

A Curriculum Audit™
of the
Thornton Township High School District 205
Harvey, Illinois

Executive Summary



International Curriculum Management Audit Center
Phi Delta Kappa International

Operated in affiliation with
Curriculum Management Systems, Inc.
5619 NW 86th Street, Suite 500
Johnston, IA 50131

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**Conducted Under the Auspices of
International Curriculum Management Audit Center
Phi Delta Kappa International
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5619 NW 86th Street, Suite 500, Johnston, IA 50131)

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205 Audit Team:**

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Summary of the Thornton Township High School District 205 Curriculum Management Audit

I. INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes the Executive Summary of the final report of a Curriculum and Assessment Alignment Audit of the Thornton Township High School District 205. The audit was commissioned by the Thornton Township High School District 205 Board of Trustees within the scope of its policy-making authority. It was conducted during May 2016. Document analysis was performed off site, as was the detailed analysis of findings and site visit data.

A CMSi Curriculum Audit™ is designed to reveal the extent to which officials and professional staff of a school district have developed and implemented a sound, valid, and operational system of curriculum management. Such a system, set within the framework of adopted board policies, enables the school district to make maximum use of its human and financial resources in the education of its students. When such a system is fully operational, it assures the district taxpayers that their fiscal support is optimized under the conditions in which the school district functions.

Approach of the CMSi Curriculum Audit

The Curriculum Audit™ is a process that was developed by Dr. Fenwick W. English and first implemented in 1979 in the Columbus Public Schools, Ohio. The audit is based upon generally-accepted concepts pertaining to effective instruction and curricular design and delivery, some of which have been popularly referred to as the “effective schools research.”

A Curriculum Audit is an independent examination of three data sources: documents, interviews, and site visits. These are gathered and triangulated, or corroborated, to reveal the extent to which a school district is meeting its goals and objectives, whether they are internally or externally developed or imposed. A public report is issued as the final phase of the auditing process.

The audit’s scope is centered on curriculum and instruction, and any aspect of operations of a school system that enhances or hinders its design and/or delivery. The audit is an intensive, focused, “postholed” look at how well a school system such as Thornton Township High School District 205 has been able to set valid directions for pupil accomplishment and well-being, concentrate its resources to accomplish those directions, and improve its performance, however contextually defined or measured, over time.

The Curriculum Audit centers its focus on the main business of schools: teaching, curriculum, and learning. Its focus is based upon the data gathered before, during, and after the audit that negatively or positively impact the district’s primary focus. These data are reported along with the main findings of the audit.

In some cases, ancillary findings in a Curriculum Audit are so interconnected with the capability of a school system to attain its central objectives that they become major, interactive forces, which, if not addressed, will severely compromise the ability of the school system to be successful with its students.

The Curriculum Audit represents a “systems” approach to educational improvement, that is, it considers the system rather than a collection of separate, discrete parts. The interrelationships of system components and their impact on overall quality of the organization in accomplishing its purposes are examined to “close the loop” in curriculum and instructional improvement.

Background of the District

Community

Thornton Township is one of 30 townships in Cook County, Illinois. As of the 2010 census, its population was 169,326. Incorporated in 1850, it is located immediately south of the city of Chicago. It is the second most populous township in Illinois as of the 2010 census, after Rockford Township (pop. 178,527) in Winnebago County.

The village of South Holland serves as the governmental seat of Thornton Township. The township is named after the village of Thornton, located in the south-central portion of the township. Many parts of the township carry names inspired by the village's name, including the three high schools of Thornton Township District 205.

History of Thornton Township High School District 205

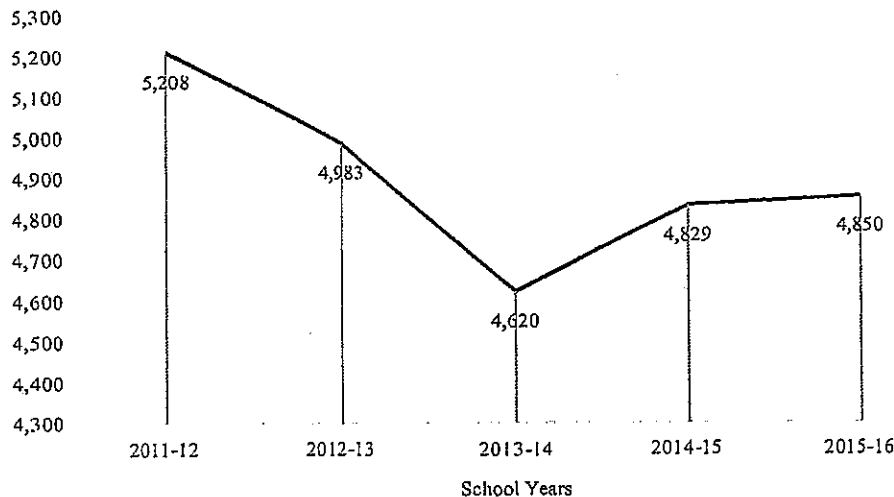
Thornton Township High School District 205 was formed in 1892 in Harvey, Illinois. The district is composed of three high schools: Thornton Township High School in Harvey, IL (1898); Thornridge High School in Dolton, IL (1960); and Thornwood High School in South Holland, IL (1972). District 205 covers all or portions of the following communities from Thornton Township: Blue Island, Burnham, Calumet City, Dixmoor, Dolton, East Hazel Crest, Harvey, Hazel Crest, Lansing, Markham, Phoenix, Posen, Riverdale, South Holland, and Thornton.

District 205 proudly serves over 4,850 students in grades 9 through 12 (Fall 2015 enrollment). Students attending Thornton Township High School District 205 have a four-year graduation rate of 81 percent. The overall enrollment trend for the school district over the last five years is summarized in [Exhibit 0.1](#).

Exhibit 0.1

Overall Enrollment Trends of Public School Students Thornton Township High School District 205 October 2011-October 2015

Five-Year Fall Student Enrollment Trends for Thornton High School
District #205



[Exhibit 0.1](#) shows that enrollment declined from 5,208 high school students in 2011-12 to a low of 4,620 students in 2013-14. Enrollment has increased each year since 2013-14 and in 2015-16 rose to 4,850.

The Thornton Township High School District 205 vision and mission statement as well as the goals adopted by the school board and Superintendent of Schools are provided below:

Vision

Thornton Township High School District 205 Curriculum Audit Executive

To inspire our community of learners to achieve educational excellence

Mission

In taking a holistic approach, all stakeholders will be responsible to provide an Innovative and Challenging Instructional Delivery; impact Critical Thinking Skills; and promote Positive Social Behavior in our students to Develop Productive Citizens. Our vision is Preparing All District 205 Students to be Competitive Leaders in Our Global Society. We Believe in "High Expectations, Community Engagement, College and Career Readiness, All Stakeholders Being Accountable, Inspiring a Positive Impact in the 21st Century, Having One Shared Voice."

School Board Established Goals

The School Board developed five goals because of hearing the various community concerns about our schools and the education of our students:

1. Ensure learning development, growth and achievement for all students;
2. Ensure a safe, supportive, challenging and culturally sensitive learning environment;
3. Recruit, train and retain a high-quality staff that is committed to continuous improvement through teamwork, collaboration and shared leadership;
4. Engage parents, students, staff, clergy, business owners and community (stakeholders) in the District's continuous improvement effort;
5. Demonstrate and communicate effective and efficient school district operations to ensure excellent stewardship of public resources.

Identified by the board of education as High Level and Visionary, per the superintendent, the goals provide the guiding direction for the curriculum and school culture. A summary of the board of education's High Level, Long Term Visionary Goals and Aligned Strategies 2015-18 is provided in Appendix B.

System Purpose for Conducting the Audit

The contract for the curriculum management audit of the Thornton Township High School District 205 indicated the following reasons for conducting the audit:

To determine if:

1. The school district has a rigorous written curriculum for students for all grade-levels and courses;
2. The school district has sufficient resources aligned with core and non-core standards;
3. The school district is organizationally structured and resourced for achieving an aligned written taught, learned, and assessed curriculum;
4. The school district demonstrates control, adequacy, and equitable distribution of resources, programs, and personnel;
5. The school district demonstrates internal consistency and rational equity in its program development, implementation, monitoring, accountability, and evaluation of students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, struggling learners, and gifted students;
6. The school district has the internal capacity to develop rigorous assessments and use the results to adjust, improve, or abandon ineffective instructional practices, programs, or curricula.

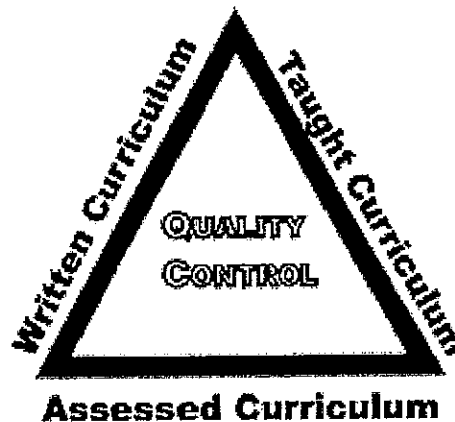
Thornton Township High School District 205 leadership indicated that feedback from the audit will be used to
Thornton Township High School District 205 Curriculum Audit Executive

develop a fully aligned written, taught, and assessed curriculum for all grade levels and content areas.

I. METHODOLOGY OF THE AUDIT

The model for the Curriculum Audit™ is shown in the schematic below. The model has been published widely in the national professional literature, most recently in the best-selling book, *The Curriculum Management Audit: Improving School Quality* (1995, Frase, English, Poston).

A Schematic View of Curricular Quality Control



General quality control assumes that at least three elements must be present in any organizational and work-related situation for it to be functional and capable of being improved over time. These are: (1) a work standard, goal/objective, or operational mission; (2) work directed toward attaining the mission, standard, goal/objective; and (3) feedback (work measurement), which is related to or aligned with the standard, goal/objective, or mission.

When activities are repeated, there is a “learning curve,” i.e., more of the work objectives are achieved within the existing cost parameters. Thus, the organization, or a sub-unit of an organization, becomes more “productive” at its essential short- or long-range work tasks.

Within the context of an educational system and its governance and operational structure, curricular quality control requires: (1) a written curriculum in some clear and translatable form for application by teachers in classroom or related instructional settings; (2) a taught curriculum that is shaped by and interactive with the written one; and (3) a tested curriculum that includes the tasks, concepts, and skills of pupil learning that are linked to both the taught and written curricula. This model is applicable in any kind of educational work structure typically found in mass public educational systems, and is suitable for any kind of assessment strategy, from norm-referenced standardized tests to more authentic approaches.

The Curriculum Audit™ assumes that an educational system, as one kind of human work organization, must be responsive to the context in which it functions and in which it receives support for its continuing existence. In the case of public educational systems, the support comes in the form of tax monies from three levels: local, state, and federal.

In return for such support, mass public educational systems are supposed to exhibit characteristics of rationality, i.e., being responsive to the public will as it is expressed in legally constituted bodies such as Congress, state legislatures, and locally elected/appointed Boards of Education.

