

March 2019

Forward ...

A review of the Kent ISD special education center-based programs was commissioned by the Kent Intermediate Superintendents Association in the spring of 2018. The study was intended to develop a pathway to enhance the educational experience of students being served within center-based programs. The pages that follow reflect the review conducted by Beth Steenwyk, the consultant hired to complete this project.

The significance of this report is that it provides a framework to move forward. Five key “pillars” to improve our center programs are found on pages 5-6. These include:

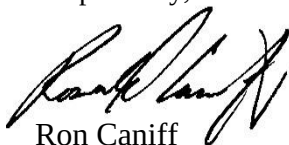
- 1) Development of a unifying core mission and a requisite set of guiding principles;
- 2) Alignment of the guiding principles to fundamental and explicit expectations of staff performance and instructional practices;
- 3) Safe, secure and well-maintained learning environments;
- 4) Consistency across all programs in the use and implementation of curriculum aligned to high quality, evidence-based standards with customized professional development for staff; and,
- 5) Rigorous and purposeful use of continuous school improvement processes.

It would be wrong to attempt to use this report to find fault or assign blame. The staff operating and administering these programs are very dedicated. The report reveals, however, that a thorough review was overdue. These programs have operated under a structure that was created several decades ago in a very different era. Our largest school district within the county has long shouldered the responsibility of operating center-based programs for 19 other school districts in the county while also delivering high quality programs for its own K-12 students. Layering the responsibility of providing educational programming for our most unique and complex learners from 19 other school districts *on top of* the demands of providing exceptional programs for its own students has been a very heavy lift, and for far too long that school district has been doing it alone.

The operation of center-based special education programs by intermediate school districts is common elsewhere in Michigan but it has not been the practice in our county. This will change beginning July 2019. Kent ISD welcomes the opportunity to administer these programs since we are accustomed to operating other instructional programs that serve students from all 20 local districts within our ISD as well as the public school academies within our borders. This report provides a foundation from which we can grow as we take these programs on.

A special thank you goes to the parents and staff who provided input into this report. As we embark on the transition of these programs to Kent ISD, we are especially grateful to the Grand Rapids Public Schools for the high degree of professionalism they’ve provided in serving students with special needs since the inception of center-based programs decades ago.

Respectfully,



Ron Caniff
Superintendent

Kent ISD Center-Based Program Review

January 2019

Beth A Steenwyk

Introduction

A review of the Kent ISD Center Programs was commissioned by the Kent Intermediate Superintendents Association in the spring of 2018 and by late summer the Grand Rapids Public School Board had voted to turn over operations of all Center Programs to Kent ISD. This review, although initially prompted by parent and staff concerns, has become a unifying effort to improve services for nearly 1,400 students with complex learning needs from throughout Kent ISD. To date there have been numerous opportunities for stakeholder involvement through personal interviews, Town Hall style meetings and Focus Group meetings.

The final component of this review process was to conduct a series of full day onsite visits to each of the programs. These visits included observations of building routines, conferences with the building Principal and key staff, building orientations, program walk throughs, classroom observations and an all staff meeting at the end of the school day. Each visit followed the same protocols and utilized a *Quality Indicators for Center Programs* rubric (Appendix). The rubric examined specific focus areas and will be described in depth later in this report.

Specific findings and recommendations for each program will be addressed in separate documents; the incorporation of these recommendations into respective school improvement plans is strongly advised. Program implementation plans will be developed, and implementation supports will be provided using key elements of current research around effective implementation practices within educational settings. Program improvement and implementation plans will be accessible after each program has been given an opportunity to be included in the development process and provide input on priority areas, action steps and alignment with other improvement efforts.

A substantial condition of the agreed upon deliverables of the Center Program Review process was a final, comprehensive report of the findings of the Program Review and Observation process. Thus, the remainder of this report will focus on areas of critical importance to the future of Kent ISD's Center Programs:

- Description of program visits;
- Impressions of the current situation;
- An overview of critical concerns and aggregate of findings related to Program Observations;
- Recommendations for county wide collaboration efforts for young children and post school age young adults;
- Recommendations for a county wide educational services for complex learners,
- Recommendations related to individual program reports;
- Recommendations for system supports for implementation efforts and long-term sustainability; and,
- Summary.

