

**Standards-Based Reform in the Jefferson County Public Schools**

**Update Report**

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**with assistance from**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In our baseline report (August 1996), we raised concerns about the fact that JCPS did not have its own reform agenda. We worried that this meant the district would have nothing in place should the state terminate or drastically alter KERA, the Kentucky Education Reform Act. We were troubled by the fact that the district's focus was so much on raising score on KIRIS, the state assessment, that few people were attending to student learning. When we next visited Louisville in December 1996, we saw and learned about changes that teachers and principals were making in an effort to improve student achievement. Many of them were reasonable, but for the most part, they were not connected to standards-based reform. Rather, due to poor KIRIS test results on the Spring 1996 test, the district and schools were putting all of their energy into preparing students for the next KIRIS test in April 1997.

However, in the midst of all the KIRIS preparation work, and for the first time since we began our work in Louisville in 1993, central office administrators reported that they had not been sufficiently attentive to implementing standards-based reform. They now understood that they had to lead the district with a reform strategy if they were to improve teaching and learning and, as a product of that, students' KIRIS scores. We agreed with that assessment and noted that the district employed many people at Gheens, at central office and in the schools who understood standards-based reform and could help formulate a strategy for its implementation.

When we returned to Louisville in November 1997, we reported that, with the Superintendent's leadership, the district was taking advantage of its in-house expertise and moving forward with the development of performance standards and a diagnostic testing system. In our January 1998 update report we wrote:

Teachers, principals, and central office personnel in Louisville have made great strides toward implementing standards-based middle school reform since our visit in the fall of 1996. We cite the district's orientation to principal professional development, the implementation of the Cadre Teacher role with its focus on authentic assessment, the re-orientation of central office to the schools through the Dialogue Process, and the rapid progress with development of performance standards and a district-level assessment strategy to support this conclusion. (January 1998)

During our next visit, in March 1998, we saw and heard further evidence of the district's progress. Louisville had completed its strategies for implementing standards-based reform. Although they place a major emphasis on testing, the

strategies focus the district on using tests to improve instruction and not only to evaluate student performance. In this way, the tests appear to represent a sensible approach to implementing standards-based reform.<sup>1</sup>

The strategies have at their core a comprehensive diagnostic testing system called "STEPS for KIRIS."<sup>2</sup> (See Appendix A for a description of the STEPS system.) STEPS focuses on testing that will strengthen the district's capacity to help children achieve at high levels on the KIRIS assessment. However, should the KIRIS system disappear, it provides the district with its own strategies for assessing student achievement in light of standards. Administrators affirm that STEPS is the district's approach to standards-based reform and the kind of performance assessment represented by KIRIS. Implementation of it demonstrates Jefferson County's commitment to the reform.

It supports KIRIS, but that's not the total purpose. Because, if the legislature decides to do away with KIRIS, then STEPS will carry us through. It's Jefferson County's version of performance assessment. It combines diagnostic testing using a standardized test for some purposes with the performance standards piece.<sup>3</sup> (Central Office B)

STEPS builds on KIRIS by adding a diagnostic testing component in reading, writing and mathematics for students scoring at the Novice level, and by adding performance tasks to demonstrate achievement of standards.<sup>4</sup> Teachers will use data from the diagnostic tests to design instruction targeted to what students need to know and be able to do in order to move out of the Novice category. The performance tasks, which will be developed at the schools, will be linked to the district's newly developed performance standards and will measure the extent to which students' work meets the standards. They will also be used to inform standards-based curriculum development and classroom instruction.

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<sup>1</sup>With the mandate to have Site-Based Decision Making councils (SBDMs) at each school, KERA gave schools authority to adopt texts and make curricular and programmatic decisions. Districts cannot mandate any of these, although they can make suggestions. Districts, however, maintain responsibility for testing and assessment. As a result, through the design of their testing systems, districts have the opportunity to influence curriculum, teaching and, therefore, learning.

<sup>2</sup>The acronym STEPS stands for Student Testing, Evaluation and Performance Standards.

<sup>3</sup>No one suggests that KERA, the Kentucky Education Reform Act, is likely to be revoked or significantly changed.

<sup>4</sup>Novice is the lowest performance level on the KIRIS assessment.

Principals with whom we spoke in the Spring were glad to see the district making a clear statement about the importance of standards and taking responsibility for assessing student learning.

We have really gone away from putting all of our eggs in the KIRIS basket. [Now we have] the STEPS program. And the district, I believe, has seen the error of depending solely on KIRIS to evaluate what kids are doing and what schools are doing. I'm a lot more comfortable with what we're doing now than what we were doing a few years ago. (Principal A)

...the Superintendent wants to be sure that if KIRIS goes away that standards and all those pieces in the reform that make sense stay with us. (Principal C)

In March 1998, we heard and saw evidence of advancing work with STEPS and with the associated strategies for implementing reform. More specifically, we learned about a) completion of the performance standards, b) plans for end-of-year professional development to engage principals and teachers in using them to improve instruction, c) continuing work to enhance principals' knowledge of instruction and their role as instructional leaders, and d) initial positive reactions to the District Dialogue Process. Central office administrators, Gheens professionals, and principals provided us with examples of this progress.<sup>5</sup>

**Organization of the Report.** In this report, we describe progress in these areas and the ways in which we think they can lead to better teaching and increased student achievement. We begin with a discussion of the district's roll-out strategy for standards. In that section, we describe the ways in which the district prepared teachers and principals for their work with performance standards, we describe the two days of school-based professional development held at the end of May and we discuss the challenges that still lie ahead. Following this section, we discuss the district's progress with developing Gheens and central office capacity to work directly with schools on standards-based reform. We review the work of the District Dialogue Teams, discuss the initial use of walk-throughs and describe the approach to training district personnel to work in these efforts.

**Review of the Evaluation Design.** During the week of March 19, 1998, Barbara Neufeld, Leticia Fickel and Adrian Bennett visited Louisville. All three interviewed

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<sup>5</sup>We do not discuss the role of the Cadre Teachers in this report. They are teachers who have been trained to work in the area of authentic assessment and, therefore, their role can support the implementation of performance standards and tasks. However, according to Sherry DeMarsh and others, this role needs to be strengthened before it can fulfill its important function.

teachers and principals at Lassiter, Johnson, Conway and Farnsley Middle Schools. In addition, we interviewed Sandy Ledford, Assistant Superintendent; Sherry DeMarsh, Director of the Clark Project; Jacqueline Austin, Director, Curriculum and Assessment; Lennie Hay, Director, Professional Development and Innovations; Pamela Rogers, Coordinator of Professional Development; Ken Draut, District Assessment Coordinator; and the five Clark Fellows, Marcia Lile, Denise Finley, Melody Raymond, Kathy Zwanzig, and Cheryl Lineweaver. All of these individuals at the schools, at Gheens and at central office have a central role in forwarding standards-based reform in the district. As usual, they were generous with their time and extremely helpful in explaining their work to us.

