

The Role of Small Independent Research Firms in District Improvement

Experience & musings from Rochester, NY



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Chicago & Rochester | Different scale, similar substance

- **CCSR = inspiration *and* intimidation for GRA-scale**
 - Full disclosure: salt in CGR's wound
- **CGR & RCSD's story of building a "critical partnership"**
 - Emerging successes, frustrations, questions

About Center for Governmental Research | **CGR**

- **Founded 1915 to “get things done for community”**
- **Public watchdog: nonpartisan, objective**
- **Pragmatic research, policy analysis, public sector management consultants**
- **Nonprofit, 15 staff**
- **Generalists: gov’t management, education, public finance & economics, human services, health care**

What this has meant | Education

Type of work	What happened
Charter schools Evaluations, tech assistance	Data challenges around attrition Ultimately two closures
Program evaluation Range: Tech assistance to schools, implementation, longitudinal matched -control outcome studies	Range: staff capacity to use evaluation tools, pure compliance, program improvements, scaled back/cut, too political to be touched
Catholic schools Governance and fiscal modeling, market research, surveying	Diocesan system PD focus School closings
Shared services Districts, municipalities, Regional high school options	Central Business Offices, IMAs Regional HS-workforce approach Currently unfolding
Community Coalitions Taskforces, blue ribbon panels, Mayor's Literacy Commission, etc., etc.	Skepticism, frustration, lack of necessary progress...still unfolding...

CGR & RCSD: Then



CGR & RCSD | Now

PROBLEMS with that model

1. Didn't work.
(key result was ↑ defensiveness, insularity)
2. Unnecessary in NCLB era.
3. Bred hopelessness on outside.

→ → Wasn't serving public interest.

2009 | New Type of Engagement

Challenge #1: What the heck are you doing with the District?

Inside-outside role / “critical friend”

- JCB needed to model accountability & transparency
- CGR wanted to re-engage, inform board, community

Partnership enabled:

1. Internal access to leaders, ability to be candid
2. Feedback loop (policy & school), connect dots
3. Informed community, documenting complexity
4. Flexible research & consulting capacity
5. “Outsider” status gave internal leverage

What we did | Districtwide Surveys 2 X year to Help "Recognize-Intervene"

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RCSD Teacher Input - April 2010

1. Introduction -- Why you should fill this out

CGR is helping the Rochester City School District monitor the implementation of the portfolio plan. We need to hear from you.

Given all that is going on--the portfolio plan, talk of mayoral control, the changes in Central Office--your views are even more important and timely. Please provide your perspective on the long term needs of Rochester's children.

This survey is your chance to express your opinions about changes in the district. Teachers and provide feedback to district leadership. Survey results will be used to improve the district as well.

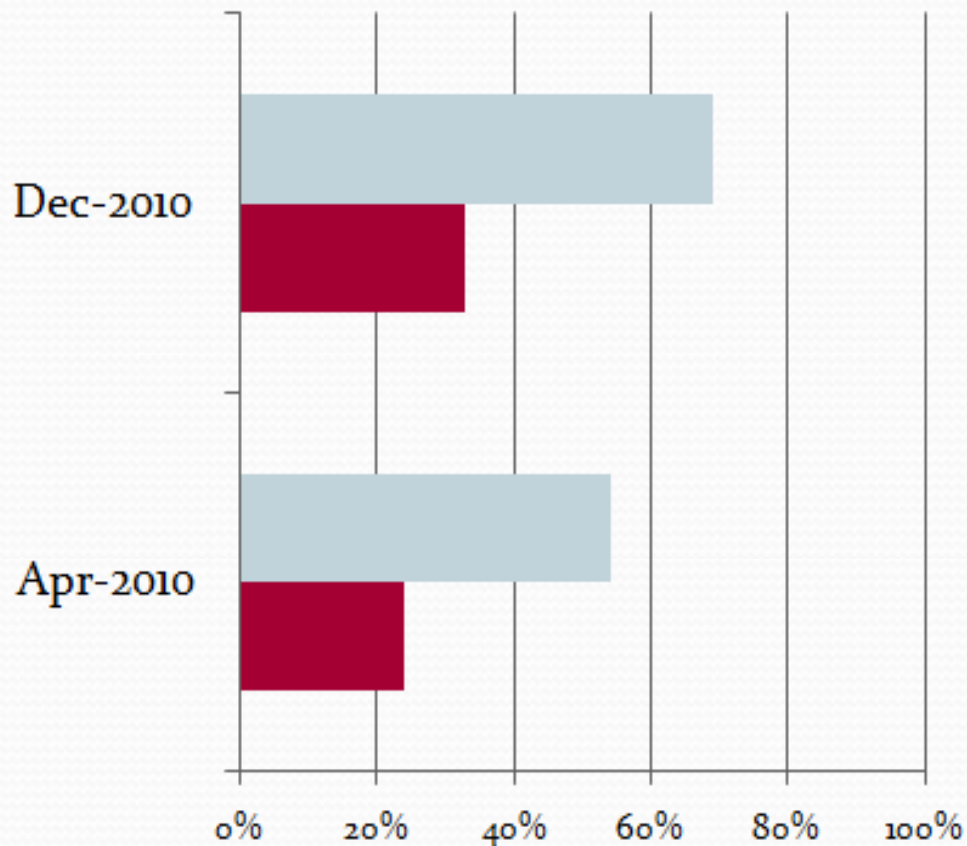
These surveys are anonymous, and individual surveys will not be shared. (This survey, it is not attached to your name or computer and we have no way of knowing who person can only complete one survey.) If you would like to follow up on your survey, please contact your principal.

