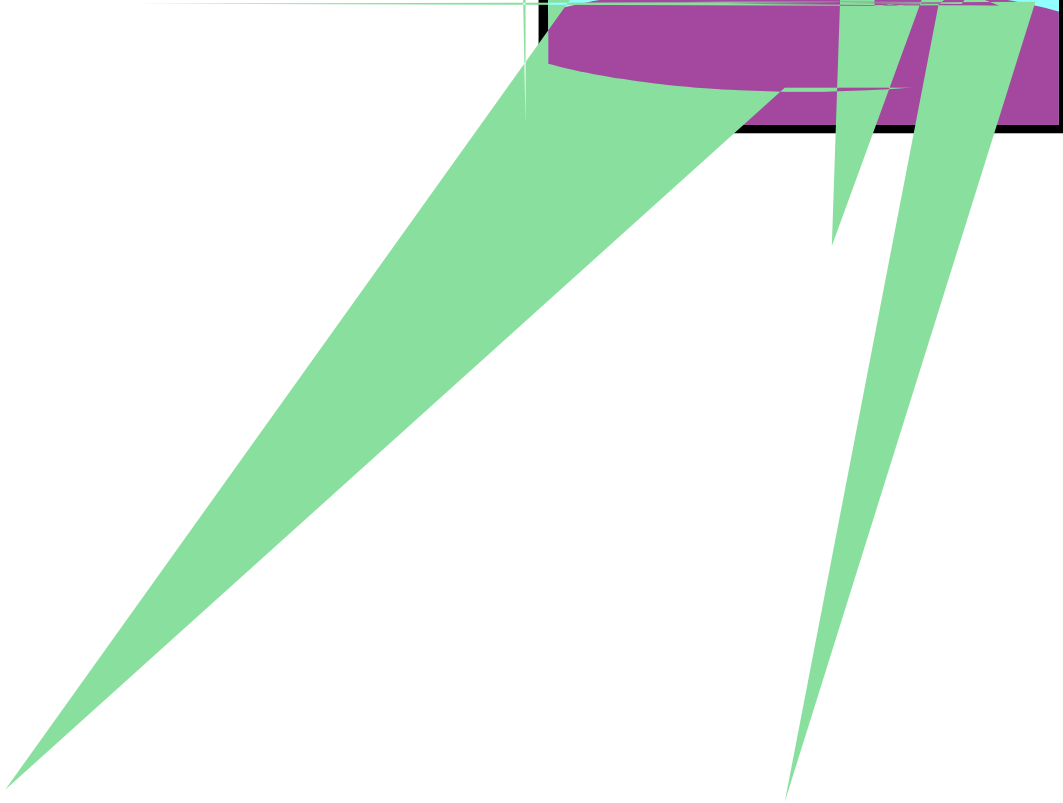
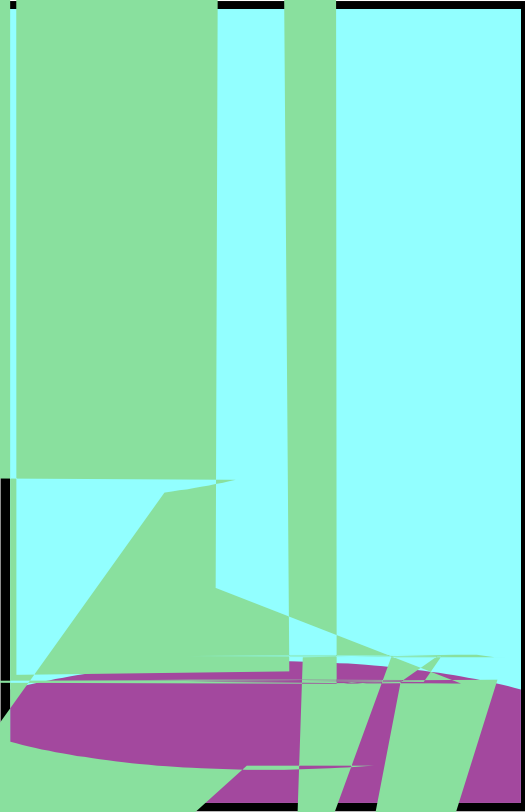