## **II. MOVING AHEAD WITH STANDARDS REFORM**

As we wrote in our February 1998 update report, during the fall of the 1997-1998 school year, Louisville was rapidly writing district performance standards under the leadership of Jacqueline Austin. In Austin's words,

Performance Standards define what students will do to demonstrate achievement of the Content Standards. Performance Standards, along with performance tasks, help us answer the question, "How good is good enough?"...Content and Performance Standards are intended to provide a "clear picture" of what needs to be accomplished. Performance tasks aligned with those standards form the measurement system for assessing student performance.<sup>6</sup>

The performance standards were written for each grade level and content area for two reasons. First, the district wanted them to align with the Kentucky standards. Second, the district wanted to make it clear that all teachers, not only those teaching at the accountability grades, were responsible for what students had to know and be able to do. The performance standards were presented to the School Board in December for the purpose of informing members of progress with standards reform and plans for the next phase of the work.

The next phase involved designing a roll-out strategy for the performance standards. Lennie Hay, Pam Rogers, Jacqueline Austin along with others at Gheens and at central office took on this important task. In this update, we report on the first phase of what will be a multi-year implementation process.

### **Designing the Implementation of Performance Standards**

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<sup>6</sup>This quote is taken from "Performance Standards: Basic Overview," by Jacque Austin in Regionally Speaking, a quarterly newsletter for the Regional Service Centers. March 1998, p. 1

Professionals at Gheens and central office felt that the roll-out strategy for performance standards had to address multiple goals. Of course, it had to result in teachers and principals who understood performance standards and their links to content standards and performance tasks. In addition, staff wanted the strategy to reinforce and enhance principals' roles as instructional leaders. They wanted it to create a set of knowledgeable teachers in each school who could support and enhance the principal's instructional efforts. And, they wanted all teachers involved, regardless of what subject they taught.

To emphasize principals as instructional leaders, the roll-out strategy provided repeated opportunities for principals to learn about the standards and to act as instructional leaders. The initial opportunity for most principals came with the introduction of the performance standards at a monthly principal meeting. Sometime after the meeting, principals had to present the performance standards to their teachers. Gheens staff knew that not all principals would be knowledgeable enough to do this well, but the requirement was for everyone. While principals were preparing, Gheens staff were available to help, but they were not at the presentations. Principals were on their own. Finally, after another opportunity to learn about performance standards, principals had to, once again, act as instructional leaders at the two days of school-based professional development at the end of May. The two days were designed to begin incorporating performance standards into curriculum development. With these strategies, the district reinforced principals' knowledge of the curriculum and the message that they were to be instructional leaders.

To create teams of knowledgeable teachers, Gheens prepared a three-hour professional development program for teams from each school. Principals had to select at least three teachers to join them in training about the meaning and use of performance standards. One reason for having teams was reinforcement: regardless of how well the principal had done the in-school presentation, Gheens staff wanted the opportunity to convey key information themselves to insure that principals heard the message again and teachers heard the complete message.

We want to note that the district practiced some of its roll-out strategies on several groups of middle school principals and department chairs who were on a two day retreat. The retreat was an opportunity for the district to practice working with the performance standards and it was another opportunity for principals, along with a team of teachers, to work on instructional issues.

And we really got down to how we were going to use those performance standards within classrooms. We got away from just defining and introducing what's going to happen to, really, down to the real stuff the

teachers will actually use. And that's a very difficult process. It requires completely revamping your thinking about lesson plans and what you expect kids to do and what's going to happen in your classroom, and it was an intense, difficult two days, but I think we came out of it with a lot. Sherry DeMarsh is the one that organized it. We were lectured to, then put into groups, then brought back out, and shared, and lectured, that type of thing. It was a fourteen hour block of time, but it was actually a preview of what [teams heard later]. We were the first ones in the system for them to roll this information out to us, so we actually have been hit with it more than once, now, which helped. (Principal C)

To emphasize the fact that all teachers were to be involved in the work of performance standards, Gheens staff stressed that all curriculum specialists were to work with the teachers to figure out how, by teaching their content, they could contribute to the district's focus on literacy and math. As one Gheens administrator noted,

I think one danger we face is, if I'm a science teacher or social studies teacher, okay, I can just take the year off then. I mean, the superintendent has said [the focus is] literacy and math, so it's vacation time for me and nobody's going to be monitoring me. No. What I have said to the social studies specialist and the science specialist, in particular, but to all of the others, is that this isn't a time for you to relax or for your middle school teachers or high school teachers to kind of kick back. This is a time for you to meet with them and help them to see ways that they can help, how by teaching science, they can help increase the reading scores....So that's the approach we're taking. (Gheens B)

Principals also found the approach promising. It provided them with a rationale for engaging all teachers, as this principal reports.

I like that we have established a key focus and that everybody has bought into that. Ours is reading. I think it's important. [A faculty member from the University of Louisville] reminded me that we shouldn't be saying "reading in social studies," or "reading in science." We should be calling it science literacy, or reading literacy; That is really much more appropriate. For a while, there was a little of that: "Well, I've got enough to do just to get all the science content without having to do any teaching of reading." But when you approach it as science literacy, then it's a whole new ball game. And everybody understands it can be computer literacy, and physical education literacy. Everything has its

own vocabulary, its own reading content. And I think we have really bought into it, I feel real good about that part. (Principal C)

Throughout February 1998, school teams from all levels came to three-hour sessions at Gheens. During that time, they chose a focus for their schools, either reading, writing or math, and they received the performance standards for their focus.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Gheens staff provided team members with opportunities to consider the standards and their implications.

We looked at the standards, tried to establish a common language around those, had teams look at their format. We talked about quality professional development and the issues of building capacity at their schools. We dealt with some leadership kinds of things. We looked at student work, did a brief analysis of that. [We] pretty well packed the hours. And then the final thing was for them to look at their Consolidated School Plan -- a draft of that was to be finished by the end of February -- to make sure that it reflected the fact that they needed to do work on performance standards. (Gheens A)

The meetings with school teams reminded Gheens staff and central office personnel about the importance of their work with performance standards. They learned, once again, that teachers did not have common expectations for student work, that there were, as yet, no common criteria for quality in assessing student work within the district.