Click the "Next" button at the bottom of each page; then click "Done" at the bottom of the last page. We encourage your colleagues to complete the survey too.

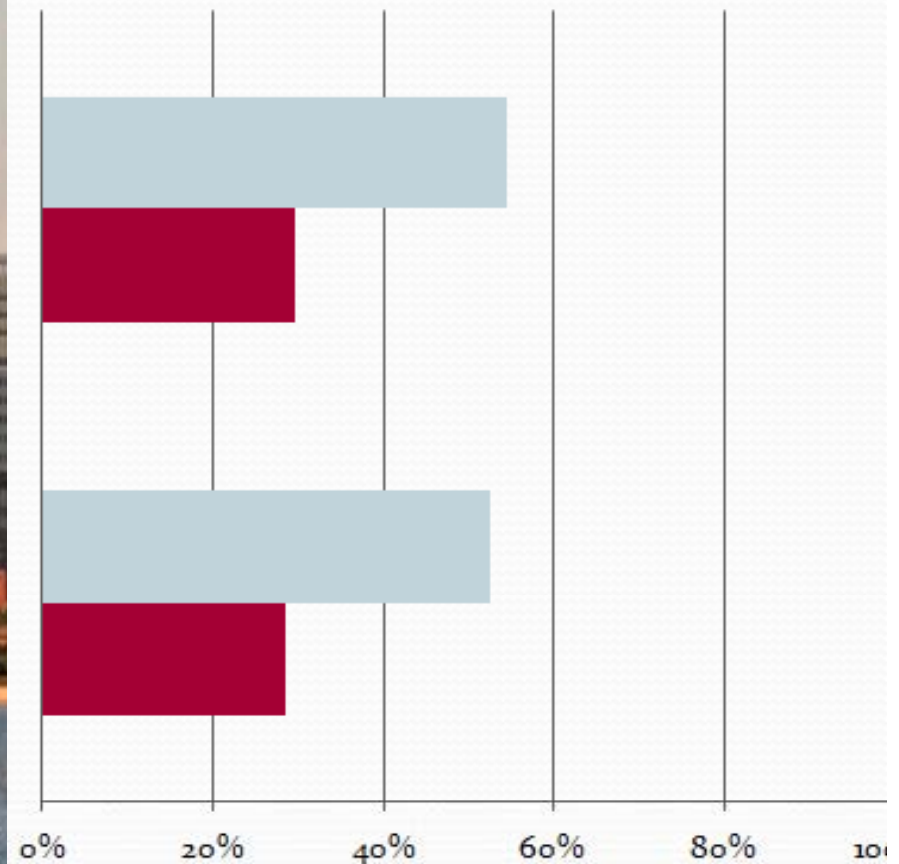
REPORT CARD			
GRADING PERIOD	1	2	3
READING	A		
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION	A		
MATHEMATICS	C		
SCIENCE/HEALTH	B		
SOCIAL STUDIES	B		
ART	A		
MUSIC	A		
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	C		
Grade Average	B		
Attendance:			
Present	48		
Absent	0		
Tardy	1		
A = Excellent • B = Good • C = Satisfactory • N = Needs Improvement U = Unsatisfactory • I = Insufficient / Incomplete			
Student:			
Grade:			

Findings Shed Light on Buy-in & Culture

The district's strategic plan sets the right priorities.

