

“Toward a Strategic Use of Resources In Saint Paul Public Schools”

*A Review of the SPPS FY2006
Spending Strategy with Recommendations*

Acknowledgements

This analysis was conducted by Education Resource Strategies, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping create systems of excellent urban schools. The primary authors, Stephen Frank and Keri Munkwitz received significant help from Nicole Ireland, Jonathan Travers, Simmons Lettre and the rest of the ERS team. Special thanks go to the dozens of Saint Paul Public School officials who worked tirelessly to provide data, to review multiple drafts of this work, and to challenge us to continually improve our analysis. Without their active participation in the process, this report would have been impossible. The Saint Paul based corporate donor who funded this work wishes to remain anonymous but has our thanks as well.

“Toward a Strategic Use of Resources In Saint Paul Public Schools” Executive Summary

In the Fall of 2006, Education Resource Strategies (ERS), a nation-wide leader in helping school systems make the most of their resources, was invited by Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) to study the use of resources in the district and create priority recommendations to inform the district’s strategic plan. Saint Paul is in a situation where overall enrollment is declining while key subgroups (students in poverty, English language learners, students with disabilities, and students of color) are increasing as a percentage of district enrollment. In this context, our analysis focused on three key questions:

- How much money does SPSS spend and how are the resources distributed?
- Does SPPS empower strategic use of school-level resources to improve student performance?
- Does SPPS use district resources in a way that supports schools in promoting student success?

This report summarizes ERS’ key findings and priority recommendations regarding strategic resource use in SPPS.

I. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on extensive analysis of FY 06 budgets, interviews with leaders across the district and at the school level and participation in working sessions with key district leaders, ERS recommends the following key steps to build on Saint Paul’s existing strengths and move toward even more strategic use of resources to improve student learning in SPPS.

- 1 To the extent possible, model the provision of special education services after the highly successful “pull-in” flexible grouping model used by Saint Paul’s English Language Learner program. This will require the cross-certification of some resource teachers and a new professional development strategy for all of them.
- 2 Foster accountability for the strategic use of school-level resources by clearly defining standards for school-level instruction and resource use including professional development, providing models of effective school organization (that specify practices such as flexible grouping and bell schedules), creating regular reports that review key resource metrics, and working closely with principals to ensure understanding and implementation. Integrate the accountability system with the school improvement planning process and with supervision and evaluation of principals and teachers.
- 3 Provide training and tools for principals and assistant principals regarding instruction and the strategic use of resources that are aligned with the accountability system and school models introduced in the new accountability system.
- 4 Develop a district-wide professional development strategy that aligns resources to address district priorities while adjusting for school level needs and performance and that includes teams of teachers using formative assessments in weekly collaborative planning. The district needs to increase spending on expert content and/or pedagogical support for each teacher.

II. SUMMARY-LEVEL FINDINGS

A. How much does SPPS spend and how are resources distributed?

In FY 2005-06, Saint Paul Public Schools had a total K-12 operating budget of \$505.3 million.¹ The average cost per pupil is \$12.4K, which is the median of other urban districts ERS has studied. After weighting for student needs, we find that SPPS spends \$7.8K per pupil on “regular education” students and \$8.8K per pupil on ELL students. The District also receives \$83 million, or \$2.9K per pupil, in categorical funds to provide assistance to students meeting federal poverty guidelines or in high-poverty schools. Spending on students with disabilities (SWD) is much higher and varies according to placement setting (level) and primary disability:

- Level 1 (students are outside of the regular classroom less than 21 percent of the day) is \$15.5K per pupil
- Level 2 (students are in a resource room between 21 percent and 60 percent of the school day) is \$19.0K per pupil
- Level 3 and 4 (self-contained) ranges from \$21.5K per pupil to \$59.9K per pupil, with an average of \$34.4K per pupil

Spending also varies by school type. After adjusting for student needs, we find that SPPS spending by school type is as follows:

- \$12.7K per pupil at Elementary schools
- \$11.5K per pupil at Middle/Jr. High schools
- \$10.1K per pupil at Sr. High schools
- \$11.4 per pupil at the K-12 span school
- \$14.0K per pupil at Area Learning Centers (ALC’s)

Comparing Saint Paul’s spending patterns to that of urban districts across the country, we find that SPPS spends about the same on regular education, ELL, and “Students with Disabilities” (SWD) resources students as comparison districts. However, SPPS spends more than comparison districts on its SWD self-contained students and receives more funding for poverty students.

Looking across school type, schools with similar student populations receive the same level of resources—any differences in funding levels can be explained by school size (small schools spread overhead costs across fewer students) and by the percentage of students in poverty. The district allocates revenues directly to schools by a formula that recognizes student needs and that (by state law) awards incrementally more funds to schools with high concentrations of poverty.

Finally, in examining the amount of money allocated to the school site and the flexibility school leaders have to use that money to address specific school needs, analysis showed that Saint Paul reports 66% of resources at school level during the budget process and provides significant flexibility to schools to use these resources at their discretion. In total we tracked 94% of spending to schools. This includes shared services, staff, materials and equipment.