...as we were conducting those workshops in February, we gave a sample writing piece to the teachers and asked them to tell us what performance level you think it is, what age student you think wrote this. It was amazing. People said everything from grade five to grade ten. There was no common expectation. We talked about the characteristics of a good piece of writing, what we should find in a proficient piece. And what we discovered -- and it wasn't a new discovery, but it just confirmed our thinking -- is that what's proficient to me, may not be proficient to you. And that's the whole purpose, why we need standards and why we need a common expectation for students....Teachers have to come to that realization on their own if they're ever going to design [standards-based] lessons. My hope is that the impact is going to be

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<sup>7</sup>The Superintendent's requested that each school declare a focus to insure that their standards-based work was unified across the school and central to the mission of improving student achievement. Earlier in the schoolyear, the Superintendent had declared literacy and math to be the district's focus.

reflected in their lesson plans and in the content. And unless they understand what makes a proficient piece, that can't happen. (Gheens B))

Given the district's reasonable assumption that teachers have to be engaged with the development of performance tasks in order to understand their meaning and purpose, the next phase of the roll-out engaged all teachers in working to align curriculum and develop performance tasks at their schools. Gheens leadership also reasoned that, were they to create the tasks centrally, teachers would use them as the curriculum, which they are not. However, Gheens did provide teachers with sample performance tasks and samples of student work that met the standards at a "proficient" level so that they could have exemplars of quality from which to work.

Over the next two school years, Gheens staff plan to examine the work done at the schools in order to assess progress with implementing performance standards and to develop districtwide standards for high quality work. In this regard, we cite again the comments of Deborah Walker, Executive Director of Gheens that we included in our February 1998 report.

And over this next year, [staff] will do some school level benchmarking asking [for example] what does good work look like based on these standards? And then the following year, [we will] take some of those sample performance tasks and the rubrics that go along with them that teachers have developed, select some of the really strong ones so we have them for grade level, and do a district wide assessment. And we probably could only score a sample of those. But what that would tell us is, you know, as the district is moving toward standards at each grade level, where do the problems seem to be, what kind of professional development do we need to help teachers.

### **Design and Implementation of the May Professional Development**

The next step of the roll-out was to design the work for two professional development days at the end of the school year. Lennie Hay, Pam Rogers, Jacque Austin and others at Gheens and central office created the structure for the two days.

They began by engaging the school teams in some preliminary work. Prior to the first day, the teams were asked to do a self-assessment of the school to determine where to begin the process of implementing performance standards.

We wanted them to say, "Okay, now after you attended the three hour session, which was just basically an overview, where are you? Where do

you see your staff and your faculty, [what is] the next step for you?" Some of those schools will be ready to sit down that day and start dividing into teams and start writing some performance tasks. Some of them need to start with curriculum alignment. Because this [performance standards] is not a curriculum. I had to say to them, this is not a curriculum. So some of them will need to just look at their curriculum and do a gap analysis identifying what's missing. So that's what the next step includes for them. (Gheens B)

Schools would be at different places for a number of reasons. Those that were determined to be in decline, by their KIRIS scores, had worked with their Distinguished Educator (DE) on curriculum alignment.<sup>8</sup> Teachers from such schools, would likely be ready to connect the performance standards with their curriculum and begin the process of developing performance tasks. Some schools might have departments that had begun the work of aligning curriculum; their teachers might be ready to turn to performance tasks while other departments began the work of curriculum alignment. Still other schools might not have done any curriculum alignment work.

We think it was essential that the district recognized and accounted for these differences in schools' readiness in designing the two days of professional development that followed. It helped to insure that schools began the work of standards reform at an appropriate entry point.

Education Matters observed the two-day professional development activities at two of our sample schools. We chose one school that had worked with a DE and one that had not. This enabled us to see how the work of the two days played out in light of prior experiences. Some teachers in the school that worked with the DE were poised to move forward with work related to the performance standards. However, teachers at both schools engaged in important work related to curriculum alignment and standards implementation.

The two day experience began with a video in which the Superintendent spoke about the work ahead and why it was important. He noted that teachers and principals were likely tired, given that it was the end of the year, but that they had been successful and needed to continue the hard work. Using the district's metaphor of "on the road to reform," Dr. Daeschner told the audience that it was

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<sup>8</sup>As one Clark Fellow stated, "Curriculum alignment is a process of insuring that what we are teaching is what we are assessing, and that the way we teach is congruent with our assessment format....Curriculum alignment is a process to make teaching congruent with KIRIS. It is also a way to coordinate sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teaching and content." (Lile)

time to “review our game plan and develop a map,” and that “our destination is improved student achievement.” The overall message was that a) everyone in the district would move forward by focusing on performance standards, diagnostic testing, and continuing professional development, and b) performance standards are for **all** students. Dr Daeschner stated that the product of their two days of work should be a) an action plan to revise curriculum, and b) a plan for professional development that would help teachers achieve their goals. After these introductory remarks, teachers and principals worked in department and team groups. They returned mid-morning to hear another message from Dr. Daeschner and other central office administrators and then returned for the rest of the two days to work at their schools.

In the sessions that Education Matters attended, teachers worked in department groupings to look at the standards across grade levels and they worked in teams to consider the possibility of creating integrated units. All teachers were reminded that they had a part in the school’s academic focus. For example, if a school chose reading as its focus, then all teachers were to consider themselves as math literacy or science literacy teachers. This approach helped stress the point that all teachers are to be working on the school’s academic focus.

Departments that had not worked with a DE spent their time talking about what they were to teach and how to align it across the grade levels. In one discussion, teachers pointed out that their strategy of focusing students on how to answer open-ended KIRIS questions had left them with children who knew how to construct the form of the answer but who had insufficient content knowledge to answer the questions. They realized that they had to make significant changes to the curriculum.

In one school, the Clark Fellow who was assisting with the standards work reminded teachers that they had Transformations, a document put out by Kentucky several years ago, that might be useful to them in developing performance tasks. The Fellow pointed out that Transformations a) uses “demonstrators” to indicate what students should be able to do to demonstrate their learning and b) suggests products that students might do to demonstrate learning. These are akin to the performance standards and tasks. The demonstrations are accompanied by examples of student work that meet the performance standards.

Teachers at both schools worked on curriculum alignment and/or curriculum mapping activities designed to lay out the curriculum and what students would do for the entire year. Once a department and team developed such maps, individual teachers could then work on their own unique syllabi. One short-term goal of this work is to have curriculum information available for parents by October. A more

long-term goal, of course, is to create and implement a coherent, standards-based program of instruction for grades six through eight. Although it was the end of the year and teachers probably were quite tired, we saw many put a great deal of energy into this work. Some commented that it was work they should have done a long time ago; they now realized that they had to have a real academic purpose for their assignments and for the activities in which they had students engage.

