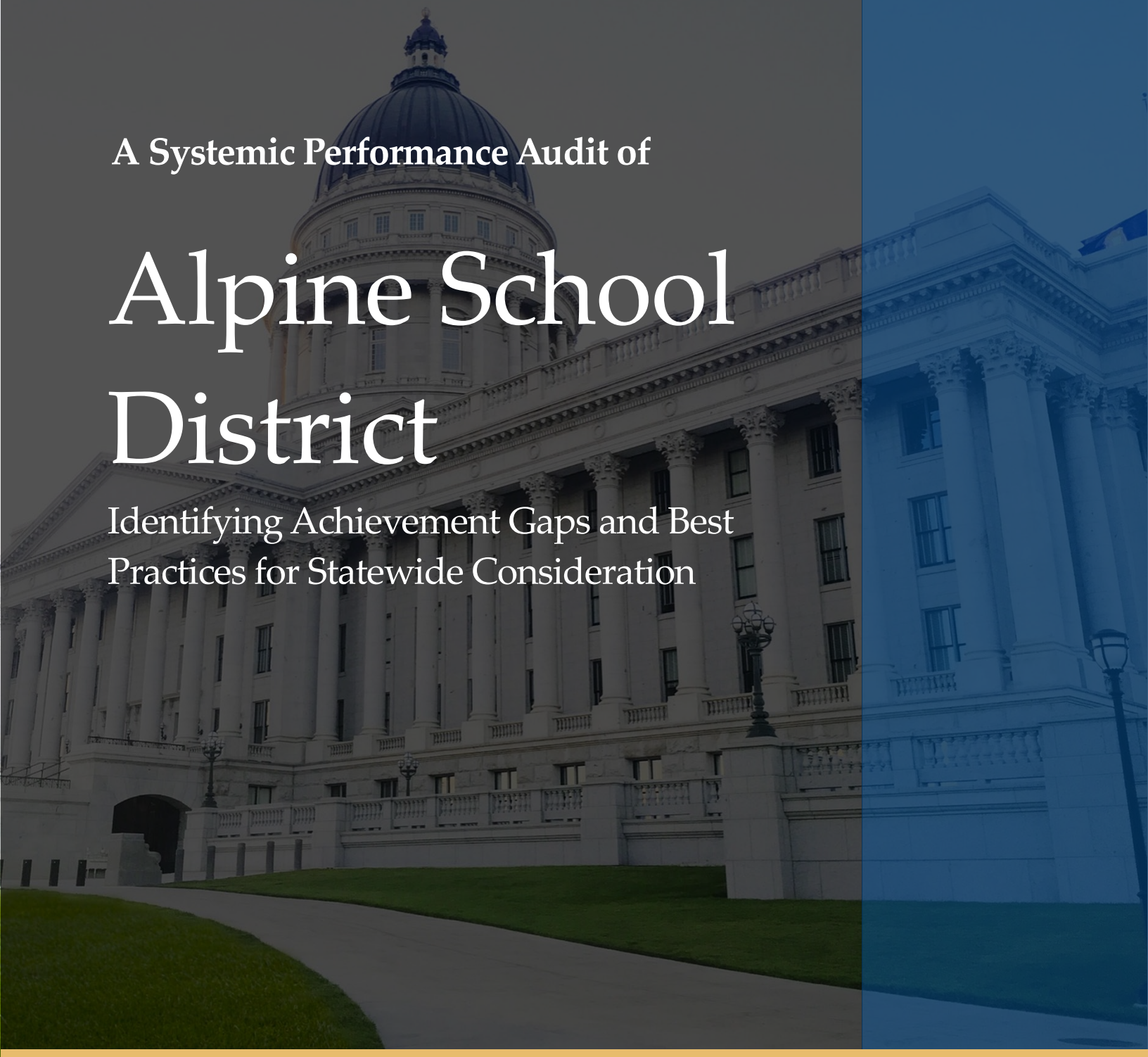
Heard in the Education Interim Committee meeting on 8-20-25.

Report No. 2025-07



A Systemic Performance Audit of

Alpine School District

Identifying Achievement Gaps and Best Practices for Statewide Consideration

Office of the Legislative Auditor General

Report to the **UTAH LEGISLATURE**

LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL
1975 - 2025


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50
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APRIL, 15, 2025

TO: THE UTAH STATE LEGISLATURE

Transmitted herewith is our report:

"A Systemic Performance Audit of Alpine School District: Identifying Achievement Gaps and Best Practices for Statewide Consideration" [Report #2025-07].

An audit summary is found at the front of the report. The scope and objectives of the audit are included in the audit summary. In addition, each chapter has a corresponding chapter summary found at its beginning.

Utah Code 36-12-15.3(2) requires the Office of the Legislative Auditor General to designate an audited entity's chief officer. Therefore, the designated chief officer for Alpine School District is Superintendent Shane Farnsworth. Superintendent Farnsworth has been notified that they must comply with the audit response and reporting requirements as outlined in this section of ***Utah Code***.

We will be happy to meet with appropriate legislative committees, individual legislators, and other state officials to discuss any item contained in the report in order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kade Minchey

Kade R. Minchey, CIA, CFE
Auditor General
kminchey@le.utah.gov



LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL

Alpine School District

By the Numbers

OVERVIEW

Alpine School District (ASD) is the largest school district in Utah. It currently covers 14 municipalities across Utah County, from Eagle Mountain in the west to Orem in the east. The district's mission is to ". . . partner with students, families, and community members in achieving the Vision for Learning with each student. . ." Its Vision for Learning is that its students "acquire [the] essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions." Below are key statistics about the district, pulled from the district's fiscal year 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, USBE school year 2025 enrollment data, and data from the 2024 Utah School Report Card.

84,757

STUDENTS
19% are more disadvantaged racial minority

89

SCHOOLS
60 Elementary, 14 Middle, 11 High, and 4 Other

3,634

TEACHERS
60% of whom have 7+ years of experience

96%

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE

20%

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

36th

LARGEST DISTRICT IN THE NATION

During the November 2024 election, two ballot initiatives to split Alpine School District passed. ASD will split into three districts over the next two years. The first district will cover Cedar Fort, Fairfield, Eagle Mountain, and Saratoga Springs. Lehi, Alpine, Highland, American Fork, Cedar Hills, and part of Draper will form the second district. The third will have Orem, Vineyard, Lindon, and Pleasant Grove.



LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL

AUDIT SUMMARY

REPORT 2025-07 | APRIL 2025

Office of the Legislative Auditor General | Kade R. Minchey, Auditor General

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

ALPINE SCHOOL DISTRICT

AUDIT REQUEST

The Legislative Audit Subcommittee requested and prioritized a systemic performance audit of Alpine School District. This is the sixth audit of Local Education Agencies (LEAs). This type of audit has an initially large scope that is reduced as risks are identified.

BACKGROUND

Alpine School District (ASD) is the largest school district in Utah with approximately 85,000 students and 89 schools. Overall, the district performs well on assessments and with strategic planning. However, the district mirrors the state in having large achievement gaps at many schools.

KEY FINDINGS

- **1.1** Alpine School District Has Overall High Student Performance
- **2.1** Alpine School District Can Further Develop Best Practices From State Criteria and Peer Districts
- **3.1** Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Follows Best Practices and Could Be Considered by Other LEAs
- **4.1** Alpine School District Can Better Communicate Its Procedure for Addressing Bullying and Student Behavior
- **5.1** Alpine School District Appears to Have Comparable Administrative Costs to Peer and Other School Districts

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **1.3** Alpine School District should assess the reason for large achievement gaps at certain schools and facilitate goal setting and action steps at those schools to close the gaps.
- **2.1** Alpine School District should identify high-performing teachers, implement best practices learned from them, and monitor that implementation to determine its success.
- **3.2** Alpine School District should implement specific performance measures that can demonstrate its strategic plan's success and are publicly reported.
- **4.2** Alpine School District should make its bullying management procedures available on its website and in school handbooks.
- **5.1** The Legislature should consider whether the Office of the State Auditor and the Utah State Board of Education should have shared financial reporting requirements for public schools.
- **5.2** The Legislature should consider whether requirements for Transparent Utah should include common naming conventions.

Summary continues on back >>

REPORT SUMMARY

Alpine School District Performs Well and Should Continue to Focus on Low-Achieving Groups

While the district has overall high student achievement, there are achievement gaps between some student groups. These gaps are not unique to ASD but are found statewide.

Alpine School District Has Adequate Internal Controls, But Some Can Improve

The district has existing policies and procedures that adequately address most of our audit concerns. However, we still identified some areas where the district can improve, including its bullying policy and school safety.

Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Follows Best Practices and Could Be Considered by Other LEAs

Much of the district's strategic plan follows best practice guidelines. Many surveyed district employees are aware of the strategic plan and believe it impacts their work.

Alpine School District Consistently Reports Its Administrative Costs, But Reporting Discrepancies Exist Statewide

The district appears to have comparable administrative costs to its peers, including superintendent salary and per-pupil costs.

Alpine School District Can Continue Implementation of Best Practices

A number of teachers in ASD, shown as blue circles in the chart, have moved up below-proficient students in math. The prevalence of blue dots shows many teachers have successfully improved the performance of some low-achieving students in the district. Many of the highest-performing teachers belong to ASD's peer districts. When we met with some of these teachers, they credited the use of PLC teams and other best practices that ASD is currently implementing.

While not found in ASD, some of the highest-performing teachers from its peer districts are now in administration.

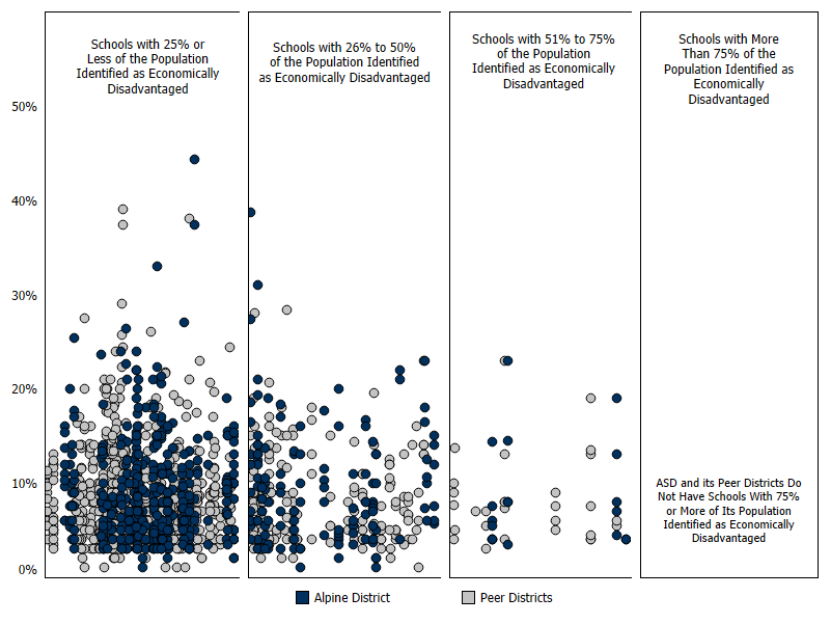


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Introduction

Since 2022, our office has conducted six systemic performance audits of local education agencies (LEAs). This audit is of Alpine School District (ASD or district), which is currently the largest school district in Utah. Our report presents the district's mostly positive student performance, and how ASD implements best practices in its use of PLC teams, professional development, and its strategic plan process. This report also notes areas of improvement and risk, including academic achievement and internal controls.

Alpine School District Is in the Process of Splitting Into Multiple Districts

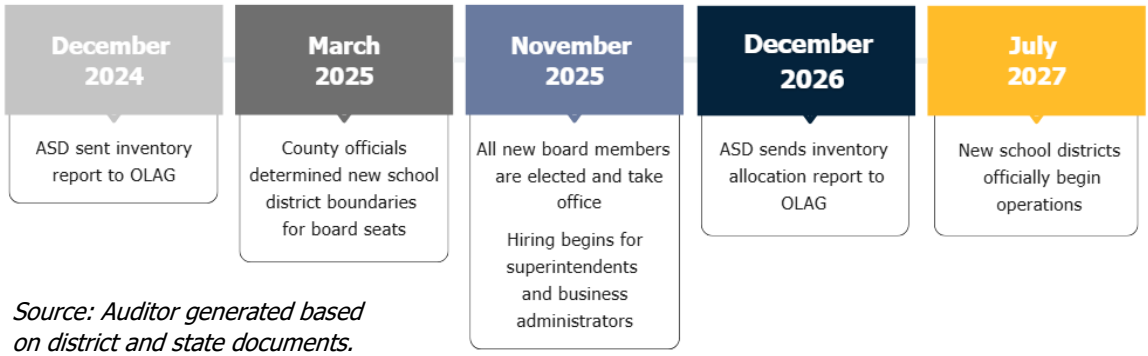
During the November 2024 election, two ballot initiatives to split Alpine School District passed. This means ASD will dissolve and split into three new school districts. The new school districts will comprise the following municipalities:

- "West": Cedar Fort, Fairfield, Eagle Mountain, and Saratoga Springs
- "Central": Lehi, Alpine, Highland, American Fork, Cedar Hills, and Draper (Utah County portion)
- "South": Orem, Vineyard, Lindon, and Pleasant Grove

Recent legislation has guided the process of district splits. H.B. 3003 from the 2024 3rd special session amended the process of creating a new school district. Among other requirements, the bill requires a school district undergoing a split to send our office a copy of its inventory, including the district's assets and liabilities. In compliance with H.B. 3003, Alpine School District delivered to our office a copy of the district's inventory.

Next Steps in the District Split

ASD's split was initiated with the passage of Propositions 11 and 14 in the November election. The split into three new school districts will roll out over the next two years. The following figure highlights a general timeline for the split.



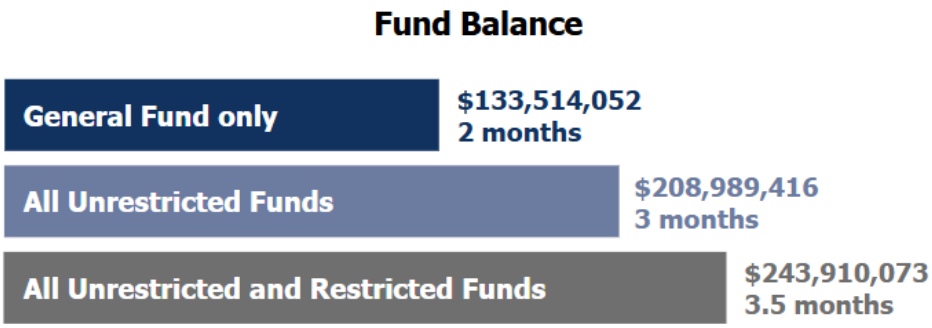
Source: Auditor generated based on district and state documents.

As the figure shows, the three new school districts will officially begin providing educational services in July 2027.

Like H.B. 3003, S.B. 188 from the 2025 session outlines further requirements for the new districts as they split and reorganize. The bill also defines our office's role as a data repository. For instance, S.B. 188 requires the district to send our office a written report detailing asset and liability allocations across the three new districts. In the event of a dispute, our office's role is to provide information to the appointed arbiter and the district school boards. We will not resolve disputes but will provide information to help facilitate the overall process.

Alpine School District's Fund Balance Is Enough to Fund the District for Two to Three Months

In anticipation of questions regarding existing fund balances in ASD, we provide the following information. As of fiscal year 2024, ASD's annual operating expenses added up to approximately $878 million. Operating expenses include expenses for instructional services, staff, facility maintenance, transportation, nutrition services, and others. Some district funds are restricted to specific uses, such as capital projects; however, generally the district's funds are equivalent to two to three-and-a-half months of liquid assets, depending on which funds are included in the calculation. This means that during the split process, the district will need to carefully monitor the transfer of assets and its fund balances.



Source: Auditor generated based on district data.

BACKGROUND

Alpine School District (ASD) has consistently performed well on statewide assessments at the district level. Additionally, at least ten schools have already met legislative targets in each subject area (English language arts, mathematics, and science).

FINDING 1.1
Alpine School District Has Overall High Student Performance

RECOMMENDATION 1.1
Alpine School District should identify high-performing PLC teams in their district and in peer districts, and use best practices found there to continue to improve PLC teams around the district.

FINDING 1.2
Alpine School District Can Improve Performance of More-Disadvantaged Student Groups

RECOMMENDATION 1.2
Alpine School District should track that schools are setting goals for their most needed student group(s) and are holding schools accountable on meeting those goals.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3
Alpine School District should assess the reason(s) for large achievement gaps at certain schools and facilitate goal setting and action steps at those schools to close the gaps.

CONCLUSION

Even with ASD's strong academic performance, there is still room for improvement. At many schools in the district there are achievement gaps between student groups, with a particular focus on racial minority students in this audit. This is not unique to ASD, as was discussed in a recent audit by our office. We believe the district has opportunities to take best practices from high-performing teachers and schools to implement in places where student achievement is low.



Chapter 1
Alpine School District Performs Well and Should Continue to Focus on Low-Achieving Groups

Alpine School District (ASD or district) has had success on various state assessments in 2024 and in years prior. While the district has had continued success at the district and school level, there are achievement gaps between some student groups. These gaps are not unique to ASD. As reported by our office in a recent audit,[1] this is a statewide problem. We recommend that ASD learn from those successes and facilitate school goals that target low-performing student groups.

1.1 Alpine School District Has Overall High Student Performance

ASD shows positive results across a range of student performance indicators. Multiple schools within the district demonstrated strong student achievement on those same metrics.[2] We believe the professional learning communities (PLCs) in the district contribute to this success. We recommend that the district identify high-performing teachers and implement their best practices where applicable.

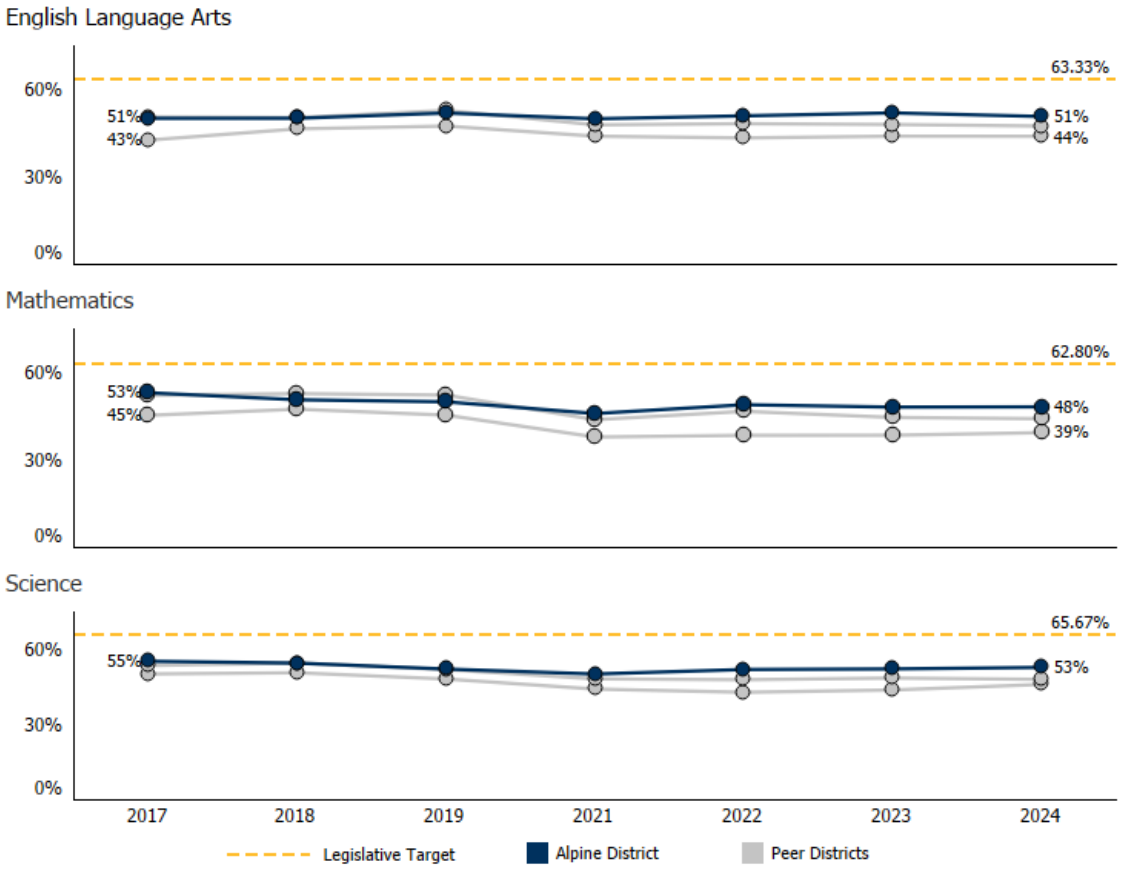
In all three subject areas, the district has led its peers in performance on the RISE assessment since 2021.

