

Meta-review of  
Recent  
Reports on

Providence  
Public School  
District



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# Meta-review of Recent Reports on the Providence Public School District

The Providence Public School District (PPSD) is going through a period of great transition. As the 2008-2009 school year begins, the new leadership of Superintendent Tom Brady presents an opportunity to reflect on the challenges facing the district and to target the areas where action is most urgently needed to ensure high achievement for all students.

At Superintendent Brady's request, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University reviewed eleven reports published over the last five years about the district's performance (see Appendix A for a list of the reports). Our charge was to synthesize what the reports can collectively tell us about teaching and learning in Providence's public schools and to identify important areas that the reports do not sufficiently clarify. The gaps in these areas will help shape a plan to be developed by the school district, with input from key Providence stakeholders.

Our analysis is designed to help foster collaboration, effective organizational culture, appropriate internal and external communications, accountability systems, and investment and engagement as key central office functions. It is our hope that the report will help PPSD pinpoint the areas of greatest need in this crucial transition period. We also hope the report will act as a springboard to help the district build a broad set of civic, business, and community partnerships in support of student achievement.

## Overview of Performance Trends in the Providence Public School District

The essential starting point for an analysis of PPSD's performance is a review of the district's efforts across time – particularly in terms of instructional interventions that have contributed to student progress and improved achievement outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

### OVERALL IMPROVEMENT

The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) has been administered in the district since 2005 for grades 3 to 8 and since 2007 in grade 11. There have been some gains in proficiency over this period. Overall, there has been a trend of improvement in the percentage of students achieving proficiency in reading. In grades 7 and 8, NECAP proficiency rates rose 15 and 13 percentage points, respectively. In mathematics, students have shown some modest gains in proficiency, and in grades 7 and 8 the percentages of students deemed substantially below proficiency have declined by 10 and 13 points, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> The Annenberg Institute did not conduct an analysis of student achievement. Data from this section are drawn from the various reports we reviewed, especially the Phi Delta Kappa audit, as well as the evaluations and analyses conducted by CRM.

## COMPARISON WITH STATE AND NATIONAL AVERAGES

However, despite the improvement, well below 50 percent of students in PPSD, across all grade levels, are proficient in reading and mathematics, and PPSD achievement levels are well below state and national averages. In the fall of 2007, 36 percent of Providence's grade 6 students scored proficient in reading, as opposed to 62 percent of students statewide. Providence students in grade 11 had the highest proficiency rates in reading, at 44 percent proficient. This is still well under the state proficiency rate of 61 percent proficient. Providence proficiency rates in mathematics range from 9 percent in grade 11 to 34 percent in grade 5. State proficiency rates for these grades are 22 percent and 57 percent, respectively. Students in Providence scoring substantially below proficient in mathematics range from a low of 40 percent in grade 3 and a high of 71 percent in grade 11.

## ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

There are substantial achievement gaps among student subgroups. In 2007, gaps in reading scores across grades 3 to 8 between African American and White students ranged from 8 to 15 percentage points in reading and 11 to 21 percentage points in mathematics. The gaps between Hispanic and White students at these grade levels were similar, ranging from 10 to 19 percentage points in reading and 10 to 23 percentage points in mathematics. While some gaps have decreased since 2005, others have grown. The Phi Delta Kappa auditors estimate that at the current rate of progress, subgroups in some grade levels will never reach parity with their White counterparts.

Analyses of the reading proficiency of special education students and English language learners (ELLs) conducted by CRM also showed low proficiency. For example, in 2006, about 80 percent of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in grades 4 to 10 scored below basic on reading comprehension, signifying they need intensive intervention. For English language learners, only 17 percent scored proficient on the reading portion of the 2006 NECAP at third grade, with diminishing proficient proportions at grades 4 and 5 (11 percent proficient) and in middle school (5 percent proficient). These proficiency rates are substantially lower than their non-ELL peers.

## AYP AND CORRECTIVE ACTION

Providence has entered its seventh year of state corrective action, with approximately two-thirds of the district's schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Performance targets. Between school years 2006 and 2007, the number of schools classified as moderately performing rose from seven to seventeen. In school year 2008 this number dropped to sixteen. This slight decrease corresponds to the raising of achievement requirements by the state.

