

Ferguson- Florissant School District

Superintendent's Transition Team

Final Report



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Final Report of the Superintendent's Transition Team Ferguson-Florissant School District

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INTRODUCTION

Upon his appointment as Superintendent of the Ferguson-Florissant School District (FFSD), Dr. Joseph Davis presented the community with a Superintendent's Entry Plan. In the plan, he outlined the goals and activities of his first several months on the job, designed to provide him with first-hand knowledge of the strengths and challenges of FFSD and of the aspirations of the students, parents, staff, community, business and civic leaders and school Board members.

As a key part of the entry process, Superintendent Davis appointed a Superintendent's Transition Team to assist him in determining his actions and agenda for the first school year and beyond. In the invitation to the transition team, it was stressed that the purpose of convening an external panel of educational leaders was to assist Superintendent Davis. Our charge was to be of such utility that Superintendent Davis could use our collective assistance in data gathering and analysis, review of current research and best practice, and structured discussions to assist FFSD in crafting a reform agenda that is bold, attainable, and appropriate for student needs. During the past four months, the team has visited FFSD schools and classrooms, interviewed and surveyed school Board members, met with teachers, principals, central office leaders, and community representatives, and gathered data in nearly every area of the school district. The team has used that data to prepare recommendations for short- and long-term action.

Although the bulk of these recommendations are presented for the first time in this report, the team made recommendations for immediate action when it saw an urgent need, such as:

- professional development for principals and appropriate central office leaders in instructional improvement, which resulted in the engagement with Targeted Leadership;
- a Board of Education retreat with transition team facilitation, resulting in goals for the 2015-16 school year, a communications protocol with the new Superintendent, clarification of roles for the Board and Superintendent, and an evaluation instrument for the Superintendent's performance; and
- the examination of contracts to set better conditions and outcomes for FFSD students and staff.

Superintendent Davis addressed these and other issues in his preparation for the opening of schools.

In his charge to the transition team, the Superintendent asked us to look particularly at four issues of concern that he was made aware of during his entry: quality administrators and teachers; high performance of students; safe and orderly schools; and effective and efficient operations. To the extent possible, we kept to our assignment. As is inevitable in these inquiries, we found that, within the parameters set by the Superintendent, we had to shift our focus, elevating some issues and introducing new concerns or, hopefully, new strengths that demanded our attention, study, and analysis. When this happened, we conferred with the Superintendent to ensure we were on the right track.

We also acknowledge the cooperation of *everyone* we engaged with in our work. Students, teachers, school leaders, central office administrators, School Board members, union leaders, college administrators, religious and other community members extended themselves so that we would both understand the nature and needs of their schoolchildren and their willingness to support the new Superintendent's efforts to improve FFSD. All members of the transition team commented on the presence of community willingness to support the schools.

THE TEAM

The transition team consisted of the following members:

- Chair: DR. ROBERT S. PETERKIN, Professor Emeritus, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- DR. ANDRES ALONSO, Professor of Practice, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- DR. LARRY LEVERETT, Executive Director, Panasonic Foundation
- FRANCES-VICTORIA OLAJIDE, Doctoral student, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- DR. RACHEL ROEGMAN, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Purdue University
- MAREE F. SNEED, ESQ., Partner, Hogan Lovells
- DAVID SUNDSTROM, Co-Founder and Chairman of the Board, Atlantic Research Partners, Inc.
- DR. JOSEPH WISE, Co-Founder / Chief Executive Officer, Atlantic Research Partners, Inc.

Ex-Officio members:

- DR. CARL COHN, Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
- DR. CAROL JOHNSON, Visiting Professor, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University; Harvard Advanced Leadership Fellow

The team brought approximately 200 years of cumulative teaching, support and school leadership experience to the transition processes. We recognize, however, that we were able to bring this experience in a short timeframe to an examination and analysis of the Ferguson-Florissant School District. Thus, the report is meant to be incorporated into Superintendent Davis' entry activities, core beliefs, theory of action and professional expertise. The team hopes that the evidence and recommendations in this report will serve to inform Superintendent Davis and the School Board in their efforts to improve educational outcomes and the life chances of all FFSD's students — "All Means All."

As stated in the introduction, the team looked at best practice both inside and outside of FFSD, surveyed educational research on areas of concern in the district, and used our background knowledge (six members have been superintendents, seven have been principals, all have been teachers) to craft our analyses. Additionally the team visited FFSD schools; talked with students, teachers and principals; met with university leaders and community representatives; interviewed district cabinet members and School Board members; and attended a management-teacher union communication session and spoke with the FFNEA leadership – all in an effort to amass a robust understanding of the state of the district's strengths and weaknesses, looking for opportunities for growth. Additional details about the team's process – including people interviewed, documents reviewed, and data analyzed – are included in Appendix A.

GENERAL THEMES

As the team conducted its work, four critical themes emerged that permeated the district and seemed to inhibit its efforts to improve student performance:

1. Loose coupling
2. The need for urgency
3. Leadership capacity building and support
4. Accountability



Loose coupling is often cited by researchers (Weick; Meyer) to account for the weak link between school district policy and prescribed practice and what actually occurs in schools and classrooms, especially in teaching and learning. Though the findings are debated by other researchers (Spillane), members of the transition team separately cited this as a problem inside FFSD. In discussion with staff in areas as diverse as budget, program adoption and implementation, and supervision and evaluation, individuals charged with the overall responsibility for these areas felt an obligation to defer to school personnel in the name of a distorted form of school-based management. Since the district is struggling to hold on to its state accreditation, we argue that the schools and their primary work – teaching and learning, with rare exception – need to be more tightly coupled with the strategic plan and direction of the district. Of course, we would anticipate that schools and their constituents would be critical participants in the discussion developing that direction, as the next iteration of the district's strategic plan is developed.

Urgency: The Ferguson-Florissant School District has both a unique opportunity and a formidable challenge. On the positive side, FFSD has a strategic plan developed by the School Board with extraordinary community input. The School Board has hired a new Superintendent with a track record of school improvement and a commitment to excellence and equity for all students. The Superintendent has developed a set of short-term goals and a theory of action for the district. Professional development is being provided for principal and central office leaders to support the new standards of professionalism demanded by the Superintendent and the Board. There is a sense of optimism about the schools that has been missing in the community for years.

On the other hand, FFSD has a four-year graduation rate of 75%. Disciplinary rates, access to advanced academic programs and special needs placements are negatively disproportionate for African-American students. District personnel and some community representatives feared that the district would lose its state accreditation, and test data bears out this concern. If the district loses accreditation, it could also mean a loss of student enrollment, as FFSD students would be allowed to attend school in adjoining accredited districts.

The opportunities that lie within grasp of FFSD to improve education for its students, and the present condition of African-American and other underserved students, demand urgency in a range of areas that the team considered essential to effective and efficient school operations. By this, the team does not mean some mindless adherence to bureaucratic procedures, but a sense of immediacy for the care and support of students and those who teach them. By immediacy and urgency, we do not mean haste, but thoughtful, planned direction to the combined effort of a school system and its leaders, to

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the needs and demands of students. This latter approach is generally accomplished when expectations are clear, where there is a shared sense of purpose and accountability and focused support toward common goals. Efficiency in the use of resources and the equitable (not “equal”) distribution of resources obtained through a rigorous examination of expenditures and subsequent recommendations for savings offered herein, and a dynamic human resources strategy, are essential to aggressively pursuing equity and excellence for *all* of FFSD’s students.

Leadership capacity building and support: Several major areas of concern require a higher level of execution by school and district leadership, including the district’s strategic plan, the Superintendent and Board’s goals for 2015-16, the academic underperformance of underserved student groups, the need for a highly rigorous curriculum and instructional improvement (as demonstrated by a pointed curriculum audit by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), and the potential loss of accreditation, among others. The current performance of many of the district’s students and the increased demand for higher student achievement on state and national standards require focused and content-rich professional development.

The foci of this new professional development are the acquisition of skills in curriculum and instructional improvement, largely for teachers and principals, and support of that improvement in schools and classrooms, largely by central office leaders. The transition team was struck by the enthusiastic support among principals and central office leaders for the new professional development approved at a Board meeting we attended. Although the team is familiar with the work of Targeted Leadership, we sent a member of the team to attend the first sessions with the district. Reports revealed enthusiasm for the learning offered by Targeted Leadership and the focus on instructional improvement and school support. Our only recommendation on this matter is that the professional development include the district’s response to the curriculum audit performed by DESE, as curriculum and professional development should be aligned.

Accountability: The clarification of goals and expectations for the district and its students, and the provision of high quality curriculum and professional development for staff (especially school and district leaders) set the stage for the FFSD community to establish and enforce standards of accountability for the staff in the district. Once the barriers to the learning of students are removed – whether those barriers are skill-based or administrative in nature – those responsible for that learning should be held accountable for the *outcomes* of those students. Currently, as is the case in school districts across the nation, students in FFSD bear the responsibility for their learning outcomes or the lack thereof. But the very rationale for the existence of our schools is to add to student learning, as the adults within are professionally prepared to do so. Additionally, the adults in school districts must be held accountable for the outcomes of their students.

Instructional improvement is the primary responsibility of school and district leaders. One educational saying holds true: There are only two groups of employees in a school district — teachers and those who support teachers. Teachers should be equipped with high expectations to teach their subjects expertly, analyze student data and differentiate their teaching to meet diverse student needs, and ensure that students make at least grade-to-grade academic progress.

To accomplish the above, teachers must have adequate facilities and equitable resources to use in their teaching, classroom mentoring, monitoring and support in an on-time, on-site basis, and administrative support for school and community issues. Principals need to understand and share the instructional vision for the district, use tools to assist teachers in improving instruction and be prepared to hold the school community accountable for improved student outcomes.

Therefore, the evaluations of these employees should reflect that accountability. Team members would not presume to prescribe the form or extent of the procedures the district would implement for such a cultural change, nor are we ignorant of the furor such a recommendation has prompted in some districts. Nonetheless, FFSD students deserve such accountability from the adults in the district.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the superintendent's charge to the transition team, and the themes mentioned above and identified during our study of the district, we chose to focus on four key areas:

- I. **Governance and Leadership** – Ensuring equitable outcomes for *all* students
- II. **Student Achievement** – Opening access to rigorous curriculum and high-quality teaching while removing obstacles to student success
- III. **Talent Recruitment and Hiring** – Improving the human resources functions
- IV. **Communication** – Informing and engaging the community

On the following pages, we provide a set of findings and recommendations in each of these four key areas. For each area, members of the team have outlined priorities and recommendations.

I. Governance and Leadership

We choose to start our findings and recommendations with recognition that governance and leadership are the most critical levers for change, the foundation upon which school leadership, instructional improvement, and substantial improvements in student performance will be built. FFSD is embarking on a new chapter in its history, and the relationship between the new Superintendent and a committed Board will have to be established quickly and be substantially devoted to improving the schools and their performance.



Although this has not been the recent history of the district, the transition team sees many signs that this new leadership team – Superintendent and School Board – can and, hopefully will, dedicate themselves to that task.

Recently, the Board and Superintendent have been working to establish communication protocols to clarify roles and responsibilities. Additionally, the Board recognizes the need to improve the overall climate of the district to address expectations for adults and students in the areas of academic rigor and success, access to rigorous curriculum and learning tasks for all students, discipline, chronic absenteeism, relationships among and between adults, and relationships between adults employed by the district and the students they serve.

The Board and Superintendent have demonstrated their ability to work as a unified team as evidenced by joint efforts to set district goals; establishment of a Superintendent evaluation process; and planning and participating in a Board/Superintendent retreat. We envision this leadership team serving as a model for the school-based teams (data teams, Instructional Leadership Teams, etc.) that will focus on instructional and curriculum improvement. To continue the evolution of the Superintendent-Board team development, members of the transition team offer their service, should they wish, to facilitate another retreat in early Spring 2016.

Highly effective and inclusive approaches to communications and community engagement practices are required to build public understanding and support for the commitment of the Superintendent and school Board to lead for equity.

Aligned, coherent and focused approaches to implementation of key strategies to accomplish stated goals are essential to district efforts to achieve desired outcomes. The Board-adopted strategic plan is an example of the Board's effort to align the key work of the district.

The policy governance model provides the Superintendent and Board with a framework that facilitates shared understanding of roles and responsibilities of the Board and Superintendent. The use of this framework will enhance the work of the Board and Superintendent to become more effective and efficient in their efforts to build accountability systems in which roles of key individuals are clarified and monitoring processes are well defined.

The school district is encouraged to develop and implement a system-wide framework to ensure that all components of the school district operate seamlessly to provide every student with access to resources and supports necessary for all students ("All Means All") to achieve academic and social success.

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The Ferguson-Florissant Board of Education has the opportunity to demand the school system to act affirmatively to examine and respond to the root causes of student performance disparities, set clear expectations for the elimination of opportunity to learn and academic achievement gaps, and intentionally confront the disparities in academic and social success among student populations.