Principles of Learning
200 Evaluation Report



Principles of Learning, 2001-2002 Report

Of the teachers, 63% responded that they had participated in no more than 19 hours on professional development related to the Principles of Learning.

reported that area and vertical team meetings were most effective for helping them learn about the Principles; district leaders of this initiative may want to consider how this avenue for professional

PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to present information for decision makers about the implementation of the Principles of Learning initiative during the second year of the partnership between the Austin Independent School District (AISD) and the Institute for Learning (IFL), and to make recommendations for program improvement. Program managers for the partnership and campus administrators will find information about implementation of the Principles of Learning and about professional development related to the initiative. Central office administrators and school board members will find information that should inform decisions about district practice and policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation staff would like to acknowledge the feedback and technical assistance provided on various portions of the evaluation of the Principles of Learning initiative during 2001-2002. AISD program managers offered input in planning the evaluation and on the surveys used to gather data from participants. Staff in the Division of Accountability and Information Systems provided support and constructive feedback for this evaluation. Resident Fellows of the IFL at the University of Pittsburgh and a senior advisor for education policy at the RAND Corporation offered feedback on the construction of surveys. AISD also acknowledges the RGK Foundation for their support of the AISD-IFL partnership. Finally, the evaluation staff would like to thank all those who participated in the surveys, interviews, observations that were conducted during the course of the evaluation, especially the teachers, instructional specialists, and principals at the campuses.

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OVERVIEW

Since July 2000, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) has maintained a partnership with the Institute for Learning (IFL), which is directed by Lauren Resnick at the University of Pittsburgh. The goal of this partnership is to provide a framework for guiding leadership and classroom practices that ensure all students in the district have the opportunity to reach the standards established by the Texas Essential Knowledge and

2002. Educators at all levels, including teachers, instructional specialists, curriculum specialists, and administrators, all participated in professional development focused on the Principles. Among other professional development activities, two district-wide staff development days for teachers devoted time to the Principles of Learning. Professional development for principals occurred most visibly in five district wide Principals' Seminars. The purpose of POL-related professional development was to continue discussions about and coaching in the Principles of Learning that will improve classroom practices. Discussion of the TEKS was an important part of the professional development. In addition, some teachers, instructional specialists, and curriculum specialists were called to participate in professional development on a new component of the AISD-IFL partnership known as Content-Focused Coaching (CFC).¹

LearningWalks continued to occur at all campuses, though not all were led by an area superintendent as was often the case during 2000-2001. For some campuses, LearningWalks served as another means for teachers' professional development on the Principles of Learning; these were led by principals or area superintendents. LearningWalks were conducted to engage campus staff in discussions about instruction and student learning at a thoughtful level, to examine what the practices associated with the Principles looked like in the classroom, and to discuss future improvements.

FUNDING FOR THE INITIATIVE

The total allocation for funding the AISD-IFL partnership for 2001-2002 was \$235,000 (i.e., \$3.01 per student, based on approximately 78,000 students). Funding for the initiative came from a variety of sources. AISD contributed \$110,000 from its Coca-Cola staff development fund, and the RGK Foundation provided a grant of \$125,000 to the Austin Public Education Fund to help fund the cost of AISD's partnership with IFL. Additionally, a second \$87,000 contract was developed for the Content-Focused Coaching component, as part of the state's Academics 2000 Cycle 8 grant funds to AISD. AISD's partnership with the IFL led to additional funding, including \$60,000 from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Research and Improvement to fund the district's

EVALUATION DESIGN

To help decision-makers examine and improve the Principles of Learning initiative, this report is divided into sections that address the following four questions:

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2. a a a
a ?