Program Visitations-Description

Full day onsite program visits were conducted between the dates of October 8, 2018 to November 1, 2018. The visits followed a prescribed protocol to ensure consistency across all programs. This protocol included adherence to the following components:

- Observations of Beginning of School Day Routines;
- 60 Minute Dialogue with Building Principal (Principal could choose to include staff member representation in discussion);
- 3 IEPs were randomly pulled from each program to review and used as a foundation for questions around curriculum, instruction and assessment;
- Program Walk Through and Classroom Observations;
- Observations of End of School Day Routines; and,
- Staff were invited to meet with Beth Steenwyk at end of day.

The dialogue portion of the visit was guided by a comprehensive set of questions which were aligned to the *Quality Indicators for Center Programs* rubric used throughout the building walk through process.

Guiding Questions for Principal Dialogue

Culture of High Expectations

- What does a good day look like?
- What are the indicators that a culture of high expectations exists in this program?

IEP Review-3 students

Curriculum (Use identified IEP Goals when framing)

- How were the goals for “*student’s name*” determined?
- What curriculum standards are these goals aligned to?

Instruction

- What process do you as a principal use to determine the fidelity of instruction to “*student’s name*” goals? How do you communicate with the teacher about this?

Progress Monitoring

- How is student progress monitored? What data are used to inform instruction?
How is instruction aligned to learning targets?

Secondary Transition

- What does transition planning look like for your students?

Building Systems

- What building systems are in place for:
 - Intentional Resource Allocation
 - Personnel Development
 - Decision making
 - Communication
 - Safety/Crisis Management
 - Instruction
 - Behavior

The program walkthrough and classroom observations were all conducted using the *Quality Indicators for Center Programs* rubric:

Rubric items were clustered into the following categories:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Culture of High Expectations | • Communication Interactions |
| • Curriculum | • Organization of the Environment |
| • Instruction | • Secondary Transition |
| • Progress Monitoring | |

Rubric items were scored using a three-point rating scale of 0-1-2.

- Full development & implementation of an item received a rating of 2;
- Partial development & implementation of an item received a rating of 1;
- Little or no evidence of an item received a 0.

Impressions of Current Situation

The central findings of Phase 1, which included over 60 hours of interview time with a range of stakeholders, centered around six key areas:

1. Meaningful and Respectful Engagement
2. Timely and Effective Communication
3. Oversight, Adequate Staffing and Safety
4. Quality Programing and Instructional Practices
5. Adequate Resources and Specialized Training
6. Collaborative Professional Relationships

These six key areas were clustered into four categories and used as a foundation for focus group questions. Stakeholder focus groups were conducted in September 2018 and focused on the topic areas of:

1. Meaningful Engagement and Effective Communication
2. Adequate Staffing and Resources
3. Safe and Secure Environments
4. High-Quality Instruction and Services

There was a remarkable uniformity of concerns and recommendations for improvements expressed by all stakeholders. The consistency of the concerns and the overwhelming unified voice, regardless of perspective, is notable. The perception that stakeholder concerns were rooted in a difficulty in accepting change were not substantiated during this process, in fact stakeholders repeatedly voiced not only acceptance of change but a willingness to be part of it. Issues of safety and security, quality and consistency of services within and across programs, ineffective communication, staffing ratios and the reported reductions of fiscal resources were observed during the onsite visits. These concerns, expressed multiple times across all programs and within each stakeholder group session, have contributed to feelings of disenfranchisement for personnel and parents alike. These feelings were repeatedly voiced and ranged in expression from anger to depression to a guarded hope that things could change if the programs were seen and supported as valuable assets to the educational community.

Throughout the process of gathering stakeholder input, participating in county wide meetings, and conducting the onsite observations shared vision regarding Center Programs was neither referenced or articulated. When specifically questioned regarding the nature or existence of a shared purpose and vision for the Center Programs individuals and groups alike responded in accord: “there isn’t one, but we need one.” Absent a unifying voice and purpose, programs and staff struggle to do their best to deliver consistent educational services to students with the most complex learning needs. The resulting individuation across and within Center Programming has contributed to a pervasive variability across all aspects of the educational process. This presents challenges when addressing the needs of students who require consistency, intensive supports and unique learning situations. This variability also influences and promotes perceived or at times real programmatic weakness.