Priority 1: Board/Superintendent roles and responsibilities

The Board of Education and Superintendent have embarked upon clarifying the roles and responsibilities each has in leading, governing and managing the school district. The successful Board of Education retreat and the work being done on a communications protocol are an early indicator of shared efforts to clarify roles and responsibilities. The Board's engagement in self-assessment has served to clarify areas in which the Board and Superintendent have agreement on the important governance and executive leadership challenges in the district. The Board and Superintendent also have agreed on a comprehensive instrument and process to evaluate the Superintendent.

The School Board and superintendent must continue to invest in clarifying the role of the Board and Superintendent in all areas of school district operation. The challenges before them require clarity on shared goals, measures and indicators to provide timely information on system performance on goals. Presently there appears to be significant reliance upon standardized tests results as the sole indicator of how well the school system is performing. Unfortunately, the district lacks systematic processes and procedures to measure system performance in areas that support college and career readiness goals, as well as information to inform system improvements in the areas of social-emotional competence, digital literacy, global awareness, cultural responsiveness, and managing the diversity of staff across the system.

It appears that, despite the strategic plan developed by the Board, the district has various sets of goals that make it difficult to communicate the central priorities of the school district. The existence of multiple sets of goals results in goal diffusion and the overall absence of alignment, coherence, and focus from the "board room" to the classroom. The absence of a few high-level district goals confuses the allocation of time, effort and resources and conditions in which staff, community, and the School Board do not always understand the priority work of the system. The Board and Superintendent should continue their joint effort to determine a few (3-4) clear district goals for the 2015-16 school year and to develop a goal-setting process that aligns the focus of all operations in the Ferguson-Florissant School District.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 1:

Short-Term Actions:

- Establish clear goals for the 2015-16 school year.
- Implement responsibilities related to the Board-approved Superintendent evaluation process.
- Develop and implement a goal-setting process that reinforces focus, alignment and coherence across all departments and schools.
- Provide leadership for assessing the district's present strategic plan and recommendations to revise/update the strategic plan to incorporate initiatives to advance educational equity and effective administrative and management operations.

Long-Term Actions:

- Engage the School Board in professional development activities that include learning about the Policy Governance Model and determine shifts in roles of the Superintendent and the Ferguson-Florissant Board of Education. These shifts should institutionalize policies and by-laws that support shifts from a management-oriented Board to one that is policy-oriented. The Superintendent, working with the Board, should develop and implement structures and processes necessary to monitor system performance.
- Maintain fidelity in all aspects of implementation of the Board-approved Superintendent evaluation process.
- Develop and implement disciplined work processes that include a) annual goal-setting process; and b) annual Board of Education work plan and calendar that sets forth the major work of the Board in terms of Board development and monitoring system performance, with priority given to policies necessary to ensure educational equity across the school district's instructional and non-instructional operations.

Priority 2: Systemic framework for educational equity

The Board has an abiding commitment to the district's strategic plan and has appointed a Superintendent with a strong track record of improving student performance. There are clear indications that the Superintendent has accepted the responsibility to lead for equity and has already launched numerous initiatives to improve the capacity of district and school leaders to develop sharper insights and alignment on instructional quality. The Superintendent engaged an external consulting team to provide principals and central office with the tools to better determine the quality of instruction in district schools. This investment received enthusiastic support from principals and central office staff.

Enactment of the approaches listed below is necessary and essential to eradicating longstanding barriers that adversely impact the success of all Ferguson-Florissant students if the Board and the Superintendent fully accept the shared responsibility to lead for equity:

1. Provide the Board, staff and community with a sustained engagement process resulting in the adoption and implementation of an equity-based vision, mission, system goals and policies to provide an equity-based framework for the work of the school district's staff.
2. Maintain effective communication and relationship-building with the Board of Education; quarterly Board of Education retreats, workshop meetings focused on topics of shared interest to the Board and Superintendent.
3. Continue to demonstrate leadership, courage and the will to collaborate on matters related to the attainment of systemic equity strategies.
4. Recommend that district resources be distributed equitably to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed academically and socially.
5. Educate and engage the community to create a shared sense of urgency aggressively to do "whatever it takes" for every student to achieve success in school.
6. Enable all students in all classrooms to engage in high intellectual study, enriched curriculum for all learners, including those learners requiring supports and interventions, to achieve mastery of rigorous academic content.

7. Act to hold all staff, instructional and non-instructional accountable for contributing to the success of students.
8. Monitor system performance of all students to assess, report and communicate the academic performance of all students.
9. Ensure that a high-quality teacher teaches students with the greatest needs and that a high-quality principal leads every school.
10. Strategically engage families, communities, residents, businesses, municipal elected and appointed officials, community-based organizations and others to increase the effectiveness of collaborative efforts to support the academic and social success of all students.
11. Model high standards of ethical practices both individually and in their roles as Superintendent and the Board.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 2:

Short-Term Actions:

- Identify national examples of school district equity frameworks to inform the development of a equity framework for FFSD.
- Initiate the design and development of a system for monitoring system performance across departments (instructional and non-instruction) and schools, programs and services.
- Support Board of Education efforts to review all district policies, beginning with each policy that correlates to teaching and learning and aligned with the system's vision for educational equity and framework.
- Engage with the school Board to identify strategic plan updates/revisions to ensure more attention to equity-based needs.

Long-Term Actions:

- Provide leadership for the establishment of a Ferguson-Florissant District Equity Framework that embraces the indicators listed above.
- Work with the Board of Education to ensure that all policies are current, relevant to the equity aims of the school district, and a system of accountability to measure system effectiveness.
- Organize the central office leadership team to support the effective implementation of district goals and the equity framework.
- Fund, implement, communicate and own the success for implementation of a comprehensive equity framework.

Priority 3: Commitment to Board development and effectiveness

The Board and Superintendent are commended for investing in a successful Board retreat that was informed by all seven Board members completing the self-assessment, participation in individual interviews, and attendance at the retreat (with the exception of one member who was unable to attend due to a family responsibility).

The Board and Superintendent have agreed to a communications protocol that supports efforts to clarify roles and responsibilities among and between the Board of Education, Superintendent, staff and community. The Board and Superintendent also have agreed to a Superintendent evaluation instrument and process.

The Board of Education has acknowledged the need to shift from past “command and control” approaches to the operation of the school district and appears united in support of the Superintendent’s leadership to assume full charge of the day-to-day operations of the school district.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis (and the Board) in Priority 3:

Short-Term Actions:

- Implement the communications protocol developed by the Board and Superintendent.
- Implement with fidelity the Board-approved Superintendent evaluation process.
- Initiate a review of Board policies, particularly those policies directly related to teaching and learning, educational equity, organizational culture, internal and external district relationships, and financial stewardship and accountability.
- Develop a Board work plan and calendar and topics of interest for Board development for the balance of the 2015-16 school year and into future years.
- Commit to ongoing efforts between the Superintendent and the Board to plan and implement at least two Board of Education retreats over the next six months and quarterly retreats in following school year.

Long-Term Actions:

- The Superintendent, in partnership with the school Board, should review the effectiveness of the Board’s committee structure to ensure alignment between the focus of committees and district priorities.
- Adopt, upon recommendation of the Superintendent, a Ferguson-Florissant District Equity Framework informed by the 11 indicators listed earlier in this section.
- Complete the overhaul of the Board of Education policy manual.
- Develop and implement a Board work plan, calendar and Board development for the 2016-17 school year.

II. Student Achievement



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The transition team ascribes to the belief that rigorous curriculum and quality teaching in the regular classroom should be the reality in every classroom if persistent gaps and underachievement of certain populations are to become a relic of the past. As the team visited schools and classrooms, analyzed data, talked to teachers, principals and central office leaders, and interviewed school Board members, a picture emerged of a district with an overabundance of programs and an unclear academic vision. Teachers talked about the district historically making a commitment to a program (reading was the most frequently cited example) and subsequent professional development only to have the district commit to another program a few years later. School Board members cited the difficulty of receiving evaluations of this multiplicity of programs so that they could make wise choices about resource allocation.

The team was prepared to recommend that the district commission a curriculum audit when we were informed that the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) had completed such an audit and issued its report to the district in June 2015. Having read the audit, we feel that it was appropriately conducted and provides valuable feedback to the district, especially in areas such as depth of knowledge, rigorous content, differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching, depending on the subject area. We encourage FFSD to use the DESE audit in conjunction with the team's academic recommendations and to integrate both resources into the instructional improvement component of the Targeted Leadership professional development.

With a curriculum audit available to FFSD, the transition team focused on student access to rigorous content via the district's gifted and talented programs and Advanced Placement courses, and student representation in special education, dropout rates and disciplinary referrals. In our experience, the academic gaps that are revealed in the regular classroom for African-American and other underserved student populations are compounded by their under-representation in advanced academic programs and classes and over-representation in special education and discipline referrals. It is important that the district assess these access and overrepresentation issues so that it can "back map" stronger academic support for students so that they might enroll in these classes and programs, and remove barriers and inappropriate referral, if any, to special education classes and programs.

The primary mission of our public schools is to ensure that all students reach their potential. This mission is embodied in the Ferguson-Florissant School District's three-year strategic plan, which states the "belief that all of our students deserve equal access to a quality education which can unlock their potential and help them achieve life-long success," and commits to "empower all students to achieve their potential by cultivating a love of learning in an environment of respect, accountability and responsibility."

This section of the FFSD transition team report explores the challenges and opportunities to fulfill that commitment for every student, every classroom and every school. It focuses on four key areas: the present practices and processes that support learning for all students and schools – including central guidance, support and accountability for improving core programs and services for teachers and students; how access and academic rigor play out in programs for advanced and gifted students, across the spectrum of grades; the systems that support

students at risk, including students with disabilities; and the policies and practices that support a climate for learning in FFSD schools and classrooms, especially responses to issues of student discipline.

In order to highlight the type of detail and evidence examined, Appendices B and C provide more granular detail about district practices and offerings for gifted students in elementary and middle schools and Advanced Placement courses in high schools.

Strengths in Student Achievement

The district has strengths on which to build in order to meet the needs of its students and communities and respond to their challenges:

- There is an emerging awareness of the need for urgency, evident in every conversation and in strategic planning. There have been much listening and thinking in response to the events of the past year, with outreach to and participation of every level of the district's stakeholders and communities. There is enormous honesty about the district's challenges, as well as frustration about the district's inability to meet those challenges. There is engagement from the larger community, and a clear sense (expressed in the Ferguson Commission Report, for example) that education is key to the health of the larger community.
- The Data Achievement Plan addresses many of the issues that emerged from community and stakeholder engagement. In its focus on increasing coherence, on changing teaching practices, and on bringing about shared responsibility for student success, it contains building blocks for continuous improvement. It calls for systematic attention to individual students and student data, and it has resulted in emerging school level data inquiry processes that can be powerful agents in support of students at risk if they mature fully and with focused guidance.
- There is great investment in adult learning – three full-day district professional development days, and six days of building-level professional development. This extraordinary investment, if used well, provides the opportunity to coordinate, align and focus the efforts of the district in ways that many other districts would envy. The professional development with Targeted Leadership, for all principals and central office leaders, is an example of an investment in instructional improvement and leadership.
- The district has invested in programs for gifted students in elementary and middle grades that comply with state law requirements and procedures for gifted programs, including the development of programs and services in early elementary, elementary and middle school grade bands that go beyond what is ordinarily provided in the district's regular programs. Parents can find information about these programs in a handbook and in frequently asked questions and resources. On the other hand, like other school districts, FFSD has struggled with the underrepresentation of certain subgroups of students in its gifted programs,
- The Superintendent has stated that in order for FFSD to be a top-flight system, it must have "college readiness" as a goal. FFSD has diversified its programs and services for high school students, and it includes Advanced Placement ("AP") courses as part of a four-year plan for courses to be taken in grades 9 through 12. The district has made requirements for these courses available to students, as well as an appeal process for courses requiring teacher approval. There are serious limitations, however, to access to these courses, which are summarized below.
- The district's historical collaboration through the Special School District (SSD) partnership agreement has successfully met parents' due process needs and issues of compliance. Unlike in many other places, there is no contentious relationship with parents over issues of identification, inclusive placements and the provision of related services. The agreement between the district and SSD provides a framework for collaboration and

potentially for the provision of external capacity and support, if used well and with specificity. There is evidence that district leaders and SSD leaders see the benefit of increased collaboration, coherent efforts and mutual learning, even though there is concern that the present relationship lacks real accountability for student outcomes.



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- There is a base in the district for the expansion of positive behavior intervention supports, which is absolutely necessary given the incidence of out-of-school suspension in discipline data and concern about student behavior in stakeholders' responses. Surveys suggest that adults in the district find value and knowledge in past coaching and support in Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS), as noted in the Ferguson-Florissant PBIS Evaluation Report. The focus group interviews suggest that there are many different supports for students at risk and schools, though the effectiveness and coherence of those supports are questions for the respondents.

Challenges in Student Achievement

- The greatest challenge facing the district is its struggle to educate its students so that they are learning at grade level, and will meet its ultimate goal – graduation of all students at college readiness levels. The data suggests that FFSD cannot think of simple and disconnected interventions with a small subset of students. State assessments show that for all students and subgroups, the great majority of its students failed to meet state proficiency standards. Scale scores and proficiency numbers have declined in Language Arts and Mathematics over time, according to the Missouri DESE District Report Card. There has been more variation over time in Science, though again the overwhelming majority of students are failing to meet state proficiency standards. For students with disabilities, there is a significant achievement gap with general education students, and that gap has grown both in their meeting proficiency standards and in scale scores.

