



The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code/DBN	530600010000
District	Schenectady City School District
District Address	108 Education Drive, Schenectady, NY 12303
Superintendent	Laurence T. Spring
Date(s) of Review	March 1, 2013
Schools Discussed in this Report	Lincoln Elementary School, Mont Pleasant Middle School

District Information Sheet											
District Grade Configuration	Pre-K -12	Total Student Enrollment	10,013	% Title 1 Population	73%	% Attendance Rate	92%				
% Free Lunch	67%	% Reduced Lunch	8%	% Student Sustainability	96%	% Limited English Proficient	4%	% Students with Disabilities	17%		
Racial/Ethnic Origin of District Student Population											
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	% Black or African American	33%	% Hispanic or Latino	17%	% Asian, Native Hawaiian /Other Pacific Islander	16%	% White	32%	% Multi-racial	2%
Personnel											
Number Years Superintendent Assigned/ Appointed to District	Less than 1 year	Number of Deputy Superintendents	0	Average Years Deputy Superintendents in Role in the District	N/A	# of Directors of Programs	6 (program and operations)				
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate in District	0%	% Teaching Out of Certification in District	0%	% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Yrs. of Exp. in District	10%	Average Teacher Absences in District	10 (days per teacher)				
Overall State Accountability Status (Mark applicable box with an X)											
District in Good Standing		Focus District	X	Number of Focus Schools Identified by District	4	Number of SIG (a) Recipient Schools	1	Number of Schools in Status	18		
% ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	33%	% Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4	41%	% Science Performance at levels 3 & 4	67%	% 4 yr. Graduation Rate (for HS only)	57% (2006 Cohort with August Grads)	% 6 yr. Graduation Rate (for HS only)	58% (2006 Cohort)		

Did Not Meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA			
	American Indian or Alaska Native	X	Black or African American
X	Hispanic or Latino		Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
	White		Multi-racial
X	Students with Disabilities		Limited English Proficient
	Economically Disadvantaged		
Did Not Meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Mathematics			
	American Indian or Alaska Native	X	Black or African American
X	Hispanic or Latino		Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
	White		Multi-racial
X	Students with Disabilities		Limited English Proficient
	Economically Disadvantaged		
Did Not Meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Science			
	American Indian or Alaska Native		Black or African American
	Hispanic or Latino		Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
	White		Multi-racial
	Students with Disabilities		Limited English Proficient
	Economically Disadvantaged		
Did Not Meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for Effective Annual Measurable Achievement Objective			
X	Limited English Proficiency		

Tenet 1 - District Leadership and Capacity: The district examines school systems and makes intentional decisions to identify and provide critical expectations, supports and structures in all areas of need so that schools are able to respond to their community and ensure that all students are successful.

Mark an "X" in the box below the appropriate designation for each statement of practice (SOP), and indicate in the OVERALL RATING" row the final designation for the overall tenet rating.

#	Statement of Practice	H	E	D	I
1.1	The district has a comprehensive approach for recruiting, evaluating and sustaining high-quality personnel that affords schools the ability to ensure success by addressing the needs of their community.		X		
1.2	The district is organized and allocates resources (financial, staff support, materials, etc.) in a way that leads to appropriate levels of support for schools based on the needs of the school community, which promotes school improvement and success.		X		
1.3	The district leadership has a comprehensive explicit theory of action about school culture that robustly communicates high expectations for addressing the needs of all constituents.			X	
1.4	The district has a comprehensive plan to create, deliver and monitor professional development in all pertinent areas that is adaptive and tailored to the needs of individual schools.			X	
1.5	The district promotes a data-driven culture by providing strategies connected to best practices that all staff members and school communities are expected to be held accountable for implementing.			X	
	OVERALL RATING FOR TENET 1:			X	

Tenet 2 - School Leader Practices and Decisions: Visionary leaders create a school community and culture that lead to success, well-being and high academic outcomes for all students via systems of continuous and sustainable school improvement.

