

High School Programming Audit

Prepared for Omaha Public Schools



3215 Cuming Street  
Omaha, NE 68131

Prepared by:



---

Dr. Aimee Wyatt & Dr. Vanessa Garcia

2735 Scott Mill Terrace

Jacksonville, FL 32257

904-669-4863

November 22, 2019

## Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	<b>1</b>
<i>District Overview</i> .....	<b>1</b>
<i>Promising Practices</i> .....	<b>6</b>
<i>Evidence of a Need for Improvement</i> .....	<b>11</b>
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	<b>24</b>
<i>References</i> .....	<b>25</b>

### List of Tables

Table 1	Student Demographics
Table 2	Attendance, Expenditure and Special Populations
Table 3	High School Graduation Rate by School
Table 4	ELL Percentages by School
Table 5	Graduation Rate, Dropout, and College Going
Table 6	Achievement
Table 7	Focus Groups Responses; <i>What program(s) is your school best known for?</i>
Table 8	Focus Groups Responses; <i>What programs do you wish your school offered?</i>
Table 9	AP Participation and Exams Passed
Table 10	Percentage of Students Completing at Least One AP Course
Table 11	Suggested Pathways

### List of Figures

Figure 1	Percent Proficient ELA State Test (CE Concentrators)
Figure 2	Percent Proficient Math State Test (CE Concentrators)
Figure 3	Four-Year Graduation Rate (CE Concentrators)
Figure 4	Placement Rate (CE Concentrators)

## **Introduction**

Steele Dynamics was retained to perform a district-wide evaluation of high school program offerings in Omaha Public Schools (OPS). The purpose of the programming audit is to provide the school district with a snapshot of district and school practices as well as feedback on the health and quality of the high schools' programs. This report will provide the district with an external look on the value added of district programming.

The report includes a review of district quantitative data and an analysis of qualitative data collected through focus group interviews and written responses from school and district personnel and students and other. This audit reveals promising practices, areas of growth and provides recommendations for next steps.

All school principals and three district personnel received a written questionnaire to complete. Responses were received from six out of eight principals and the three district staff persons. Focus groups were created at all seven high schools in addition to the Career Center. Focus groups were made up of students, teachers, counselors, and administrators. Steele Dynamics met with focus groups on October 28, October 29, November 5 and November 6. The duration of each focus group averaged roughly 30 minutes. In addition to focus groups, a building walkthrough was also conducted at each high school and the Career Center.

## **District Overview**

Omaha Public School District is the largest district in the State of Nebraska. Within the metropolitan Omaha community, the school district serves over 52,000 students of various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds in preschool through twelfth grade. There are wide varieties of excellent educational opportunities offered to students and there are many options for school choice. Magnet and Focus programs provide the opportunity for challenging activities in math, science, engineering, visual and performing arts, leadership, world languages and international studies. Numerous business and civic community organizations work together with OPS to fulfill the district's mission of providing educational opportunities that enable students to achieve their highest potential.

According to the Nebraska State Department of Education (<https://www.education.ne.gov>), OPS is classified as a district in need of improvement. Three high schools: Burke High School, Central High School and North High School are currently classified in good standing.

OPS has seven high schools and one Career Center made up of approximately 14,150 high school students. The mission of OPS is to prepare all students to excel in college, career and life. OPS offers magnet programming in STEAM, dual language, college readiness, law and global studies, as well as more than 20 career focused programs. OPS has a diverse population with a majority of students being Hispanic or Latino. Based on trend data, OPS can expect to see continued growth in

the Hispanic or Latino and Asian populations. There is a downward trend for enrollment of White students, while all other ethnicities have remained relatively constant. (See Table 1) Attendance and per pupil expenditure are consistent with national averages; however, the percentage of students needing interventions, modifications or socio-economic support is larger than both the state and national average ([www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com)). (See Table 2)

<b>Table 1</b>							
<b>Student Demographics</b>							
	<b>American Indian</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Black or African American</b>	<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	<b>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Two or more races</b>
2018-2019	443	3424	13129	19214	79	14035	2870
2017-2018	451	3227	13249	18729	69	14290	2801
2016-2017	473	2928	13232	18252	77	14616	2766

<b>Table 2</b>			
<b>Attendance, Expenditure and Special Populations</b>			
	<b><u>OPS</u></b>	<b><u>Nebraska</u></b>	<b><u>National</u></b>
Per Pupil Expenditure	\$12,101	\$12,614	\$12,201
Attendance Rate for Secondary Schools	91%	94%	91%
Gifted	10%	13%	6.7%
SPED	18%	15%	14%
FARL	72%	45%	52%
ELL	18%	7%	14%

There is no district-wide trend in graduation rate over the last three years. Some schools have increased rates while others have decreased. Two schools consistently have higher graduation rates than the other schools. These same two schools also have less than 10% ELL populations. Schools with lower graduation rates have high ELL populations. (See Table 3 and Table 4)

<b><u>Table 3</u></b>			
<b><u>High School Graduation Rate by School</u></b>			
<b><u>High School</u></b>	<b><u>2016</u></b>	<b><u>2017</u></b>	<b><u>2018</u></b>
Benson	67%	71%	71%
Bryan	78%	77%	79%
Burke	87%	89%	84%
Central	82%	81%	82%
North	77%	81%	78%
Northwest	76%	78%	75%
South	77%	75%	74%

<b><u>Table 4</u></b>			
<b><u>ELL Percentages by School</u></b>			
	<b><u>2016-17</u></b>	<b><u>2017-18</u></b>	<b><u>2018-19</u></b>
<b>District Averages</b>	<i>18.43%</i>	<i>17.3%</i>	<i>18.34%</i>
Benson	16.64%	19.55%	19.10%
Bryan	10.76%	11.75%	12.75%
Burke	2.64%	2.99%	3.52%
Central	7.66%	8.85%	9.61%

<b><u>Table 4</u></b>			
<b><u>ELL Percentages by School</u></b>			
North	.99%	2.06%	2.49%
Northwest	10.49%	11.16%	11.88%
South	13.57%	15.16%	16.39%