- While there is indication that the district has tried to shift teaching practices to bring about greater rigor of instruction, and it appears to be asserting greater coherence in its guidance of instruction (for example, through the introduction of a Balanced Literacy approach and an effectiveness framework for instruction in the past two years), there is evidence (from classroom visits and state curricular audits) that instruction remains tied to the acquisition of low-level skills, and there is variability in practice and quality not only across schools but within schools and grades. There is also variability in how schools group (though usually by ability), how they intervene with individual students, and which materials they use for intervention strategies. This suggests a gap in individual and collective knowledge to adopt new practices, or a leadership failure in guiding and supporting new behaviors, or a culture of disconnected goals and expectations.

- This inconsistency in the execution of strategies for improvement suggests a lack of clarity, agreement and follow-through in executing the district's theory of action and key strategies for improvement. The focus group interviews consistently referred to a lack of clarity of roles and authority, to the misalignment of people and responsibility, to overlaps or missing components in functions, and to frustration with processes and outcomes that belied very hard work and commitment. The district should focus how it coordinates, guides and supports and holds accountable its staff both at the central and school levels. Quite simply, there seems to be a very loose

coupling between what FFSD is trying to do and how it monitors and follows through on what is doing.

- The inconsistency evident in execution of core programs is evident in programs and services for students that extend outside the regular curriculum. Enrollment in gifted programs, for example, has declined over time in both elementary and middle school, and the under or overrepresentation of certain subgroups in these programs, as well as changes in the racial and ethnic composition of students in these programs over time, raises serious questions about fairness in screening, identification or access to rigorous curriculum and standards by certain groups students (including students with disabilities, African-American and Hispanics students, and English Language Learners). There is significant variability in access to these programs among students in some schools. There is no specific program for gifted students in high school, with gifted students encouraged to take Advanced Placement classes (See a detailed analysis of Gifted Programs in Appendix C).
- There are serious limitations in the information provided to high school students about Advanced Placement, which falls short of the kind of information available to students in other districts and modeled by the College Board, which potentially discourages participation in these courses. Actual offerings are quite limited, in comparison to those available from the College Board, and vary among the three high schools, suggesting a problem of access that potentially affects students from traditionally under-represented groups. The high school with the lowest percentage of African American students enrolled, for example, has the highest number of AP courses. Access to prerequisites also varies by school and is not always consistent with College Board guidance. Alarming, unlike in many other districts across the nation, enrollment in AP courses has not increased significantly over time, and has actually declined in two of the last five years. Last year, only 16 students from the entire district took an AP exam, and only eight of these earned a qualifying score of 3 or higher. This suggests a significant gap in bringing academic rigor and college readiness to the most advanced students in the district (see Appendix B on AP Course offerings for details).
- While the district's collaboration with SSD had yielded benefits, especially in meeting legal requirement and in providing services and programs for students with disabilities, the partnership as presently enacted lacks specificity about its goals in addressing the needs of students at risk of failing, beyond the clear responsibility for operational components related to traditional elements of compliance. Students with disabilities are failing, and the brunt of accountability is on the district, while SSD has the resources to intervene with these students. There is the additional challenge in a thread of responses that the primary role of SSD with regard to students with disabilities leads educators at FFSD to assign responsibility for outcomes for those students to SSD. The students are a shared responsibility, and the district's inclusive practices mean that most of the students with disabilities are spending the majority of time in inclusive FFSD classrooms. The agreement calls for collaboration but lacks specifics about what it means in terms of oversight, or responding to district-wide challenges, as well as about issues of accountability such as evaluation and holding staff responsible for outcomes. Ideally, collaboration would lead to a cohesive, strategic approach that encompasses all students at risk and that assigns everyone clear roles, taking advantage of existing strengths in both partners.
- The significant number of students who fail to meet basic and proficient standards in state tests suggests the need to focus on issues of learning in the majority of classrooms in the district, and for consistently applied strategies that encompass identification of the students' needs, greater supports for learning, and attention to how teachers and schools are responding to both individual children and aggregate issues of learning. But the district's discipline practices mean that many students are being put out of school (see Table 1 below), and there is great inconsistency about why (2014-2015 SY Discipline Incident Report by School). Clearly, the district needs to respond to gaps in knowledge about how to respond to student behavior, and to support schools and teachers in engaging students differently. The Code of Conduct has a punitive

thrust; it pays little attention to support and allows principals extraordinary discretion to suspend students, with little or no oversight for suspending students for non-violent behaviors. While the district reflexive response to student conduct is to exclude, statements from the focus group interviews suggest a belief that it is “soft” in its response to student conduct, and that many schools are not responding with appropriately swift consequences to inappropriate student conduct. Actual implementation of PBIS strategies suggests that execution is variable, and not nearly equal to the extent of the need.

Table 1: FFSD Suspension Rates

All students, 2014-2015 School Year

Month	Referrals	Days suspended										Long-term suspensions
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	(more than 10 days)
August	56	19	10	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	7	0
September	1,633	925	224	88	13	51	0	3	1	1	53	9
October	2,861	1,610	459	207	27	77	0	3	3	0	91	7
November	2,178	1,182	373	163	25	58	3	4	2	1	42	3
December	1,353	748	176	84	24	32	2	6	1	1	50	5
January	2,628	1,568	378	133	18	66	9	6	1	4	67	4
February	3,317	1,902	543	170	25	83	1	6	3	2	73	7
March	2,896	1,661	434	188	23	74	2	1	1	1	76	6
April	3,424	1,898	522	243	37	115	16	12	1	2	99	3
May	2,234	1,053	242	135	44	67	7	8	7	4	60	5
June	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
July	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Priority 1: Clarify how the district will approach challenges of academic improvement at the student, classroom, school and district levels.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 1:

Short-Term Actions:

- *Clarify expectations about decision-making concerning curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and intervention and enrichment approaches.* There is variability in practices in the district, at the level of the program, the school and the classroom. Some of it seems related to a legacy of principal autonomy or deference to the role of the principal. That variability might be useful if leveraged to identify best practices and to foster innovation. But it is not being managed, and it seems a reflection of a historically confused theory of action. The district is clearly planting stakes or placing bets on teaching and programmatic strategies that it thinks will work better than existing practice. But if it allows execution to slide in different directions without a logic of action about why it is fostering variability, that undercuts district decisions and the effective use of resources. Variability in practice should be encouraged if it is leading to either improved learning or improved understanding of practice. Neither seems to be the result here.
- *Clarify strategy, and roles and responsibilities, for guidance, support and accountability of schools.* With the present practice of deference and loosely coupled guidance, there seems to be an abdication of central responsibility to monitor, to intervene and reposition resources to those in need, and to hold one another and schools accountable. What are the necessary guidance, support and accountability for schools? What does that mean in terms of how central departments work with one another and hold one another accountable for progress? Those questions require quick answers.
- *Develop processes for ongoing feedback to address disconnects across departments, between central and schools, and with partners.* An emphasis in focus group discussions was a need for a strong central role or process to ensure the coordination and the learning and the alignment of effort, as well as feedback loops to monitor implementation and respond to school and student needs.

Long-Term Actions:

- *Reconsider types of central structures to ensure optimal coordination and support.* It is unclear that the present organization structure supports schools effectively. There are people doing multiple functions, functions that seem missing or thinly led, and unclear lines of responsibility. The district is small enough that it can function like a large network, so consider what might be the structures and processes of supports that can respond nimbly to schools that are sometimes experiencing crises. Should the central office be organized in traditional departments, or should more integrated teams, with explicit problem solving responsibilities, be responsible to supporting individual or groups of schools?
- *Reconsider school and central funding to leverage support and programs at central and school level.* The focus groups raised concerns about how the district allocated resources across schools and programs, as well as whether funding decisions are actually aligned with district strategies and evidence of effectiveness. There will be functions that will be best managed at the school level, functions that will be best managed and leveraged at the central level, and decisions about programs and focus that require revisiting. Does it make sense, for example, to allocate resources proportionately on the basis of students, or does the district want to weigh resources and supports for specific types of students and challenges?

- *Develop process for cabinet accountability.* While state accountability measures create transparency about school and school personnel effectiveness, there is little evidence that the central office has performance evaluation measures and systems that it applies rigorously to itself. It will be difficult to bring true accountability to schools without reciprocal accountability for central departments and administrators.

Priority 2: Develop systems to support adult learning and problem-solving in response to changes in practice.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 2:

Short-Term Actions:

- *Continue to audit practices and curriculum to ensure consistency and identify needs.* State curriculum audits concluded that FFSD classrooms often deviated from state curriculum standards, scope and sequence, were not aligned at the grade level, and teaching choices did not always match the expected needs of students. They found variation in behaviors across content areas. They also found variability in teachers' attitudes toward collaboration. While the district has moved toward defining non-negotiables and making its understanding of effectiveness more explicit, there is concern among district leaders about whether direction is sufficiently explicit, and whether principals and instructional coaches and content leaders have the knowledge to bring about more explicit understandings for teachers. Rather than assume either fidelity of implementation or its absence, district leaders should audit practices to surface problems of consistency or understanding, and identify school and individual grade level and content needs, and then respond explicitly to those needs.
- *Identify best practices in classrooms and make them transparent.* Increasingly, research on evaluation and teacher learning suggest that teachers (and principals) often struggle to change their enacted practices if they can't see both their own practice in real time and examples of how others do it differently and more effectively. The district should not simply describe or state what it considers best teaching practices; it should make those practices transparent in real classrooms. This strategy would force central leaders, principals and teachers to wrestle with their understandings of good practice, and make that practice accessible to others.
- *Develop networks of teachers and networks of principals to improve practices.* As in every district, there are examples of effective teaching in every school in FFSD. There are principals who have been strong leaders. The district should develop networks of teachers and networks of principals and tap those networks for ideas, for examples of best practices, and for the type of problem-solving that ensures that the solutions are connected to how people in schools experience those problems.
- *Focus professional development.* The investment in professional development time at both the district level and building level is probably the district's greatest actual investment of resources for improvement. It therefore needs to be focused on the areas of greatest need. It should be on ongoing strategic planning process, with input from those networks of effective leaders and teachers described above, and it should be audited in relation to whether it changes actual practice.

Long-Term Actions:

- *Establish a human capital strategy to identify and train future leaders.* District leaders consistently observed that the most important lever for improvement was a great principal. But it wasn't entirely clear what was

the criteria for appointing a principal, nor the district strategy for training future leaders, or how it supported the systematic learning of leaders (including central staff) at different stages of their career. There are potential future leaders in every school in FFSD, but it is unclear how they will reach their potential without explicit systems and processes to identify them and grow that potential.

- *Rethink evaluation measures and their sanctions and incentives.* If the district shifts its focus on practice and its expectations for how people respond to students, it should be rethinking its evaluation processes, and its incentives and sanctions, to align them coherently to its new goals and expected behaviors. This will require collaboration with teachers and administrators, and clarity about expectations and appropriate supports.

Priority 3: Develop a consistent response to interventions strategy and processes with clear links to specific types of students.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 3:

Short-Term Actions:

- *Identify characteristics of a cadre of students to pilot a system or systems of interventions.* The sheer number of students in need in a district can often paralyze the district as it seeks to respond to needs that outweigh its resources. . It can be useful to bring specificity to the task of supporting students via pilot interventions. The district should identify a cadre or cadres of students so that it can bring greater specificity of intervention to its understanding, strategies and accountability for actual students. It can then understand how it organizes for action, how those actions manifest themselves in specific schools and classrooms for specific students. It should then expand its efforts to more students, learning throughout the process. It could be valuable to identify those cadres in gateway grades (kindergarten, third grade, sixth grade and ninth grade) since it is likely that students in those grades will exhibit warning signals for later failure, and identifying students in those gateway points will allow for time to measure the effectiveness of those interventions across later grades.
- *Agree on standard supports and timelines for interventions.* The district should be clear about standard supports for students at risk. That can mean expectations for grouping, for after-school or Saturday academies, for longer school year, or for specific materials or technology or types of assessments. At this moment, many of the responses seem voluntary or school-specific.
- *Make clear expectations and supports for school data teams.* Conversations with district and school leaders suggested that a great amount of the responsibility for supporting students at risk lies with the data teams at the school level. It is unclear, however, that the data teams have sufficiently specific guidance about the types of questions and data they should be reviewing. The workings of the data teams appear to vary. There is danger that the structure will face the same challenges of other structures in other places, such as grade level or collaborative planning – it takes resources and specificity about practice for teams to learn how to function effectively. Principals have participated in surveys and interviews to determine their perspective on the capacity, performance and needs of the data teams. The information gathered will be shared with the Superintendent for use in the evolution of the data teams. The result of this inquiry was not yet available as of the writing of this report.