The work teachers did during the two days advanced the implementation of standards and it also highlighted differences in teachers' understanding of how teaching, rather than only curriculum content, might need to change. For example, in one math department, teachers agreed that students needed to learn vocabulary words associated with mathematics. Given the agreement, several teachers wanted to figure out **how many** words to teach each week. They thought they should coordinate the number they selected with language arts and social studies teachers so that students would not have too many words each week. Their focus was not on how to refine instruction so that students might really learn the words.

One teacher tried to shift the discussion to pedagogy, suggesting that they design curriculum to teach the words as if they were teaching a foreign language. In other words, once the children had learned the words, they would be expected to use them when discussing mathematics. If they did not use them where appropriate, they would have points deducted from their work. In this way, suggested the teacher, the words would become part of their working vocabulary, of their math literacy, and not just words on a list. From the silence that followed this suggestion, and the shift back to "numbers of words to be learned," we did not think that other members of the math department understood the importance of considering the pedagogy as well as the content. We wonder whether they are aware of the benefits of embedding the teaching of new vocabulary into on-going language use.

We want to stress that the design of the two days asked teachers to address extremely important issues. For example, all teachers were to discuss the following questions during their department meetings:

1. Are minority and majority students achieving at the same rates?
2. Where are the differences?
3. How will STEPS contribute to our closing the gap?

The reason for the discussion was the persistent gap in learning between white children and children of color. The questions were designed to get teachers to use disaggregated data in considering how to address children's learning needs. The goal of the exercise was to look at how teaching might lead to low achievement.

The desired outcome was improved instruction that would enable children of color to achieve at levels similar to those of white children.

We observed teachers discussing these questions in one of our sample schools. Teachers talked about the ways in which learning styles might be associated with race and with different levels of achievement. The emphasis was on how the student was “different” and, therefore, in need of some special help. The Clark Fellow who was at this school shifted the discussion away from a sole focus on the students and to a focus on teachers. She urged teachers to look at themselves as well as at the students, saying, “This question asks us not to look at kids, but forces us to look at our institutional practices and classroom practices to understand this gap and why it is growing.” She stressed that differences in achievement often arise because of the ways “we are teaching and motivating kids. These are kids who can do the work and who can learn, but we are not tapping into how to help them.” To the extent that these kinds of orienting statements were made across schools, and to the extent that teachers were prepared to discuss how they may be influencing low achievement, they could help teachers and principals begin to think more deeply about how they and the school can influence learning and lack of learning.<sup>9</sup>

During the two days, several departments talked about how they would be looking at student work in the coming year to learn about their progress with the performance standards. Looking at student work would be an excellent way to begin to understand what children are learning and what might help them learn better within and across racial, ethnic and gender groups. Looking at student work has the potential to keep the focus on the work and not on the students’ characteristics.

When we observed the two days of professional development in May, we saw principals engaged with their teachers in the work of curriculum alignment and performance task development. They reminded teachers of the products they were to produce from their work, participated in discussions about curriculum alignment and curriculum mapping, urged teachers to make good use of the support people who were in the building to help them, and reinforced the Superintendent’s

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<sup>9</sup>At their Middle Level Principals’ Institute in late June, principals in San Diego spent an entire day addressing issues associated with the achievement gap between children of color and white children and how the principal might work to improve student achievement. Their work was facilitated by a consultant who provided considerable insight into how the principal and the school as a whole can organize to support these children’s academic achievement. It might be useful for Louisville to talk with the Institute’s facilitator, Judy Walker, principal of Ray Kroc Middle School, to learn more about the session and determine whether it might be useful to Louisville’s middle school principals.

message about the importance of creating a coherent curriculum that was aligned with the standards from grade six through eight.

Overall, we think that the two days, viewed through the lens of two middle schools, were a promising start to what the district envisions as three years of concentrated professional development devoted to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The Superintendent, other central office administrators and principals conveyed the importance and the seriousness of the work. Teachers and principals were actively engaged with the performance standards. In collaboration with their team and department colleagues, they worked toward incorporating performance standards into curriculum development. The organization of the two days gave them the opportunity to begin this work at an appropriate place. The multi-year timeline for completing the work seems appropriate.

### **Challenges to Further Progress.**

The two professional development days revealed that the schools and district face a number of challenges as they implement standards-based reform. They include how to a) continue support for the leadership teams trained by Gheens, b) provide opportunities for teachers to learn new pedagogy and reflect on its impact with appropriate support for teachers whose content knowledge is insufficient for teaching to standards, c) discover a model for looking at student work that engages teachers in discussions of pedagogy, d) find time for all of these activities, e) provide support for students in the Novice category that does not isolate them in substantially separate, low-level classes, and f) sustain principal leadership. We write briefly about each of these challenges.

**A. Continuing Support for the Leadership Teams Trained by Gheens.** Gheens staff began to create site-based leadership capacity for standards-based reform by training principals and a set of lead teachers to support implementation of the May professional development days. Their work is supported by the School Support Resource Teachers and the Clark Fellows. Still, we think that team members will need additional training as they and their colleagues move further with the implementation of performance standards and tasks. They will need to know how to distinguish between strong and weak performance tasks; they will need to know how to work within their departments and across their teams.

As a result of watching some school-based sessions, we also realized that department chairs, whether or not they are members of the leadership team, will be crucial to the success of the overall enterprise. Some are strong teachers, knowledgeable about the implications for teaching that accompany standards; others are not. Some department chairs know how to facilitate meetings, keep

them on-track, engage **all** teachers in the work of reform, and insure that conversations stay focused on important aspects of standards-based reform including instructional practices.<sup>10</sup> Others do not. Department chairs may also need help in identifying colleagues who can support them and colleagues who need additional support to implement reform practices. These are likely to be new roles for department chairs, roles that aim to change the traditional culture of schools in which teachers work independently of one another. To further support the school-based teams and the department chairs, in particular, it might be beneficial for Gheens staff to consider how to enhance team members' capacity to deal with these and other important issues that will arise during the next steps of implementation.

**B. Opportunities for Teachers to Learn New Pedagogy and Content.** During the first two years of our evaluation, we reported that teachers understood standards-based reform to be about creating a coherent, consistent curriculum for all students. We noted that they did not usually know that the reform required changes in teaching. Now, the district is ready to deal with the fact that standards-based reform is about teaching as well as curriculum content. The district has resources to help teachers consider their pedagogy. These range from the School Support Resource Teachers, to the Clark Fellows, to the Alliances that support teachers in the four core content areas, to support provided by Gheens. Teachers also learn when they participate in their professional associations. In the context of all of these opportunities, however, we think that Louisville will need to take stock of what it has available in light of what is likely to be large numbers of teachers who will need to significantly change their practice.

