

Wyoming District Peer Review

Uinta County School District #4

Introduction:

The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) conducted a virtual peer review visit, on March 24-25, 2021, in Uinta County School District #4. The visiting team included Kellie Boedecker, Johnson County School District #1, Jay Curtis, Park County School District #1, Katrina Crossland, Platte County School District #1, Mick Wiest, Retired PLC Coordinator, Susan Board, Retired Reading Specialist, Jo Ann Numoto, Wyoming Department of Education, Bill Pannell, Wyoming Department of Education, and Joel Dvorak, Team Lead. The team would like to thank the district for its hospitality during the visit.

In Wyoming's Peer Review Accreditation Model, a team is selected, made up of professionals from Wyoming school districts, constituents from the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE), and a team lead that facilitates the visit. These professionals come from a variety of areas within an educational setting and serve as "equals" (Approaches to Accreditation, 2018) to those professionals directly reporting to the peer review team during their district's two-day visit. This model offers a "collegial" (Approaches to Accreditation, 2018) approach that closely examines annual accreditation criteria, artifacts of implemented processes, the district's assessment system, and input from the school district's stakeholders. Anticipated benefits from Wyoming's Peer Review Model is that it serves as a mechanism to help a school district with prioritizing, making informed decisions, and to reflect on their own unique quality standards that have been identified in their strategic plan.

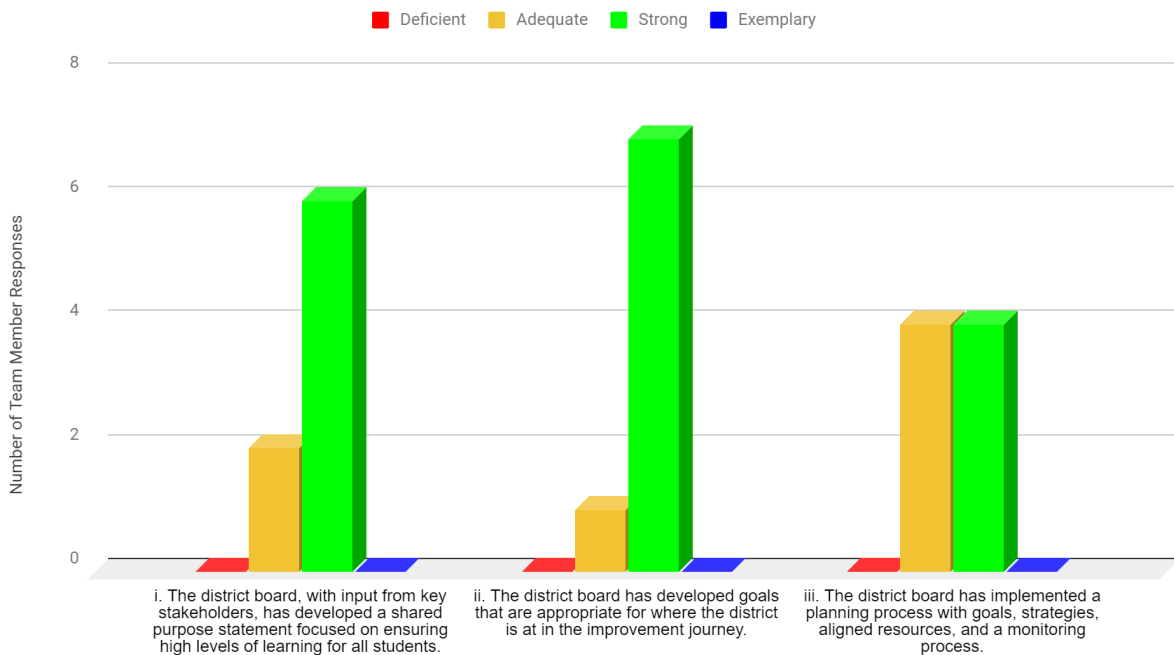
Approaches to Accreditation. (2018, February 8). Retrieved from <http://accreditation.org/accreditation-resources/approaches-accreditation>

A. GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

01. District Board

a. District Purpose

a. District Purpose



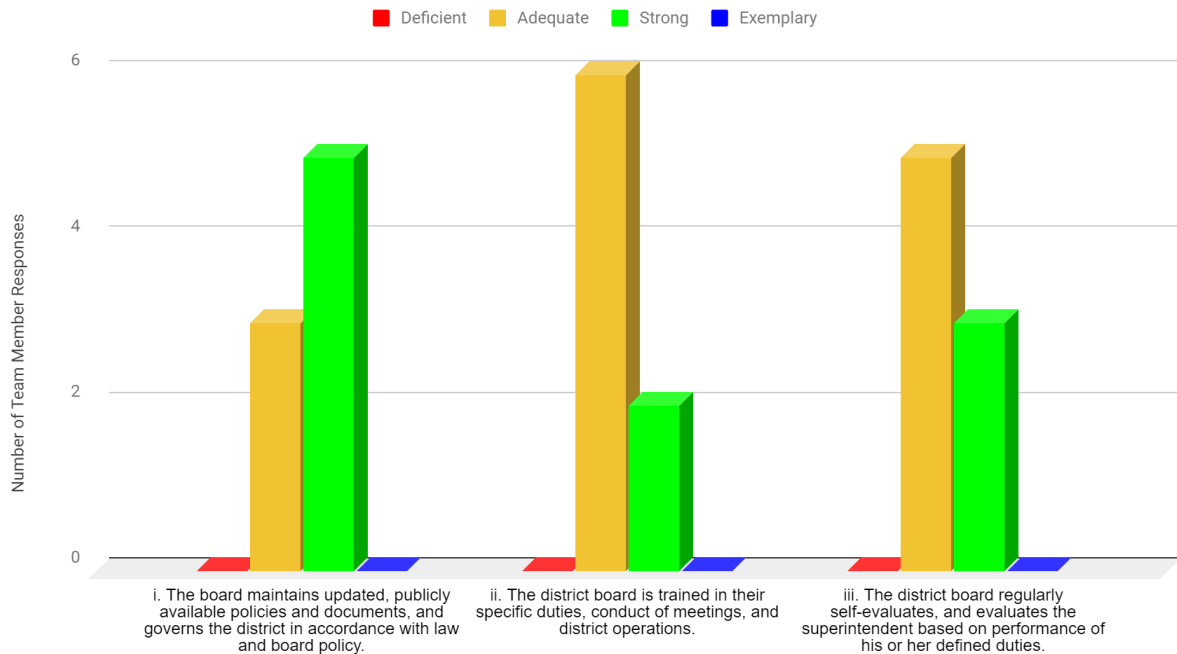
For the past 12 years, the 4 district values have been the driving force behind the mission and vision of the school district. The stability and longevity of staff, leadership team, and the school board is an outstanding representation of quality governance. Four board retreats per year allow relationship building and goal development to occur on a regular basis and is a best practice.

The tradition of holding 4 board retreats each year demonstrates your commitment to building relationships which are in line with the core values of the district. Nearly everyone in the interview process commented on the importance of this aspect and how it has led to open communications and discussions for student improvement.

The goals and strategies in the strategic plan are different from the goals and strategies in the goals document, which raised some confusion as to which is current. The mission is not clearly focused on ensuring high levels of learning, even though that was the obvious focus of the system throughout the presentation. It appeared to the team from other evidence that the reality exceeds what is stated in the strategic planning documents.

b. Governance and Oversight

b. Governance and Oversight



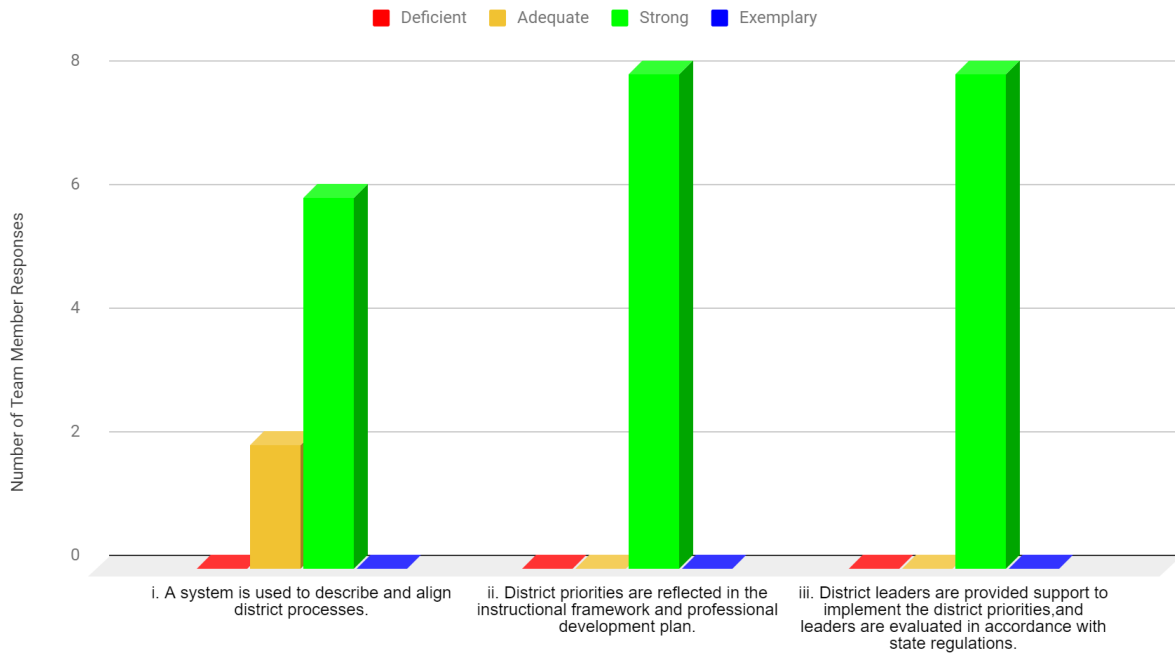
The level of governance training this board has received from the WSBA combined with the longevity of trustees serving on the board is a strength. These pieces of evidence combined with a 12-year tenure of the current superintendent demonstrate that quality governance is valued and trust at the top of the district is strong.

A good process is in place for yearly training via WSBA conference and retreats. The district could potentially look to WSBA for specific training involving goals specific to board function and self-evaluation. It is very apparent that the strength of the governance system lies within the people in the system. The district leadership may consider solidifying some systems through improved documentation of processes that are currently more people-dependent.

02. District Leadership

a. Organizational Leadership

a. Organizational Leadership

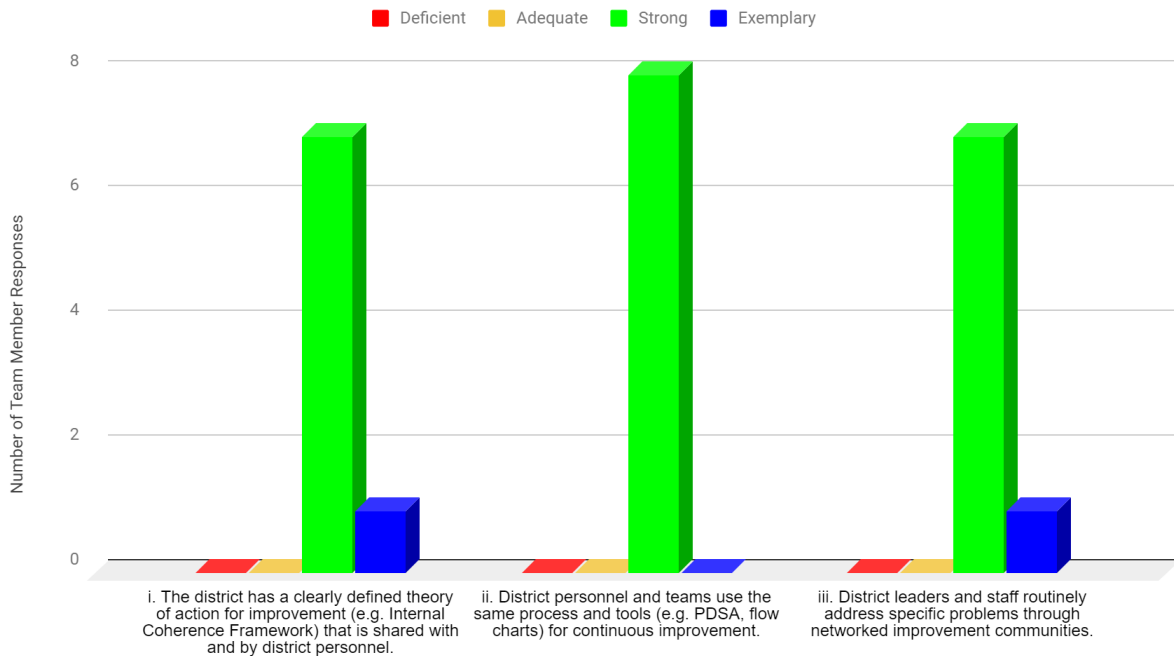


Strategic planning appears to be well developed and enculturated within the district. There is clear evidence that a coherent, aligned system with defined priorities and clear expectations exists across the district. The Danielson Instructional Model has been and continues to be the instructional model for the district since 2003. The Framework Clusters were added in 2020 to better refine the implementation of the instructional framework through effective classroom walkthroughs.