- *Clarify central, school and SSD responsibility.* The success of the school data teams and school interventions will require central supports, school level supports, and the collaboration and expertness of SSD, which owns the kinds of resources (social workers, learning experts, teachers who have been training in accommodations) that individual schools might lack. Therefore, it is essential that the responsibilities of each “actor” be clear. That requires more than ensuring that different roles be at the table.
- *Develop strategies to provide information and outreach to parents, including parents of students who are historically under-represented in gifted programs, and include information as part of the outreach about the revised screening and identification procedures.*
- *Review the reasons for difficulty in getting accurate data and develop a system for ensuring that data is accurate and is readily available to decision makers.* Without accurate data, the FFSD will not be able to develop and revise policies and practices that are equitable for all students.
- *Review the enrollment in elementary and middle school gifted programs to determine the reasons for the decline in enrollment and for the under-representation of certain subgroups.*
- *Develop strategies for increasing enrollment in the gifted program, particularly for under-represented subgroups.* Consult with an expert in the field of gifted education to assist in developing these strategies.

Long-Term Actions:

- *Expand the Early Childhood Education component and align its goals with strategic goals.* The Ferguson Commission Report called for the expansion of early childhood education options to all eligible students. The district runs its early childhood component separately from SSD, with an enrollment of 432 students in 2015, a decline from 545 in 2012, even though state preschool enrollment has increased over that time. Considering that 66.8 percent of students tested in 3rd grade Mathematics and 63 percent of students tested in 3rd grade English Language Arts performed below basic standards, it is imperative to increase preparation early, before schools have to resort to cycles of remediation.
- *Develop an “early warning system” for kindergarten and grades 3 and 6.* The research of scholars such as Bob Balfanz at Johns Hopkins has shown that it is possible to identify early students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. In Balfanz’s case, that research focused on the correlation between certain conditions and behaviors in 6th grade and the incidence of dropping out of school. Later research has looked at similar types of indicators in earlier grades. What they find is that often students begin to fall behind early, in ways that are hard to counter if ignored. Just as interestingly, some students show early aptitude toward success in schools, and then begin to fall behind. The district should develop systems and processes to map students who exhibit those signals and behaviors in the early grades and in later gateway grades, in order to understand where students begin to falter, and intervene intentionally and specifically in the conditions that explain their outcomes. Specifically, all students should be reading on grade level by third grade as measured by STAR and lexiles. This approach would also provide information about settings that contribute to children falling behind, and to those that have “restorative” effect, in ways that will improve the identification of best practices and future leaders.
- *Develop intervention processes and systems for each of those grades that align vertically and across schools.* With information from this early warning system, the district can begin to expand its portfolio of options to respond to specific student behaviors and outcomes, and align those responses across grades, networks, types of students, as well as vertically across grade levels.

- *Develop an acceleration component for 9th grade for overage, under-credited students.* Balfanz's research, and analysis of high school outcomes in large systems such as New York City over time, show clearly that without intentional processes in 9th grade to intervene with and accelerate the learning of students who are overage and under-credited once they reach high school, those students predictably glut in 9th and 10th grade and eventually drop out of school. FFSD should develop acceleration components, including flexible hours, increased time on task, innovative use of technology, and the deployment of its best teachers to 9th grade, rather than concentrate many of its resources to higher grade levels, as happens in many urban settings.

Priority 4: Invest in programs and services that increase the rigor of instruction and access to excellence across the spectrum of grades, but especially in high school, where there are no gifted programs.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 4:

Short-Term Actions:

- *Review the Probe Center program to determine if it is the most educationally sound and cost-effective way to deliver services to students identified as in need of such services.* As part of this review, consult with an expert in gifted education to explore other models for providing services to students identified as gifted. This review is important, given that students identified as gifted spend only one day a week at the Probe Center.
- *Review, revise and disseminate information about the district's AP program to provide more information for students and parents to assist them in understanding the benefits of taking AP courses and to encourage students to enroll in AP courses and to take AP examinations.* See the College Board website for additional information that may be included.
- *Review AP course offerings currently offered in the district and expand the AP course offerings, particularly in Science, Mathematics, Social Studies and World Languages and Cultures.* This review should ensure that no matter where students are assigned to school, they have equitable access to the AP courses offered in the district.
- *Review prerequisites for AP courses currently offered to determine whether they are consistent with the College Board recommended prerequisites for those courses, and review the College Board recommended prerequisites in developing prerequisites for the new AP course offerings.*
- *Develop and implement strategies to ensure that parents and students are aware of any prerequisites for AP courses and ensure that students have access to these prerequisites and enroll in them.*
- *Develop and implement additional strategies for increasing enrollments in AP courses in each high school.*
- *Determine what, if any, barriers exist for African-American students or any other under-represented subgroups of students to enroll in AP classes, and develop and implement strategies to reduce or eliminate these barriers.*
- *Develop strategies to encourage students to take AP examinations, including the district paying the examination fees for students who cannot afford to pay.*

- *Develop and implement a plan for reviewing data regarding the AP Program, including:* courses offered; prerequisites for courses; schools where courses are offered; enrollment in courses for the district and for each high school, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ELL and special education; AP examinations taken for the district and for each high school, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, poverty, English Language Learners and special education and students receiving a 3 or better on AP examinations for the district and for each high school, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ELL and special education.

Long-Term Actions:

- *Consider revising the district's Equal Educational Opportunities policy to ensure that it covers equity and access for Advanced Placement courses and similar courses and programs.*
- *Partner with the College Board and other successful districts in offering professional development opportunities to teachers, including access to classrooms where large number of students are taking and passing AP examinations, so that they can move into prerequisites and improve the rigor of AP offerings.*

Priority 5: Leverage collaboration with SSD in order to better serve students with disabilities and students at risk.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 5:

Short-Term Actions:

- *Clarify understandings and responsibilities under contract for each of its components.* SSD's long-standing relationship with FFSD has yielded significant benefits to the district. As a result of the special tax levy that funds the operations of SSD, there are economies of scale that would be difficult for any individual district to maintain (SSD's per pupil in 2013-2014 was \$13,395 across the roughly 21,000 students it served). The partnership has ensured that the district is not mired in the type of compliance swamp that beleaguers many school systems (while there have been instances of FFSD failing to meet compliance standards over time, SSD has partnered with the district to correct the instances promptly). FFSD students with disabilities meet state goals in most compliance areas, including students in least restrictive environments. Outcomes for students with disabilities lag behind district outcomes for those students, as well as state goals. The vision in the partnership agreement calls for a partnership "which provides educational services and supplemental supports to enable every child to achieve his or her full potential." The partnership "will collaborate and share responsibility to provide the equitable and seamless implementation of services for every student." That language, and similar language throughout the agreement, suggests that the district and SSD be full partners in a systemic strategy to identify and respond to students at risk. Except in the case of coaching and assessment under Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) protocols, it is not clear that this has been the case, which is unfortunate because there are so many resources in SSD that would be instrumental in any FFSD systemic strategy that looks at the needs of all students.
- *Clarify responsibility for coordination with central directors, and the relationship with principals.* Focus groups with Executive Directors and central leaders consistently raised challenges of systemic coordination and alignment in relationship to many functions, not simply to the coordination and alignment of services for students with disabilities. But those issues arose in relationship to the provision of services to students with disabilities. SSD has area coordinators who interact primarily with principals. The partnership agreement

calls for collaboration in hiring, the creation of programs, and evaluation. Despite an emphasis on collaboration at the school level and at the highest system level, it is unclear that managers in the middle, who supervise or guide principals, feel that they are part of the collaboration, and if FFSD needs to act coherently in executing its strategies across schools, it can benefit if there is an explicit understanding of what that role should be.

- *Examine systems of interventions at work at SSD to avoid duplication and adopt best practices.* While there were dissenting voices concerning the capacity of SSD teachers and staff to address some of the behavior and learning challenges experienced at FFSD, there was consistent acknowledgment of the focus of the work of SSD, and the resources it deployed to support students. Given this focus and acceptance that the resources (more learning experts, social workers, mental health clinicians, etc.) are with SSD, FFSD should not only seek best practices in SSD, but also explore whether they can be adopted or expanded to students without a classification as part of partnership agreements that appropriately leverage the resources of both districts in a proactive way to serve all students.
- *Ensure training of all FFSD teachers in accommodations, and academic and behavior interventions.* In conversations with both SSD and district leaders, there was emphasis on recent efforts to ensure that SSD teachers participated in district professional development along with school staff. For others in the focus groups, it was just as necessary to have all FFSD general education teachers become smarter in accommodation, small group differentiated instruction and behavior interventions.

Long-Term Actions:

- *Articulate specific goals in the SSD partnership agreement and make the outcomes public.* The partnership agreement has no specific student outcome goals. It has no specific process or compliance goals. They should be negotiated in reference not only to state goals, but to FFSD specific needs and aspirations in future agreements.
- *Align a system of core instruction and interventions and professional development across all teachers.* SSD has a sophisticated knowledge management system that includes explicit standards and scope-and-sequence for every grade level and content area. It should be a model for FFSD. It is not clear, however, whether the *execution* of this guidance is appropriate across classrooms. It is also not clear that the inclusion model in FFSD classrooms is working appropriately for students with disabilities, and if it is consistent with the district's guidance about good instruction. FFSD and SSD should strive to align systems of core instruction, processes for interventions, and professional development across all teachers who work with individual students, and adopt their best practices.
- *Understand all its options in the partnership for the provision of services to students with disabilities.* Because SSD has been such a successful institution historically, because it has support from parents in the disabilities community (one of the members of its governance council is a representative from FFSD), and because of the financial advantage the arrangement with SSD provides to FFSD, there is little thinking about whether there are alternative ways of providing services to students with disabilities under a separate model or arrangement, or whether there are other, more effective partners who might achieve better outcomes. The present arrangement, which might seem counterintuitive to some outside observers, seems a given to district respondents. Yet St. Louis Public Schools do it differently. How has it managed to provide services to students with disabilities outside of the SSD partnership agreement? FFSD should primarily seek to bring coherence to its partnership with SSD, and clarify shared roles, responsibilities and especially outcomes goals more clearly. But it should also explore different options to serve its students if those outcomes do not improve.

Priority 6: Ensure a positive climate that promotes learning in every classroom and school.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 6:

Short-Term Actions:

- *Establish a community-wide conversation about district values and the efficacy of existing discipline practices.* There is ambivalence in how district officials, stakeholders and community respondents speak about the climate for learning and discipline practices in the district. The Ferguson Commission Report highlights the pernicious effect of suspending students. School staff and community members (including some School Board members) appear to believe that many inappropriate student behaviors go “unpunished.” But district leaders also believe that at the root of inappropriate student conduct lie problems of learning, teachers who don’t engage students, and students’ feelings that the adults in the district don’t respect them. Visits to schools suggest that most students go through the day obeying authority, but the data for referrals and suspensions, especially suspensions that last fewer than 10 days, indicates that suspension is a reflexive practice in FFSD (See Table 1 above). The incidence of out-of-school suspension is very high, and it is disproportionate for African American males and for students with disabilities, according to federal and state reports. The disagreements in these perspectives, coupled with the startling data, call for a community-wide conversation about values, and what research tells us about the effect of zero tolerance policies, as well as about the absence of supportive and intentional interventions in schools.
- *Clarify standards and review the effects of principal discretion to suspend students.* The FFSD Code of Conduct divides student offenses or misconduct and their consequences into two types: Type I offenses and Type II offenses. Type I offenses can lead to suspension for up to 180 days. They include serious misconduct such as disruption of school; damage to school property; theft; fighting, threat, assault and battery and attending fights; possession of weapons and dangerous instruments; possession of controlled substances; and harassment and bullying. They also may include nonviolent offenses such as repeated school offenses, habitual truancy, and the catch-all category of “other,” which could include any type of offense not covered by the previous categories and be “disruptive under the schools’ authority or that may interfere with the good order and discipline of the school.” The broadness of this category offers principals enormous discretion to suspend students for terms longer than 10 days, though this discretion can be appealed within 30 days. Type II offenses include many lesser or inappropriate offenses such as “tardiness, skipping class, unexcused absences, leaving school grounds without permission ... insubordination, refusal to comply with directions of staff, class disruption.” Type II offenses could be punishable with suspension up to 10 days, without a right to appeal. A principal, therefore, has almost unfettered discretion to keep a student out of school for a non-violent instance of misconduct. A review of suspensions disaggregated by school shows that the reasons specific schools adduce for student referrals and suspensions varies greatly between schools (according to the 2014-2015 SY Discipline Incident Report by School). The process needs standards and oversight. It also underscores the absence of a culture that has experience with or values disciplinary alternatives to suspensions.
- *Monitor execution of PBIS interventions across schools.* Even though school staff indicates that PBIS coaching supports their learning, it is clear that actual execution of positive behavior interventions falls far short of what students need. The number of incidents of suspension, especially for students with disabilities, coupled with the number of homeless students in the district, dwarfs the number of students actually receiving Type 2 and 3 PBIS supports. The district should monitor execution of PBIS supports across

schools, and explore new ways to support teachers with useful tools to respond to student misconduct, and well as way to support students with collaboration from community partners.