In the case of emerging national public school reforms, more and more this responsiveness is assuming a distinctive school-based management focus that includes parents, teachers, and, in some cases, students. The ability of schools to be responsive to public expectations, as legally expressed in law and policy, is crucial to

their survival as publicly-supported educational organizations in the years ahead. The Curriculum Audit is one method for ascertaining the extent to which a school system or subunit thereof, has been responsive to these expressed expectations and requirements in its context.

Data Sources of the Curriculum Audit™

A Curriculum Audit uses a variety of data sources to determine if each of the three elements of curricular quality control is in place and connected one to the other. The audit process also inquires as to whether pupil learning has improved as the result of effective application of curricular quality control.

The major sources of data for the Thornton Township High School District 205 Curriculum Audit™ were:

Documents

These sources consisted of written board policies, rules, administrative regulations, curriculum guides, memoranda, budgets, state reports, accreditation documents, plans and organizational charts, assessments, and any other source of information that would reveal elements of the written, taught, and tested curricula and the linkages among these elements.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted by auditors to explain contextual variables that are operating in the school system at the time of the audit. Such contextual variables may shed light on the actions of various persons or parties, reveal interrelationships, and explain existing progress, tension, harmony/disharmony within the school system. Quotations cited in the audit from interviews are used as a source of triangulation and not as summative averages or means. Some persons, because of their position, knowledge, or credibility, may be quoted more than once in the audit, but they are not counted more than once because their inclusion is not part of a quantitative/mathematical expression of interview data.

Forty-nine (49) people were interviewed for the Thornton Township High School District 205 Curriculum Audit™. These individuals included teachers, principals and assistant principals of the schools visited, curriculum personnel, the financial officer, operations staff, high school students, members of the school board, and the superintendent.

Site Visits

All three (3) high schools were visited by the CMSi audit team. Site visits reveal the actual context in which curriculum is designed and delivered in a school system. Contextual references are important as they indicate discrepancies in documents or unusual working conditions. Auditors attempted to observe briefly all classrooms, gymnasiums, labs, hallways, restrooms, offices, and maintenance areas to properly grasp accurate perceptions of conditions, activities, safety, instructional practices, and operational contexts.

Online Surveys

Online surveys were customized for this project and were screened by district curriculum leaders for relevance and content. This was done to ensure that the most pertinent questions for the specific concerns and circumstances in Thornton Township High School District 205 were included. The survey enables auditors to access information from the classroom teachers. This group is invaluable in understanding what instruction is really like in the Thornton Township High School District 205. The survey was offered to all Thornton Township 205 teachers. Ninety-five (95) teachers responded to the questions on the online survey.

Standards for the Curriculum Audit™

The CMSi Curriculum Audit™ uses five standards against which to compare, verify, and comment upon the Thornton Township High School District 205's existing curricular management practices. These standards have been extrapolated from an extensive review of management principles and practices and have been

applied in all previous curriculum management audits.

Thus, the standards reflect an ideal management system, but not an unattainable one. They describe working characteristics that any complex work organization should possess in being responsive and responsible to its clients.

A school system that is using its financial and human resources for the greatest benefit of its students is a district that can establish clear objectives, examine alternatives, select and implement alternatives, measure results as they develop against established objectives, and adjust its efforts so that it achieves a greater share of the objectives.

These five standards and their indicators include:

Standard One: Governance and Control

The school district demonstrates its control of resources, programs, and personnel. Under Standard One, the auditors expect to find:

- A curriculum that is centrally defined and adopted by the board of education;
- A clear set of policies that establish an operational framework for management that permits accountability;
- A clear set of policies that reflects state requirements and local program goals and the necessity to use achievement data to improve school system operations;
- A functional administrative structure that facilitates the design and delivery of the district's curriculum;
- A direct, uninterrupted line of authority from the school board/chief executive officer/superintendent and other central office officials to principals and classroom teachers;
- Organizational development efforts that are focused to improve system effectiveness;
- Documentation of school board and central office planning for the attainment of goals, objectives, and mission over time; and
- A clear mechanism to define and direct change and innovation within the school system to permit maximization of its resources on priority goals, objectives, and mission.

Standard Two: Direction and Expectations for Learning

The school district has established clear and valid objectives for students and clientele. Under Standard Two, the auditors expect to find:

- A clearly established, system-wide set of goals and objectives adopted by the board of education that addresses all programs and courses;
- Demonstration that the system is contextual and responsive to national, state, and other expectations as evidenced in local initiatives;
- Operations set within a framework that carries out the system's goals and objectives;
- Evidence of comprehensive, detailed, short- and long-range curriculum management planning;
- Knowledge, local validation, and use of current best practices and emerging curriculum trends;
- Written curriculum that addresses both current and future needs of students;
- Major programmatic initiatives designed to be cohesive;
- Provision of explicit direction for the chief executive officer/superintendent and professional staff; and
- A framework that exists for systemic curricular change.

Standard Three: Connectivity and System Equity

The school district has demonstrated internal consistency and rational equity for students in its program development and implementation. Under Standard Three, the auditors expect to find:

- Documents/sources that reveal internal connections at different levels in the system;
- Predictable consistency through a coherent rationale for content delineation within the curriculum;
- Equity of curriculum/course access and opportunity;
- Allocation of resource flow to areas of greatest need;
- A curriculum that is clearly explained to members of the teaching staff and building-level administrators and other supervisory personnel;
- Specific professional development programs to enhance curricular design and delivery;
- A curriculum that is monitored and its implementation supported by central office and site supervisory personnel; and
- Teacher and administrator responsiveness to school board policies, currently and over time.

Standard Four: Assessment and Feedback

The school district has used the results from district-designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs. Under Standard Four, the auditors expect to find:

- A formative and summative assessment system linked to a clear rationale in board policy;
- Knowledge, local validation, and use of current curricular and program assessment best practices;
- Use of a student and program assessment plan that provides for diverse assessment strategies for varied purposes at all levels—district, school, and classroom;
- A way to provide feedback to the teaching and administrative staffs regarding how classroom instruction may be evaluated and subsequently improved;
- A timely and relevant data base upon which to analyze important trends in student achievement;
- A vehicle to examine how well specific programs are producing desired learner outcomes or results;
- A data base to compare the strengths and weaknesses of various programs and program alternatives, as well as to engage in equity analysis;
- A data base to modify or terminate ineffective educational programs;
- A method/means to relate to a programmatic budget and enable the school system to engage in cost-benefit analysis; and
- Organizational data gathered and used to continually improve system functions.

Standard Five: Productivity and Resource Use

The school district has improved its productivity and efficiency, particularly in the use of resources. Under Standard Five, the auditors expect to find:

- Planned and actual congruence among curricular objectives, results, and financial allocations;
- A financial data base and network that can track costs to results, provide sufficient fiduciary control, and be used as a viable data base in making policy and operational decisions;
- Specific means that have been selected or modified and implemented to attain better results in the schools over a specified time;
- A planned series of interventions that have raised pupil performance levels over time and maintained those levels within the same cost parameters as in the past;

- School facilities that are well-kept, sufficient, safe, orderly, and conducive to effective delivery of the instructional program; and
- Support systems that function in systemic ways.

A finding within a Curriculum Audit™ is simply a description of the existing state, negative or positive, between an observed and triangulated condition or situation at the time of the audit and its comparison with one or more of the five audit standards.

Findings in the negative represent discrepancies below the standard. Findings in the positive reflect meeting or exceeding the standard. As such, audit findings are recorded on nominal and ordinal indices and not ratio or interval scales. As a rule, audits do not issue commendations, because it is expected that a school district should be meeting every standard as a way of normally doing its business. Commendations are not given for good practice. On occasion, exemplary practices may be cited.

Unlike accreditation methodologies, audits do not have to reach a forced, summative judgment regarding the status of a school district or sub-unit being analyzed. Audits simply report the discrepancies and formulate recommendations to ameliorate them.

A summary of each finding is presented in the following section, followed by the comprehensive recommendation for ameliorating those same weaknesses across the system. It must be noted that managing the delivery of curriculum, especially, is the most comprehensive task a district faces and its most important one. Delivering curriculum means realizing meaningful and measurable learning for every student in the system, and requires a cohesive, collaborative effort across all departments and at all levels. Accordingly, the recommended actions span all departments and expect such collaboration of effort to improve learning for all School District 205 children.

III. FINDINGS

This report and these findings are the result of an invitation by the superintendent and board of education to have outsiders review and critique curriculum and design in the district and offer suggestions for how the system might improve, to ultimately improve student achievement. Curriculum design and delivery, however, involve more stakeholders than just the leaders in Teaching and Learning and school-based personnel. Managing curriculum is a shared responsibility across all departments and at all levels of the system. Improving student learning and creating the system of supports, interventions, and tools that teachers and building-based personnel need requires every staff member's attention and focus. Accordingly, the findings and recommendation in this report reflect that system-level focus, starting with governance and administration and extending to individual teachers in the classrooms.

Finding 1.1: Board policies are inadequate to provide quality control needed for effective management of the curriculum and related district functions.

Board policy is the most critical source of direction and control in any effective school district. Policies set expectations for how curriculum will be designed, developed, delivered, monitored, and measured within parameters that define what quality instruction looks like and how the central office will support student learning. Policies exist to guide decision making and to ensure that decisions are congruent with system-level goals, priorities, and values.

Adoption of policy is the primary responsibility of the board of education, with input from district administrators. Policies represent the guidelines for implementing and managing decision making for improving practice. When policies are not sufficiently specific or do not exist, accountability is hindered and operations can become inconsistent or even contradictory.

To determine the quality of the policy framework in the Thornton Township High School District 205, the auditors examined the district's policies found online on the district website and conducted interviews with district personnel about the presence and quality of district policies relative to curriculum management and related district functions.

Overall, auditors found that the policies relevant to curriculum management had been most recently adopted or revised in 2010. They found no administrative regulations providing further direction. In almost all cases, critical policies were either missing or were inadequate to meet minimum audit criteria for curriculum management.

Finding 1.2: District-level *planning* does not meet audit standards to provide direction for system-wide change. Linkages between district-wide and school-level *plans* are inadequate to provide clarity and consistency at all levels of the system. Additionally, the district lacks clear direction and planning for curriculum management, professional development, and student assessment and program evaluation.

Long-range planning is the process by which leadership envisions a school district's future and suggests ways and means to achieve the vision and its concomitant characteristics. Long-range planning, using multiple data sources, is essential for a school system to make decisions with a clear future goal in mind and to maintain continuous focus on attainment of these goals and objectives. In an effective school system, all district-wide *planning* is closely aligned to the district's long-range *plan*. The district's strategic plan should serve as the umbrella for and function in concert with all other major planning efforts, including, but not limited to, curriculum management planning, professional development planning, and planning for student assessment and program evaluation.

The auditors reviewed various district and campus documents provided by district personnel. They also interviewed board members, district and campus administrators, and teachers, and collected data from a teacher survey administered online.

The auditors found plans and planning, overall, to be inadequate to provide clarity and consistency across these various district functions. They found that planning tended to be done in silos, with little coordination or alignment from one plan to the next. The district and each campus had state-mandated, written improvement plans, but these were added onto each year, and goal completion was not always updated. Current goals and related activities were difficult to locate, so the documents were not user-friendly. Written planning communicating curriculum management, professional development, and student assessment and program evaluation functions were limited and tended to consist of meeting agendas and minutes or, in the case of professional development, Institute Day agendas.