## THE NEED TO RAISE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Though some gains have been made in Providence, there is a clear and urgent need for increasing the pace of significant improvement in student academic outcomes. This document will outline the analytic framework for our meta-review, then integrate and analyze the findings of those reports about PPSD's performance and effectiveness.

## Analytic Framework

The goal of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform is to help school districts and their communities create “smart education systems” to achieve excellence and equity at scale. These smart education systems combine the strong leadership of an effective school district in key areas with a comprehensive web of opportunities and supports for children and families provided in partnership with the community. The “smart district” at the center of the smart education system provides young people with the education they need to grow up to be knowledgeable, productive, and caring adults.

The Annenberg Institute has developed a “Smart District Framework”<sup>2</sup> that describes the key functions of a central office and the practices that support these functions. The framework is based on the accumulated knowledge about effective central offices gleaned from the Institute’s work with districts and communities, as well as from our own and others’ research. The six key functions are:

- Lead for Results and Equity
- Focus on Instruction
- Manage Human Capital
- Use Data for Accountability
- Build Partnerships and Community Investment
- Align Infrastructure with Vision

Achieving this vision requires recognizing the vital importance of the roles of the school district central office, but also updating and adapting those roles. The experience of the Annenberg Institute indicates that no significant gains in student achievement will occur if a district limits itself to simply mandating instructional policies and providing appropriate supports. Nor is school improvement a matter only of technical improvements. The district must also be attentive to the culture it creates: *how* the district develops and implements policies and supports is as important, if not more important, than *what* the policies and supports are. The district’s work will only be effective when it embraces the value of collaboration, service orientation, good communication, recognition of equity issues, and a proper balance between prescription and flexibility toward schools and communities.

The distinguishing feature of this meta-review is our focus on how the central office operates, not just what it requires and provides. This perspective shapes our characterization of the major findings across the reports, as well as our analysis of what the reports have missed or deemphasized.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B.

## Summary of the Reports' Findings

This section presents our summary of the findings of the recent reports on PPSD. Taken together, these findings suggest a deep-seated set of structural and cultural issues and problems that limit PPSD's performance and achievement gains. We have organized the findings of our synthesis around the six key functions of the Smart District Framework mentioned in the previous section.

Following each set of findings, we have included short-term goals developed by PPSD in response to that area of need.

### I. LEAD FOR RESULTS AND EQUITY

Smart districts develop and provide leadership necessary for the district and its schools to accomplish the goal of providing all students with an excellent education. In our formulation, responsibility and authority for policy implementation are firmly lodged with the superintendent, but he or she understands the need for and the power of inclusive, distributed leadership. Plans and policies are drafted by teams with expertise in the area of interest but are reviewed and revised through input from staff at all levels of the district and from parents and other interested citizens. Leadership sets the tone for the organization by modeling professional behavior, including a service orientation, clear communication, and effective collaboration.

Our synthesis suggests that:

- Staff and leadership acknowledge the need for change; leadership has taken steps to create collaborative structures, such as the Response to Intervention process, the District Literacy Leadership Team, and the Teaching and Learning Committee.
- Various planning efforts were integrated and focused on appropriate system and school issues; however, plans were not reflected in day-to-day decisions and were disconnected from performance evaluation and budget realities, making the plans virtually impossible to carry out.
- The district has poor internal communication, as evidenced by:
  - ❖ the limited depth of knowledge of reform priorities, beyond a few central office leaders;
  - ❖ confusion of school administrators about budget allocations;
  - ❖ the lack of an employee handbook and other written documentation regarding staff roles and behavior.
- The central office organizational culture is generally fragmented and counterproductive, as evidenced by:
  - ❖ the lack of interdepartmental knowledge and collaboration;
  - ❖ inconsistencies in the organizational chart;
  - ❖ the lack of capacity of central office staff to provide support to the school system;
  - ❖ staffing of critical central office functions by clerks, not professional staff;
  - ❖ frequent leadership turnover.

- Innovations have been focused on how schools are organized and managed (e.g., small schools, site-based management).
- The central office lacks a service orientation toward schools and the community as evidenced by:
  - ❖ the overall poor quality of human resources services;
  - ❖ parents' difficulty in accessing respectful and helpful school staff;
  - ❖ the perceived inequity in the student registration and assignment processes;
  - ❖ the absence of any kind of customer service survey.