OPS is significantly behind both the state and national average graduation rate, even when considering a 5-year graduation rate. The college-going rate lags behind the state average, but is comparable with the national percentage. (See Table 5)

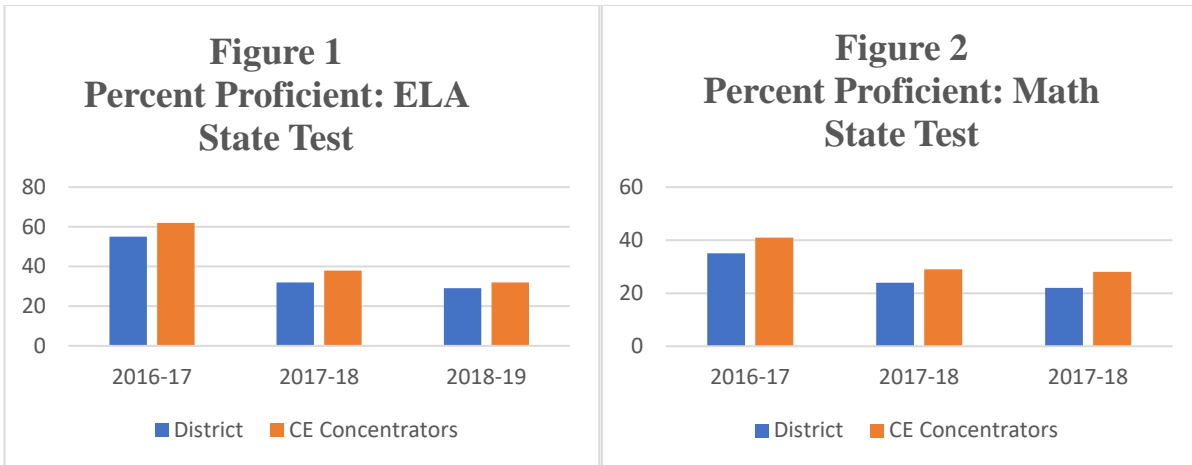
<b><u>Table 5</u></b>			
<b><u>Graduation Rate, Dropout, and College-Going</u></b>			
	<b><u>OPS</u></b>	<b><u>Nebraska</u></b>	<b><u>National</u></b>
Graduation Rate	78% (4 year) 82% (5 year)	89% (4 year) 91.5% (5 year)	84.6%
Dropout Rate	Less than 3%	1%	5.4%
College-Going Rate	65%	76%	67%

OPS student achievement is significantly lower than the state average according to the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS). Students are performing better in Science as compared to other tested areas; however, there is still a significantly larger gap between the district and state data. The NSCAS ACT Math reflects a wide gap for students as compared to their peers across the state. (See Table 6)

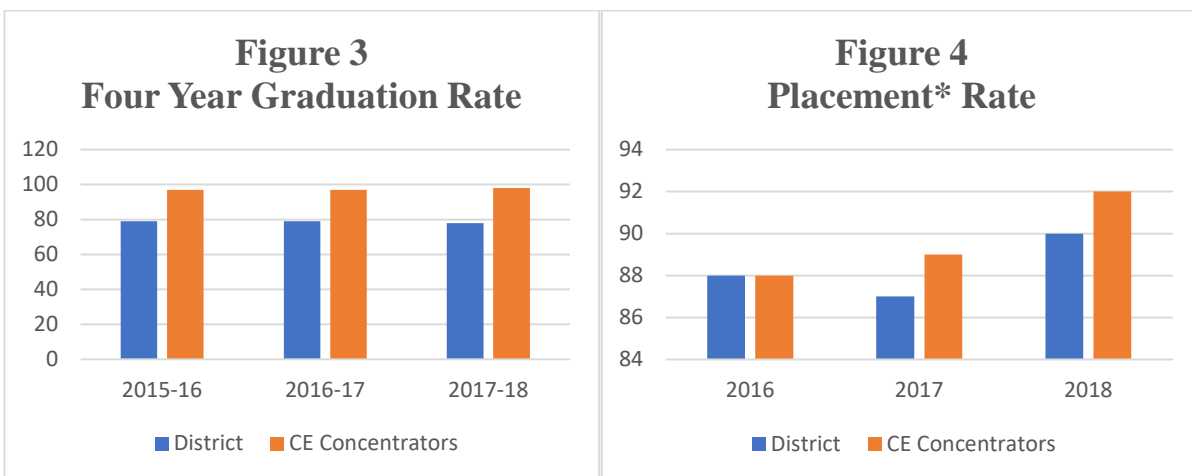
<b><u>Table 6</u></b>			
<b><u>Achievement</u></b>			
	<b><u>OPS</u></b>	<b><u>Nebraska</u></b>	<b><u>National</u></b>
NSCAS ELA	33%	52%	N/A
NSCAS Math	30%	52%	N/A
NSCAS Science	43%	66%	N/A
NSCAS ACT-ELA	29%	51%	61%
NSCAS ACT- Math	26%	52%	41%
NSCAS ACT- Science	29%	53%	36%

According to district data, students who participate in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses outperform other students in the district on English language arts and math assessments. In addition, those students also have a higher graduation rate and postsecondary placement rate. However, across the 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 program years, 1,639, 1,743, and 1,352 students met the criteria to be called a Career Education (CE) Concentrator. There was a significant decline in the number of students attaining that distinction. For the 2018-19 program year the definition of CE Concentrator was altered, to include 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who had completed three or more courses that map into one of the 16 career clusters. (See Figure 1- Figure 4)

Across the past three program years, CE Concentrators had a slightly higher proportion of White and Black students and a slightly lower proportion of Hispanic students. CE Concentrators also had a lower percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.



For CE Concentrators, the percent proficient is calculated by “looking back” at the CE Concentrators’ 11<sup>th</sup> grade state assessment scores. The District percent proficient, provided for comparison purposes. For ELA, in 2016-17, the NeSA assessment ranged from a 15-16. In 2017-18 the ACT assessment. For math, in 2016-17, the NeSA assessment ranged from a 15-16.



