

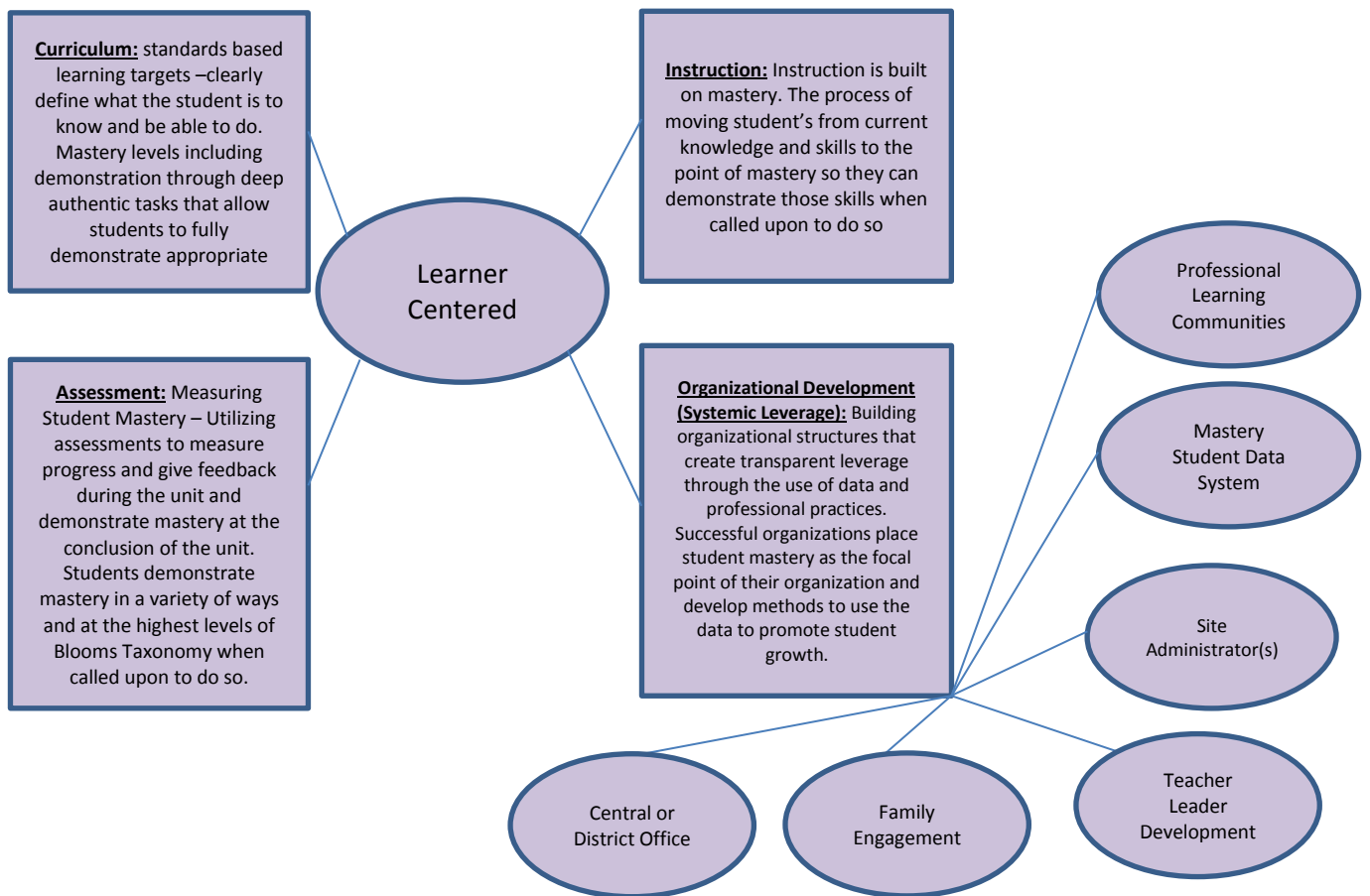
Carson City School District Race to the Top for Districts (RTT-D)