**PPSD'S IMMEDIATE GOALS** in the area "Lead for Results and Equity"

- With the assistance of stakeholders, the PPSD should seek to enhance its leadership abilities to better serve the district's "customers." Service enhancements should include:
  - ❖ Continue to build collaborative efforts with the principals, teachers, union leadership, parents, students, and community partners in the district who are focused on improving student achievement.
  - ❖ Improve communication through strong development and implementation of district policies (reform policies, budget allocation regulations, employee handbooks, etc.)
  - ❖ Focus central office organization based on a customer service framework, including consistency in organizational charts, adequate staffing by qualified candidates, and increase in central office staff in support of the district initiatives to increase student achievement.
  - ❖ Partner with community groups to overhaul human resources, improve student registration and assignment processes, and focus services to satisfy the needs of students.

## 2. FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION

Having an instructional focus does not mean creating a lockstep, teacher-proof curriculum. Rather, it means that the central office ensures that a district's time, attention, and resources are focused primarily on schools and student learning. Achieving this focus relies on input from school-based staff to agree on a set of common materials and approaches, so that the highest standards for instruction and learning are built into the system. These materials and approaches are supplemented with supports and timely interventions for students who are not reaching the standards, professional development opportunities for teachers, and extended learning opportunities for all. In a smart district, the central office ensures that these supports and interventions are available; they may provide them or they may simply coordinate their provision.

Our synthesis suggests that:

- The district has taken steps to collaboratively develop mathematics and literacy curricula and pedagogical approaches (e.g., (K–5 Scope and Sequence; Investigations and Connected Math; Disciplinary Literacy; Scope and Sequence for Reading; Balanced Approach to Literacy; Reading and Writing Workshops) and has worked to align them with the Grade-Span Expectations and Grade-Level Expectations delineated by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

- Implementation of the curricular efforts in mathematics and literacy varies greatly and is not regularly monitored by the district.
- The ability of the central office to focus on instruction is limited by:
  - ❖ the non-existence of a “substantive, systemwide curriculum” (PDK International report, p. 34);
  - ❖ the lack of emphasis on curriculum development, review, or delivery;
  - ❖ the small proportion of courses having curriculum guides and the inadequacy of existing guides.
- The district’s system of summative and formative assessment is fragmented, as evidenced by:
  - ❖ the small proportion of courses that are actually assessed;
  - ❖ the absence of formative assessments, with the exception of the Interim Assessments for Reading that as of October 2006 were at an early stage of implementation;
  - ❖ the lack of alignment and conflicting messages about required programs and pedagogical approaches.
- PPSD has in place some reading intervention programs, such as Plato Achieve Now and Read 180. In mathematics, supplementary intervention programs are not evident. In both cases, the number of students who need intensive intervention far exceeds the services available and the capacities of existing staff.
- There are perceived inequities in the distribution of educational opportunities, particularly at the high school level, as well as disproportionate placements in special education and advanced academic programs.
- In special education, the development of the Response to Intervention process is positive, but it has not yet impacted integration of general and special education. General educators at all levels of the system do not always consider special education students their responsibility. The CRM special education evaluation report cited the large proportion of students with IEPs being taught in self-contained classrooms.

**PPSD’S IMMEDIATE GOALS** in the area “Focus on Instruction”

- PPSD needs to seek out partnerships to help create core curriculum for all grade levels. Investment in development of teaching and learning initiatives will not only increase the rate at which curriculum can be created and implemented throughout the district, but it will also increase the rate at which student improvement increases on a districtwide level.
- PPSD must determine what materials are necessary to support the development and implementation of a core curriculum (textbooks, professional development, etc.).
- In an effort to ensure that the work being done by the district will have a long-term impact on student achievement, partnerships must be developed that will help improve information technology to support teaching and learning.

### 3. MANAGE HUMAN CAPITAL

Currently, human resources departments in most districts are just that – functional departments that lack the essential connection to instruction that a smart district requires. Smart districts make important changes in how they approach the work of managing human capital by prioritizing it, reorganizing it so that it is viewed comprehensively – including acquisition, development, deployment, advancement, and accountability – and expanding it to draw on the capacities of partners and other organizations.