Table 1: Data Sources and Content of Data Collection for the Evaluation of the Principles of Learning Initiative, 2001-2002

Data Source		Data Collection
Interviews with AISD and IFL program		

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:
STAFF INVOLVEMENT AND QUALITY**

Principals, instructional specialists, and teachers participated in several types of professional development activities that incorporated training on the Principles of Learning. Although area superintendents also participated in POL-related professional development, they were considered part of the team of program leaders. Therefore, data on staff participation, perceptions of effectiveness, and the quality of professional

toward the lower ranges in hours, while responses by principals are skewed toward higher ranges in hours. These data suggests that POL-related professional development may

- frequency of staff meetings and discussions of the Principles of Learning was determined by the principal.
- !" ***Campus-based professional development.*** Time during two staff development days at the beginning of each semester was devoted to coverage of the Principles of Learning; all teachers were expected to attend. Materials were provided by the district's director of professional development, and principals had a choice of topics about the Principles of Learning to include, based on the needs of the campus faculty.
 - !" ***Campus-based study groups for teachers and staff.*** These professional development activities were at the discretion of principals and other campus leaders.
 - !" ***Workshops and seminars for teachers led by staff of the Professional Development Academy.*** At the discretion of the principal and area superintendent, PDA staff were invited to the campus to conduct a session or series of sessions for teachers according to a stated need of the campus. Alternatively, teachers could attend sessions at the PDA. New teachers to the district could also attend a PDA session that introduced the Principles of Learning.
 - !" ***LearningWalks.*** At the discretion of the area superintendent or principal, teachers participated in LearningWalks on their own campuses or other campuses as part of their POL-related professional development. Two elementary campuses used federal Title II funds to enable teachers to do LearningWalks.
 - !" ***Grade level team meetings.*** Attendance by teachers was expected; the frequency of meetings and the degree of focus on the Principles of Learning was at the discretion of department or grade-level team leaders.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INSTRUCTIONAL . campuse1

!" *LearningWalks*. Instructional specialists often participated in LearningWalks at their campuses with the principal and area superintendent.

STAFF PARTICIPATION AND EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS FOR

For principals, the most frequently attended professional development activities at which the Principles of Learning were discussed were the area or vertical team meetings. Seventy-two percent of principals reported attending these meetings seven or more times during 2001-02. Most principals (62%) rated area and vertical team meetings as “very effective” for helping them implement the Principles. Teachers reported participating in more grade level team meetings than any other activity listed on the survey, with 59% reporting that they participated seven or more times in grade level team meetings. Of all the professional development activities that teachers rated for effectiveness, a majority of teachers (56%) rated grade level team meetings as “very effective” for helping them implement the Principles of Learning.

LearningWalks

Table 3 shows that 85% of principals who responded to the survey participated in 3-4 LearningWalks on their campus, while 72% of responding teachers participated in 2 LearningWalks at their campus. Of the professional development activities listed in Table 3, LearningWalks deserve explanation regarding staff perceptions of effectiveness because they were a prominent practice in AISD’s Principles of Learning initiative. Although there were many LearningWalks across the district, area superintendents sometimes organized them differently. At least one area superintendent organized meetings for campus staff from a few schools within that area (referred to as “cluster meetings”), where LearningWalks were part of the agenda. Two principals elected to use federal Title II funds for teacher professional development that involved LearningWalks. One teacher who participated in a LearningWalk responded on the Title II survey that, “This is an extremely valuable in-service...It helps pump you up when you see good examples.” In general, LearningWalks appeared to offer high quality professional development and a notably collegial atmosphere to staff who participated.

One factor to consider in relation to teachers’ participation in and their judgments about the effectiveness of LearningWalks is the differing opportunities to participate, depending on the campus or area. The variability in organization of LearningWalks by the different area superintendents and principals may be related to ratings of effectiveness, as shown in the survey data. Of the teachers who responded to the survey, 26% rated LearningWalks as “very effective” for helping them implement the Principles of Learning. In contrast, 49% of principals characterized LearningWalks as “very effective” for helping them implement the Principles at their campuses.