The district may want to consider soliciting stakeholder input on the next iteration of the strategic plan. All evaluations appear to be aligned with Chapter 29 Leader evaluation requirements.

b. Quality Improvement

b. Quality Improvement



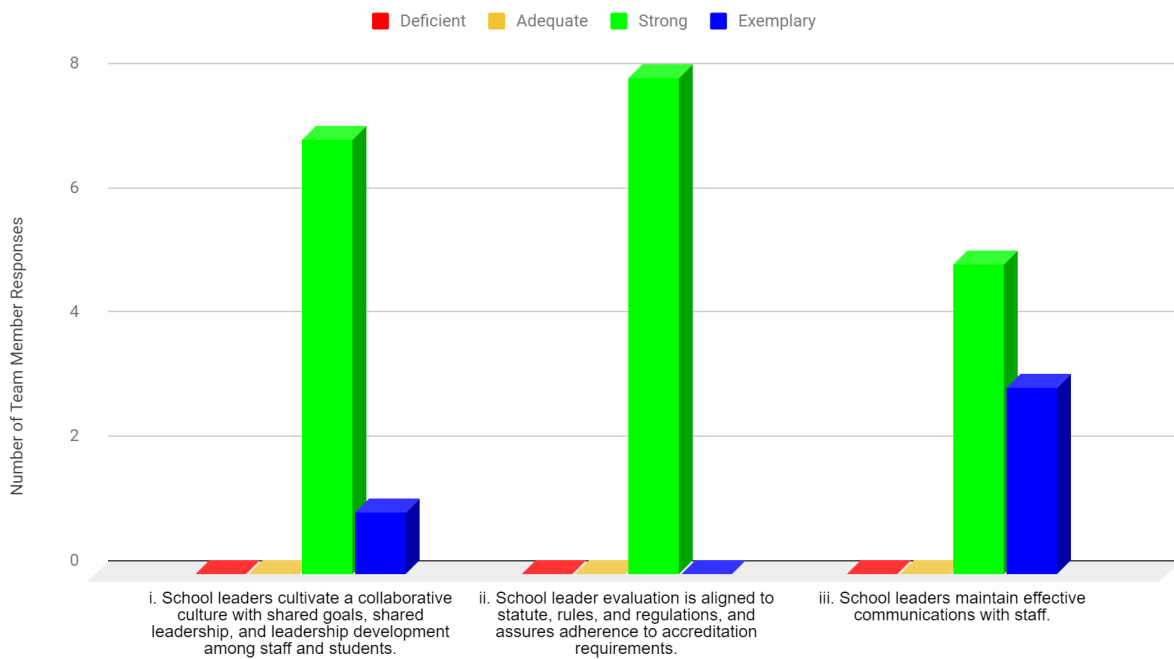
It was shared with the team that the PLC model is being used as the critical framework for improvement across the district. The PLC journey began in the district in 2013 with training leadership and moved to full PLC implementation in the 2018-19 school year. As such, strong PLC processes are in place and clear evidence that the journey to improvement through that process is well underway. The fact that the elementary is being considered to be a model school by Solution Tree is an exemplar. The district may want to consider the next steps toward unified common planning times at the secondary level to make the growth of staff and students to the next level.

The WILN process is a good representation of continuous improvement in your district. The system allows for several purposes: increasing administrator capacity in the evaluation as well as inter-rater reliability. Additionally, it provides a vehicle for teacher best practice, feedback, and improvement. There is substantial involvement by central office administrators and school leaders in statewide improvement networks. The district participates in the statewide system of support and works in partnership with the WDE by effective use of materials and resources provided by the department.

03. School Leadership

a. Principal Leadership

a. Principal Leadership

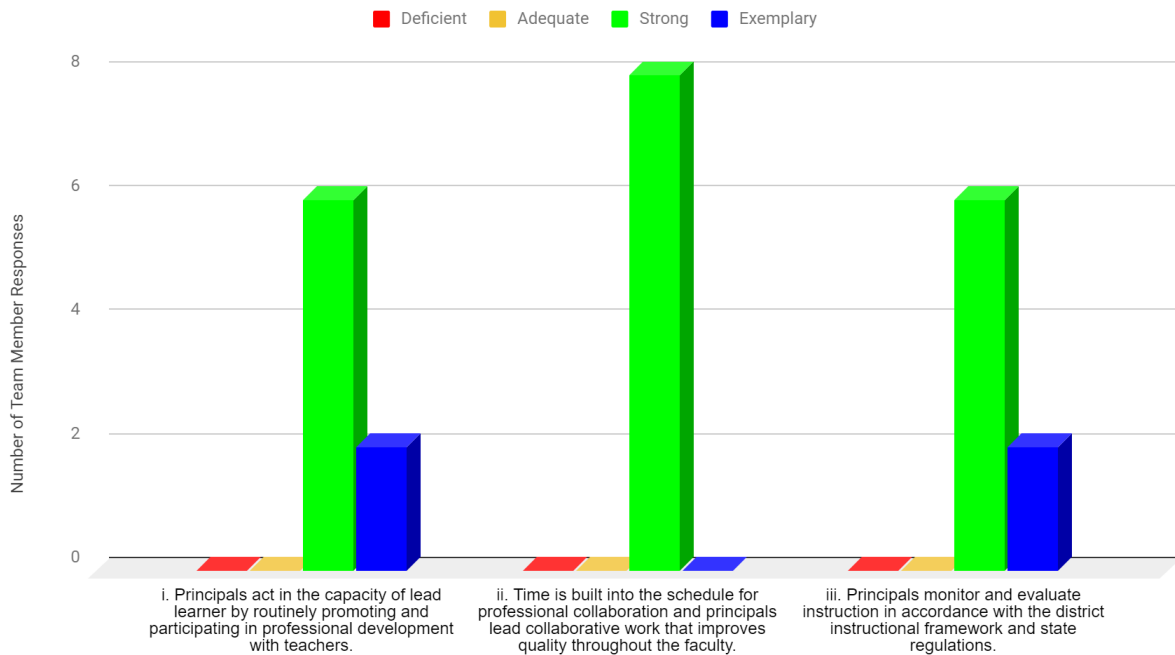


Principals' and other administrators' longevity is a clear testament to the strength of the principal leadership system. The team found strong evidence of excellent communication at all levels. Many staff spoke of the approachability and support they receive from the administration team. The exemplary scores were the result of evidence received through the teacher focus groups. Each group of teachers spoke to how happy they were with their school's culture and how valued and appreciated they were by their principal and other administrators. The staff shared a growth mindset and were not afraid to share opinions and ideas with their cohort and leadership.

The evidence observed by the team is a clear indication that the principals are intentionally living out the core values of the district and have created the conditions for a very collaborative culture in the schools.

b. Learning Leadership

b. Learning Leadership



There was clear evidence of the level of learning leadership with active engagement of principals in professional learning, participation in the Wyoming Instructional Leadership Network (WILN) walkthroughs, and the monitoring and evaluation of instruction. Principal participation in book studies, conferences, and attendance at PD are evident at all levels. Principals and administrators sitting side by side with teachers in the PLC process clearly demonstrate adult learning and growth is a priority in the district and that principals are lead learners.

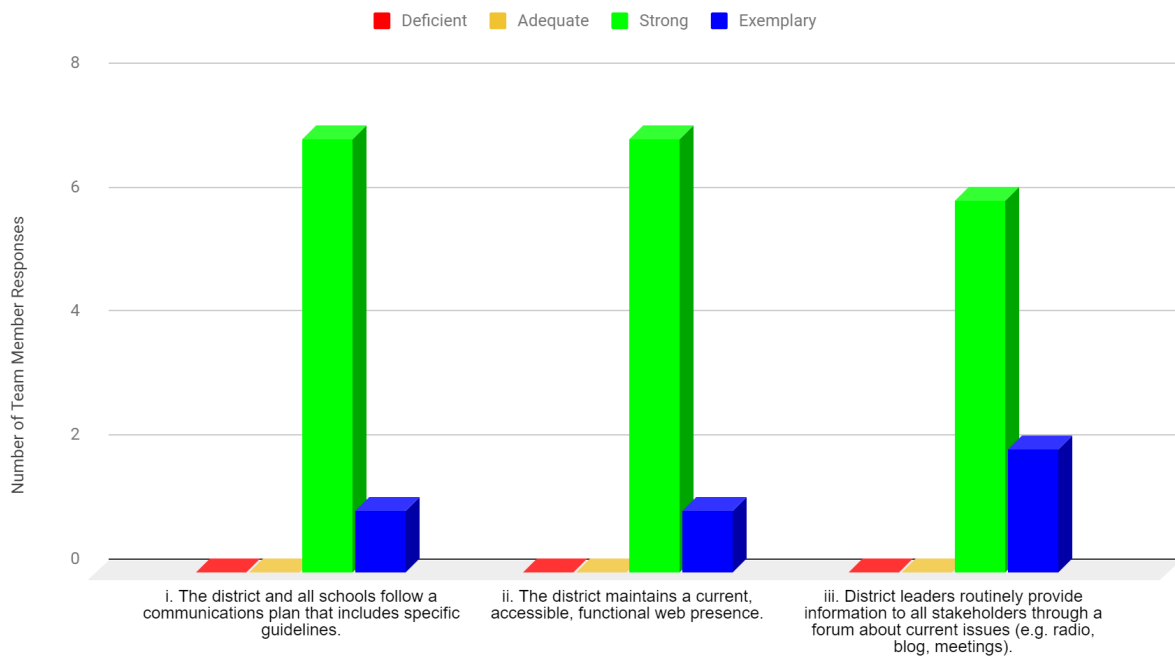
The team appreciated the WILN walk-through protocol and its alignment with the Framework Clusters.

Learning leadership in the form of creating time, within a daily schedule, to collaborate at the elementary level was reflected positively by all the teachers. Many teachers commented on the improvement of their own instruction thanks to their colleagues' discussions and practices. At the secondary levels, teachers seemed appreciative of any time to vertically align and to check on students' needs and how to best meet them with additional communication with other staff members. In addition, the WILN walkthroughs seem to provide immediate feedback to teachers that is appreciated.