One particularly difficult aspect of supporting new pedagogy derives from teachers' knowledge of their own content area. While most teachers know the content that they teach, during the process of preparing for the implementation of performance standards, administrators and Gheens staff realized that some teachers are not sufficiently grounded in their subject matter. As one Gheens staff member noted,

As I conduct these workshops with principals and teachers, some [teachers] are not very comfortable with their content knowledge. Whether they want to admit it, whether it's [at an] unconscious or conscious level with them. This [reform] is exciting to me because I believe in it and I know that it's going to make a difference. But you can't believe that and feel that kind of exhilaration or kind of excitement

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<sup>10</sup> Cadre teachers may also serve this role. However, with only two in each school and with some schools having both cadre teachers from the same discipline, they will not be able to provide sufficient support to this work.

if you're uncomfortable with your content knowledge. Teachers [who are] not really feeling comfortable about having the core content knowledge cannot teach and come up with those exciting lesson plans and knowledge work that engages kids and keeps them wanting to do the work. (Gheens B)

We know that part of the problem with content knowledge arises from teachers being assigned to teach out of their area of knowledge. For example, during one year of our evaluation, we talked with a number of social studies teachers who were not grounded in social studies content but had been assigned to that subject in order to create complete teams for each grade level. Other problems arise because many teachers were never prepared to understand or teach mathematics in the ways recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Despite attending workshops provided by the state and the district, they remained unable to implement the new teaching strategies.

What can the district do to enhance teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge? We know that the Clark Fellows, the Alliances and Gheens offerings address content as well as pedagogy. However, these opportunities do not reach most teachers. They are offered to teachers who come as individuals interested in learning more about their content area. If the district's reform strategy is to be successful, then most, if not all teachers will need to participate in professional development that can support their school-based work. We do not have a simple suggestion for addressing this need, but we have seen content-based professional development programs that may be examples of what the district could try. With respect to mathematics, for example, there are professional development programs that combine learning the content with learning new ways to teach it. Some are connected with the adoption of new texts; teachers learn to teach the new material with new approaches prior to using the text with the children. Others are connected with newly developed curricula that aim to make mathematics classrooms more interactive.<sup>11</sup>

Given the Kentucky context, we understand that the district cannot select programs and mandate participation. Schools and/or individual teachers choose to participate in such programs. However, given knowledge about such programs, coupled with team leadership at the school level and the district's focus on

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<sup>11</sup>San Diego used an approach that supported teachers in using a new text that was based on the NCTM standards. Professional development was spread over a two-year period. In Boston, an organization called TERC combines a mathematics program called "Investigations" with professional development that attends to content and pedagogy. Both approaches engage teachers in learning together and sharing their experiences using the new pedagogy.

mathematics and literacy, we imagine that some SBDMs would choose to use professional development funds for such learning opportunities. Further, given that several middle schools have already begun working together on improving mathematics instruction, the conditions may be right for a joint venture with such programs. Overall, we are suggesting a process by which the district identifies promising professional development that focuses on content as well as pedagogy and departments and schools take responsibility for selecting professional development that addresses their teachers' learning needs and engages all teachers in the work of improving instruction.

***A Word About Performance Tasks.*** We have not yet seen any of the performance tasks that teachers developed during the summer, nor have we seen any of the tasks that Gheens staff created for use during the professional development training. Therefore, we make our next comments from experience in other districts that are developing performance tasks.

We agree that Gheens staff cannot and should not provide all of the performance tasks. After all, tasks must be tied to the particular curriculum that teachers use. However, we urge Gheens staff, principals and teachers to attend to the quality of the tasks, as well as to the quality of student work associated with them, from the outset. We think this is important because there will be a tendency for teachers to want to create tasks that enable a wide range of students to succeed. After all, teachers have been grading student work on a) the quality of the work itself, b) their judgment about the students' capability, and c) the amount of effort the student brought to the task.<sup>12</sup> For the first time, they will be asked to assess student work only in relation to the standards. And they will be asked to do this for everyday work, not just for KIRIS, the state assessment. This will be extremely challenging and teachers may resist creating high quality tasks that they think their students will fail. One way to avoid this dilemma, is to create tasks that describe the components of the work -- the number of paragraphs, the thesis statement, the number of references -- without describing genuine indicators of quality. If the district pays close attention to the early phase of performance task development, it will be able to determine whether this is happening and, if it is, how to encourage teachers to develop better quality performance tasks.

**C. A Model for Looking at Student Work that Immerses Teachers in Discussions of Pedagogy.** During our spring 1998 visit, we learned that teachers will spend more time during the next several years looking at student work with an eye toward changing curriculum and instruction. This is certainly a good idea. We want to

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<sup>12</sup>See the August 1996 Baseline Report for more detail on this finding.

offer two cautions. First, Louisville's teachers have been looking at student work for several years in light of the open-response portion of the KIRIS assessment and the writing portfolio requirement. Yet, they have not, primarily, focused on instruction, as a result of this effort. Rather, we have been told that teachers paid attention to what students needed to know in order to formulate an answer to an open-response -- how to restate the question at the start of the response, how to respond to key words such as analyze, compare and contrast, and so forth. In too many instances, teachers, looking at student work in the company of colleagues, have not attended to how they teach the curriculum content. As a result, some say that the students knew how to answer the questions but had nothing to say.

Looking at student work in light of performance standards and performance tasks that are attached to everyday work, and not only to KIRIS or other end-of-the-year assessments, can be a powerful tool with which to improve teaching. In order to support this goal, however, the model for looking at student work must explicitly require teachers to address issues of teaching after they have understood the links, for example, between the assignment and the work produced.<sup>13</sup> The presence of the list of prerequisite skills lists that are part of the STEPS system can direct teachers attention to what students may still need to learn. But, they will not, by themselves, lead teachers to try alternate strategies. For this to happen, teachers need to know that there are alternate strategies and then, they need to know how to use them. It is for this reason, that the Diagnostic Test portion of STEPS will include information about "best practices."

In some schools, department chairs, colleagues, Clark Fellows, and/or School Support Resource Teachers may be able to help teachers think of or apply new strategies after they have looked at student work based on the performance standards and tasks. Without such sources of new information, it is doubtful that teachers will be able to invent new approaches to teaching.

In addition, our experience in other districts suggests that it will be important for teachers to try new strategies and then report to their colleagues on the impact of the strategies they tried. If they can do this, then their department or team can become the kind of learning community that keeps instruction at the center of its work. We imagine that this is the ultimate goal of the professional development work underway.