The district has historically had success with the RISE and Utah Aspire + (UA+) assessments. For the 2024 school year, ASD had 51 percent of students proficient in English language arts (ELA). This is compared to the statewide proficiency of 44 percent and the peer district rates of 48 and 44 percent. The same was seen with the district's performance on the math and science assessments. In all three subject areas, the district has led its peers in performance on the RISE/UA+ assessments since 2021. Figure 1.1 shows the proficiency rates of ASD and its peers on the ELA, math, and science tests over time.

[1] *A Performance Audit of Student Performance on Statewide Tests* (2024–23). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2024-23_RPT.pdf.

[2] These ASD schools performed above state proficiency rates for the most recent school year.

Figure 1.1 Alpine School District Outperforms Its Peers on RISE/UA+ Assessments. The district has come closer to recent legislative targets (yellow lines) than either of its peers.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.
**Note: The yellow dotted lines on each of the above graphs represent the target percentage designated by the Legislature. These targets were first included in the public education base budget bill during the 2024 General Session.*

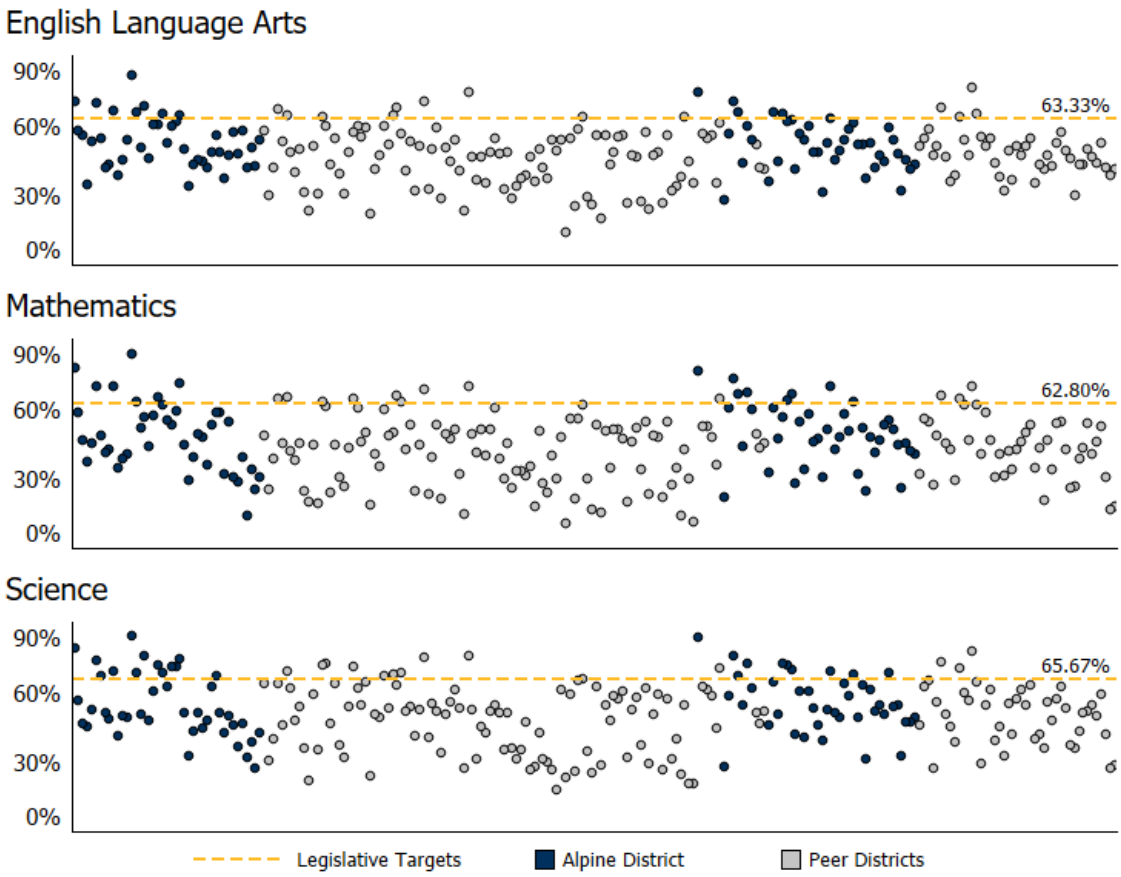
Figure 1.1 shows that ASD leads its two peers in districtwide performance on ELA, math, and science RISE/UA+ assessments. Prior to the pandemic, the district performed the same or below peers. The district has since surpassed its peers in the post-pandemic era. Despite progress, ASD's proficiency rates remain 12 to 15 percent below legislative targets in all subjects, highlighting areas for improvement.

The district also has room to improve by returning to 2017 proficiency rates in math and science. Math proficiency rates from the most recent test administration were five percent below 2017 proficiency, and science had a two percent gap over that same period. ELA rates have returned to 2017 proficiency rates, reaching 51 percent in 2024.

Alpine School District Schools Perform Comparably to Schools in Peer Districts

ASD is currently the largest school district in the state, with its academic peers (Davis School District and Jordan School District) being second and third in size, respectively. Between the three districts, there are over 200 schools with test results shown in the graph below. Figure 1.2 shows the proficiency rate of each of those schools for the 2024 school year.

Figure 1.2 ASD Schools Performed Comparably to Peer District Schools in 2024. Looking at schoolwide proficiency percentages, schools in the district perform similarly to their peers. The yellow dotted lines mark legislative targets.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.

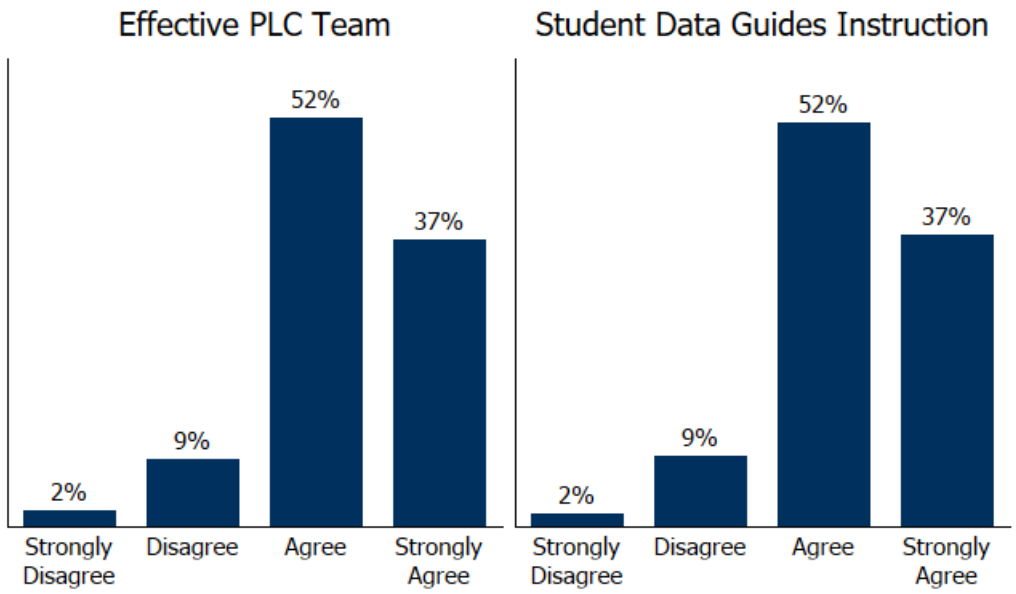
Even with legislative targets above 60 percent, ASD and its peer districts have several schools performing above those thresholds. In addition, no ASD school has a proficiency rate that falls below the lowest performing peer schools.

Many Alpine School District Teachers Feel Their Professional Learning Community Team Follows Best Practices

PLCs are widely considered a best practice for improving teacher and student learning. A previous audit conducted by our office discussed potential benefits of implementing PLCs. The report stated that PLCs provide time to "promote collective responsibility, cultivate accountability, as well as become more data and goal-driven."[3] PLCs appear to be functioning well in many ASD schools, which is likely due to the district's work to prioritize them. Audit team observations conducted in ASD elementary schools indicate that PLCs are functioning well in the district. We recommend that ASD now work to find consistently high-performing teams and spread best practices found there.

As part of our systemic audits of local education agencies (LEAs), we administer a survey to the agency's employees. The survey includes several questions concerning PLCs within their school. Two of those questions are highlighted below in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Teachers in Alpine School District Report Effective PLCs. About ninety percent of teacher respondents indicated that they believe their PLC is effective and, similarly, that their PLC is using student data to inform instruction.



Source: Auditor generated based on a survey conducted by the Legislative Auditor General.

[3] *A Systemic Performance Audit of Rich School District: Addressing Improvements in Student Achievement, Strategic Planning, and Teacher Support Systems* (2024–10). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2024-10_RPT.pdf.

Figure 1.3 shows that about 90 percent of teacher respondents indicated that they consider their PLCs to be effective. It also shows that the same percentage reported their PLC using student data to guide instruction.

In various criteria collected by our office, using data to improve instruction and provide intervention is important to student and school improvement. This will be discussed further in section 2.1.

PLC Teams Observed Were Often Employing Best Practices. Over the course of the audit, we observed PLCs in several ASD elementary schools. In each school, we observed one or more PLC teams in collaboration meetings and instruction. In most of these observations we found that teachers implemented PLC meetings as expected.

Alpine School District Has Prioritized Professional Learning Communities

ASD has implemented district policies and provided resources that support PLCs in its schools. It is notable that the district has established policies that hold teachers accountable for PLC participation.

ASD Policies on PLCs:

Policy 4091:
"Educators function as collaborative teams in Professional Learning Communities, using the essential questions and data, with student learning as the focus."

Policy 4106:
"Collaborative team meetings focus on improving student learning by utilizing district frameworks and embracing processes used in high-functioning professional learning communities (PLCs)."

"School personnel—learning coaches, counselors, administrators, and others—may participate in collaborative teacher team meetings to support the team's pursuit of student achievement goals. As partners in the overall school PLC, each plays a vital role in achieving better results for students, teams, and the school."

Policy 5180:
"Administration, teachers, and service providers will consistently engage in the Professional Learning Community (PLC) Results Cycle to gather data in an effort to make instructional decisions and inform intervention."

ASD has prioritized the implementation of PLCs in its district. Each team is also expected to set goals in line with their school's priorities (see chapter 3).

The district already establishes expectations for addressing achievement gaps through their *Seven Tight Essentials of a PLC in ASD* and the *PLC Results Cycle*. Included in these documents are expectations, such as

- All members of a PLC are accountable for student learning
- A schoolwide system of intervention needs to be in place and based on student data
- PLC teams should improve their individual and collective practices based on data

We recommend that the district use the existing tools they have, and others as necessary, for tracking PLCs and goals in order to identify any PLC team meeting expectations and having continued student improvement. Best practices from these teams should be spread to other schools and teams in the district.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

Alpine School District should identify high-performing PLC teams in their district and in peer districts, and use best practices found there to continue to improve PLC teams around the district.

1.2 Alpine School District Can Improve Performance of More-Disadvantaged Student Groups

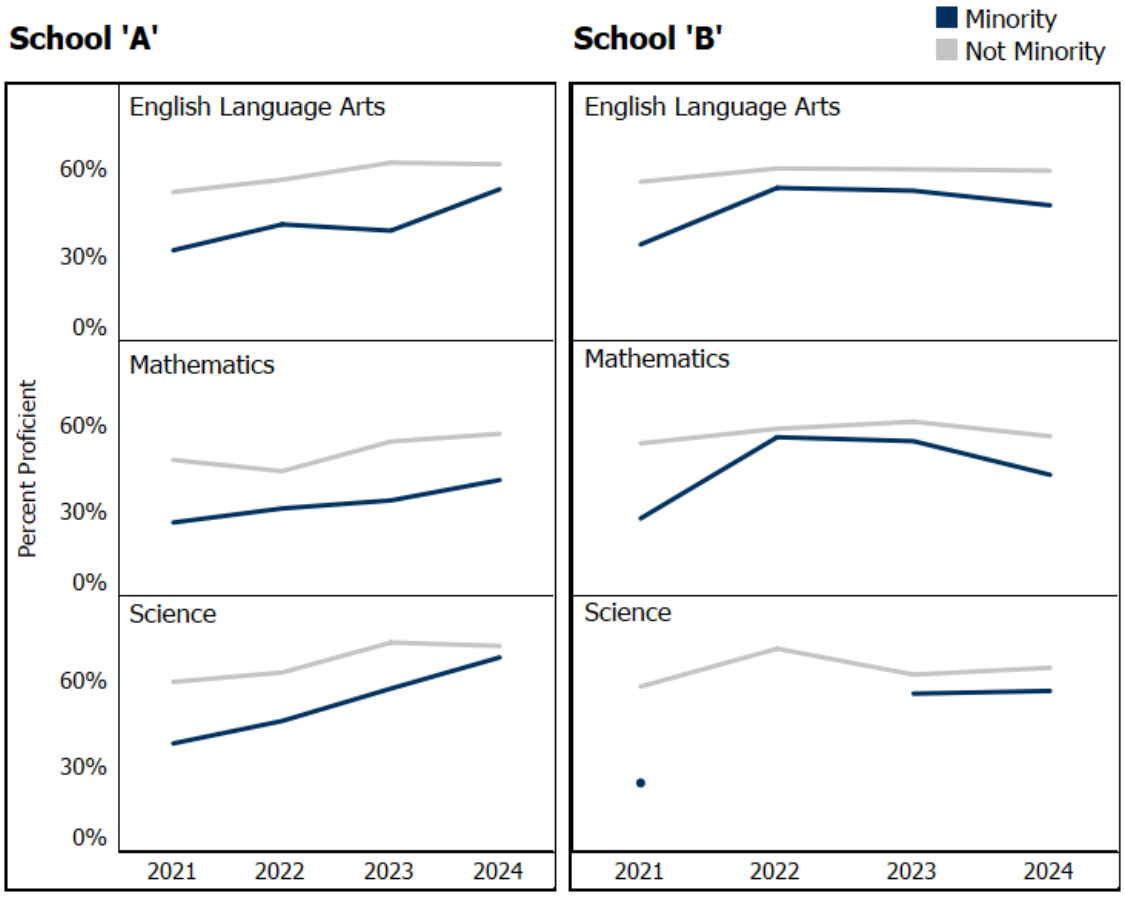
ASD has many schools that have achievement gaps between their more-disadvantaged racial minority groups and the students that are not.[4] This is a challenge we have witnessed statewide and is not unique to ASD. There are some schools in the district that have found success, shrinking some of those gaps. We recommend that the district ensure schools are prioritizing school goals around student groups that have the greatest need for academic improvement, and to determine the cause for the achievement gaps in its schools.

[4] Racial/ethnic groups included in this racial minority grouping are students who are African American/Black, American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and Pacific Islander.

Achievement Gaps Within Alpine School District Schools Demonstrate Need for Improvement

Despite ASD's strong performance, there are still achievement gaps between racial minority students and their non-minority counterparts. More than half of the district's schools have achievement gaps between racial minorities and their counterparts in at least one subject area. Figure 1.4 shows two schools with small achievement gaps. Conversely, Figure 1.5 shows two of many schools with large achievement gaps in the district.

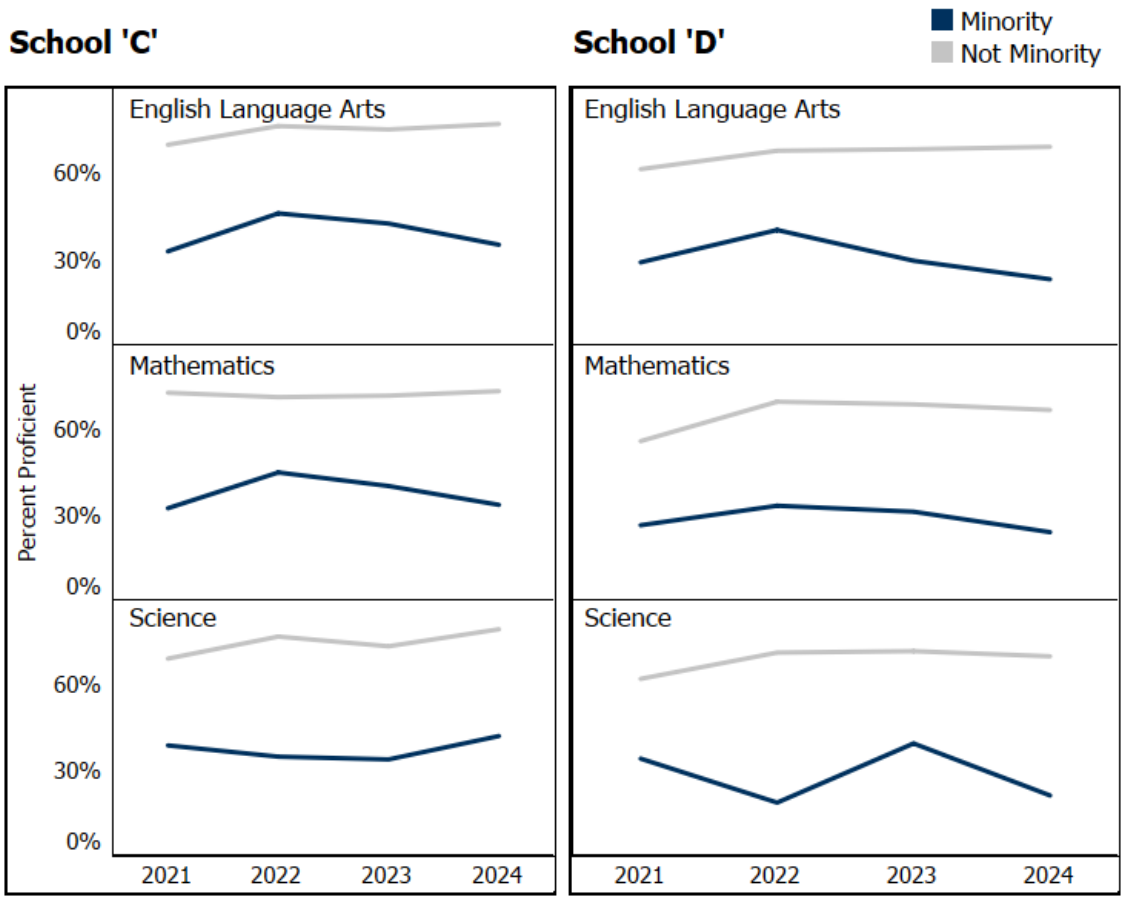
Figure 1.4 School A and School B Have Good Student Performance by Both Minority and Non-Minority Student Groups. These schools have achievement gaps of less than ten percent in at least one of the three subject areas.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.