#	Statement of Practice	H	E	D	I
2.1	The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports for the school leader to create, develop and nurture a school environment that is responsive to the needs of the entire school community.		X		

Tenet 3 - Curriculum Development and Support: The school has rigorous and coherent curricula and assessments that are appropriately aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) for all students and are modified for identified subgroups in order to maximize teacher instructional practices and student learning outcomes.

#	Statement of Practice	H	E	D	I
3.1	The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports that are connected to the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum appropriately aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and are inclusive of the arts, technology and other enrichment subjects in a data-driven culture.			X	

Tenet 4 - Teacher Practices and Decisions: Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students and pertinent subgroups experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking and achievement.

#	Statement of Practice	H	E	D	I
4.1	The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports for teachers to develop strategies and practices that lead to effective planning and account for student data, needs, goals, and levels of engagement.			X	

Tenet 5 - Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health: The school community identifies, promotes, and supports social and emotional development by designing systems and experiences that lead to healthy relationships and a safe, respectful environment that is conducive to learning for all constituents.

#	Statement of Practice	H	E	D	I
5.1	The district creates policy and works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and resources that positively support students' social and emotional developmental health.			X	

Tenet 6 - Family and Community Engagement: The school creates a culture of partnership where families, community members and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being.

#	Statement of Practice	H	E	D	I
6.1	The district has a comprehensive family and community engagement strategic plan that states the expectations around creating and sustaining a welcoming environment for families, reciprocal communication, and establishing partnerships with community organizations and families.			X	

District Review Narrative:

Tenet 1 - District Leadership and Capacity: The district examines school systems and makes intentional decisions to identify and provide critical expectations, supports and structures in all areas of need so that schools are able to respond to their community and ensure that all students are successful.

Statement of Practice 1.1: The district has a comprehensive approach for recruiting, evaluating and sustaining high-quality personnel that affords schools the ability to ensure success by addressing the needs of their community.

Debriefing Statement:

The district has developed a plan in place for recruiting, evaluating and sustaining high-quality personnel. The plan includes a partnership with BOCES that allows them the ability to hire from a pool of applicants from an online application system (OLAS). They also develop internal candidates, specifically for administrative positions.

Strength:

- The District has hiring and recruitment strategies and a plan for supporting school leaders and staff. As reported by the Superintendent in the Self-Assessment, “We have become explicit in our desire to hire staff who believes that race, economics, and disability should not serve as predictors of student achievement and have knowledge and skills to help reverse our current [statistics] in this regard.” In partnership with BOCES, the District uses the Online Application System for Educators (OLAS) to assist in the recruitment of teachers and administrators. This allows the District to streamline processes and procedures associated with recruitment by providing them the ability to view resumes online and quickly sort potential candidates by their qualifications and certification areas. District personnel reported that they are making plans to enhance recruitment strategies to include recruitment from New York University in New York City. In interviews, the IIT heard that District directors and school leaders have had professional development (PD) on APPR, and that District coordinators are assisting with the APPR process. District personnel also stated that school leaders had received re-training on evaluating and developing teachers for effective instruction and that some teachers had participated in this training. Furthermore, District personnel stated that they are trying to target staff reductions that will not directly affect students. District personnel reported to the IIT that the district offers competitive salaries and provides mentors to new staff. The District’s comprehensive approach to human capital has allowed the District, within current budget constraints, to ensure that schools have many of the personnel in place to meet the needs of each school community.

Statement of Practice 1.2: The district is organized and allocates resources (financial, staff support, materials, etc.) in a way that leads to appropriate levels of support for schools based on the needs of the school community, which promotes school improvement and success.

Debriefing Statement:

The district has used a more decentralized approach to the allocation of resources (financial, staff support, materials, etc.) to individual buildings with school leaders making the decision decisions based on the needs of their buildings. The building allocations were based on per pupil basis and did not reflect the strategic use of funds to address the unique needs of buildings. The superintendent has identified a problem solving process that will be used for future allocation resources and existing resources will be realigned to the unique needs of buildings.