Our synthesis suggests:

- The central office is inadequately staffed to support the system, both in the number and the quality of its employees. This problem has been exacerbated by rapid turnover at leadership and management levels.
- The human resources office is ineffective in providing even basic services. For example:
  - ❖ the processing of job applications is neither organized nor timely;
  - ❖ job descriptions do not exist across the board for current employees, and bridging positions, such as literacy coaches, end up dealing with competing demands due to the lack of a shared understanding of their roles;
  - ❖ the table of organization is incomplete and in need of revision;
  - ❖ some key vacancies have not been filled.
- The number of teaching assistants and pupil services staff is relatively large, and the amount spent on substitute costs is relatively high, which takes away from resources available to increase the number of teachers in the system.
- Evaluation of personnel is ineffective throughout the district, both at the level of process description (staff handbook) and implementation. Teacher and principal performance are not connected to student performance goals or data-driven accountability for results, and feedback for improvement is not provided consistently.
- While a variety of adult learning and development activities exist, professional development design lacks policy guidance and accountability through evaluation of the effectiveness of offerings.
- The uneven implementation of reading and math curricula and interventions is in part attributable to human capital issues:
  - ❖ Teacher expertise and skill level varies greatly, as does understanding of how to effectively use available programs. Overall, there is a perception that teachers are weak in both content and pedagogy in reading and math and are not qualified to provide appropriate interventions.
  - ❖ While there have been intensive training efforts, such as the efforts to prepare for the implementation of the Response to Intervention process and for the change in role of diagnostic prescriptive teachers and school psychologists, in general professional development opportunities are not integrated and are used unevenly. Because participation is voluntary, different levels of knowledge and understanding impede full implementation.

- ❖ With an estimated 80 percent of students in PPSD not reading at grade level, the scope of intervention needed goes well beyond what classroom teachers can provide on their own. Not enough specialized and support personnel are available to deliver interventions, and the depth of intervention varies across schools. There is also a need for clarification around who is qualified to provide interventions, as well as the appropriate roles of support personnel.

**PPSD'S IMMEDIATE GOALS** in the area "Manage Human Capital"

- PPSD must work with the Providence Teachers Union to develop contract initiatives that will support the development of teachers throughout the district. Partnering together to focus on professional development, teacher evaluations, and team communication implementation will help improve organization, stability, and, ultimately, increased student achievement.
- With the assistance of stakeholders, the PPSD needs to look to community, business, and higher education partners to increase the size, quality, and productivity of central office staff.
- Reorganization of human resources must include updating technology processes and improving employee organization (organizational charts, employee handbooks, hiring processes, etc.).

#### 4. USE DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

To achieve results, smart districts need to know current and past results and what they have to do to improve those results. That means that districts and their partners need to develop sophisticated and user-friendly data collection and analysis systems that enable them to monitor the performance of young people, schools, programs, personnel, and the partners themselves against the results they expect. Smart districts integrate not only the collection of data, but also the serious and regular examination of data into the normal operating procedures of schools and districts.

Our synthesis suggests that:

- Use of data to assess progress and challenges and make changes in approaches and interventions is limited in PPSD. Board policy supports the use of data, but the capacity to collect, organize, and act on data is limited.
- Targets have been established for improving student achievement outcomes, but no one is held accountable for reaching those targets.
- Accessibility of data is limited by:
  - ❖ the lack of capacity to generate and share data;
  - ❖ technological and political constraints that limit who can directly access data;
  - ❖ the timing of district delivery of data reports.
- District programs and services are not adequately evaluated to assess the extent of their implementation or their effectiveness.
- Given inadequate data accessibility and use, the public perceives a lack of clarity about district efforts and effectiveness.

**PPSD'S IMMEDIATE GOALS** in the area "Use Data for Accountability"

- PPSD must identify necessary data sets to inform decision making to improve student achievement, develop data reporting systems that clearly articulate results to various stakeholders, and develop a plan for comprehensive professional development of district staff in data decision making that establishes a clearly defined culture of assessment literacy to support student achievement.
- With the assistance of stakeholders, the PPSD should seek to inventory all technology equipment, review the district's technology plan, and ensure that all equipment and plans support twenty-first-century teaching and learning initiatives.

## 5. BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

In most communities, the school district is the organization with the most resources at its disposal, both fiscal and human, for serving children. It is also the entity charged with ensuring the academic success of those children. Smart districts recognize that children need more than what is available in school to be successful students. Therefore, smart districts embrace the responsibility to advocate strongly for supports that address the needs of the students they serve both *and* outside of school. Smart districts partner with and involve a wide spectrum of community members, organizations, and agencies to set and achieve the overarching goals of the district. These partners share information widely and have regular, respectful conversations among themselves to help ensure distributed leadership, responsibility, and accountability for results.