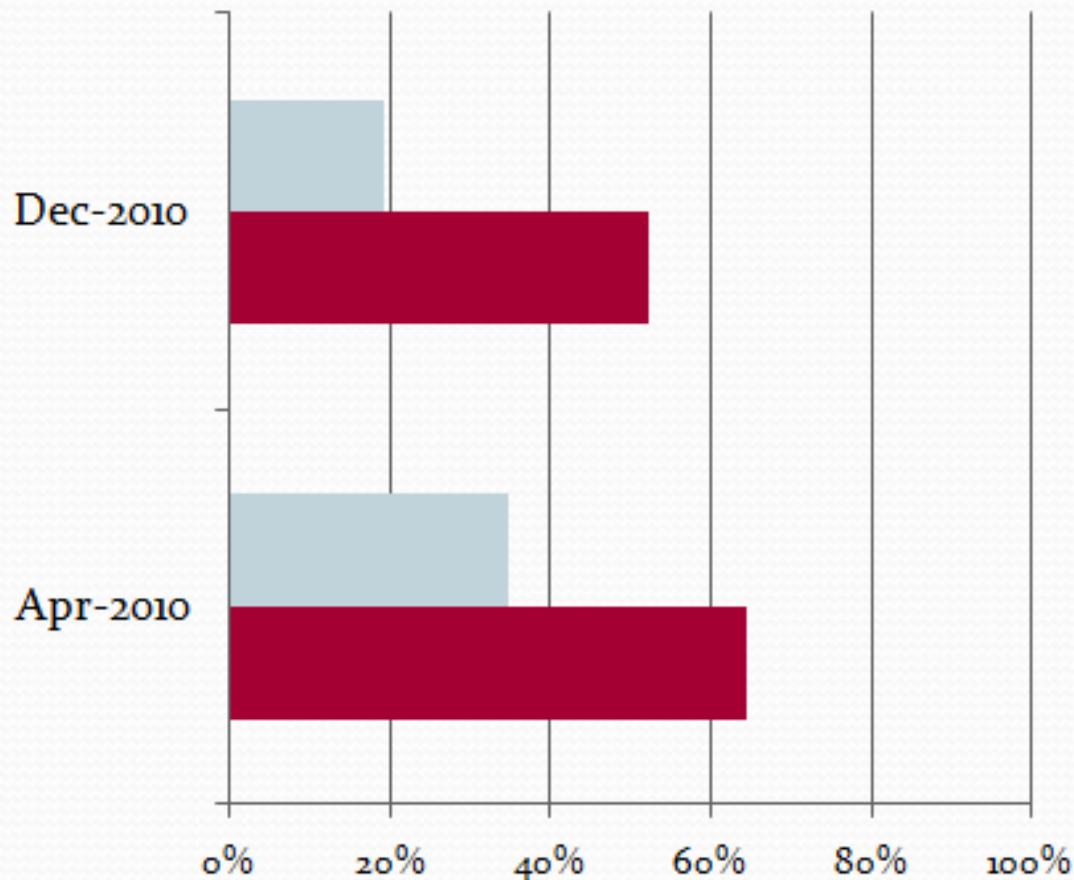


District leadership values the work that I do.



Findings Shed Light on Buy-in & Culture

Until we address poverty as a community, schools can't accomplish much.