The smallest achievement gap between schools A and B was a four percent difference in science. The largest was a 16 percent difference in math. School A has been closing the gap in recent years, while school B appears to be growing their gap. Thus, the district should determine what is happening at each school to cause the movement in each direction.

Figure 1.5 School C and School D Have Some of the Largest Achievement Gaps Between Minority Groups in the District. School D has the largest achievement gaps with each subject area having gaps between racial groups that exceed 40 percent.



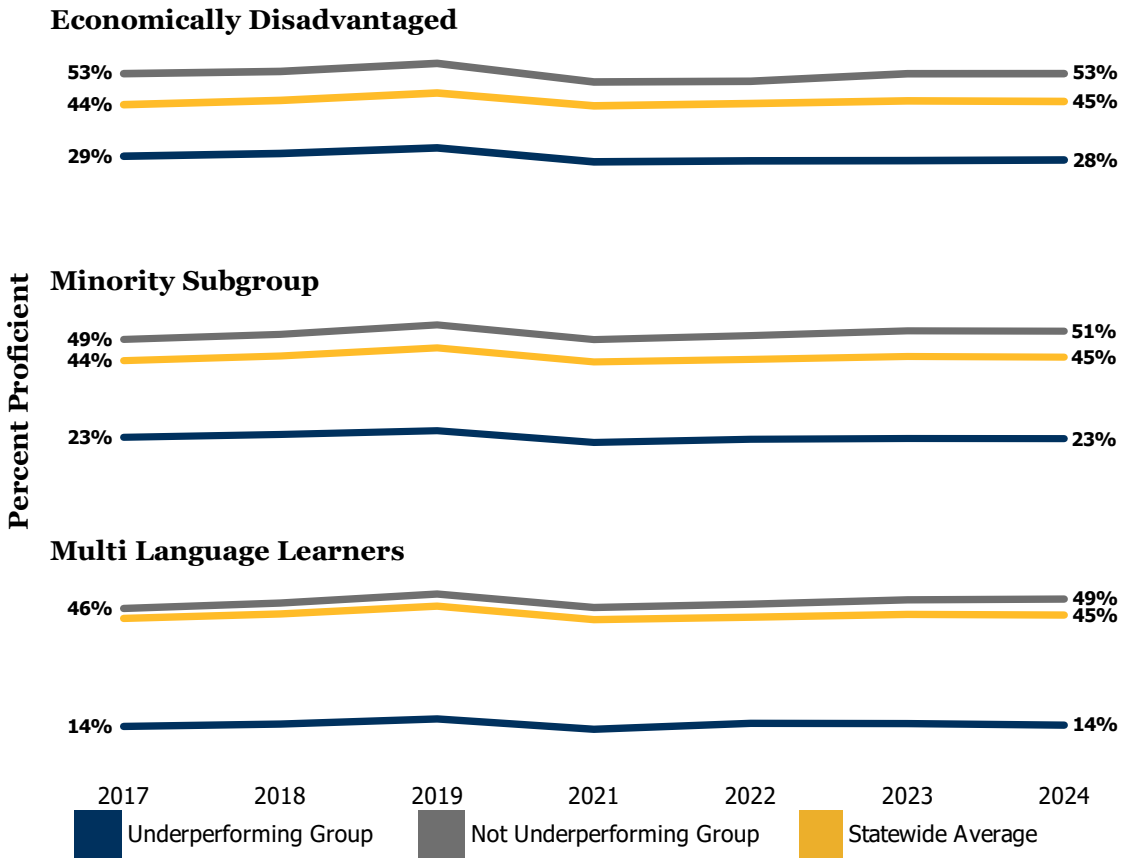
Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.

Figure 1.5 shows the large achievement gaps that exist at some of the schools in ASD. School C and D have gaps between racial minority and non-racial minority students of at least 30 and 40 percent, respectively. The district should determine why the achievement gaps are so large between racial groups in these two schools and many others across the district.

Statewide Achievement Gaps Exist

ASD is not the only LEA that struggles with closing achievement gaps in at least some schools. *A Performance Audit of Student Performance on Statewide Tests* (Report No. 2024–23) by our office analyzed achievement gaps for LEAs across the state to determine trends. We found that this is a problem statewide for racial minority groups, multiple language learner groups, and economically disadvantaged groups. Figure 1.6 shows a graph from the statewide tests audit that displays the statewide achievement gap between those student demographic groups and their counterparts.

Figure 1.6 Achievement Gaps Between Different Demographic Groups in the State Are Significant. While the more advantaged student groups hover slightly above the state average, the disadvantaged student groups lag by about 20 percent.



Source: A Performance Audit of Student Performance on Statewide Tests (Report No. 2024-23).

Our recent audit found that some top-performing LEAs are doing better than others at closing achievement gaps. We identified best practices used by those agencies that were reported to contribute to their success. It should be noted that our report found achievement gaps in LEAs across the state.

ASD Should Determine How to Close Achievement Gaps. As seen in Figures 1.4 and 1.5, ASD has schools where racial minority student groups are performing comparable to their peers and others that have large achievement gaps. We recommend that the district work to determine why certain student groups are consistently performing below other groups and develop a plan to address those findings.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2

We recommend Alpine School District should track that schools are setting goals for their most needed student group(s) and are holding schools accountable on meeting those goals.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3

We recommend Alpine School District should assess the reason(s) for large achievement gaps at certain schools and facilitate goal setting and action steps at those schools to close them.

BACKGROUND

Effective instructional strategies and training for school administrators are the best practices focused on in this chapter. Our office has discussed each of these best practices in prior audits. Information from those reports, as well as information found throughout Utah and Texas contribute to the expectations laid out in this chapter.

FINDING 2.1
Alpine School District Can Further Develop Best Practices From State Criteria and Peer Districts

RECOMMENDATION 2.1
Alpine School District should identify high-performing teachers, implement best practices learned from them, and monitor that implementation to determine its success.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2
Alpine School District should continue to improve its administrator mentoring program.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3
All school districts that form from the existing Alpine School District should continue to improve student performance by employing this report's best practices for teachers and administrators in all its schools.

CONCLUSION

Alpine School District (ASD) has prioritized developing new school administrators and providing students with quality education (the latter is covered in chapter 3). Best practices from Texas and ASD's peer districts can help the district continue to develop in these spaces.



Chapter 2
Alpine School District Has Schools Implementing Best Practices

Our office identified some practices we believe could contribute to increasing student achievement in Alpine School District (ASD or district). These best practices are supported by previous audits, criteria found in peer states, and interviews with some of Utah's high-performing teachers. Effective instructional practices and robust school administrator training are both ways to influence the success of a school. We found that ASD uses both but could benefit from additional work in those areas. We also recommend similar actions by the districts that will be forming from ASD in 2027.

2.1 Alpine School District Can Further Develop Best Practices From State Criteria and Peer Districts

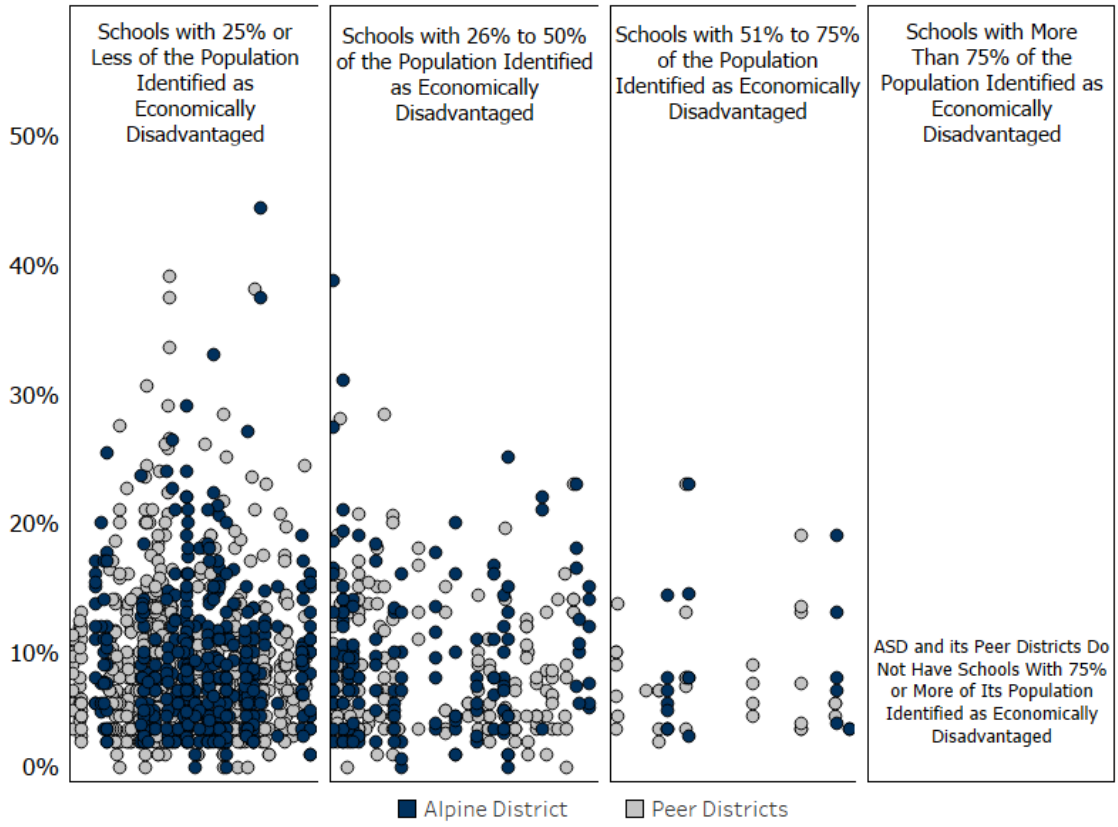
Through the course of the audit, we found examples of best practices in multiple locations—districts in peer states, peer districts, and within ASD. Previous audit work by our office also contributed to our expectations. ASD appears to be leading other Utah school districts in expanding its school administrator training. However, there are additional opportunities for expansion that we believe could benefit student and school achievement.[5] Due to the impending district split of ASD, some of the report is geared towards the districts that will form in 2027.

Highest Performing Teachers Are Employing Best Practices

As part of our audit, we analyzed proficiency rates at district, school, and grade levels. The latter two showed varying performance within ASD and peer districts. We determined that more useful than proficiency rates at those levels is whether students are moving from below proficient to proficient or above. Figure 2.1 shows a distribution of teachers that moved up students in math proficiency levels.

[5] Based on findings from *A Performance Audit of Teacher and Principal Performance Within Utah's Public Education System* (2022–03). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2022-03_RPT.pdf.

Figure 2.1 A Number of Teachers in ASD and Peer Districts Have Moved Up Below-Proficient Students in Math. ASD had over 500 teachers moving up students in math over the past three years.



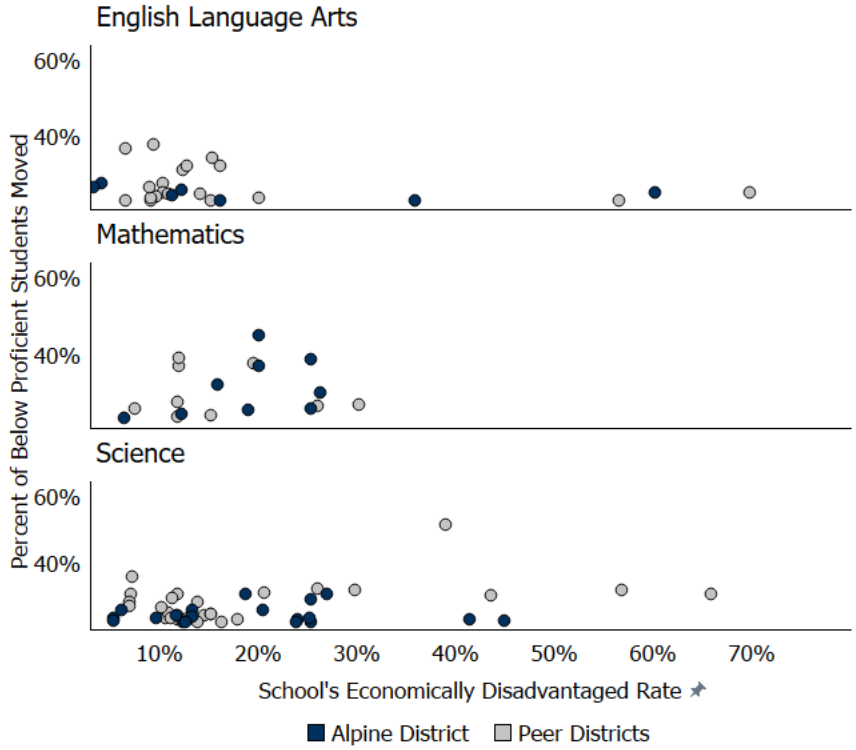
Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.
**Note: To be included in this graph, a teacher needed to teach within ASD, Davis, or Jordan District for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 school years. The percentage tied to each teacher is the three-year average of the percentage of students that came into that teacher's class below proficient but left the class at or above proficient.*

Figure 2.1 identified teachers in ASD and its peer districts. We consider these teachers to be high performing due to their movement of students that had been below proficient. The blue circles in the figure represent teachers in ASD that moved up students to at or above proficient. The prevalence of blue dots shows many teachers have successfully improved the performance of some low-achieving students in the district.

There are fewer teachers moving students up as the analysis examines schools with more than 25 percent of students being considered economically disadvantaged. This was not limited to ASD but also to its peer districts. We acknowledge that there will be fewer teachers due to there being fewer schools that fall into those subsequent categories.

Figure 2.2 focuses on the highest performing of these teachers. It shows the subset of teachers that moved an average of 25 percent or more of their students.

Figure 2.2 ASD's Peer Districts Had More Teachers Moving Up an Average of 25 Percent or More of Below-Proficient Students. Science was the subject where the most teachers moved up an average of 25 percent or more of their students.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.
**Note: To be included in this graph, a teacher needed to teach within ASD, Davis, or Jordan District for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 school years. They needed to move up an average of 25 percent of their students over time. The percentage tied to each teacher is the three-year average of the percentage of students that came into that teacher's class below proficient but left the class at or above proficient.*

As part of our audit, we met with or observed several high-performing teachers that were identified by our analysis. Our discussions and observations yielded several shared best practices between these educators.

- High-performing teachers expressed the significance of implementing a PLC team that collaborates well and is willing to adjust instruction to meet student needs. An additional component added by some teachers was the timeliness of the decisions and implementation by the PLC—indicating that their PLC would discuss changes throughout the school day and make sure to implement them by the next class period.
- Teachers within other districts reported or demonstrated giving students the opportunity to come up with answers and respond. This is in contrast to the teacher supplying the answers (or "student talk" versus "teacher talk").

- An administrator and teachers expressed the importance of moving around the classroom to keep students on task but also to make the instruction engaging.

Adopting best practices based on these factors is beneficial to districts. We recommend that ASD seek ways to identify high-performing teachers within its district and then learn from these teachers by implementing best practices utilized in those classrooms. We understand that best practices used by some teachers will not be beneficial to all other teachers, so the district should facilitate the implementation of identified best practices where applicable.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

We recommend Alpine School District should identify high-performing teachers, implement best practices learned from them, and monitor that implementation to determine its success.

Alpine School District Can Build on Its Existing Administrator Mentoring Program

ASD implemented an administrator mentoring program for new school administrators during the 2024 school year. One purpose of this program is to provide training to new administrators on various requirements they are expected to fulfill throughout the school year. Another purpose is to facilitate networking between administrators that are undertaking the new position together. This is the first example we have seen of dedicated administrator preparation since our recommendations in 2022.[6]

[6] *A Performance Audit of Teacher and Principal Performance Within Utah's Public Education System* (2022–03). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2022-03_RPT.pdf.

One piece of research cited in the 2022 audit is the value of an effective administrator being equivalent to two months of learning.[7] Conversely, an ineffective administrator can have an impact equivalent to two months less of learning.[8]

Both our audit on teacher and principal performance and state criteria indicate that school principals should be developed beyond current program and licensing requirements, before stepping into the role.

Recently introduced legislative targets on student achievement metrics demonstrate a priority for increasing student learning. With that being the case, improving the effectiveness of school administrators is one way to target that priority.

We believe there is additional work that can be done to improve administrator effectiveness. Both our audit on teacher and principal performance and state criteria indicate that school principals should be developed, beyond current program and licensing requirements, before stepping into the role. With the impending split of the district, we also expect all new districts that form to expand on the initial efforts introduced by ASD in regard to school administrator development.

Development of School Administrators Should Be a Priority

Our 2022 audit made multiple recommendations concerning a principal preparation pipeline, which is still a recommendation we wholly support. These recommendations were supported by additional information that focused on three priorities for principal preparation:

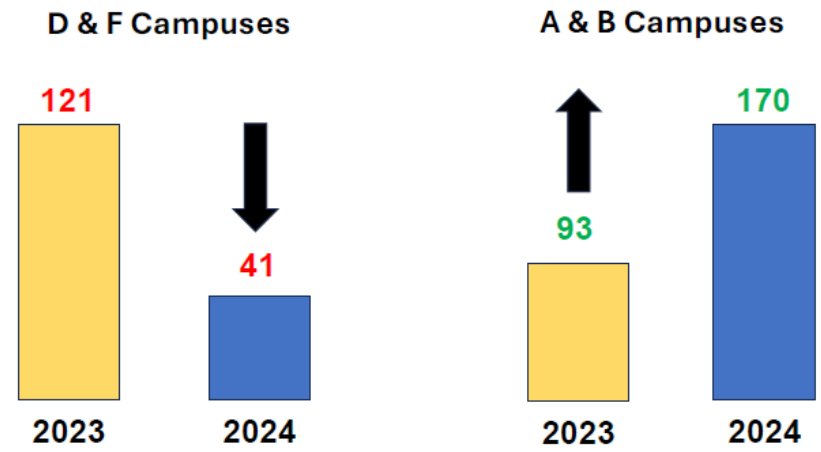
- High-quality principal preparation
- Selective hiring and placement of principals
- On-the-job evaluation and support

A school district in Texas introduced a process to develop new school administrators. Individuals that desire to serve as a school principal apply for the district's *Principal Leadership Academy*. If accepted, their role in the academy becomes their full-time position. They are compensated $90,000 to $100,000 for

[7] *A Performance Audit of Teacher and Principal Performance Within Utah's Public Education System* (2022–03). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2022-03_RPT.pdf.

[8] Ibid.

the year to participate in the program.[9] While in the academy, potential principals are trained on future job responsibilities, the district's expectations, putting together their resume, and preparing for job interviews. This school district has seen significant school improvement in the past two years. One example reported by the district is the change in schools being classified as "D" or "F" campuses.[10] This is shown below.



Source: Texas School District.

The visualization created by the Texas school district shows the jump in "A" and "B" campuses in just one school year. They attribute this improvement to, among other things, changes in instructional practices, educator support and evaluations, and the intensive training of new school principals.[11]

RECOMMENDATION 2.2

We recommend Alpine School District should continue to improve its administrator mentoring program.

[9] Participants in the program for the 2025 school year are paid an annual salary of $90,000. It will increase to $100,000 for the 2026 school year.

[10] "D & F Campuses" and "A & B Campuses" are designations that come from Texas.

[11] Assistant principals are also trained through a special program, but it is not full time.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3

We recommend all school districts that form from the existing Alpine School District should continue to improve student performance by employing this report's best practices for teachers and administrators in all its schools.