¹ The K-12 operating budget excludes capital, pre-K, adult education, tuition payments for privately place special education students, charter schools, private and parochial schools, EMID, and other pass-throughs.

B. Does SPPS empower strategic use of school-level resources to improve student performance?

Analysis shows that some schools and programs already use resources as a strategic lever for improved school performance. For example, Saint Paul's English Language Learner (ELL) model integrates supplemental resources into the regular education environment in ways that focus on literacy and that promote teacher collaboration. However, secondary schools, particularly middle schools, may have an opportunity to improve resource use, as they currently have high teacher loads and spend less time on literacy and math, despite significant numbers of students who struggle in these important subjects.

In examining how SPPS empowers principals to use resources effectively, we find that while principals and local site councils appear to have significant discretion and flexibility over portions of the school budget, they are not supported with training, tools, school-design templates or held accountable for effective resource use with clear standards for resource use and regular reviews of whether resources are being used in ways suggested by research.

C. Does SPPS organize district resources to support schools in improving instruction?

Benchmarks with other districts suggest that SPPS has an overall strong use of resources but also highlighted a few key areas where district resources could be reallocated to higher priority activities. For example, our analysis shows that SPPS spends much less than other districts on professional development activities (both with and without contract time). And while spending is fairly consolidated across twelve different initiatives, it is unclear whether or not these initiatives are focused on the district's highest priority needs. The District needs to invest in a coherent, multi-year strategy for professional development that supports teachers, principals and assistant principals.

“Toward a Strategic Use of Resources In Saint Paul Public Schools”

A Review of the SPPS FY06 Spending Strategy with Recommendations

Full Report

In June of 2006, Education Resource Strategies (ERS), a nation-wide leader in helping school systems make the most of their resources, was invited by Meria Carstarphen, newly appointed superintendent of Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) to study the use of resources in the district and create priority recommendations to inform the district’s strategic plan. For the purpose of this discussion, “resources” is defined as time, people, and money. In addition to this report, we have presented the district leadership team with a slide presentation, a compilation of the most important data and charts that were presented to the Saint Paul Public School System over the course of this project.

I. DISTRICT BACKGROUND

Saint Paul Public Schools has a diverse student body of approximately 40,700 students including

- 41% regular education students
- 42% English language learners (ELL)
- 17% students with disabilities (SWD)
- 4% on self-contained settings (1,430)
- 13% in settings that are not self-contained
- 71% students in poverty²

Over the past eight years, total enrollment has declined by approximately 4,200 students, partly due to the increase in charter schools. At this same time, the school system has seen increases in key student subgroups as a percentage of overall enrollment. Students in poverty increased from 63% to 71%, ELL students increased from 30% to 41% and special education students increased from 15% to 18%. Because these students typically require additional resources to attain high standards, this will put budget pressure on the Saint Paul school system and makes it critical that the district use these resources wisely.

The District met student performance targets in 2005 and 2006 as measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), with 70 percent of the district’s 55 traditional schools meeting AYP improvement targets in both reading and math.³

SPPS enjoys strong community support as evidenced by the recent passage of a \$30 million referendum per year for the next six years. The Saint Paul community has a strong history of supporting innovation and reform. Key stakeholders express pride that Saint Paul was a leading adopter of school choice, which has become part of the district’s identity and culture.

² Meet federal poverty guidelines to be eligible for free or reduced-priced meals

³ Excludes Area Learning Centers and the Bridgeview special Education site;

Source: ERS analysis of Saint Paul Public Schools and the Minnesota Department of Education AYP Reports.

II. METHODS

In this context, our analysis focused on three key questions and related sub-questions:

A. How much does SPPS spend on each type of student and school and how are resources distributed?

- How much does the district spend overall?
- How much does the district spend to support students with greater needs?
- Do schools with similar student populations receive the same level of resources?
- Are there additional resources that could be awarded to school sites or made more flexible? If so how much?

B. Does SPPS empower school leaders to use their resources strategically?

- Do schools currently organize resources in ways likely to improve student performance?
- Do schools have the flexibility necessary to reorganize resources to meet their school's specific needs?
- Do school leaders have the right set of knowledge and skills to use resources strategically, and are they well supported (tools, training, model schedules) in their efforts?
- Has the district established a system of reciprocal accountability that promotes joint problem solving with regard to resource use in schools?

C. Does SPPS use district resources in a way that supports improved teaching and learning?

- Does spending on district-level activities maximize resources available for improving instruction and align with a coherent strategy for ensuring excellence and equity?