04. Stakeholder Communications and Input

a. Stakeholder Communications

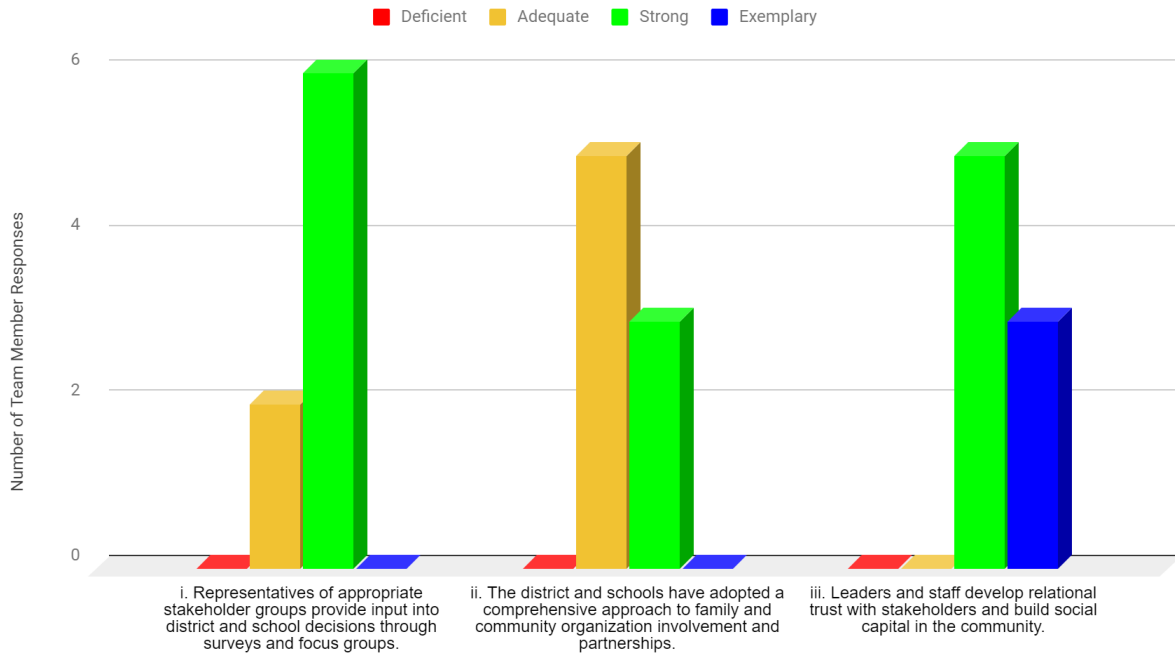
a. Stakeholder Communications



It is clear by the evidence that the district follows its communication plan. The district's use of both formal and informal communication is strong; in particular, the team was impressed by the use of social media, which is a best practice. Stakeholder communication is strongly evidenced through the district website, Twitter, Facebook, ALICE, Swift Alert, newsletters, and other electronic messaging. In addition, the Annual Report to Stakeholders is also a best practice and has been in effect for 12 years.

b. Stakeholder Input

b. Stakeholder Input



The team found multiple opportunities for stakeholders to provide input, both through formal surveys and assemblies and informally at events at the school. There are high levels of informal involvement with families and community members. There are also high levels of ongoing opportunities to provide input and feedback into school operations. There is a high level of participation of leaders and staff in the community through church, the chamber of commerce, as well as multiple other examples. There is clearly a high level of trust within the district and between the district and the community. The length of services of board members and administrators, is an indicator that the school is central to and well-respected within the community.

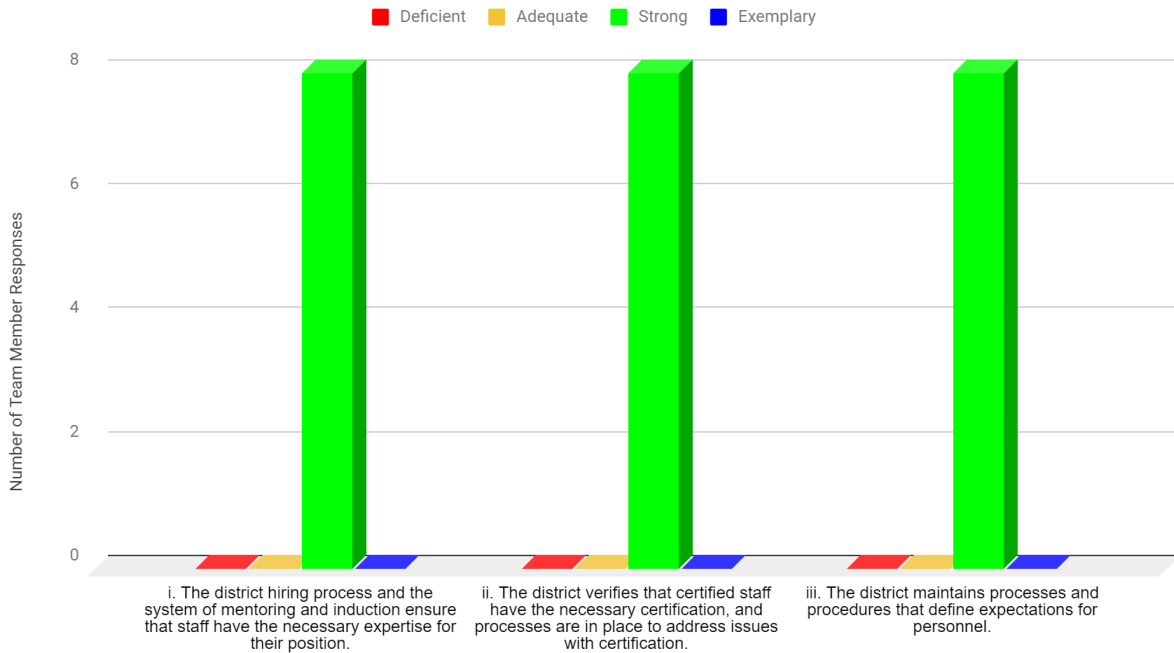
Transition and Re-Entry Plan Committee is a best practice for community involvement. Although there is strong evidence of community support and trust, a clear and well defined system of stakeholder involvement could be strengthened.

B. PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY

05. Employment and Certification

a. Human Capital

a. Human Capital

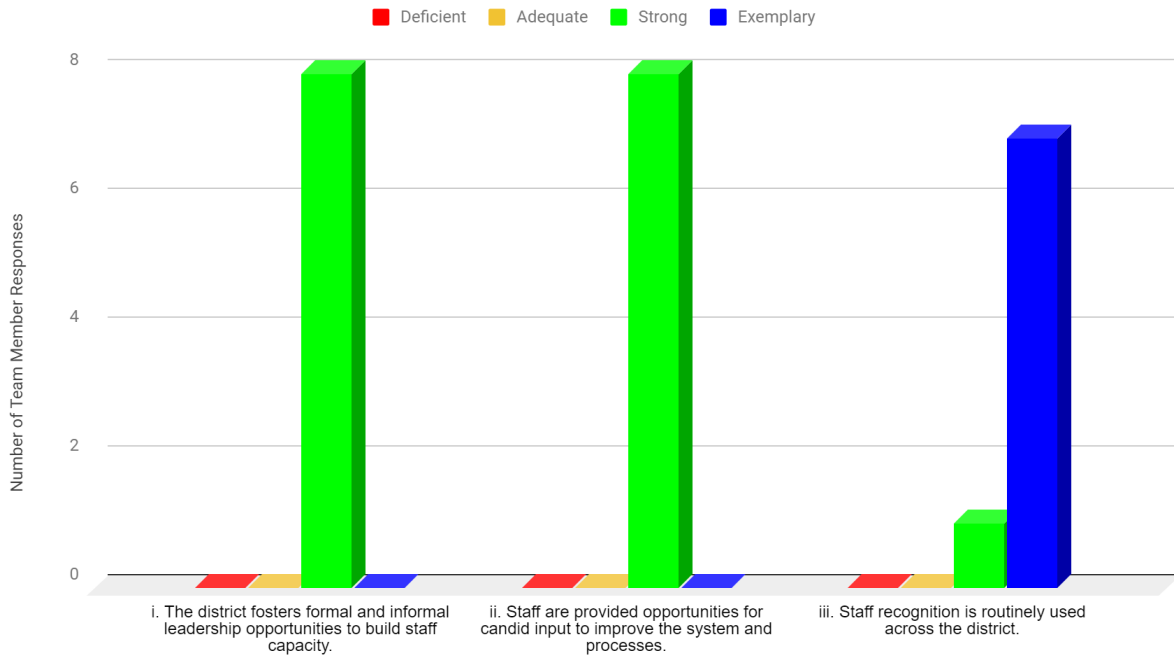


In the area of human capital, Uinta 4 demonstrates a commitment to their staff in a variety of ways. This is evidenced by the long-term employment from your administration team and teachers. Low turnover rates of staff reflect the culture the district has created. It is also evident that the district has made it a priority that teachers are well compensated which contributes to a positive culture and teachers feeling valued and appreciated.

A mentoring program is in place for new teachers for their first and second years. The district's mentor contract clearly spells out expectations and opportunities for both mentor and mentee. Tuition costs for approved graduate degrees are reimbursed at a rate of 50% of the University of Wyoming tuition rate and this policy promotes opportunities for professional growth of staff within the district.

B. Employee Recognition

b. Employee Recognition



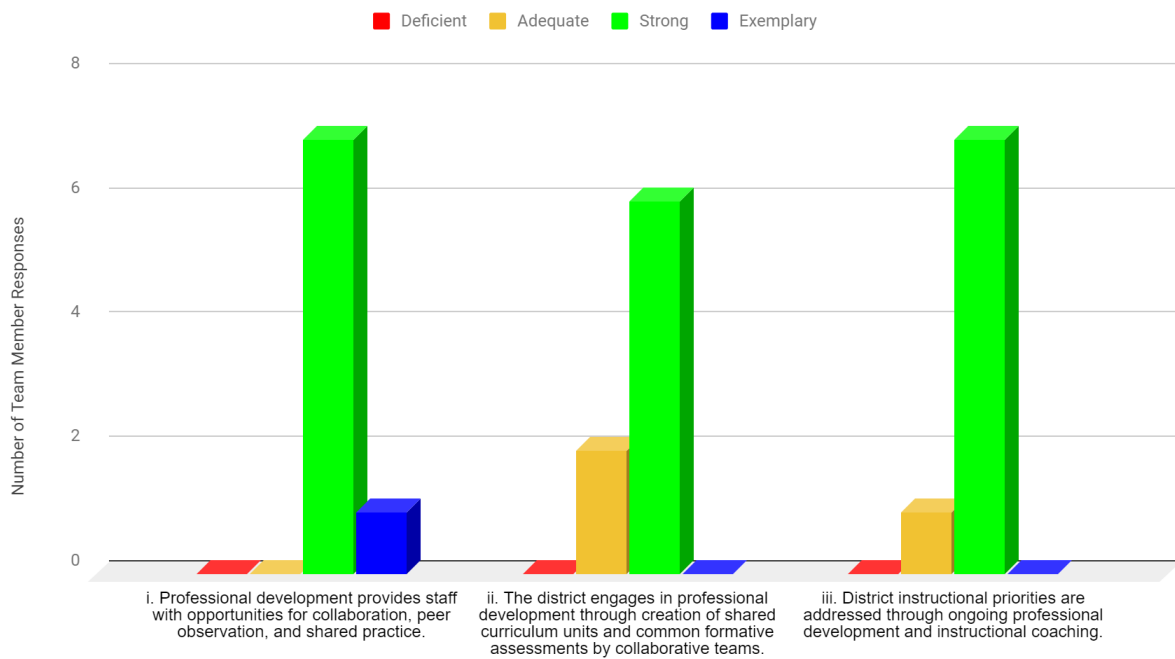
The Spotlight on Success was a highlight of this area. Recognition of a variety of staff was apparent; additionally, an acknowledgment in a variety of modes (board meeting, handwritten note, and social media) is powerful. The amount and quality of staff recognition is impressive. The specific use of twitter to share recognition of staff is a best practice.

Staff are provided the opportunity to anonymously respond to a survey about administrator effectiveness and get candid feedback. There are abundant formal opportunities for staff shared leadership through committee participation and informal opportunities through PLC team structures.