Strength:

- The District has structures for assessing and deploying resources, giving support to school leaders regarding how to benefit from their resources, and ensuring that the District allocates resources throughout the District so that schools can meet needs. The superintendent has identified a problem solving approach the District will use for future allocation of resources to realign them with needs. As he reported, “[The new] Schenectady committee for Equity and Excellence... will establish guidelines for equity in our ‘outputs’ as well as our ‘inputs’ or resource allocations.” The IIT learned that a Director of Business and Finance was hired in January 2012 and the Administrative Council began meeting in November 2012 to review current programs and look at potential scenarios based on the budget deficit and potential cutbacks. In the interim, school leaders based their budgets on level funding amounts. In interviews with the IIT, District personnel described how individual schools determine the allocation of fiscal resources based on their needs. The IIT also heard that the District recently had provided training for principals on using the fiscal data management program for budget development. In addition, as reported to the IIT, the Director and Assistant Director of Special Education have made an effort to track students with disabilities programming needs and trends based on annual review meetings for special education planning. It was further reported that the District Management Council (DMC), one of the partners in the Systemic Turnaround Grant, reviewed existing practices for the provision of services to students with disabilities and that outcomes of the study would be shared with the Director of Child & Family Services and Director of Special Education. The District personnel also shared that another study would be completed to examine general education instruction and the provision of supports for students within general education, with a focus on shifting from a response-based system to one that is prevention and intervention focused. The IIT also received information that the K-12 Coordinators for English Language Arts and mathematics helped to support vertical curricula alignment across the district and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Furthermore, the District formed a Technology Committee and worked to get more technology in place at the high school for students with disabilities and special education teachers. The District has used the resources available to address its needs and provide the assistance needed to promote academic success.

Statement of Practice 1.3: The district leadership has a comprehensive explicit theory of action about school culture that robustly communicates high expectations for addressing the needs of all constituents.

Debriefing Statement:

The district leadership has an explicit theory of action that communicates high expectations for addressing the needs of all constituents. However, staff have not consistently aligned their professional practices to student outcomes.

Area for Improvement:

- The new superintendent has an explicit theory of action that he has communicated to district and school administrators and the operationalization of which is in process. The understanding of this theory of action and the urgency associated with it varied among District personnel. The Superintendent described the theory of action as “the belief that smart is not something that children are, but rather something that children can become.” He reported to the IIT that this theory had begun to be the focus of conversations at Administrative Council Meetings and school level faculty meetings. District personnel indicated that the capacity of school leaders to be instructional leaders varies and that the District will provide PD in summer 2013 to school leaders on increasing expectations. The IIT heard that District Coordinators meet with the elementary Teaching and Learning coaches each month

and that District Coordinators guide the coaches to focus on instructional practices; however, the school leaders sometimes pull the coaches away from their instructional work to complete other tasks. The superintendent expressed a vision for assigning special education teachers to individual content areas at the high school level, rather than having these teachers work across multiple content areas, and there is a desire to hire dual certified teachers to help increase student achievement. The IIT found that special education school staff recommend that students be placed only in the special education programs staff know are currently available in their schools. As a result, programs for special education students are not always based on the students' individual needs. The District has high expectations to implement its theory of action; however, specific targeted goals are not in place and the District has just begun to communicate its expectations and goals to all school stakeholders. Therefore, the urgency to meet the needs of the entire school community is just emerging.

Statement of Practice 1.4: The district has a comprehensive plan to create, deliver and monitor professional development in all pertinent areas that is adaptive and tailored to the needs of individual schools.

Debriefing Statement:

The district offers professional development as a reactive measure to respond to areas of need based on school requests. Professional development is voluntary for teachers. There is no district plan or calendar for professional development that strategically targets identified needs that will result in improving student outcomes.