Finding 1.3: The Thornton Township High School District 205 Organizational Chart does not meet audit criteria for sound organizational management. Job descriptions are inadequate in providing clear direction and position control. Multiple inconsistencies and duplications were noted between job descriptions and the organizational chart.

Clarity of administrative role relationships is important to an organization in the productive grouping and management of its tasks and functions. A functional and accurate delineation of administrative relationships is generally depicted in graphic form and called an "Organizational Chart" or "Table of Organization." An organizational chart graphically depicts the line of authority and responsibilities from the school board and superintendent to site principals and classroom teachers responsible for delivering the curriculum.

Curriculum Audit criteria require well-defined delineations of lines of responsibility and authority, which are critical in guiding the design and delivery of functional curriculum and programs in the district. To serve as an effective guide in curriculum and program design and delivery, a school district's policy framework must be specific so decisions can be made by referencing relevant policies.

In order to analyze the adequacy of the district's organizational charts and job descriptions, auditors requested, for review and analysis, copies of appropriate board policies, organizational charts, job descriptions, and other documents communicating information about roles and areas of responsibility. Auditors also interviewed school board members and district and school administrative, instructional, and support staff regarding the functions included in the organizational charts and job descriptions.

The auditors found that the district's organizational chart does not meet audit criteria for sound organizational management. The district organizational chart is inadequate in the Chain of Command and partially met the Span of Control criterion. Auditors also identified several specific inconsistencies in organizational chart structure when compared with job descriptions and staff listings. Such inconsistencies impact the district's ability to determine staffing at appropriate levels. Job descriptions are inadequate for clear direction and position control. Analysis of job descriptions determined that 56 percent of the job descriptions were rated inadequate in at least one criterion. Qualifications were not included in 69 percent of the job descriptions, 44 percent of job descriptions did not include a list of subordinates, and only 50 percent included language sufficient to create an appropriate relationship to the curriculum. Most prominently, auditors noted multiple instances of inconsistencies in job titles between job descriptions, organizational charts, and staff lists. Such inconsistencies make staff roles, responsibilities, and position control difficult.

Finding 2.1: The scope of district written curriculum is inadequate to direct instruction.

Curriculum documents are the written guidelines that provide direction for teachers in planning classroom instruction. These documents should include information about standards and objectives for students, prerequisite skills, instructional resources, classroom strategies, and methods of assessment. A complete set of curriculum documents includes written curriculum for all subjects and courses taught. This is known as the scope of the written curriculum. When there is no curriculum document for a subject or content area, teachers must rely on other resources for planning and delivering instruction. These resources may or may not be aligned with the district's intended curriculum. In addition, they may not provide for consistency, focus, and equity across schools, grades, and courses.

The auditors expect to find written curriculum documents for all subjects and courses offered at every grade level. For curriculum scope to be deemed adequate in a school system, 100 percent of the four core areas and 70 percent of all other (non-core) content areas must have written curriculum documents. This finding addresses only the presence or absence of some form of written curriculum document for each grade level and course. The quality of written curriculum documents is addressed in [Finding 2.2](#).

To determine the scope of the district's written curriculum, the auditors look for the presence of comprehensive curriculum documents for each content area and course at each grade level in the school system. Auditors referred to the various documents made available, in the absence of a single, comprehensive curriculum document for each subject area. Auditors reviewed board policies, planning documents, course lists, and course guides. They reviewed curriculum documents presented to them, as well as Illinois Learning Standards. They interviewed board members, administrators, and teachers regarding the scope of curricula in both core academic (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) and non-core content areas.

Overall, auditors found the scope of written curriculum did not meet audit standards. Only 74 percent of courses in core content areas and 59 percent of courses in non-core content areas had some form of written curriculum documents.

Finding 2.2: The quality of curriculum documents is inadequate to support instruction and maximize student success on high stakes assessments. Use of curriculum documents to provide direction for classroom instruction is inconsistent district-wide.

Quality curriculum documents provide teachers with clear frameworks connecting the written curriculum with what is taught and tested in the classroom. No amount of inspired teaching is a substitute for teaching the appropriate curriculum, and quality curriculum guides support instruction through clear objectives, alignment to assessments, delineation of prerequisite skills and knowledge, appropriate and aligned instructional resources, and instructional strategies for classroom implementation. Quality curriculum documents also allow all students equal access to learning and eliminate learning gaps from one grade to the next, as well as from campus to campus. Incomplete or unavailable curriculum documents contribute to inconsistency in teaching

and learning as teachers make independent decisions regarding objectives, resources, instructional approaches, and assessments.

A comprehensive curriculum designed to meet state and national standards should provide internal consistency from the learning objectives through the selected materials and strategies to the formative and summative assessments used to diagnose progress and measure student mastery of the objectives. Effective curriculum documents also demand engagement of a range of thinking skills, drawing upon a variety of types of cognition and employing increasingly higher cognitive demand to provide a rigorous curriculum for all students. Such curriculum design offers confidence that the work to be accomplished by teachers and students will address the intended learning standards and objectives and provide a spectrum of activities to build upon each level of learning undertaken by students.

Consistent utilization of user-friendly quality curriculum documents supporting teaching and learning in classrooms is critical to establishing quality control of the educational program of a school district. In order for students to have equal access to the adopted curriculum with comparable opportunities for achievement, teachers at all district sites and all grade levels should provide consistent instruction to support student mastery of district goals and objectives.

To assess the quality and use of curriculum in Thornton Township High School District 205, auditors reviewed a variety of materials provided by the district; conducted interviews with board members, administrators, and teachers; and gathered survey data provided by teachers. Board policies were reviewed for references to requirements and direction for written curriculum. The auditors found only limited direction in board policies. The following policies addressed written curriculum:

- *Board Policy 3:10—Goals and Objectives* directed the superintendent to “plan, organize, implement, and evaluate educational programs” without direct reference to the written curriculum.
- *Board Policy 6:10—Educational Philosophy and Goals* directed that the district must provide an “educational program” and listed eight objectives for the program without linking those objectives to any requirement for written curriculum. However, it referred to the board’s responsibility for monitoring attainment of these objectives by requiring the superintendent to annually give a “review and evaluation of the present curriculum,” “a projection of curriculum and resource needs,” and “an evaluation of, and plan to eliminate, any bias in the curriculum or instructional materials.” The policy did not define the term *curriculum*, so the auditors were unable to determine whether the policy-writers meant written curriculum documents or all aspects of the program that could affect student learning and achievement.
- *Board Policy 6:40—Curriculum Development* suffered similarly by not defining the term *curriculum*. The policy referred to a “comprehensive curriculum” that is aligned with the district’s philosophy and goals and that meets students’ needs; provides students with “the knowledge, skills, and abilities required... to become life-long learners”; meets minimum state and federal requirements; and aligns with those of feeder schools, Illinois and district learning standards, and assessments mandated by the state or federal government. The policy directed the superintendent to “develop a curriculum review program to monitor the current curriculum and promptly suggest changes to make the curriculum more effective” and current. It was not fully clear whether this referred to written documents or the overall educational program. Furthermore, other than stating that guides would exist, the policy provided no direction whatsoever as to the format of such documents.
- *Board Policy 6:60—Curriculum Content* did not add clarity, in that it stated, “The curriculum shall contain instruction on subjects required by State statute or regulation...” The policy went on to list the subjects to be taught and a variety of specific topics to be addressed in certain courses and grade levels.
- *Board Policy 6:210—Instructional Materials* referred to selection of materials to “support the curriculum.” Again, the term was imprecise.
- *Board Policy 6:340—Student Testing and Assessment Program* stated that the student assessment program was to inform “curriculum and instructional effectiveness.” Once again, the definition of *curriculum* lacked clarity.

The auditors were not given job descriptions for several positions that most likely had responsibilities for curriculum development and implementation; these included those for AILs, instructional coaches, data coaches, and new teacher mentors. Job descriptions assigning responsibility for design and use of the written curriculum included:

- The Superintendent was to set a vision for curriculum development.
- The Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction and External Funding was responsible for overseeing “implementation of the curriculum rationale and framework,” directing the work of a Curriculum Implementation Team, and serving as the district’s instructional leader.
- Principals were expected to engage in design and implementation of “curriculum goals and learning outcomes” as well as “instructional improvement activities related to learning outcomes.” They were expected to monitor instruction and evaluate curriculum.
- Assistant Principals were to work with their Principals on these tasks.

Auditors reviewed all district curriculum documents presented to them. For the purposes of this review, they did not rate curriculum documents that consisted of textbook tables of contents or purchased computer programs that formed the basis for instruction (e.g., Read 180). However, they used whatever other documents they were given in determining their quality ratings. For example, if they found district common assessments, these were used in ratings of the congruity to the assessment process; course descriptions in the district course catalog were frequently used in determining prerequisite skills or knowledge; and any suggestions for activities found in unit plans were considered in rating of instructional strategies.

The auditors found wide variations in availability, quality, and format among the documents available to teachers to direct classroom instruction. Collectively, the district’s curriculum documents did not meet the audit standard for quality and specificity. No single set of course curriculum documents met the minimum audit standard for quality, although one nearly met the standard. Curriculum standards and sample district-designed assessment items lacked congruence in content and cognitive type. Finally, use of written curriculum documents to guide instructional planning was inconsistent across the district.

High quality curriculum documents are critical in providing teachers with clear frameworks connecting the written curriculum with what is taught and tested in the classroom. It was noted, however, that district personnel were making efforts to develop local curriculum aligned with state objectives. In the past, the district had subscribed to a framework using Understanding by Design (UBD), and some curriculum leaders were still using this format. However, this had lapsed and the auditors found no common format to promote ease of use by teachers. The district’s Curriculum Framework offered little guidance in writing curriculum designed to align with state and national standards and assessments, align with district assessments, or provide resources and strategies for teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Auditors rated curriculum documents using criteria for curriculum guide quality and specificity. To meet the minimum audit standard, curriculum documents for a given course must receive at least 12 out of a possible 15 points. None of the 107 sets of curriculum documents received a rating of 12 points to meet the audit standard. However, the curriculum documents for one course (English II) were awarded a rating of 11 points, and with slight modifications could meet the standard.

Use of curriculum documents was limited, in part because many curriculum documents were missing or were out of date, incomplete, and lacking in the basic quality components to support teachers in designing classroom instruction. In addition, the auditors found instances, especially in core content areas, where one curriculum was intended to direct instruction for several levels of courses, without offering teachers assessment options, resources, and instructional strategies to meet varied student needs.

Teachers believed they had technology available to them and to students. However, nearly two-thirds believed technology software and programs were not clearly referenced in curriculum documents and that software selections were not made based on their alignment with district course curriculum documents and/or state

assessments.

Finding 3.1: Policies provided inadequate guidance for equal access to educational programs and equitable distribution of resources to students. Plans were adequate but not effectively implemented. Substantial achievement gaps existed between Black and Hispanic students and other demographic groups. Racial/ ethnic parity does not exist between faculty/student parity information. Issues of cultural competence need to be addressed by the district.