In order to answer these research questions, ERS conducted an in-depth analysis of the District's spending patterns and use of school-level resources. Specifically, ERS:

- Visited the district on eight separate occasions and interviewed dozens of district and school leaders in virtually every department.
- Gathered data from a variety of sources including the student information system, the payroll system, expenditure reports, human resources information, budget reports, special education enrollment files, and the student master course schedule. This information was supplemented with interviews at several levels of the system.
- Merged the payroll, expenditure and human resources files to create a detailed master database of K-12 operating budget and expenditures for FY 2005-06.
- Conducted interviews to better understand the District's operations and determine appropriate methods to allocate costs.
- Created reports of cost per pupil at each school, capturing the cost of regular education students as well as those receiving supplemental funds such as ELL students and students with disabilities.
- Used the cost per pupil data to create "weights" that help us compare whether funding is equitable across schools after accounting for student needs.
- Analyzed the District's course schedule data to understand the use of student time at each school and across types of schools.
- Compared Saint Paul to other "benchmark" large urban districts that ERS has studied.
- Synthesized data and presented interim status reports to the Saint Paul Public Schools leadership team and key community stakeholders, including the Citizens Budget and Finance Advisory Committee, the Joint Property Tax Advisory Committee, the Capitol City Partnership, and the Funder's Organization.

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

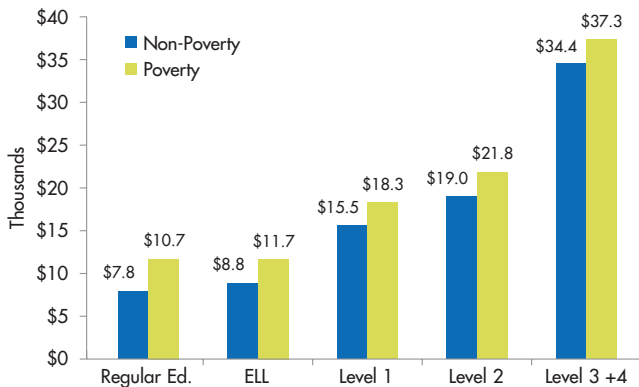
A. How much does SPPS spend on each type of student and school and how are resources distributed?

Spending by Type of Student

In FY 2005-06, Saint Paul Public Schools had a total K-12 operating budget of \$505.3 million.⁴ The average cost per pupil is \$12.4K, which is the median of other urban districts ERS has studied. We find that SPPS spends \$7.8K per pupil on “regular education” students and \$8.8K per pupil on English language learner students. The District also receives \$83 million, or \$2.9K per pupil, in categorical funds to provide assistance to students meeting federal poverty guidelines or in high-poverty schools. Spending on students with disabilities (SWD) is much higher and varies according to placement setting (level) and primary disability:

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Fully Allocated \$/Pupil



Comparing Saint Paul’s level of spending to other urban districts ERS has studied, we find that per pupil spending for regular education, ELL and SWD resource students is in line with other urban districts.

However, spending on SWD self-contained students is much higher than comparison districts for two primary reasons. First, SPPS invests heavily in SWD Instructional Aides, spending 20% (\$18 Million) of its total special education budget to fund these positions. To compare, benchmark districts spend 8% (District of Columbia), 11% (Chicago Public Schools) and 14% (Rochester City School District) on SWD Instructional Aides. We often find that districts hire additional SWD aides to address a teacher

shortage; however, spending on special education teachers is in line with (similar to) spending in these other districts. This suggests that the use of Aides may be excessive in SPPS. The Saint Paul Public School system has already begun to address this issue by trimming the overall special education budget by \$4.8 million in FY2006-07, which included a reduction in the total number of Instructional Aides.

Second, a disproportionately high percentage of middle school African-American males are diagnosed as “Emotionally Behaviorally Disturbed” (EBD) and referred to special education. This situation occurs in many urban districts and may suggest a lack of training for teachers

⁴ The K-12 operating budget excludes capital, pre-K, adult education, tuition payments for privately place special education students, charter schools, private and parochial schools, EMID, and other pass-throughs.

and/or bias during the referral and assessment process. Notably, the district is taking steps to address this issue by conducting pre-referral interventions, teacher staff development, and data collection and analysis. SPPS reports that the EBD referral rate has been reduced by nearly 50% in the past year.

Spending by Type of School

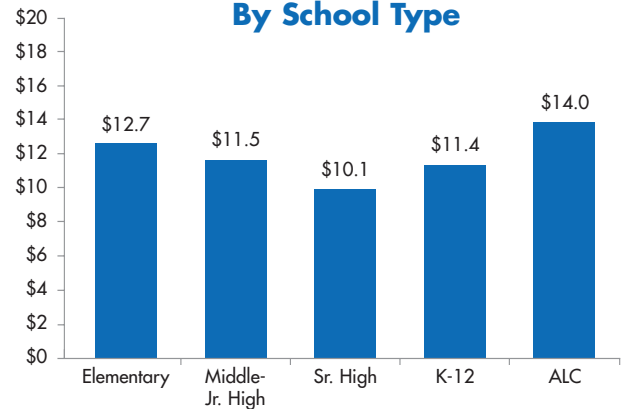
We also analyzed spending by school type—for example elementary, middle, and high schools—and examined whether or not schools with similar student populations receive the same level of resources. When we compare spending from one school to another (school-to-school equity), we must first adjust for the fact that all schools have different student populations and that the needs of various school populations can vary significantly. So first we make an adjustment for student needs.⁵ After we do this, we find that SPPS spends:⁶

- \$12.7K per pupil at Elementary schools
- \$11.5K per pupil at Middle/Jr. High schools
- \$10.1K per pupil at Sr. High schools
- \$11.4 per pupil at the K-12 span school
- \$14.0K per pupil at Area Learning Centers (ALC's)⁷

This spending pattern reflects SPPS' deliberate and strategic choice to invest more resources in elementary schools and ALC's than in other schools. Overall, these decisions seem to reflect a sound instructional strategy. ERS notes, however, that the amount of the difference between elementary schools and high schools is higher than seen in other districts. To the extent that the district wants to focus on improving high-school performance, it might discuss whether or not it wants to continue such a significant focus on elementary schools.