06. Professional Development

a. Collaborative Expertise

a. Collaborative Expertise

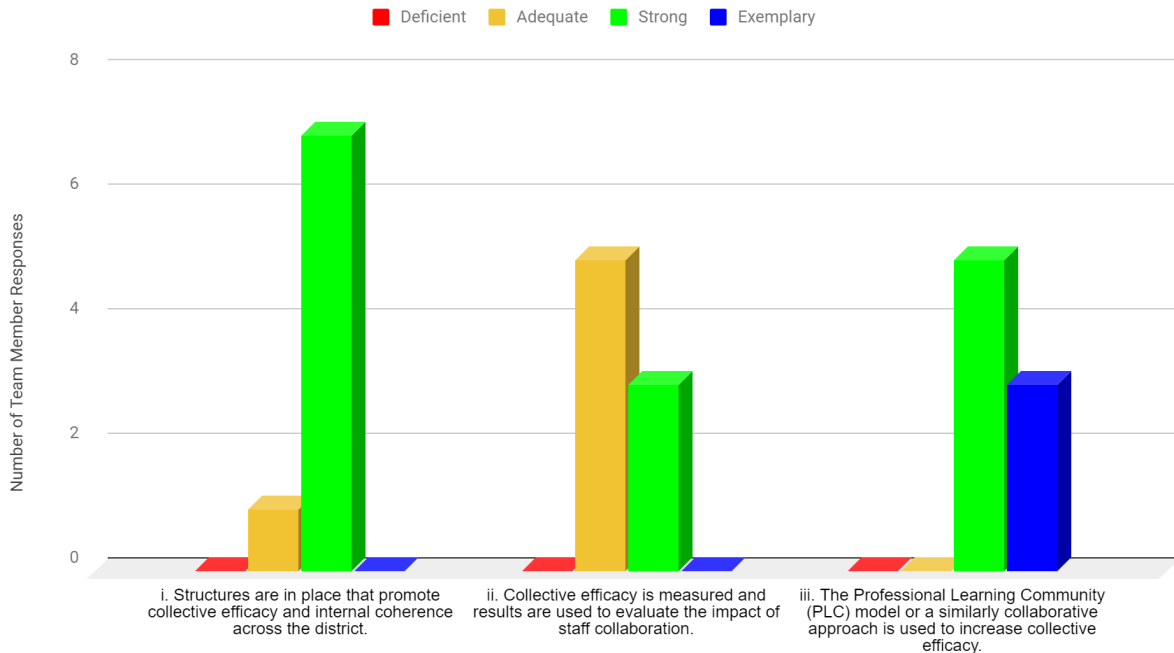


The evidence indicates that there is a well-developed collaborative system in place through the implementation of professional learning communities, with a more focused approach to professional development than existed in the past. The development of teacher skills in the strategies with the highest-effect sizes is an effective strategy used by the district. The district may wish to visit more with Jan Hoegh about the sharing of proficiency scales with students to allow them to self-assess and report performance levels relative to the standards. Also, the clear focus on defining the learning targets and success criteria, and ensuring that students understand both is indicative of teacher clarity, another practice with a high effect size.

In the elementary school, the practice of flooding was well articulated. The document demonstrating how co-teaching is accomplished shows how instruction is being maximized for every student in the classroom. The team is excited to see your progress with the creation of formative assessments and the use of data to drive instruction. This will require some creativity to utilize common formative assessments at the secondary level, but anything you can do to make that happen will be worth your while. Even if the secondary PLCs focus on improvement of instructional practice through peer observation, you would see strong benefits.

b. Collective Efficacy

b. Collective Efficacy



Collective efficacy is a strength for the district, with a clear commitment to the PLC process. It is evident that secondary school is lagging elementary in PLC journey. (this is normal) Stay the course! Also, consider strengthening measurement of efficacy by strong administrator presence in team meetings, and using a tool that would then inform future practice. The PLC Team Self-Assessment is the tool used to directly measure the function of the PLC teams and indirectly measure collective teacher efficacy.

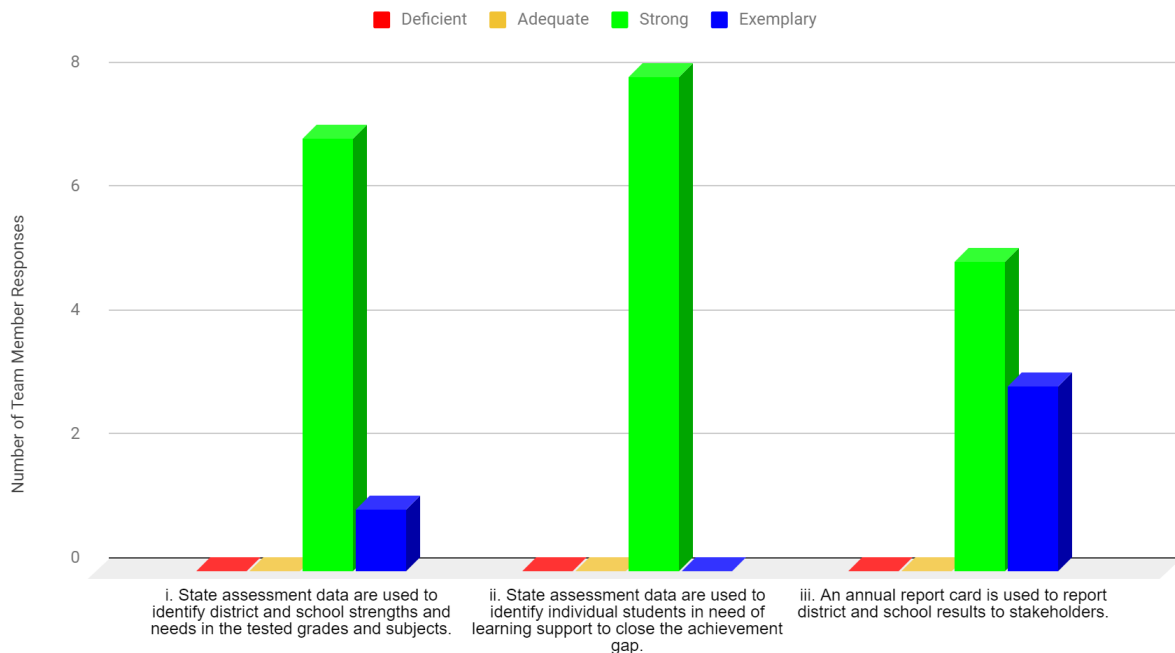
Collective efficacy was very observable as the teachers related their positive comments about the school and school district. It was obvious that the culture of learning is high because the teachers and staff have established sound relationships with one another and enjoy the collaborative work within the PLCs. When veteran and new teachers can learn from one another, students benefit in the end. Teachers at all levels certainly understand the value of PLCs and appreciate what it has added to their practice and student attainment.

C. ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT

07. State Assessment and Accountability

a. District Performance

a. District Performance

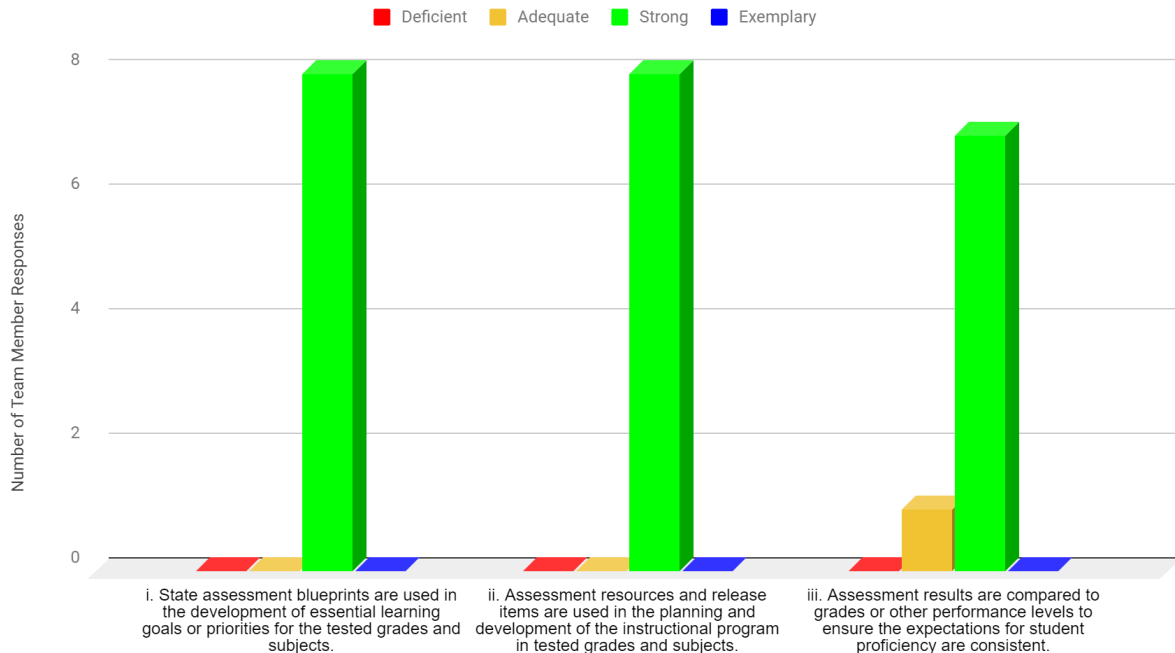


One exemplar under district performance is the use of WAEA data to inform improvement efforts at schools, individual grade levels, content areas, and subgroups. Well Done! This district is very strong in data use for improvement. Another exemplar is the Annual Report to Stakeholders. The Annual Report to Stakeholders is an impressive report showcasing student data as well as multiple other ways of demonstrating that high levels of learning are happening across the district. Because it has been used consistently, it is also a document that chronicles the journey the district has been on for the last 12 years.

One consideration the district may want to think about is to distill the Annual Report to a more concise communication tool that is a companion piece to the full report.

b. Curricular Guidance

b. Curricular Guidance



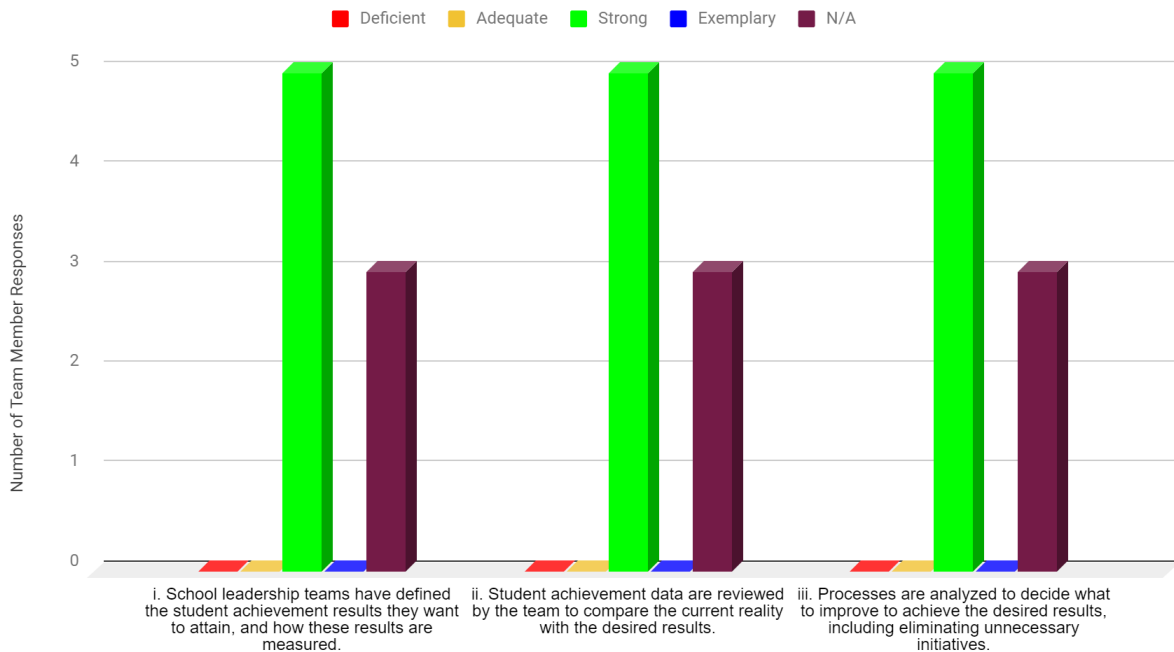
With respect to curricular guidance, every teacher group spoke about the use of assessment blueprints, power standards, and common assessments, and their use in planning instruction. This appears to be systematic, as all teacher teams used common vernacular with zero conflicting information.