\*Placement Rate refers to the percentage of graduates who are either attending post-secondary education, working, or both.

## Promising Practices

OPS High Schools provide a caring and supportive environment for students. Observations at all schools affirm a welcoming and friendly atmosphere for students and visitors. The audit reveals four areas of promising practices related to programming for students. These practices include a culture of student support, positive school climate, community partnerships and clubs, and early post-secondary opportunities.

- 1. Culture of Student Support.** Student support is defined by practices in place that directly support students. A positive culture is evident by the number of available programs,



knowledge of career and college information of counselors and student tutoring. Non-academic supports are especially strong as evident by focus group interviews. “Non-academic student supports are activities and programs that are designed to encourage academic success but that do not deal directly with academic content. They include formally structured programs—such as student success courses—and one-on-one services, such as academic, career, and financial aid advising”

(<https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-nonacademic-student-supports.pdf>).

**a. Awareness of available programs.**

- Administrators, teachers, students and counselors are aware and can describe available in-school programs and community programs that connect students to college and career opportunities, especially for low socio-economic students. All sites report multiple modes of communicating available programs to include email, newsletters, social media, open house, phone calls, and orientation days as well as targeting specific students based on teacher and counselor recommendations.

**b. Counseling program.**

- Counselors at all sites report utilizing a district-wide counseling program centered on the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (<https://www.schoolcounselor.org>) standards where they meet with all students individually two times a year. Counselors are knowledgeable of support programming and actively seek out students who will benefit from additional support. High school counselors provide program information to students at all middle schools, Freshman Day and Open House. All counselors report utilizing Naviance in the 9th grade to assist students in researching college and career information.
- Counselors at three of the sites feel that their counseling program is the most effective program in their building. Students at the Career Center state that their high school counselors inform them of program offerings and say they are currently at the Career Center based on a recommendation from their home school counselor. They also are complimentary of the Career Center counselor and say that she reviews their college and career plan routinely. Students at three sites report that counselors were actively involved in providing information about high school programs.

**c. Student tutoring.**

- Administrators, teachers, students and counselors report that all sites provide after school tutoring opportunities for students. They also report that teachers are willing to help students whenever needed, whether this be before, during or after school implying that teachers make themselves extremely accessible to students. One student states, “Even if you are not in her class, you can go to a different teacher and she will teach it in a different way.” Students acknowledge that their teachers go above and beyond to provide additional supports outside of the classroom. Although some

teachers receive payment for tutoring, all teacher focus groups are willing to provide tutoring on a regular basis whether they receive pay or not. Most sites report utilizing a late bus specifically for after school tutoring so that more students can participate.

2. **Positive School Climate.** “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (<https://www.schoolclimate.org/school-climate>). All interviewees display a genuine sense of pride and positivity in serving their student population. Students share that they have strong relationships with adults in the building. The positive school climate reflects the way staff and students describe their school experience, the fact that teachers and leaders have remained in the school and/or district for a number of years, and the support provided by alumni.

a. **Positive School Comments.**

- At all sites, students use positive adjectives when asked to describe their school. Seven-student groups say their school is diverse, six say their school is fun and four say their school is unique.
- Teachers who have courses in academies and IB report high levels of teacher collaboration as evident by their use of common planning time. Two schools provide common planning for subject areas during the school day. Teachers who are able to collaborate appreciate the time they have to discuss students' needs which fosters a positive school climate.
- School-wide pride of outstanding programs was evident throughout the interviews. Participant's highlighted specific programs and feel their school is well known for exceptional offerings in the areas identified. Responses are available in Table 7.

**Table 7**

**Focus Groups Responses**

*What program(s) is your school best known for?*

	<b>Benson High</b>	<b>Bryan High</b>	<b>Burke High</b>	<b>Career Center</b>	<b>Central High</b>	<b>North High</b>	<b>Northwest High</b>	<b>South High</b>
<i>Group 1</i>	Freshman Academy, Academies	Urban Ag, TDL Academies	AP	Electrical, CNA	English, Boys Basketball AP	STEM	Fine Arts, Magnet, JROTC	Dual Language, Arts, Spanish AP
<i>Group 2</i>	Academies	Urban Ag, TDL Academies	Counseling Program	Electrical, CNA	Counseling Program	Engineering, Art, Manufacturing	Counseling Program	NCPA, Dual Language
<i>Group 3</i>	JROTC, Cheer, Robotics	Urban Ag, TDL Academies	Focus, Air & Space, Sports/ Clubs	Construction, Electrician, Fabrication	IB, AP English	Engineering	Introduction to Law, Academic Decathlon	Performing Arts, Dual Language
<i>Group 4</i>	Robotics	Urban Ag, TDL Academies	AP	UNMC Alliance Program	General Academics, English/ Writing	Geography, STEM, Machining	Magnet, 911, Student-based Health Center	Any program that can support students at a variety of levels