Current research around effective implementation, and the supports required to achieve high levels of fidelity to evidence based educational practices, clearly point to mutual responsibilities of the entire educational cascade, from classroom to state. Any breakdown in that cascade of feedback and support or in the relentless use of data for improvement renders a confounding, pervasive set of systemic issues that require commitment to address and overcome. Richard Elmore Ed.D., Harvard Graduate School of Education, states it succinctly: *“Accountability must be a reciprocal process. For every increment of performance, I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation.”* (Reciprocal Accountability – Richard Elmore Ed.D. 2002)

Overview of Critical Concerns and Aggregate of Findings

A framework for improvement rests on a set of required core educational practices irrefutable in the profession. These include the following:

- 1) A unifying Core Mission and Purpose and a requisite set of Guiding Principles** which are specific to and govern the operation of educational programs.
- 2) Alignment of said Guiding Principles to a set of fundamental and explicit expectations of staff performance and instructional practices** that are relevant to the settings and circumstances related to instruction (e.g. Marzano’s Teacher Evaluation Model, Danielson’s Framework for Teaching).

- 3) **Safe, secure and well-maintained environments** that promote learning, have access to current technology and specialized supports for students.
- 4) Consistency across all programs in the use and implementation integrity of **essential components of education practice**:
 - a. *Coherent curriculum* aligned to standards,
 - b. *High quality, evidence based* instructional and intervention practices,
 - c. *Consistent use of educational data to inform instruction* specific to the complex learning needs of students and delivered in such a manner as to afford individual access to learning,
 - d. Evidence of *consistent, competent and resilient building-wide systems* that ensure equity of and consistent delivery of services and sound placement decisions,
 - e. *High quality and consistent* access to *Professional Development* that is specific to the needs to personnel supporting the most complex learners.
- 5) Rigorous and purposeful use of **Continuous School Improvement** processes to insure meaningful, sustainable program improvement based on data with efficient and effective use of educational resources.

While there is evidence that features of these core educational practices exist within some of the Center Programs, they are not systemic across all programs, nor are all core practices evident within any program. Time and again the program observations and dialogues with key stakeholders indicated awareness in the persistency of gaps in relation to quality education practice; there was acknowledgment of a need for improvement yet a recognition of very real system limitations to achieve those improvements and an uncertainty on how to take the right next step.

The following are items observed based on rubric analysis and individual accounts of encounters with students and staff.

- Staff across buildings convey a genuine sense of caring and compassion for their students. Many express a strong desire for opportunities to grow and learn through exposure to current practices. However, current cultures do not foster a mindset of high expectations and student potential.

- Presumption of student competence...varies from fully present to no evidence...
- It is unclear if there is a sense of collective ownership of these programs across the county.
- **Over-prompting** i.e. hand-over-hand is found consistently across classrooms, programs and buildings. Staff are focused on the end product/task rather than the functional skills built within.
 - A need for staff development exists to understand and implement a clearly defined hierarchy of prompting that ensures and allows for student engagement time and appropriate learning opportunities.
- Resource insufficiencies have created access limitations and renders student participation to teacher directed activity with one shared classroom tool.
- Instructional integrity is dependent on the individual teacher and/or support staff in the room. Thus, quality of programming is highly variable. Many classrooms were organized, some appropriately staffed and highly engaged with students. However, in other classrooms there was little evidence of any “school-like” structures.
- Across all programs, buildings and classrooms, Principals and staff report that they have little to no access to professional learning, current technologies or high-quality educational practices related to the unique needs of the students they serve.
- ...these programs are not specialized in terms of instruction and related supports and thus we are left with a gap in the continuum for our most needy learners.
- Staff are generally positive and enjoy their work, however, they have not been given adequate support to perform their most essential functions. There is little clarity regarding curricular focus or data-based decision making to improve student outcomes.
- There is a need to re-establish effective communication with parents and other stakeholders.

Horner’s (2013) comments related to effective teachers come to mind, when he states:

*“Education continues to rely on the “excellent teacher” myth rather than on the “**improved system**” approach. Excellent teachers are a gift, and we should admire, learn from and support them. But the real issue is how to*

- a) train more “excellent teachers”,*
- b) give them curricula that really works, and*
- c) give them a **system** that makes it easier and more likely that excellent teaching happens by design rather than by heroic efforts to overcome the system.*

The above items frame the experience of the onsite review process. The business of teaching and learning is a dynamic and complex endeavor, making change a constant. This reality demands we attend to the necessary and sufficient supports required to achieve the desired outcomes we strive for in education. The concept of *Reciprocal Accountability* so articulately expressed by Dr. Richard Elmore clearly underscores the mutuality of the task in the education of children and young adults.