There is clearly effective use of the resources available from the WDE as they relate to standards and assessment. The use of the WDE website for curriculum work has been helpful to the district in its work on alignment and rigor. Teachers related that exemplars posted have helped many students visually see their goals. Additionally, the team heard lots of communication between grade level cohorts to vertically align goals which again helps students receive rich instruction with a good foundation.

08. School Improvement and Support

a. Analysis of Needs

a. Analysis of Needs

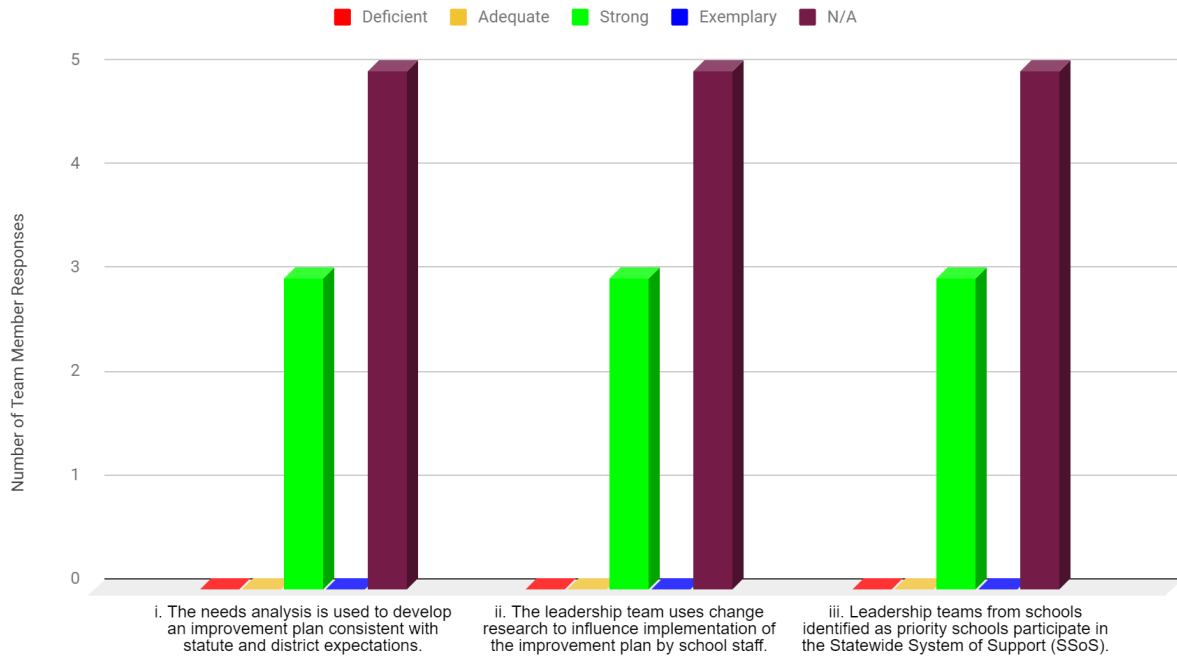


While all your schools are meeting expectations and are not required to have a school improvement plan, all 3 schools have dedicated resources to a needs assessment through their Solution Tree/PLC cohort training. Continuous improvement is an absolute priority in this district. The pride in student success was almost palpable and evident at all levels

Although several team members scored these practices N/A, it is commendable that the district schools have plans and a needs assessment for each level as per the Solution Tree & WDE project. Also, the district does discuss and decide on "unnecessary initiatives" or modify/revise existing ones to make the work viable.

b. Improvement Plans

b. Improvement Plans



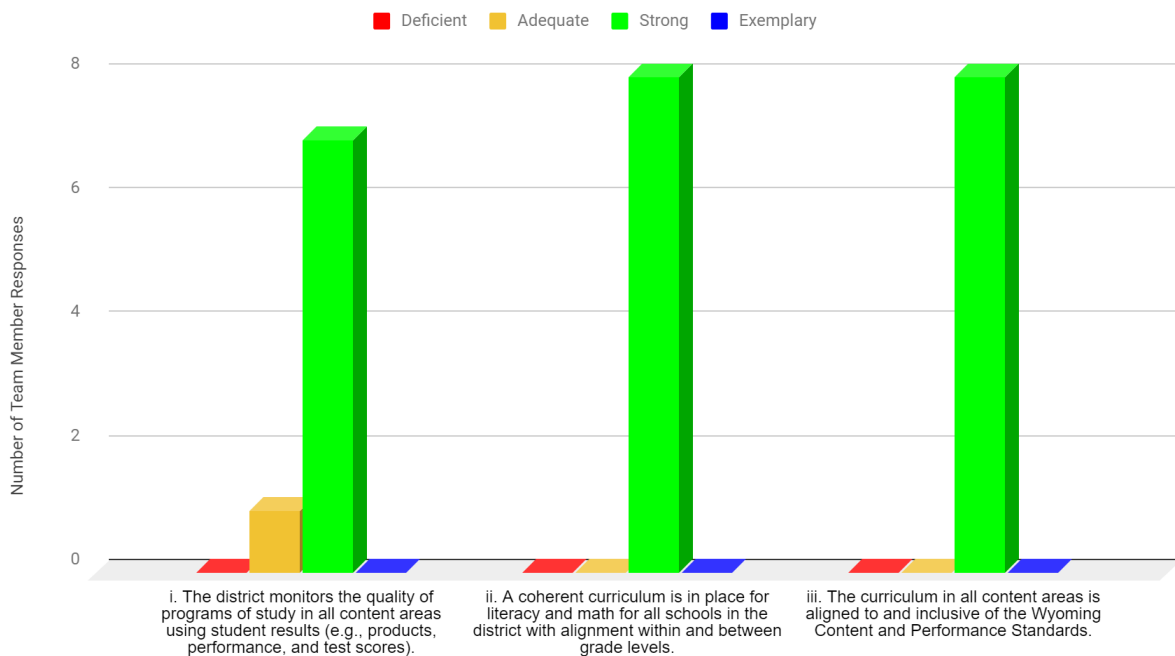
After reviewing the evidence, it became clear that the commitment to continuous improvement is ongoing in Uinta 4. Several members of the team marked this as not applicable because school improvement plans are not required. However, the district is strong on all three practices. This district is really a shining example of a district that has participated in and benefitted from the statewide system of support.

D. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

09. Programs, Standards, and Curriculum

a. Content Areas

a. Content Areas

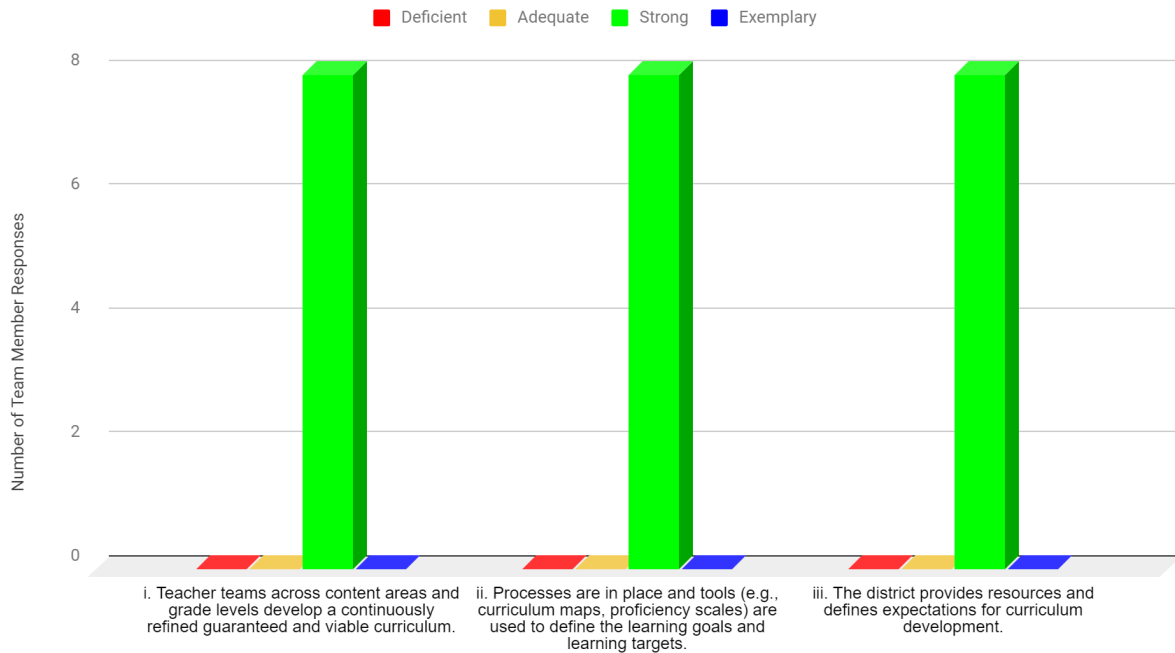


The district has a coherent and aligned curriculum that has been developed and refined through the PLC work done in collaborative teams. The work accomplished in the PLC was consistently referred to as being extremely valuable for both student and teacher growth. There was some evidence that the quality of programs of study was monitored through common formative assessments, but little reference to other methods of monitoring non-tested programs. Examples would include program enrollment, state and national honors, etc. There was evidence of a well-aligned and coherent curriculum in math and literacy but no evidence of curriculum aligned to standards in subject areas that have shared standards (e.g., CTE).

The team appreciated seeing evidence of authentic tasks, student performances, and student products make up a significant portion of learning activities. Through teacher panel discussions the team heard that while power standards were being articulated at the secondary level, there was a tapering off of some of those activities, but, it was good to hear they are being added back into the instructional program, inclusive of student voice and student choice.

b. Curriculum

b. Curriculum

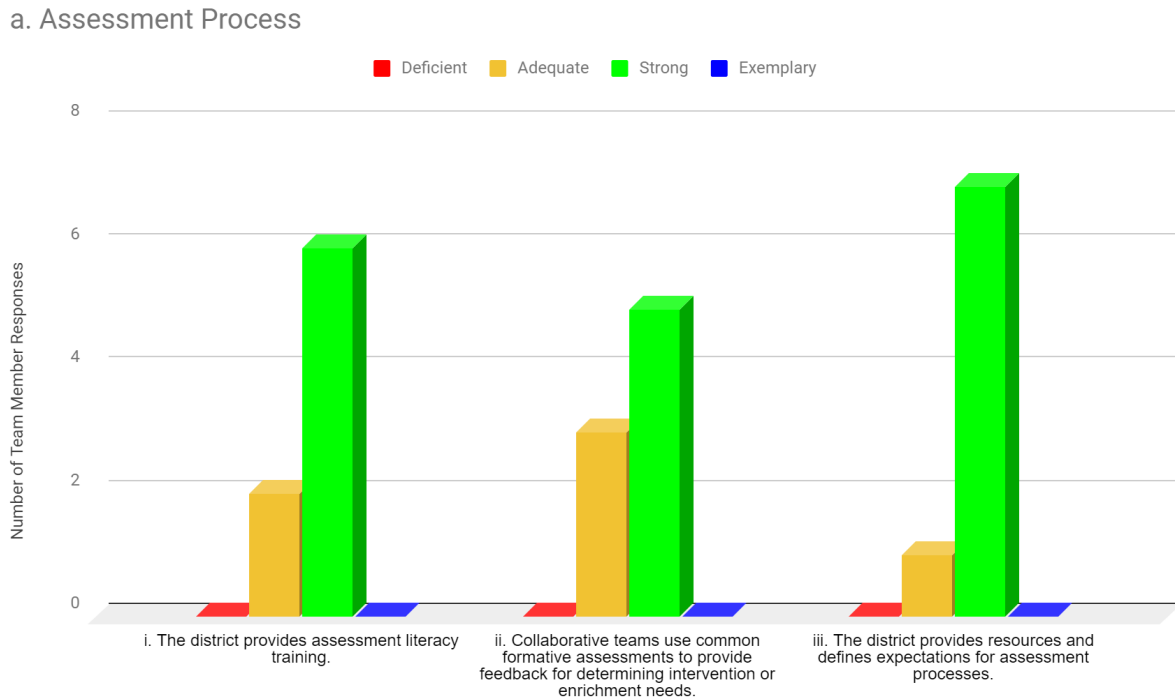


The district is strong in the area of curriculum development. It is evident after reviewing the evidence that a great deal of work has been done on the curriculum in the last 3 to 5 years. The refinement process is not as evident, but the system is in place for that to be the logical next steps in the journey.