We conclude that there is a high degree of equity among schools with similar student populations. The differences in funding levels that do exist are due primarily to a) school size (smaller schools spread administrative overhead costs across fewer students); and b) concentration of students in poverty (by state formula, schools with higher concentrations of students in poverty receive more supplemental poverty dollars on a per pupil basis).

**School Attributed \$/Per Pupil
By School Type**



⁵ We adjust for student needs using the “weights” calculated previously for each student group. For instance, if Saint Paul, on average spends 10% more for English Learners then each school should receive 10% more for each English Learner in the student population. We adjust the number of students at each school so that we can determine whether schools are receiving an equivalent amount of money given the types of students they serve. This process is called “weighting” students or “adjusting for needs.”

⁶ Intra-district comparisons are based on school-attributed dollars only.

⁷ Area Learning Centers (ALCs) offer alternative learning programs that are designed to meet the unique needs of different types of students in a non-traditional setting. They include AGAPE (for pregnant and parenting teens), BESTT (for 7th and 8th graders not meeting the criteria for high school), Community School (11th and 12th graders, and 5th year seniors on a full and part-time basis), Creative Arts HS (for students with a strong interest in graphic and performing arts), LEAP (for ELL students), Transition for Success (for students transition out of correctional facilities), and Unidale (for students lacking credits).

Flexibility of Resource Distribution

ERS began our analysis of flexibility by first analyzing how many resources (time, people, and money) are distributed directly to schools (reported on school budgets) and whether schools have the flexibility to spend these resources in support of a coherent instructional vision. ERS found that SPPS reported 66% of the operating budget at the school level, which is the median of other urban district's ERS has studied. We also asked how much of the budget is eventually spent (expended) in schools. Overall, we traced 94% of the expenditures to schools.

Ninety-four percent is high and represents a district strength: SPPS keeps its administrative structure relatively lean and focuses funds on schools. The district might consider increasing the amount of school-level expenses that are initially budgeted to specific schools. However, in general we did not see lack of flexibility around school-level resource use to be a significant barrier to strategic use of resources in Saint Paul Public Schools. Rather, in the case of SPPS, the larger issue was that the district has not invested sufficiently in support or accountability structures to ensure the strategic use of these resources, resulting in inconsistent or ineffective practices. We discuss this in more detail in the next section as it is one of our key findings.

B. Does SPPS empower school leaders to use their resources strategically?

For 15 years, Education Resource Strategies has been studying and working with hundreds of schools in urban districts across the country to understand how district and school leaders use their resources to improve learning. Despite differences in size, student population, geography and school type, we find that high performing schools consistently use and organize their time, people, and money to:

- 1. Invest to continuously improve teacher quality through hiring, professional development, job structure, and common planning time.** These schools hire and organize their staff to fit school needs, invest in well-designed professional development that uses classroom-based expert support, schedule teacher collaborative planning time that is used to improve instruction and promote individual teacher growth.
- 2. Create individual attention and personal learning environments.** High performing schools create individual attention by assessing student learning and adjusting instruction based on findings, creating smaller group sizes and reduced teacher loads in high need areas, and organizing structures that foster personal relationships between students and teachers.
- 3. Use student time strategically emphasizing core academics and literacy.** These schools maximize the time students spend on academic subjects (often including blocks of uninterrupted learning time) and vary time and instructional program to insure all students meet rigorous academic standards.
- 4. Flexibly organize to maximize resources for instructional design.** Finally, high performing schools define and refine their organizational design to fit student and teacher needs; use flexible job definition, work schedules, and part-time staff; and invest to leverage expertise inside and outside the school organization.⁸

⁸ (Miles & Frank, 2007)

To examine whether Saint Paul empowers school leaders to use their resources strategically, we first examined how schools currently use their time, people and money and compared these findings to patterns of resource use often seen in high performing schools as discussed above. We then explored whether SPPS provides school leaders with the flexibility, support, and accountability they need to use their resources strategically and effectively. This analysis identified several district strengths as well as some opportunities for reorganizing around these research-based principles.

Resource Use in Elementary Schools

Overall, resource use in elementary schools is a district strength. Elementary schools use several resource strategies that are consistent with patterns seen in high performing schools. For example, they focus a tremendous amount of time literacy and math. They also use supplemental resources to create small groups for literacy instruction through the English Language Learner (ELL) model. Nationally recognized for narrowing the achievement gap between English-language learners and native speakers, this model's team-teaching approach pairs an English Language teacher with the homeroom education teachers for up to 90 minute sessions, several times per week. This strategy, called a "pull-in" approach, allows two teachers to provide individual attention and targeted instruction to small groups of students (7-9 students per group) during literacy blocks. Not only does this benefit students by giving them lessons based on their individual needs, it also maximizes time in literacy and promotes teacher collaboration. This program is a core strength of the districts' elementary schools.

