



To: Lisa Leali, Superintendent
Jackie Tivador, Director of Curriculum
Fr: Dr. Kaine Osburn, Director
Consortium for Interdistrict Collaboration (CIC)
Re: Executive Summary CIC Report for Lake Bluff School District 65
Date: March 26, 2026

Introduction

From February 25 - February 27, a team of educators from four different districts in *The Consortium for Interdistrict Collaboration* conducted a District Visit to Lake Bluff School District 65.

In addition to producing Commendations and Recommendations based on eight benchmark indicators, the Visit Team also provided Commendations and Recommendations based on an Essential Question posed by District 65 host team. The question was:

To what extent do *learning experiences* in Lake Bluff D65 support *every student* in developing *ownership* of their learning and growth?

Deploying the visit protocol established by CIC on which all the visit team members had been trained, twenty-five experts spent two and one-half days pouring over evidence submitted by the District, visiting classrooms, and interviewing students, staff, parents, administrators, and Board members.

The resulting report then produced more than sixty commendations and recommendations organized around the Essential Question and the eight indicators used by CIC to benchmark the District's performance in key areas that directly and indirectly support successful teaching and learning.

Overall Impressions

Foremost, the Visit Team was impressed by a number of aspects of their visit that must be mentioned before providing details related to the Essential Question or Indicators.

Specifically, the team was impressed by the presentation and organization of the host team, particularly the opening presentation and especially the documentary evidence included, its thoroughness and its organization. Dr. Leali, Ms. Tivador, and Ms. Roehrick are to be commended for their work in the above regard and their representation of the District, its staff, and its leadership.

Furthermore, upon visiting the schools, the Visit Team was struck by the climate for learning in the school buildings and classrooms and the maturity and responsiveness of students. Upon returning from visits to schools, team members' overwhelming impression of the schools was described as "calm," and as a place they would like to work and have their own children learn. Additionally, the maturity of students' responses in focus groups stood out. These impressions speak to the climate that has been established and sustained by District 65 staff.

Essential Questions Commendations and Recommendations

In response to the District's Essential Question (see above), the Visit Team made the following Commendations and Recommendations:

Commendations

- There was evidence of various types of student choice across disciplines in both the elementary and middle school. Choice is a necessary (but not sufficient) precursor to ownership.
- While the current status was indeterminate, there was evidence that participation of students in parent-teacher conferences offers multiple and different opportunities for students to exercise ownership over their learning.
- There was evidence that students across fifth through eighth grade classrooms have the opportunity to advocate for themselves and exercise ownership over their learning in asking for help or seeking other kinds of support throughout a given day.
- There was evidence that some teachers have successfully integrated data-driven student reflections, including but not limited to: within a middle school math class, wellness portfolios, K-1 reading checklists, Career Day, math facts tracking, “Badge Books.”
- There was evidence that teachers were frequently providing or have frequently provided students with opportunities to contribute to classroom culture and participation, whether in the context of RULER or otherwise.
- There was evidence that students can exercise types of ownership in various non-classroom experiences, including but not limited to: book clubs, bus buddies, debate monitors.

Recommendations

- Consider providing opportunities for student choice that can evolve to promote meaningful ownership, including but not limited to:
 - Students input on what they learn and how they learn
 - Student input on when and how they are assessed on standards
 - Student learning portfolios that promote ownership of learning over time and contexts
- Consider how age-appropriate student participation in conferences can promote authentic student ownership, which goes beyond the “what” of learning and engages with the “how” of students’ learning.
- Consider developing a district-wide definition of student ownership (in collaboration with staff, students and families) and choice that defines what ownership of learning (including behavior) looks like at each grade level (building on what was done to support the CIC Visit).
- Consider steps to develop ownership for students historically marginalized from such opportunities due to language or accessibility barriers.
- Consider how well-defined student ownership can drive curriculum and instruction decisions.
- Consider how student agency and voice can be encouraged in the context of school-wide recognition opportunities.
- Consider a collaborative process that could identify current practices that impede student ownership.

Highlights from Indicator Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations and Recommendations related to the eight indicators deployed by the CIC Visit Team total more than forty, so are too numerous to list in this Executive Summary. Additionally, it is not the expectation that District 65 attempts to address every commendation or recommendation provided. Rather, the District 65 leadership team, in collaboration with its staff leadership groups, will review the report and identify where its best next level of work can be accomplished. Thus, in the following section, a few Commendations and Recommendations are listed for indicators which most align to the Essential Question.

Indicator #1: Performance-Based Assessment

Commendations

- There was evidence that several grade levels effectively used student binders to support student goal setting, student reflection, and documentation of student growth over time, together reinforcing the long-term nature, student agency (and metacognition)
- There was evidence of aspects of student choice across disciplines in both the elementary and middle school, demonstrating opportunities for voice and ownership in learning.

Recommendations

- Consider expanding the use of data binders or learning folders across all grade levels to support student reflection, goal setting, and ownership of progress.
- Consider developing a way to determine the character of student choice that includes whether or not there is a “student driven” quality to that choice, i.e. *choice that is meaningful to the student*.

Indicator #2: Student Metacognition

Commendations

- There was evidence of varied use of student rubrics/checklists across grade levels and subject areas.
- There was evidence that the “Writer’s Checklist” is consistently used across all subject areas in the Middle School, providing an opportunity for students to reflect on what and how they are thinking in the context of writing.