The objective of educational equity efforts is to produce comparable academic outcomes for all students. To produce such outcomes, students need to have equal access to programs and services, and equitable support that addresses their unique needs. As used in the audit, the terms *equal* and *equity* are not synonymous. *Equal* means “exactly the same.” *Equity* means that resources are distributed to students according to their needs, rather being distributed based on per pupil allocations or other formulae that do not take into consideration the fact that students come to the educational setting with different experiences and learning tools. Without monitoring and active measures to achieve both equal access and equity, schools simply perpetuate any societal disadvantages that a public education was designed to mitigate.

To determine if students had equal access and equitable support in the Thornton Township High School District 205, the audit team reviewed documents that included board policies, district plans, test data, budget documents, and participation and performance rates for a variety of programs and services. Auditors also interviewed board members, administrators, and teachers and visited all three schools in the district to collect “snapshot” observations of classroom activities.

The audit team found that policies were inadequate to address district equity issues. Plans contained sound initiatives and objectives, but none did an adequate job of identifying funding sources to support resolving equity issues. Implementation of policies and plans was ineffective for most activities reviewed by auditors. Test scores were low for most students, including Black and Hispanic students, the district’s two major demographic groups. Achievement gaps characterized by gender and ethnicity were prevalent on recent examinations. Some student demographic groups were overrepresented in academically disadvantageous programs and underrepresented in programs considered academically advantageous. Overall, the design for equal access and equity was inadequate; delivery was ineffective.

Finding 3.2: Observed instructional strategies were not consistent with commonly accepted, effective practices for improved student learning and achievement. Critical instructional monitoring, mentoring, and professional development functions are ineffective in supporting the instructional priorities of the school district.

The goal of every school district is to provide the best education possible for all students regardless of their background, prior experience, economic status, or ability. Delivering on this mission requires the strategic management of the human capital within the school organization. Specifically, the skill and professional capabilities of teachers are critical to the success of schools in meeting the educational needs of all children.

Effective delivery of curriculum is a key determinant of a district’s capacity to impact student achievement. Effective delivery of curriculum begins with well-written, user-friendly curriculum guides that identify district priorities and goals for student learning. In an effective school system, leadership will establish explicit expectations regarding the nature and quality of instruction, communicate those expectations to teachers, monitor classroom activities to ensure teaching meets those expectations, analyze data generated during observations, and use those data to modify curriculum and instruction.

Diversifying teaching methods promotes student growth, combats student boredom, and addresses diverse student learning styles and needs. In order to best meet the instructional needs of students with varying academic

skills, language backgrounds, learning preferences, and levels of engagement, teachers must know and apply a wide variety of instructional techniques. In successful schools, classrooms reflect rigorous, student-centered approaches, research-based best practices, and varied learning arrangements to ensure effective differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Successful learning experiences for all students are contingent on effective delivery of the written curriculum. Systematic and systemic monitoring of classroom instruction ensures that the adopted curriculum is being implemented with fidelity and provides teachers with support and feedback to improve their teaching. Monitoring classroom instructional practices supports the connections between the written, taught, and tested curriculum. District and campus administrators, as well as instructional leaders and coaches, are in positions to assess instructional practices and to provide constructive feedback to the instructional staff. Mentoring of new teachers is another means by which districts may assure effective curriculum delivery. Successful mentoring programs can promote proper use of the district's curriculum and assessment, support use of district-supported initiatives and practices, and reduce attrition rates among early career teachers. Professional development tied closely to the curriculum and to district expectations for instruction is another means of promoting effective delivery of the curriculum and promoting student learning and achievement. In fact, both monitoring and mentoring are authentic, job-embedded forms of professional development.

To determine district expectations for classroom instructional practices, auditors reviewed district documents, including board policies, job descriptions, district- and school-improvement plans, and other guiding documents. The auditors interviewed administrators and teachers, and they conducted an online teacher survey to gather information about the nature of teaching practices and instructional environments in district classrooms. Auditors visited 60 classrooms where instruction was occurring to collect observational data.

To assess instructional monitoring, mentoring, and professional development practices in the Thornton Township High School District 205, the auditors reviewed board policies, district planning documents, job descriptions, in-service agendas, and other documents used in evaluating teaching. The auditors also interviewed district personnel and collected teacher survey data to determine the degree to which monitoring, mentoring, and professional development practices were linked to and supportive of district improvement initiatives.

Overall, the auditors found district expectations regarding instruction were not clearly communicated. Instructional monitoring functions were inadequate to support curriculum delivery and instructional decision making. Early career teachers were given mentors and the mentoring program met minimum state requirements, but beginning teachers received most of their support from their mentors and little from campus or district administrators and instructional leaders. Professional development initiatives were in place, but were not designed to ensure adequate developmental training, especially in several key areas.

Every school district's goal is to provide excellent education for all students. If districts are to be successful in meeting the educational needs of all children, then the district must communicate clear expectations for classroom instructional practice and plan and implement processes for supporting instructional improvement and measuring teacher effectiveness through frequent monitoring, mentoring of new teachers, and formal teacher evaluation.

In the Thornton Township High School District 205, expectations for classroom instruction were ineffectively communicated through board policy, district and campus administrators, and through monitoring of classroom instruction. Even though a majority of teachers responding to the audit survey indicated expectations were communicated through the written curriculum and professional development, interviews and survey responses showed that expectations relative to several major district initiatives (e.g., use of the written curriculum, differentiated instruction, and ELL strategies) were not being effectively communicated.

A consistently implemented process for monitoring of instruction, which includes a formative feedback loop, did not exist. For the most part, coaching occurred at the request of individual teachers. Auditors found a state-mandated, new teacher mentoring program in place. Although the mentoring program met minimum state requirements, early career teachers received support mostly from mentors; only sometimes did they receive

support from others upon request.

Professional development was offered at both the district- and campus-levels and was planned by district and campus committees. However, other than district in-service days, professional development was optional. Consequently, the teachers who needed to attend certain training could not be forced to do so. The absence of racial/ethnic parity between student and teachers in the school district may contribute to some of the instructional delivery issues raised in this section as well as to the need for an additional focus on cultural competency training as a focus of professional development. Developing strong linkages between the written, taught and tested curriculum is the primary focus of this audit, but a further need exists to be able to communicate the curriculum to a diverse set of teachers and then to deliver instruction to students who look very different than the faculty providing instruction once the tight fit has been established for the curriculum. The auditors found that this is an issue that needs to be addressed by the school district.

Finding 4.1: The scope of student assessment is inadequate for core and non-core courses in the Thornton Township High School District.

A comprehensive assessment program based on a district's written curriculum enables district personnel to measure the effectiveness of the taught curriculum in attaining desired district goals and results. It completes the connection between the written and the taught curriculum. A quality assessment program includes both formative and summative assessments for every district course at every grade level. Formative assessment provides opportunities throughout the school year to address weaknesses prior to the summative measures usually occurring once a year with high stakes state tests. Without a comprehensive assessment program, a district has no way to measure curriculum effectiveness. Instructional differentiation for specific student needs suffers with the lack of concrete measures to target student performance. Further, dependence upon yearly tests limits the use of these results to reactive rather than proactive measures.

Auditors expect to find assessments for all courses offered in all content areas at every grade level. However, to meet audit adequacy requirements, 100 percent of courses in the four core content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) must have some form of formal, district-wide student assessments. For all other offerings (non-core content areas), a minimum of 70 percent of courses must have some form of district-wide assessments to meet the audit criterion.

To determine the assessment scope of the Thornton Township High School District 205, the auditors examined course assessments and other information provided by district personnel. Audit team members interviewed district administrators, principals, and teachers. Auditors also reviewed board policies, administrative regulations, and other district documents to gather information about the district's scope of assessment.

Overall, the auditors did not find adequate board policies that required objective measurement and development and implementation of an assessment plan. At the time of the audit, core courses for grades 9-12 did not meet the audit standard of 100 percent assessment coverage. The district also did not meet the minimum audit standard of 70 percent assessment coverage for non-core courses at any of the grades in the high school district.

Board policies did not require an assessment plan (see [Finding 1.1](#)) and objective measurement. Board policy for assessment was inadequate. Though there was some very general language in policy that indicated assessment information was to be utilized to improve district curriculum and instruction, no specific information was provided on the types of student assessments that were to be implemented in the district beyond those required by the State of Illinois.

Finding 4.2: Assessment trends show stagnant or declining proficiency rates for Thornton Township High School District 205 students, and performance remains below state and national averages.

Student assessment data enable a school system's staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the written curriculum, as well as the instructional methods used to improve student achievement. The board of education, district
Thornton Township High School District 205 Curriculum Audit Executive

and school staffs, and community use comparative assessment data to determine how effective schools and the district have been in educating students in comparison to national and state performance averages. These data also enable the analyses of program effectiveness. Effective school systems are able to document high achievement among all students. It is expected that an analysis of test scores will indicate a consistent pattern of improvement over time. Without such data, leaders do not have the information necessary to assess the quality and consistency of student learning, program effectiveness, and organizational performance. Additionally, leaders do not have a sound basis for making decisions about the design and the delivery of curriculum.

To identify proficiency goals and trends, the audit team reviewed state and district policies and plans, test data reports, and related documents. Auditors also interviewed school board members, members of the district administration, principals and assistant principals, and area instructional leaders. Teachers were surveyed. Auditors found that student proficiency rates, as measured by state assessments, are low and consistently below state averages. Students are not making sufficient progress to achieve the Thornton Township High School District 205 Vision: "To inspire our community of learners to achieve educational excellence." Overall, data trends show stagnant or declining performance, and the gaps between district and state proficiency rates remain the same or are increasing.

The State of Illinois has made several changes in the assessments that are required of high school students over the last four years. In 2013-14 and the years before, the *PSAE* was administered to high school students. In 2014-15, the transition year to the *PARCC* assessments, the state issued district and school report cards that focused on aggregate *PSAE* scores and *PARCC* field testing. In 2015-16, the *PARCC* was administered to high school students. In 2016-17 the *SAT* will be administered at the high school level and the *PARCC* will continue to be administered at the elementary and middle school levels. Because of the frequent changes in the achievement assessments administered as required by the State of Illinois, the audit team elected to focus on three assessments: the *Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE)* for students in eleventh grade for the five years that data was provided for students meeting or achieving proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science; the *PARCC* test; and scores from the *ACT*. *PSAE* assessments are required to be completed by all eleventh graders in Illinois, and include the *ACT* battery in English, mathematics, reading, science, and writing as well as a state-developed science assessment.

Auditors also completed analysis comparing district assessment results against the state and national performance of Black students. This analysis provides a lens that more closely mirrors the demographics of the district. Auditors organized recent data from these assessments into a series of exhibits designed to highlight the salient conditions and trends of the greatest benefit to curriculum managers.

A review of the broad sweep of the data displayed in [Exhibits 4.2.1 through 4.2.9](#) reveals that student performance is well below state and national performance and has not improved from 2006 to 2014 in all grades and subjects on the *PSAE*. Thornton Township High School District 205 students have consistently performed lower than national and statewide averages on the *ACT* exams. Overall, assessment trends show stagnant or declining proficiency rates for Thornton Township High School District 205 students, and performance remains below state and national averages.

Finding 4.3: Use of formative and summative student assessment data is inadequate to inform curricular and instructional decision making.

Use of student assessment data from a variety of sources is essential for sound curriculum management and responsible decision making for various district functions, as well as for classroom instruction. Direction for linking feedback to improvement of learning should originate from board policy. Effective assessment measures include student achievement data, survey and follow-up studies, program evaluation, audits, and reviews. The resulting data serve as bases for comprehensive planning, program evaluation, professional development, and budget prioritization.