To the extent possible, **ERS recommends that Saint Paul Public Schools model the district's special education services after the ELL "pull-in" model.** Currently, the District provides services to students with disabilities in a way that is consistent with the State's required staffing levels and related service standards and based on the student's classification and in accordance with their Individual Education Plan (IEP). These services are often delivered outside of the regular classroom and often unrelated to the lessons of the regular school day. However, this service delivery model, which is typical of many districts, tends to pull students, resources and accountability outside of the general education classroom, ultimately fragmenting responsibility for student learning.

By integrating supplemental resources into the regular education classroom, SPPS could leverage the complete set of school resources to better serve *all* students. Using this model, the regular education and special education teachers would work together to teach all students in a shared classroom, very much like the ELL model. Flexibly organizing students into smaller groups according to the specific concept or skill they are learning allows for customized attention in literacy and/or math. Both teachers would be responsible for instruction planning and delivery, student achievement, assessment, and classroom management. Of course, this will require the cross certification of some resource teachers and a new professional development strategy to address the needs of all of them (discussed further in Section C). Implementation of this model will be most successful if it is phased-in at the elementary schools first, where the ELL model is already well integrated.

While district elementary schools are successfully addressing literacy in classrooms, analysis shows additional opportunities for reallocating resources to support student learning. For example, supplemental resources for other subjects are not regularly integrated into the classroom. Also, formative assessments are routinely used in literacy (again, a strength of the ELL model), but they are not widely used in math. Further, many schools lack the weekly time needed for teachers to meet and share results of assessments and instructional strategies.

ERS recommends that SPPS work with the union to implement weekly sessions of collaborative planning time for grade-level teachers across the system as soon as possible. We further recommend that these sessions be ninety minutes in duration and be staggered so that teacher teams are off at different points during the school day and week. This will facilitate access to the teams by support professionals such as coaches or other training providers. Some of these collaborative sessions can replace existing PD time but there may also need to be a reallocation of resources to finance part of the cost of this effort.

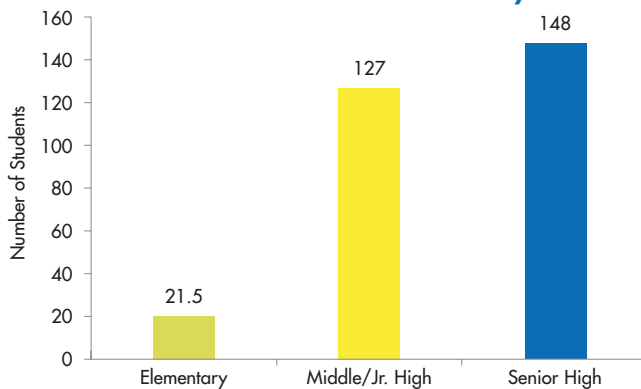
Resource Use in Secondary Schools

Opportunities exist for secondary schools, and particularly middle schools, to reprioritize and reorganize existing resources around the research-based strategies for effective resource use presented earlier.

First, secondary schools use formative assessments on a very limited basis and, similar to elementary schools, lack regularly scheduled time for teachers to collaborate. Time should be reorganized so that subject teachers have the ability to meet weekly during the school day to reflect on practices, to review student work, and to create a community of continuous adult learning.

Second, SPPS secondary schools have an opportunity to increase individual attention to students. Analysis shows that student count is high in secondary schools. A teacher's "student count" (sometimes called teacher load) is the number of students assigned to a teacher in any given time period. Lower student counts allow greater opportunity to build relationships between teachers and students because teachers can get to know their students both personally and academically and can tailor their instruction accordingly. In SPPS, we find the average student count to be high: the middle school average is 127 (ranges from 96 to 159), and the Sr. high school average is 148 (ranges from 125 to 178).

Projected Teacher Load by School Type General Education Students Only

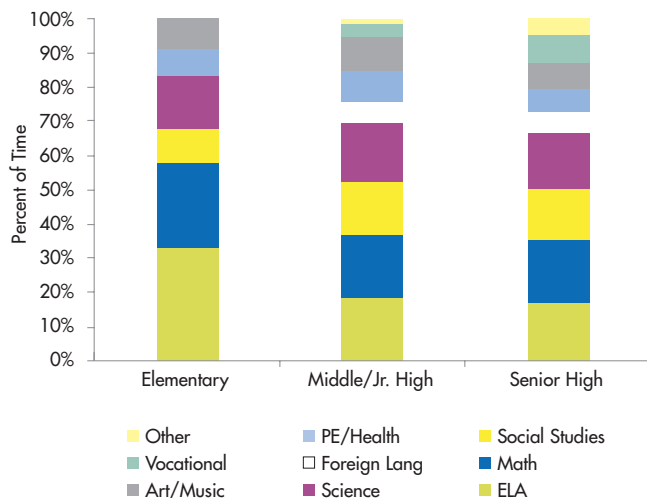


We also find little evidence that Saint Paul schools are attempting to create individual attention in core subjects such as English or Math. Specifically, we find that the average class size in Sr. High schools is about the same (~27) in both core and non-core subjects,⁹ revealing that there is little prioritization in high-need subject areas. Strategically allocating resources at the secondary level, for example, might mean that the District increase class sizes in some non-core subjects in order to finance smaller group sizes in literacy and math—two high-priority subjects for the district.