- *Analyze data to identify students and find patterns that spur new solutions.* Research and districts across the country have analyzed suspension data and correlated that data with statistics such as attendance, habitual truancy, students being overage and dropping out of school, falling behind in school and state assessment data, and health markers such as being a perpetrator or victim of violence outside school. What they tend to find is that there is enormous correlation among students who are suspended multiple times and these markers of eventual failure. They also find patterns in how individual schools and teachers contribute to the problem or become sources of nourishment and restoration. District leaders should mine data they already have, just as in the case of students needing academic interventions, to find new solutions and new ways to deploy resources in support of their most vulnerable students. They should develop problem-solving teams that include teachers, administrators, community partners and committed students to help develop these solutions and change the culture of exclusion now prevalent in the district.

Long-Term Actions:

- *Review and revise the Code of Conduct:* There are model Codes of Conduct in other districts (Madison, WI, and Montgomery County, MD, for example) that couple explicit progressive responses to inappropriate student behavior with alternative approaches to suspension, as well as attention to the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in supporting students and schools. Those districts have learned that schools require resources and new learning in order to change past practices, and that this work requires enormous communication and collaboration with teachers and community. FFSD should review and revise its Code of Conduct to reflect its values and existing best practices across the country.
- *Develop guidance, support and accountability measures at the classroom, school, district, community, partner, and parent levels.* Because changing discipline practices requires enormous changes in how teachers and administrators respond to inappropriate behavior, it is not sufficient simply to change the language and requirements in the Code of Conduct. Teachers will need new strategies, administrators will need to lead new approaches, and the central office will need to develop new systems and processes of guidance, support and accountability at all levels. The most important components will be new tools for teachers, and supports that engage students and parents as partners in new practices.
- *Partner with the community, including business and faith sectors, to develop positive interventions and mentors to encourage best conduct.* These supports will need to include resources outside schools. The responsibility to support students at risk extends to the entire community. The district should partner with business and community leaders to identify mentors, jobs and apprentice opportunities, and the enrichment inherent in sports, in science and in the arts to motivate students and to help them find meaning in school.
- *Adopt a real-time system of problem-solving that includes teachers and principals to develop supports and feedback for students and teachers.* As in the case of interventions for at-risk students (and there will be enormous duplication between those students and students being suspended), the district will do best if it finds leadership in this effort within its ranks. In every school system, there are teachers and administrators who command the respect and allegiance of their students without resorting to exclusionary practices. FFSD should examine its data in this area and have these model principals and teachers work with their colleagues, support other educators, and lead a necessary change in practices in the district.

In many conversations with district actors, the transition team consistently heard a tone of distress from educators about the district's past inability to meet the needs of all students, and concern about its present

capacity to do this well. There was recognition that there was a significant distance between the rigorous content and teaching necessary to close existing gaps and underachievement for many, and the reality in many classrooms. Often, we heard questioning of past practices, and a call for urgency. Consistently, there was a call for focus and coherence. What that would mean was less clear among different stakeholders.

Bringing focus to the work of improving teaching and learning in district schools and classrooms, and building the processes and systems to develop people's new understanding about what this means – and new ways of facilitating knowledge for students as a result – are the most important work of the Board and the Superintendent. The work ahead will entail improving teachers' understanding of core content and performance standards, highlighting examples of great teaching so that expectations about academic tasks change, and building new, coherent systems of guidance and accountability to support administrators and teachers. It will mean a new way of working for central leaders, principals and school staff.

There are emergent practices that will support a transformation. The district's increasing reliance on looking at individual student data, for example, provides a platform for understanding what is happening with individual students. But it could become a powerful trampoline for understanding systemic patterns of success and failure, and patterns of access, that it can then leverage this knowledge and its resources to bring focus, and to create stronger supports for specific types of students and for specific schools – both gifted and advanced students and students traditionally considered at-risk.

The district is at a pivotal point where it needs to turn crisis into opportunity. The national attention to its outcomes should bring about the type of urgency its students deserve, and prompt a reconsideration of past practices, for example: how FFSD can leverage its partnership with SSD to bring greater coherence and effectiveness to its work with students with disabilities and students that are struggling; how it can rethink its offerings for students who show early academic potential, and how it can nourish that early potential; how it can provide high school pathways that are truly rigorous and geared to college readiness; and how it can transform its approach to student conduct so that exclusion is not the default response to problematic student behavior. One thing should be clear: if the students are not in school, they are not going to learn. While it will be hard work to provide the incentives and supports to change exclusionary practices, the entire community should become a partner in this critical effort.

III. Talent Recruitment and Hiring

The transition team has commented on the need for effective leadership and quality teachers in every work site in the district, be it schools or central office. Instructional leadership and teacher support will be the keys to transforming FFSD into an excellent and equitable school district for *all* students. Thus, we took a closer look at the human resources area for its role in recruiting and selecting the best candidates for positions in FFSD. Once staff are hired, we anticipate that the newly focused professional developmental approach will support the retention and advancement of these personnel. Only then will the district be able to meet the new aspirational goals for FFSD students. The team has made a series of recommendations for changes in the way the Human Resources (HR) department conducts its work, while seeking the needed finances to support the changes. We point to efficiencies between Human Resources and Finance where needed for this purpose.

Strengths & Challenges

The district notably had only 12 vacancies for teaching positions at the start of the 2015-16 academic year. In the current employment market, this is an uncommonly low number for a district of Ferguson-Florissant's size, and evidences substantial effort and cooperation among those on the Human Resources team. Further, team members consistently expressed and evidenced high levels of cooperation internally.

However, the Human Resources Department does not appear to have a strategy in place to facilitate the recruiting and hiring needed to bring top talent into the system. As a result, the district is unable to draw from a candidate pool with the quality, quantity and diversity of candidates, particularly in teaching and administrative positions, to achieve the necessary improvements to the school system. Only by attracting a higher level of talent to can FFSD realize its primary goal of accelerated academic achievement across the Board.

Priority 1: Recruitment of a highly qualified, diverse workforce

Efforts to recruit top talent appear limited. Historically and currently, there appears no cohesive strategy to recruit highly qualified teachers and administrators reflecting the ethnicity/race of the students FFSD serves. Coupled with this lack of purposeful recruitment is an absence of data regarding the pool from which candidates are selected, and the manner in which candidates are pre-screened (an apparent requirement by the labor organization representing employees).

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 1:

- *Engage a third party vendor to provide critical services related to applicant recruitment, tracking and hiring.*

Within a narrow window of time, and in accordance with HR staff interviews relating to specific needs, FFSD should solicit — through issuance of a Request For Proposals ("RFP") — services of a third-party provider to perform all of the following services through a single, cohesive process: teacher-candidate assessment based on predictive analytics; those analytics to be documented in psychometrics with reliability and validity statistics specified in any responding proposal; comprehensive applicant tracking; electronic onboarding management to complement the district's existing Tyler-Munis system; and automated substitute teacher dispatch and absence management.

- *Issue a separate and distinct RFP to select a third-party provider for services related to assessment of principal candidates.¹*

This recommendation also has time sensitivity and is a result of the realities of shifting market/providers.²

- *Develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment plan that increases the quantity, quality and diversity of applicants for certificated and non-certificated positions.*

This action may require a new leader charged with diversity, equity, talent acquisition and development. The recommendation also relates to the Communications section below, in terms of positioning FFSD as a district with great opportunities to make an impact.

Priority 2: Inefficiency in the Human Resources and Finance Departments

The transition team also recognized a duplication of efforts between Human Resources and Finance departments, resulting in inefficient systems and processes. Currently, the district assigns key HR Department employees and key Finance Department based upon service categories (e.g., one person addresses teacher hiring, another addresses payroll issues, etc.). As a result, school leaders must contact multiple individuals, and engage in multiple hiring and other processes, to effectively meet their site-specific HR needs.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 2:

- *Restructure the Human Resources Department by realigning duties of existing staff, particularly to provide principals and other hiring managers with a single point of contact to meet their site-specific needs.*

In the short-term, such a transition of duties could occur without adding HR or Finance positions, and could additionally provide opportunity for cross-training of existing staff—a substantial need at the moment. Realignment of duties in this manner has—to a statistically significant degree—reduced cycle-time for those site-based clients of HR services who are dependent upon HR process and transactions.

- *Consider a merger of the HR team with the Finance team.*

Each department's duties currently overlap, creating ambiguity of roles among staff, uncertainties of where responsibilities begin and end, and an overlapping of multiple processes. In the long-term, merging the HR Team with the Finance team into a single cohesive unit could improve cycle times, create substantive efficiencies, and likely resolve other internal performance inefficiencies.

¹ The authors believe, for example, that the Gallup organization, among others, provides such services.

² Possible entities FFSD may wish to solicit include Applitrack, TeacherMatch, and others.

IV. Communication

In order to ensure dramatic improvement for students and schools, the Superintendent and his team, along with all district staff, must prioritize ongoing, proactive internal and external communication. The central office and schools have a responsibility to keep all stakeholders – students, parents, staff, partners, and the community – informed and engaged. The need for effective communication cuts across all key areas addressed in this report; none of the academic or operational goals can be met without considerable work to institutionalize sound communication practices throughout the community.

Prior to Dr. Davis' arrival, the district already had begun to strengthen the foundation for community engagement through the strategic planning process, which included input from a variety of sectors. The process helped build community understanding of and commitment to the school system, while also providing district leaders with a clearer picture of community needs and priorities. We are encouraged by the Superintendent's early efforts to build on this work, both through his entry activities and through his interest in seeking additional community input for the next iteration of the strategic plan. Dr. Davis consistently has emphasized that parents and community members are essential partners in school improvement work, and they must remain informed and involved at every level.

The transition team recognized various opportunities to strengthen communication with external audiences in order to foster transparency, celebrate good news, seek assistance with challenges, attract new talent, and generate support for the Ferguson-Florissant School District. Some of the essential components of effective external communication already are in place but can be used in more consistent, strategic ways to have greater impact and reach.

Staff members in schools and central offices report unevenness in internal communication, noting that the district has demonstrated some success in conveying operational information to employees but less success in building district-wide understanding and ownership of overarching goals and priorities. In order to create a more unified school system, in which staff across the district are working with a shared sense of purpose, internal communication must be a top priority at all times.

Given the recent history of racial and socio-economic tension in Ferguson-Florissant, the Superintendent and his team, in partnership with the Board, should be thoughtful and intentional about engaging families and residents who have historically lacked access to information and influence.

Priority 1: Infrastructure for effective strategic communication

The Communications Office has a critical role to play in leading the efforts throughout the district for improving internal and external communication. The office is charged with the important responsibilities of working with the media, marketing schools and the district, and delivering information to a wide range of audiences, among others. These areas of responsibility require staff to demonstrate initiative, innovation and skill in terms of both content (identifying and crafting compelling stories) and methods of delivery (developing myriad ways of getting news out). It is equally important for the Communications Office to build capacity across the district, particularly among school and central office leaders, through professional development and technical assistance, in critical communication and marketing skills.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 1:

- *Identify the staffing and financial resources needed for the Communications Office to lead the district's communications agenda in a more proactive, visionary, and strategic way.*

The effective branding, marketing, and positioning of FFSD requires a team of communications professionals directed by an innovative leader. The team should have access to sufficient resources to design and produce high-quality materials for digital and print distribution, while taking full advantage of the latest technology to reach audiences in schools, in the community and beyond. The Director of Communications and Marketing, in particular, must drive the communications work in a strategic manner, providing support to the Superintendent and his cabinet, building capacity and communications skills and knowledge among school and district leaders, and devising strategies to put FFSD on the cutting edge of school communication and community engagement.

Priority 2: Design and implementation of strategic communication initiatives to support district goals and priorities

Just as the academic, operational, financial, facilities and other work of the school district should be guided by a long-term plan, so too should the Communications Office operate from a comprehensive plan aligned to the overall goals and priorities of the district. Too often, school district communications work is driven by matters of immediacy – the crisis of the day or the priority of the moment. Clearly, the communications team must be prepared to act swiftly and skillfully to respond to unexpected issues. However, they also must identify and be held accountable for a set of goals and objectives, with timelines and deadlines, for longer-term initiatives that support the district's strategic plan and highest priorities, particularly as they relate to improved student achievement.

Recommendations to Dr. Davis in Priority 2:

- *Adopt and execute a district-wide Strategic Communications Plan.*

As noted above, the plan should guide not only the work of the Communications Office but also serve as a district-wide blueprint for improved communication and community engagement among all schools and central offices. The plan should be coupled with the resources and supports needed to help build capacity and skill throughout the district, including training for all school and central office leaders.

The following recommendations should be considered key features of the Strategic Communications Plan, given their importance in the overall direction of the district, as noted throughout this report.

- *Launch a campaign to rebrand FFSD.*

The Ferguson-Florissant School District is poised to embark upon a new chapter in its history. The hiring of a new Superintendent presents a unique opportunity to shine a spotlight on the district and to strengthen its “brand” – identity, reputation, positioning – particularly to build confidence and pride among students, families, staff and the community about the future of the schools.

FFSD already has some key branding elements in place, including a logo, a tagline (“One District United”), and a *subset* of schools with strong reputations for academic excellence. The challenge before the Superintendent and his team is to deepen and expand those elements, to shape and reinforce a district identity that emphasizes excellence and equity across the system. Dr. Davis often states his expectation that the community will have full confidence in *all* of the schools rather than a select few. The academic agenda to improve school and student performance therefore should be accompanied by an ongoing campaign to shift public perception of the district as a whole.