3. **School Leadership and Teacher Retention.**
  - a. **School Leadership.** All sites report having a principal who has been with the school or school system for more than five years. Longevity and leader effectiveness support a positive school climate.
  - b. **Teacher Retention.** None of the principals expressed large amounts of new hires or difficulty in hiring positions. Most teachers who were interviewed have been in their school or the school system for more than five years.
4. **Alumni Support.**
  - a. **Alumni Associations.** Two schools, Benson and Central, share that their alumni association is very strong and that they get extra support from them. This sense of community adds to a positive school climate.
5. **Community Partnerships and Extra-Curricular Activities.** Students must have access to a range of supports to enhance their learning. According to the Coalition for Community Schools, “Community partners can help schools prepare students for college, career, and citizenship by offering additional opportunities, supports, and enrichment for young people” ([www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)).
  - a. **Community Support.** Staff at all schools cite programs that provide individual support services to help students from low-income backgrounds such as Upward Bound, College Possible, Avenue Scholars, TRiO, Education Quest, Urban League, Methodist Counseling Program, Pathways to Success, Boys’ Town, UNL NCPA, and student-based health center.
  - b. **Extra- Curricular Activities.** Schools report having various clubs that students can participate in such as: Thrive, NICE, NHS, Student Council, Mock Trial, Drama, Dream Girls, Anti-Defamation Leaders, LGBTQ, Skills USA, DECA, Robotics, HOSA, and FBLA. Schools also offer various athletic programs to students.
6. **Early Post-Secondary Opportunities.** Early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) include a course and/or exam that give students a chance to obtain postsecondary credit while still in high school. Research has shown that students who participate in early post-secondary courses are more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary environments. Courses (whether stand-alone or in conjunction with an exam for postsecondary credit) must be aligned to postsecondary standards.
  - a. **Advanced Academics.** All high schools have honors, Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment (including dual language) offerings for their students. One high school offers IB. Students enrolled in an AP course receive dual enrollment credit even if they do not take or pass the AP exam.
  - b. **Postsecondary Partnerships.** All sites report partnerships with local and state universities, community, and/or technical colleges such as MCC (Metropolitan Community College), UNO (University of Nebraska Omaha), UNL (University of Nebraska Lincoln), and UNMC (University of Nebraska Medical Center). There is

an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with local universities and create a district Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher Pipeline.

## Evidence of a Need for Improvement

OPS High Schools requested this audit so that they could make informed decisions moving forward on how to improve programming to better support their students. The audit reveals four areas for growth related to programming for students' equity and access, vision of program offerings, college and career planning, and quality of instruction.

**1. Equity and Access.** Equity and access is the ability of all students to receive an education from qualified teachers in buildings that are safe and conducive to learning in a district with sufficient resources that are responsibly equal among other schools. Even though there is school choice and a variety of program offerings throughout the district, ELL students remain concentrated in Benson, Bryan, Northwest and South. Interviews across all schools reveal that inequities in student access to school programming could be the result of a lack of transportation, entrance selection processes, or master schedule conflicts. In addition, staff cite needing alternative programming to support all students.

**a. Transportation.** Administrators and counselors in seven of eight schools cite transportation as a primary barrier for students to access available programs both during and after school. A counselor at one-school mentions, "If you live within 5 miles, you are not offered transportation." Not all schools have access to public transportation due to lack of bus stops in close proximity to schools. School observations on each of the four mornings indicate a pattern of tardiness that could be a result of a lack of transportation. According to one school leader, "Students within the attendance area do not qualify to receive transportation...this impacts their attendance." A further study on whether students select their out of zone school in order to receive transportation should be conducted and the affect it has on community schools.

Although a late bus is offered for after school tutoring and sports, counselors state that it is only available to students who are already approved for transportation. One-school states, "All at-risk programs are offered off site with no transportation." Some schools only offer clubs after school and staff mention a lack of participation due to transportation. One principal added that there is limited participation in internships because of the lack of transportation.

**b. Program entrance selection.** In total, six schools discuss concerns with the process for selecting programs. There is some concern with how many spots are open or available to students in magnet, academy and career center programs. One counselor says, "We accept 100 students, but 200 students apply." When asked "What happens to the 100 students who do not get accepted?" counselors and leaders could not provide a clear explanation. In addition, some staff encourage students to attend other schools because of the availability of programs at their home school.

Counselors state that they ask students if they are going to college in ninth grade and they create a four-year course plan based on their response. The district requires three years of math and does not require world languages; therefore, students may not graduate college-ready based on course self-selection, recommendations in the ninth grade and lack of alignment with postsecondary requirements. Counselors also share that students cannot progress in math courses if they fail a course, so many students are left behind. One-counselor shares, “There are seniors who get stuck in Pre-Algebra.” This contributes to an inequity in student access to postsecondary opportunities.

Three schools cite having high student mobility and that students may not be able to apply to many programs if they do not start the program their freshman year. One counselor says that refugee students miss the lottery system. An example one student provides is “I would have been in (that program) if they told me before ninth grade. Now you can’t get in after ninth grade.” Another student says that if you are in the magnet program in middle school, then you can get in the program in high school. One school leader mentions, “Some programs feel exclusive.”

- c. **Master schedule.** Not all schools are on the same schedule and some schools offer more opportunities for course credit than others do. Some schools offer a “zero hour” course or the opportunity to take a course during lunch. According to one counselor, “Sometimes students want to take all of our classes, but they only have 8 blocks, so they have to make tough choices of what they want. Sometimes they have their heart set on another school, but they have to come here.” A student reports that they cannot take certain courses because of when they are offered and a counselor says that certain programs conflict with one another.

Four leaders share concerns that there is not equity among all schools in offering the same levels of AP courses or pathway offerings. A school leader states, “Some years we have to be creative with scheduling AP. For example, some years we can offer AP Chemistry and some years we cannot.” Another leader gives an example that if a student is in ELL classes, they cannot attend the career center due to scheduling conflicts and GPA requirement. The district may want to consider offering courses on an A/B block schedule to increase the amount of student project and work-based learning opportunities.

- d. **Alternative programs.** Four schools state they wish there were more opportunities for alternative options that address students who are falling behind. Although there are services such as virtual school and an accelerated learning program offered at the TAC, teachers and counselors often cite transportation and limited spots as barriers. One leader states, “You need 13 credits to attend virtual school, so if you have four credits you cannot attend.” One counselor says that for IS Flex “250 students fight for 8 spots district-wide.” Counselors also share that students have to apply and be accepted to the accelerated program and there is always a wait list.

Programming at each school is targeted towards specific groups (e.g. gifted, advanced, SPED, ELL) but according to one teacher group, “There is not a service for the middle kids.” School leaders at one school said, “We need additional support for kids who are truant or not excelling in this environment. We need an alternative setting: either school specific or district-wide for that sub-group of kids.” A teacher states, “I would like to see a program to reduce suspensions, detentions and encourage students to be prepared to learn.” A school leader states, “I would like to see an alternative school for kids with emotional trauma.”