Area for Improvement:

- There is currently no district PD plan or calendar, although school leaders can use their school allocation to fund PD for their staff, and some staff have attended district-led PD even though it is voluntary. According to District personnel interviewed, there is no district budget for PD, and they are not using data-based decision-making to identify PD needs in the District. However, the District reported that school leaders make decisions on PD for their schools and staff. The IIT learned that new teacher mentors are in place; some social workers sometimes participate in PD via a partnership with Samaritan Hospital; and the Teaching and Learning Coaches received National Staff Development Coaching Academy training, and provide some embedded PD at the elementary level, but their role and focus can vary. Other District personnel indicated that there is not enough collaboration between school leaders and special education administrators regarding special education teacher PD needs and that the Director of Child and Family Services, Director of Special Education and Assistant Special Education Director, due to their restructured roles, are limited in their capacity to provide PD to special education teachers. The IIT also heard that the District no longer regularly trains paraprofessionals in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention. District personnel stated that a half day PD was provided to teachers on the first unit of Singapore mathematics this fall and that half day K-6 English Language Arts (ELA) curricula lesson study PD sessions were offered for grades three – six. However, as told to the IIT, the district-led PD is voluntary, so not all general education or special education teachers have had PD on the CCLS and new curricula. While the District does offer some PD, without a targeted data based plan for the entire school community, the District is not meeting fully the needs of individual school personnel.

Statement of Practice 1.5: The district promotes a data-driven culture by providing strategies connected to best practices that all staff members and school communities are expected to be held accountable for implementing.

Debriefing Statement:

The district promotes a data-driven culture in the community through the Schenectady City School District Achievement Targets and Improvement. This document communicates high expectations for addressing the needs of all students. Although data is increasingly available, all staff have not yet consistently gathered and analyzed formative assessments to ensure that all students, including sub-groups, have access to high-quality instruction.

Area for Improvement:

- While the District has taken steps to develop a data-driven culture, the District has not yet consistently trained staff on using formative assessments or developed consistent expectations for adjusting instruction based upon data. District personnel reported that they are sharing data depicting the status of achievement across the district and progress toward improvement goals in the *Schenectady City School District Achievement targets and Improvement* document. The IIT learned that teachers had access to assessment data via the school’s data management system, and school leaders, coaches, or other in-school supports provide the training on the use of data. Other District personnel indicated that Interim ELA assessment data was to be used to develop intervention plans for individual students and small groups of students and that the expectation for some teachers was that they completed formative assessments prior to the next benchmark to check for progress and make adjustments in instruction. However, the IIT learned that there was not a consistent expectation for teachers to collect progress-monitoring data to document progress or lack of progress on the Individual Educational Plans (IEP) goals of students with disabilities. Although the district leadership had begun to implement strategies to build expectations for district wide accountability, the lack of full implementation of data driven instruction and PD in this area has resulted in inconsistent use of data to inform instruction.

This section provides a narrative that communicates how school communities perceive the support provided by the district.

Tenet 2 - School Leader Practices and Decisions

Statement of Practice (SOP) 2.1: The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports for the school leader to create, develop and nurture a school environment that is responsive to the needs of the entire school community.

SOP Rating

E

Strength:

- The District is supportive of the school leaders and provides them with the ability to make decisions for their individual school needs. As reported by District personnel, the district theory of action includes a focus on developing the capacity of school leaders. In addition, the IIT learned that school leaders had control over their school budget and professional development for their staff. In one school, the IIT heard that the District supported the school leader in obtaining the School Improvement Fund (SIF) Grant awarded for 2013-16, which provides wrap around services for families and students in partnership with Ellis Hospital and Northeast Parent and Child. In addition, District personnel stated that school leaders had some control over staff assignments within their schools and that school leaders

could choose paraprofessionals for open positions from an established paraprofessional substitute list. The IIT also learned that District personnel assisted school leaders with the APPR process this year, and that District-level Coordinators and coaches assisted school leaders with the development and implementation of CCLS-aligned curriculum and instruction. As a result of the district support, school leaders are able to develop and nurture schools that are responsive to the needs of the school community.