- *Leverage national interest in FFSD to attract talent and resources.*

The events of 2014 put Ferguson in particular in a national media spotlight. The leaders of the school district now have a rare and profound opportunity to harness that attention for positive results. While the communications work should focus primarily on local stakeholders, we cannot overlook the vast resources that could be brought to bear beyond the district boundaries.

First and foremost, the high-profile news coverage creates tremendous opportunity to attract top talent to the district. Educators and other professionals across the country watched events unfold here, and many have wondered if and how they can make a difference. Dr. Davis himself has said he applied for the FFSD Superintendent position because he was inspired by the unprecedented opportunity to help a community heal and rebuild by promoting excellence and equity in its schools. There are countless other Americans who could be compelled to accept a similar calling – to serve as teachers, principals, district leaders, or other positions with the potential to change lives.

As noted in the Human Resources section above, the Superintendent has stated the need to recruit, hire, and retain the very best and brightest staff at all levels, while also building a more diverse faculty that more closely reflects the demographics of the student population. Dr. Davis and his team would be well served to turn the national focus on Ferguson-Florissant into an ambitious recruiting campaign to bring great talent to the district. That effort should include recruitment of top candidates from this region and from other states.

In addition to recruiting great staff, the Superintendent also may leverage the national spotlight to attract financial and other resources to the district from across the country. Dr. Davis has an extensive national network of educators and resources that he is bringing to bear on systemic improvement. There are innumerable other opportunities to seek involvement from celebrities, philanthropists, and others who – if asked – may be eager to provide monetary or personal support for FFSD’s academic agenda, given its critical role in shaping a bright future for the community as a whole.

- *Develop and disseminate core messages about the work of FFSD, reinforced by positive stories from the schools.*

Essential to the rebranding work described above is the consistent delivery of a set of core messages about the district’s priorities and the results they aim to produce. Dr. Davis and his team have begun to articulate some of the critical levers for improved student outcomes, including: improved central office service and support to schools; an intentional focus on reading from pre-kindergarten through high school; investment in STEM education and the arts to help students become competitive in the 21st century workplace; and the use of data to improve teaching practices, particularly by enabling teachers to focus more deeply on particular instructional strategies. The Superintendent now has an opportunity to codify these and other priorities and to infuse them throughout schools and the community.

Success stories focused on these priority areas will help internal and external audiences alike understand their importance and their potential to transform the district as a whole. Therefore, Dr. Davis and his team should

create ongoing opportunities to identify and disseminate positive news stories from the schools – through both traditional media and the district's own communications tools. These acknowledgements of student and staff achievements, as well as promising practices from the schools, should be a major focus of the district's Strategic Communications Plan.

- *Strengthen the district's digital identity.*

The current FFSD website (www.fergflor.org) does not serve as the most attractive, informative, or engaging representation of the school district. The site would benefit from a major redesign, with architecture and navigation designed with key users and functionality in mind, including a home page that features news and images of student and staff success stories. The website also should reinforce the core messages referenced above, offering users easy access to information about the district's goals and its progress in achieving them.

Moreover, social media platforms provide rich opportunities to inform and engage stakeholders and drive traffic to the district website. The Interim Director of Communications has begun to bolster FFSD presence on social media, and these tools can be put to even greater use to share news and information and to reinforce core messages about the district.

Priority 3: Community engagement

Effective communication must be a “two-way street” – with the district not only delivering messages to the community, but also creating opportunities to get input from a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Since his arrival, Dr. Davis has worked tirelessly to meet with and hear perspectives from many students, parents, teachers, staff, external partners, civic leaders and other important community voices. As he continues to craft and present his agenda for school and district improvement, Dr. Davis would be well advised to continue to engage students and adults on an ongoing basis, particularly to get feedback on successes and challenges in the implementation of plans.

Recommendation to Dr. Davis in Priority 3:

- *Establish mechanisms for ongoing community discussion and feedback about district priorities, with particular focus on the Superintendent's academic agenda.*

The use of technology creates seemingly endless opportunities to engage with stakeholders online, and as noted above, the district would be well served to take full advantage of digital tools to receive and respond to community input. The Superintendent already has announced plans to administer regular internal and external surveys in order to measure community perception over time, which is an important endeavor.

However, even the most robust digital engagement cannot and should not replace face-to-face engagement. In both internal and external communication, Dr. Davis and his team should prioritize in-person presentation and discussion whenever possible, particularly on complex matters not easily conveyed in memoranda, emails, web content, videos and news articles alone. The same approach is required at the school level, where too often parents rely on occasional newsletters or informal email groups for information, often resulting in inadequate or inaccurate communication.

As school and district officials engage with a broad range of stakeholders – both in-person and through digital means – the quantitative and qualitative data gathered should continue to influence the district’s reform agenda, including mid-course corrections as needed.

CONCLUSION

The transition team offers these recommendations, some of which are antithetical to current practice, to move FFSD beyond the loosely coupled and incremental approach currently employed by the district. Additionally, we offer them because we are encouraged by the early receptivity of the FFSD community to the changes suggested by Superintendent Davis and the transition team, as evidenced by the work with Targeted Leadership (in support of instructional improvement and teacher effectiveness), the outcomes of the Board/Superintendent Retreat (2015-16 short-term goals; communications plan), emerging partnerships with the religious and academic communities, and initial responses to the DESE curriculum audit.

The transition team, however, is concerned that the urgent need for change as recommended herein cannot, and will not, be accomplished with the organization that currently exists. Authority and accountability are too diffuse to generate student improvement at newly anticipated levels. Firstly, the current table of organization reflects a “loose coupling” between the goals and organization of the district, those designated to promote and support those goals and their discharge at the school level.

Two critical issues stand out for the transition team. The first is on the academic “side” of the district. Although the assistant superintendent for curriculum and learning and the executive directors are nominally charged with the supervision of the principals at their respective school levels, some data indicates that that may not be the case. Conversations with the assistant superintendent and the executive directors and others, descriptions of budgetary authority at the school level, and other data indicate that the schools have a degree of autonomy that may be incompatible with district goals, strategic plans and efforts to retain accreditation. Evidence cited was the building selection of multiple reading programs at the elementary level (“proliferation” was the term used). School Board members, in our interviews, asked why evaluations were not readily available on the effectiveness of these programs and why such data would not be used to select a common reading program that was successful with the largest number of students.

The other issue that we raise is the separation of operational functions between multiple offices on the “business” side. We have already suggested a merger of some functions of the Human Resources and Finance offices. As we approached the end of our study, we became convinced that all operations should be united under a single operations chief who could bring the full power and resources of operations in service of the twin goals of excellence and equity for *all* students. In the end, however, after conversation with the superintendent, we posit that a more comprehensive reorganization of the central office is warranted that meets the issues raised by the under-performance of certain student groups. Only then can the school board’s mission be accomplished – “We will empower all students to achieve their potential by cultivating a love of learning in an environment of respect, accountability and responsibility.”

Finally, the transition team has attempted to answer the questions and fulfill the charge given us by Superintendent Davis. We do not claim to have addressed all of the issues confronting FFSD, not to mention all of the issues some may have wished we would examine, in the short time available. We hope that we have provided another perspective and some different analyses on how FFSD might approach their ambitious improvement agenda. We believe that FFSD can be an excellent and equitable school district for *all* students if it intelligently and aggressively accelerates the pace of change on such an agenda.

We thank Superintendent Davis and the FFSD School Board for giving us this opportunity to serve the students of the Ferguson-Florissant School District.

APPENDIX A: Documents, Interviews and Data

To prepare this report, transition team members gathered and reviewed documents, interviewed or contacted people, and analyzed data. The following are summaries of transition team resources consulted and activities undertaken, by key area:

1. Governance and Leadership

- Report of individual Board member interviews, involving six of the seven Ferguson-Florissant Board of Education members
- Interviews with the Superintendent
- Observation of Board of Education meeting
- Board-approved Superintendent evaluation instrument and process
- Selected School Board policies
- 2015 Board of Education Self-Assessment Report
- Several meetings with the Board of Education Retreat Planning Committee
- Facilitation of October 9-10 Board of Education Retreat
- Ferguson-Florissant School District Strategic Plan
- Ferguson Commission Report (education-related sections)
- Operational norms developed by the Ferguson-Florissant Board of Education and Superintendent
- Status reports generated by district's senior staff members

2. Student Achievement

Members of the transition team reviewed and spoke to multiple sources: observations from school visits, conversations with district leaders and partners both individually and in focus groups (they included focus groups with executive directors and cabinet members), review of focus group interview notes involving central office and school staff, and recommendations and assessments of district needs by cabinet members. The FFSD transition team also examined policy documents such as the District Strategic and Achievement Plans, the Special School District (SSD) partnership agreement, the FFSD Code of Conduct, and district and department guidance in support of the goals in those key policy pillars, as well as external audits of classroom practices. It examined student achievement outcome data presented in the district and state website, as well as data supplied by the district in response to specific clarification questions.

3. Talent Recruitment and Hiring

Team members analyzed available data, reviewed current practices within the Human Resources Department (and to a limited degree, the Finance Department), and conducted interviews with HR leadership and staff. Interviews and analysis were structured to ascertain existing successes, primary challenges related to efficacy and efficiency, and to ultimately make recommendations for increased effectiveness related to HR customer service and processes.

Documents reviewed included demographic reports on race/ethnicity of teaching staff (including building administrators), non-teaching staff, materials relating to interrelationship between HR and Finance Department and their respective communications, and processes currently deployed for interviewing and ultimately selecting individuals for employment positions within the district.

4. Communication

Findings and recommendations developed through:

- Observation of professional development sessions
- Observation of meeting between district leaders and FFNEA officers
- Review of FFSD digital tools, particularly the website, social media, and videos
- Review of selected FFSD print materials
- Review of status reports from members of the Communications & Marketing Team
- Conversations with district officials, including Superintendent Davis and Kevin Hampton, Interim Director of Communications and Marketing
- Other sources cited in sections 1-3 above

APPENDIX B: Additional Detail about Advanced Placement (AP) Programs

Members of the transition team conducted a thorough examination of FFSD student participation in Advanced Placement (“AP”) courses and examinations. This appendix provides an overview of historical data about the district’s only program of advanced study for high school students, including consideration of equitable access to the program among racial and ethnic subgroups of students.

Information about AP

The district developed a document that is to be used by all students in the three high schools to develop a four-year plan for courses to be taken in 9th through 12th grade. For the 2015-16 school year, this document is called “College and Career Planning Guide 2015-2016” (the “Guide”). The Guide is made available to all high school students.

The Guide includes information about Advanced Placement and where the courses are offered in the district. According to the Guide (p. 14):

College Board Advanced Placement (AP) is a nationally recognized program. Highly motivated students are given an opportunity to take college-level courses and exams while still in high school.

Students can earn advanced placement/college credit from most colleges and universities in Missouri and across the United States. Students’ credit will be based on the results of a College Board summative examination.

Advanced Placement courses are seen as enhancements of student’s confidence in his or her ability and readiness for academic challenges in college.

For the 2015-2016 school year, the Guide lists the following AP courses offered at each school:

Table 1.

Department	Course Title	School*
Fine Arts - Visual Arts	AP Art History, AP Art Studio	McN McC
Fine Arts - Music	AP Music Theory	McN
English Language Arts	AP Literature/Composition	McN McC
Mathematics	AP Calculus, AP Statistics	McN McC McSB
Social Studies	AP European History	McN McSB
Science	AP Environment Science	McN McC McSB

* McC = McCluer, McN = McCluer North, McSB = McCluer South Berkeley

The Guide explains that teacher recommendations are needed for certain courses, stating, “The purpose of the teacher approval/recommendation for a course is to discuss course expectations and ensure the student has the prerequisite skills needed to be successful in the course.” The Guide also refers to an appeals process available if teachers deny approval for a student to take certain courses, with the appeal managed by the Academic Permissions Assistant Principal (p. 5).

The requirements for taking AP courses are included in the “Subject Area Information by Department” section of the Guide. For example, the Guide states the following prerequisites for students to take the AP core courses offered by the district:

- For AP Literature and Composition, a student must have “Grade A in [British & World Literature/Composition] with permission or a B or better in [Honors British & World Literature and Composition] with permission,” see Guide at page 30;
- For AP Calculus, a student must have a “B or higher in Pre-Calculus,” see Guide at page 40;
- For AP Statistics, a students must have a “B or higher in [Geometry/Honors Geometry] and Algebra II/Honors Algebra II,” see Guide at page 40;
- For AP Environmental Science, a student must have a “B in [Biology or Honors Biology] and [Chemistry] completed recommendation form,” see Guide at page 44; and
- For AP European History, a student must have a “B or better in previous Social Studies Class or current teacher’s signature,” see Guide at page 52.

The district has an Educational Opportunities policy. (See Policy 3010 Educational Opportunities.) The policy states that “[e]ach student in the Ferguson-Florissant School District, being limited only by individual difference, will be given the opportunity to develop and achieve. Therefore, the school district will foster an educational environment that provides equal education opportunities for all students.”