2. **Vision of Program Offerings.** A district must have a vision that all staff members recognize as a common direction of growth, something that inspires them to be better. An effective vision also announces to parents and students where you are heading and why they should take the trip with you. Without a vision, the district lacks direction. If you do not have a common, agreed-on destination, then everyone is left to his or her own devices to imagine one—a scenario that results in unharnessed and unfocused efforts, with everyone believing that what he or she is doing is right. A common understanding of the destination allows all stakeholders to align their improvement efforts (<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/107042/chapters/developing-a-vision-and-a-mission.aspx>).
- a. **Ability to define “program.”** All sites asked for a clearer definition of the word “program” when asked about program offerings at their school. Focus groups do not have a clear distinction of what is a school program, pathway, club, certification, counseling program or community service. One group of teachers states, “Programming is not a main focus here.” Across the district, interviewees interchanged words and phrases rather than using clear labels for programs. For example, these terms are used interchangeably to describe the same program offering:
- Nursing, CNA and health science
  - Robotics, STEM and engineering
  - DECA, finance and business
  - Trades, CTE, industry and skills

There are varying understandings as to what a pathway is and what an academy is. Most sites refer to any CTE course as a pathway even if the school does not offer a minimum of three sequential courses. All academies do not cohort schedule students and teachers. If a school does not cohort students, then the question that is raised is “Is that a career pathway or an academy?”

- b. **Multiple offerings.** In seven high schools, the master schedule reveals elective courses that may be unnecessary and CTE courses that are not a part of a pathway. Many schools are offering all courses listed in the course catalog and have small load classes in the master schedule. Both counselors and students share that there are many conflicts in scheduling because of the large amount of course offerings.

One counselor says, “With programming, we are a mile wide and an inch deep” and another says, “We are trying to do everything.”

- c. **Assessment of programs.** While all staff and students can clearly, articulate programs offered at their school, the data reveal that there is a lack of understanding on how effective each program is for students. The most common response to “How do you know if a program is excelling?” is student enrollment numbers. The majority of focus groups could not articulate other forms of data analysis except the career center, which uses specific indicators to measure success, and one freshman academy team who could speak to specific data on their at-risk students. One staff person says, “We struggle with assessing programs. Rule 47 standards are followed but are more compliance than growth models, as directed by Nebraska Department of Education.”

All schools share examples of new programs they would like to see at their school, but there is a district-wide understanding that programs cannot be duplicated within the district. There is no clear process for evaluating a program, retiring a program or starting a new program. The types of programs schools would like to add are listed in Table 8.

- d. **Communication.** Several school leaders and counselors state that language and mobility are both daily challenges when working with Hispanic students. Leaders in predominantly Hispanic communities say that parent perceptions and educational experiences are a barrier to student participation in programming. In addition, due to cultural differences, students are not able to take advantage of after school opportunities due to high school students providing after school care for their younger siblings or having to work. Most focus groups share there is a misperception of district and high school programming and varying perceptions of school offerings in the community. For example, one counselor states that they have openings and they will not turn away students. Yet, she also states that if a student does not want what they offer, the student should attend another school. A teacher states, “No one knows we exist.” Students report that the best way they learn about programs is word of mouth from friends, parents and siblings. Another teacher goes on to share “If they know, they must have a kid here or they went here themselves.”



**Table 8**

**Focus Groups Responses**

*What programs do you wish your school offered?*

	<b>Benson High</b>	<b>Bryan High</b>	<b>Burke High</b>	<b>Career Center</b>	<b>Central High</b>	<b>North High</b>	<b>Northwest High</b>	<b>South High</b>
<i>Admin.</i>	Culinary, school-based health center, expand CNA	Technology, dual language, teacher academy, community service	Industry certification program, service learning	Dental, pre-health care exploratory for 10 <sup>th</sup> graders and a 3 <sup>rd</sup> year for construction and electrical	CTE, alternative programming for at-risk students, professional development on trauma, career academies and technology access	Trades, freshman programming, alternative programming for students	Industrial technology, alternative program for at-risk, AP courses	Better options for students who arrive after the 20 <sup>th</sup> day, staggered day/schedule, trades
<i>Students</i>	Firefighting, coding, martial arts, nutrition, more AP or IB	More languages and STEM	Sign language class, CAD, more focus classes and ACT practice	Business class, programming and personal finance	A pool, boys' volleyball, engineering/robotics,	Multi-cultural History, performing arts	Involvement and school spirit, more AP classes, bring AVID back	Law, an after-school boys and girls club, spirit squad
<i>Teachers</i>	Reading and writing classes, targeted tutoring during the day, job training credit and community liaison	STEM, more trades, small engine repair and technology	SEL development, services for the "middle" kids, trades	Electro-Mechanical Engineering	STEM, apprentice program, career academies	More teachers	Mental health resources, build AP offerings, in-house alternative programming, skills classes	Debate/ Speech, environmental awareness course

3. **College and Career Planning.** While counselors make every effort to support students, college and career planning is inconsistent across the district and there is a lack of evidence of a clear process based on student comments. “Efforts to increase career readiness are critical to improving postsecondary readiness—therefore career development activities should begin no later than middle school, and require all students to develop and maintain a personal Career and Academic Plan that aligns career and life goals to academic, postsecondary, and career pathways”(Career Readiness For All Spring, 2019) ([www.coalitionforcareerdevelopment.org](http://www.coalitionforcareerdevelopment.org)).

a. **Program of study alignment.** Not all students have a clear program of study. Students reveal that access to some high school programming is dependent on where they went to middle school and if the middle school counselor shared options with them. Students in an established academy have an alignment to postsecondary, but all other students are dependent on counselors to help them make choices during their senior year. Therefore, some students feel left out of the process and they are unclear how course selection relates to long-term goals.