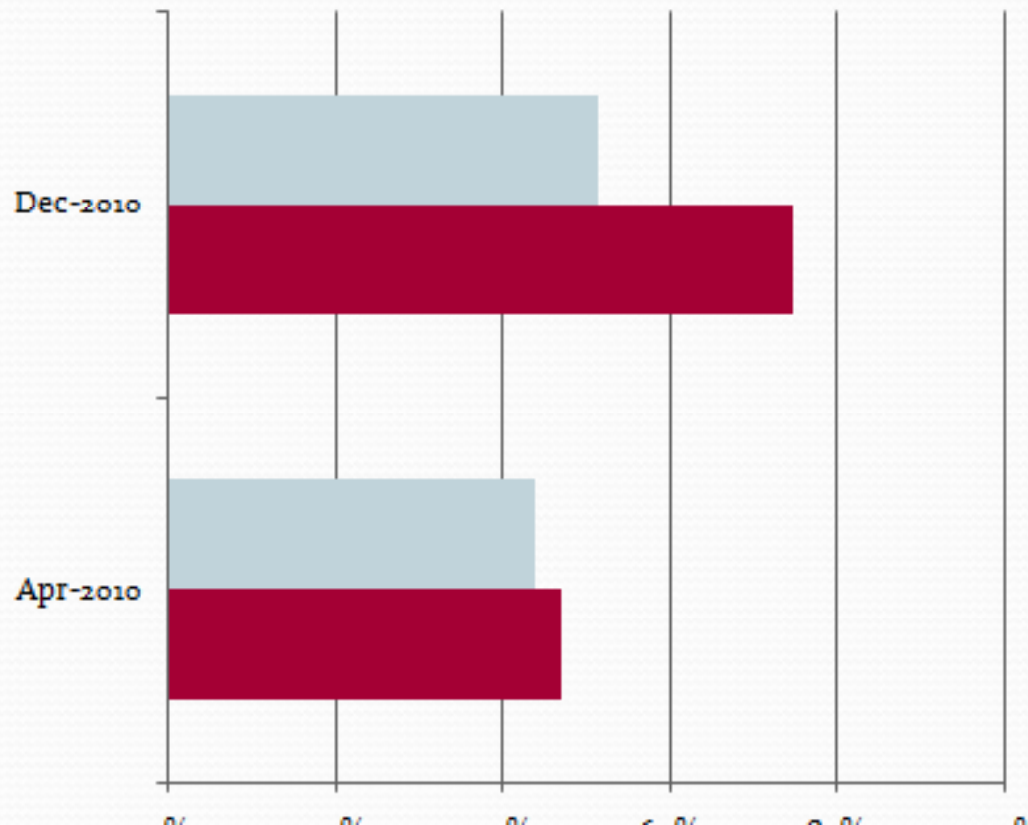
➤ **61% of teachers said adults in their school do NOT feel free to admit when need to improve**

➤ **85% of teachers said district doesn't do a good job identifying ineffective teachers**

Teaching & Curriculum | Revamped PD

Rochester Curriculum Use?

The Rochester Curriculum has been helpful to classroom practice.



➤ 77% of eligible teachers report daily use (up from 51%)

➤ 50% of principals report all or most of teacher use

➤ 3/4 of teachers say "expected to use," 43% say leadership checks use, 33% P's say Chiefs monitor

Research Capacity | New Schools Evaluation

- Opened 5 new HS 2010-11; poor track record
- Would have looked at data, but no protocol or capacity to look deeper → **missed opportunity**
 - student & staff surveys
 - site visits
 - partner interviews
 - student and staff profile
 - outcomes
 - set protocol for Y2 and beyond

Challenge #2: How can we talk about all this in objective, useful ways? Who's the audience anyway?

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October 14, 2010

Measuring Up Improving the of Data in the R

What needs to happen next?

1 Effort and money should continue to support improving data coordination, access, and integrity. To some extent, we'd expect this to occur naturally at the school level as numbers are made more public and used to make decisions. To speed this process, the district should continue to conduct data audits for schools, and aggressively ensure that all personnel who enter data receive proper training, promoting a culture that reinforces the effective use of credible information.

The new data warehouse should spur standardization of definitions, calculations and protocols for data entry and analysis. Data are only useful if standardized at the point of collection and interpretation.

Implementation of the data warehouse tool needs to be collaboratively and carefully managed, especially by the lead departments of Information Management & Technology and the Office of Accountability. Previous system installations (e.g., Chancery) were not appropriately managed, and the district is still dealing with problems in that student information system as a result.

2 Roles and responsibilities regarding data need to be redefined as information moves to center stage.

- Who "owns" certain datasets?
- Who gets access? Who has permission to correct or add data? How can data be made broadly available while maintaining appropriate confidentiality?
- What are the critical reports/metrics for various staff to use and how frequently?
- Who is responsible for building capacity to use data, and for ensuring its use?

3 Continue to build interest in and capacity to use data to improve teaching and learning at all levels, with all employees. Building data into regular strategy discussions will help drive culture change and align decision-making teams. For example, central office meetings should have more of a consistent data focus and school-based planning teams should be provided training in the use of data to improve teaching and learning.

People Count—Investment in infrastructure won't accomplish much unless more employees on the ground level (not only principals and teachers but also assistant principals, counselors, secretaries, etc.) understand the importance of accurate data and the power of good analysis. This will transform the mantra of "data-driven per-
... " which has been voiced by

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What we've learned | What we're still wrestling with

- **FIRST**, there is value to the “squishy” side of applied research, but hard to quantify/justify/fund;
 - Documenting roll-out of teacher eval is HUGE need
- **SECOND**, iterative (and costly) to target what's useful, and to build relationships
- **THIRD**, navigating inside-outside is tricky
- **FOURTH**, timing is challenging
- **FIFTH**, leadership-dependent at early stage