ASD Peer District Has Lost Highly Effective Teachers to Administrative Positions

One of ASD's peer districts had at least 4 of its high-performing teachers move to administrative or district positions this year. In meeting with some of the teachers that have moved into administration, they hope they can extend their knowledge and practices to impact more teachers. However, we are unable to determine to what extent that is currently happening.

S.B. 173 from the 2024 General Session created a pilot program for LEAs to provide additional merit-based pay to their top teachers. An audit conducted by our office noted that Utah did not have a way to provide differentiated pay for effective teachers prior to the passage of S.B. 173.[12] This is an optional program for LEAs. However, ASD and its peers might benefit from finding opportunities to recognize its highest-performing teachers.[13]

ASD and its peers might benefit from finding opportunities to recognize its highest-performing teachers.

We believe there are opportunities for implementing lessons learned from a peer district losing a number of its highest-performing teachers, and for former teachers to continue to have an impact. A school district in Texas utilizes its school administrators to provide instructional feedback to teachers daily. ASD and future districts could create a structure within their schools that facilitate this type of opportunity for its most effective educators and school administrators.

[12] *An Initial Review of Merit Awards for Teachers: Best Practices to Inform Program Implementation* (2024–06). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2024-06_RPT.pdf.

[13] Alpine School District was considering opting into the pilot program established by S.B. 173 but chose to pass at this time due to the district split happening in the middle of the five-year program.



CHAPTER 3 Summary

Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Follows Best Practices and Could Be Considered by Other LEAs

BACKGROUND

Our office has identified strategic plan best practices through work within our organization, and through the efforts of the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB). GOPB has published a guide that identifies eight necessary elements of a strategic plan. In addition, our office's *Best Practices Handbook* identifies a number of strategic plan best practices in relation to The Management Cycle.

FINDING 3.1
Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Implements Best Practices

RECOMMENDATION 3.1
District-level administrators should work with school administrators to ensure that the strategic plan and its role is being more fully communicated to all employees at every school.

FINDING 3.2
Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Should Be Able to Determine Its Effectiveness

RECOMMENDATION 3.2
Alpine School District should implement specific performance measures that can demonstrate its strategic plan's success and are publicly reported.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3
Alpine School District should provide additional relevant information about the district's strategic plan and its progress in a publicly accessible location.

CONCLUSION

Alpine School District has already implemented many of the best practices identified by our office. The district can improve on an already solid strategic plan by better incorporating some of the identified best practices, and by making that information accessible to the public.



Chapter 3
Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Follows Best Practices and Could Be Considered by Other LEAs

Many of Alpine School District (ASD or district)'s strategic plan components follow best practice guidelines, but there is still room for improvement. Our *Best Practices Handbook* states that using The Management Cycle can enable an organization to achieve its mission and goals. Organizations may also look to the eight elements identified by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB) for best practices on strategic planning. ASD has created a strategic plan and informed employees of it. Results of the survey conducted by our office support that finding, showing that a majority of respondents are aware of the district's plan and believe that it impacts their work.

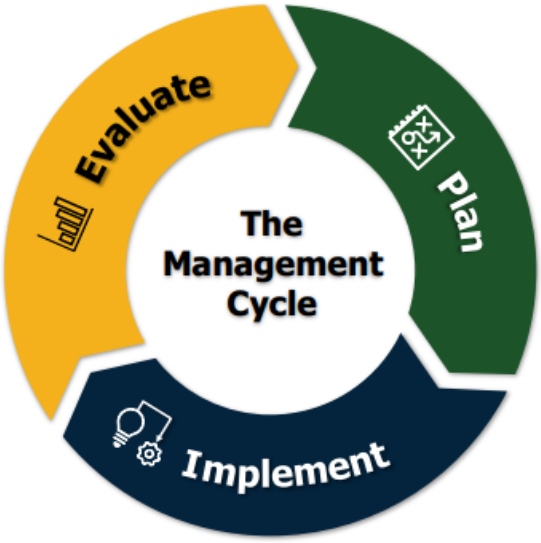
3.1 Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Implements Best Practices

The district has a strategic plan with a mission and vision at the highest level and team-level goals in line with district priorities at the bottom. GOPB has identified eight elements that an organization should include in its strategic plan. ASD's plan has components that tie to each of the eight elements to some extent. In addition, there is evidence to support that the plan is being implemented across the district.

OLAG and GOPB Have Identified Strategic Plan Best Practices

To help agencies with strategic planning, our office and GOPB have shared best practices. The *GOPB Strategic Planning Guide* contains a visualization of eight elements of strategic planning. These will be discussed in more detail in section 3.2.

To explain strategic plan expectations to those being audited, our office uses our *Best Practice Handbook*. The structure of the handbook is centered around the components of The Management Cycle: plan, implement, and evaluate.



Source: OLAG Best Practice Handbook

Within The Management Cycle categories, we identify 12 best practices, many of which are tied to an organization's strategic plan. These include the following:

- Develop and refine strategic plan
- Establish standards
- Exercise oversight
- Collect and protect data
- Evaluate the condition of the organization
- Balance and evaluate performance measures

ASD incorporates each of these best practices within its governance processes. The extent to which this happens will be discussed in the rest of the chapter.

Alpine School District Leaders Have Prioritized Strategic Efforts

The implementation and utilization of ASD's strategic plan, also known as the Alpine School District Coherence Map,[14] is prevalent across the district. In this audit, both processes and procedures introduced by district leaders and the plan's visibility and usability in schools and classrooms are highlighted. The plan, in its entirety, is seen on the following page.

[14] ASD Superintendent Farnsworth said it was named such, rather than just a "strategic plan," to highlight the cohesion of the district. In this chapter, both "strategic plan" and Coherence Map will be used. ASD's strategic plan can be found here: https://alpineschools.org/mvvg/.

ALPINE SCHOOL DISTRICT COHERENCE MAP

BOARD OF EDUCATION MORAL IMPERATIVE

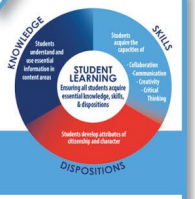
The Alpine School District Board of Education commits to high levels of learning for every student by strategically prioritizing: student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and community engagement.

MISSION

We partner with students, families, and community members in achieving the Vision for Learning with each student to strengthen individuals, families, and communities.

VISION FOR LEARNING

Our students acquire the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions in each content area, and the fundamental capacities of collaboration, critical thinking, communication, creativity, citizenship, and character.



DISTRICT–WIDE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIS) OF ACHIEVING THE VISION FOR LEARNING

- **Literacy**
- **Next Level Readiness**
- **Connection**

VALUES

We commit to high levels of learning for each student by:

- Creating the conditions for student and adult well-being
- Functioning as Professional Learning Communities
- Utilizing trusted tools and frameworks (Vision for Learning, PLC Results Cycle, RTI, & SEW)
- Embracing the 5 Partnership Commitments (Civic Preparation & Engagement, Equitable Access to Knowledge, Nurturing Pedagogy, Stewardship, & Renewal)
- Decision-making and goal setting at the school level with reciprocal accountability focused on student achievement.

AREAS OF FOCUS TO ACHIEVE THE VISION FOR LEARNING

- Academic Achievement
- Culture, Climate, & Connection
- Professional Capacity
- Community Engagement
- Operations, Facilities, & Resources

LENSES TO SHARPEN OUR FOCUS

- Equity
- Innovation
- Results



EVIDENCE-INFORMED SCHOOL PRIORITIES & PRIORITY-INFORMED TEACHER TEAM GOALS

We engage in a process to establish, measure, and achieve goals in three areas

- **SCHOOL-WIDE ACHIEVEMENT**
- **STUDENT GROUP ACHIEVEMENT**
- **STUDENT CONNECTION**

Updated: 9/6/2023

District employees shared their feedback on the strategic plan (Coherence Map) throughout the audit. Below are examples of statements about ASD's strategic plan shared with us and said during districtwide trainings.

Example #1

The coherence map [strategic plan] sets priorities for a school, allowing school teams to move in the same direction. It should help administrators achieve the district's "Vision for Learning." [District leader] wants to develop a culture of results.

This approach being used by ASD has allowed some components of the strategic plan to be developed bottom-up. District administrators reported that this addressed the problem they had with ownership of ASD strategic efforts. We believe this could be useful for other LEAs encountering a similar problem.

The examples were not limited to district leadership that deal directly with school and student performance. One non-academic district employee made the following comment:

Example #2

[District leader] does not deal a lot with the overall focus of the district but knows that one of the district's priorities is better scores and achievement for all students. [District leader] recognizes that the district's administration wants every department to generally focus on an overall goal of student achievement.

The district has also engaged in a multi-year process to build a survey to be used as an evidence-based tool. The survey, available to ASD schools, can be used to gauge a school's progress on its student connection goal.[15] While there is not yet one full year of districtwide data, it is encouraging that the district is working to establish data points for its strategic priorities.

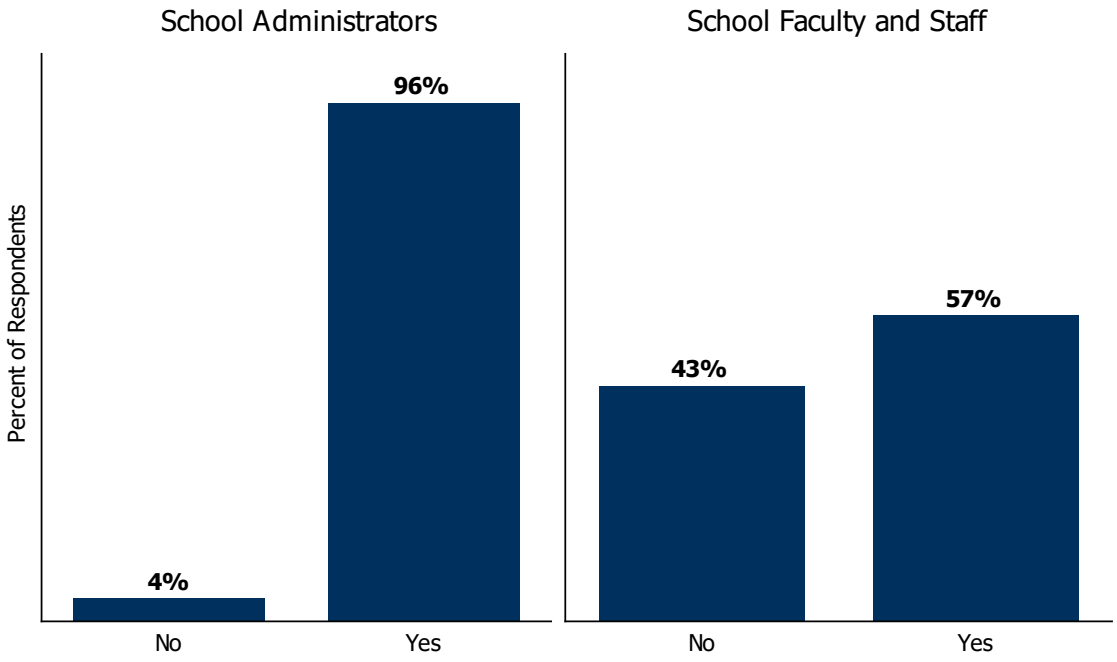
Awareness of the District's Strategic Plan Can Be Improved at Schools

Knowledge and utilization of ASD's strategic plan extends beyond district-level employees. Many surveyed school-level employees reported understanding and using the plan, but there is an opportunity to improve their knowledge of it at this level. On a question asking respondents whether they were aware of the

[15] The district's survey tool that is used for student connection metrics is focused on student safety, inclusion, and engagement with content being covered in classes. It is administered to students upon parent approval.

plan, 43 percent of teachers and school staff indicated they were not. Figure 3.1 shows the lack of awareness of the strategic plan by school staff compared to administrators.

Figure 3.1 A Greater Percentage of School Administrators Are Aware of the Strategic Plan. While both groups had a majority of respondents aware of the district's plan, 96 percent of school administrators indicated awareness compared to 57 percent of school staff.

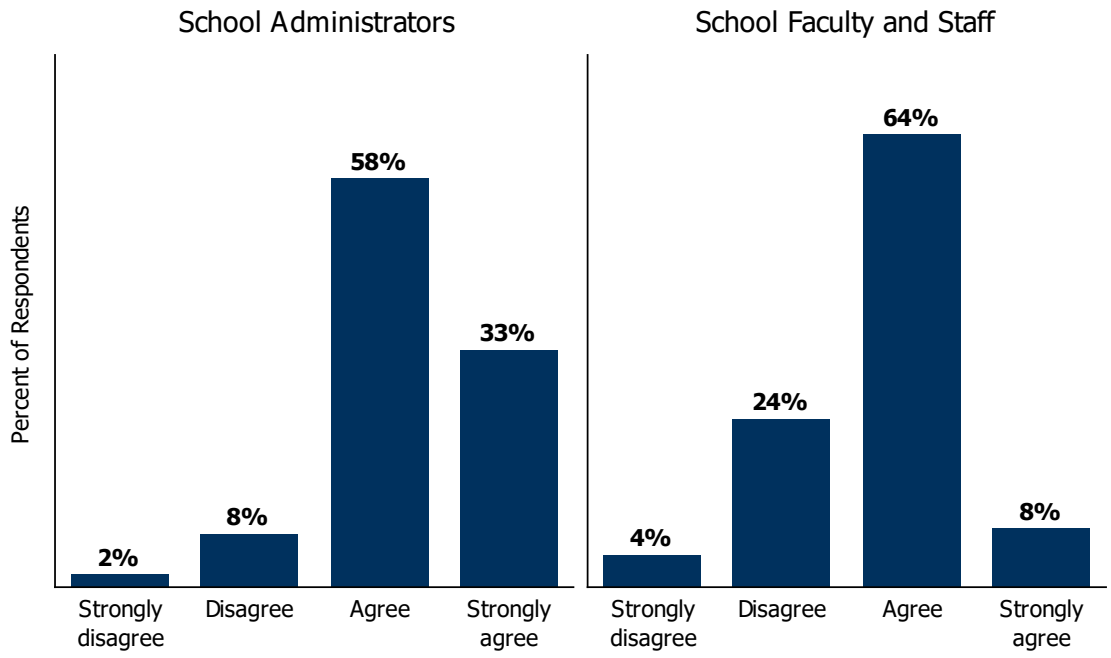


Source: Auditor generated based on a survey conducted by the Legislative Auditor General.

The discrepancy highlighted in Figure 3.1 was addressed in multiple interviews with school administrators. They stated teachers were probably not familiar with the strategic plan or all components of the strategic plan because they had not addressed it in their school.

A difference in understanding exists between school staff and their administrators. Over 90 percent of school administrators believe ASD's strategic plan is guiding decisions at the school-level. School staff lagged behind administrators, with 72 percent sharing that sentiment. Figure 3.2 shows in more detail the variation by the different employee groups.

Figure 3.2 A Greater Percentage of School Administrators Believe the Strategic Plan Guides School Decisions. While both groups had a majority of respondents indicate that the plan guides decisions at their school, school staff lagged behind their administrators by 19 percent.



Source: Auditor generated based on a survey conducted by the Legislative Auditor General.

Figure 3.2 shows there is an opportunity for more school-level personnel to understand the strategic efforts of the district and to implement those efforts in their work. District leaders should work with school administrators to increase the discussions surrounding ASD's strategic plan, including the role it should play for school decisions and individual responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1

We recommend that district-level administrators work with school administrators to ensure that the strategic plan and its role is being more fully communicated to all employees at every school.

3.2 Alpine School District's Strategic Plan Should Be Able to Determine Its Effectiveness

ASD has included many best practices in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of its strategic plan. Employees within the district have acknowledged that their schools are benefiting from the strategic efforts of the district. However, there are still improvements that can be made by ASD within the established best practices mentioned in section 3.1. We recommend that the district improve its strategic plan in areas that are not fully implementing best practices, particularly with evaluating the effectiveness of the plan.

Most School Administrators Attribute School Improvement to Strategic Plan

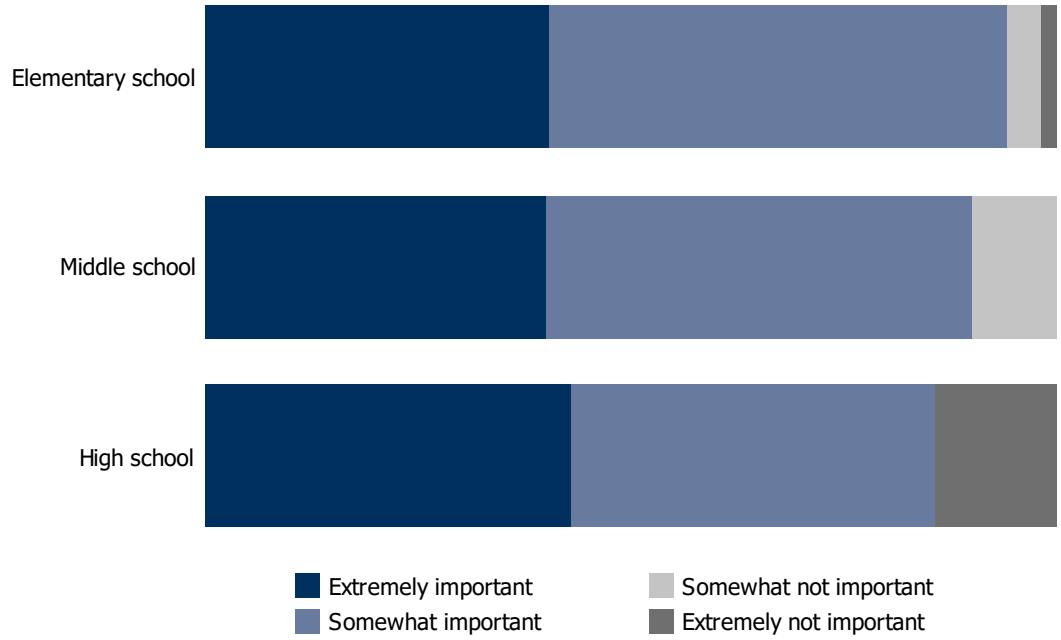
ASD's strategic plan sets three priorities for each school: school achievement, student group achievement, and student connection. For each of the three key priorities, data-driven objectives[16] should be set by each school and collaborative team to address group needs. School administrators are required to submit those measurable objectives to the district administrator in charge of school achievement. In addition, a district administrator reported that they track each school's goals and performance.

For each of the three key priorities, data-driven objectives should be set by each school and collaborative team to address group needs.

The structure created by ASD district administration appears to have facilitated school success. A survey of school administrators showed that most felt the district's strategic plan helped improve their schools. Figure 3.3 shows the percentage of respondents that feel the strategic plan does or does not play a role.

[16] ASD considers these "goals," but they will be considered "objectives" in the report to follow best practice terminology.

Figure 3.3 Most Respondents Feel That the District's Strategic Plan Has Influenced School Improvement. Elementary school administrators are slightly more likely to credit ASD's strategic plan with school improvement success compared to high school and middle/junior high school counterparts.



Source: Auditor generated based on a survey conducted by the Legislative Auditor General.

Figure 3.3 shows that a majority of respondents at each level (elementary, middle/junior, and high schools) feel that ASD's strategic plan is influencing their school's improvement. In addition to the results from the survey, one school administrator provided additional details on the plan's impact on their school.

ASD School Administrator

The district's Coherence Map [strategic plan] gave the school team the opportunity to set school-specific goals related to student achievement, school achievement, and student connection. Before the Coherence Map existed, [school administrator] felt that each school received general feedback, but it was confusing and no one knew how to apply that to their specific school. Now there's greater freedom as each school operates within the three priorities.

The information provided by school administrators provides some assurance of the success of the district's strategic plan. However, we believe there is room for the plan to use best practice methods to better determine its success.