Preface to Recommendations for ISD-wide Efforts

It is important that a distinction be made related to the nomenclature being used to describe what is currently known as Kent ISD's Center Programs. This distinction is made based on the uniqueness of clientele needs being served, age appropriate services and settings and what constitutes best practice based on the above variables. 1) Within the educational arena the term "program" denotes setting. When this concept is applied to infants, toddlers and young adults it creates confusion around how supports and services are best provided, and in fact may limit more creative solutions. 2) Supports and services for students within the age range typically found within a traditional PreK-12 system should show clear and consistent evidence of alignment to and coherence with Curriculum Standards, Assessment Practices and Instructional Best Practice desirous within a PreK-12 setting. While there is evidence that some of these factors are partially in place within the current structures there is insufficient evidence that there is consistency, coherence and fidelity across the continuum of supports and services for students.

Decision making regarding high quality instructional practices is best governed by the needs of the students served, the outcomes desired and the capacities of the staff and system to deliver. A significant take away from the Center Program observation process was an emerging awareness that there seems to be an over generalized approach to understanding the needs of the personnel who operate within these programs and the students that attend these programs. To effectively facilitate and support the operation of these programs an awareness of the tremendous diversity that exists within these programs is required; and that a commitment to explicit standards of operation does not preclude customization of those standards to the unique needs of students and staff. Cases in point would be teacher evaluation systems, systems of personnel development, access to and use of educational

technology and educational data to improve instruction, safety and security.

The above distinctions are critical in framing recommendations for ISD wide collaborative efforts and the recommendations for ISD wide educational services for students with complex learning needs. These distinctions do not suggest that certain standards are required for only those students within the PreK-12 age range, but rather appropriate standards should govern all supports and services and be customized to reflect age appropriate opportunities and experiences.

Recommendations for ISD wide collaboration efforts for young children and post school age young adults

It is imperative and a clear indicator of best practice that services for young children and post school young adults reflect age appropriate opportunities, settings and experiences. As an example, young children may best be served within home or community settings rather than traditional school settings, while post school young adults may best be served within work environments, their home communities and/or within college or university settings. While there is evidence that current practice attends to these principles, this review process creates an opportunity for the ISD to examine the consistency and fidelity of practice related to the services which young children and post school young adults receive.

It is recommended that two separate stakeholder groups be convened during the Spring/Summer of 2019 to begin exploring how services to young children, inclusive of the current Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE classrooms) and post school age young adults could be organized and coordinated and what a ISD-wide continuum of services should look like. There is no doubt that ISD-wide expertise exists and should be utilized to discover and design efficient, collaborative approaches for each of these “book end services” for young children and young adults.

It is also recommended that these groups have appropriate and balanced representation from all county stakeholder voices inclusive of parents who are currently end users of the current system/s. The facilitated structure for the groups would follow a specialized protocol that ensures, the necessary discovery of current strengths and challenges, suggested design strategies to improve current systems, and supportive recommendations for the implementation of improvement efforts.

A framing infrastructure for these efforts would utilize data and information gathered during the stakeholder engagement processes, the program observations, and align to the aforementioned critical set of core educational practices relevant to the delivery of services to young children and post school age young adults (these can be found on page 5 and 6 in the section titled **Overview of Critical Concerns and Aggregate of Findings**):

1. A Core Mission and a set of Guiding Principles,
2. Explicit expectations of personnel with regards to adherence to legal requirements and effective practices relevant to young children and post school age young adults,
3. Safety and security in home and community settings,
4. Selection of and implementation of high-quality practices relevant to these populations,
5. Consistent and relevant engagement of ISD wide perspectives to support continuous improvement efforts

By the Fall of 2019 there would be an articulated set of recommendations for improvement that could be acted upon by administration and staff serving students within those age groups. These improvement efforts could then be actualized within a School Improvement process and supported with effective implementation supports, which would also be integrated into the School Improvement process. Periodic engagement of ISD wide stakeholders would complete the continuous improvement efforts through structured and predictable stakeholder meetings to analyze and review data, understand strengths, needs and challenges and advocate for necessary changes.