Executive Summary

12/27/2012

The Carson City School District has developed an extremely strong Race to the Top for Districts (RTT-D) application in order to gather the funds necessary to improve the educational opportunities of the students that it serves. The Carson City School District is a high poverty high need school district with over fifty percent of its student population qualifying for free and reduced lunch. In addition, over eighty percent of the graduating seniors require remediation in reading and/or mathematics when entering Nevada’s University and Community College systems. Despite this record the Carson City School District has a strong history of transforming low performing schools. In order to facilitate this change the district has defined an educational change model that can be effectively employed to identify areas of deficiency and improve school performance at all levels. The district defined this model as a Learner-Centered Organizational Model. (See (B)(1) Figure I)

(B)(1) Figure I: Carson City School District – Learner-Centered Organizational Model 2013



(B)(1) Figure I: Learner-Centered Organizational Improvement Model: Originally developed by the Carson City School District in 2009.

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The model is strategically designed to address four critical elements, specifically; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Leadership. Each of the four elements must be fully developed and designed to provide appropriate learning opportunities that will lead to student mastery. Failure to develop or effectively implement any of the four areas will create gaps and ultimately leave a large number of students performing below expectations. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of the interrelationship of the elements identified in this model. The latest educational research has identified teacher effectiveness as one of the most important elements to achieving student success, however if the curriculum or assessment system presented by the organization does not provide an accurate pathway to mastery of the state assessments then no matter how effective the teacher, student outcomes will always fall short of expectations. Nevada schools are facing significant challenges in the curriculum and assessment area because the state of Nevada does not host a common curriculum or formative assessment system. With limited resources small districts are susceptible to problems in this area. Carson City School District has not fully developed its curriculum and assessment systems and is also deficient in some of the other components of the Learner-Centered Model. Specifically the application addresses the adoption of standards and assessments that will prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace in a global economy. The application also provides the resources to build a data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals with data about how they can improve instruction. Finally, successful implementation of this project will allow the district to recruit, develop, and retain the strongest teachers and will allow the district to turn around its lowest achieving schools.

1. Standards: Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;

Aligned Curriculum and Assessment System: The district will create an aligned curriculum and assessment system that will provide a rigorous pathway through the district's secondary school system. Each course will have common comprehensive post assessments and students who master this material will leave the district college and career ready. The district will also possess common unit assessments that will allow students to demonstrate mastery in various ways. Finally, the district will verify that the series of courses offered in each department will be vertically and horizontally aligned. The district will map the curriculum backwards from college entrance down to the fifth grade level. In order to do this effectively the district will seek a partnership with the university system to bring together experts from the secondary and post-secondary arena to make important decisions related to curriculum and expectations. All content areas will be addressed in this process.

Staff Understands and Can Articulate Learning Targets: Staff members must be clear about the learning targets and how they will be measured if they are going to move students to mastery. Common classes will have common learning targets and expectations. Staff members who teach common courses will come together to set the learning targets and the methods of assessment for each class. The district believes that having classroom instructors complete this task with a highly skilled facilitator will allow the teachers to deeply understand the learning targets, and the district will have an aligned curriculum and assessment system that can provide the pathway for every student to reach mastery. This work will be completed in all classes and all content areas.

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As part of this process, performance expectations will be set for each unit of study. Results will be collected during the delivery of the unit and this data will form the foundation of the student data system. Performance information will be organized by standard mastery. The system will be designed in a way that will allow stakeholders to monitor how often a student encountered a specific standard and how well they performed on the related skill connected to it.

