culture. The primary strategy districts report using to promote a collaborative professional culture is through PLCs. Districts reported using PLCs to support high-quality instruction. Common practices of PLCs include aligning curricula, instruction and assessment strategies, development of individualized SMART goals related to instruction, collaborating on instructional strategies targeted to the individual student, and evaluating progress toward instructional goals. Frequency of PLC meetings range from daily informal gatherings, to quarterly districtwide gatherings which require student release days.

The primary way districts use to promote a collaborative professional culture is through professional learning communities.

Outside of the PLC structure, districts reported implementation of teacher mentoring programs and cooperative leadership teams—both across subject matter areas and across schools—as strategies to support young teachers and respond to various schoolwide issues.

Section 5. Equitable access to excellent teachers

School districts were asked to describe how they review data to examine the equitable distribution of teachers, as well as how data is used to formulate strategies for ensuring equitable access to excellent teachers by low-income and minority students. This is in accordance with WBWF goals and requirements.

A note on small school districts

Many of the small school districts indicated that equitable distribution of teachers was not a challenge because all students had access to all teachers, and thus did not require a process to address it. For small school districts that *did* describe a process, most simply relied on a rigorous hiring process to ensure that if students only had one option for a teacher, that teacher would be an effective one.

Only 12 of the districts reviewed (6 percent) provided information in Section 5, and what they provided was mostly related to student demographics (for example, race/ethnicity, English learners, or FRPL) and teacher characteristics (for example, percentage of those on continuing contracts, percentage with a master’s degree, percentage of those who are out-of-field teachers).

Inequity references and discussion elsewhere in district summaries

A third of the districts (33 percent) indicated that they are using a teacher development or evaluation system to distribute teachers.¹³ Some districts simply stated a process existed to distribute teachers equitably (but did not elaborate) or discuss a system for evaluating teacher candidates not yet hired by the district. A few districts indicated that they use student-level data (for example, FRPL status, achievement data, and social and emotional needs) and teacher-level data (for example, STAR data and years of teaching experience) to distribute teachers. Other strategies identified by districts included: distributing new hires among different buildings, pairing at-risk students with high-achieving teachers, and ensuring that students will not receive teachers with probationary status more than once or in consecutive years.

¹³ About half (53 percent) of the districts included some information or narrative about reducing inequities elsewhere in their summaries.

Sample goal: Equitable distribution of excellent teachers

At **Big Lakes Schools**, as each school year is planned, administrators review achievement, demographic, and student group data from each grade level to determine the best distribution of staff to meet student needs.

Arts and Science Academy described that they plan to use student achievement data to consider placing teachers with “high achievement records in classrooms” with higher concentrations of students considered at risk based on their academic history.

Conclusion

In closing, this memo presents a synthesis of the 198 reviewed WBWF district summaries, lifting up common themes across all five WBWF strategy and goal areas. As the sample of districts is representative and was randomly selected, many of the findings from this review are likely generalizable to the entire Minnesota school district population. By understanding how districts are setting strategies and approaching their goals, MDE can increase its own capacity to support districts throughout the state with implementation of WBWF legislation, and can increase districts’ capacities to navigate common challenges and share best practices.

Appendix A. School characteristics

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has requested a review and synthesis of school districts' plans for implementing the World's Best Workforce (WBWF) legislation. School districts are required to complete a WBWF Report Summary that contains five key sections: (1) stakeholder engagement; (2) goals and results; (3) needs based on data; (4) systems, strategy, and supports; and (5) equitable access to excellent teachers.

Table A1 summarizes the characteristics of the 200 school districts included in a review of the WBWF Report Summary conducted by MDE. The districts were randomly selected based on four major characteristics: (1) economic region, (2) district type, (3) district enrollment, and (4) percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). The number of districts sampled from each category was proportionate to the total number of districts in that category.

Table A1. Percentage of sampled districts in each category of key variables for the target districts and the sampled districts

District characteristics	Frame (<i>N</i> = 493)	Sample (<i>n</i> = 200) ^a
Economic region		
01	8.5	8.5
03	8.3	8.5
04	6.7	6.5
05	5.1	5.0
06	11.2	11.0
07	9.5	9.5
09	7.1	7.0
10	10.8	11.0
11	32.9	33.0
District type		
Traditional	66.9	67.0
Charter	33.1	33.0
District enrollment		
Within first quartile	25.2	25.0
Within second quartile	24.9	25.0
Within third quartile	24.9	24.5
Within top quartile	24.9	25.5

District characteristics	Frame (<i>N</i> = 493)	Sample (<i>n</i> = 200) ^a
Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch		
Below or equal first quartile	25.2	26.0
Above first quartile but below or equal second quartile	24.9	26.0
Above second quartile but below or equal third quartile	24.9	23.0
Above third quartile	24.9	25.0

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

a. 200 district report summaries were randomly selected for this review; however, we reviewed 198 district summaries because two districts had incomplete data.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Report Summary.

Appendix B. Goal 2 summary data

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has requested a review and synthesis of school districts’ plans for implementing the World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) legislation. School districts are required to complete a WBWF Report Summary that contains five key sections: (1) stakeholder engagement; (2) goals and results; (3) needs based on data; (4) systems, strategy, and supports; and (5) equitable access to excellent teachers. MDE has requested a summary of each section which we synthesized in a separate memo. The following is a detailed summary of MDE’s inquiry about Section 2: Goals and Results.