It was unclear how the non-tested subjects are evaluated. The team saw great evidence for the curricular areas of math, science, ELA, etc., and would have liked to have more information about how you are evaluating the effectiveness of other programs-music, Ag, art, etc. There was ample evidence that the district uses proficiency scales and those power standards are modified as you work through the curriculum.

10. District Assessment System

a. Assessment Process

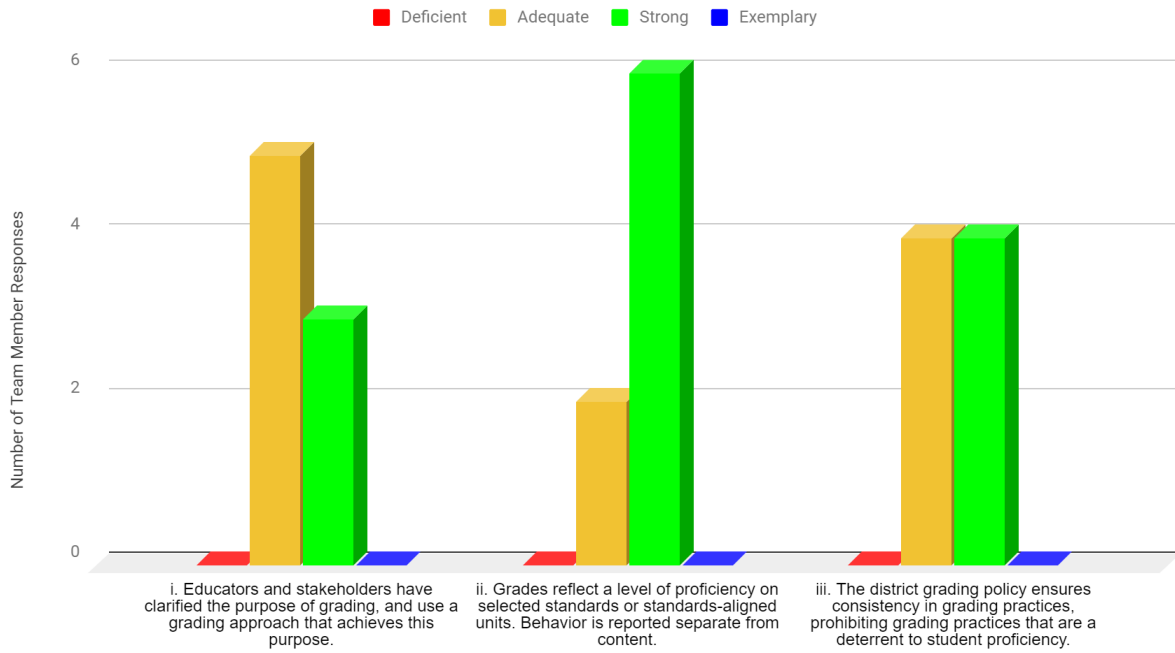


In teacher interviews, it was evident that strong use of common formative assessments is well developed at the elementary, but not as readily evident at middle school and high school. Some teachers could speak to this specifically, where others could not. There was plenty of opportunity for assessment literacy training, but the data did not appear to support the idea that a high percentage of the instructional staff have received the training. There is evidence of quality common formative assessments and their use. The expectations for assessment processes seem to align with the assessment literacy training. The district has taken great advantage of the assessment literacy training provided by WDE. Examples include PLC training from Solution Tree and Assessment literacy training from Jan Hough.

From what was shared by both the teachers and district personnel regarding assessment literacy, ownership is becoming more and more ingrained and accepted. Resources and support are very evident when talking with the teachers. At this point in the PLC journey, you seem to be doing nice work with training. Again, growth in the use of CFAs at the secondary will come along as you think of ways to work on common skills even if the content is different.

b. Grading and Reporting

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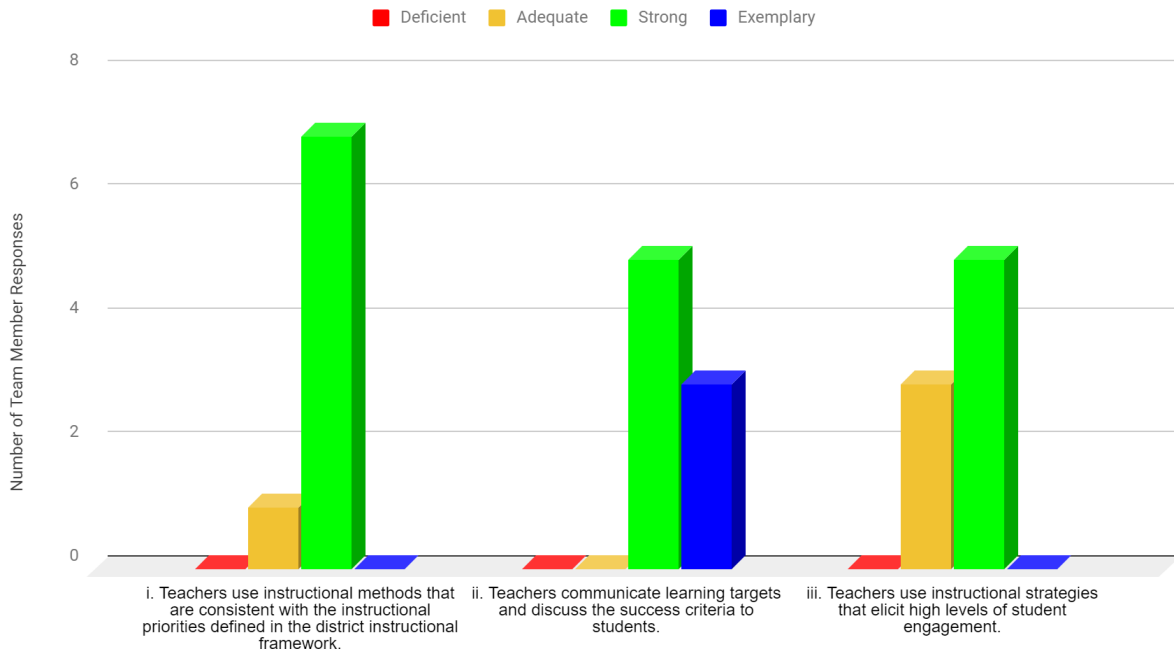


The team was not able to see clear evidence that the purpose of grades is clarified by the district and that all levels utilize the same premise for grading to promote learning. A worthwhile conversation for the district to have would be around the kinds of scores that belong in a gradebook. The team appreciated the clear effort at developing conversion scales for proficiencies to grades and that effort bridges the gap between standards-referenced reporting and percentage-based grading relatively well. The effort to separate behavior and social skills grading from academic grading is applauded and, from the evidence presented, moving forward at all levels.

11. Instructional Methods

a. Instructional Practices

a. Instructional Practices

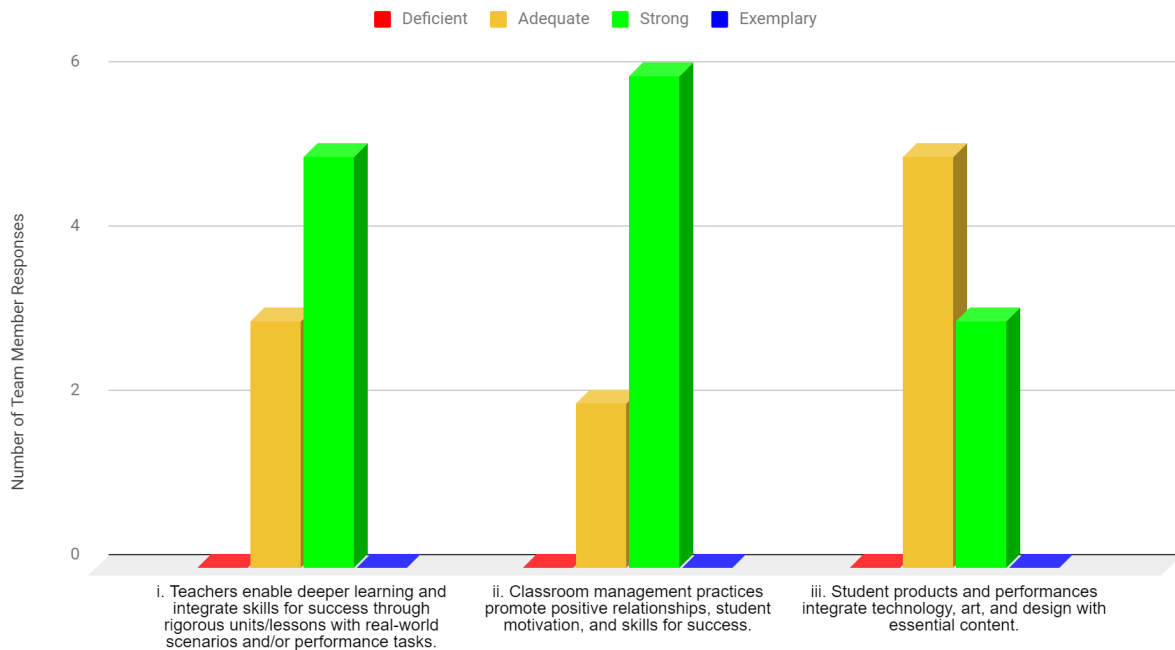


In the practices of this area, the team appreciated the work that has been done by teachers to post both learning targets and success criteria to help students take ownership of their own learning. The framework for teaching, learning targets, and success criteria posted all seem to guide instruction and is best practice. Teachers posting the criteria is helpful not just to the teacher but to students as well.

There was evidence of a clear focus on the use of the instructional framework and clarity around the learning targets and success criteria. There was little discussion of student engagement or the use of instructional strategies designed to elicit engagement (e.g., Kagan Strategies). The statement made about raising expectations, asking tough questions, and holding each other accountable in doing what is best for students was affirmed by teachers. There is a strong commitment by staff to keep student learning at the forefront of all things.

b. Academic Tasks

b. Academic Tasks



There were several examples provided of higher-level academic tasks in the elective areas and not much discussion about their use in the core content areas. There was some indication of the use of technology, art, and design to create high-quality projects and products, but the discussion in this area was fairly limited.