In effective districts, the student assessment process is ongoing, programmatic, and systemic. Administrators and teachers demonstrate clear understanding of how students are assessed on required testing instruments. In those school systems, all administrators and teachers know how to analyze important trends in the instructional program, as well as areas of strength and weakness by classroom, groups of students, and individual students. School leaders and teachers make frequent use of assessment data to design classroom instruction aimed at improving student achievement. Various forms of data are used to identify needs that can inform decision making at both school and district levels.

Summative assessment is used retrospectively when evaluating programs or student outcomes. This form of assessment is used to determine how well the program, group, or individual achieved predetermined goals. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is used at various points during implementation of a program or instruction in time to make changes that will affect outcomes. In other words, assessments are summative if the results are used to judge performance or effectiveness; assessments are formative if the results are used to modify programs or instruction in time to affect student learning and program outcomes. When properly used, both summative and formative assessments add value to systemic decision making.

The auditors reviewed board policy, various planning documents, and evaluation reports provided to determine the extent to which data were used in curricular and instructional decision making. Auditors also conducted interviews with board members, district and building administrators, and central office staff to better understand how data were used in the district.

Auditors found summative student assessment data were available district-wide for certain courses and at certain grade levels (e.g., grade 9 in reading and grade 11 in English/language arts and mathematics). They found that some forms of formative assessments were available for some courses and grade levels. However, neither summative nor formative data were being used consistently for curricular and instructional decision making to improve student achievement.

Thornton Township High School District 205 did not have any board policies that specifically guided the use of formative and summative student assessment information.

Both formative and summative data are essential in informing decision making about implementation, continuation, expansion, modification, or termination of district programs. Use of formative and summative data related to student achievement is in its infancy in the Thornton Township High School District 205 and has been hampered to some extent by state-wide changes in the high school assessments annually over the last three to four years. Teachers do not have adequate access to informal assessments or an item database that can be used to develop informal assessments. While there is some use of pre/post, unit, and performance assessment by some teachers, there is inconsistency in use as well as a need for professional development regarding the use of assessment data for teaching and learning improvement.

A system-wide process for use of data in evaluating programs prior to implementation or when making decisions about continuation, modification, or termination was not in place. When programs are not evaluated, they may continue to drain financial and human resources even when ineffective. On the other hand, they may have strong potential, if modifications are made to ensure the effectiveness of their implementation. In the Thornton Township High School District 205, data use for programmatic decision making was neither systematic nor systemic. The auditors found data for programmatic decision making was limited, in large part, to production of compliance reports.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PDK-CMSI CURRICULUM AUDIT™ TEAM FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE THORNTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 205

Based on the three streams of data derived from interviews, documents, and site visits, the PDK-CMSi Curriculum Audit™ Team has developed a set of recommendations to address its findings shown under each of the standards of the audit.

In the case of the findings, they have been triangulated, i.e., corroborated with one another. In the case of the recommendations, those put forth in this section are representative of the auditors' best professional judgments regarding how to address the problems that surfaced in the audit.

The recommendations are presented in the order of their criticality for initiating system-wide improvements. The recommendations also recognize and differentiate between the policy and monitoring responsibilities of the board of education, and the operational and administrative duties of the superintendent of schools.

Where the PDK-CMSi audit team views a problem as wholly or partly a policy and monitoring matter, the recommendations are formulated for the board of education. Where the problem is distinctly an operational or administrative matter, the recommendations are directed to the superintendent of schools as the chief executive officer of the school system. In many cases, the PDK-CMSi audit team directs recommendations to both the board and the superintendent, because policy and operations are related, and both entities are involved in a proposed change. In some cases, there are no recommendations to the superintendent when only policy is involved or none to the board when the recommendations deal only with administration.

Audit recommendations are presented as follows: The overarching goals for the board and/or the superintendent, followed by the specific objectives to carry out the overarching goals. The latter are designated "Governance Functions" and "Administrative Functions."

Recommendation 1: Develop a comprehensive, multi-year implementation plan that addresses the findings and recommendations contained in the Curriculum Audit™ report. Align district decisions and actions toward closing gaps identified in the audit findings.

A school district served by district leaders who are committed to academic excellence and have high expectations for the achievement of all students develops a shared vision that is consistently communicated through the actions and practices of the organization and through the results achieved. Effective planning is essential for focusing and organizing district efforts toward achieving its goals. Comprehensive planning benefits students by increasing the probability that effective programs, practices, and resources will be available at every level of the school district. A school district committed to academic excellence systematically collects and analyzes student achievement data at the classroom, grade, department, building, and district level; identifies gaps between current and desired performance; identifies possible strategies to enhance teaching practices; and then organizes interventions to close any performance gaps. While many innovations work for some groups of students and may be preferred by teachers, ultimately, district staff and leadership must determine if the instruction, programs, and services of the school district are making a difference. Ensuring that all students are provided appropriate opportunities to learn and are achieving at desired levels are critical and require school districts to be thoughtful about how they engage students and the expectations held for their success. Responsibility within a successful school district is discharged through numerous short- and long-term plans and actions, including curriculum development, professional development, instruction, and student assessment.

The mission, goals, and value statements developed by district leadership convey an expectation of high expectations of students and the belief that all students can learn. The district's policies, role definitions, plans, programs, and interventions are inadequate in design and implementation to ensure the alignment of district decisions and establish a system-wide focus on improving student achievement over time. Approaches to curriculum design, student assessment, and professional development lack many of the components necessary to ensure that student achievement is predicated on appropriate opportunities for all students to learn.

The leadership of Thornton Township High School District 205 has commissioned and received a Curriculum Audit™. The audit report represents a detailed examination of the design and delivery of the grades 9-12 curriculum and the results achieved in terms of student achievement. The audit report contains specific recommendations for actions that district leadership can take to ameliorate conditions outlined in the findings and improve curriculum design and delivery. Without synthesizing the audit findings and recommendations into a coherent plan of action, district leadership assumes the increased likelihood of failed implementation and the inefficient use of limited district resources. It is recommended that within six months of receiving this Curriculum Audit report, the Thornton Township High School District 205 Board of Education take steps to ensure the development of a cohesive set of multi-year plans aligned with board policies and goals to focus the resources of the district in accomplishing identified priorities.

Governance Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Thornton Township High School District 205 Board of Education:

G.1.1: Direct the superintendent to develop a five-year plan addressing the findings and recommendations in the Curriculum Audit™ and focusing and aligning organizational efforts at all levels (i.e., classroom, department, grade level, building, and district) toward achieving learning goals that have been established by the board. The audit findings and recommendations represent significant organizational change that will require time to implement and incorporate into the school district's organizational culture.

G.1.2: Direct the superintendent to present to the board annually an operational budget that includes the resources necessary to implement the five-year plan directed in **G.1.1**.

G.1.3: Appropriate the resources necessary for the superintendent to carry out the five-year implementation plan. If the board is unable to appropriate the resources requested, direct the superintendent to modify the implementation plan by extending the timelines so the plan can be accomplished within available resources.

G.1.4: Assess board practices and actions and use the results to revise, as necessary, board policies to ensure that they clearly define the role and responsibilities of the board regarding district governance, policy development, operational oversight, relations with the superintendent, public engagement, community relations, and advocacy of public education.

G.1.5: Review the current mission statement and District Improvement Plan to ensure they present a compelling direction for the Thornton Township High School District 205 to guide decision making, resource allocation, and the collective energy of the organization to ameliorate discrepancies between current and desired results (see Recommendation 4).

G.1.6: Require that the campus vision and mission statements as well as their campus improvement plans be closely aligned with the district plan with district goals addressed as part of campus plans.

G.1.7: Incorporate into the board's annual goals, goals directly related to the implementation of the superintendent's multi-year plan for addressing the findings and recommendations contained in the Curriculum Audit™ report. Require the superintendent to report every four months on the progress made in addressing the audit findings and recommendations, specifically in terms of changes in organizational and professional practices.

G.1.8: Direct the superintendent to draft for consideration by the board a policy that specifically guides planning functions within the district. Ensure that the policy language adheres to audit criteria and requires the development of a comprehensive, district-wide, long-range plan with annual renewal provisions and linkages among plans (building level plans, curriculum management plans, professional development plans, student assessment and program evaluation plans, technology plans, budget plans, facilities plans, etc.). All plans should be aligned with the district's strategic directions.

G.1.9: Adopt a board policy for comprehensive district-wide, long-range planning, which focuses district efforts toward improved student achievement. Require that planning be designed to ensure that the long-range strategic plan drives other plans, that there is collective planning among buildings and functions, and that the process is timed to coordinate with annual strategic planning activities.

G.1.10: Direct the superintendent to develop administrative regulations or guidelines that provide detailed direction for how board policies will be implemented.

Administrative Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Superintendent of the Thornton Township High School District 205:

A.1.1: Develop a five-year plan (as referenced in **G.1.1**) that addresses the findings and recommendations included in the Curriculum Audit™ report. The five-year implementation plan should describe desired results, contain explicit statements of action, establish specific timelines, assign roles and responsibilities, and include a detailed listing of the resources that will be required to accomplish each action step.

A.1.2: Assist the board in reviewing, and, if necessary, developing a comprehensive plan to ensure that the stated mission, vision, core values, and strategic directions present a compelling direction for the Thornton Township High School District 205.

A.1.3: Assist the board in developing a clear, concise, comprehensive policy framework using the audit findings as a guide (see Recommendation 2).

A.1.4: For critical policies, develop comprehensive administrative regulations that clearly describe how board policies will be implemented. Incorporate into administrative regulations all of the characteristics displayed in Exhibits 1.2.2 through 1.2.6 of the Curriculum Audit™ report to ensure that administrative regulations are capable of clearly communicating district operational procedures and practices.

A.1.5: Develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum and instruction management plan to ensure maximum student achievement. The purpose of a cohesive and comprehensive curriculum and instruction management plan is to establish a systematic process for curriculum development in all areas, comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation, and professional development that is designed based on clearly identified curriculum, assessment, student achievement, and job performance needs (see Recommendation 2).

A.1.6: Develop or revise and implement a comprehensive set of job descriptions to ensure that the work of key positions is aligned with the design, delivery, and monitoring of curriculum.

A.1.7: Utilize the Curriculum Audit™ report in the prioritization of strategies to achieve focus and to identify management clusters of activities.

A.1.8: To gain clarity on what needs to be accomplished to achieve the board's vision, collect and analyze accurate, detailed data to determine the status of the school district in terms of the board's vision and strategic direction. Specifically, examine the effectiveness of district programs and interventions that have been implemented to improve student achievement. Terminate those programs and interventions that, within a three-year period, have failed to achieve their original goals. Identify programs and interventions that will most likely close the achievement gaps, particularly among minority and low income students. The number of innovations is not so important as the targeted linkage between the intervention and system goals.

A.1.9: Develop a communications plan for communicating district programs and results in addressing the findings and recommendation of the Curriculum Audit™ report. Address in the communications plan:

- Modes of communication, including use of the district website and social media;
- Communicating in multiple languages to include second language families or families not fluent in English; and
- Staff communications that clarify district priorities and efforts.