Perkins V defines “CTE concentrators” as students who have completed at least two courses in a single CTE program. Most CTE-related organizations recommend a minimum of three or four CTE courses in a pathway. The law does not define what a “course” is; however, the trend across the nation is that a course is one full-year credit or a double blocked course in one semester. OPS students may only be completing the equivalent to half of the number of CTE courses/credit hours that their peers complete across the nation and are not always completing courses in a specified program of study.

b. **College and Career Plan.** The current method of planning is that counselors create a four-year course selection plan based on student interest during a ninth-grade registration meeting. There is no evidence of the use of aptitude assessments in addition to interest surveys. Counselors ask students about their interests and have students independently research college and career information on Naviance. Although counselors use the ASCA National Model of developing plans centered on the domains of academic, career and social/emotional development, there is inconsistency with the tools and templates used to develop these plans.

Many students do not remember creating a college and career plan or are not familiar with their Individual Learning Plan, while other students say they did it in ninth grade, but never looked at it again. Senior students say that counselors work with them a lot on college applications, but did not do anything with them in tenth or eleventh grades. Some schools put all or the majority of freshman in an exploration class and advisory, while other schools do not talk about any such class. A staff person states, “They do take courses based on interest but often do not realize how course selection leads to other courses or to a college and career plan.” The following are student remarks demonstrating inconsistency:

- “I was never told what I get credits for, so I never knew that I would not get a credit for study hall.”

- “None of the students have developed a college and career plan.”
- “In the fall, during my senior year we met with them one on one.”
- “My counselor was not there that day.”
- “They took you out of PE but I don’t take PE.”

4. **Quality of Instruction.** While the purpose of this assessment does not involve an audit of curriculum and instruction, several themes emerged that are related to quality of instruction for students.

- Quality assignments.** Only two teachers across all schools can articulate a challenging assignment given to students. One teacher describes a math assignment where students apply mathematical concepts to real-world application by finding the height of the ball when throwing it from pitcher to catcher. Another teacher shares a high-quality research-based writing assignment. There is a lack of cross-curricular relevance and/or real-world application across most schools.
- Engagement.** Observations of students out of class and in the hall during instructional time as well as sleeping and not engaged in lessons is evident across the district. Observation of students during the passing period with little to no urgency to get to class on time. Teachers were observed sitting at desks during instructional time. The audit only provides a snapshot of a building walkthrough, which lasted approximately 30 minutes; however, these observations are prevalent at seven of the eight schools.
- Teacher collaboration.** There is inconsistency with who has common planning time during the day. One school provides common planning for English and Math teachers by course taught, another school provides it for career academy teachers, and at one-school IB teachers have common planning. Most teachers share that they have to meet outside of the school day if they want to plan together.
- Early postsecondary opportunities.** Although this area is a strength in that EPSOs are offered (AP and dual enrollment), there is an opportunity to strengthen advanced academic opportunities as evident by student achievement in these courses (See Table 9 and Table 10). Six groups of school counselors share that there are prerequisites for AP courses such as grades and teacher recommendations, but parents can request an override of those requirements. One school has eliminated all prerequisites in an effort to provide more equity and access. Although, AP enrollment has increased in the district and is more accessible to all students, AP data reflects that the quality of instruction may have diminished to reach these students rather than raising expectations for those students. Staff reports that because students get dual enrollment credit even if they do not pass the AP exam, students may not feel the need to perform as well on the AP exam; therefore, the data are unreliable. This makes evaluating the quality of instruction difficult.

<b><u>Table 9</u></b>				
<b><u>AP Participation and Exams Passed</u></b>				
	<b>Number of courses taken</b>	<b>Number of exams taken</b>	<b>Number of exams passed</b>	<b>Percentage of exams passed</b>
Benson	370	140	27	19%
Bryan	865	226	31	13.7%
Burke	1506	961	277	29%
Central	1145	517	277	54%
North	551	368	133	36%
Northwest	442	186	36	19%
South	1015	534	128	24%

<b><u>Table 10</u></b>			
<b><u>Percentage of Students Completing at Least One AP Course</u></b>			
	<b>Total Enrollment in 2017-18</b>	<b>Number of students completing at least one AP course</b>	<b>Percentage of students completing at least one AP course</b>
Benson	1519	225	14.8%
Bryan	1932	463	23.9%
Burke	2040	649	31.8%
Central	2690	519	19.3%
North	1938	273	14%
Northwest	1747	251	14.3%
South	2698	538	19.9%

## **Recommended Actions for Growth**

- 1. Create a district vision for program offerings that provides all students equal access to high quality programs.**
  - a. Create a steering committee to provide vision.** In order to clearly articulate all the opportunities OPS has to offer students, the district should take a comprehensive

approach to offering quality programs. Develop a steering committee to provide a clear definition of what a program is versus a support program or extra-curricular offering. Create criteria for determining which schools receive what type of programming. Since the district will be opening two new high schools, it is recommended that the schools be divided into three regions with three schools in each region. Administrators can collaborate about program offerings ensuring that the majority of the 16 career clusters are represented giving special attention to those that align to labor market needs and community partnerships. It is recommended that program duplication not exist within these regions; however, high-demand areas should be represented in each region. Schools can offer the same career pathway, but take a different approach depending on the individual school’s industry partner. As a part of this comprehensive plan, ensure that the career center has non-duplicative pathways that are aligned to introductory courses at the high school and dual enrollment/credit or certification opportunities at the postsecondary level. This same approach should be used for consideration with advanced academic programs and arts programs to ensure equity and access across schools.