Finally, SPPS secondary schools also have an opportunity to increase the time on core academics. An analysis of course schedule data shows that middle school students spend 37% of their day on literacy and math. Senior high students spend 35% of their day on these core subjects. This demonstrates very little prioritization of student time despite significant numbers of students who struggle in these two subjects.

⁹ In practical terms, average class sizes of 27 reflect that large classes can exceed 40 students.

Instructional Time by Subject and School Level



SPPS leaders should make sure that students who are three to five years behind grade level in reading or math have sufficient time to catch up to grade level and that the intervention (reading or basic math) is appropriate for the level of their academic need. The amount of time currently spent during the regular school day does not seem sufficient to allow these struggling students to catch up to their peers. There is great opportunity, especially for students who are not meeting standards, to increase the amount of time they spend both in literacy (especially reading for those behind) and in math.

To maximize these opportunities for strategic resource use in schools, ERS makes the following recommendations.

First, ERS recommends that SPPS redesign secondary schools for more time and attention in core subject areas. There are several strategies that the

District can implement to ensure that all students are meeting rigorous academic standards—many of them center around schedule. For example, certain schedules that block classes into longer durations for fewer days have the ability to reduce teachers’ student counts and simultaneously allow schools to focus more time on core academic instruction. The “4x4 Block Schedule” and the modified block schedule are examples of schedules that accomplish these goals. In a 4x4 block scenario, students take four classes each term for four terms per year while teachers teach three classes each term for four terms per year.

In this schedule, some middle and high schools are able to require students to spend as much as 50% of their time in literacy and math in some grades, while still taking enough credits in other subjects to stay on track for graduation. Because teachers teach only three groups of students per term, student counts drop to 81 per term (with class sizes of 27). And in English and Math, which are often required year-round for struggling students, teachers see only 81 students all year long as opposed to the current 140+.

At the middle grade level, another scheduling-related option is to “core” classes or, put differently, to combine Math with Science or English with Social Studies so that they are integrated and taught by the same teacher. “Coring” of this type provides an additional reduction in teachers’ student counts. Many core teachers in these schedules see only two groups of students all year long. This would result in teacher loads of 54 at the secondary level in SPPS. This reform is a “high-capacity” reform that should be considered thoughtfully.

Subject	6		7		4 A/B	
	Periods	% Time	Periods	% Time	Periods	% Time
English/Reading	1	17%	2	28%	2	25%
Social Studies	1	17%	1	14%	1	13%
Math	1	17%	1	14%	2	25%
Science	1	17%	1	14%	1	13%
PE	1	17%	1	14%	1	13%
Elective	1	17%	1	14%	1	13%

Implementing block scheduling or coring has several challenges. First, teachers need to be prepared to use longer blocks. The District must ensure that any change in schedule be accompanied by support and professional development for teachers on how to effectively use longer blocks of time. The curriculum also needs to be evaluated and/or adjusted to fit with the changed teaching methods that are an important part of the success of this change. Second, as regards coring subjects, teachers must become prepared and certified to teach more than one subject. Providing incentives to encourage middle school teachers to seek dual certification and targeting teachers with multiple certifications in the hiring process are critical first steps to this strategy.

We recommend that the SPPS leadership identify low-performing schools that are interested in making these changes as soon as possible and then to phase-in the reform across additional schools over time. We also recommend that the district not consolidate to one mandatory bell schedule but provide a small menu of research-supported schedules that they will support and then work with schools as they adopt the new schedules. We believe that the teacher's union needs to be a close partner with district and school leaders as they discuss the adoption of new secondary schedules.

Before we conclude our findings on secondary schools, we want to highlight a specific concern with the BESTT (The Building Esteem and Success Today and Tomorrow (BESTT) program. We recognize that many district leaders share this concern and are creating plans to address this issue. The BESTT program serves 7th and 8th grade students who have not yet met the District's criteria for entering high school. Although students are referred to the program by school administrators based on the District's promotion policy, our analysis of school data shows that BESTT enrollment appears to be racially unbalanced—64% of BESTT students are African American, yet only 32% of middle school students are African American. Similar to the over-identification of African American male students as EBD, this situation may also be the result of a lack of training for school administrators and/or bias during the referral process. This data, along with anecdotal information from district staff about the behavioral/disciplinary basis of program referral, raises our concern that the current model of separating and isolating these students from the general student population may not be the most effective way of meeting these students' needs. **ERS recommends that SPPS consider options for serving BESTT students in a more integrated setting**, while still meeting the State's funding requirements for ALC's.