A.1.10: Designate in the annual operating budget the resources needed to implement a five-year plan that addresses the findings and recommendations included in the Curriculum Audit™ report.

These recommendations, if implemented, should provide district staff with the means to address the findings contained in the audit report while focusing all district efforts toward achieving equity in student achievement outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Update the district organization chart to convert several functional areas contained in the chart to positions, create job descriptions for organizational chart positions where none exist, and update job descriptions for all positions to provide clear chain of command references and job linkages to teaching and learning. Modify existing board policies to provide direction and control for the design and delivery of curriculum and other district functions in the Thornton Township High School District 205.

Current, well-written policies provide an updated legal framework for school district program operations and help create an educational focus for ongoing decision making at the campus and district levels. Policies are relied upon to be a source of reference for district management as they deal with recurring issues and make operational decisions to promote consistency of administrative practices and cohesion of organizational functions. Local policies move beyond legal compliance and, when integrated with audit standards, provide the specificity needed for clear direction of key curriculum management issues, including the design and delivery of curriculum and other district functions.

Clarity of administrative role relationships is essential to an organization in the control and management of its tasks and functions. Curriculum Audit criteria require well-defined lines of authority and adequate staffing for all programs to plan, deliver, and achieve the expectations of the district and state.

Auditors concluded that the current board policies do not meet Curriculum Audit standards. Board policies are inadequate to provide quality control needed for effective management of the curriculum and related district functions (see [Finding 1.1](#)).

Auditors also found that district-level planning does not meet audit standards to provide direction for system-wide change. Linkages between district-wide and school-level plans are inadequate to provide clarity and consistency at all levels of the system. Additionally, the district lacks clear direction and planning for curriculum management, professional development, and student assessment and program evaluation (see [Finding 1.2](#)).

Auditors also concluded that the Thornton Township High School District 205 Organizational Chart does not meet audit criteria for sound organizational management. Job descriptions are inadequate in providing clear direction and position control. Multiple inconsistencies and duplications were noted between job descriptions and the organizational chart (see [Finding 1.3](#)).

In this recommendation, auditors provide suggested steps to be taken to remedy the above areas of inadequacy noted in the audit analysis. Most actions can be addressed within one year to meet audit criteria.

Governance Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Board of Education for the Thornton Township High School District 205.

G.2.1: Direct the superintendent to revise current policies and/or develop new board policies to address the deficiencies identified in [Finding 1.1](#) and present the policies to the school board for approval and adoption. Administrative regulations or procedures should also be established to provide guidance for implementation of superintendent's actions related to the board policies. Board policies and associated administrative procedures should exceed legal compliance and incorporate Curriculum Audit standards.

G.2.2: Direct the superintendent to establish an ongoing policy review and update schedule to avoid policies being outdated and ignored.

G.2.3: Direct the superintendent to establish a mechanism to ensure all administrators' understanding of policies and the expectation that policies are to be followed throughout the district.

G.2.4: Direct the superintendent to work with staff to convert functional areas on the organizational chart into line/staff positions to clarify the span of control and reporting lines in the district. The updated organizational chart should be presented to the board for review. Refer to the criteria in [Exhibit 1.3.1](#) for organizational chart criteria that meet auditor expectations.

G.2.5: Direct the superintendent to work with staff to develop job descriptions for all positions that currently lack

them, update existing job descriptions so that reporting responsibilities up and down the chain of command are clear, and link work responsibilities to curriculum design and delivery where appropriate. All job descriptions should incorporate Curriculum Audit standards outlined in Finding 1.3. Require the superintendent to provide an update on the changes made to the job descriptions to the school board for their information and approval, if required by board rules. Once the organizational framework is improved and brought up to standards, act to identify factors affecting superintendents' tenure, and take steps to improve the longevity of service of the senior administrative position for leadership stability and competency.

Administrative Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Superintendent of Thornton Township High School District 205:

A.2.1: Revise current policies and/or develop new board policies to address deficiencies identified in this audit and present the policies to the school board for approval and adoption. Board policies and associated administrative procedures should exceed legal compliance and incorporate the Curriculum Audit standards outlined in Finding 1.1.

A.2.2: Establish an ongoing policy review and update schedule to avoid policies being outdated and ignored.

A.2.3: Establish a mechanism to ensure all administrators' understanding of policies and the expectation that policies are to be followed throughout the district. Assure that policies are clearly communicated to all staff.

A.2.4: Work with staff to either align existing staff titles/positions with the district organizational chart or revise the organizational chart so that it reflects the position titles currently being used in the school district. Remove Board committees from the organization chart since those are governance activities reporting to the Board of Education, not to the Superintendent. Further, strategic planning activities need to be delegated to the Superintendent rather than managed by the Board. In addition, eliminate functions from the organization chart and only include positions. Organization units such as unions should also be removed from the organization chart because they are not a part of the Board and Superintendent's chain of command. Several key positions are missing and have been added in our draft organization chart. Create and/or update job descriptions so that they are aligned with the direction that is taken, incorporating Curriculum Audit standards for the job descriptions as outlined in Finding 1.3. Present the changes made to the school board for approval and adoption.

A.2.5: Work with staff to revise the current salary schedule to align with the direction taken in Administrative Function A.2.4. Revise the current salary schedule based on the levels of qualifications and responsibilities required for the position. Present the changes made to the school board for approval and adoption.

Recommendation 3: Design and implement a comprehensive curriculum management system that integrates development and use of the written, taught, and tested curriculum; provisions for equitable access to programs and opportunities that affect student achievement; expectations for instruction; monitoring of instruction; and professional development to provide continuity and consistency across all grade levels and campuses.

The goal of every school district is to provide quality instruction to each student. To achieve this goal, a district must focus time, energy, and the necessary resources to ensure that each student within the district has equal access to a quality education. A comprehensive curriculum management plan allows the district to focus resources and efforts toward the goal of increased student achievement for all students through a systemic means for the design, delivery, and alignment of the curriculum. The plan also ties directly with and focuses the work of professional development in the system. Curriculum management planning provides for coordinated leadership (see Recommendation 2), with clear role responsibility for the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the plan.

A quality curriculum document is based on a written, taught, and tested curriculum that is aligned in content, context, and cognitive and knowledge types. Thus, when a curriculum is truly aligned, the content (what is taught) is aligned with the context (how a concept is learned and practiced), and with the cognitive and knowledge types (thought process and knowledge dimensions required to accomplish the task). When a quality

curriculum is in place, learning is not left to chance but becomes an intentional, focused effort with clear direction for teachers and access to the same learning for all students across the district. A consistent format for curriculum documents across grade levels and content areas further ensures that the key components of an aligned curriculum are included: objectives that have clarity and specificity, assessments that match district and state performance evaluations, prerequisite skills and knowledge needed for new learning, instructional resources and texts that match the objective, and specific classroom strategies for each objective taught. In addition, curriculum documents need to be easily accessible to all teachers who need to refer to them in designing instruction. Supplemental programs and interventions need to align with and support the curriculum. The absence of any of these components leaves curriculum delivery to individual interpretations of district goals and intents.

In effective school systems, equal access to comparable programs, services, and opportunities in all schools is present. Fairness to all students is apparent in such areas as placement in special programs and access to challenging course offerings. At the system level, areas of inequity must be monitored and addressed through cohesive district, campus, and departmental planning; professional development efforts; and sometimes even staffing changes. Identification, monitoring, and remediation of areas of inequity must be addressed through data analysis, monitoring of classroom instruction, teacher evaluations, and district and campus improvement plans. At the classroom level, teachers also must monitor equity by looking at assessment data for different subgroups; by monitoring the effectiveness of their own instruction, behaviors, and attitudes; and ultimately determining whether students are making appropriate achievement gains, despite any demographic factors that might predict failure. What is fair for one student might, in fact, be unfair for another; treating students equitably often means one must treat students differently based on their unique needs. The driving force behind the concept of equity is that all students can attain academic success if given adequate support, instruction, and time.

Quality school districts have processes in place to communicate and institutionalize the system's instructional philosophy/model. School district belief statements in board policies and administrative regulations set the expectations for instruction in district classrooms and tie these practices to student achievement. District guiding principles are transferred to all classrooms, where they come alive, rather than existing simply as statements for display. Use of effective instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners, thereby positively impacting student achievement, is paramount. Communicating expectations of monitoring classroom practices and curriculum delivery, and providing professional development based on that information, afford school district personnel the opportunity to adjust for learner differences, thus improving student achievement.

The primary purpose of professional development is to provide all staff members with the knowledge and skills to deliver the written curriculum effectively and, thus, improve student learning and achievement. Professional development is a key factor in ensuring the alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum. An effective professional development plan is comprehensive, long-term, based on district goals, linked to staff and student needs, and aligned to the district's curriculum management plan.

The auditors found board policies provided insufficient direction for curriculum planning (see [Finding 1.1](#)). The district had no comprehensive curriculum management plan (see [Finding 1.2](#)). Many of the courses offered throughout the district lacked written curriculum documents to serve as guides in planning instruction (see [Finding 2.1](#)). Written curriculum that was present lacked many of the elements required to provide teachers with sufficient guidance for quality instruction; additionally, congruence among state objectives, curriculum elements, and local assessments was weak (see [Finding 2.2](#)). Although school district plans conveyed some commitment to equal access to educational programs and services and equitable support to students, the plans were not supported by enabling board policies. The audit team concluded that the design for equal access and equity was inadequate, and delivery was ineffective ([Finding 3.1](#)). Classroom instructional practices generally indicated low levels of rigor and limited use of effective instructional strategies (see [Finding 3.2](#)). Expectations for monitoring of instruction and curriculum delivery were lacking and there was no consistent approach to monitoring district-wide (see [Finding 3.2](#)).

The Thornton Township High School District 205 needs to design and implement a comprehensive curriculum management system to guide the development, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of an aligned curriculum. Initially, district personnel need to revise and/or add policies for design and implementation of the curriculum management system, equity, student assessment and program evaluation, monitoring of instruction, and

professional development. They need to develop and adopt a curriculum management plan to provide the foundation for a district-wide approach to design, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of the written,

taught, and tested curriculum. This plan, or others closely aligned with it, needs to address other critical district functions, including student assessment and program evaluation, monitoring of instruction, and professional development.

District personnel need to focus on development of quality curriculum documents promoting alignment and depth of content, in a consistent document format for ease of use district-wide. The district needs to begin with curriculum documents for core content area courses, but, with the goal of system-wide quality control, district personnel also need to develop curriculum documents for non-core courses, using the same format. Along with development of curriculum documents, a priority needs to be development of aligned assessment tools to provide formative data on student learning for instructional decision making.

Implementation of a comprehensive curriculum management system must address critical inequities in the system, as well as include clear delineation of expectations for instruction and implementation of a system for monitoring instruction based on those expectations and aligned with the written curriculum. In addition, the professional development system needs to include processes for formative feedback for both early career and more experienced teachers to promote teacher growth and ensure faithful and consistent implementation of district expectations for instruction.

Governance Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Board of Education of the Thornton Township High School District 205:

G.3.1: Direct the superintendent to revise for board adoption the existing *Board Policy 6:40* or develop new policy/policies requiring development and implementation of a comprehensive, system-wide curriculum management plan to guide the development, delivery, monitoring of, and training in an aligned written, taught, and tested curriculum.

