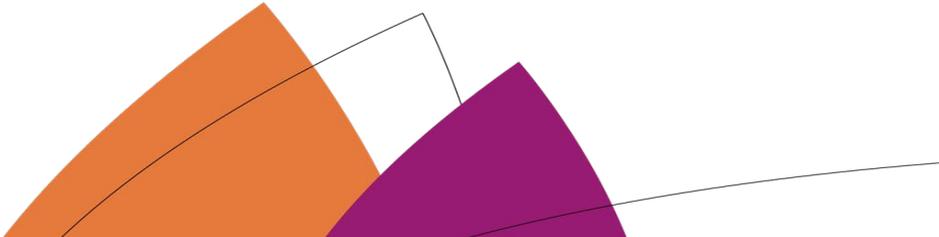




# Jeffco Review of Academic Functions

November Board Study Session



# *Good to Great* - Confronting the Facts

*From good to great to extraordinary...*

1. Read the excerpt from *Good to Great* by Jim Collins
2. Guiding questions:
  - a. What points resonate with you from the article?
  - b. How does the article guide our discussions regarding improvement efforts throughout the district?



# Context of the Findings

- Jeffco is a good district with talented and committed staff, that is on a journey of continuous improvement.
- We are all part of an ecosystem and our individual work is dependent upon the health of that ecosystem. Efficacy thrives when the environment of an ecosystem supports the work.
- The system has experienced high leadership turnover as evidenced by 6 superintendents in 7 years (including 'interim' superintendents).
- This turnover has greatly impacted the health of our ecosystem and is reflected in the findings.

# Context of the Findings

- There are good practices happening in the District, but they are not happening systemically.
- The review is not intended to blame any particular group or individual for the district's decline in student achievement.
- The purpose of this review is to support teachers and leaders as they strive to enrich instruction, increase student engagement, and accelerate learning for all students.
- Every participant in the system should continue to be encouraged and challenged to fulfill its obligations to its students by taking responsibility for results and continued improvements.

# Purpose of the Review

- To conduct a review of the academic functions of Jeffco Public Schools.
- To develop a system-wide plan to strengthen the District's capacity to better serve all schools in their efforts to improve teaching and learning and the educational experience for all students.
- To support teachers, educational support professionals, and school leaders as they strive to enrich instruction, increase engagement and accelerate learning for all students.
- To move the District from good to great to extraordinary.

# Guiding Questions

- How are the academic departments in Jeffco Public Schools organized and operating in support of schools and school leaders so that they can focus on high quality teaching and learning and improvement of student achievement?
- Where do we have success? Where do we need improvement?
- What are proven ideas, used by similar districts, for us to consider in the areas in need of improvement?

# Process

- A series of interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders (students, teachers, educational leaders, educational support professionals, board members, parents) to hear and understand what each of the stakeholders believe is working well in the district and what needs to be strengthened.
- Collection and analysis of data from many sources to create a composite picture of strengths to leverage, key challenges to address, and improvement strategies to prioritize.
- Shared findings with all district leadership for feedback and collaboration

# Bright Spots

- Talented, hardworking, and committed staff members give the District the potential to become an even higher-functioning organization
- The level of engagement in the interviews and focus groups has been inspirational. Conversations have been honest, respectful, and solution-oriented
- Continued progress in reducing the number of K-3 students Below/Well Below benchmark in English Language Arts
- 4-year and 7-year graduation rates are 2.9 percentage points higher than Colorado's rates. The five-year trend of 4 year and 7 year graduation rates indicates a general overall improvement
- CMAS, PSAT and SAT reading performance consistently above state averages
- Learning lab and PLC were highlighted as models for professional learning

# Student Learning Trends

We have challenges to address:

- Declining student achievement rates from 2017 on, in both math and reading
- Students who are not graduating with their 4 or 7 year cohorts are disproportionately free/reduced lunch eligible, male and minority
- Additional impacts of loss of learning time from the pandemic

# Findings – Major Themes

1. Leadership, Management and Strategic Direction
2. Organizational Structure
3. Curriculum and Instruction
4. Data and Accountability
5. Human Capital

# Leadership, Management and Strategic Direction

1. There is a **lack of a shared understanding of the district's strategic direction**; thus, creating a system that lacks coherence. This lack of coherence leads to a diversion of attention and energies in seemingly opposite directions.
2. There is a **lack of a clear and coherent communication protocol** to ensure that strategies and decisions related to curriculum and instruction are relayed and understood by schools.
3. There is **lack of system coherence between and among schools** due to a culture that values autonomy without accountability.
4. There appears to be an **insufficient sense of urgency regarding improving achievement for ALL students**, and special attention needs to be paid to students who have historically under-performed.

# Organization Structure, Data and Accountability

1. The **Ed Center is not setup to support schools** and teaching and learning.
2. While the District is data rich and appears to employ data for planning purposes, there is **no systematic approach to identify, execute, and monitor strategies aimed at driving academic improvement**. In addition, improvement strategies and their expected outcomes are often undefined or poorly defined. The review found no evidence that the District routinely uses data to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies it has implemented.

# Curriculum and Instruction

1. The review found evidence of an **absence of shared understanding of standards** throughout the system. Lessons do not appear to be aligned to state standards.
2. The review found a prevalent **lack of rigor** throughout the District. This finding is reinforced by the fact that the item on the student survey that receives the lowest rating is *students feeling academically challenged*.
3. The review found that the District seems to pay **more attention to operational issues over improving student learning**.
4. The deficiencies of instructional coherence have led to a **weak and disjointed instructional program** that does not appear to give all students access to a guaranteed and viable standards-based curriculum.