A third area of ISD wide discussion is warranted and relates to a specific group of students who experience life on the Autism Spectrum. The Kent CAN program is a grant-funded initiative of Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START). It is a regional collaborative network of the Kent ISD that is working to implement "best practices" for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). To the reviewer's knowledge it is not apparent how this initiative is coordinated with services for students with Autism who are educated within the Center Programs. Without a clear understanding of the alignment of the regional efforts with Center Programming it is difficult to comprehend the full continuum of services for students on the Autism Spectrum. It is recommended that a group be convened to review any existing ISD efforts, commitments or practices related to the continuum of service delivery options for

students with Autism. Subsequent to these discussions it is advisable that an articulated continuum of services inform the instructional practices for students with Autism that are currently receiving educational supports and services within existing Center Programs.

Recommendations for a ISD wide educational services for complex learners,

Educational supports and services for students with complex learning needs require clarity of purpose, articulation of measurable outcomes, explicit expectations of staff, access to reliable and consistent resources and a comprehensive set of instructional supports. The subsequent recommendations align to the aforementioned critical set of core educational practices previously found on page 5 and 6 in the section titled **Overview of Critical Concerns and Aggregate of Findings:**

1. A Core Mission and a set of Guiding Principles
2. Explicit expectations
3. Safety and security
4. Selection of and implementation of essential components of high-quality practices relevant to student populations served
5. Consistent and effective use of Continuous School Improvement Processes

Each of these components will be addressed within this section as a broad-spectrum approach to the educational supports for the following Kent ISD Center Programs:

- Grand Rapids Oral Deaf Program
- Pine Grove
- Lincoln School
- Lincoln Developmental Center
- Kent Educational Center @ Oakleigh
- Kent Educational Center @ Beltline

1) Core Mission and Purpose and Guiding Principles for Center Programs

The educational supports and services for students attending the Kent ISD Center Programs would be best served if there was a unifying Core Mission and Purpose and a requisite set of Guiding Principles. A need for a shared purpose and governing principles was repeatedly identified throughout the various stakeholder input processes. An overarching, ISD wide shared purpose is needed to ensure a unified commitment to these programs, facilitation of coordinated and aligned continuum of services and uniform operational practices across the county. In addition, a ISD wide Core Mission and Purpose and Guiding Principles sets a

foundation for each program to develop similar statements which would then guide and support continuous improvement efforts in the future.

To enable the development of such statements it is recommended that the external consultant and the Director of Center Programs reach out to three distinct groups: ISD wide Parents, Special Education Administration, and Center Program Staff. Efficient methods of soliciting input, such as web-based surveys, designed input tools deployed through existing meeting structures, and strategic interviews would yield a body of information that could be synthesized into clear and concise statements of mission and purpose which would then be collectively agreed upon through a final input process. A final set of Core Mission and Purpose and Guiding Principles would be complete at the time of transition of the programs, July 1, 2019.

2) Explicit expectations

Becoming more explicit about expectations supports stakeholders in an equitable and clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and sets a stage for effective partnerships and collaborations. To that end it is warranted that this concept of “explicit expectations” be applied to staff evaluation systems, parent involvement and engagement, systems of communication, and developing program cultures that promote and facilitate high expectations for students regardless of complexity of need.

A review of appropriate staff evaluation systems related to the operation of Center Programming is warranted. It is recommended that an intentional effort be made to become more informed of quality practices and tools currently being used throughout the state, specifically in Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) similar in size and demographics to Kent ISD. In addition, while doing so, it would also be efficient to develop an understanding of effective practices being utilized (e.g. Curriculum, Instruction/Intervention, Assessment, Parent Engagement, Communication and Cultures of High Expectations etc.). The development of a set of probe questions, related to practices utilized in other ISDs, would facilitate a common set of information that could be used in decision making.

3) Safety and Security

The stakeholder engagement processes and the program observation process revealed genuine concerns about building security systems and staff and student safety concerns.

Specific concerns and recommendations related to the individual programs will be addressed within each of the individual program reports which will be released later in 2019.