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<sup>13</sup>One model that meets these requirements is the one developed by Ruth Mitchell at the Education Trust. We know that some principals have the book, *Front-End Alignment*, which describes her approach to looking at student work. There are other models that the district and schools could explore. Our point is that the model must lead teachers to see the implications for practice if it is to support improved teaching and learning.

**D. Time for These Professional Development Activities.** We know that everyone in Louisville is aware of the time demands associated with the professional development required to implement performance standards and new ways of teaching. We also know that the district has an extreme shortage of substitutes which makes it almost impossible to release teachers during the school day for professional development work. In our February 1998 update report we wrote that,

As part of its commitment to educate students to the highest standards, the JCPS was seriously considering alternate calendar proposals that would result in professional development time during the school year. For example, the district was considering whether to add two days to the winter break when teachers but not students would be in attendance. These days might be used to develop curriculum or performance assessments. Students might return to school earlier in August so that they would not lose instructional time. Virtually everyone with whom we spoke supported the idea of changing the school calendar to increase the time available to teachers for professional development that focuses on curriculum, standards, and assessment. (February 1998)

It was just such a careful examination of time that enabled the Superintendent to discover the two days that were used for professional development at the end of May. We think it would make sense for SBDM teams to look at how time is used in their schools and to seek ways to re-allocate that usage so that teachers can engage in this important standards-based work.

**E. Support for Students in the Novice Category that Does Not Isolate Them in Substantially Separate, Low-level Classes.** With the Superintendent's leadership, Louisville is working hard to insure that, in short order, the district has no students achieving in the Novice category in literacy or mathematics. To support this effort, the STEPS system includes a diagnostic testing component, based on already-existing, nationally normed tests, that can pinpoint the knowledge and skill that students are missing that keeps them in the Novice category. With this information, and the associated "best practices" ideas, teachers should be better able to target instruction for these students.

We agree with this approach, but reiterate a concern that we discussed in our February 1998 update where we wrote:

The diagnostic tests will identify what the district calls "supporting skills," skills it considered to be the prior knowledge a student must have in order to participate in standards-based learning. We raised questions

about this assumption, and about the potential for the district to use the two-pillar assessment approach to, inadvertently, create a two-track educational system.<sup>14</sup> We worried about this potential at the early grades and at each of the transition grades.

[Ken] Draut [District Assessment Coordinator] and his colleagues are aware of the danger inherent in such a system and intend to insure that students in need of additional support in “basic skills” do not end up in separate classrooms where they have no access to the higher level thinking skills and content. They argue that they must hold students accountable for achieving the performance standards and that, in order to do that, they must insure that the students have the skills with which to engage in the high level work of the standards-based system.

Students certainly need to have opportunities to learn what they do not know. Our concern about the ultimate organization of such learning opportunities at the schools arises because people talk about the needed “prior knowledge” in a linear fashion: students must know the basic skills **before** they can do the work necessary for the performance standards. We are concerned that while students are learning those basic skills, they will be missing important work that is connected to standards. We stress again that it may be possible to teach the identified prior knowledge in the context of teaching to standards. Sandy Ledford assured us that this is the intent of the strategy, saying,

And here’s where the diagnostic assessment comes in. The performance standards piece says to a teacher, “In order for kid A to achieve this performance standard, these are the prerequisite skills that you must deal with while also helping the kid demonstrate proficiency of the standard by giving these kinds of activities and using these kinds of performance tasks as assessment.” Hopefully, it will get teachers to understand you can't get from diagnostic skills -- prerequisite skill areas -- to performance standards without doing some kind of safety net, [the prerequisite skills instruction], in- between.

This description supports the integration of instruction for prerequisite skills with standards-based instruction. Our concern is that teachers and principals may not know how to transform this idea into organizational practices that make it a reality. As one principal suggests, it would be possible to create some form of tracking from this initiative.

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<sup>14</sup>The system was called “two-pillared” with one pillar the diagnostic testing and the other the performance standards and tasks.

And, you know, it's going to come back to the same thing, to tracking, if we aren't careful. And I told [central office administrator], it's going to be fine identifying these kids. But, we don't want to get back into tracking kids, for pete's sake. And it could possibly happen. I mean, I could see that happening if principals don't guard against that. (Principal B)

We know that the district intends to guard against this outcome. We agree that students need the kind of targeted support that the diagnostic system and accompanying teacher strategies are designed to provide. Such support is all the more important in light of the district's adoption of stringent criteria for high school graduation. And, it is extremely important because, according to district administrators, many of the children who need to learn prerequisite skills are children of color. To be successful with this approach, however, we think the district will need to help teachers and principals create organizational arrangements within and between classrooms, before and after school, that enable students to learn prerequisite skills while they engage in the high level work associated with performance standards.

**F. Sustained Principal Leadership.** Everyone with whom we spoke at Gheens, central office and the schools reported that the district continues to emphasize the centrality of principals to the successful roll-out of standards-based reform.

We're trying to really push the principals to be the leader here. I feel very strongly that if the principal is not on board with this [reform agenda], it's not going to go anywhere. The specialists cannot be out there in the school everyday. I can't be out there at the school everyday. The superintendent cannot [be there]. The principal is the one who has to really drive this work. Because even when the specialist goes out there, [and I'm] out there providing support, when we leave and they close the door, the principal is the one that has to make sure that the work continues. (Gheens B)

Over and over again we heard Gheens and central office staff say that encouragement for the work of reform must occur at the building level and that the principal is the key player in the effort. Principals are fully aware that their roles are changing and that they are expected to direct their attention to teaching and learning.

There's that push to nudge us into the arena of actually physically doing it and instructing. And they're coming out with all kinds of check sheets

of what a classroom should look like, what you should look for in a classroom, in a reading classroom, in a social studies classroom, in a science classroom. So, we're getting a lot of that. (Principal C)

The principals with whom we spoke are pleased with this emphasis and with their new knowledge and roles. They were eloquent about what they were learning, how they could use that learning, and about the support they were receiving from the district.

