



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	140600010000
District	Buffalo City School District
District Address	712 City Hall, 65 Niagara Square, Buffalo, NY 14202
Superintendent	Pamela C. Brown
Dates of Review	May 19 and 22, 2014
Schools Discussed in this Report	McKinley Vocational High School; Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center; Frank A. Sedita School; Harvey Austin School; West Hertel School; Southside Elementary School; Buffalo Elementary School of Technology; D'Youville Porter Elementary School; Middle Early College High School

District Information Sheet											
District Grade Configuration	PS-12	Total Student Enrollment	33852	Title 1 Population	79.1%	Attendance Rate	89%				
Free Lunch	74.2%	Reduced Lunch	4.9%	Student Sustainability	n/a	Limited English Proficient	12.3%	Students with Disabilities	19.1%		
Racial/Ethnic Origin of District Student Population											
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.1%	Black or African American	50.1%	Hispanic or Latino	17.4%	Asian or Native Hawaiian /Other Pacific Islander	7.3%	White	21.4%	Multi-racial	2.8%
Personnel											
Number Years Superintendent Assigned/Appointed to District	1.8	Number of Deputy Superintendents	1	Average Years Dep. Superintendents in Role in the District	1	# of Directors of Programs	32				
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate in District	1.0%	% Teaching Out of Certification in District	2.0%	% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Yrs. of Exp. in District	4.0%	Average Teacher Absences in District	Not available at this time				
Overall State Accountability Status (Mark applicable box with an X)											
District in Good Standing		Focus District	X	Number of Focus School Identified by District	16	Number of SIG Recipient Schools	14	Number of Schools in Status	44		
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	13.1%	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4	11.4%	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4	57.6%	4 yr. Graduation Rate (for HS only)	56.0%	6 yr. Graduation Rate (for HS only)	59.1%		

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

#	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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.2	The district leadership has a comprehensive and explicit theory of action about school culture that communicates high expectations for addressing the needs of all constituents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.3	The district is organized and allocates resources (financial, staff support, materials, etc.) in a way that aligns appropriate levels of support for schools based on the needs of the school community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	OVERALL RATING FOR TENET 1:				I

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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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(s) to ensure CCLS curriculum that provide 21st Century and College and Career Readiness skills in all content areas and provides fiscal and human resources for implementation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 and addresses effective planning and account for student data, needs, goals, and levels of engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

District Review – Findings, Evidence, Impact and Recommendations:

<p>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.</p>	<p>Overall Tenet Rating</p>	<p>I</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Tenet Rating</p>	<p>I</p>
<p><u>Debriefing Statement:</u></p> <p>The district has internal recruitment strategies and external partnerships with colleges and agencies to secure adequate personnel in schools. District leaders prioritize finding staff for shortage subject areas, such as for mathematics, limited English proficiency (LEP), and special education classrooms. District leaders take steps to hire staff of high quality; however, the placement of staff members throughout the district occurs with little consideration given to specific school needs. The District does not have a comprehensive professional development plan. Therefore, the professional learning opportunities are not coherent or connected to an overall vision to address the acceleration of improved students outcomes. The district has promoted professional development (PD) through training and coaching; however, training and coaching have not resulted in the application of new practices in classrooms, so improvements are slow.</p> <p><u>Areas for Improvement:</u></p> <p>Overall Finding:</p> <p>The district has developed initial systems and processes concerning the recruitment and retention of staff; however, these systems are not connected to evaluation ratings under APPR for all staff, and there is a lack of cohesion in the deployment of staff across schools, coupled with PD that is not tied to APPR data and is therefore not having the impact on classrooms necessary to raise achievement levels for all groups of students.. Further, the district continues to struggle with ensuring that all educators who require an annual professional performance review (APPR) receive one.</p> <p>Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district has a number of incentives to attract top-quality staff and has systems in place for providing training opportunities. Its plan for recruitment is wide ranging, with special attention focused on seeking teachers from outside the district for shortage subjects. Significant funding has been allocated by the district to develop processes to recruit and retain effective instructional staff district-wide. This funding includes an allocation of \$25,000 to advertise in national publications to bring viable candidates into the district, along with funding to provide support for a candidate screening process and the development of partnerships with colleges and career services. While the district secured a \$500,000 Model Induction Grant to enhance the support to early career educators 		

in low performing schools and teachers in specific teacher shortage areas, the district only used \$313,069 of the \$500,000 available. In addition, school leaders reported little choice in determining whom they can hire. Furthermore, school staff shared that it was unclear why staff are moved around the district, saying the moves seem to be done “at random.” One teacher told reviewers about applying to the district because of a desire to work in a particular school that shared her educational philosophy. Although hired, district leaders did not appoint the teacher to that particular school despite appropriate vacancies. School leaders talked of teachers being moved around the district and of school leaders being assigned to schools with little consideration given to their backgrounds and experiences. School leaders reported that PD did not always align to school needs.