Some safety concerns are facility specific and relate to inadequate, faulty or absent systems of essential security systems for educational facilities. It is recommended that a comprehensive facility walk through process be completed prior to the final transition of the program operations to ensure that facility decisions are based on what is in the best interests of students and staff when it comes to future program locations.

Other safety concerns are related to the lack of, or inconsistent deployment of, high-quality building-wide systems that support positive behavior, cultures of high expectations and high-quality learning environments. While some of these concerns are program specific others relate to a lack of consistency from a unifying administrative structure that requires, supports and monitors that these building systems are in place and operational. Evidence of such systems should be observable and measurable in terms of adult behavior and student performance. Absent these unifying structures, individual teachers are left to determine what constitutes appropriateness for their classrooms which does not secure uniformity of expectation or practice.

Yet another set of concerns related to safety and security lies with an arbitrary set of standards applied to student groupings. It is unclear how decisions for student placements are made and there does not seem to be a set of clear decision rules applied when looking at student groupings. Decision making should consider a set of variables consistently applied to each situation (e.g. issues of safety and security, student primary educational, behavioral and medical needs, and staff and program capacities).

Deeper analysis of the existence of consistent building wide systems and uniform decision-making practices is warranted. It is also imperative that current ISD wide decision-making practices related to the placement of students in Center Programs be analyzed and revised.

4) Effective implementation of essential components of education practice

As outlined earlier in this report a set of essential components of educational practices should be evidenced in each program. It is necessary that programs be supported to focus on the following essential practices:

- a. Coherent curriculum aligned to standards;
- b. High quality, evidence based instructional and intervention practices;
- c. Consistent use of educational data to inform instruction specific to the complex learning needs of students and delivered in such a manner as to afford individual access to learning;
- d. Evidence of consistent, competent and resilient building-wide systems that ensure equity and consistent delivery of services and sound placement decisions; and,
- e. High quality and consistent access to Professional Development that is specific to the needs to personnel supporting the most complex learners.

While it is fundamental that each program individually review current practices around these essential components of educational practices it is also necessary that there be some guidance provided on how this is to be done. To that end it is suggested that a set of guidelines be developed which is informed by the quality practices and tools being used across other ISDs.

The development of guidelines should create boundaries by which decisions regarding each of these essential components are to be made, yet also allow for the necessary customization to be made for each program. An example of such would be a set of guidelines related to the use of a coherent, articulated curriculum aligned to state standards.

Programs serving students with emergent communication skills would need to align curriculum and instructional practices to current national research around the use of Assistive Technologies and Augmentative Communication Strategies as well as to rigorous early learning standards and age appropriate outcomes. The complexities of these processes should be supported by expertise which already exists.

In contrast, programs serving students who are in need of intensive behavioral supports and are progressing along grade level standards, must ensure a fully aligned curriculum to state standards and effective implementation of evidence-based practices around Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, Trauma Informed Practices, Self-Regulation and Resiliency Practices. This expertise also exists within the Kent ISD and should be utilized to support these programs to integrate these practices, and others, within existing curricular structures.

A common issue raised within all stakeholder events, each and every program visit, and in many of the dialogues with principals and staff was the lack of personalized, relevant and timely professional development opportunities. The frequency and consistency of this issue warrants a thoughtful approach as Kent ISD considers how to develop an efficient, cost

effective manner of building and maintaining the level of staff expertise and capacity to deliver high quality programming to a select group of students with the most complex learning needs.

This approach will need to consider all aspects of a capacity building system from hiring practices, to training opportunities, to access to coaching and teacher performance management systems. To embark on a professional development system that is not customized to the specific needs of these populations would likely result in expenditures of funds and resources with marginal benefits. A more judicious approach would be to develop a high-quality professional development system that provides for the universal, targeted and intensive support needs of staff around both subject matter and personal capacity. More in depth recommendations on implementation supports will follow later in this report.

These illustrations are not intended to indicate that essential components of these practices are absent in current programming. However, the observation process did determine that gaps around decision-making, coordination, implementation and consistency existed across all measures of the essential elements of educational programming. Absent a core set of guiding principles, explicit expectations of program staff and consistent follow through and monitoring of these essential practices renders a patchwork quilt of diverse approaches, lack of continuity across programming and limited staff expertise.