Our synthesis suggests that:

- The areas of partnerships and community investment were not thoroughly investigated in the major reviewed reports. The need for the central office to bolster its capacity through partnerships is, however, detailed in recommendations focused on outsourcing certain central office functions and strengthening the relationship with the teachers union (see recommendations section).
- The reports do not give a sense of current partnerships with community stakeholders, available community supports, or engagement efforts made on the part of the district.
- Though efforts on the part of the district to collaborate with community organizations and parents were acknowledged in the READY report, some dissatisfaction was noted around communication: communications from the district, particularly in the area of student assignment and interactions, or lack thereof, with school-based personnel.

**PPSD'S IMMEDIATE GOALS** in the area "Build Partnerships and Community Investment"

- PPSD must work to build the confidence and trust of the community through its partnerships with community, business, and higher-education partners. Accessing resources available to the community to focus efforts on core curriculum development will help increase student achievement.
- Recognizing that a student's day of learning can neither begin nor end with the school day, PPSD must seek to partner with community groups to reinforce the curriculum initiatives that are being implemented in the classroom to contribute to an extended day of learning.

## 6. ALIGN INFRASTRUCTURE WITH VISION

School districts are complex organizations involved not only in educating young people but also in transporting them, feeding them, paying their teachers, and complying with state and federal mandates. Smart districts manage their operations and resources to ensure an appropriate learning environment and support systems for all schools and students. Smart districts employ sound management practices, ensuring that the buses run on time, legal obligations are met, paychecks go out, and facilities are conducive to learning. Finally, they make clear the difference between board and central office roles and responsibilities.

Our synthesis suggests that:

- The relationship between the school board, city council, and superintendent does not respect clear lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability and has contributed to the high turnover in leadership in PPSD.
- The budgeting process
  - ❖ is disconnected from planning, which means that resources are insufficient to implement action steps;
  - ❖ lacks a process for linking cost-benefit analyses, program evaluation, or student achievement to decision making and funding allocation. Though analyses of some programs were conducted, the district seems to lack a comprehensive system of program assessment and the means to conduct accurate cost-benefit analyses.
- The Facilities Master Plan is not adequately funded and lacks an evaluation plan. Many schools are in need of repair, maintenance, and cleaning.
- Board policies around human resources and curriculum management are lacking and/or in need of review.
- Much effort has been made to improve the district's compliance with special education rules and regulations.
- The district's Technology Plan is not funded and is inadequate to guide the integration of technology and instructional strategies and materials.
- Both the budget and human resources offices would benefit from systems and technology that would track and report data in an integrated, effective, and timely manner and/or replace cumbersome and ineffective paper-driven processes.

### **PPSD'S IMMEDIATE GOALS** in the area "Align Infrastructure with Vision"

- Work with stakeholders to define the resources needed to assist operational functions that contribute to student achievement.
- Identify local and national foundations to provide support to the district in building uniform curriculum, implementing the facilities master plan, and improving information technology throughout the system.

## Across the Reports: Critical Issues and Noticeable Gaps

The number of issues identified in the various reports might seem overwhelming. In every area of our framework, PPSD – despite good-faith efforts by many – has major inadequacies. Some themes about what is needed arose from the recommendations made by the authors of the eleven reports we reviewed. To address the many inadequacies found, the reports recommended that PPSD:

- Address the limited capacity of the central office by engaging school-based staff to lend their expertise to instructional planning tasks, partnering with external individuals and groups, and outsourcing some of the functions that are not currently being fulfilled.
- Reestablish sound working relationships with key stakeholder groups that have been seen as a barrier to reform, such as the Providence Teachers Union and the City Council.
- Provide more diverse and rigorous opportunities for students attending Providence public schools, including intensive intervention for students scoring below basic on reading and mathematics assessments.
- Implement a consistent cycle of development, implementation, and review for district programs and supports.
- Develop plans that deal realistically with budget limitations and work to secure new sources of funding.