The impact of LearningWalk letters on teachers’ instructional decisions appears to be relatively low, according to teachers’ survey responses. Teachers were asked about

the impact of LearningWalk letters on their practice, and 61% of teachers who responded reported that the letter reinforced either their prior classroom instruction, or their prior views about effective instruction. The effects of the LearningWalks letters as reported by teachers suggest that the letters elicited few changes in classroom practices or views about instruction. Another 15% of teachers who responded to the question reported that the LearningWalks letters had no impact on their view or instruction. A small proportion of teachers (21%) reported that LearningWalk letters gave them ideas about how to change their classroom instruction. In general, most teachers appeared to believe they were already implementing the Principles of Learning, or practices like them. For teachers, the impact of the LearningWalk letter on instructional practice appears to differ from that of participating in a LearningWalk group. Participation in a LearningWalk might be more helpful for understanding the Principles of Learning and how they are manifested in classroom instruction and student work. A LearningWalk letter, however, requires teachers to make a translation of the letter's content to classroom practice. By design, LearningWalks provide components of effective professional development that reaffirm standards set by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) in terms of context, process, and content (NSDC, 2002). Because teachers attended fewer LearningWalks than principals, however, it remains to be seen how effective LearningWalks may be as an avenue for teachers' professional development.

QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To assess the quality of selected professional development sessions, evaluators adapted a protocol designed by Horizon Research Inc. (entitled *2001-2002 a S a a a*)³. The protocol is based on standards for professional development developed by the National Staff Development Council, and was adapted to include components relevant to professional development about the Principles of Learning. The revised protocol included the following components of professional development:

- !" design—the structure of the session, including the time allotted for activities, the strategies, assigned roles, and resources for the session
- !" implementation—the effectiveness with which the facilitator implemented the design, as well as the likelihood that the session would move the participants forward in their capacity as teachers and/or leaders

³ The original protocol developed by Horizon Research Inc. may be downloaded at: <http://www.horizon-research.com/LSC/manual/0102/existing.php>.

- !" Principles of Learning content—the depth and breadth of attention to POL and/or the content area of focus, and its appropriateness for participants’ backgrounds and learning needs
- !" pedagogy—quality of attention to student thinking and learning, classroom

ratings were given for implementation (3.6) (range: 2.5 to 5) and culture (3.5) (range 2.4 to 4). The lowest ratings were in the area of pedagogy (3.0) (range: 2.5 to 4 out of a possible 5).

Ratings and observations of professional development indicate that POL-related sessions for principals and those led by PDA staff for teachers were of solid quality, especially in design and implementation. At several sessions in 2001-2002, area superintendents and PDA staff were observed to demonstrate Accountable Talk in ways that would allow their audience to see this Principle in action before discussing it in more detail during the professional development session. Academic Rigor was illustrated in several ways, including having participants work through mathematics problems and then discuss their solutions with others. In a LearningWalk, one area superintendent was observed to use old LearningWalk letters during campus LearningWalks to engage participants in discussions of the campuses' progress and their future goals. With teachers and principals, PDA staff led discussions about a fundamental idea behind the Principles—that an effort-based learning environment could lead students to achieve rigorous learning standards.

Under the protocol for assessing professional development, was also rated highly in observations of professional development for principals; however, some evaluators made note of occasional disengagement among participants, especially when the sessions were very large. For example, at several principals' meetings, evaluators observed that participants were not always intellectually engaged in presentations or discussions. In some cases, participants had not read the required articles that would be a focus of discussion during the session, thereby making meaningful discussion about the articles difficult. Extraneous comments or conversations occurred during these larger sessions, or principals often excused themselves from their tables to answer or return phone calls. At other times, principals were observed to give reasoned, critical feedback to area superintendents about materials or exercises that were part of their sessions. Another observation related to culture was the tendency of participants, most commonly in LearningWalks, to cite positive evidence of the implementation of the Principles, without a critical discussion of specific weaknesses and how they could be addressed.

Observations of professional development for teachers, which were led in relatively small groups by staff of the Professional Development Academy, appeared to focus on specific tools that would help teachers understand the Principles of Learning and implement them. At these sessions, groups were much smaller in comparison with sessions for principals, and teachers were highly engaged in the discussions. PDA facilitators demonstrated skill and sensitivity to the teachers' needs, such as initiating

more discussion about the Principles of Learning and the philosophy behind them when teachers raised questions. Much of at least one session also focused on ways to implement practices associated with the Principles in their classrooms through discussions of sample assignments and materials in the area of history and social studies.