5) Continuous School Improvement Processes

Finally, to ensure effective implementation and long-term sustainability of the essential core educational practices it is recommended that integrated supports across Kent ISD's Teaching and Learning Department be considered. Expertise around Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment practices, specialized behavioral supports, Augmentative Communication and Accessible Educational Technologies and Continuous School Improvement should be consulted on effective ways to support and facilitate improvement within individual programs. The appropriate supports could then be provided based on the unique needs of individual programs.

Recommendations related to individual program reports

In keeping with the original design of the Center Program Review Proposal each program principal will receive an individualized, customized report of the findings gathered during stakeholder engagement processes and program observations and will outline observed

and conveyed strengths and areas for improvement. In addition, a set of recommendations, framed to the aforementioned critical set of core educational practices, and specific to each program will be provided in separate program reports. It is anticipated that these individual reports will be released during Spring 2019.

Each report will be reviewed and discussed with the building principal and staff. A structured process will be developed for the report reviews to ensure parity between and across all programs. An outcome of this process will be a synthesized set of program strengths, needs, and recommended improvement areas. Additionally, there will be an intentional approach to embed the improvement strategies into the School Improvement Plan process which will include a comprehensive approach to effective implementation of improvement efforts. The integration and coordination of expertise within Kent ISD Teaching and Learning Department's supports would facilitate the improvement efforts of individual programs. Finally, as a result of this process each program will develop a communication plan to share and discuss with pertinent stakeholders the findings of their program report, the outcomes of the report review process and the resulting improvement efforts.

Recommendations for system supports for implementation efforts and long-term sustainability

A meta-analysis of effective implementation was completed in 2005 (Fixsen et al.) and concluded that there are specific elements that must be present to facilitate the implementation of evidence-based practices.

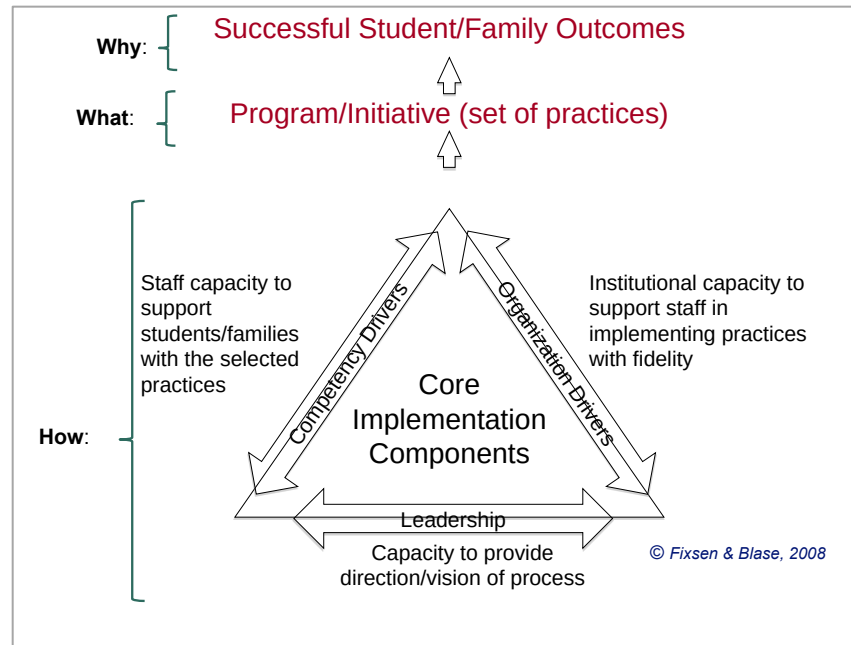
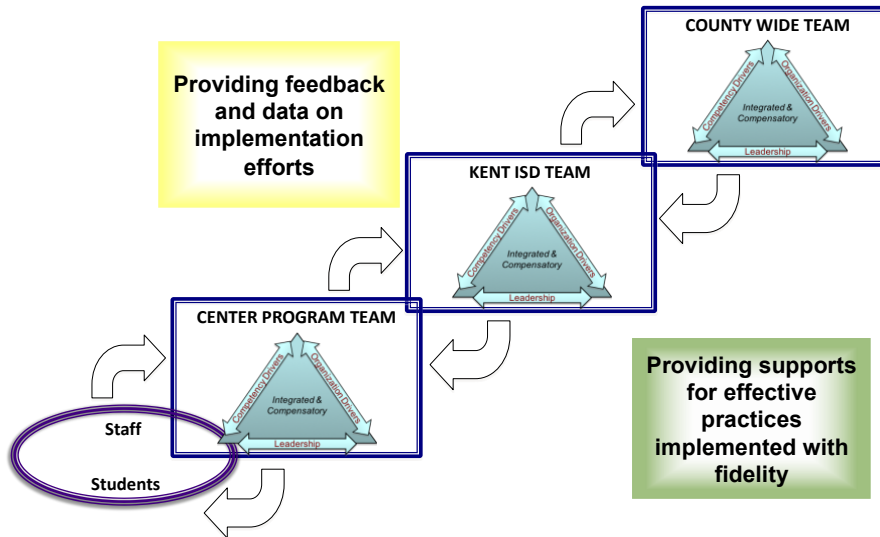