The common themes address some of the most critical needs of the system. But from our perspective, there were some areas the reports did not touch on that are also important to consider. The reports included little or no discussion of:

- how the central office could promote partnership and support by being clearer with stakeholders about its resources and needs (e.g., there was little emphasis on improving the transparency of district decision making and outcomes);
- how the central office approaches its work (with the exception of the Council of the Great City Schools, which focused exclusively on human resources, the need for changing the culture of the central office was not explicitly targeted in recommendations);
- the district leadership's role as advocates for children and youth (e.g., there was little or no encouragement for district leaders to act as an integral part of a unified agenda of education and supports for children);
- the specific needs of English language learners and how that challenge will be addressed, given the demographics of the city (with the exception of the two CRM achievement analyses on these groups);
- the provision of extended learning opportunities – supports that go beyond the classroom, including the role of arts, athletics, work, and other opportunities that inspire and engage students;
- how to include input on policy decisions and greater decision-making roles for educators, students, and parents (e.g., only two of the reviewed reports specifically recommended involving teachers in developing teaching tools and resources).

## Conclusion

The reports we reviewed were all very recent; seven of them were written in the last two years. But the issues they raise are not new. The questions that loom are “Why has so little been accomplished? What has prevented action in the past?” And, most important, “What will it take for things to be different this time?”

The reviewed reports offer many useful recommendations for improvement, the majority of which involve technical solutions. But helping school district central offices become *smart districts* at the heart of *smart education systems* – the foundational goal of the Annenberg Institute’s work – involves both strong technical solutions on the part of the district and explicit attention to how those solutions are implemented. Technical and cultural changes must be sought simultaneously so that they complement and reinforce each other.

Thus, our recommendations for the partners meeting are to:

- engage the district and its constituency stakeholders in the work and review;
- ask “how” and “why” questions (rather than the “what” and “how many” questions the previous reports focused on);
- pay close attention to social, political, cultural, and relational dynamics among the school system’s employees and the larger community.

There is new leadership in PPSD, including a superintendent who thus far has received strong support from the mayor, the school board, the city council, and many in the community. This is an opportunity to rethink how the city’s public school system operates and who is involved. The school district must mobilize its partners to help bring in new resources, build capacity, and prioritize the areas to address. Without this kind of mobilization, technical solutions will remain inadequately designed, funded, and implemented.

## Appendix A: Methodology

Two Annenberg Institute staff worked on preparing this report: Dr. Ellen Foley, associate director of district redesign and leadership and assistant clinical professor in the Master's in Urban Education Policy program, and Tracie Potochnik, research analyst in district redesign and leadership.

To conduct the review that is at the heart of this report, we first uploaded all of the reports into a qualitative data-analysis software application called NVivo 7. Each report was read by at least one of us and then coded according to the Annenberg Institute's Smart District Framework (Appendix B). We also noted whether the sections of the reports we were coding were recommendations or findings and whether the findings were positive or negative.

To align our coding, we both coded one section of the same report and discussed discrepancies in detail. From these discussions, we formulated decision rules about how to code particular items, which eventually resulted in a relatively high degree of alignment across both coders.

When all of the reports were coded, we used NVivo 7 to reorganize the reports by the framework practices. We then prepared summaries about what the reports said in each of the primary areas of the framework:

- Lead for Results and Equity
- Focus on Instruction
- Manage Human Capital
- Use Data for Accountability
- Build Partnerships and Community Investment
- Align Infrastructure with Vision

Those summaries formed the basis for the overview section. To develop the summary section, we used a matrix analysis to determine which parts of our framework had large sections of the reports coded to them and which parts were discussed less often.

The reports reviewed for this synthesis are:

- *A Curriculum Management Audit of the Providence School Department*, International Curriculum Management Audit Center, Phi Delta Kappa International, 2008
- *Review of the Human Resources Operations of the Providence Public Schools*, Council of the Great City Schools, 2007
- *A Review of Response to Intervention Implementation in Providence Elementary Schools*, Center for Resource Management (CRM), 2007
- *Evaluation of the Providence Mathematics Program*, CRM, 2007
- *Analysis of ELL Performance by Time in Program*, CRM, 2007
- *Evaluation of the Providence Reading Program: Phase I Evaluation Findings*, CRM, 2006

- *Evaluation of the Providence Special Education Program: Phase I Evaluation Findings*, CRM, 2006
- *Mobilizing the Community to Action*, Providence Educational Excellence Campaign, 2005
- *Providence Public Schools, Rethinking School Resources to Improve Student Performance*, Education Resource Strategies, 2004
- *READY to Act: A Status Report to the Community, Raising Expectations and Discovering Our Youth*, READY, 2004
- *Community Perspectives on High School Graduation Requirements: A Report to Providence Public Schools*, Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, 2003

*Imagine . . . The Report of the PROBE Commission*, Providence Blueprint for Education, 1993, provided additional context.