Learning Expectations – Student Engagement: Every course will have a published set of learning goals that will be used by students to identify their learning targets and monitor their individual progress throughout each unit of study. These documents known as *learning guides* will help all stakeholders to clearly understand learning expectations at any given point in time. Students will receive a learning guide at the beginning of each unit. The teacher will review the guide with their students focusing specifically on what knowledge and skills will be required and how the student will demonstrate mastery within the unit. Students will be able to use the learning guide to determine if they are on target or if they need to make changes in order to successfully complete each unit. Students who do not reach mastery at the conclusion of the unit will have the opportunity to receive additional support so that they will be able to reach their mastery targets within a reasonable amount of time.

Academic and Career Development: The district will utilize a career cluster model to create school-within-a-school small learning communities in each of its high schools. The clusters are built on the following focus areas; Agriculture, Business, Family and Consumer Science, Health Occupations, Informational Technology, and Trade and Industry. The districts vision is to have students travel along the traditional college pathway and at the same time pursue their career interests by working through one or more of the career cluster options. Students will be required to excel in both the traditional academic arena and the school to career arena. This dual foundation will prepare students to face global expectations.

Counseling Services: Counselors will be expected to provide academic and career guidance to every student. In this system a counselor will provide training to teachers and students on academic and career expectations. The district will develop a student electronic portfolio that will be used to provide information to students and parents about academics, school to career, and college expectations. This portfolio will be available twenty four hours a day and will update the data system as soon as information becomes available. Counselors will use the portfolio as an informational anchor and training point for students and parents.

Parents Engagement: Parents will have access to academic and career requirements throughout their child's educational career. Parents and students will receive specific training and ongoing support throughout their child's secondary career. This training will help parents and students to make informed decisions about their educational future. Parents will be able to access the student data system and determine if their students are meeting academic expectations in all courses. The data system will provide specific mastery data and parents will be able to identify where they can support their student's learning as needed. This is much more than making grades available. This is about listing specific knowledge and or skills and parents will be able to react to the information in a way that will enhance a student's ability to demonstrate mastery.

Student Support: Students will be assessed to determine their basic math and reading skills

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utilizing the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) as soon as they enter the district. Students will be assessed at least two times per year grades six through nine. Results will be used to determine if the students are able to demonstrate grade appropriate skills in reading and mathematics. Students who are performing below grade level will receive intense remediation within the classroom. Students who require further support will receive remediation outside of the core classroom. This double dose scenario will allow the student to keep working toward mastery in the regular classroom, but will also be receiving targeted support that will improve basic skills. This additional remediation may arrive in the form of an additional course or may be part of a before or after school remediation program.

2. Data systems: Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals with data about how they can improve instruction;

This project will see the development of two intertwined data systems that will support stakeholders to build a data driven environment within all participating schools. These data systems include a student electronic portfolio and a student unit mastery data system.

The student e-portfolio will be used to address the longitudinal pathway that students will follow from middle school through graduation. This portfolio will house both academic and career requirements from grades six through twelve. The system will be updated weekly as students reach mastery or complete a required course. Within the system both college and career components will be monitored.

The student unit data system will be used to monitor student mastery of standards based learning targets within each classroom. This system will be used to track student progress within each unit. These results will provide teachers and administrators a window into the overall skill of each student. Since these results are spread across all classrooms and all grade levels student support can be provided across all content areas. Results will be used by teachers to improve instruction. The data will be used in common course PLC's and by administrative staff to monitor student progress over time. This system will also house all critical academic and remediation information about each student. Finally, parents will have access to their child's data and will be able to make decisions as to what additional assistance might support ongoing progress of their student. This centralized data warehouse will be easy to access and use and is a true example of a transparent data system.

3. Strong Teachers: Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most

The single greatest factor in the success or failure of a student is the quality and preparedness of the classroom teacher (Darling-Hammond, 1999). In order for all students to demonstrate mastery at college and career ready levels the organization's teaching staff must be made up of members who are highly qualified and have the ability to move students to mastery within a standards based system.