Alpine School District Should Determine Plan Effectiveness

Based on its inclusion of GOPB's *Strategic Planning Guide*'s eight elements and the three components of The Management Cycle, ASD's Coherence Map is considered a "comprehensive" strategic plan. Nonetheless, within these best practices are areas where the district should improve its strategic plan. In this part of the chapter, we break down where the district is meeting best practices and where they can improve.

Based on its inclusion of GOPB's *Strategic Planning Guide's* eight elements and the three components of The Management Cycle, ASD's Coherence Map is considered a "comprehensive" strategic plan.

In the following infographic, GOPB's eight elements are displayed along with the piece of ASD's plan tied to it. The elements that are found in blue boxes are ones that we feel are meeting best practice expectations. The pieces of ASD's plan in red boxes do implement the element to an extent but can be enhanced to better fit the purpose of the practice. Specifically, we would recommend that ASD further develop the four elements in red at the district level as it has in its schools.



As seen in the infographic, the district could improve its strategic plan with objectives, strategies, performance measures, and its annual work plan (the components in red boxes on the graphic to the right). Currently, ASD generally limits those pieces of the plan to the school level. According to the superintendent, the strategic plan's initial draft was adjusted to increase ownership and implementation at the school level. To address this, the district pivoted and gave schools the flexibility to build certain components, establishing oversight but not specific district-level metrics. The last four elements appear to be functioning successfully, despite being only at school level. However, the district could better determine future adjustments and needs by implementing a

formal evaluation piece on the components operating at each of the individual schools.

The *Evaluate* Component of The Management Cycle Highlights the Need for Additional Work by ASD. In the previous section, we highlighted two best practices within the *Evaluate* section of the Management Cycle. These practices include evaluating the condition of the organization and balancing and evaluating performance measures.

Administrators at ASD have been using this feedback, and will continue to do so, as they work on creating their next strategic plan.

District-level administrators reported that they are collecting feedback on ASD's current strategic plan and will continue to do so as they work on creating their next strategic plan. However, our understanding is that this information is not widely or publicly shared. Instead, it is kept within district administration and any others working on the strategic plan. The district needs to implement specific metrics that can demonstrate the plan's success and can be publicly reported using relevant data. Additionally, the district should provide explanations of the strategic plan components and the role each one plays, also in a publicly accessible location.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2

We recommend that Alpine School District implement specific performance measures that can demonstrate its strategic plan's success and make the measures publicly available.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3

We recommend that Alpine School District provide additional relevant information about the district's strategic plan and its progress in a publicly accessible location.



BACKGROUND

Alpine School District typically had existing policies and procedures that adequately addressed most of our audit concerns. However, we still identified areas where the district can improve, including enhancing bullying management policies and improving the security of several of its school sites.

FINDING 4.1
Alpine School District Can Better Communicate Its Procedures for Addressing Bullying and Student Behavior

RECOMMENDATION 4.1
Alpine School Board should expand their bullying and harassment policy to comply with ***Utah Code*** 53G-9-605.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2
Alpine School District should make its bullying management procedures available on its website and in school handbooks.

FINDING 4.2
Alpine School District Should Install Property Fencing at Some of Its Elementary Schools

RECOMMENDATION 4.3
Alpine School District should work with other entities involved in property sharing agreements to determine how to best limit future incidents.

FINDING 4.3
Alpine School District Should Increase School Zone Signage at Its Summit and Polaris High Campus

RECOMMENDATION 4.4
Alpine School District should increase school zone signage at all entry points and throughout the parking lot of the Summit and Polaris High School campus.

CONCLUSION

Alpine School District has some opportunities to improve bullying policy and security at school sites.



Chapter 4
Alpine School District Has Adequate Internal Controls, But Some Can Improve

Alpine School District (ASD or district) typically has existing policies and procedures that adequately address most of our audit concerns. However, we still identified several areas where the district can improve. ASD can better communicate its procedures for addressing bullying to satisfy legislative requirements and parental concerns. The district can also better secure several of its school sites to improve safety and limit negative impacts from surrounding properties.

4.1 Alpine School District Can Better Communicate Its Procedure for Addressing Bullying and Student Behavior

ASD implemented additional procedures for addressing bullying in its schools this year in response to complaints made by parents of students to a statewide complaint hotline. Some complaints cited inadequate bullying management by school administrators and the absence of clear ASD procedures for handling such incidents. Although we found that ASD's newly updated resources and procedures for managing bullying are adequate, the district's publicly available bullying policy does not comply with ***Utah Code*** and does not provide information to the public on how it addresses incidents of bullying. To better inform parents, guardians, and students, ASD should revise its bullying and harassment policy according to ***Utah Code*** 53G-9-605. The updated policy should be published on the district website and included in school handbooks.

ASD's Public Policy for Managing Bullying Does Not Fully Meet State Requirements

Utah Code[17] requires local education agencies (LEAs) to adopt a bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, abusive conduct, and retaliation policy. This statute outlines the essential components an LEA must include in their policy. Most notably, LEAs must include language that does the following:

- Defines abusive conduct
- Prohibits abusive conduct

[17] ***Utah Code*** 53G-9-605(1)

- Outlines a process for notifying parents of an incident
- Creates an action plan for an incident

Furthermore, the action plan must include a communication plan with parents and include a range of tailored and appropriate consequences for the student(s) who caused the incident.

ASD executives stated that they are in the process of reconciling and updating these processes and policies.

ASD's policy for managing bullying is difficult to follow because it is broken into separate sections for employees and students. More importantly, both sections do not meet most of the requirements outlined in ***Utah Code***.[18] ASD does have procedures for managing inappropriate student behavior, but they are in separate sections of policy under student discipline and sexual assault. ASD has had a bullying policy in place since 2007, and has revised it several times since, including in 2018, when ***Utah Code*** first required LEAs to have a policy. Unfortunately, it still falls short of ***Utah Code*** requirements. ASD executives stated that they are in the process of reconciling and updating these processes and policies. Having clear policies that are in compliance with ***Utah Code*** will improve parent and student awareness and confidence in ASD, and reduce complaints.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1

We recommend that Alpine School Board expand their bullying and harassment policy to comply with ***Utah Code*** 53G-9-605**.**

Alpine School District Recently Implemented New Tools to Improve Responses to Student Bullying and Behavior

Beginning in the fall of 2024, ASD administrators introduced a new set of tools for principals to use that provide detailed guidelines on how bullying and student behavior should be managed. These tools augment existing tools that have been in place prior to the 2024–2025 school year. One new tool introduced is the district's bullying decision tree. This tree guides principals through the initial investigation, then helps them determine what type of abusive action may have taken place. Finally, it helps them decide the next steps necessary to address that action. Another new tool is its case management flowchart which guides principals through ASD's process for expulsion.

[18] The employee bullying policy is not required by statute.

The first intervention used in cases of potential bullying is a no-contact contract, which limits contact between the parties involved. If a school administrator determines the incident is considered bullying, they also implement a student safety plan, establishing conditions for the offender. Additionally, the administrator uses a response plan to further outline interventions for the offender(s), and a victim safety plan that identifies possible supportive measures for the victim(s).

Alpine's new and existing tools have been successful in helping school administrators manage student behavior and bullying.

District supervisors reported that these new and existing tools have been successful in helping school administrators manage student behavior and bullying. Furthermore, district supervisors also reported that administrators typically reach a resolution with students and parents at the school level, and they rarely need to intervene.

Complaints to Utah State Board of Education May Be Reduced by Better Communicating Procedures to Parents and the Public

Some USBE hotline complainants felt that ASD did not have a policy or procedure in place for managing bullying or student behavior. Because ASD's public facing policies and procedures are scattered throughout their website, it can be difficult to determine how the district will manage an incident. Furthermore, the tools it uses to guide administrators are not available to the public, making this process even more unclear. Therefore, we recommend that ASD make its bullying management procedures available on its website and in school handbooks.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2

We recommend that Alpine School District make its bullying management procedures available on its website and in school handbooks.

4.2 Alpine School District Has Elementary Schools With Incomplete Fencing

We found that some elementary schools in ASD do not have fencing that separates school property from adjacent public parks. As a result, there have been cases of individuals trespassing on school grounds during school hours, creating a distracting and potentially unsafe school environment. The passage of H.B. 84 in the 2024 legislative session required school playground property to be fenced. Furthermore, the bill's intent is to secure points of entry to school

property. To improve student safety and limit points of entry, we recommend that ASD work with municipalities to determine how to best limit future incidents related to access from public parks.

State Law Requires Heightened Security Measures at Schools

H.B. 84 from the 2024 legislative session made amendments to school safety regulations: including adding requirements for schools to limit entry points and to fence in playgrounds. This law does not expressly require a school to enclose its entire property, the bill's intent is to ensure safety at schools.

Furthermore, ***Utah Code***[19] defining criminal trespass on school property requires that schools post signs that are reasonably likely to come to the attention of trespassers, or design fencing or enclosures to exclude trespassers.

Alpine School District Should Review Fencing as an Option to Improve Safety

We identified some elementary schools in ASD that are adjacent and open to public parks.[20] One school administrator discussed how having a school playground open to a city park has created safety concerns. In one instance, they reported calling the police to confront an individual who was in the park, but near the children on a school playground. On another occasion, the principal had to confront an individual who was sunbathing on school property without clothing. We recommend that the district determine the best solution to limit these types of incidents in the future.

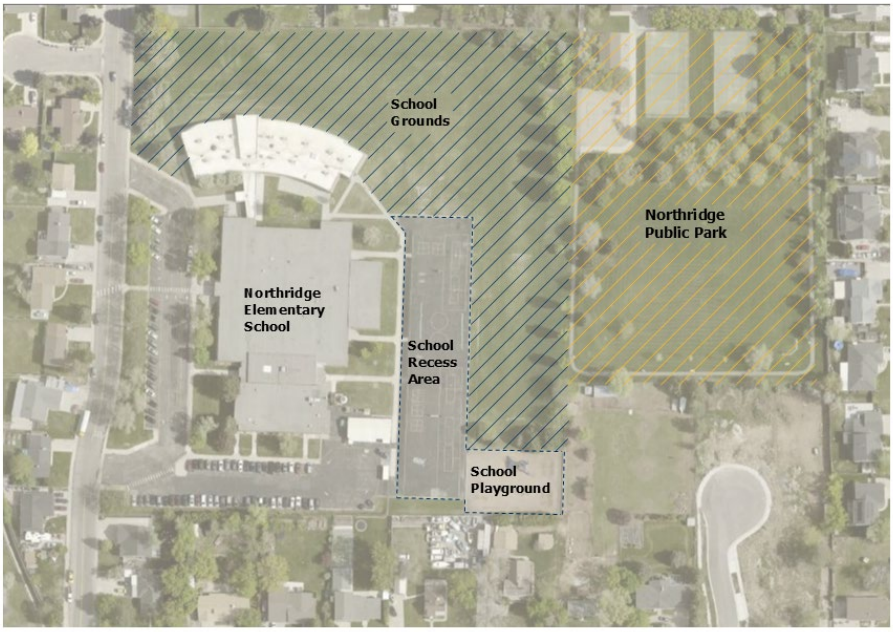
Several ASD elementary schools are adjacent to public parks but do not have a fence to separate school and municipal property.

As seen in figures 4.1 and 4.2, Northridge and Windsor Elementary Schools have no fencing to separate the school grounds from a city park.

[19] ***Utah Code*** 53G-8-603(1)(b)

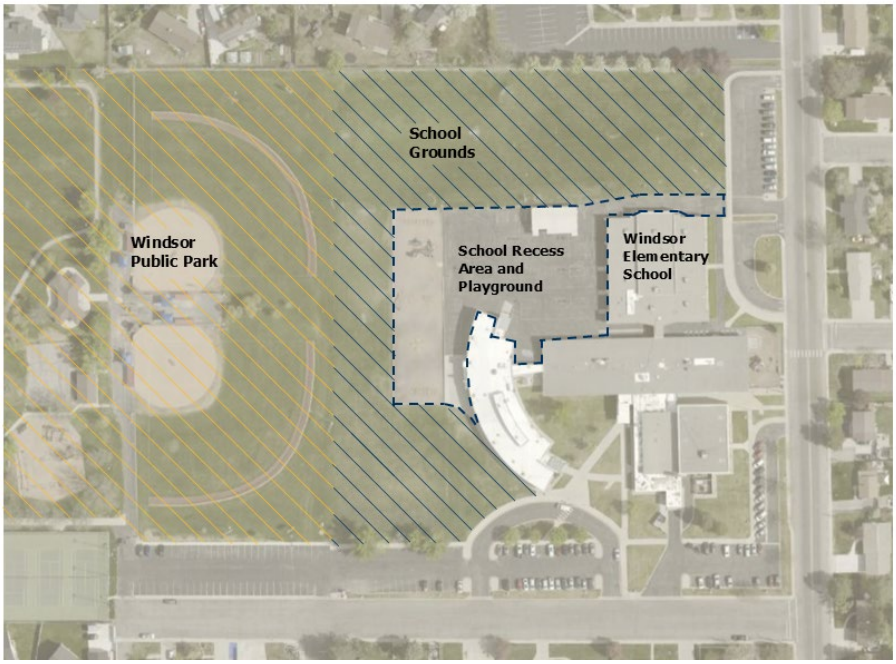
[20] Our audit focused on schools located in Orem due to concerns brought to our attention.

Figure 4.1 Map of Northridge Elementary and Adjacent Northridge Public Park. Northridge Elementary is currently open to a public park. The district should pursue a solution with the relevant municipality.



Source: Auditor generated using Utah County Parcel Map.

Figure 4.2 Map of Windsor Elementary and Adjacent Windsor Public Park. Windsor Elementary is currently open to a public park. The district should pursue a solution with the relevant municipality.



Source: Auditor generated using Utah County Parcel Map.

In addition to Northridge and Windsor, we found that Foothill, Rocky Mountain, and Orchard elementary schools also have open sections of school property adjacent to public parks.[21]

One school administrator stated that ASD was planning to install a fence and exterior cameras but was unaware of a timeline for its completion. Another administrator noted that they are working directly with the municipality to install a fence between the school and the local park.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3

We recommend that Alpine School District work with other entities involved in property sharing agreements to determine how to best limit future incidents.

4.3 Alpine School District Should Increase School Zone Signage at a Combined High School Campus

Polaris High School and Summit High School are alternative schools that share a leased building adjacent to an I-15 exit in American Fork. We found that ASD does not have sufficient school zone signage at its combined Summit and Polaris high school campus. Consequently, school administrators reported illicit drug activity by non-students and transient individuals on campus, compromising student safety and causing distractions. Because the property is in a commercially zoned district and was historically a big box retailer, the public has a limited awareness that the property is now a school zone. We recommend that ASD install additional signage at all entry points and throughout the parking lot at the Summit and Polaris High School campus.

Increased School Zone Signage Can Reduce Risk to Students

The property for Polaris and Summit is a GC-2 planned commercial zone, which is a mixture of retail and wholesale commercial, and is intended to function as a transitory zone. The property was previously used by a big box retailer and has a

[21] Alpine School District owns property around Orchard Elementary, which includes playgrounds and a large grassy area. The district has a legal agreement with the municipality. This means that after school hours, the property around Orchard Elementary becomes accessible to the public as "Orchard Public Park."

large parking lot. Furthermore, part of the building is also leased as a commercial gym.

Unfortunately, a school administrator reported that the parking lot lends itself to transient individuals and trucks staying overnight. Furthermore, they reported instances of people parking in the lot while possessing or actively doing drugs in their vehicles. This is especially alarming because Summit High School primarily serves a youth-in-custody student population.

ASD had tentative plans to reduce the parking lot size and establish fencing, but the district split has put that on hold.

ASD had tentative plans to reduce the parking lot size and establish fencing, but the planned district split has put that on hold. One of the school administrators believed that building and parking lot signage was prevalent, but our team observed only one small sign in the parking lot that indicated it was a school zone. We found no other signs at any entrances or elsewhere around the property. Figure 4.3 shows a map of the property, its proximity to I-15, and its large parking lot.

Figure 4.3 Map of Summit High School and Polaris High School Property. Polaris and Summit High Schools share a leased building in a commercially zoned district near I-15 in American Fork.



Source: Auditor generated using Utah County Parcel Map.

Signage Should Improve Despite Limited Guidance for School Zone Signage

USBE and ASD do not have policies that prescribe school zone signage. However, ***Utah Code***[22] defining criminal trespass on school property requires that schools post signs that are reasonably likely to come to the attention of trespassers, or design fencing or enclosures to exclude trespassers. Therefore, to reduce inappropriate traffic and behavior on school property, we recommend ASD increase school zone signage at all entry points and throughout the parking lot at the Summit and Polaris High School campus.

School zone signage may reduce inappropriate traffic and behavior on school property.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4

We recommend that Alpine School District increase school zone signage at all entry points and throughout the parking lot at the Summit and Polaris High School campus.

[22] ***Utah Code*** 53G-8-603(1)(b)(ii)

CHAPTER 5 Summary

Alpine School District Consistently Reports Its Administrative Costs, But Reporting Discrepancies Exist Statewide

BACKGROUND

Statute requires local education agencies (LEAs) to submit financial reports and spending data to the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE). Each of the required items are reportedly submitted at various times in a school district's reporting process. The discussion in this chapter is focused on the more specific spending data rather than the annual audited reports.

FINDING 5.1
Alpine School District Appears to Have Comparable Administrative Costs to Peer and Other School Districts.

NO RECOMMENDATION

FINDING 5.2
Administrative Costs Reporting Varies Statewide

RECOMMENDATION 5.1
The Legislature should consider whether the Office of the State Auditor and the Utah State Board of Education should have shared financial reporting requirements for public schools.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2
The Legislature should consider whether requirements for Transparent Utah should include common naming conventions.

CONCLUSION

Financial reporting continues to vary between school districts. This includes how districts report their superintendents' salaries, although Alpine School District had consistent salary reporting for its superintendent. We believe that shared reporting requirements could facilitate better transparency of LEA spending, particularly on administrative costs.



Chapter 5
Alpine School District Consistently Reports Its Administrative Costs, But Reporting Discrepancies Exist Statewide

Alpine School District (ASD or district) appears to have comparable administrative costs to its peers. It also appears to report similar costs to different entities. Both the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) require each local education agency (LEA) to submit financials annually, at a minimum.[23] While ASD had consistent reporting, we found discrepancies when comparing costs reported by other school districts.[24] We recommend that the Legislature consider whether they want the reporting requirements to be the same for OSA and USBE.