## Appendix B: The Annenberg Institute’s Smart District Framework

The Annenberg Institute’s Smart District Framework identifies the six key functions of a district central office and the practices that support these functions.

Key Central Office Function	Practices That Support the Function
Lead for Results and Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with all stakeholder groups to develop a vision for the district and implement a strategic plan for realizing it</li> <li>• Build ownership of and sustain progress toward the vision through effective internal communication</li> <li>• Establish a collaborative organizational culture that balances the prescription and guidance of the central office with flexibility and autonomy for schools</li> <li>• Develop substantive leadership at all levels of the organization</li> <li>• Encourage and evaluate new ideas, methods, and partners to ensure the availability of the most effective supports and services for schools</li> <li>• Ensure a service orientation toward schools and the community</li> </ul>
Focus on Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a common curricular framework aligned with high academic standards and assessments</li> <li>• Develop and implement valid and useful systems of formative and summative assessment for students</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate supports and interventions for all students while maintaining high expectations</li> <li>• Ensure extended learning opportunities and supports that facilitate learning beyond the classroom</li> <li>• Develop and distribute teaching and learning tools and resources effectively</li> </ul>
Manage Human Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract talent from a variety of sources, create a diverse pipeline of quality applicants, and streamline entry into the system</li> <li>• Provide ongoing mentoring and support in varying levels and forms</li> <li>• Deploy human capital to meet the varying needs of schools and students</li> <li>• Evaluate the effectiveness of personnel and provide appropriate recognition and accountability</li> <li>• Ensure that all staff participate in high-quality professional development that is tied to evaluation and, whenever appropriate, supports instruction</li> <li>• Provide competitive compensation and a variety of incentives for excellence and meeting goals</li> <li>• Establish a career track for teachers that provides varied challenges and advancement opportunities for the most effective individuals</li> </ul>
Use Data for Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect, organize, and act on data</li> <li>• Monitor the student, school, and central office outcomes as well as indicators that impact those outcomes</li> <li>• Assist others throughout the system to analyze and use data effectively</li> <li>• Evaluate the effectiveness of district programs</li> <li>• Ensure technology and support necessary for timely and effective use of data</li> <li>• Promote organizational transparency to the public by consistently providing timely district performance data</li> </ul>
Build Partnerships and Community Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broker partnerships and work with outside stakeholders to increase resources for schools and students</li> <li>• Collaborate with multiple sectors of the community to set district priorities and identify strategies for realizing them</li> <li>• Advocate for a web of community supports and coordinate partnerships to provide them</li> <li>• Communicate effectively externally and promote a high level of transparency</li> <li>• Regularly seek community input and feedback</li> </ul>
Align Infrastructure with Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the effective, equitable, efficient, and transparent distribution of public and private resources</li> <li>• Ensure clean, safe, and well-maintained facilities that allow for productive learning environments</li> <li>• Develop and implement policies that support the instructional focus of the district while maintaining compliance with established legal and policy regulations</li> <li>• Develop a technology infrastructure that enables the central office and school-based staff to do their jobs efficiently</li> <li>• Attend to the logistical needs of students so that they arrive on time and ready to learn</li> </ul>

We have infused throughout the framework and our analyses based on the framework, not just *what* smart districts do, but also *how* smart districts approach their work. Smart districts and their central offices support genuine reform by being:

- *collaborative*: involving community, partners, and staff in key decisions;
- *service oriented*: recognizing students, families, the community, schools, and educators as their partners and working with them to ensure that children have what they need to be successful;
- *communicative*: striving for a high level of transparency, ensuring opportunities for community participation in goal setting and governance, and providing clear and consistent explanations for district decisions;
- *attentive to equity*: championing the cause of equity throughout the district through communication with the community, strategic allocation of resources, and nurturing of high expectations;
- *balanced*: finding the right mix of prescription and guidance from the district and flexibility and autonomy for individual schools and their staff and communities.