PROGRAM LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Several program leaders were interviewed about the POL initiative, and also asked to discuss training and support for principals and teachers. One suggestion proposed was to cluster principals according to “where they are in their learning.” In this way, principals would be able to study the implementation over time so they could share best practices and be better trained to lead teachers. This program leader also cited the need for a “vehicle for novice people” where the principals—with the assistance of district’s Principals’ Academy—could be organized as a cohort and assigned

CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

Approximately half of the principals who responded to the spring survey described their school's progress in implementing the Principles of Learning as "well along in implementing." Furthermore, 71% of principals reported that 70% of

well. Due to the differing purposes of that evaluation from this one, Curry (2002) used a different instrument to assess implementation.

Table 4: Number and Content Area of POL Classroom Observations

	Mathematics Observations	Language Arts Observations	Other Content Area Observations	Total Number of Observations
Elementary Schools	18	3	2	23
Middle Schools	1	2	0	3
High Schools	4	4	0	8
All Schools	23	9	2	34

S S 2002 a a

DESCRIPTION OF THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION RUBRIC

answer or following predetermined procedures, instead of guiding them to develop deep understandings of the material. In this lesson, the teacher did not making academic expectations clear to students. Perhaps because expectations were not clear, students in this classroom and others rated as weak in implementation, in general, could not state the underlying purpose of the lesson and usually could not judge their work based on stated criteria. As one student explained, "I know what [grade] I get when the teacher gives it [my work] back." In lessons rated as weak in implementation, even when teachers used the Principles of Learning, the Principles did not appear to effectively lead students to deeper conceptual understandings of the material. In this lesson, students' understandings of the topic rarely advanced because they did not grapple actively with the underlying concepts. In the classrooms rated as weak in implementation, students were at times exposed to rigorous assignments, but the quality of the lesson was eroded by a focus on memorization, algorithms, or procedures.

Moderate Implementation

In classrooms rated as moderate in implementation, teachers implemented the targeted Principles of Learning, but limitations were observed. Teachers in classrooms rated as moderate in implementation used the lessons observed to understand many of the tools of the curriculum and analyze student work by the end of the lesson. In the classroom discussed through the criteria, the teacher used 97.6 percent of the criteria, but as with the teacher in this lesson, the criteria were not fully met.

meetings. In one classroom, a group of second grade students met in pairs to edit a paper they were going to publish. There was a rich, meaningful exploration of the language arts content by both students and the teacher in this classroom. Another example was a high school class in which students grappled with the contents of the play, "Long Days' Journey into Night." The teacher told her students, "The goal here is not to tell you what the play means, but to all struggle with its meaning. Why does the author do what he does?" This classroom was coded as strong in implementation because in the discussion of the play, multiple meanings were assumed to exist and students' perspectives were encouraged and valued. In one classroom a student spontaneously asked, "Why are we doing this?" The teacher proceeded to facilitate a discussion of the possible future uses of the knowledge.

Table 5: Principles of Learning Implementation: Number of Classrooms Rated at each Overall Level of Implementation

	Classroom Rating		
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
All Levels (n=34)	16	8	5
Elementary Schools (n=23)	11	6	4
Secondary Schools (n=11)	5	2	1

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The level at which a classroom was rated overall (i.e., *a*, *a*, or *a*) was related to specific features of the classroom's lesson and/or activities. This finding is informative, although not surprising. Classroom features that are related to higher ratings either represent indicators of the underlying Principles (for example, an indicator of a classroom in which the Principle of Clear Expectations is being implemented is that students can judge the value of their work using a rubric) or the classroom features are logically linked to underlying indicators (for example, in a classroom where students are grouped as pairs, it is more likely that student-to-student talk will occur—an indicator of Accountable Talk). In classrooms where students were working in pairs or engaged in small groups, lessons were significantly more likely to be rated as *a* in implementation than classroom lessons where these features were not present⁶. Additionally, in classrooms where at least part of the lesson included a lecture by the teacher, lessons tended to be rated lower in implementation than in classrooms where lecture was not a major component of the lesson.⁷ Finally, in classrooms where students could describe the purpose of their work and judge the quality of their work according to standards, lessons were significantly more likely to be rated as *a* or *a* in implementation than in those classrooms where students could not describe the purpose of their assignments or judge the quality of their work⁸.