School Leader Capacity and Support

Strategic use of school resources requires three preconditions: flexibility, capacity and accountability. Leaders need flexibility to use their resources in ways that address their students' specific needs, capacity to know how to reorganize resources for student learning and accountability for using these strategies in schools. Our analysis of the District's budget shows that principals have a relatively high degree of flexibility and autonomy when it comes to managing their budgets or shifting personnel.

But do principals have the capacity to manage their resources strategically? Capacity includes not just the existing knowledge, skills, and talents of principals but also the specific support networks put in place by the school system. These might include training, templates and tools for strategic resource use. Our analysis of District practices suggest that principals are not well supported in managing their resources in researched-based ways. The district does not provide sufficient training, tools, or school-design templates to support leaders in reorganizing resources strategically. Professional development for principals has been shown to have the

greatest impact when it is situated at the school level and offered in the context of the curriculum and instructional methods being implemented (often present in CSR models). In SPPS, principal training is primarily provided through the Center for Academic Excellence (workshop model) and the Leadership Institute (which focuses on preparing aspiring principals for leadership roles within the district).

Giving principals control of their budgets inherently requires that they be held accountable for how well those dollars are used. **ERS recommends that SPPS foster a system of reciprocal accountability for the strategic use of school-level resources.** This would include:

- Building principal capacity to strategically manage time, people, and money at the school level, with a special focus on helping site leaders align school level professional development resources with their curriculum, instructional approach and the needs of their faculty and students;
- Establishing clearly defined standards for school-level instruction and resource use, including professional development, and holding principal supervisors accountable for doing this;
- Providing models of effective school organization that specify practices (such as grouping and regrouping students throughout the day based on skills (with and without additional teacher support) or suggested bell schedules),
- Creating regular reports that review key resource metrics;
- Working closely with principals and conducting regular reviews to ensure understanding and determine if resources are being used in research-based ways, and holding principal supervisors accountable for doing this; and,
- Integrating the accountability system with the school improvement planning process and with the supervision and evaluation of principals and teachers.

C. Does SPPS use district resources in a way that supports improved instruction?

Research has shown that teacher quality is the single most powerful school-influenced determinant of student achievement.¹⁰ Although many school systems spend significant funds to improve instructional quality through professional development, these efforts are often fragmented and lack the coordination, focus, and school-level support needed to implement research-proven strategies.¹¹

Evaluating PD Need

One of the first steps in creating an effective PD strategy is to understand the needs of the faculty at each school. Because research suggests that new teachers often struggle and need extra support, we first examined the percentage and distribution of teachers by their years of teaching experience across schools by Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) performance category. We found that schools “Not Making AYP” (one measure of low performance) had a slightly higher percentage of new teachers, but overall, the distribution of teachers across schools by their total years teaching experience is fairly consistent across all categories of AYP. It is important that professional development spending support teachers (and principals) at all

¹⁰ See discussion in Marzano, 2003.

¹¹ Miles and Frank, 2007.

stages of their career lifecycle and that the investment flow to teachers and schools that need it most. This includes new or struggling teachers and schools that are struggling with low academic performance. In schools where teacher retention is a big problem, leaders should consider working to change conditions in the school before investing a lot more money on professional development.

Evaluating Current Expenditures

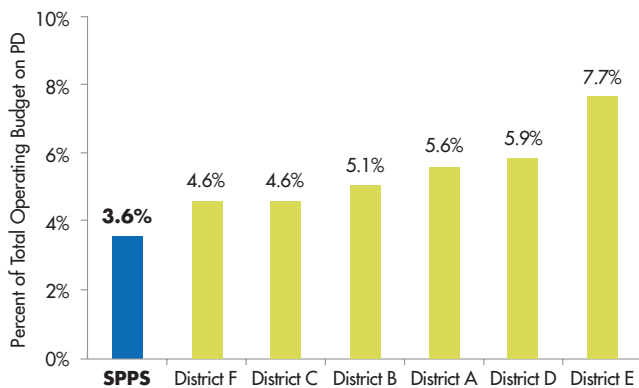
The next step to creating an effective PD strategy is to understand how the district is currently investing professional development dollars. To understand how SPPS uses district resources to support improved student learning, ERS conducted a high-level review of all Saint Paul’s professional development spending and activities looking for evidence of a comprehensive system-wide PD strategy that is aligned to district priorities. For purposes of this analysis, we define professional development as all investments across programs and departments in building the knowledge and skills of professional staff.

SPPS is already investing in teacher quality by laying a strong foundation for an effective PD strategy. In 2001, SPPS launched the Project for Academic Excellence to provide a unified direction for curricular reform across all schools. What began in the elementary schools is now a comprehensive reform lever for all schools in the district. Since then, there has been a district-wide focus on Reading and Writing, with training primarily delivered through a workshop model. The District has also implemented the use of Learning Walks¹² and set up three professional development demonstration schools to promote the replication of best practices.