The information included in the Guide about AP courses is very general and does not encourage students to take AP courses. While the Guide is available to students in the district’s intranet, there is nothing available on the district’s website about the district’s AP courses.

The information in the Guide is in contrast to the College Board website developed for students (<https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/exploreap>), which includes sections that explain: what it takes to take an AP class; how students can get the most out of AP classes; why students should take AP classes; how AP classes can help students explore subjects in which they are interested; and how to enroll in courses. The website also includes resources for parents and families.

AP Course Offerings

As Table 1 above shows, for the 2015-16 school year, the district offers a limited number of AP courses, particularly a limited number of courses in the core areas. For example:

- In Science, the district offers only AP Environmental Science, but the College Board also offers AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism, AP Physics C: Mechanics, AP Physics 1: Algebra-Based, and AP Physics 2: Algebra-Based;
- In Social Studies, the district only offers AP European History, but the College Board also offers AP Comparative Government and Politics, AP Human Geography, AP Macroeconomics, AP Microeconomics, AP Psychology, AP United States Government and Politics, AP United States History and AP World History;

- The district offers AP Statistics and AP Calculus, but the College Board also offers AP Computer Science A and AP Computer Science Principles; and
- The district offers no AP courses in World Languages and Cultures.

For the 2015-2016 school year, the district offers a broader range of AP courses in the Arts. The three courses offered are: AP Art History, AP Music Theory and AP Studio Art.

In addition, as Table 1 shows, for the 2015-16 school year, the number of courses and the courses offered varies among the three high schools. For example, McCluer North High School offered AP courses in all four core areas – English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science. McCluer High School offered AP courses in three of four core areas – English, Mathematics and Science. McCluer South Berkeley High School offered courses in three of the four core areas – Mathematics, Social Studies and Science. Significantly, McCluer North High School, which has the lowest percentage of African-American students enrolled, offered the highest number of AP courses.

Prerequisites for AP Courses

For the 2015-2016 school year, the district offers two math AP courses – AP Calculus and AP Statistics – at all three high schools, but it does not offer the other core AP courses – English, Mathematics and Science – at all three high schools. For example, AP Literature and Composition and AP Environmental Science are offered at McCluer and McCluer North, but these courses are not offered at McCluer South Berkeley. AP European History is offered at McCluer North and McCluer South Berkeley, but it is not offered at McCluer.

In some cases, the prerequisites for the AP courses do not appear to be consistent with the prerequisites recommended by the College Board. For example:

- According to the Guide, the district prerequisites for AP English Language and Composition include: “Grade A in [British & World Literature/Composition] with permission or a B or better in [Honors British & World Literature and Composition] with permission.” The College Board Course Description for AP English Language and Composition states that: “[while there are not prerequisites for an AP English Language and Composition course, students who have had experience in rhetorical analysis, argument and synthesis may more easily address the objectives of the course. Such skills may be introduced as early as the middle school level.” (Course Description, Effective Fall 2014, at page 9.)
- The district’s Guide states that a student must have a “B or higher in [Geometry/Honors Geometry and Algebra II/Honors Algebra II] for AP Statistics.” The AP Course Description for AP Statistics that “AP Statistics is an excellent option for any secondary school student who has successfully completed a second-year course in algebra and who possesses sufficient mathematical maturity and quantitative reasoning ability.” (AP Statistics Course Description, Effective Fall 2010, at page 5.)
- For Environmental Science, the district requires a “[B in [Biology or Honors Biology] and [Chemistry] completed recommendation form.” The College Board recommends that students have completed one year of life science, one year of physical science and one year of algebra. (Environmental Science Course Description, Effective Fall 2013, at page 5.)
- According to the district’s Guide, for AP European History, a student must have a “B or better in previous Social Studies Class or current teacher’s signature in order to participate.” In contrast, the College Board states that “[there are no prerequisites for AP European History. Students should be

able to read a college-level textbook and write grammatically correct, complete sentences.” (See AP European History Course and Exam Description, Effective Fall 2015, at page 4.)

AP Course Enrollments

In contrast to other school districts in the country where there have been significant increases in enrollment in AP courses, the district’s enrollment has not increased significantly over the last five years, and in fact, the enrollment in AP courses decreased in two of the last five years. See Table 2 below. For example, in the 2011 school year, the district’s AP enrollment was 194, but it decreased to 183 in 2011-12 and to 163 to 2012-13. The enrollment increased to 185 in 2013-14 and to 209 in 2014-15. As Table 2 below shows, the enrollments in the three high schools also have increased and decreased over the past five years.

Dr. Davis has stated that one of his goals is “expand AP participation.” (See “Students are Hope for Recovery in Ferguson,” *Education Week*, September 16, 2015.) Thus, based on the district’s reported enrollments in AP courses, the district must step up its efforts to increase enrollment in AP courses.

Table 2.

McCluer	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
AP Courses Offered	2	2	2	3	3
AP Classes/Sections	4	3	3	4	4
Enrolled Students	78	57	51	62	61
Asian	5	0	1	0	0
Black	60	40	37	47	33
Hispanic	3	1	2	1	3
White	8	9	11	11	21
Multiple	2	7	0	3	4
McCluer North	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
AP Courses Offered	5	5	5	5	6
AP Classes/Sections	7	7	6	7	6
Enrolled Students	113	99	82	95	126
Asian	2	1	1	0	2
Black	44	47	34	45	51
Hispanic	4	2	5	1	7
White	54	38	35	40	56
Multiple	9	11	7	9	10
McCluer South Berkeley	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
AP Courses Offered	2	4	3	2	1
AP Classes/Sections	2	5	3	2	1
Enrolled Students	18	29	30	26	7
Asian	0	0	0	0	0
Black	18	27	30	24	6
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
White	0	2	0	2	0
Multiple	0	0	0	0	1

As Table 3 below shows, for the last five years, the total percentage of African-American students enrolled in AP courses district-wide is lower than the percentage of African American students enrolled in the district. For example, for the 2014-15 school year, the percentage of AP students who were African-American students was 58% compared to the district-wide enrollment that is 85.9% African-American.

In addition, as Table 3 demonstrates, the percentage of African-American students among all students enrolled in AP courses has fluctuated over the last five years. The lowest percentage of African American students enrolled in AP courses was in 2010-11 and the highest percentage of African American students was in the 2011-12 school year. The percentage decreased in 2012-13 and 2013-14 and increased slightly in 2014-15.

Table 3

School Year	% of FFSD students enrolled in AP Courses who are African-American	% of all FFSD students who are African-American
2010-11	46%	85%
2011-12	63.3%	87%
2012-13	61.9%	85.3%
2013-14	56.2%	85.4%
2014-15	58%	85.9%

Of the three high schools, McCluer North High School had the most significant gap between the percentage of African American students enrolled in AP courses, compared to the percentage of African American students enrolled in the school. For example, for the 2014-15, the percentage of McCluer North High School enrolled in AP courses who are African-American was 38.9%, compared to an overall enrollment of 74.9% African-American students in the school.

AP Examinations

In the 2014-15 school year, only 16 students in the district took AP examinations. Four of these students took more than one AP examination for a total of 23 AP examinations taken by students in the district. Twelve of the students taking the AP examination were enrolled at McCluer North, and four of the students taking the AP examinations were enrolled at McCluer High. No students at McCluer South Berkley took AP examinations. Of the 16 students taking AP examinations, eight were White, six were African-American, one was Asian, and one was Multiracial.

Of the 16 students taking the AP examinations in the 2014-15 school year, eight students received a 3 or better on the AP examinations, and all of these students were enrolled at McCluer North. Seven of the students earning a 3 or better were White, and one was African -American. Seven of the students earning a 3 or better took the English Literature examination, and one of the students earning a 3 or better took the Statistics AP examination.

The Superintendent stated that one of his goals is “to transform the district into a top-flight system, similar to the ones that are featured in the annual U.S. News & World Report ranking of the country’s best high schools,” (see *Education Week* article) as well as a commitment to preparing all FFSD graduates for college and career success. According to the latest U.S. News & World Report, none of the three high schools is ranked, and only one school – McCluer North High School – has a College Readiness Index. The College Readiness Index is based on the percentage of students who take AP examinations and the percentage of students who receive a 3

or better on the AP examinations. McCluer North High School has a College Readiness Index of 1.6, which is below the Missouri average.

APPENDIX C: Additional Detail about Gifted Programs

Members of the transition team conducted a thorough examination of gifted programs for academically advanced students in the elementary and middle grades. This appendix provides an overview of historical data about these gifted programs, including consideration of equitable access to the program among racial and ethnic subgroups of students.

Missouri special education law authorizes the State Board of Education to develop standards for programs for gifted students. State law defines gifted students as those “who exhibit precocious development of mental capacity and learning potential as determined by competent professional evaluation to the extent that continued educational growth and stimulation could best be served by an academic environment beyond that offered through a standard grade level curriculum.” (See section 162.675, RSMo.) State law authorizes a school district to implement gifted programs if the district has a sufficient number of students who are identified as gifted and the requires a school district to develop “programs or services beyond the level of those ordinarily provided in regular public schools programs” State law requires the State Department of Education to approve a school district's plan annually.

Annually, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issues procedures for gifted programs: the Gifted Education Programs Procedure Manual (the “MDESE Gifted Manual”). The 2015 manual provides guidelines for the types of services for gifted students and for screening and identification procedures. According to the 2015 manual, “[g]ifted programs must provide a minimum of . . . 150 minutes per week of direct instructional time in which the identified gifted students work exclusively” with teachers from the gifted program.”

I. Information Available to Parents

The transition team requested information available to parents regarding the gifted program. We were provided three documents: a resource guide for parents and staff regarding the gifted program, a letter to parents whose children had been identified for the program, and a 2015-16 calendar for Probe, the district's gifted program for elementary and middle school children.

The district developed a “professional and parent resource guide” for its gifted programs, PROBE: Gifted Education Handbook (“Gifted Handbook”). The district last revised the Gifted Handbook in 2013. According to the handbook, FFSD provides the following programs for gifted students:

- Firecrackers for students in first grade at each elementary school;
- Probe for students in grades one through three at Probe Center;
- Probe for students in grades four through six at Probe Center;
- Middle School Probe; and
- High School Probe.

The Gifted Handbook includes: a definition of giftedness; a brief description of each of the programs; a list of characteristics of gifted students; an outline of the screening and selection process; a teacher checklist for Probe; frequently asked questions; and resources for parents.

II. Screening and Selection for Probe Program

The MDESE Gifted Manual provides guidelines for selection and placement of students for gifted services (pages 5-7), specifying that the process must include two stages – (1) screening and individual evaluation, and (2) placement – and provides guidance for each stage, including the areas that must be assessed. In addition, the MDESE Gifted Manual allows districts to propose “alternative identification plans” to identify students who have been historically under-represented in gifted programs and requires districts to submit to MDESE for approval any alternative plans.

According to an August 4, 2015 memorandum from Dr. Sheila T. Ward to Dr. Gwendolyn Diggs (“August 4, 2015 Ward Memorandum”), the district will implement revised screening and identification procedures for the Probe Program, beginning with the 2015-16 school year. The purpose of the revised screening and identification procedures is to address under-representation by subgroups of students in gifted programs. For example, beginning with the screening process during the 2015-16 school year, the memo states that the district will screen students in grades two through four for the Probe Program in order to “cast a wide net” using the K-BIT2 assessment.

The transition team did not review the specifics regarding the screening and identification process currently being implemented by the district. Instead, based on the enrollment data analyzed below, we focused on the reality that there is under-representation among some student subgroups.

III. Elementary Gifted Programs

A. MDESE Requirements for Elementary Gifted Programs

The MDESE Gifted Manual requires that districts provide gifted students with a program that includes “at minimum of one hundred fifty (150) minutes per week of direct instructional time in which the identified gifted students work exclusively with the teacher of gifted” (page 4). In addition, the manual prescribes maximum and minimum class sizes and suggests maximum class loads for teachers of gifted students (page 5). The MDESE recognizes that, at the elementary level, most districts will use a pull-out program and that “the pullout program is one in which the teacher of gifted students spends 100% of his/her time in the resource classroom.” For kindergarten only, the MDESE allows districts “to use the first semester for identification with placement in direct instructional programs starting in second semester.”

B. FFSD Elementary Gifted Programs

1. Firecracker Program for Kindergarten and First Grade

For kindergarten and first grade students, the FFSD offers the Firecracker Program, beginning for kindergarten students in second semester. (See Gifted Handbook, page 3.) The Firecracker Program is offered at each elementary school in the district. Students meet once a week throughout the school year. The purpose of the program is to challenge students to develop vocabulary, logic and special skills through the use of a variety of games, puzzles and related activities.

According to the August 4, 2015 Ward Memorandum, for the 2015-16 school year, the district is implementing the Firecracker Enrichment Program for students in kindergarten and first grade in all 17 elementary schools. Two teachers are providing services to approximately 200 students identified for the Firecracker Enrichment

Program, with one teacher serving schools identified as 1 through 9 and the other teacher serving schools identified as 10 through 17. The teachers are providing services to first grade students all year, and the teachers will service kindergarten students beginning second semester.