⁶ Mann-Whitney tests were statistically significant at the p<.05 level.

⁷ Mann-Whitney tests, p<.06 trend.

⁸ Mann-Whitney tests were statistically significant at the p<.01 level.

a a . Furthermore, the greatest job challenge that instructional specialists selected out of nine listed was “having adequate time to work with teachers.” This option was selected by 72% (=28) of instructional specialists who responded to the survey.

Two program leaders for the POL initiative mentioned the lack of time as a factor in the progress of the implementation (for district staff overall), but differed in their views about it. One leader asserted that the claim of insufficient time was an excuse for not engaging fully in the implementation. It is not known, for example, how principals’ time for professional development on the Pr.148t8.26(les os ncu5.81(rrnt y ibe5.82(ng fse d,an dhow tohe)]

Teachers met regularly to study the videos that are part of the software and discuss the Principles of Learning. This learning opportunity undoubtedly contributed to a stronger understanding of the Principles by teachers at this campus. Finally, at a few campuses, IFL staff visited with the principal and a few teachers in LearningWalks or sessions to discuss a particular content area, such as social studies. In summary, some principals (and teachers) had additional avenues to learn about the Principles of Learning others did not. Although this variability was anticipated by program leaders for the initiative, the discrepancies in opportunities for learning by principals and teachers may help explain the variation in levels of implementation observed (see Classroom Implementation of the Principles of Learning).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR NEW TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALy STJ/F1 1 Tf12 0 0 12 901 524993 Tm/C0004

evolving. Staff from the IFL often solicited ideas and evidence about the on-going effort to incorporate the Principles of Learning into AISD's instructional settings for the purposes of their research, but district staff also wanted on-going support for addressing specific needs in AISD. Finally, program leaders have suggested that the partnership's effectiveness could have been stronger from the beginning if the IFL had more openly addressed the district's need for focus in the area of instruction.

A critical concern cited by district leaders and administrators was the cost of the partnership. One leader questioned whether the district was "getting enough bang for their buck." Another leader cited general concerns about the district's budget in upcoming years. Although a contract for the partnership was developed and costs were covered by grants and specified funding sources in the district (see the Overview section, "Funding for the Initiative"), IFL reportedly levied extra charges on the district. Two leaders went on to suggest that the partnership should not have to exist in its current form (and at its current cost) on a long-term basis. One program leader suggested, "It should not be a forever partnership—it should be for building capacity, and then [we should be] able to go back to them when we need help." Another program leader proposed that the district can do the same kind of work on its own, and then consult with IFL staff as necessary.

Without a doubt, the partnership has given the district valuable assistance in the areas of educational leadership and instructional practice. With respect to the latter, there was evidence that district staff have based decision-making and other changes with instructional practices in mind. One program leader explained:

I see us as becoming more focused. For example, because of the curriculum [focus], we decided not to go with [a specific technology-based mode of professional development]. We turned it down in favor of the district curriculum. We're keeping a focus for more consistency.

Monthly meetings for principals are no longer referred to as "operations meetings," but "instructional management meetings," where discussions about operations will be kept to a minimum. On the other hand, while improvements in instructional leadership are evident, some staff groups in the district experienced variability in access to these opportunities. In this way, the net effect of the IFL's nested learning community has been a concentration of theoretical and practical knowledge at the top of the district hierarchy with less headway being made at the level of the classroom. While time for working with teachers is a factor cited by many, the allocation of time on professional development and substantive discussions about implementing the Principles would go far in reducing the variability in the implementation seen in classrooms.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHS

During the second year of the Principles of Learning initiative, area superintendents, principals, instructional specialists, and teachers continued to learn about the Principles and how to implement them. In Spring 2002, professional development and implementation efforts coincided with AISD's preparations for the new Texas assessment, TAKS, to be administered in 2002-2003—most notably in the development of the curriculum and instructional planning guides that were aligned with the TEKS. The Principles of Learning embrace the importance of alignment between instructional content, the manner in which it is taught and learned, and assessment. The Principles also support the values of (a) student effort in building aptitude, (b) equity in learning opportunities for all students, and (c) the role of students in actively managing their learning. Observational and survey data show that the AISD-IFL partnership and the POL initiative itself have yielded the following positive results or benefits:

- !" The implementation of practices aligned with the Principles of Learning and a common language among many educators in the district about effective leadership and classroom instruction has continued. Principals reported that their campuses were implementing the Principles of Learning at high rates during 2001-2002, in comparison with the first year of implementation in 2000-2001. Also, 85% of principals reported that they had participated in a a 3 LearningWalks at their campuses during 2001-2002, and 61% reported they had participated in a a 3 LearningWalks at campuses.
- !" Professional development for principals, teachers, and instructional specialists often included information about the Principles of Learning and how to make them explicit in the curriculum content. Most notably, a large majority of principals (88%) and teachers (80%) who responded to the Spring 2002 surveys reported that POL-related professional development included discussions of the TEKS. These results help demonstrate that the research-based instructional practices described by the Principles can be integrated with the state's learning standards.
- !" Additional focus by district administrators on instructional practice in the classroom has influenced decision-making about other initiatives and the use of funds (e.g., federal grant monies).
- !" Program leaders cited the following benefits: resources from the Institute for Learning in the form of consultations with the director and the liaison assigned to

the district in 2001-2002, contacts with other districts that had partnerships with the IFL and were engaged in similar initiatives, and the literature and research-based practices that AISD staff had opportunities to read and discuss.

CHALLENGES

Despite the strengths of the initiative, data and observations from the Principles of Learning evaluation indicated the following challenges:

- !" Opportunities for professional development differed across groups of staff, with principals citing more time (as shown in the survey data) and opportunities for professional development than teachers. In estimating the total number of hours spent on professional development related to the Principles of Learning, 31% of principals reported spending 20-39 hours in POL-related professional development, but a majority responded that they had spent more time than that. Of the teachers, 63% responded that they had participated in no more than 19 hours on professional development related to the Principles of Learning. By design, much of the POL-related professional development involved principals, who were, in turn, expected to work with teachers. The data suggest though, that the quantity of professional development for teachers was mixed, and that additional professional development for teachers might be helpful in order to implement the Principles more effectively.
- !" Opportunities for professional development for principals as well as for teachers varied across the district. Some principals participated in activities (e.g., conferences held by the IFL, pilot work with the NetLearn project, or LearningWalks by IFL staff) that would likely enhance their understanding of the Principles of Learning and lead to stronger implementation at their campuses. The variability in opportunities is one factor that may be related to the differences in implementation that were observed across the district. Although this aspect of the initiative was planned, the activities may have enhanced understanding of the

- !" Program leaders, principals, teachers, and instructional specialists cited a lack of time for professional development activities about the Principles of Learning.
- !" Despite the strengths of the initiative, some district program leaders have cited a concern about the costs involved in the partnership with the IFL.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Principles of Learning initiative involves a continuous focus on high quality instructional practice and leadership. The IFL has provided valuable resources and assistance to the district, not just in preparation for the upcoming TAKS, but in motivating increased staff attention on instructional practice in the classroom and discussion of how to foster student aptitude through effort. These aspects of the POL initiative help address current and important issues for the district in its ongoing effort to address achievement gaps between White students and African American as well as Hispanic students, and improvements in teaching and learning to benefit all students. The Principles of Learning initiative should therefore continue in the district with some modifications, especially in the area of professional development, as described below. Professional development is key to the district’s implementation of the Principles of Learning. Under the AISD-IFL partnership, many professional development activities have been aligned with the standards set forth by the National Staff Development Council, and these activities are suited for long-term change and improvement. The following four recommendations are related to professional development and are offered as a result of the evaluation of the Principles of Learning initiative:

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Program leaders for the initiative incorporated different learning opportunities for principals across the district. One campus, for example, had the opportunity to participate in a pilot of the IFL’s NetLearn software. Additionally, the survey data about participation in POL-related professional development suggests that learning opportunities focused more on administrators than teachers. Although experts in educational reform (e.g., Elmore, 2000) describe the importance of district leaders in guiding instructional improvement, professional development and implementation efforts related to the Principles of Learning must better reach all classrooms. District leaders

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: G

!" Students in the class can describe the substance of what they are trying to learn.