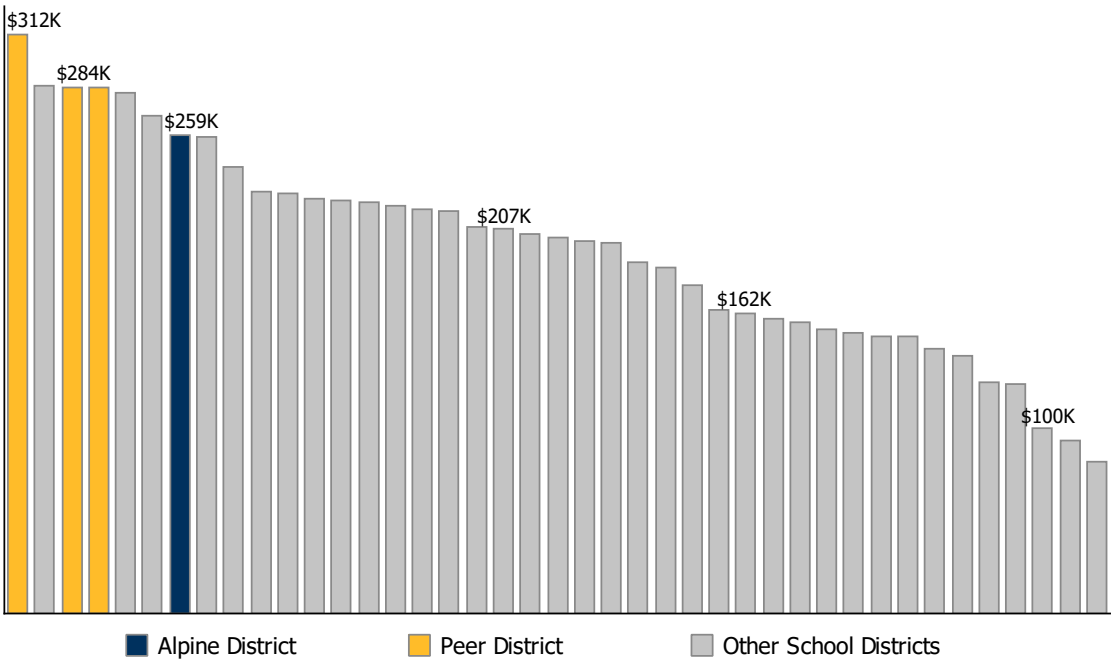
5.1 Alpine School District Appears to Have Comparable Administrative Costs to Peer and Other School Districts

Our audit included a salary analysis for the superintendent position. We assessed the ASD superintendent's salary against other districts, focusing on those of comparable size, to gauge whether it was excessive. We found that the district's superintendent has a lower salary than its peer districts (Davis, Granite, and Jordan Districts). It is also lower than three other districts in the state that are not similar in size to ASD.

Figure 5.1 highlights the salaries of the four largest districts in the state. However, we acknowledge that factors other than size are considered in a superintendent's salary.

[23] The requirements apply to all LEAs in the state, but our analysis was limited to school districts.
[24] Transparent.utah.gov has the following disclaimer on its website: "Please note that the data contained on this website is raw, unaudited, and unconsolidated data and therefore may not match any audited or printed financial statements."

Figure 5.1 Alpine School District Has the Seventh Highest Superintendent Salary in the State. Based on the data reported to USBE, the district's salary for its superintendent was approximately $259,000 for the 2024 school year.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.

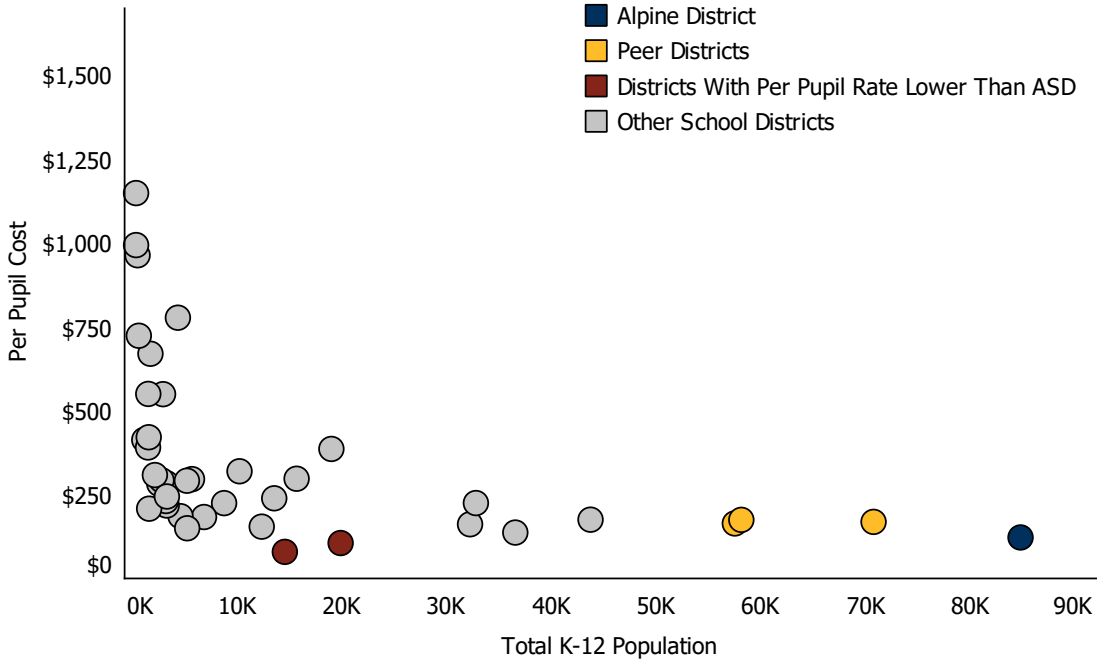
ASD reports the second highest district administrative salary costs in the state, behind Davis School District.[25] However, with the district serving the most students in the state, its per pupil costs (seen in Figure 5.2) for district administrative salaries appear to be the third lowest among all districts and the lowest compared to its slightly smaller peer districts.[26]

Figure 5.2 shows the distribution of per pupil costs and student population for each of the state's school districts.

[25] ASD reported its total district administrative salaries to be $10.6 million for the 2024 fiscal year. Davis School District reported amounts higher than that for the same time period. Granite School District reported an amount approximately $300 thousand less, and Jordan School District reported an amount approximately $1 million less.

[26] ASD's per pupil cost appears to be third lowest because the reported amounts for other districts differ between sources.

Figure 5.2 Alpine School District Has One of the Lowest Per Pupil Costs for District Administration Salaries. Based on the data reported to USBE, the district's administrative salaries have a per pupil cost of $125.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.

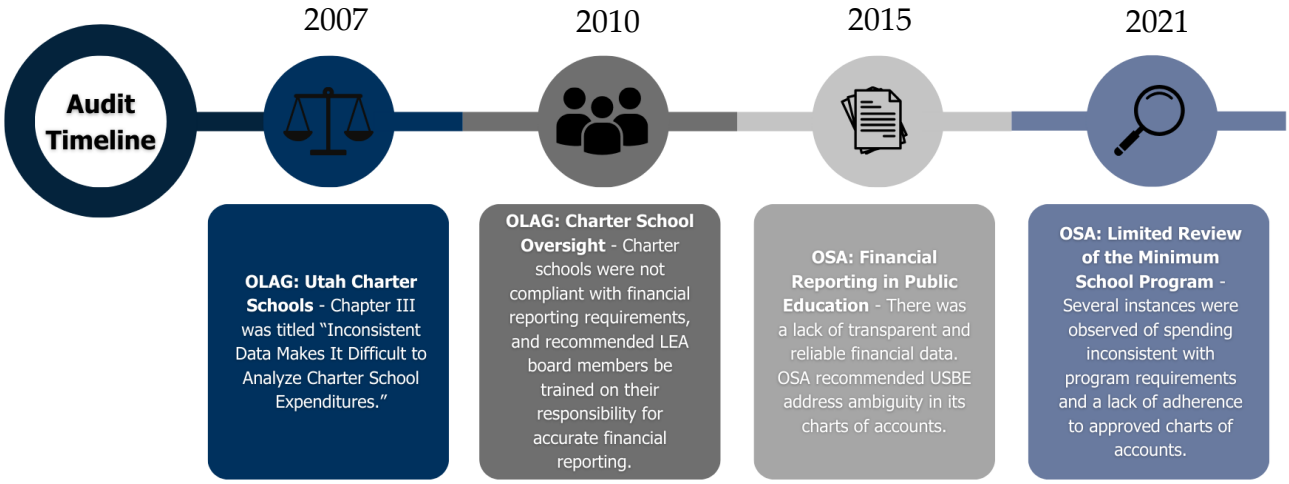
Figure 5.2 demonstrates that many school districts in Utah have low per pupil costs when it comes to paying district administration salaries. The four largest school districts, including ASD, have a per pupil cost between $125 and $177.

There are two school districts with a lower per pupil cost than Alpine School District—Iron and Cache School Districts. These two districts have a per pupil cost of $82 and $108, respectively.[27]

[27] The per pupil costs for district administration salaries is based on the amounts reported to USBE by each district. In this case, district administration salaries include the superintendent, business administrator, school board, supervisors and directors, and associate, deputy, or assistant superintendents.

5.2 District Administration Salary Reporting Varies Statewide

The salaries reported for key district administrative positions can vary between sources. OSA and USBE are both required to receive financial reports from LEAs. In our review of district administrative salary reporting, ASD was consistent. However, we found inconsistent reporting among other districts. Discrepancies between district reporting to OSA and USBE were found in instances where we would expect matching amounts. A previous report by our office highlighted several audits that have addressed financial reporting concerns with LEAs.[28] The infographic below is a visualization summarizing earlier findings.



Source: A Performance Audit of Financial Reporting in Public Education (2022–04).

In addition to the conclusions found in these earlier audits, our office has continued to point to the discrepancies found in LEA financial reporting.[29] We have previously made a recommendation to USBE to consider aligning its financial reporting format with Transparent Utah requirements. If the Legislature would like to better understand how LEAs are spending their funds, then we

[28] *A Performance Audit of Financial Reporting in Public Education* (2022–04). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2022-04_RPT.pdf

[29] *A Performance Audit of Public Education Reporting Requirements* (2019–14). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/19_14rpt.pdf
A Performance Audit of Financial Reporting in Public Education (2022–04). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2022-04_RPT.pdf
A Performance Audit of Public Education Administrative Costs (2022–05). https://olag.utleg.gov/olag-doc/2022-05_RPT.pdf

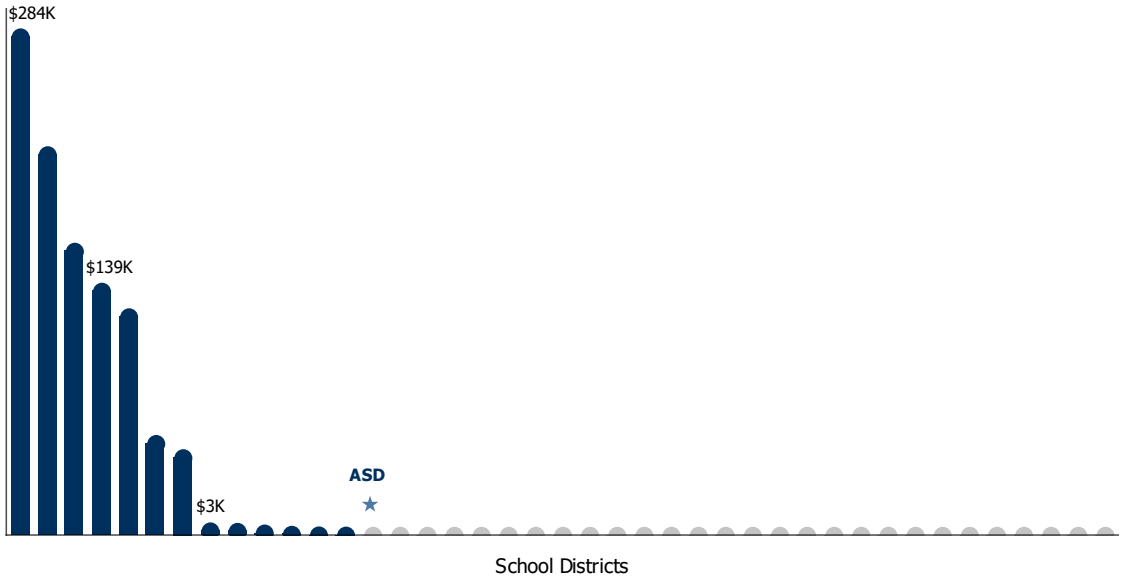
believe working towards shared financial reporting requirements will be essential to achieving that goal.

Differences In Salary Reporting by Districts Inhibits Public Transparency

The Legislature requires each LEA to submit some type of financial reporting to both OSA and USBE.[30] As part of these annual requirements, each LEA must submit an audited financial report. In addition, payroll data must be submitted to OSA for use on the Transparent Utah website, and annual financial data is submitted to USBE through the Utah Public Education Financial System (UPEFS).

In a comparison of payroll data available through Transparent Utah and specific salary codes required by USBE, we found that some school districts were reporting differing amounts between the two locations. Figure 5.3 compares what each school district reported to USBE as their superintendent's 2024 salary compared to Transparent Utah. Discrepancies in the two reported salary amounts were as high as $284,000.

Figure 5.3 Some of Utah's School Districts Vary in Reporting of Their Superintendents' Salaries. While most school districts, including ASD, report the same amounts to USBE and Transparent Utah, there are some discrepancies. Where it exists, reporting variance ranges from $100 to $284K.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE and OSA data.

[30] ***Utah Code*** 51-2a-201, ***Utah Code*** 51-2a-202, ***Utah Code*** 51-2a-301, ***Utah Code*** 53E-3-501, and ***Utah Code*** 53G-4-404.

Figure 5.3 demonstrates some of the discrepancies we found in comparing salaries reported by school districts.[31] The difference in reported amounts inhibits auditors' ability to provide accurate comparisons. We recommend that the Legislature consider whether USBE and OSA should have shared financial reporting requirements when it comes to expenditures, revenue, and payroll reporting.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1

We recommend the Legislature should consider whether the Office of the State Auditor and the Utah State Board of Education should have shared financial reporting requirements for public schools.

Discrepancies in Position Titles Could Negatively Impact Public Wage Transparency. Transparent Utah is a legislatively mandated resource that provides the public with information on agency costs, including salaries. Currently, an agency submitting payroll data to Transparent Utah can assign any title to each individual on which they are reporting. As the visualization below demonstrates, inconsistent job titles for similar positions make comparisons difficult.



Source: Auditor generated based on Transparent Utah data.

[31] Some school districts have large reporting discrepancies because they did not have a reported superintendent's salary in Transparent Utah, or it was tied to a position title that was not close enough to the examples provided in the above visualization.

We found a variety of titles relating to superintendent salaries, business administrator salaries, and school board compensation. This can inhibit the public's opportunity to find and compare salaries of public employees in the same position across the state. We recommend that the Legislature consider whether to implement a requirement for Transparent Utah to have common naming conventions for the public to use, specific to payroll reporting on this platform.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2

We recommend the Legislature should consider whether requirements for Transparent Utah should include common naming conventions.





Complete List of Audit Recommendations



Complete List of Audit Recommendations

This report made the following fifteen recommendations. The numbering convention assigned to each recommendation consists of its chapter followed by a period and recommendation number within that chapter.

Recommendation 1.1

We recommend Alpine School District should identify high-performing PLC teams in their district and in peer districts, and use best practices found there to continue to improve PLC teams around the district.

Recommendation 1.2

We recommend Alpine School District should track that schools are setting goals for their most needed student group(s) and are holding schools accountable on meeting those goals.

Recommendation 1.3

We recommend Alpine School District should assess the reason(s) for large achievement gaps at certain schools and facilitate goal setting and action steps at those schools to close them.

Recommendation 2.1

We recommend Alpine School District should identify high-performing teachers, implement best practices learned from them, and monitor that implementation to determine its success.

Recommendation 2.2

We recommend Alpine School District should continue to improve its administrator mentoring program.

Recommendation 2.3

We recommend all school districts that form from the existing Alpine School District should continue to improve student performance by employing this report's best practices for teachers and administrators in all its schools.

Recommendation 3.1

We recommend that district-level administrators work with school administrators to ensure that the strategic plan and its role is being more fully communicated to all employees at every school.

Recommendation 3.2

We recommend that Alpine School District implement specific performance measures that can demonstrate its strategic plan's success and make the measures publicly available.

Recommendation 3.3

We recommend that Alpine School District provide additional relevant information about the district's strategic plan and its progress in a publicly accessible location.

Recommendation 4.1

We recommend that Alpine School Board expand their bullying and harassment policy to comply with ***Utah Code*** 53G-9-605.

Recommendation 4.2

We recommend that Alpine School District make its bullying management procedures available on its website and in school handbooks.

Recommendation 4.3

We recommend that Alpine School District work with other entities involved in property sharing agreements to determine how to best limit future incidents.

Recommendation 4.4

We recommend that Alpine School District increase school zone signage at all entry points and throughout the parking lot at the Summit and Polaris High School campus.

Recommendation 5.1

We recommend the Legislature should consider whether the Office of the State Auditor and the Utah State Board of Education should have shared financial reporting requirements for public schools.

Recommendation 5.2

We recommend the Legislature should consider whether requirements for Transparent Utah should include common naming conventions.