Table B1. Detailed summary on Section 2: Goals and Results of WBWF district plans

Goal	Type of assessment/measure?	Student Input?	What student groups is the district focusing on?	Is this goal measurable/quantifiable?	Is goal rigorous? ¹⁴	State or local district data?
2a. All Students are Ready for School 162 districts provided a goal in this category. Schools that did not provide data did not enroll kindergarten students.	77% (<i>n</i> = 125) use local assessments, such as Individual Growth and Development indicators (IGDIs), nonspecified district determinants, or just active enrollment in Early Childhood Family Enrollment	Very few districts provided data on “student input.” The data that districts provided were inconsistent and could not be easily coded. ¹⁵	No data	77% (<i>n</i> = 125) identified measurable, quantifiable goals.	No data	23% (<i>n</i> = 37) use state-approved assessments such as the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) (<i>n</i> = 13), TS Gold (<i>n</i> = 9), or AIMSWeb (<i>n</i> = 9)

¹⁴ See comment about rigor at the bottom of page 3.

¹⁵ The determination of student “input” was highly subjective, depending on how schools phrased their goals. For example, where districts stated, “students will participate in early childhood screenings,” they were coded under “student participation.” However, when districts stated, “school will screen XX% of incoming students,” they were not counted under “student participation.” Similar circumstances exist for all sections under this question. Thus, we are unable to effectively respond to student “input” as the question is currently phrased.

Goal	Type of assessment/measure?	Student Input?	What student groups is the district focusing on?	Is this goal measurable/quantifiable?	Is goal rigorous? ¹⁴	State or local district data?
	(ECFE) programming.					
2b. All Students in Third Grade Achieving Grade-Level Literacy 175 districts provided a goal in this category.	62% (<i>n</i> = 109) use the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) to measure literacy skills. Other assessments include: AIMSWeb (<i>n</i> = 9) STAR (<i>n</i> = 7) NWEA (<i>n</i> = 7) FAST (<i>n</i> = 5) Fountas & Pinnell (<i>n</i> = 5).	No data	No data	74% (<i>n</i> = 129) were measurable, quantifiable goals.	No data	State data 62% (<i>n</i> = 109) use the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) to measure literacy skills.
2c. Close the Achievement Gaps Among all Subgroups 192 districts provided a goal in this category.	49% (<i>n</i> = 94) districts use the MCA to measure progress toward closing achievement gaps. Other assessments include: Multiple Measures Rating (MMR) (<i>n</i> = 15) NWEA (<i>n</i> = 10)	No data	FRPL 40% (<i>n</i> = 76) Special education 26% (<i>n</i> = 49) Race/Ethnicity 18% (<i>n</i> = 35) English learners (EL) 6% (<i>n</i> = 11) Did not specify a subgroup to focus on 44% (<i>n</i> = 85)	64% (<i>n</i> = 122) were measurable, quantifiable goals. 34% (<i>n</i> = 65) reported they were making efforts to close the achievement gap, but did not specify how they would measure progress.	No data	73% (<i>n</i> = 140) report using state data to measure progress.
2d. All Students Career- and College-Ready by Graduation 175 districts provided a goal in this category.	The most common measures indicated were:	No data	No data	64% (<i>n</i> = 112) were measurable, quantifiable goals.	No data	63% (<i>n</i> = 110) use state assessments.

Goal	Type of assessment/measure?	Student Input?	What student groups is the district focusing on?	Is this goal measurable/quantifiable?	Is goal rigorous? ¹⁴	State or local district data?
	ACT 34% (<i>n</i> = 60) MCA 17% (<i>n</i> = 29)					
2e. All Students Graduate 159 districts provided a goal in this area.	96% (<i>n</i> = 153) use the district graduation rate. 3 districts reported credit attainment, and 3 districts reported an increase in achievement test scores as the measure for success.	No data	No data	57% (<i>n</i> = 89) were measurable, quantifiable goals.	No data	153 districts use graduation rate data, whereas 3 districts use credit attainment, and 3 use achievement test data. Note: Just one district serving 12th-grade students uses ACT data in lieu of graduation rate.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) 2015–16 World’s Best Workforce Report Summary (*N* = 198).

Is goal rigorous?

We are not able to easily determine rigor due to the variable definitions of what rigor may represent. Bower and Powers (2009) conducted a study to determine the essential components of rigor. They defined rigor as “how the standard curriculum is delivered within the classroom to ensure students are not only successful on standardized assessments but also able to apply this knowledge to new situations both within the classroom and in the real world.” They also identified higher-order thinking and real-world application as two critical aspects of rigor, suggesting that it is not enough for students to know how to memorize information and perform on multiple-choice and short-answer tests. Students must have deep and rich content knowledge, but rigor also includes the ability to apply that knowledge in authentic ways. Furthermore, in sections of the district plans where districts may have incorporated an ambitious goal, we do not have longitudinal, historical, or circumstantial data sufficient to judge whether the goal is ambitious. For example, a district may state a goal where they will increase the graduation rate by 10 percentage points from the previous year. For districts with enrollment numbers in the 10s or low 100s, substantial fluctuation rates would be expected, making the goal relatively modest.

Reference

Bower, H. A., & Powers, J. D. (2009). What is rigor? A qualitative analysis of one school's definition. *Academic Leadership Live: The Online Journal*, 7(4). Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol7/iss4/39/>.



10 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 600

Chicago, IL 60606

312-288-7600

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/index.asp>

This publication was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under contract ED-IES-17-C-0007 by Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, administered by American Institutes for Research. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government. The publication is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce in whole or in part for educational purposes is granted.