Tenet 3 - Curriculum Development and Support

Statement of Practice (SOP) 3.1: The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports that are connected to the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum appropriately aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and are inclusive of the arts, technology and other enrichment subjects in a data-driven culture.

SOP Rating

D

Area for Improvement:

- The District created a framework for CCLS used by the schools and has begun developing and implementing CCLS aligned curricula and units of study. The district provision of CCLS aligned curriculum for ELA and mathematics enabled school leaders to focus resources on CCLS implementation. According to documents reviewed and interviews with the District, the IIT found that the Office of Instructional Support Coordinators works with school leaders, attends school-level meetings when available, meets regularly with Teaching and Learning Coaches to model best practices and teaching strategies, and observes special education teachers to assess their implementation of instruction aligned to CCLS. The IIT also determined that the ELA Coordinator meet regularly with district literacy coaches to modify units to better align them with CCLS, create assessments aligned to CCLS and develop resources to support teacher needs. District personnel shared that the ELA Coordinator meets regularly with BOCES coaches and works on examining evidence of CCLS implementation in classrooms, and the ELA coordinator will also works on mentor texts, anchor papers, and rubrics for unit implementation. The IIT learned that district curricula and resource supports are available on the district’s T-Share and on Curriculum Connector/Performance Plus and the District shares resources with school staff via e-mail. District personnel also stated District Coordinators support school coaches who are providing instructional and administrative support at the elementary and secondary levels. District personnel mentioned that Coordinators work with school coaches on protocols for analyzing data, but did not mention how the Coordinators are integrating arts, technology or other enrichment subjects. Thus, although the District provided schools with support on CCLS, they are still in the process of developing curricula and integrating arts, technology, and other enrichment areas into the CCLS curriculum, which limits student access to a comprehensive curriculum.

Tenet 4 - Teacher Practices and Decisions

Statement of Practice (SOP) 4.1: The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports for teachers to develop strategies and practices that lead to effective planning and account for student data, needs, goals, and levels of engagement.

SOP Rating

D

Area for Improvement:

- The District does not have a formal written plan or calendar of PD offerings for school leaders, teachers or instructional support staff. In addition, although some PD offered district wide takes into account school or student data, the District has a limited system for providing follow up support to the PD in which school staff participate. District personnel reported that there is not a district PD plan or calendar and that school leaders determine the PD for their schools. Furthermore, the IIT learned that though there are learning opportunities for teachers, participation in district-led PD is voluntary. District staff also stated that there is “limited time and avenues for collaboration between buildings and the District.” District and school staff told the IIT that Teaching and Learning coaches provide some embedded PD (e.g., modeling lessons, instructional planning, analyzing student work, gathering resources, assisting in RtI strategies), but their role and focus varies. District employees in the central office indicated that “Assessment data and benchmark data are increasingly available, though staff are not yet consistently trained or using formative assessments or adjusting instruction based on data.” According to the District, the Office of Instructional Support Coordinators meet with school leaders and attend school meetings when asked or intermittently. One of the school leaders mentioned that there are Administrative Council Meetings for school leaders required twice a month, and this is PD for school leaders. Staff in one school voiced that they felt there is no instructional leadership from the special education department, and there is not sufficient use of data in making special education decisions. Due to the inconsistent amount of collaboration between school staff and district leadership and the limited amount of PD on data-driven instruction, the District’s ability to effectively plan and maximize student learning is not fully realized.

Tenet 5- Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health

Statement of Practice (SOP) 5.1: The district creates policy and works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and resources that positively support students’ social and emotional developmental health.