OPS should rebrand all schools so all schools have a magnet or pathway that attracts all students. The following provides some suggested pathways for each school. (See Table 11)

<b><u>Table 11</u></b>			
<b><u>Suggested Pathways</u></b>			
	<b><u>Suggested Programs to Keep</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested Programs to Redesign</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested Programs to Consider</u></b>
<b>Region 1</b> <i>(Burke, Northwest and new school)</i>	Air and Space, JROTC, Law, AP,	Focus	Architectural and Engineering Design, Energy and Power, Environmental and Nature Resource Management, Education Pathway, Cyber Security
<b>Region 2</b> <i>(Benson, North and Central)</i>	JROTC, Freshman Academy, Health (CNA), Design, STEM, Engineering and Manufacturing, Digital Design, IB, AP	Business to Entrepreneurship	Coding, Hospitality, Education Pathway

**Table 11**

**Suggested Pathways**

	<b><u>Suggested Programs to Keep</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested Programs to Redesign</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested Programs to Consider</u></b>
<b>Region 3</b> <i>(Bryan, South and new school)</i>	Urban Agriculture, Visual and Performing Arts, Dual Language, AP,	TDL to supply chain management adding in robotics, Carpentry, Education Pathway	STEM, Small engine repair, Information Technology
<b>Career Center</b>	Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing, Health (CNA), Audio/Visual production, Automotive Collision Repair, Networking, Construction, Welding,	Photography, EMT, Fabrication	Mechatronics

It is also recommended that the district steering committee look at scheduling and transportation as barriers to access. Having all high schools on the same schedule and providing transportation to more students are two ways to allow more student participation and equal opportunities.

- b. Develop a model for continuous improvement.** Develop a systematic process for school-based data collection and analysis for each program. Align program goals to the profile of a graduate. Determine the amount and cycles of data to be collected and analyzed. Then develop a process for how the data are to be shared in a systemic way with teachers, department chairs, and administrators. Determine the “go to” persons for specific data sets and communicate this information, making it easier for administrators and teacher leadership to locate data.
  
- c. Develop a program modification process.** As a part of this comprehensive model, the district should develop a process for opening and closing programs. Over time, it may be necessary to remove a program or start a new program. There should be a clear process to request a change. This process should include data and community input. Currently, Nebraska’s rule 47 provides a process for the identification and creation of career academies; however, there needs to be a district process for all programs. The district can create this on their own or use a process provided by Steele Dynamics.

**2. Improve the college and career planning process.**

**a. Develop programs of study aligned to postsecondary programs for each pathway.**

To ensure student success, the district should improve the overall college and career planning process to provide a clear and consistent approach. “The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) calls upon states to create sequences of academic and Career Technical Education (CTE) coursework to help students attain a postsecondary degree or industry-recognized certificate or credential, otherwise known as programs of study (POS)” ([www.careertech.org](http://www.careertech.org)).

The district should create programs of study aligned to workforce needs, and develop a pathways guidebook to provide to all students and parents. The Southern Regional Education Board suggests that a pathway be comprised of 4 non-duplicative, sequential CTE courses (one credit each) ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)). While the district may choose to require less, it is imperative that the district specify a minimum of three full-year or six semester courses constitute a pathway. Charge a committee of teachers, counselors, district leaders, and postsecondary representatives to develop career pathway programs of study sequences that include dual or articulated credit and industry certifications. Plans of study should be developed for each pathway and published in a catalog to illustrate the connections between academic course selections and CTE courses. By developing programs of study, schools can provide recommended electives and core courses, which will streamline the master scheduling process and remove extraneous courses from hindering appropriate scheduling.

Create a POS template that:

- Incorporates challenging, state-identified academic standards;
- Addresses academic and technical knowledge, as well as employability skills;
- Is aligned to the needs of industries in the state, region, tribal community or local area;
- Progresses in content specificity;
- Has multiple entry and exit points that allow for credentialing; and
- Culminates in the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential.

Resources and templates for programs of study can be found at the department of education websites for the states of Florida (<http://www.fldoe.org>), Tennessee (<https://www.tn.gov/education.html>), and Virginia (<http://www.doe.virginia.gov>) as well as with the Southern Regional Education Board (<https://www.sreb.org>).

- b. Require career exploration or seminar course for all freshman.** Since schools who require all students to take a freshman exploration course are seeing more college and career preparation, it is recommended that all students take some type of career

exploration, freshman seminar or high school 101 course that could be offered at either the eighth or ninth grade. Once programs of study are clearly articulated, then counselors can develop six- or ten-year plans with students in these courses rather than a four-year high school course selection plan. Create consistency with how Naviance is utilized across the district so that counselors can have students load these plans and visit them each year.

- c. **Create middle school alignment.** Improve alignment with the middle schools so that the district can ensure all students are informed and have equal access to all high school programs. Have middle school students take aptitude surveys as well as interest surveys so counselors can identify areas of opportunity for college and career planning as well as inform district program offerings.
- d. **Provide more opportunities for parent involvement.** Involve parents with their students' college and career plan of study through an annual parent-advisor-student conference. The conferences' purpose is to review and revise the plan and select courses for the next school year. A student-led conference is even more powerful. Teach students to conduct conferences with their parents. Schools that do this can see as much as an 80% increase in parent participation. This approach:
  - Helps students accept responsibility for their own learning
  - Engages students and parents in "honest talk"
  - Advances students' knowledge about future options
  - Allows students to express their goals, actions, decisions: "Here are my scores/grades – and here is how I'm going to improve." "Here is what I really want to do in life."
  - Builds students' confidence and commitment to higher achievement

**3. Increase rigor in the classroom through teacher collaboration, professional development, and more opportunities for experiential learning.**

- a. **Provide teacher collaboration time during the school day.** Establish the time/opportunities for more teachers to work together during the school day to examine and increase the rigor of coursework. This could be done through establishing a common schedule and eliminating some course offerings so that common planning time becomes a priority in the master schedule.
- b. **Provide support for teachers.** Provide professional learning in the use of a specific teacher protocol(s) for the development and peer reviewing of assignments, classroom questioning and assessments to determine their level of rigor, using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/educationx92x1/chapter/webbs-depth-of-knowledge/>) as the criteria for rigor. About a third of student assignments and



assessments should be at the basic level (levels one and two on the Webb rubric), and the other two-thirds at the proficient and advanced levels (levels three and four on the Webb rubric. Determine if questions and assignments are aligned to the same level as assessments. Determine to what extent student work has been produced that is at the same level of DOK as the assignment expects. Identify, design and critique assignments and assessments at levels three and four of DOK. After teachers are trained, make it a priority to designate times for them to use training protocols to examine each other's assignments and assessments to determine the level of difficulty, and upgrade them as needed. Provide professional development on Project-Based Learning in all subject areas. Projects based on authentic, real-world issues provide a mechanism to integrate academic and technical content and extend students understanding and career development. While most teachers believe their students complete projects, project-based learning is a distinct pedagogy easily implemented in classrooms and for which there is a growing body of evidence as to its efficacy in improving students' overall academic ability.