However, Saint Paul’s level of investment in professional development is less than all other urban districts ERS has studied. We measure professional development spending in two basic ways. First, we measure all of the expenditures on professional development regardless of source or department. Second, more broadly, we also estimate and include the time that

the district is contractually obligated to dedicate to professional development: contract time. In the case of SPPS, this includes two district-wide PD days plus four early release days.

Comparative PD Spending (with Contract Time)*



Not including contract time, SPPS spends \$13.5 million, or \$5,074 per teacher, on professional development. This is approximately 2.7% of the total K-12 operating budget. Comparison districts spend between 3.4% and 5.5% of their operating budget on professional development (without contract time). When we include contract time, SPPS spends \$18.1 million, or roughly \$6,800 per teacher and 3.6% of the total K-12 operating budget, on professional development. Other urban districts ERS has studied spend between 4.6% and 7.7% of their operating budget on professional development (with contract time).

¹² Learning Walks are organized visits through a school’s learning areas which give staff the opportunity to look at the classroom and student’s work, and to talk to students and teachers. Between classroom visits, participants on the Walk take time to talk about what they see and ask questions about instructional practices.

Further, we found that 80% of professional development spending goes to the top twelve district PD initiatives¹³; however, it is unclear whether or not these initiatives are focused on the district's highest priority needs. For example, 25%, or \$4.6 million, of all PD spending is for district-wide staff development days, but there is little accountability for the effective use of this time (e.g., principals are not held accountable for ensuring that teachers meet together in teams during common planning time to improve instruction).

Research suggests that professional development should be primarily school-based and embedded within the school day and the teachers' own classroom practice (job embedded), with content focused on student learning goals and teacher and principal needs. Our analysis shows that school-based instructional support for teachers (i.e., coaches, teachers on special assignment (TOSAs), and Staff Development Specialists) is spread thinly across schools—elementary schools average 0.3FTE per school, middle schools have 0.2FTE and high schools have 0.4FTE. Furthermore, many of these teachers on special assignment (TOSAs) are actually not providing professional development. If we exclude these 22 positions, the average school-based instructional support staff member per school drops in half. This level of investment is not sufficient to support a point of delivery model for continuous instructional improvement. Most teachers would only be able to receive a few hours of support per year, if any.

Finally, as mentioned above, common planning time is voluntary and the use of planning time varies by school. For those schools that do have it, there is little accountability for how well that time is used.

Detailed Recommendations

Opportunities exist for SPPS to build on its strong foundation of professional development by **developing a district-wide professional development strategy that aligns resources to address district priorities and accounts for school level needs and performance.**

- Invest in additional expert content and/or pedagogical support (i.e., coaching) in district priority areas of literacy and math. These support providers could be full-time or part-time coaches, lead teachers with release time or extra pay, or mentors for new teachers. Adopt a rigorous screening process for hiring literacy and math coaches who can work with teachers at either the elementary or the secondary level.
- Organize for 90-minute blocks of common planning time (CPT) for teachers. CPT sessions would be used by teacher teams (grade and content teams as appropriate) to review student work, analyze student performance data, and share successful instructional practices. Content experts (i.e., coaches) would facilitate many of these meetings, having been trained in agenda setting, meeting facilitation, use of performance data, and protocols and rubrics to support teachers working together to review student work.
- Implement the use of formative assessment for math at all levels and literacy at the secondary level, and creating a system-wide strategy for adjusting instruction based on formative assessments of student progress.

¹³ These twelve initiatives are: PD days (\$4.5M), PAE (\$2.3M), TOSA (\$1.7M), Instructional Coach (\$1.3M), PD Conferences (\$937K), School-wide PD (\$704K), Teacher Quality Enhancement (\$701K), SLC (\$601K), Consultants (\$464K), IT (\$461K), Special Education (\$437K), and ELL (\$300K).

Second, **ERS recommends that SPPS build Principal and Assistant Principal capacity to strategically manage professional development resources, and hold them accountable for effective use.**

- Build principals' capacity to implement coaching and common planning time and to use school-level resources effectively.
- Hire several principal coaches, if necessary, to work with school leaders on implementation of CPT and content coaching. For example, these coaches would work with school leaders to teach them what good use of CPT looks like; how to support teachers, how to strategically use content coaches to accelerate teacher growth and how to foster an adult learning community within the school.
- Clearly define standards for school-level instruction and resource use including professional development.
- Provide models of effective school organization (that specify practices such as flexible grouping and bell schedules).
- Create regular reports that review key resource metrics, and work closely with principals, directors and local superintendents to ensure understanding and implementation.
- Integrate the accountability system with the school improvement planning process and with supervision and evaluation of principals and teachers.
- Provide training and tools for principals and their supervisors regarding instruction and the strategic use of resources that are aligned with the accountability system and school models introduced in the new accountability system.

IV. ADDITIONAL READINGS

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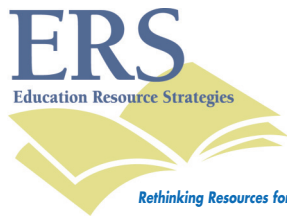
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