SOP Rating

D

Area for Improvement:

- The District has multiple policies, programs, and partnerships that support student social and emotional development in the schools. However, it is unclear whether there is an overarching policy or plan for how the multiple programs, collaborations and intervention structures form a cohesive system of prevention, support, and intervention. District personnel reported having many policies related to social and emotional development (e.g., Bullying, Children with Disabilities, Grouping by Similarity of Need, Student IEP Development and Provision, Guidance Program, and Civility, Citizenship and Character Education). District staff also described engagement in partnerships with numerous community agencies for the schools, such as Child Guidance, Boys and Girls Club, and Schenectady Police Department Probation. Reviewers at one school heard that the district supported the school in obtaining a School Improvement Fund (SIF) Grant awarded for 2013-16, which provides wrap around services for families and students through a partnership with with Ellis Hospital and Northeast Parent and Child Society. The IIT learned that a Community Collaborators group made up of representatives from the District office, schools, agencies, the county and parents meets monthly, and the District and schools have participated in training on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). However, some central office staff identified student behavior as a concern in the district. They felt that current practices for behavioral interventions do not get at the reason for behaviors in order to identify effective interventions, and this often results in students referred to special education. The IIT also

heard that School Based Support Teams (SBST) existed, but the quality varied by building and that teams sometimes do not get to root causes for student difficulties and do not follow through on intervention implementation. District staff indicated that the pre-referral process would now include the Director of Child & Family Services or the Director of Special Education observing the student in his or her class and making recommendations for supports. The IIT also learned that there was disproportionality in the suspension of students with disabilities in the District. The district participated in technical assistance on disproportionality data analysis and interventions from the Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality at NYU and part of the work with NYU was focused on standardizing SBST forms and procedures; however, this work had been recently suspended. Therefore, although certain programs, resources, and supportive community partnerships have some positive impact on the schools, the District and schools' capacity to support student social and emotional needs is limited, which diminishes the potential for increases in student achievement.

Tenet 6 - Family and Community Engagement

Statement of Practice (SOP) 6.1: The district has a comprehensive family and community engagement strategic plan that states the expectations around creating and sustaining a welcoming environment for families, reciprocal communication, and establishing partnerships with community organizations and families.

SOP Rating

D

Area for Improvement:

- The District has many policies for involving parents and families; however, the district does not have a tactical strategy for engaging fully parents, families, and the community in mutual planning for increased student achievement. District personnel reported there are many current policies that involve parents and families, such as policies concerning interpreter services and parent access to information. District personnel indicated that the District assists Title I schools with the implementation of Parent Partnership Teams, and the District also provides a liaison to the PTO and PTO council. The District supports a Community Collaborators group that meets monthly and includes representatives from the District, the schools, community agencies, county and parents. The IIT also saw that the District and schools' websites provide parents with information on community agencies and opportunities for families to connect with these agencies. However, according to personnel interviewed by the IIT, the District has moved some elementary students with disabilities between schools and this has negatively affected the relationship between the students' parents and the school staff. The IIT was also unclear how the district is reporting progress on IEP goals to parents without IEP goal progress monitoring data. Furthermore, there is limited evidence to indicate that the District is working in connection with the schools on creating and sustaining a welcoming environment for parents and families. Without a comprehensive strategic plan that expects all school leaders to engage collaboratively with parents, families, community constituents, and external partners, not all schools have the systems and structures to ensure family participation and student success.

DISTRICT LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Tenet 1: District Leadership and Capacity

In order for the District's strategy and practices to fully align with the concepts in the Effective column of Tenet 1, the District should:

- 1.3: Develop a comprehensive, written theory of action including a vision and clearly delineated outcomes based on high academic expectations. District personnel should have strategies for ensuring that they communicate the written document to the entire school community and that all constituents in the school District have an understanding of the action plan.
- 1.4: Design a calendar of PD opportunities that is inclusive of District needs and meets the discrete needs of each school in the District. Use factors that include the District's strategic plan and student data to inform the PD needs.
- 1.5: Provide professional development to teachers, staff and leadership that results in greater understanding of a data driven culture. Use of data to drive instruction and monitor student progress should be required practice at the District, school, and classroom levels.