And so we began, this year, to have professional development in the afternoon. [It was] optional; if people don't want to stay they don't, but we do. And we've had the writing specialist and the reading specialist come [to our meetings] periodically to give us a principal walk-thru observation instrument, [with what] to look for, in a print-rich environment with writing across the content area, what it would look like in October and November and December. We've brought our own writing portfolios to the meetings, and the writing specialist just guided us through what you can do with fifteen minutes in a writing classroom. You can pick up these portfolios; you can look at the table of contents. If you see this in the table in the contents, you know you've got a content teacher who knows what she's doing. If you see this, that's a flag to go look at the content piece. But if the content pieces look like this, then you know you've got somebody that's aware of the expectations. If they're doing this, they don't have that awareness. So, what they were doing was giving us some quick look-fors in the writing portfolio. And again, the reading specialist has been instrumental in helping a lot of us buy the right stuff to give to our teachers, and has been on our task force here, at the local school level, to guide us in getting the reading inventory done and to get the materials and the training up and running with the teachers....For professional development, I can call on Ken Draut. He's helped me a lot with assessment. And when he comes in and leads something with my teachers, then I'm going to know how to do it next time. I didn't know how to do a reading inventory, but the central office people came and figured it out for me, so now we know how to do it....When the central office staff responds, which they have been doing, I've been really overwhelmed by some of the help I've had....I need to do it, it's helped me. I need to do it [in the school] rather than go to some hotel and talk about how to analyze data, and it's not connected with the real work. It's when I'm dealing with my real stuff, then, if I have a cadre of people I can call on, who have at their fingertips some awareness and analysis of instructional practices, that's powerful. And we've been beginning to do that, and it's a whole different way of teacher and

principal professional development. We've got some people that are pretty closely linked to the real work, and so they've had the ability to design some stuff to do, and it's been right on. It's the best stuff we've done. (Principal E)

This principal values the professional development because it a) is tightly connected to important, real work for the school, and b) engages her in learning by doing the work of instructional leadership. These two attributes of principal professional development are not happening by accident. They undergird the district's approach. We noted this earlier when we reported that principals had to present the performance standards to the teachers as a way to come to an understanding of them and, at the same time, practice the instructional leadership role. We hear the theme again in the next two administrators' comments.

I think principals need some work in actually doing the kind of work we're going to be asking the teachers to do. To really sit down, look at the documents, develop some strategies for actually aligning those performance standards with the curriculum work they've done in their buildings. I personally think they need some work in designing the performance assessment tasks. So just some of the basic things that they're going to be expecting teachers to do. They need to be comfortable, knowing enough to support them (Central Office A)

My belief is that [full teacher buy-in] will only happen if, principals, when they go into classrooms, can have real conversations about the work that teachers are doing in the classroom. And not in a generic sense, but what that teacher's practice is; how that practice impacts the learning that's taking place in the classroom. So that's why it's just so important for us to keep doing what we're doing around the principal work. (Central Office B)

We wrote about principals' positive reactions to the early stages of instructionally focused professional development in our February 1998 update. Data from our March site visit reveal that principals continue to characterize their professional development as powerful and pertinent. Their descriptions reveal that they are learning about instruction and using what they know. The district would do well to continue down the path it has chosen for principal professional development.

### **Summary: Moving Ahead with Standards Reform**

Louisville has come a long way since Education Matters, Inc. began evaluating its progress with middle-school standards-based reform. The district now has an

implementation strategy that rests squarely on professional development to support improved achievement in literacy and mathematics. The district has a process for training people in what they need to know, a testing program that supports and extends KIRIS, and a set of activities that involve everyone in the work of improving achievement. People with whom we spoke at the schools, at Gheens and at Central Office are clear about what they need to do to support the process. They are pleased that the district has taken such a clear, coherent stance on reform and look forward to seeing its impact on student achievement.

### **III. ADDITIONAL DISTRICT INVOLVEMENT WITH SCHOOLS: AN UPDATE**

When we made our November 1997 site visit to Louisville, the district was planning a strategy called the School and District Dialogue Process. The process was one part of the district's effort to focus schools and all support personnel on increasing student achievement. We learned that the "process is designed to strengthen communication between the schools and central office so that a) central office has appropriate and sufficient knowledge of the issues facing schools and the ways in which they are trying to address them, and b) central office and the schools are better able to work together toward achieving the district's vision."<sup>15</sup> According to Sandy Ledford,

These dialogue sessions are not for any auditing purposes. They are simply an opportunity for conversation so central office staff can better understand the direction schools are taking and better understand areas where schools may need central office assistance. (Memo from Sandy Ledford to Middle School Principals, 10/8/97)

The dialogue process has three stages. In the first, called the pre-dialogue phase, the district team of four or five people reviews a school's data in order to develop a focus for the Dialogue. The school team, usually made up of the principal, a parent, a teacher member of the SBDM council, and another teacher, also reviews the data with the goal of identifying strengths, weaknesses and issues it wants to discuss. During the Dialogue, which takes place after school and lasts for 90 minutes, the district team asks questions about the data and helps the school team generate ideas about connections in the data and reasons for the results. The school team answers the district team's questions and can describe ways in which it has been addressing issues. When the formal Dialogue is over, the district team meets to discuss what it learned and to prepare a one-page report that summarizes the Dialogue, notes the school's strengths and makes suggestions to address areas of

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<sup>15</sup> This statement and the description of the Dialogue process which follows are taken from Education Matters' February 1998 update report.

concern. This report is then sent to the school. The school completes a feedback form about the Dialogue process which it sends to the Dialogue Team chairperson.

In March 1998, we asked principals to talk about their experience with the Dialogue Process. Their comments reveal that they were pleased with the process and hoped it would continue.

I think what I was really impressed with was that everybody on the Dialogue team -- and we had the Superintendent, and Sandy Ledford, and Jean Green, and those people knew all this stuff about us. They knew all this stuff; they had actually read last year's STP (School Transformation Plan) and our STP was long -- even the Superintendent said it was probably a tad too long. And it was just really nice to know that they had as much information about us as we did. And they were really supportive, and, while they made suggestions, they never made us feel like we were doing something wrong. They were very supportive.  
(Principal C)

It was really an opportunity for us to talk a little bit about ourselves and it was very affirming, I guess, or validating. They would ask, "Well, we don't know if this is what you mean, but..." And we'd say, "Well, it's exactly what we mean." I think that's got some real potential. It got people into the building. Gave our staff an opportunity [to shine]. And, of course, their main thing is, "How in the world did you all get your test scores so high." And my main reaction was, "I really don't know." Oh, well. I told them what I hope. I hope it's this emphasis and that emphasis and that, you know. But it was really affirming. And I think as that grows, as those questions [the team asks] maybe become more probing, it will be a pretty neat process. If nothing else, it gets folks in central office into the schools and lets them see what is really out there and going on. Because they don't get an opportunity to do that and they need to. They really need to. (Principal B)

It was a feel good kind of thing for us. Not that we wanted to do it necessarily. I mean, it wasn't something that we thought, "Man, it's going to be great. Can't wait to do this." We were going to do some preparation to do that, even though they said, "Don't prepare for it." I mean, who's not going to prepare something, you know? So I think we feel confirmed in the things we were doing. Because we heard some really good comments from the team. (Principal D)

Central office administrators are also pleased with the Dialogue Process and plan to continue it during the 1998-1999 schoolyear.