Recommendations

- Consider having students utilize rubrics for self-assessment or to monitor their progress towards expected learning outcomes over time.
- Consider how the “Writer’s Checklists” can be intentionally implemented to promote student metacognition.

Indicator #3: Metrics of Student Performance

Commendations

- There was clear evidence of teachers and specialists at the elementary level working together to analyze results and determine necessary interventions and instructional growth strategies for all students.

Recommendations

- Consider expanding collaboration practices for the analysis of student data with all staff.
- Consider developing a more transparent way for students themselves to track and understand their own growth over time.

Indicator #4: Curriculum and Instruction

Commendations

- There was evidence that there is a consistency of lessons across all classrooms in a particular grade level (e.g. students annotating in first grade, all students debating in fifth grade, all students developing their own multiplication question in third grade).
- There was evidence that Wellness classes in elementary grades used growth and goals binders for all students where students tracked their progress over time.

Recommendations

- Consider implementing a release time structure in middle school that mirrors the elementary school format.
- Consider what feedback structure can be built to ensure that collaborative instructional planning is then executed in the classroom.

Indicator #5: Professional Learning, Supervision, and Evaluation

Commendations

- There was evidence that the *Roadmap to Inclusion* and the partnership with True North have provided a vital strategic framework, establishing a clear and unified vision for the District's instructional direction.
- There was evidence that the consistent use of class charters, CHAMPS, and "PAWS" has effectively aligned daily elementary classroom practices with district goals, creating an environment where students can clearly articulate and meet community expectations.

Recommendations

- Consider how staff release time can come to include facilitated collaborative coaching (True North/teacher-leaders) and "refresher" sessions that directly reinforce the specific inclusive practice goals, including those that foster agency for every student.

Indicator #6: Equitable Support for Student Needs

Commendations

- There was evidence that students are benefitting from equitable access to academic and non-academic programs and learning opportunities, supported by a strong sense of belonging through initiatives like Fox Den and Buddies, clear expectations through Foundations, Bluffers, and PAWS, and a consistent common language such as CHAMPS.
- There was evidence that many students are exposed to intentional practices that promote self-reflection on learning goals and performance levels, including but not limited to optional student-teacher conferences, active participation in 504 and IEP meetings (6-8), Sportfolio in Wellness (6-8) , and structured peer editing opportunities.

Recommendations

- Consider how current school practices align with best practices in advanced learning with a clear definition of enrichment access for all students and when and where and why enrichment and advanced learning occur.
- Consider how a clearly articulated instructional framework can support teachers and student growth, providing all students access to challenging learning at high levels.

Indicator #7: Shared Vision and Environment for Change

Commendations

- There was consistent and strong evidence throughout both schools of a sense of belonging, self esteem, calm, and high expectations for students.
- There was extensive evidence of building-wide structures for communicating expectations. The strategic plan and accompanying artefacts, PAWS posters, schedules, class charters, and more were readily at hand for students and staff and visitors.

Recommendations

- Consider how clarity can be developed around school-to-home communications so families experience the same quality and character of communication from schools and from the District office, especially in the context of a shared vision and important initiatives. (See Indicator #8 comments below.)

Indicator #8: Parent and Community Support

Commendations

- There was evidence that the District deploys information through myriad channels, such as district-level newsletters, roundtable discussions, principal newsletters, surveys, and community engagement events.
- There was evidence that the District demonstrates a commitment to removing barriers to engagement. A primary example is the Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC), including the provision of transportation and childcare. The District has adopted a communication platform that gives all families access to the information in their native language.

Recommendations

- Consider how the priority of developing student ownership (at school and at home) can be a regular part of communications home - from the schools and from the District.

Concluding Remarks

Lake Bluff Elementary School District 65 provides its students robust and rewarding learning experiences that are both a result of and a cause of dedicated support of staff and community members. The engagement that produced the mission, vision, values, and strategic plan are also what make coming to school every day in District 65 a meaningful experience for students and staff alike.

Like so many high performing districts, part of that success is due to the District continuing to ask difficult questions in the pursuit of continuous improvement. Participating in *The Consortium for Interdistrict Collaboration (CIC)* and hosting a visit are part of Lake Bluff District 65's commitment to improvement.

An additional sign of that commitment is that District leadership and staff asked an incredibly complex question. Emerging directly from a collaboration focused on what is at the heart of the District's strategic vision, staff honed in on a topic important to everyone: Students' ownership of their learning.

This is not a matter of answering a "Yes / No" question. Rather, along with the eight indicators used for benchmarking aspects of student learning and district performance, the question of student ownership is complex, multifaceted, and invites different perspectives of the question itself.

The inspiration of the CIC process is that it does not attempt to simplify. Rather, CIC deploys the experience and expertise of the Visit Team members, and the insights of students, staff, administrators, parents, and Board members, to produce a picture of the District and a response to the question that is deep, multi-dimensional. The picture developed then - embodied in this report itself - offers a rich opportunity for the District to build on its strengths and improve in ways it could not otherwise improve.

Specifically, over sixty commendations and recommendations are offered in the report that can result in meaningful improvements in teaching and learning in District 65. Most important for the District moving forward is identifying those recommendations and commendations that can together create the most impact aligned with the current strategic plan. The goal is not to "do as much as possible," but to find the next level of work for the District that creates the most improvement in student learning.