Effective Teachers: As part of its improvement projects the school district has identified that it's most effective teachers measure their performance in the classroom based on how well their students are able to perform the targeted curriculum when called upon to do so. This belief system does not appear to be held by all teachers. There appears to be two primary teacher

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stances. The first is a Delivery Stance in which a teacher measures his or her success by how effectively they have presented a lesson. This teacher plans a lesson that focus on presentation. The lesson is delivered and students are expected to master the content based on what is presented. In many cases, a teacher who works in a delivery stance does not check for understanding or verify mastery, they simply assume that students have gathered the critical knowledge. Once the unit of study is presented then the student is assessed and the teacher moves on. In contrast, we classify our most effective teachers as Learner-Centered. They measure success differently. They plan lessons from the perspective of the student. They are clear about what the student must master and how they are to develop learning experiences so that students will demonstrate mastery throughout the unit. Learner-Centered Teachers are constantly checking for understanding and providing feedback to students so that they can individually monitor progress throughout the unit. The Learner-Centered teacher plans, delivers, and assesses instruction in a completely different way. Though common sense tells us that all teachers measure their success in this way, initial research does not support this. This belief system has been defined as Teacher Stance. As a district we believe that teacher stance is malleable and that with support all teachers will begin to measure success by how well their students are able to demonstrate knowledge and or skills when called upon to do so.

Hiring Practices: In order to build a team of Learner-Centered Teachers the district will utilize a performance interview process that will require the applicants to describe their planning and instruction processes. They will also be required to present a demonstration lesson and work with other candidates in a simulated professional learning community setting. Finally each applicant will be asked to describe their potential impact on the students they will serve in their classroom.

Training: A high percentage of current staff members operate from a deliver stance. The goal of the district is to develop exceptional professional development opportunities for its current staff. The district has seen through several of its transformation projects that high quality professional development can change the way teachers plan and deliver high quality learning opportunities. If this project is funded the district is planning on hiring twelve Implementation Specialists who will facilitate a majority of professional development for the life of this project.

Rewarding and Retaining: The goal of the district is to build an educational system that is built on student success. Teachers who measure professional achievement in the success of their students will find great value in this system. The organization will recognize and reward teachers who are able to move students to close the achievement gap and to meet the academic expectations set forth. As the Carson City School District organizational capital grows, the ability to retain its best teachers will follow.

Administrators: Second only to the teacher, the site administrator is critical to the educational success of an organization. Each administrator will be asked to serve in the role of educational leader. Administrators will receive specific training that will help them to create data driven environments and support systems for teachers. They will receive one-on-one mentoring from district office staff and from program specialists. This additional support will prepare each administrator to lead this initiative at the site. The district leadership team has participated in the University of Virginia's school turn around project. The district will be bringing each of the components of that program to the school sites identified in this project.

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Teacher and Administrator Evaluation System: The development of a quality curriculum and assessment system described in this application will also provide a foundation to develop and improve the teacher evaluation system that can include a student achievement component. As part of the Eagle Valley SIG project the district has developed a teacher evaluation system that is being piloted. A high quality student data system will provide reliable student achievement data that can be used to support the teacher and administrator evaluation. The focus of this project is to improve instruction and with the inclusion of student achievement data teachers and administrators who perform effectively will be recognized in this system.

4. School Improvement: Turning around the lowest achieving schools.

Transformation: High performing schools possess critical organizational capital that can be used to leverage academic success for all students. The district believes that if an organization develops the correct elements they will be able to create organization pressure that will support the development of learner-centered practices in every classroom. (The table presented on pg. 1, **(B)(1) Figure I** presents the key attributes of a Learner-Centered organization.)

When this program is fully implemented the participating schools will possess an aligned curriculum and assessment system that will provide an accurate path that will lead students to mastery of college and career ready standards. Instructional practices will be designed to move every student to mastery. Professional learning communities will have the data necessary to support student learning in all courses. Parents will have access to student data and are clear about college and career ready expectations and know where their child stands along that continuum.

For more information about this project please feel free to contact:

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