People who normally don't get into schools really appreciated having the opportunity to talk to school-based people about what they were doing. Even though a little piece was missing because they didn't have the background [from walking through the school], they just felt that it was invaluable to get out there. And the folks in the schools were saying it was nice to see, for example, the director of transportation and facilities in our school and not just talking about buses, but talking about student achievement. (Central Office B)

To continue and strengthen the Dialogue Process, the district plans to a) keep the dialogue team's membership the same for each school, b) develop questions for the dialogue that probe deeper into the school's program especially in light of differences in learning outcomes between children of color and white children, and c) have team members do a walk-through prior to the after-school dialogue so that team members develop first-hand views of what classrooms and teaching look like. This will put them in a stronger position to discuss the school's Consolidated Plan in light of their own observations. Principals were aware of the plan for walk-throughs and, for the most part, thought they would enrich the Dialogue Process.

Central office administrators and Gheens staff members already have some experience with walk-throughs, having conducted a series of them during the 1997-1998 schoolyear. At that time, the walk-throughs were done, in large part, to make district personnel more familiar with the schools and to collect information that would spark further school-based discussions about instruction. Walk-throughs were not designed to evaluate teaching. However, they gave participants insight into the range of practices in use in the schools. At the end of the walk-throughs, principals received a report on the observers' conclusions which they were to share with their teachers. Reports were designed to provide an overview of what the school reflected during the walk-through.

It's a walk through. It's real quick. But we look at things like, in the classroom, is there student work displayed? Is it current student work? What type of work gets displayed? And then of course we get a chance to hear a little bit about what's going on. So we can see if the teacher is a lecture type or if there is opportunity for students to break up into cooperative learning groups, if there's small groups going on. You can get a very good sense. And so we write our responses and give those to the principal. Then we debrief. We bring the principal in and we kind of tell her what we saw and what everyone saw. And we are not afraid to

mention the problems that we see...We give them concrete examples of what we have observed. But we frame it by saying, "We know it was a walk through. We know it was just a quick look, but this was our perception and this is what we observed." (Gheens B)

It would seem that adding the walk-throughs to the Dialogue Process would provide principals and teachers with an external perspective on their schools and strengthen the dialogue discussions.

Louisville has yet another strategy designed to bring the combined knowledge and skill of Gheens and central office personnel to bear on school reform. It has created 35 teams of support staff from across the district's programs and content areas and has assigned each team to help one of 35 schools. Teams include Clark Fellows, School Support Resource Teachers, Title I staff, Special Education staff as well as members of other units. Their job, according to Sandy Ledford, is to meet periodically as a team to help address issues at their assigned school.<sup>16</sup> With this design, support people work with a range of colleagues who are outside their area of specialization. To insure that there is common understanding of what the district is doing with respect to implementing reform, all Gheens staff members meet periodically to learn about the district's efforts.

And I think the whole of what we're trying to do, which is a big order, is call together all the instructional support people from across the district on a somewhat regular basis so that we are learning and talking the same language and supporting folks in similar ways. For instance, the Title I folks attend district professional development that we provide for ourselves and hear the message [we hear]. So when they go to talk to a staff on Title I issues, they'll be delivering a similar message about professional development, about performance standards, about the principal's role and the vision. And we work real closely, of course, with the Clark folks. The Title folks, the special education folks have been meeting with us and will continue [to do so]. The technology folks, too. So I think that's another way that all the folks entering this building in any given week, they've had some similar experiences and have a similar message. (Gheens C)

We've been doing professional development in reading, writing, and math at Gheens. And we are trying very hard to keep everyone communicating about all the pieces of the professional development, how it's gone in

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<sup>16</sup>The 35 schools have low KIRIS scores. They usually have other demographic factors, such as high numbers of students on free and reduced lunch and high mobility rates, as well.

February, getting their input into the work and what it should look like. And so every Friday now is just jammed full of time to work together. We're also looking towards summer, to some intense time to work with district level leadership to advance content knowledge. We cannot do that during the school year. All of us at Gheens, Title I, the computer ed, the exceptional children, pre-school. We're trying to keep in touch with all of those groups. (Gheens A)

This strategy is important in its own right; it insures that all staff members who have a role in supporting schools have the same information base from which to work. It is especially important in light of the team support structure that the district has put in place.

Taken together, the District Dialogue Process, the walk-throughs and the professional development opportunities for all Gheens staff demonstrate the district's commitment to have everyone involved with instruction. The support that the district provides for everyone involved in this work bodes well for its impact on schools and, therefore, on children's achievement.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

This update report highlights Louisville's approach to supporting standards-based reform. It provides examples of strategies and activities that were in the formative stage when we visited the district in November 1997 and were being implemented when we returned in March and again in May 1998. As such, the report is designed to demonstrate that the district is moving forward with a reform strategy that focuses central office administrators, Gheens staff, principals and teachers on the work of improving teaching and learning. The report also notes that everyone with whom we spoke applauds the district's approach for its clarity, comprehensiveness, and thoughtful design. There is still a great deal of work that remains to be designed and implemented. We imagine that some strategies will need to be refined and others may be replaced with new approaches. That should not pose problems, however, because our data suggest that the district is in the mode of learning from its strategies.

In this report, we have not addressed the ways in which district and school-level efforts are influencing teachers' work with students and with their colleagues. Although we did not observe teaching during the last school year, we did speak with teachers at our four sample schools during both of our site visits. We know that they have been devoting considerable time to activities that focus on teaching and learning. Teachers at Conway and Farnsley, the two schools that had a DE, spent great amounts of time aligning their curriculum and making difficult decisions

about who would teach which content at which grade levels so that students would have a complete, coherent education in each of the content areas. Along with considering content, teachers considered pedagogy. Many told us that they were using more active teaching strategies and that they were finding them beneficial. Although some complained about the amount of work they had to do as a result of their KIRIS status, they suggested that, in the end, the work was beneficial, that it was work likely to help them help students. Teachers at Johnson and Lassiter also worked on curriculum and instruction. In some cases, teams worked to create interdisciplinary units that would engage students and enable them to see links between the content areas. Math teachers from both schools participated in efforts to upgrade the mathematics taught at their schools. In some departments, teachers began to look at each other's teaching strategies in order to understand why some teachers were more successful than others in enabling students to score well on the KIRIS assessment. Teachers and principals at all four schools were spending a great deal of time trying to improve curriculum, instruction and learning. We will observe classrooms during our Fall 1998 site visit and in our next update report, February 1999, we will report on the impact of these efforts to forward standards-based reform at the schools.