- c. Create a district-wide instructional focus.** It is recommended that individual high and middle schools have instructional reviews to assess classroom practices. Schools can collaborate with an outside observer or the district can create an instructional rounds model to ensure best practices. To emphasize the importance, utilize peer observations as well as administrative walkthroughs with specific “look-fors” in instructional practices.
  - d. Provide experiential learning opportunities to increase real-world connections in the classroom.** The district should offer service learning and capstone experiences for students who do not have transportation to work-based learning, internship and apprenticeship opportunities and look for additional ways to support students in getting to off-site locations.
- 4. Look for ways to expand interventions and alternative programming so that all students increase attendance and earn a high school diploma in four years.**
- a. Create alternate intervention systems during the school day.** Be deliberate in utilizing different interventions for different targeted groups of students. Look for ways to provide interventions during the school day for students whose grades have fallen below a C. Design a just-in-time system that would allow students to have re-teaching experiences, which set out the procedures for redoing work to state standards of quality. Possible options for this would look like targeted tutoring interventions during advisory, a content recovery computer lab where students relearn standards prior to failing a course, or on-line supports where students can use tutorials or participate in a blended learning model.

- b. **Design alternative schools.** Provide more alternative school programming for students who are not on track to graduate by increasing the enrollment of current programs and/or creating new opportunities. Accelerated programs are needed to target students who are over age, under credited, students who have experienced trauma, and students with high mobility or other issues that need a transition back to regular school programming. There are a variety of alternative models such as early college, Big Picture High School (<https://schools.mnps.org/nashville-big-picture-high-school>), Simon Youth model (<https://syf.org>) and Quest Academy (<https://questforward.academy/omaha/>). In addition, the district may want to research the P-TECH model, which allows students earn a high school diploma, an industry-recognized associate degree, and gain relevant work experience in a growing field. The schools create a seamless program for students to acquire the academic, technical, and workplace skills that employers need (<http://www.ptech.org/how-it-works/the-model/>).

## Conclusion

The Omaha Public School District, under the leadership of Dr. Cheryl Logan, should be commended for their commitment to continuous improvement. Staff should also be praised for creating a culture that solicits open feedback from its students, counselors, teachers, administrators and central office.

It is imperative to have district structures and processes in place in order to facilitate students learning. Once the vision is set, the district can create an instructional focus to improve student achievement. Students and teachers would benefit from an instructional focus on rigorous and engaging assignments with support from quality professional development. The overwhelming consensus in the district is that transportation is a barrier to program access. Students could also find success if there were more access to alternative programming.

This audit serves as a snapshot of the district's high school programming. Omaha Public Schools offers a multitude of opportunities for students and gives families the option of selecting schools that fit their student's needs. While this is a strength, it has caused some unintended consequences centered on equity and access across schools and individual students. There is an opportunity for envisioning high school programming in collaboration with the Omaha community to be innovative in creating 21<sup>st</sup> century learning for all students. Across the district, there is no clear process for creating and retiring programs; therefore, creating a "piled on" effect has caused programs to conflict with one another. As the district opens two additional high schools, there is an opportunity to develop a district-wide approach to ensuring all schools have similar core offerings while creating "magnet quality" programs at each school to attract students.

## References

Advance CTE. Expanding Access to Opportunity, Improving Quality Data, Perkins V  
([www.careertech.org](http://www.careertech.org))

American School Counselor Association. Counseling standards for district-wide counseling program  
(<https://www.schoolcounselor.org>)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). How To Help Your School Thrive Without Breaking the Bank. Chapter 2, Developing a Vision and a Mission.  
(<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/107042/chapters/developing-a-vision-and-a-mission.aspx>)

Coalition for Career Development. Career Readiness For All Spring, 2019  
([www.coalitionforcareerdevelopment.org](http://www.coalitionforcareerdevelopment.org))

Community College Research Center. What we know about nonacademic student supports.  
(<https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-nonacademic-student-supports.pdf>)

Florida Department of Education. Academy and Career -Themed Course Registration.  
(<http://www.fldoe.org>)

Lumen, Planning & Teaching Strategies. Webb's Depth of Knowledge.  
(<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/educationx92x1/chapter/webbs-depth-of-knowledge/>)

Metro Nashville Public Schools. Big Picture High School.  
(<https://schools.mnps.org/nashville-big-picture-high-school>)

Nebraska State Department of Education Current district and school status, enrollment numbers, achievement, district attendance and per pupil expenditure.  
(<https://www.education.ne.gov>)

Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (SCAS). Student achievement data.  
([https://www.education.ne.gov/press\\_release/nscas-helps-teachers-accelerate-student-learning/](https://www.education.ne.gov/press_release/nscas-helps-teachers-accelerate-student-learning/))

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). ([www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org))

National School Climate Center. What is School Climate and why is it Important?  
(<https://www.schoolclimate.org/school-climate>)

P-TECH. Educating the Future Work Force and Closing the Global Skills Gap.  
(<http://www.ptech.org/how-it-works/the-model/>)

Quest Forward Academy Omaha. A Thriving High School on a University Campus.

[\(https://questforward.academy/omaha/\)](https://questforward.academy/omaha/)

Simon Youth Foundation. (<https://syf.org>)

Southern Regional Education Board. Shaping policy and Practice at every stage of education. ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org))

Tennessee Department of Education. Career Exploration.  
(<https://www.tn.gov/education.html>)

US News & World Report. National attendance rate and per pupil expenditure.  
([www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com))

Virginia Department of Education. Academic and Career Plans of Study.  
(<http://www.doe.virginia.gov>)