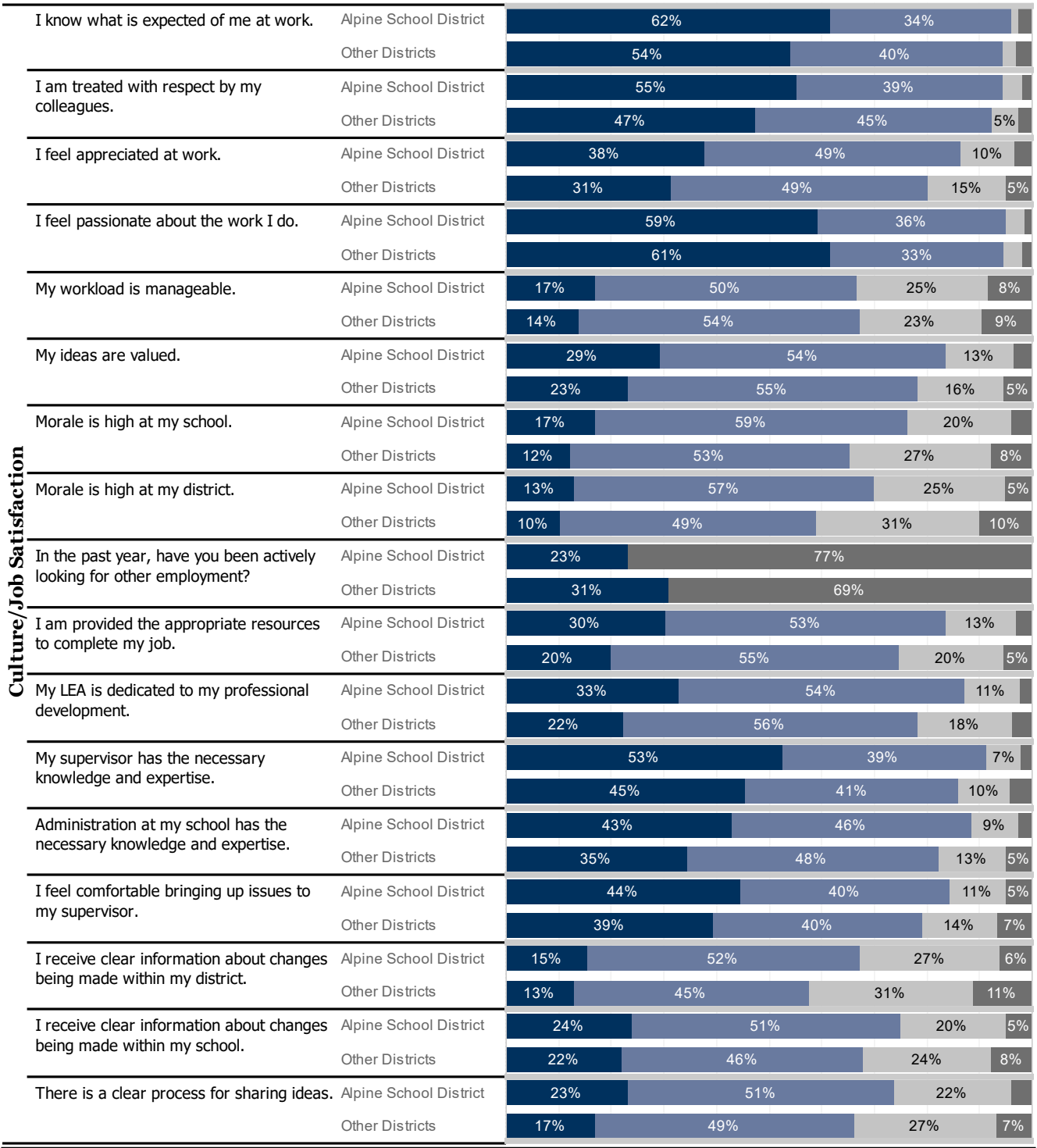
Appendices

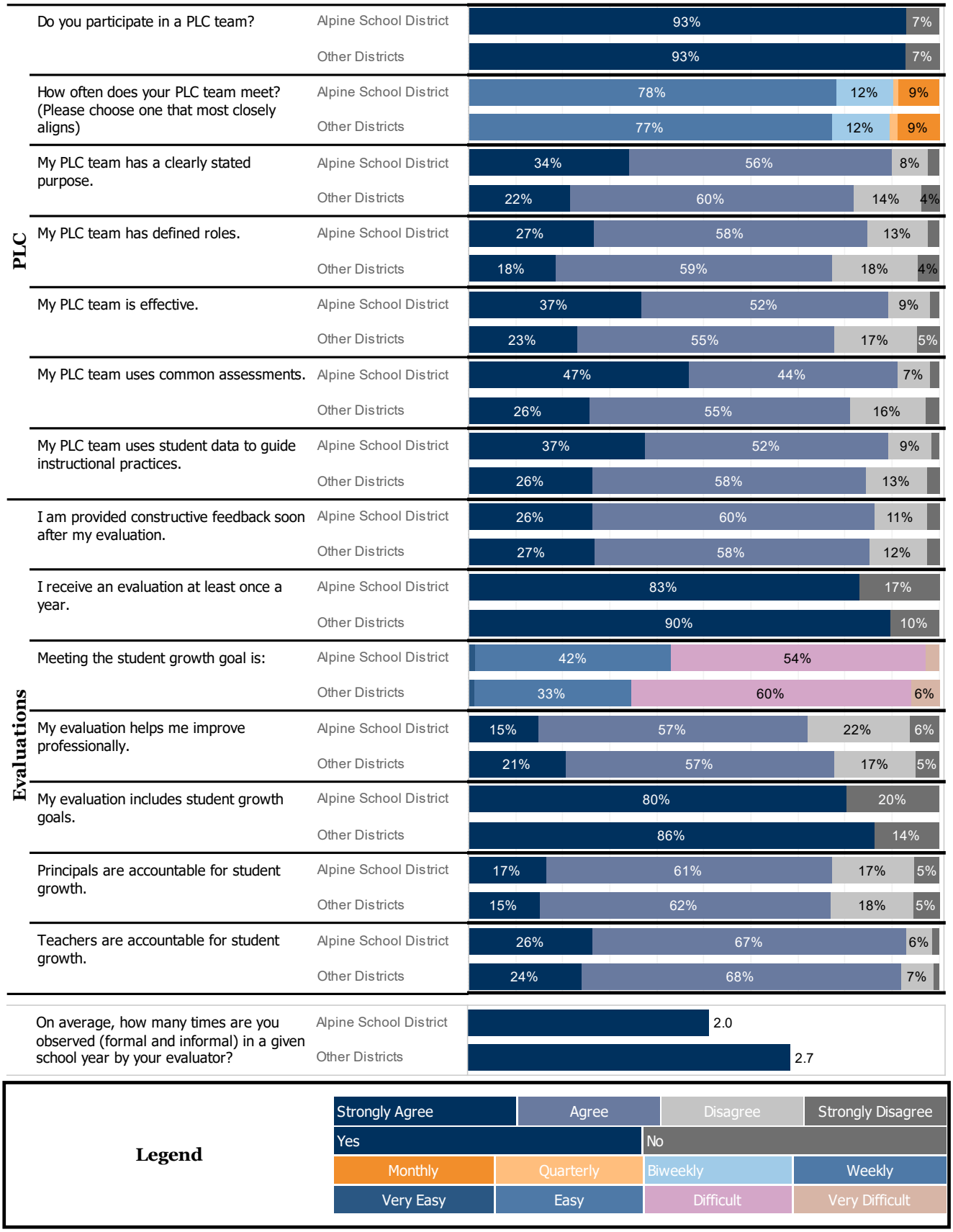


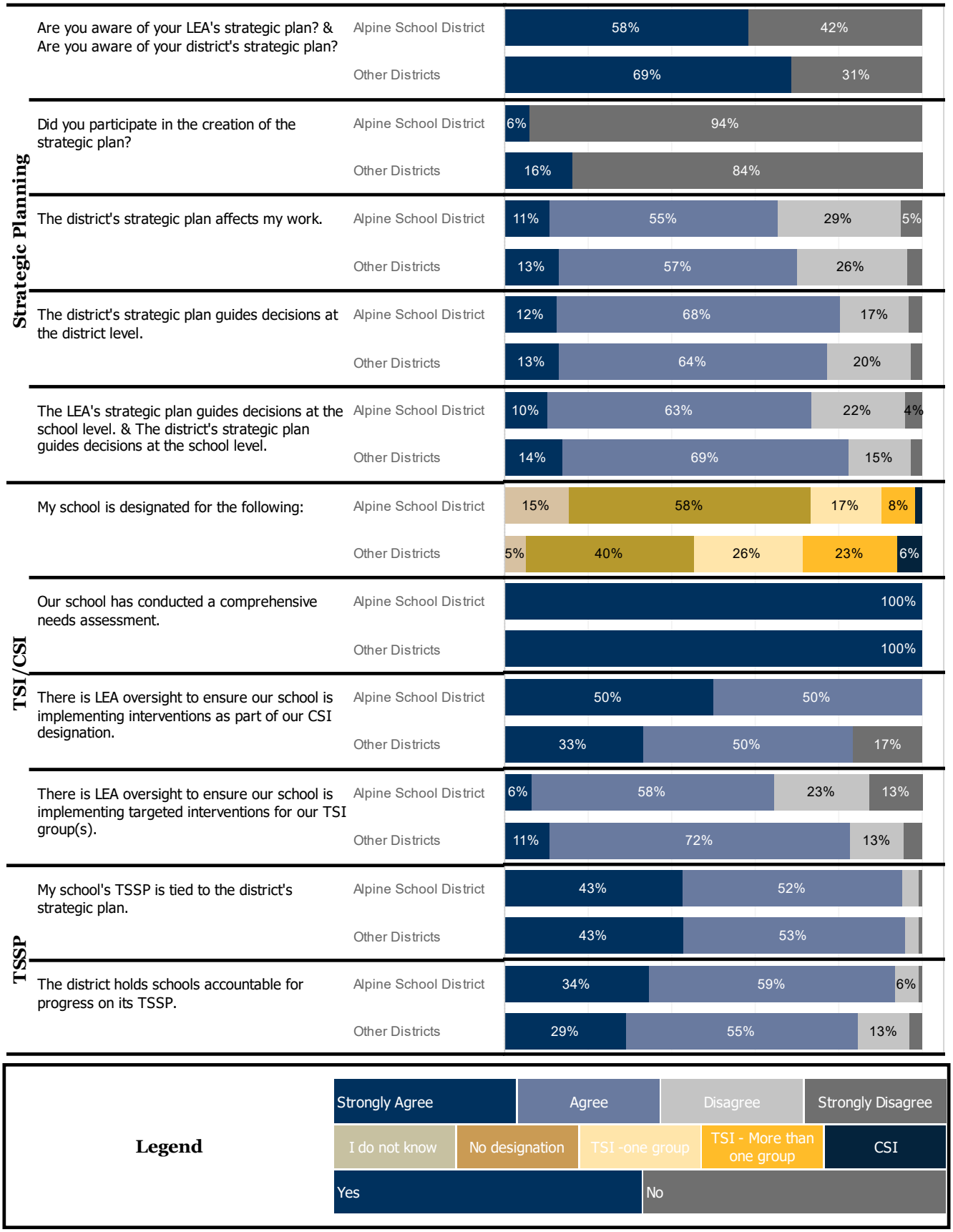
A. Alpine School District
Legislative Audit Survey Results

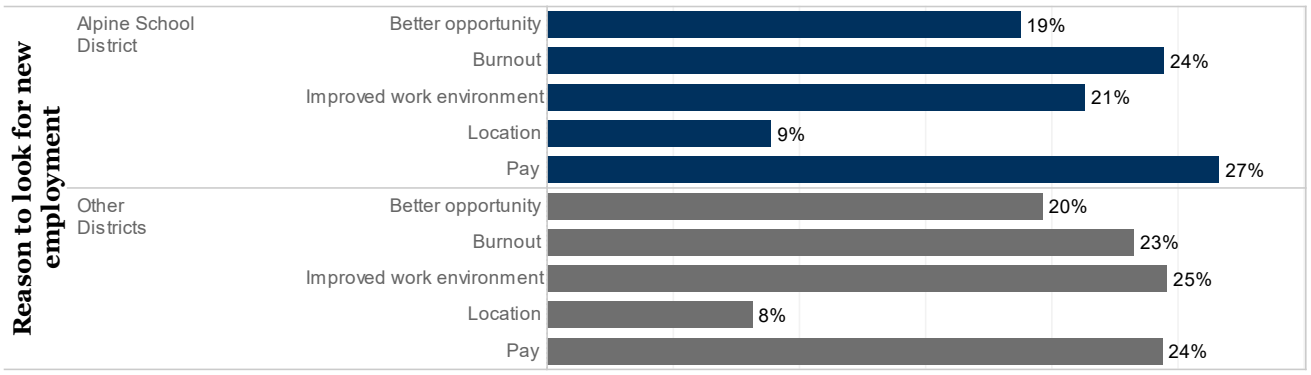


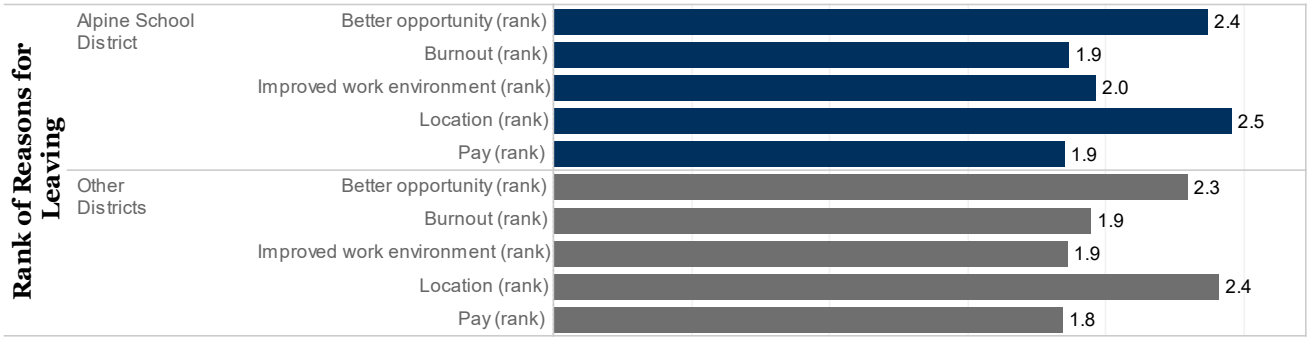
Survey Invitations - 11,405
Total Responses - 3,140
Response Rate - 27.5%

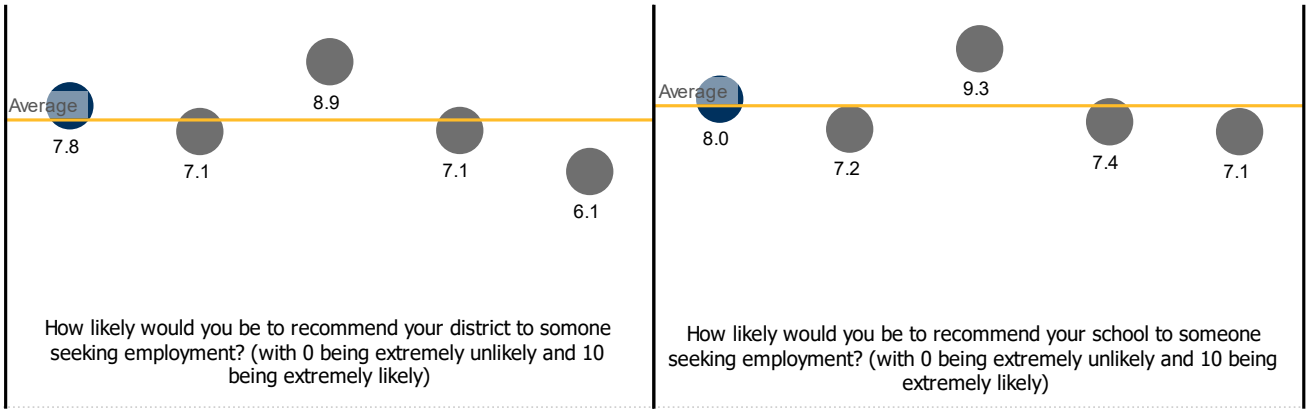


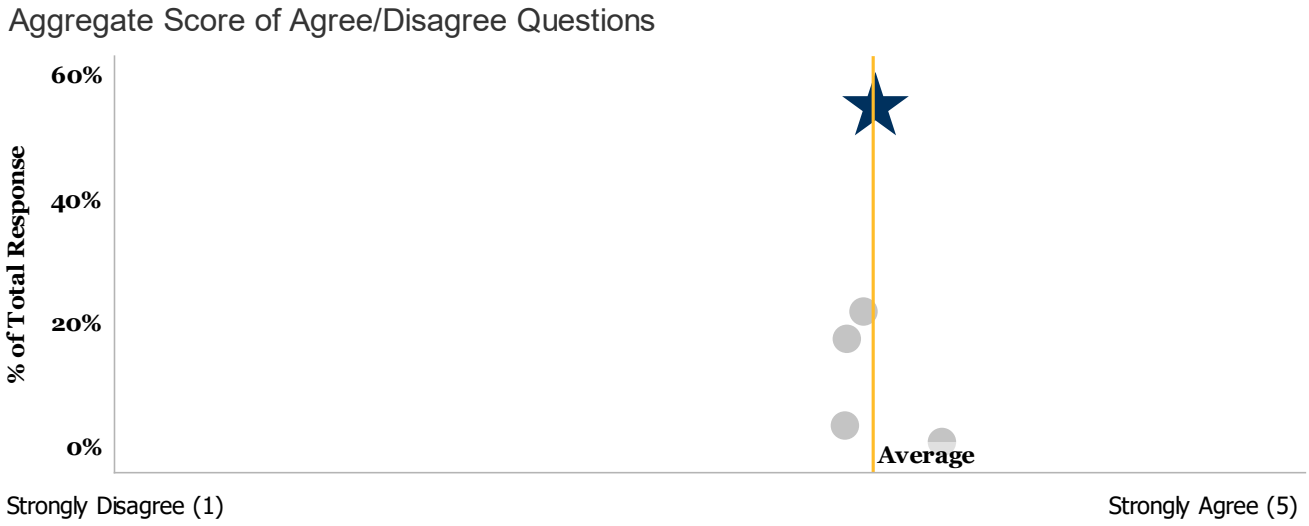

PLC
Do you participate in a PLC team?
Alpine School District
93%
7%
Other Districts
93%
7%
How often does your PLC team meet? (Please choose one that most closely aligns)
Alpine School District
78%
12%
9%
Other Districts
77%
12%
9%
My PLC team has a clearly stated purpose.
Alpine School District
34%
56%
8%
Other Districts
22%
60%
14%
4%
My PLC team has defined roles.
Alpine School District
27%
58%
13%
Other Districts
18%
59%
18%
4%
My PLC team is effective.
Alpine School District
37%
52%
9%
Other Districts
23%
55%
17%
5%
My PLC team uses common assessments.
Alpine School District
47%
44%
7%
Other Districts
26%
55%
16%
My PLC team uses student data to guide instructional practices.
Alpine School District
37%
52%
9%
Other Districts
26%
58%
13%
Evaluations
I am provided constructive feedback soon after my evaluation.
Alpine School District
26%
60%
11%
Other Districts
27%
58%
12%
I receive an evaluation at least once a year.
Alpine School District
83%
17%
Other Districts
90%
10%
Meeting the student growth goal is:
Alpine School District
42%
54%
Other Districts
33%
60%
6%
My evaluation helps me improve professionally.
Alpine School District
15%
57%
22%
6%
Other Districts
21%
57%
17%
5%
My evaluation includes student growth goals.
Alpine School District
80%
20%
Other Districts
86%
14%
Principals are accountable for student growth.
Alpine School District
17%
61%
17%
5%
Other Districts
15%
62%
18%
5%
Teachers are accountable for student growth.
Alpine School District
26%
67%
6%
Other Districts
24%
68%
7%
On average, how many times are you observed (formal and informal) in a given school year by your evaluator?
Alpine School District
2.0
Other Districts
2.7
Legend
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
Yes
No
Monthly
Quarterly
Biweekly
Weekly
Very Easy
Easy
Difficult
Very Difficult


Strategic Planning
Are you aware of your LEA's strategic plan? & Are you aware of your district's strategic plan?
Alpine School District
58%
42%
Other Districts
69%
31%
Did you participate in the creation of the strategic plan?
Alpine School District
6%
94%
Other Districts
16%
84%
The district's strategic plan affects my work.
Alpine School District
11%
55%
29%
5%
Other Districts
13%
57%
26%
The district's strategic plan guides decisions at the district level.
Alpine School District
12%
68%
17%
Other Districts
13%
64%
20%
The LEA's strategic plan guides decisions at the school level. & The district's strategic plan guides decisions at the school level.
Alpine School District
10%
63%
22%
4%
Other Districts
14%
69%
15%
TSI/CSI
My school is designated for the following:
Alpine School District
15%
58%
17%
8%
Other Districts
5%
40%
26%
23%
6%
Our school has conducted a comprehensive needs assessment.
Alpine School District
100%
Other Districts
100%
There is LEA oversight to ensure our school is implementing interventions as part of our CSI designation.
Alpine School District
50%
50%
Other Districts
33%
50%
17%
There is LEA oversight to ensure our school is implementing targeted interventions for our TSI group(s).
Alpine School District
6%
58%
23%
13%
Other Districts
11%
72%
13%
TSSP
My school's TSSP is tied to the district's strategic plan.
Alpine School District
43%
52%
Other Districts
43%
53%
The district holds schools accountable for progress on its TSSP.
Alpine School District
34%
59%
6%
Other Districts
29%
55%
13%
Legend
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
I do not know
No designation
TSI -one group
TSI - More than one group
CSI
Yes
No


Reason to look for new employment
Alpine School District
Better opportunity 19%
Burnout 24%
Improved work environment 21%
Location 9%
Pay 27%
Other Districts
Better opportunity 20%
Burnout 23%
Improved work environment 25%
Location 8%
Pay 24%


Rank of Reasons for Leaving
Alpine School District
Better opportunity (rank) 2.4
Burnout (rank) 1.9
Improved work environment (rank) 2.0
Location (rank) 2.5
Pay (rank) 1.9
Other Districts
Better opportunity (rank) 2.3
Burnout (rank) 1.9
Improved work environment (rank) 1.9
Location (rank) 2.4
Pay (rank) 1.8


Average
7.8
7.1
8.9
7.1
6.1
How likely would you be to recommend your district to somone seeking employment? (with 0 being extremely unlikely and 10 being extremely likely)
Average
8.0
7.2
9.3
7.4
7.1
How likely would you be to recommend your school to someone seeking employment? (with 0 being extremely unlikely and 10 being extremely likely)


Aggregate Score of Agree/Disagree Questions
% of Total Response
60%
40%
20%
0%
Average
Strongly Disagree (1)
Strongly Agree (5)