G.3.2: Direct the superintendent to revise (or replace) for board adoption *Board Policy 6:40* addressing expectations for development of written curriculum for each subject and grade level taught. The policy, as adopted by the board, should direct that curriculum documents meet the criteria listed in Exhibit 2.2.1, as well as the following:

- A framework and procedures for development of curriculum, including a short- and long-term plan;
- Curriculum documents that incorporate research-based best practices and are aligned with current state standards, as well as with state assessments, and a means of ensuring alignment of all curriculum document components with state standards and assessments;
- A common format for all curriculum documents across subject areas and grade levels;
- An easily accessed, user-friendly repository for all district curriculum documents;
- Procedures for implementation of the curriculum, including clear expectations for instruction and monitoring;
- High quality professional development that addresses varied developmental needs of educators, encourages job-embedded teacher growth, and demonstrates understanding of change research; and
- Formal board adoption of all curriculum documents prior to implementation.

G.3.3: Direct the superintendent to involve stakeholders in developing a definition of equal access and equity. Develop board policy to include the agreed-upon definition and to establish and communicate a commitment to provide equal access to programs and services (note: equal treatment of unequals further exacerbates inequity) (see also Recommendation 4). Policy should include:

- Establishment of high expectations for achievement among all students. Authorization for administration to take whatever steps necessary to change any practice that inhibits the district's response to increasing student achievement and eliminating achievement gaps.
- Expectation that the superintendent will hold campus administrators and teachers accountable through the formal appraisal process.

- Review of curriculum, programs, and interventions to determine equality of access and equitable distribution of resources.
- Monitoring of placements in special programs to eliminate disparities in participation by subgroup populations.

G.3.4: Direct the superintendent to present for board review and adoption a district-wide plan for monitoring curriculum delivery, including instructional expectations, necessary components (e.g., teacher evaluation, walk-throughs), and roles and responsibilities of district and campus administrators.

G.3.5: Direct the superintendent to develop and implement a philosophy of and long-range plan for professional development focused on support of quality delivery of the curriculum by teachers. The plan should be aligned with other district planning documents and address the relationship between district and campus professional development, as well as a variety of approaches to professional development (e.g., professional learning communities, mentoring).

G.3.6: Direct the superintendent to develop a plan for providing mentoring support for early career teachers that goes beyond the minimum required by the state to provide for developmental needs and to increase teacher retention.

G.3.7: Commit adequate resources to support ongoing curriculum development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities.

G.3.8: Direct the superintendent to develop and implement a communication plan to inform all stakeholders of the progress of curriculum development and implementation and the effectiveness of efforts in meeting district goals and priorities.

G.3.9: Require regular, timely reports and evaluations of curriculum development, curriculum and program/intervention implementation (including monitoring), and curriculum and program/intervention evaluation.

G.3.10: Direct the superintendent to annually review and report on the effectiveness of the implementation of the curriculum management plan.

Administrative Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Superintendent of the Thornton Township High School District 205:

A.3.1: Assist the board of education in revising existing policies or creating new ones directing the development and implementation of a comprehensive curriculum management plan.

A.3.2: Develop a set of administrative procedures with expectations for all curriculum functions in the district, including, but not limited to:

- Development and implementation of a curriculum management plan;
- Design, development, and implementation of user-friendly, written curriculum documents for all grade levels and courses taught district-wide;
- Monitoring of curriculum implementation;
- Textbook and resource selection;
- Formative and summative assessment (see also Recommendation 4);
- High quality, needs-based professional development linked to curricular and other priority initiatives; and
- Program and intervention selection, monitoring, and evaluation (see also Recommendation 4).

A.3.3: Design a comprehensive curriculum management plan to include the following elements:

- A philosophical framework for the design of the curriculum, including such directives as standards-based, results-based, or competency-based; the alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum; and the approaches used in delivering the curriculum;

- Timing, scope, and procedures for a periodic cycle of review of curriculum in all subject areas and at all grade levels;
- The stages of curriculum development;
- Roles and responsibilities of the board, central office staff members, and school-based staff members in the design and delivery of curriculum;
- Format and components of all curriculum, assessments, and instructional guide documents;
- How state and national standards will be considered in the curriculum;
- Requirement that each content areas has a focused set of precise student objectives/student expectations and standards that are reasonable in number so the student has adequate time for content mastery;
- Expectation that curriculum documents not only specify the content of student objectives and expectations, but also include multiple contexts and cognitive process and knowledge types;
- Overarching beliefs and procedures governing assessment of curriculum effectiveness. This includes curriculum-based formative and summative assessments to direct instructional decision making;
- Expectation that curriculum be designed to support teachers' differentiation of instructional approaches and selection of student objectives at the correct level of difficulty, so students needing prerequisite concepts, knowledge, and skills are moved ahead at an accelerated pace and students who already have mastered objectives are moved ahead at a challenging pace;
- Procedures to be followed in using assessment data to strengthen written curriculum and instructional decision making;
- Procedures for conducting formative and summative evaluations of programs and their corresponding curriculum content;
- Requirement that there be a comprehensive staff development program linked to curriculum design and its delivery;
- Expectations and procedures for monitoring delivery of curriculum; and
- A communication plan for the process of curriculum design and delivery.

A.3.4: Ensure that specific district personnel are designated with responsibility for planning, directing, and coordinating improved curriculum design for grades 9 through 12. Reflect these responsibilities in district job descriptions (see Recommendation 2).

A.3.5: Formalize and implement a curriculum review cycle that includes a model for the design of curriculum documents as follows:

Organizational preparation:

- Select one core content area to begin (the auditors suggest science) and use as a model; select a format for curriculum documents and other online resource materials that is functional and user-friendly and that can be used district-wide for consistency across all content areas;
- In designing curriculum documents, build upon work done previously, expanding it to meet the audit criteria;
- Test and revise the model, then use in designing all other curriculum documents. Gradually expand curriculum development to include courses in other core content areas and all other courses taught within the district;
- Establish a timeline for developing, evaluating, and revising curriculum documents for each subject and course offered;

- Select a curriculum design team and provide training in curriculum and assessment design to this small group of individuals; and
- Select a curriculum review team to analyze the curriculum documents as they are drafted by the design team. In addition to teachers who teach the discipline under review, the review team should include a principal and teachers trained in technology, special education, gifted education, and education for English language learners.

Curriculum design:

- Review the latest research and expert thinking in the discipline;
- Assess existing curriculum documents' strengths and weaknesses based on research and the audit criteria in Exhibit 2.2.1;
- Include the following components of a quality curriculum document:
 - A clear statement of what skills/concepts should be learned, when and how they should be performed, and the amount of time or emphasis given to each objective;
 - Linkages between each objective and district and state assessments;
 - Specific delineation of prerequisite skills/concepts;
 - Linkages to adopted texts and other instructional materials; and
 - Specific examples of how to teach the key concepts and skills in the classroom using a variety of proven instructional techniques.
- Include strategies for differentiating instruction to meet the needs of English language learners, special education, and gifted students;
- Incorporate rigor through expectations of higher order cognitive process and knowledge dimensions and use of effective instructional strategies—including those specific to the content area;
 - Integrate instructional technology into the curriculum;
 - Obtain feedback from the curriculum review team; and
 - Use external consultants to critique the process and products during the design phase.

Curriculum implementation:

- Ensure adequate professional development for implementation;
- Pilot test the curriculum, as well as resource materials, assessments, and instructional strategies;
- Provide ongoing support to teachers, through needs-based professional development and through monitoring by administrators;
- Evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness in relation to student achievement;
- Revise field-tested curriculum documents, based on feedback and student achievement data;
- Submit curriculum documents for adoption by the board of education; and
- Ensure easy availability of written curriculum documents for all teachers teaching the designated subjects.

A.3.6: Establish standards and expectations for instruction and curriculum implementation district-wide. These should include:

- Clear expectations for administrators and teachers regarding use of the written curriculum,
- Description of the district's philosophical approach to instructional practices,

- Revision of job descriptions to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities relative to curriculum implantation and instruction, and
- The nature and characteristics of instruction expected in the district's classrooms, including the following specific expectations for teacher practice:
 - Research-based, best practice instructional strategies;
 - Differentiated instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners;
 - Specific strategies to meet the language development needs of English language learners at all proficiency levels; and
 - Highly effective strategies and activities, based on best state and local standards and objectives and national recommendations specific to the content area.

A.3.7: Develop and implement procedures to ensure students are fairly represented in programs, services, and opportunities that impact student achievement with the intention of eliminating the achievement gap between subgroup populations.

A.3.8: Design and implement procedures for regular monitoring of curriculum implementation and teacher use of effective instructional strategies across schools, subject areas, and programs clearly distinguished from the formal teacher evaluation process, including:

- Development of a system-wide approach to monitoring that addresses:
 - Determining the curriculum objective and cognitive level of objective being taught.
 - Comparing taught objectives to the district curriculum for congruence.
 - Using data from the two previous tasks to ensure that, in all classrooms, the prescribed and authorized curriculum is implemented with fidelity, in accordance with system policies.
 - Determining what effective instructional practices for all students, as well as those specific to English language learners, are occurring.
 - Determining how instruction is being differentiated to meet the varied needs of learners.
 - Determining how formative and summative data are being used to inform instruction.
 - Noting other evidence of objectives and effective teaching practices.
 - Planning when and how feedback will be given to the teacher.
- Revision of job descriptions in terms of professional responsibilities for monitoring (as opposed to evaluating) teaching;
- Provision of ongoing training in effective coaching (monitoring-feedback loop) of those individuals tasked with implementing the monitoring program;
- Appropriate oversight of the monitoring program to ensure it is implemented with fidelity; and
- Regular reports on the impact of the monitoring program to the superintendent and the board.

A.3.9: Develop a comprehensive professional development plan to increase teacher capacity, support district goals, and increase student achievement. The plan should address the following audit criteria for professional development:

- Development of policy that directs staff development efforts and fosters an expectation of professional growth among all employees.
- Basis in careful analysis of data.
- Provision of system-wide coordination, with a clearinghouse function in place.

- Adequate funding to carry out district professional development goals.
- Plan with a framework for integrating innovations and mission, but with a long-range outlook.
- Focus on organizational change (staff development efforts tied to district goals) and systematic provision for organizational, unit, and individual change.
- Basis in proven research-based approaches shown to increase productivity.
- Basis in developmental and adult learning theory and understanding of phases of the change process— initiation, implementation, and institutionalization.
- Direction that each supervisor is a staff developer of those he/she supervises.
- Expectation that there be an evaluation process that is:
 - Ongoing,
 - Includes multiple sources of information,
 - Focused on all levels of the organization, and
 - Based on actual change in behavior.

A.3.10: Develop and implement a plan for mentoring early career teachers that goes beyond the minimum required to meet state requirements:

- Design a plan to provide for consistent support and training of all early career teachers;
- Include an assessment of needs and goal-setting processing, allowing for changing needs of early career teachers throughout the two-year period;
- Formally assign responsibilities for carrying out the plan to more than just the assigned mentor to surround early career teachers with support; and
- Annually evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum management, instructional monitoring, and professional development relative to the achievement of all students and all student subgroup populations.