!"

students in active reasoning about these concepts. In every subject, at every grade level, instruction and learning includes the following:

- !" Commitment to a knowledge core
- !" High thinking demand
- !" Active use of knowledge

Class assignments, then, are challenging and give students opportunities to raise questions, solve problems, and construct explanations within a curriculum that progressively deepens understanding of core concepts. Also, students' prior knowledge and out-of-school knowledge are used regularly in the teaching and learning process.

LEARNING WALKS AND LEARNING WALK LETTERS

LearningWalks¹⁰ are visits to a campus and its classrooms in which participants examine student work and classrooms, and talk with students and teachers. Between classroom visits, participants often gather to discuss what they learned in the classroom and offer any questions they have about their observations.

LearningWalk groups in AISD included a variety of district staff and community members. At some schools that received federal Title I funds, principals organized LearningWalks for parents with the help of the campus parent/community liaison. Parent LearningWalks were designed to give parents information about the TEKS and to help parents understand how these learning standards were being conveyed through the implementation of the Principles of Learning.

After LearningWalks that were led by the area superintendent and principal, the principal often wrote a letter addressed to the campus staff. The purpose of a LearningWalk letter was to stimulate discussions about how to improve teaching and learning among staff at a campus, in addition to promoting reflection about progress in implementing the Principles of Learning.

¹⁰ See <http://www.instituteforlearning.org>.

Level 2, Beginning Stages of POL Implementation

Teacher uses the Principle throughout the lesson and integrates it into a content area. Students are actively engaged in the lesson, but the manifestations of the Principle are *a*. Instruction does not reflect the teacher's deep understanding of POL nor strong facilitation skills. For example, in working with students to develop a criteria chart or rubric, the teacher gives answers, rather than facilitates the development of students' conceptual understanding; talk about content during discussions primarily occurs between the teacher and student, not between students; the lesson may not adequately push forward the understanding of a number of students in the classroom; indicators related to Clear Expectations or Academic Rigor are visible in classroom or hallway displays, but teacher language predominates; or students use the same strategies for solving problems or justifying arguments. The use of POL provides *a* exploration of content area that appears to lead to students' deepening their conceptual understanding of TEKS and/or rigorous content.

Level 3, Accomplished POL Implementation

Teacher uses the Principle throughout the lesson and integrates it into content area. The Principle is evident in the classroom and appears to promote meaningful learning of the content, which is TEKS-based. *a* students actively engage in the lesson, including teacher presentations, group discussions, reading, etc., but a small number of students appear less engaged. Small limitations may include: teachers' questioning strategies encourage active participation and collaboration among students, but students communicate only with the teacher; criteria charts or rubrics do not make standards for student work clear to students at all levels of performance. The use of POL provides exploration of content area that appears to enhance *a* students' conceptual understanding of TEKS and/or rigorous content.

Level 4, Exemplary POL Implementation

Students take ownership of their learning, and the teacher *a* uses the Principle in the content area of the lesson. For example, high quality talk permeates discussions about lesson content; students can articulate expectations for good work in the class; and assignments are rigorous and TEKS-based. *a a* students actively engage in the lesson, including teacher presentations, group discussions, reading, etc. Communication about content occurs among students as well as between students and the teacher. The teacher and students guide students to clarify and justify their thinking, contributing to the rigor of the task. Students and teacher are flexible in the strategies they use for

solving problems and justifying their arguments. Classroom and hallway displays communicate clearly to students, families, and the community what standards their students are working toward. The use of POL provides exploration of content area that appears to lead to a a students' deepening their conceptual understanding of TEKS and/or rigorous content.

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Publication Number 01.16

October 2002