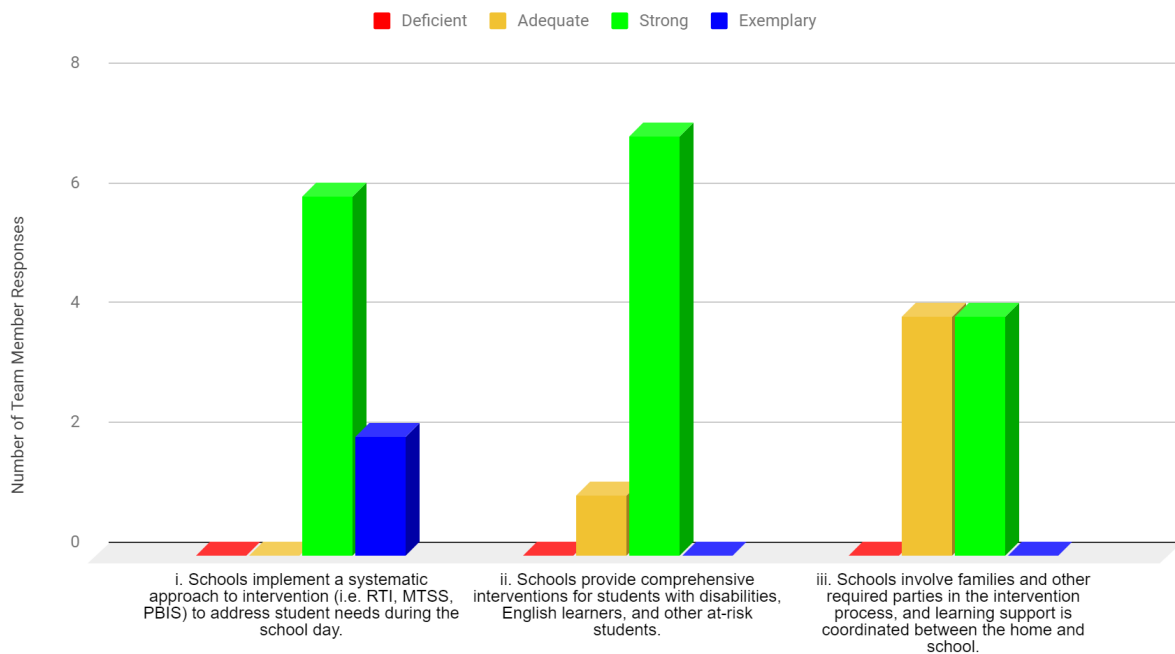
Again, it sounds as if the elementary level is working hard to integrate rigorous lessons that result in products or performances and that the middle school and high school have that as one of their priorities.

The evidence indicates that ongoing assessing are the norms now. Exit tickets, proficiency scales, and other forms of checking in are in place across all levels of the district. When students feel successful, they achieve and your thoughtful work and planning are invaluable to the students.

12. Learning Support

a. Intervention

a. Intervention

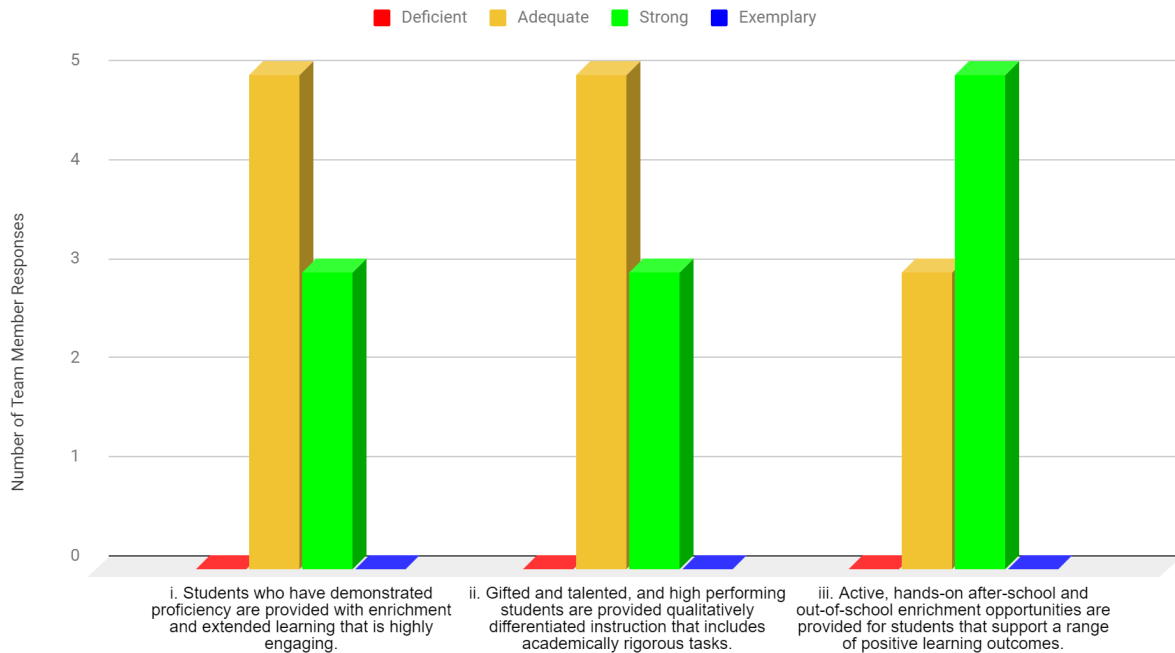


This is a very strong area for Uinta 4, with interventionists at the elementary level, and academic honor time at secondary. There appears to be a strong system in place for answering PLC question #3. The MTSS System is used to ensure all students receive the academic and social/emotional support they need to be successful students. Several layers of intervention are built into the system before students are referred for SPED services. The PLC process, RTI process, and BIT referral process are all well implemented and documented district-wide.

The district may want to consider examining different ways to involve parents in the intervention process in addition to their involvement with special education services.

b. Extension and Enrichment

b. Extension and Enrichment



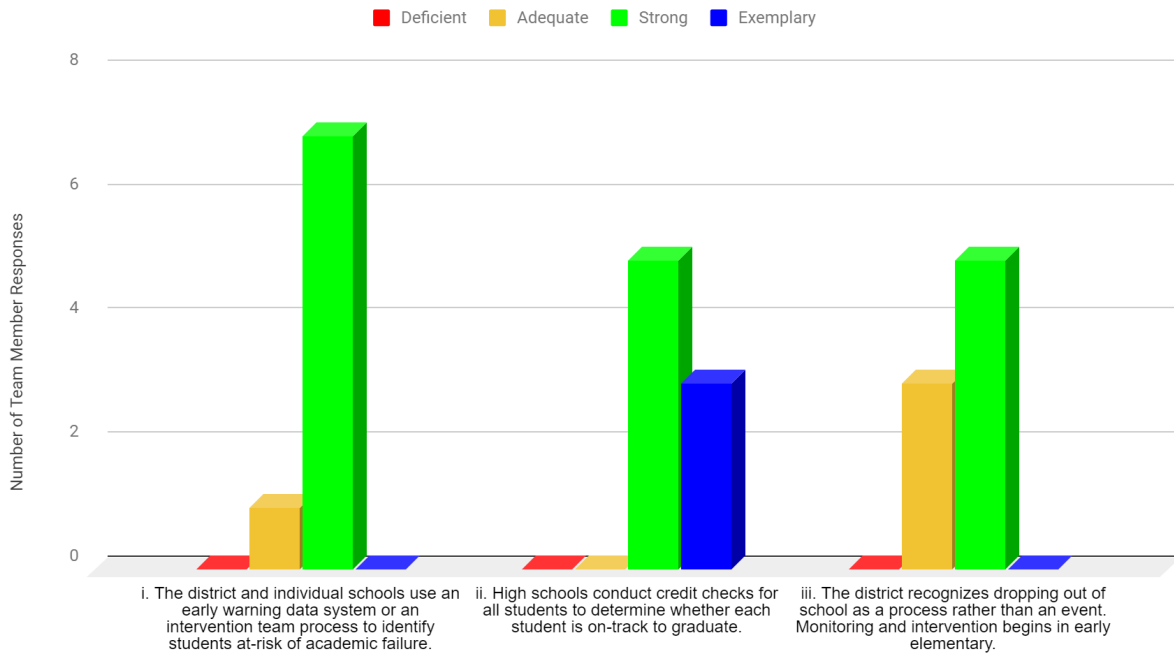
Instructional staff seems to be making progress in ensuring that extensions and enrichments aren't just doing the next grade-level standard but are going deeper with authentic and rigorous tasks that adhere to grade level learning targets. Examples of extensions to consider for students who have shown proficiency on a power standard include peer tutoring and games requiring higher-order thinking skills that align to the standard. Solid work on PLC question 4 is a result of the mature PLC processes in schools and the district is continuing this journey.

There were opportunities for enrichment through after-school programs and higher-level coursework. Other than clubs, more opportunities for learning enrichment activities beyond school hours would be a good goal for the district to consider. In the current budget scenario in Wyoming, financing additional programs would most likely depend on grants.

13. At-risk and Dropout Prevention

a. Early Warning Systems

a. Early Warning Systems

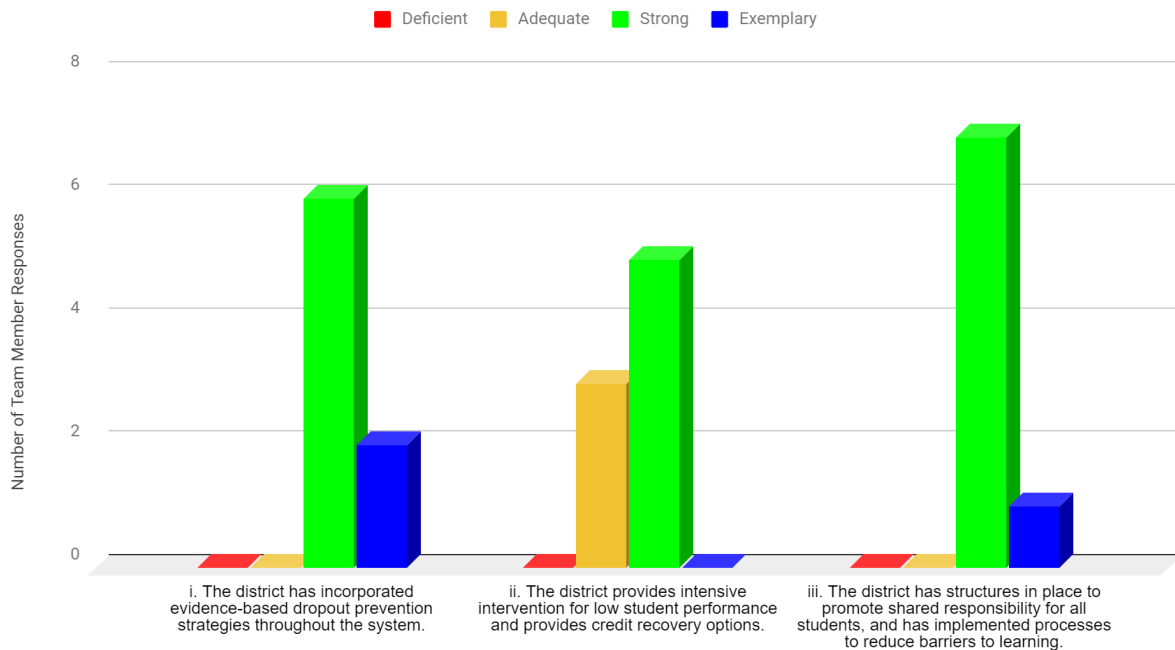


The pieces of an early warning system are in place, but there didn't appear to be a formal report that looked at attendance, behavior, and academic performance for each student. This may be the next helpful step for the district to take. Having students and their parents sign a paper that indicates where they are in terms of credits is a good strategy. The MTSS structure provides early intervention for at-risk students. The fact of graduation rates in excess of 90% every year is an indication this is a strong area for the district.

The 9th-grade transition program, elementary data meetings, the one "F" identifier for at-risk status, and the middle school's 8th-hour system are all examples of sound early warning systems.

b. Dropout Prevention Strategies

b. Dropout Prevention Strategies



While they weren't specifically addressed for this indicator, nearly every strategy from the National Dropout Prevention Center was included somewhere in the presentation. There is quite a bit of opportunity for intensive intervention, and awesome processes related to reducing poverty-related barriers to learning. There may be a case for intervening when a student is on track to be chronically absent, rather than waiting until after their attendance problems are threatening their ability to earn credit.