A.3.11 Provide financial resources within the budget to accomplish the elements of curriculum design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation noted in this and other recommendations.

If implemented, these recommendations should give the district a means of ensuring close alignment of district planning (see also Recommendation 1) and planning for management of the written, taught, and tested curriculum. Teachers will have easy access to high quality written curriculum documents for all courses offered in the district, as well as to a variety of aligned assessments and assessment tools for formal and informal instructional use. Students will have equitable access to programs, services, and opportunities that will positively impact student achievement (see also Recommendation 4). Consistent approaches to monitoring instruction with formative feedback and support for professional growth will be in place. Coordinated, system-wide professional development will support district curriculum implementation, be differentiated to meet individual needs of adult learners, and focus on improved student achievement. Development of a plan of action to implement this recommendation should take place during the 2016-17 school year with implementation to begin during the summer of 2017.

Recommendation 4: Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for student assessment and program evaluation that will provide meaningful data for decision making to support improved student achievement and to eliminate achievement gaps for low-performing subgroups. Develop system-wide formative and summative assessment tools concurrently with curriculum development. Require systematic evaluations of major programs and interventions linked with evidence of student learning to provide feedback for decisions regarding program selection, continuation,

expansion, modification, or termination.

In the Thornton Township High School District 205, the auditors found board policies, plans, and job descriptions to be inadequate to direct student assessment and provide feedback for curriculum modification and program evaluation. Planning for a comprehensive assessment program was not in place to provide feedback to students, parents, teachers, and administrators with results of student attainment of expected outcomes in all courses (see Finding 1.2). The scope of student assessment was inadequate to evaluate the taught curriculum in core and non-core courses to provide sufficient data for making sound curricular decisions (see Finding 4.3). At all levels, the percentages of district students meeting the standard of proficiency on state assessments were below those of students statewide; in addition, significant gaps in student achievement among various subgroups have persisted (see Finding 4.2). Use of formative and summative student assessment data for instructional decision making was in the very early stages (see Finding 4.3). Auditors found that a wide variety of district-wide and campus programs and interventions were present but were not being evaluated for their efficacy (see Finding 4.3).

Auditors recommend the revision of district policies and administrative regulations directing the design of comprehensive planning for student assessment in all core and non-core courses for grades 9 through 12 and for the evaluation of programs to determine the cost-benefit of programs and their alignment with district priorities. Additionally, auditors recommend the revision of board policies directing data use to identify and respond to achievement gaps. Due to gaps in student achievement among certain subgroup populations, as presented in Finding 4.2, direction through policy and administrative regulation is an immediate need to address student needs and determine which programs are beneficial in closing achievement gaps. Auditors recommend the revision of existing policies and/or development of new ones within six months.

The absence of a comprehensive plan for student assessment and program evaluation means the district lacks critical linkages with the curriculum and, therefore, direction for producing desired learning outcomes. The leadership of Thornton Township High School District 205 needs to consider, as a priority, the design and implementation of a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan or planning process. Having an assessment process in place can serve to acquire, organize, and analyze information needed to guide instructional planning, inform teachers about student learning, assess program effectiveness, and make critical decisions regarding the educational program, district practices, and resource allocations. Closely tied to the curriculum management plan (see Recommendation 3), this plan should be in place within nine months.

Governance Functions: The following actions are recommended to the members of the Board of Education of the Thornton Township High School District 205:

G.4.1: Direct the superintendent to establish the improvement of student achievement as the primary district priority and to ensure that board policies focus all district operations on supporting student achievement.

G.4.2: Direct the superintendent to present to the board for review and adoption policy that provides a framework for a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan, which may be part of the curriculum management plan (see Recommendation 3) and which includes the following:

- Description of the philosophical framework for the design of the student assessment plan and direction for both formative and summative assessment of the curriculum by course and grade in congruence with board policy;
- Direction for use of data to analyze group, school, program, and system student trends;
- An expectation for ongoing formative and summative program evaluation, an explicit set of formative and summative procedures to carry out these expectations, and provisions for regular formative and summative assessment at all levels of the system (organization, program, and student); and
- Requirement that formative, diagnostic assessment instruments are aligned to district curriculum and are administered to students frequently to give teachers information for instructional decision making.

G.4.3: Direct the superintendent to prepare for board consideration and adoption a policy or policies that commit to ending the achievement gap based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, English language proficiency,

and special education status.

G.4.4: Direct the superintendent to prepare for board review and adoption a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan as described in policy under action G.4.2.

G.4.5: Commit adequate resources to support the implementation of comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation planning.

Administrative Functions: The following actions are recommended to the Superintendent of the Thornton Township High School District 205:

A.4.1: Assist the school board in developing a new or revised policy that provides direction for development and implementation of a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan as described in governance action G.4.2.

A.4.2: Tied closely with a curriculum management plan (see Recommendation 3), develop a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan containing the following elements:

- The philosophical framework for the design of the student assessment plan and direction for both formative and summative assessment of the curriculum by course and grade in congruence with board policy.
- Direction for use of data to analyze group, school, program, and system student trends.
- An expectation for ongoing formative and summative program evaluation, an explicit set of formative and summative procedures to carry out these expectations, and provisions for regular formative and summative assessment at all levels of the system (organization, program, and student).
- Requirement that formative, diagnostic assessment instruments are aligned to district curriculum and are administered to students frequently to give teachers information for instructional decision making with a direct focus on eliminating disparities in achievement among subgroup populations.
- Inclusion of a list of student assessment and program evaluation tools, purposes, subjects, type of student tested, timelines, and so forth. Tools should make use of diverse formative and summative assessment strategies for multiple purposes at all levels.
- Specification of responsibilities of the central office and school-based staff for assessing all students using designated assessment measures, and for analyzing test data.
- Specification of connection(s) among district, state, and national assessments.
- Description of overall assessment and analysis procedures for use in determining curriculum effectiveness.
- Requirement that high quality, aligned student assessment examples and tools be placed in curriculum and assessment documents.
- Specifics regarding how equity issues will be identified and addressed using data sources, including controls for possible bias.
- Identification of components of the student assessment system to be included in program evaluation and specifics as to how these data will be used to determine the continuation, modification, or termination of a given program.
- Establishment of processes for communicating and training staff in the interpretation of results, changes in state and local student achievement tests, and new trends in the student assessment field.
- Provision for appropriate trainings for various audiences on assessment and the instructional use of assessment results.
- Delineation of responsibilities and procedures for monitoring the administration of the comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan and/or procedures.
- Description of creation of an assessment data system that allows for the attribution of costs by program,

permitting program evaluations to support program-based cost-benefit analyses.

A.4.3: Assign responsibility for development and implementation of formalized procedures for systematic student assessment and program evaluation aligned with the curriculum management plan (see Recommendation 3).

A.4.4: Continue efforts to implement technology to facilitate ease of data collection and use at all levels of the system. Provide ongoing training in its use to ensure its effective implementation system-wide.

A.4.5: Systematically expand training in formative and summative data access, analysis, and use in facilitating teaching and learning. Extend this training to all instructional staff and administrators and provide systems to connect this training to district-wide efforts to increase student achievement.

A.4.6: Establish clear expectations for administrators and teachers in board policies, administrative regulations, and job descriptions on use of assessment data for diagnosing student needs, evaluating student progress, determining curriculum and program effectiveness, and making decisions in all district operations (see also Recommendation 2).

A.4.7: Expect that all major district programs be evaluated on a regular schedule and that all program evaluations include cost-benefit analyses along with recommendations for continuation, expansion, modification, or termination.

These recommendations, if implemented, should give the district a means of ensuring consistent, appropriate use of data to assess student progress and evaluate programs and interventions, analyze results, and ensure such results are used to make sound decisions about curriculum, instruction, and programs. Additionally, assessment and evaluation data will be available for use in informing students, parents, and other stakeholders as to the effectiveness of district staff in educating their students.

III. SUMMARY

A Curriculum Audit is basically an “exception” report. That is, it does not give a summative, overall view of the suitability of a system. Rather, it holds the system up to scrutiny against the predetermined standards of quality, notes relevant findings about the system, and cites discrepancies from audit standards. Recommendations are then provided accordingly to help the district improve its quality in the areas of noted deficiency. The recommendations represent the auditors’ “best judgments” about how to meet the discrepancies disclosed in the report. It is expected that the superintendent and his staff and the board may demur with the recommendations. However, they form the starting point for a discussion of how to deal with the documented findings and improve the system so that student achievement will improve.

Normal audit practice is for the board of education to receive the audit report; they do not accept it. After review of the audit report, the board requests the response of its superintendent of schools. When the superintendent’s response is received, then the board can act upon those two sets of recommendations. In this manner, the superintendent and the board are always accountable for what occurs in the school system after an audit report is delivered.

Five years ago (2011-12), the Thornton Township High School District had a student enrollment of 5,208. Enrollment declined over the next two years, sinking to a low of 4,620 in 2013-14. The 2013-14 timeframe was a time of great turmoil with the board of education in the school district. Since 2013-14 the student enrollment has increased each year, rising to 4,850 in 2014-15. Since 1999 the school district has changed superintendents seven times. The minority majority school district has a student population that is 87.5 percent Black and 10.4 percent Hispanic. The remaining student population is composed of White, Asian, American Indian, and multiracial students (each less than one percent). For

more than 16 years, Thornton Township High School District 205 has been plagued by achievement gaps for students, when compared to surrounding districts and state performance averages. Without significant efforts to align the written, taught, and tested curriculum along with professional development that incorporates strategies that support cultural competence, many students in the Thornton Township High School District will not catch up with their grade level peers in other school districts or the state.

Auditors learned that the school board turmoil seems to have subsided since the 2015 elections. The auditors were informed by the current leadership of the district that they are optimistic about the direction and future of the school district. Several also expressed the need for the new leadership to focus on re-establishing the trust of school personnel and the community as the plans are rolled out. Finding that board policies lack the degree of specificity necessary to provide direction for curriculum development, instructional delivery, monitoring, professional development, and assessment (either formative or summative), and that there is no comprehensive long-range plan in place, the audit recommendations will provide a blueprint for improvements. The district must focus on clarifying its organization and job descriptions, updating policy, developing a curriculum management system aligned with audit standards, and strengthening instructional supervision and monitoring as well as focusing and aligning formative and summative assessments with curriculum.

Like many other school districts in Illinois, the Thornton Township High School District 205 has undergone training to implement the state mandated curriculum, which is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. However, to date, those efforts have not produced consistent high quality curriculum materials within the district to support teaching and learning. With adequate training and the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum management plan to re-center efforts, a more consistent level of curricular understanding and culturally sensitive instructional delivery is to be expected. With curriculum management in place and quality training provided for administrators in how to monitor the delivery of the curriculum, increases in student achievement will be a welcomed result.

Undertaking the Curriculum Audit is evidence of a commitment to improved student achievement. Future progress will depend, in part, on the district leadership team's efforts to address the issues presented in the audit report and the board's willingness to allow the superintendent and his team to administer to the needs of the district. It is hoped that this Curriculum Audit report will provide the stimulus for the board, administration, teachers, parents, and community members to develop an agenda for systematic change and improvement. If that process yields the kind of quality and consistency envisioned in the recommendations of the audit, there is every reason to be optimistic about the future of Thornton Township High School District 205.