Figure 1

These elements, called implementation drivers (Figure 1), ensure that the necessary and sufficient conditions exist to support implementation efforts. If systems do not attend to these elements, implementation becomes inconsistent and over time the benefits of high-quality practices are not realized. Effective implementation of any transformative practice or process requires an intentional approach, persistent application and rigorous monitoring and follow through. Absent these supports, systems will often engage in unnecessary, duplicative efforts of which the associated costs render little benefit to staff and students alike.

In addition to these required elements for implementation the need for *“Reciprocal Accountability”* as articulated by Richard Elmore becomes vital. Operationalizing this concept in reality may appear a theoretical pipe dream; however, the research on implementation gives us some practical solutions. The educational system is organized as a cascade of interconnected organizations; when these organizations are able to align purpose while focusing and maintaining implementation efforts this concept of *“Reciprocal Accountability”* can be realized. An image of how an implementation infrastructure and mutual accountability for staff and student outcomes can be seen in Figure 2.

DEVELOPING SYSTEM CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION



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Figure 2

To equip Kent ISD and Center Program staff with the capacity to implement transformative improvement efforts, the development or enhancement of existing Leadership Team structures would be a primary goal for the remainder of this school year. While there are components of this system already in place, efforts to align and create coherency across all structures is necessary. An initial focus will be on county efforts to develop a unifying Core Mission and Purpose and a requisite set of Guiding Principles which are specific to and govern the operation of the Center Programs. At the ISD level coordination of resources across the Teaching and Learning Department will facilitate the efforts at the Program level to identify and articulate improvement efforts and support the programs to begin development of the necessary implementation plans to actualize these improvements.

As the future unfolds for these programs it is anticipated that these structures will support and facilitate ongoing improvement and implementation efforts. The maintenance of a ISD wide infrastructure that periodically reviews pertinent program level data and purposefully supports improvement efforts will be necessary for long term sustainability of high-quality programming for students with complex learning needs.

Summary

The objective of this report is not to pass judgement on past or current efforts of education professionals but rather to provide an objective yet candid review of the current situation and offer logical and pragmatic approaches to achieve desired results. The purview of an external consultant affords many advantages in the analysis of existing conditions and the freedom from either perceived or real political pressures. This perspective is however limited in a full and deep understanding of the cultural and historical context within which the current situation exists.

Given those latitudes and limitations the role of an external consultant must be governed by a set of principles that are time honored and bounded by integrity. To that end this report has been duly written to offer a perspective rooted in the voices of the end users of a system designed to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, youth and young adults. These are children who enter our world and thus our public educational system as our fellow community members and who experience a set of complex and confounding learning needs, uniquely individualized challenges and extreme life conditions. This is the context of this work and it affords us as educators the opportunity to perform the craft, art and science of teaching and learning to a group of students who challenge us to do, not just our best effort, but to strive beyond what we now know as “best” to a relentless seeking of “no matter what it takes.” This is both a privilege and a deeply profound responsibility to these children, their families and ultimately to our communities.

There is no doubt that Kent ISD has the professional capacities and resources to address the needs outlined in this report. In addition, there is clearly a desire on the part of superintendents of local districts within Kent ISD to understand the current situation and take steps toward moving forward with improvements. However, an observation is in order: the transformational change Kent ISD is capable of, and indeed has shown in relation to the educational opportunities for typically developing students, is no less required for a smaller population of students whose contribution to our communities lies in our capacity to see them as individuals with innate potentials. Our openness to do so creates unlimited possibilities for access and growth.