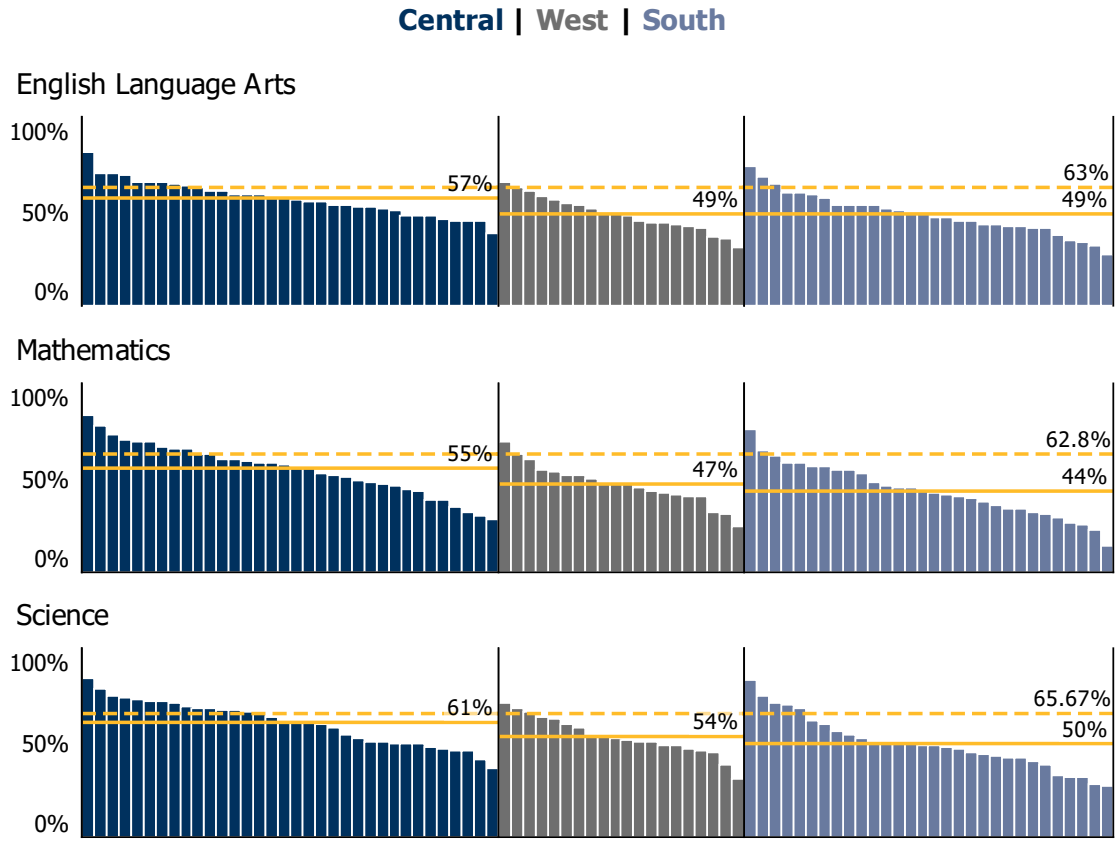


B. Student Achievement for New School Districts



With the district's split coming up in two years, we wanted to provide school proficiency rates grouped by new school district boundaries. Those rates are shown in Figure B.1. As seen below, there were schools in each new district that achieved the higher end of proficiency and those that were at the other end of the spectrum.

Figure B.1 The New School Districts Forming From Alpine School District Contain Schools With High and Low Proficiency Rates. Despite varied school performance within the new districts, the "Central" district has the highest average proficiency rate for all three subjects.



Source: Auditor generated based on USBE data.

Figure B.1 shows varied school-level performance while also highlighting the average proficiency rates across the new districts. The new "South" district has the lowest average proficiency rate at 44 percent in math. The "South" and "West" district share the same average proficiency in ELA at 49 percent. In addition, the "Central" district outperforms the other two in every subject area with 55 to 61 percent proficiency.



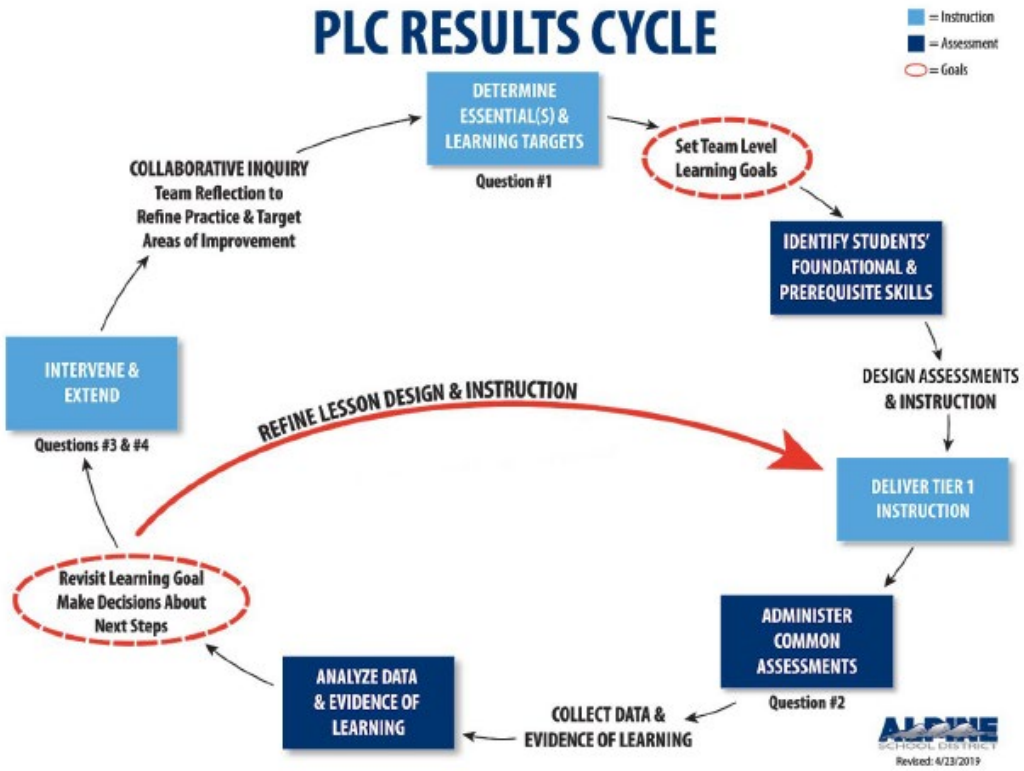
C. Alpine School District PLC Resources



This appendix includes the two Professional Learning Community (PLC) resource documents that Alpine School District (ASD or district) provides alongside its strategic plan. The first is titled, "Seven Tight Essentials of a PLC in ASD."



The second resource provided by district is the "PLC Results Cycle."





Agency Response Plan



ALPINE
SCHOOL DISTRICT
575 NORTH 100 EAST. AMERICAN FORK. UT 84003-1758

March 25, 2025

Kade R. Minchey CIA, CFE, Auditor General
Office of the Legislative Auditor General Utah State Capitol Complex
Rebecca Lockhart House Building, Suite W 315
P.O. Box 145315
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-5315

Dear Mr. Minchey,

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the recommendations from *A Systemic Performance Audit of Alpine School District*. The professionalism, trust and collaborative spirit demonstrated by the audit team resulted in a very positive experience. We welcomed the opportunity for an external review of Alpine School District and embraced this audit with full cooperation, transparency, and humility. We are committed to continuous learning and improvement so we can achieve our Vision for Learning with each student. We strive to enhance the educational experience for the students and families of Alpine School District.

We agree with the recommendations presented by the audit team and commit to implementing them. The following pages contain our specific responses to each recommendation, the next steps we will take and the primary contact for these improvement efforts. I am confident in the capacity of our organization and those assigned to these efforts to successfully implement the recommendations of the audit.

Alpine School District is a learning organization. We value feedback and growth opportunities to improve our practice. This audit has served as a valuable validation and assessment of our work. We have gleaned actionable insights into efforts we should continue and areas in which we can learn and improve.

Sincerely,

Dr. Shane Farnsworth, Superintendent

Julie E. King, Board President

Dr. Shane Farnsworth, Superintendent
Board of Education: Julie E. King, President;
Stacy M. Bateman, Vice President; Emily B. Peterson, Vice President;
Sarah L. Beeson, Dr. Mark J. Clement, Joylin Lincoln, Ada S. Wilson

Recommendation 1.1 Alpine School District should identify high-performing PLC teams in their district and in peer districts and use best practices found there to continue to improve PLC teams around the district.

Response

This is a practice we are fully committed to and have been doing informally for many years. "Schools Learning from Other Schools" is one of our *Seven Tight Essentials for PLCs in ASD.* In recent years, we began formalizing this process. Working with the five school districts in the BYU public school partnership, we identify the highest performing teams and learn from them. To validate the effectiveness of the established algorithm to identify high performing PLC teams, we met with selected first grade language arts teams in 2023-24 and sixth grade math teams in 2023-24.

Next Steps

In this summer's (2025) professional development days, these high performing PLC teams will share with other grade-level teams their best practice. Additionally, the district will compensate all interested teachers who want to attend for the day. This is a practice that we will continue to expand to support improvement in all of our teams both with other peer districts and within our own district. We will also formalize our internal processes for identifying high performing teams and best practices. Additionally, our principals and instructional coaches will be made aware of these teams so other teams can learn from them.

Contact: ASD Leading Learning Team - Dr. Vicki Carter, Dr. Analis Ruiz, Scott Sumner

Recommendation 1.2 Alpine School District should track that schools are setting goals for their most needed student group(s) and are holding schools accountable on meeting those goals.

Response

As part of our current strategic plan, all schools are required to develop a school priority in each of the following three areas: schoolwide student achievement, student group achievement, and student connection. The student group achievement area focuses on those student groups with the greatest academic need. Our area supervisors meet monthly with school leaders to support their efforts to align their teacher team goals with the school priorities.

Next Steps

We will continue our efforts in training and monthly coaching visits to ensure that our schools have student group achievement priorities that are evidence-based and address those groups with the highest needs. This will be a continued focus in the 2025-26 school year. Additional accountability measures will also be added to track performance and hold schools responsible for their goals.

Contact: ASD Leading Learning Team - Dr. Vicki Carter, Dr. Analis Ruiz, Scott Sumner

Recommendation 1.3 Alpine School District should assess the reason(s) for large achievement gaps at certain schools and facilitate goal setting and action steps at those schools to close the gaps.

Response

This is an area where we continue to refine our efforts. The student groups that we are focused on currently are multilingual learners (MLLs) and our students with disabilities. We have seen great success this year with the implementation of our MLL Task Force and we will continue to expand these efforts. We are also in the process of restructuring our special education department to better facilitate shared ownership between general education and special education for the learning of students with disabilities.

Next Steps

We also work with schools to improve their capacity to evaluate their evidence and modify practice to improve achievement for all students. We will expand the number of schools participating in the MLL Task Force training in the 2025-26 school year and in the subsequent year as well. We will ensure that students with disabilities receive both general education and special education support needed to close achievement gaps. Our special education leadership team will identify those schools closing the achievement gap and their practices and processes for doing so. Furthermore, the team will create opportunities for those schools with the largest gaps to learn from the high performing schools. This will be an ongoing effort by our new special education leadership team for the 2025-26 school year.

Contact: ASD SPED Leadership Team and Leading Learning Team - Dr. Vicki Carter, Dr. Analis Ruiz, Scott Sumner and Dr. Royd Darrington

Recommendation 2.1 Alpine School District should identify high-performing teachers, implement best practices learned from them, and monitor that implementation to determine its success.

Response

We wholeheartedly agree with this recommendation. We believe this recommendation aligns with Recommendation 1.1 as most of our teachers participate on a collaborative team. We place great value on our high-performing teachers and appreciate their influence in training their peers. We have included a few examples to illustrate these efforts:

- Many of our highest performing teachers at the secondary level also serve as part-time coaches and content specialists. The coaches work with other teachers in their buildings to help implement best practices by organizing and leading multiple PD days throughout the school year and summer to share best practices with their peers.
- Another example of this emphasis occurred recently while holding focus groups with 140 of our high-performing teachers. We learned more about what they do to create rich learning environments in their classrooms and how we can scale their best practices across the district. Their efforts yielded a tool that we call *Ten Essentials for a Rich Learning Environment*. This document was shared with administrators last month. The intention is that school leaders will work with their school leadership teams to determine how to use this tool to scale these best practices across the district.
- Our research and assessment team identifies and celebrates high-performing teachers and their teams. They are compiling best practices learned from teachers that can be a great resource for their peers as well.

We recognize that these are just a few of the ways in which we engage our high performing teachers in the sharing of best practices. However, a more systematic method of assessing the effectiveness of these efforts needs to be implemented.

Next Steps

We will continue to celebrate our high performing teachers and facilitate more professional development opportunities for these teachers to share best practices with their colleagues. The first of these PD conferences for elementary teachers is scheduled for this summer (2025).

We will support the efforts of our secondary coaches and content specialists as they continue to identify and implement best instructional practices. These efforts are ongoing with three secondary content PD days scheduled for this summer (2025) and the 2025-26 school year.

We will also work with our research and assessment team to develop a more systemic approach to assessing the effectiveness of our efforts to learn from our highest performing teachers. Additionally, this team will monitor the progress and

implementation of best practices efforts of those teachers and teams who are targeted to learn from high performing teachers and teams.

Contact: ASD Leading Learning Team - Dr. Vicki Carter, Dr. Analis Ruiz, Scott Sumner

Recommendation 2.2 Alpine School District should continue to improve its administrator mentoring program.

Response

Two years ago, we began enhancing our existing training for new administrators by developing the New Administrator Support Network. These training opportunities for first and second year administrators are centered on our ASD Leadership Essentials. Our new administrators are grateful for the training and the collegiality that it fosters. These administrators work collaboratively outside of the training to work through day-to-day concerns and support each other. In addition to these efforts, this year we centered our administrator evaluation process for all administrators on the ASD Leadership Essentials as well.

Next Steps

We will continue in the 2025-26 school year to improve our New Administrator Support Network. Our focus will be on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions captured by our ASD Leadership Essentials and the self-assessment done by our administrators. We are excited to continue to help each administrator create an individual learning plan for their professional growth as part of their annual evaluation.

Contact: Cami Harper, Executive Director of Human Resources

Recommendation 2.3 All school districts that form from the existing Alpine School District should continue to improve student performance by employing this report's best practices for teachers and administrators in all its schools.

Response

Our culture and imperative is to facilitate a successful transition by maintaining the positive momentum of Alpine School District and set up all three new districts to achieve high levels of student performance and be successful districts.

Next Steps

We will continue to work to build the capacity of teachers and administrators to best help students learn at high levels and achieve our Vision for Learning now in our current

district and in the future districts. The systems and processes developed by Alpine School District will be shared with the boards of education and new leadership of the emerging school districts.

Contact: Dr. Shane Farnsworth, Superintendent and Dr. Joel Perkins, Chief of Staff

Recommendation 3.1 We recommend that district-level administrators should work with school administrators to ensure that the strategic plan and its role is being more fully communicated to all employees at every school.

Response

This is a primary focus and where we dedicate a significant amount of time. All administrator learning meetings and training opportunities are dedicated to supporting school leaders as they work with teacher teams to help their evidence-based school priorities become priority-informed goals. Our supervisors have monthly coaching sessions with the leadership of each school to review their priorities and help the school reach their teacher team goals. We need to facilitate greater communication between school leaders and employees at every school.

Next Steps

We will continue to focus during the 2025-26 school year on supporting school leaders in setting evidence-informed school priorities with an even greater focus on supporting leaders in their efforts to help teacher teams to set and achieve priority-informed goals. We will provide tools and resources so school leaders can demonstrate evidence of the alignment of school priorities and goals with the district strategic plan. We will work with our principals to utilize great clarity and intentionality with their teacher teams. These efforts will lead to greater communication and understanding of the strategic plan by classroom teachers.

Contact: ASD Leading Learning Team - Dr. Vicki Carter, Dr. Analis Ruiz, Scott Sumner

Recommendation 3.2 We recommend that Alpine School District implement specific performance measures that can demonstrate its strategic plan's success and are publicly reported.

Response

Our strategic plan identifies our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as Literacy, Next Level Readiness, and Connection. We chose to take a grassroots approach to narrowing down the metrics for our KPIs and feel that our school-level administrators

and teachers have developed significant ownership in the metrics that we are solidifying. We have been celebrating our schools as they make significant gains in achieving their priorities. However, achievement of these priorities and metrics to measure them need to be systematized, measured, and publicized.

Next Steps
In the 2025-26 school year, we will work with our communications team to more publicly celebrate the overall success of the strategic plan as measured by our KPIs.

Contact: Dr. Joel Perkins, Chief of Staff

Recommendation 3.3 We recommend that Alpine School District provide additional relevant information about the district's strategic plan and its progress in a publicly accessible location.

Response
We frequently discuss elements of our strategic plan with administrators, teachers, students, and parents in communications, meetings, videos, and social media.

Next Steps
We will utilize additional platforms to communicate more information about our plan to a wider audience, especially to celebrate our successes, and model how we learn from our challenges. This will be a communication strategy implemented in the 2025-26 school year.

Contact: Dr. Joel Perkins, Chief of Staff

Recommendation 4.1 We recommend that Alpine School Board expand their bullying and harassment policy to comply with Utah Code 53G-9-605.

Response
While our current practice and procedures are in compliance with the most recent legislation, we recognize that our district policy needs to be adjusted to reflect our current practice. Our policy committee has been working on adjusting this policy.

Next Steps
We will update our bullying and harassment policy so it aligns with the current best practices and procedures being utilized by our administrators throughout the district. This policy change will be in place prior to the start of the 2025-26 school year.

Contact: Kraig Brinkerhoff, Executive Director of Legal Services

Recommendation 4.2 We recommend that Alpine School District make its bullying management procedures available on its website and in school handbooks.

Response

Our bullying management best practices and procedures are successful in supporting students. We recognize that many of these practices have been implemented in recent years and we can do a better job of making these procedures more available to parents and students on our website and in school handbooks.

Next Steps

We will make our current best practices and procedures available on the district website and in school handbooks before the beginning of the 2025-26 school year.

Contact: Dr. Analis Ruiz, Executive Director of Educational Opportunity and Student Support

Recommendation 4.3 We recommend that Alpine School District work with other entities involved in property sharing agreements to determine how to best limit future incidents.

Response

We have been consistently working to improve safety in all of our schools. We have made significant investments in addressing campus security through secure entries, push button locks on all classroom doors, and effective security camera systems in all of our schools. We recognize that additional work is needed to increase security especially for these school campuses with unsecured perimeters and those who share a border with a municipality property.

Next Steps

We will begin working immediately with municipalities to secure school properties adjacent to public parks. We will have the properties secured in alignment with state statute before allocation day for the new districts, July 1, 2027.

Contact: Eric Woodhouse, Executive Director of Operations

Recommendation 4.4 We recommend that Alpine School District increase school zone signage at all entry points and throughout the parking lot of the Summit and Polaris High School campus.

Response

Decisions regarding placement of school signage have typically been made at the local level. Neither the state nor the district has given any specific directions as to expectations of school zone signage.

Next Steps

We will work with the schools indicated to increase signage in this parking lot and at all entry points at these schools. This signage will be installed by June 1, 2025.

Contact: Eric Woodhouse, Executive Director of Operations

Recommendation 5.1 The Legislature should consider whether the Office of the State Auditor and the Utah State Board of Education should have shared financial reporting requirements for public schools.

Not applicable to our district as the audit findings demonstrate that we consistently report our administrative costs with both entities.

Recommendation 5.2 The Legislature should consider whether requirements for Transparent Utah should include common naming conventions.

Not applicable to our district as the audit findings demonstrate that we consistently report our administrative costs with both entities.







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