2. Elementary Probe Program – Grades 2-6.

Overview. For grades 2 through 6, the district offers the Probe Program, which is provided at the Probe Center. Each student identified for the Probe Program attends the program at the Probe Center for one day each week from 8:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. The district provides transportation from each student's home school to the Probe Center.

For grades 2 and 3, the program focuses on deductive reasoning skills, problem solving, data collection and creative thinking in various units of study. For students in grades 4 through 6, the curriculum includes lessons that emphasize research, technology, problem solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, oral and written communication and building leadership skills and units of study, such as robotics, Shakespeare, architecture, geometry and space.

Enrollment in Elementary Probe Program – Grades 2-6. According to district records, the total enrollment in the Probe Program has declined over the last four years. The total enrollments in the Probe Program for the last four years are as follows:

- 2012-13: 247 students;
- 2013-14: 173 students;
- 2014-15: 239 students; and
- 2015-16: 201 students.

From the 2012-13 through 2015-16 school years, there appears to be a pattern in the home elementary schools with the highest and lowest number of students enrolled in the Probe Program. See Tables 1-4 at the end of this appendix. For example, over the four years, Commons Lane and Parker Road had the highest number of students enrolled in the Probe Program, and Airport had the lowest number of students enrolled in the Probe Program.

Over the last four school years, the racial and ethnic composition of the students enrolled in the Probe Program has changed. See Tables 1-4. For example:

- Between the 2012-13 and 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of African-American students enrolled in the Probe Program increased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 73 African-American students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 30% of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there are 96 African-American students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 48% of the students enrolled;
- Between the 2012-13 and 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of White students enrolled in the Probe Program decreased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 142 White students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 58% of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there are 82 White students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing 39% of the students enrolled;
- Between the 2012-13 and the 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in the Probe Program decreased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 14 Hispanic students

enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 5% of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there are six Hispanic students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 3% of the students enrolled;

- Between the 2012-13 and the 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of Asian students enrolled in the Probe Program decreased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 4 students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 2 % of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there is one Asian student enrolled in the Probe Program;
- Between the 2012-13 and the 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of Multi-Racial students increased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 14 Multi-Racial students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 6% of the students enrolled, and in 2015-16 school year, there are 18 Multi-Racial students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 9% of the students enrolled.

Over the last four school years, the number of students with IEPs enrolled in the Probe Program has remained relatively low. (See Tables 1-4.) The enrollment has ranged from a low of five students in 2013-14 school year to a high of 10 in the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.

Over the last four school years, there has been a decrease in English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled in the Probe Program. The highest number of ELLs enrolled in the Probe Program was in 2012-13, when there were four ELLs enrolled. For the last two school years, there have been no ELLs enrolled in the Probe Program.

IV. Middle School Probe Program

Overview of Middle School Probe Program. The MDESE Gifted Manual provides that middle school programs may be pullout-programs” (page 5). MSESE recognizes that the programs “often consist of a special class that is part of a student’s daily schedule.”

The district serves middle school students identified for the Middle School Probe Program in their home middle schools rather than in the Probe Center. Based on interviews with district officials, there is a gifted teacher at each of the middle schools, and this teacher provides a “special class” for the gifted students.

According to the district’s Gifted Handbook, “Probe students extend their knowledge using a multi-disciplined theme-based curriculum covering a wide variety of student interests” (page 3). In addition to the theme-based curriculum, students engage “in a variety of competitions including math, economics, current events and general knowledge.” The Gifted Handbook states that “[w]hile grades are not given, a detailed assessment of the students’ progress is offered quarterly.”

Enrollment in Middle School Probe Program. As with the Elementary Probe Program, the total enrollment in the Middle School Probe Program has declined over the last four years. See Tables 5-8 below. The total enrollments in the program for the last four years are as follows:

- 2012-13: 125 students;
- 2013-14: 95 students;
- 2014-15: 76 students; and
- 2015-16: 65 students.

From the 2012-13 through 2015-16 school years, all three of the middle schools had a decline in the number of students enrolled the Middle School Probe Program. See Attachment B. Over the four school years, Berkeley

Middle School had the fewest number of students enrolled in the Middle School Program, ranging from a high of seven students in the 2012-13 school year to a low of one student in the 2015-16 school year.

Over the last four school years, the racial and ethnic composition of the students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program has changed. See Tables 5-8. For example:

- Between the 2012-13 and 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of African-American students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program decreased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 62 African-American students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program, representing approximately 50% of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there are 18 African-American students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program, representing approximately 28% of the students enrolled;
- Between the 2012-13 and 2015-16 school years, the number of White students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program decreased, but the percentage of White students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program increased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 50 White students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing approximately 40% of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there are 36 students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing 60% of the students enrolled;
- Between the 2012-13 and the 2015-16 school years, the number and percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program increased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were no Hispanic students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program, and in the 2015-16 school year, there are two Hispanic students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program, representing approximately 3% of the students enrolled;
- Between the 2012-13 and the 2015-16 school years, the number of Asian students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program decreased, but the percentage of Asian students enrolled increased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were five Asian students enrolled in the Probe Program, representing 4% of the students enrolled, and in the 2015-16 school year, there were four Asian student enrolled in the Probe Program, representing 6% of the students enrolled ;
- Between the 2012-13 and the 2015-16 school years, the number of Multi-Racial students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program decreased, but the percentage enrollment increased. In the 2012-13 school year, there were eight Multi-Racial students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program, representing approximately 6% of the students enrolled, and in 2015-16 school year, there are five Multi-Racial students enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program, representing approximately 7% of the students enrolled.

Over the last four school years, the number of students with IEPs enrolled in the Probe Program has remained relatively low. The program enrolled only two or three students with IEPs over the past four school years.

For the 2012-13 through 2014-15 school year, there was one ELL student in each of the school years. For the 2015-16 school year, there are no ELLs enrolled in the Middle School Probe Program.

V. High School Probe Program

Overview of High School Probe Program. The MDESE Gifted Manual provides that “high school programs may be pullout-programs . . . but often consist of a special class that is part of a student’s daily schedule” and that “Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes are considered a gifted service” (page 5).

The district's Gifted Handbook provides that "[a] Probe teacher collaborates with high school teachers to provide gifted students with opportunities to participate in academic competitions throughout the school year. This teacher will inform students of special contests, events and career opportunities" (page 3).

Based on interviews with district officials, however, there is no specific program for gifted students at the high school level, and there are no teachers of gifted programs at the high school level. Instead of a specific program, gifted students are encouraged to take Advanced Placement courses. See Appendix B for an analysis of AP programs.

VI. Teachers Implementing Probe Program

The MDESE Gifted Manual requires that districts ensure that "teachers implementing the gifted program curriculum must hold appropriate certification for the gifted services they are providing" (page 4). In addition, the manual prescribes maximum and minimum class sizes and suggests maximum class loads for teachers of gifted students (page 5).

For the 2015-16 school year, the district has nine teachers providing services to elementary and middle school students who have been identified for gifted services.

- There are two teachers for the Firecracker Program; one has gifted certification, and the other has provision certification to provide gifted services. Both of the teachers are White females.
- There are five teachers serving the Elementary School Probe Program in grades two through 6. Four of the teachers have full certification to provide gifted services, and one has a provision certificate to provide gifted services. Two of the teachers are White males, two of the teachers are White females, and one of the teachers is an African-American female.
- For the Middle School Probe Program, there are two teachers. Both of the teachers are certified to provide gifted services, and both are White females.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED, PEOPLE INTERVIEWED AND DATA ANALYZED

Examples of data reviewed people interviewed and data analyzed include:

- Missouri Department of Elementary Education, Gifted Education Programs Procedural Manual (2015)
- FFSD Probe Gifted Education Handbook (2013)
- August 3, 2015 Letter to Parents regarding Probe Center Program
- Probe Calendar for 2015-16
- Enrollment data for 2012-13 through 2015-16 school years
- Probe Center Registration Form for 2015-16
- August 4, 2015 Memorandum from Dr. Ward to Dr. Diggs
- Interviews and discussions with district staff

**Elementary Probe Program Enrollment:
School Years 2012-13 through 2015-16**

Table 1: 2012-13 Elementary Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	IEP	ELL
Airport	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bermuda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central	5	3	1	6	1	0	0	0	0
Combs	9	15	3	19	0	0	2	1	1
Commons Lane	22	21	22	18	1	1	1	0	0
Cool Valley	4	1	3	1	0	0	1	1	0
Duchesne	11	14	2	19	1	0	3	0	0
Griffith	4	3	3	3	0	0	1	0	0
Halls Ferry	5	10	4	9	1	1	0	1	1
Holman	3	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
Johnson-Wabash	5	3	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
Lee-Hamilton	8	10	5	8	2	0	3	0	0
Parker Road	17	14	5	22	1	1	2	1	0
Robinwood	13	5	2	13	2	0	1	2	0
Vogt	12	5	5	9	3	0	0	1	1
Walnut Grove	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wedgwood	9	9	3	14	0	1	0	1	1
Total by category	131	116	73	142	14	4	14	8	4

Table 2: 2013-14 Elementary Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Multi	IEP	ELL
Airport	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bermuda	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Central	3	4	2	5	0	0	0	0	0
Combs	6	11	2	14	0	0	1	3	1
Commons Lane	19	16	23	7	0	1	4	0	0
Cool Valley	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Duchesne	3	8	1	8	0	0	2	0	0
Griffith	3	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	0
Halls Ferry	1	9	3	5	1	1	0	0	0
Holman	3	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
Johnson-Wabash	4	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lee-Hamilton	3	5	3	3	0	0	2	0	0
Parker Road	13	6	4	9	1	0	5	0	0
Robinwood	9	4	0	10	1	0	2	1	1
Vogt	7	7	6	3	3	0	5	1	0
Walnut Grove	4	3	4	2	0	0	1	0	0
Wedgwood	4	6	2	8	0	0	0	0	0
Total by category	87	86	66	75	8	3	24	5	2

Table 3: 2014-15 Elementary Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	IEP	ELL
Airport	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bermuda	2	3	3	1	0	0	1	0	0
Central	7	5	4	7	0	1	0	0	0
Combs	7	14	3	16	1	0	1	2	0
Commons Lane	23	16	25	9	2	0	3	2	0
Cool Valley	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Duchesne	12	12	4	18	0	0	2	2	0
Griffith	4	2	3	2	0	0	1	0	0
Halls Ferry	6	10	6	7	1	0	2	0	0
Holman	2	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Johnson-Wabash	3	2	5	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lee-Hamilton	7	8	6	7	1	0	1	1	0
Parker Road	25	9	9	19	3	0	3	0	0
Robinwood	8	5	2	8	0	0	0	0	0
Vogt	12	8	10	7	1	0	2	1	0
Walnut Grove	5	2	6	1	0	0	0	1	0
Wedgwood	7	4	2	7	0	0	3	0	0
Total by category	137	102	97	109	11	1	19	10	0

Table 4: 2015 -16 Elementary Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	IEP	ELL
Airport	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bermuda	2	4	5	1	0	0	0	1	0
Central	4	8	4	8	0	0	0	0	0
Combs	4	11	4	9	1	0	1	1	0
Commons Lane	15	19	27	4	0	0	3	3	0
Cool Valley	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Duchesne	8	11	3	13	0	0	3	2	0
Griffith	5	2	4	1	0	1	1	0	0
Halls Ferry	7	7	7	5	1	0	1	0	0
Holman	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Johnson-Wabash	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lee-Hamilton	5	7	2	10	0	0	2	0	0
Parker Road	23	9	11	15	2	0	4	0	0
Robinwood	9	4	5	8	0	0	0	0	0
Vogt	5	6	7	2	1	0	1	1	0
Walnut Grove	6	1	3	2	1	0	1	1	0
Wedgwood	5	3	3	4	0	0	1	1	0
Total by category	107	94	96	82	6	1	18	10	0

**Middle School Probe Program Enrollment:
School Years 2012-13 through 2015-16**

Table 5: 2012 – 2013 Middle School Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	IEP	ELL
Berkeley Middle	1	6	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cross Keys Middle	35	34	28	32	0	5	4	1	0
Ferguson Middle	28	21	27	18	0	0	4	2	1
Total by Category	64	61	62	50	0	5	8	3	1

Table 6: 2013 – 2014 Middle School Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Multi	IEP	ELL
Berkeley Middle	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	1	0
Cross Keys Middle	34	25	20	32	2	2	3	0	0
Ferguson Middle	16	13	18	8	1	0	2	1	1
Total by Category	50	42	41	41	3	2	5	2	1

Table 7: 2014 – 2015 Middle School Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	IEP	ELL
Berkeley Middle	2	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
Cross Keys Middle	27	32	15	35	2	3	4	2	0
Ferguson Middle	6	8	8	4	2	0	0	0	1
Total by Category	35	41	25	39	4	4	4	3	1

Table 8: 2015 – 2016 Middle School Probe Enrollments

	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	IEP	ELL
Berkeley Middle	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Cross Keys Middle	18	25	10	26	0	2	5	3	0
Ferguson Middle	12	8	7	10	2	1	0	0	0
Total by Category	32	33	18	36	2	4	5	3	0