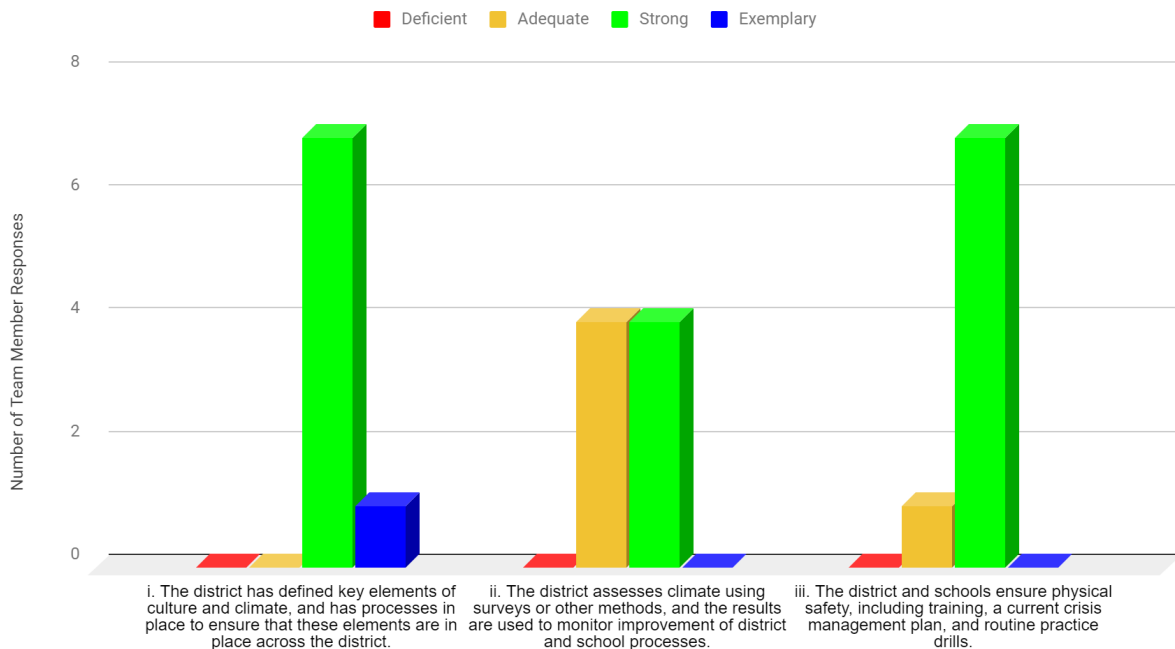
Counselors have a strong presence in the dropout prevention strategies and early warning systems. The switch from open parent-teacher conferences to an invitation at the middle and high school levels is a positive change that will have a positive impact on all students.

E. CULTURE AND CLIMATE

14. School Culture, Climate and Safety

a. Learning Environment

a. Learning Environment

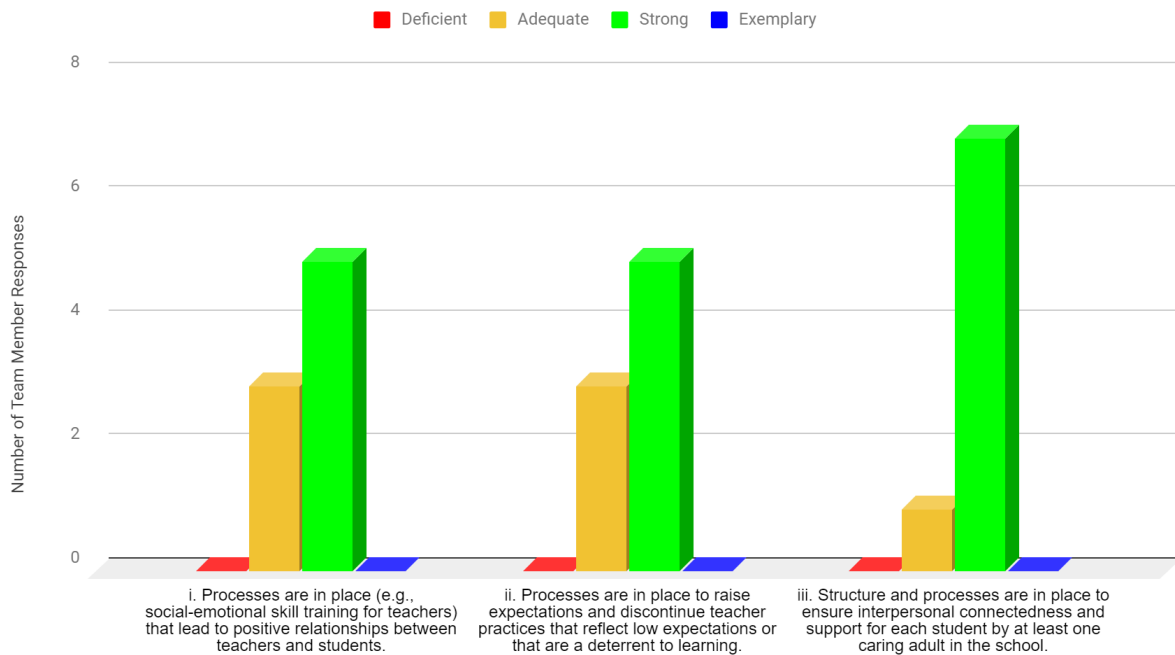


District Mission and Vision, seeded in Core Values drive decisions in the best interest of students and set the stage for a healthy learning environment. PLC's are a foundational process to improve the teaching and learning environment with all schools in the district. Continuous feedback from students and teachers is a very helpful feedback loop in keeping abreast of teacher and student needs. The student exit survey in high school is an excellent method for those students to communicate their experience.

While there wasn't a formal climate survey recently, every indication is that the climate is excellent. The practice of allowing teachers to provide anonymous feedback about administrators is evidence that there is mutual trust between teachers and leaders. There were great processes in place for safety, however, the crisis management plan provided is only for grades K-8.

b. Teacher-Student Relationships

b. Teacher-Student Relationships



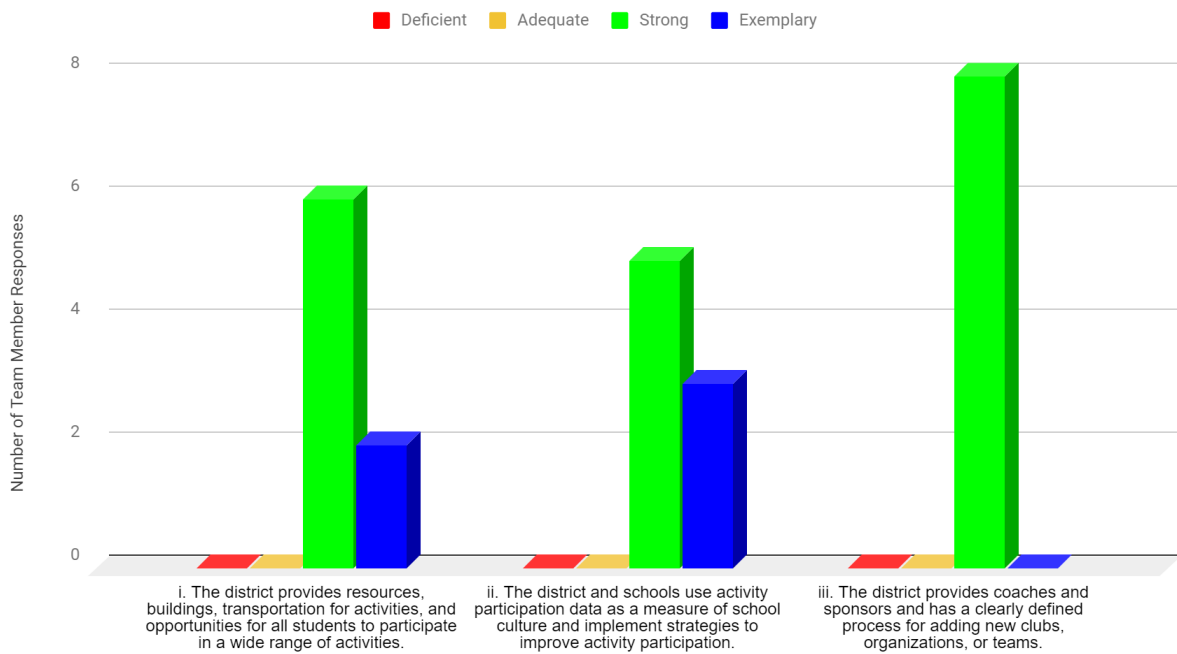
There is evidence of the importance of relationships in the district strategic plan because of the embedded core values. The emphasis on teacher credibility indicates that how teachers are viewed by students is important to teachers and leaders. There seems to be a focus on high expectations across the system, so there is a combination of positive relationships and high expectations. There wasn't a formal process for interpersonal connectedness, but this appears to be a strong area. The level of participation in academic and athletic activities indicates a high level of engagement and connectedness to the school on the part of nearly all students.

PBIS is systematically delivered in a differentiated form at all buildings within the district. Be Safe, Be Respectful, and Be Responsible are taught at all levels. The Middle School PBIS Team is a student organization to promote PBIS and is a best practice. Everyone from the administration on down mentioned how important student-teacher relationships are and that they feel that is an area where they excel.

15. Student Activities

a. Academic Activities

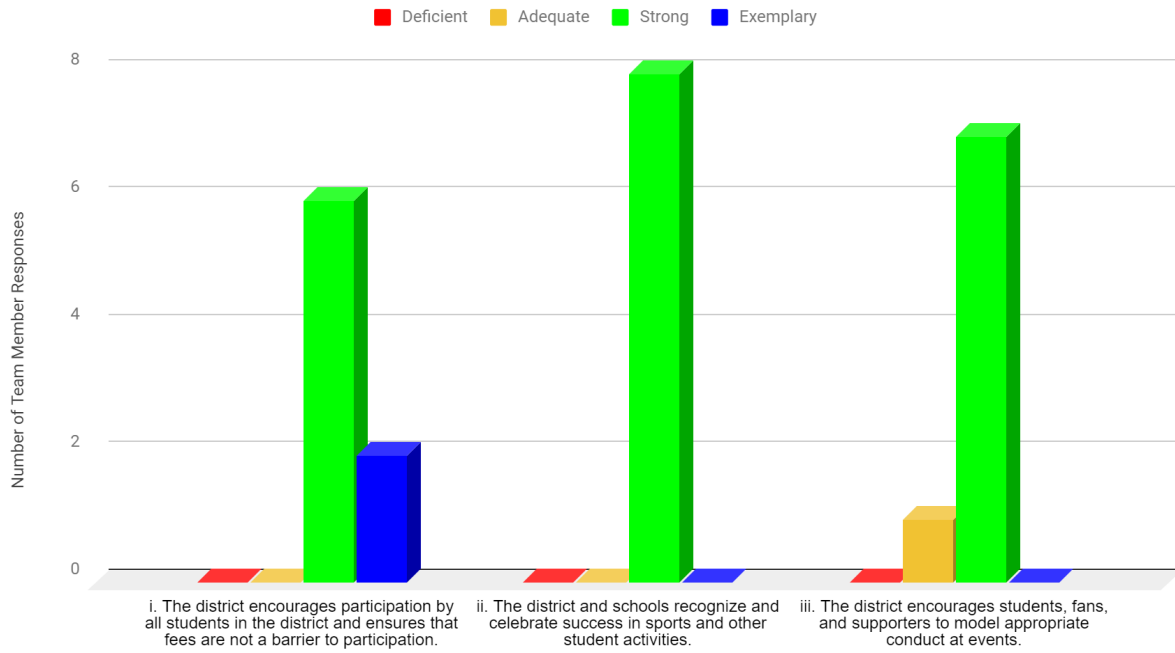
a. Academic Activities



The exemplary marks given to the district in the area of academic activities reflect that the opportunities for academic activities in the district are numerous, with a high level of participation. There are no participation fees for students and their families. There is a process for adding new clubs and organizations, and the process has been followed in the addition of two clubs relatively recently.

b. Athletic Activities

b. Athletic Activities



The district should be commended on the elimination of barriers to participation and the high participation rate. The fact that you have 87% participation from both males and females is outstanding! Great job getting kids involved! Small schools have many advantages, one being students can be active in many areas. It was good to hear that coaches work with each other when children may have conflicting schedules because of participation in multiple activities i.e., music practice and track occurring simultaneously.

There are no fees for participation, and there are formal and informal methods for covering the costs for students with financial issues. There are multiple ways success is celebrated, both in-person and through social media and other more traditional media channels. Fans and supporters model appropriate conduct at all events and this is emphasized by the district.