# Next Steps

- Create a district culture that honors continuous improvement and open honest dialogue about our successes and our challenges.
- Develop a multi-year instructional plan to serve as a roadmap, guiding work throughout the system; ensure a representative group of stakeholders provides feedback on the plan.
- Organize district teams to break down silos; realign roles and responsibilities to better support the work in schools.
- Organize teams that support the superintendent to consistently share an instructional vision and ensure that vision is aligned to school needs.
- Provide for easier access to comprehensive data reports that support school and district decision making.

# Next Steps

- Conduct an in-depth study of schools that have promising practices in improving student achievement and growth. Evaluate and study schools that are beating the odds with sub-groups to identify replicable and sustainable programs, practices and structures. Once identified, share those practices across schools.
- Redefine expectations regarding autonomy vs. system coherence. The system can have coherence while still offering flexibility to schools to meet their unique characteristics or needs.
- Create structures to support collaboration with community and parents
- Establish a project management system to communicate, implement, document and monitor, major initiatives, including a process for implementing real-time adjustments.

# Appendices

## Initial Findings: Leadership, Management and Strategic Direction

1. Staff members are well intentioned and truly care about students; however, a recurring theme that surfaced during the interviews of all stakeholder groups was that the District, as a system, appears to make decisions that are not always aligned to school's reality or that are in the best interest of students.
2. There is a lack of trust throughout the system.
3. There appears to be an insufficient sense of urgency regarding improving achievement for ALL students, and special attention needs to be paid to students who have historically under-performed.
4. There is a lack of collective responsibility for students with IEPs and those learning English as a second language.
5. There is a lack of a shared understanding of the district's strategic direction; thus, creating a system that lacks coherence. This lack of coherence leads to a diversion of attention and energies in seemingly opposite directions.
6. An examination of the district's UIP reveals a plan that does not yet have the level of detail needed to promote effective district management.
7. There is a greater need for parent and community engagement and involvement in the District's instructional plan.
8. The district is rich in effective ideas for instructional improvements, yet appears to struggle with capacity to effectively implement initiatives.
9. There is lack of system coherence between and among schools due to a culture that values autonomy without accountability.
10. The District does not adhere to a change management process, which has led to resistance from stakeholders.
11. There is a lack of a clear and coherent communication protocol to ensure that strategies and decisions related to curriculum and instruction are relayed and understood by schools.
12. The review only found pockets of effective use of project management tools to monitor and adjust instructional practices.

## Initial Findings: **Organizational Structure**

1. The Ed Center is not setup to support schools and teaching and learning.
2. There is a lack of cohesion and alignment among the departments at the Ed Center.
3. There is a lack of systems and structures to support the work. As a result, there are identified inefficiencies and a diminished sense of self-efficacy.

## Initial Findings: Curriculum and Instruction

1. The review found evidence of an absence of shared understanding of standards throughout the system. Lessons do not appear to be aligned to state standards.
2. The review found a prevalent lack of rigor throughout the District. This finding is reinforced by the fact that the item on the student survey that receives the lowest rating is *students feeling academically challenged*.
3. The review found that the District seems to pay more attention to operational issues over improving student learning.
4. The District has granted schools the autonomy to select their own instructional programs. Consequently, curriculum programs vary greatly across content areas and grade levels. Many stakeholders attribute the Central Office's inability to be responsive to schools' needs to the variability across the District.
5. The deficiencies of instructional coherence have led to a weak and disjointed instructional program that does not appear to give all students access to a guaranteed and viable standards-based curriculum.
6. Though the District's Bridge to Curriculum allows educators to unpack the standards and better understand grade level expectations, the system is not user friendly.

## Initial Findings: **Data and Accountability**

- While the District is data rich and appears to employ data for planning purposes, there is no systematic approach to identify, execute, and monitor strategies aimed at driving academic improvement. In addition, improvement strategies and their expected outcomes are often undefined or poorly defined. The review found no evidence that the District routinely uses data to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies it has implemented.
- The District lacks systems to hold its staff accountable for their accomplishment of identified goals, including any clear systems for monitoring and reporting progress. All stakeholders are ill-served by this absence. Accountability must start at the top. Goals are set, but there is no clear mechanism to provide the community, or the schools, with the data necessary for evaluating the progress of initiatives or the system as a whole.

## Initial Findings: Human Capital

- Talented, hardworking, and committed staff members at the, central office and in the schools, give the District the potential to become an even higher-functioning organization.
- There is a lack of a coherent approach to professional learning that is provided consistently across the system.
- Jeffco has experienced frequent leadership turnover. This instability reduces the District's ability to focus on implementing educational initiatives that would better support schools. This makes it difficult to sustain improvement efforts and creates a culture of complacency.
- The pool of principal candidates has become smaller over the past four years. This may become an issue with school leader turnover maintaining at about 15% on average over the past 8-10 years.
- There is apparent variability in the processes used for hiring for central and school leader positions.

# Timeline

- **October**
  - Begin hiring process for Deputy Superintendent of Instruction and School Leadership
- **November**
  - Preliminary Findings and Suggested Next Steps – Dr. Aquino will join us
- **December**
  - Begin to implement first steps identified in November
- **January and Beyond**
  - Implementation of first steps and ongoing analysis to ensure continuous improvement