- Staff in the Talent Management Department provided documents that outlined the responsibilities of the central office staff and protocols that help school communities navigate district departments effectively. These documents itemized the steps necessary for each procedure and service offered by the district, so that both users and providers have a clear understanding of delivery mechanisms across the district.
- District leaders stated that they use data to engage in conversations with school leaders and teachers about performance, strengths, and opportunities for development.
- The district offers a number of PD opportunities; however, the district does not consistently use data to inform PD or connect it to the evidence collected under APPR and in the quality of instruction in schools. Pathways to Success, the district’s strategic plan for 2013-18, and the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP) have, within the list of objectives related to raising student achievement, many strategies and actions designed to improve PD. However, the review team found limited evidence of the impact that PD is having on classroom instruction.
- During the 2012-13 school year, the Department identified a number of issues surrounding the implementation of the district’s APPR plan. Chief among those concerns were missing or incomplete evaluations for more than one-third of the district’s educators as well as notice that the district had entered into a side agreement with its teachers union to not use APPR results for employment related decisions. As a result of these concerns, the Office of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness commenced monitoring of the district’s APPR implementation. For the 2013-14 school year, the district had similar struggles providing complete evaluations to all educators. Based on a comparison of the staff evaluation record that was submitted to the Department for the October 17th deadline and the district’s IMF file, evaluation records were only submitted for 73% of educators (2512 of 3454 educators, including teachers and principals). Additionally, of those records that were submitted, 24% of teachers and 9% of principals were missing data for at least one subcomponent of the evaluation. This means that nearly a quarter of teacher evaluations and 9% of principal evaluations were incomplete. The district has begun making improvements to existing data management systems that are expected to provide more complete records beginning in the 2014-15

school year.

Impact Statement:

Without a clear system committed to ensuring that staff are hired, assigned to an appropriate school and developed professionally, the district struggles to ensure that personnel are able to effectively address the needs of its students.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Place staff in schools by aligning their skills and performance with school identified needs so that student achievement is enhanced; ensure, through staff evaluation and staff management, that PD is delivered in ways that maximizes the use of time and talent; and monitor that the application of learning is immediately implemented to improve curricular and instructional practices.
- Improve data collection and management systems to ensure that all staff are evaluated annually and held accountable for student performance.

Statement of Practice 1.2.: The district leadership has a comprehensive and explicit theory of action about school culture that communicates high expectations for addressing the needs of all constituents.

Tenet Rating

I

Debriefing Statement:

The district leader expresses a theory of action about raising student performance as a part of Pathways to Success, the five-year strategic plan for the district. A review of this plan and other documents demonstrate clear objectives and practical actions to bring about improvement. However, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and actions to improve schools are not consistent. Despite indications of recent progress, student outcomes across multiple measures are still low. The district self-assessment claims consistent effectiveness in all tenets, although district cabinet members acknowledged that these judgments reflect progress from low levels, rather than performance at high levels.

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

While the district is developing plans to ensure schools understand the directions and actions needed to improve student performance, the current implementation, monitoring and evaluation of practices do not consistently support improvement across the district.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- The district has communicated its high expectations for school culture through the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) framework in order to drive the planning process and

involve constituents in the process. District-level planning is developed and the various tiers of planning are coordinated. Nevertheless, there are inconsistencies around the implementation of the various plans, partly because of their complexity. Pathways to Success, the strategic plan for 2013-18, sets out a clear mission with core beliefs, priorities for change, and a framework for coherence targeted on improving instructional outcomes. This document also contains a route for improvement, with detailed Specific, Measureable, Ambitious, Results-oriented, and Timely (SMART) objectives linked to the DCIP. However, while the Pathways status update indicates that the district has made significant progress, the DCIP status update indicates only partial progress at this stage.

- Monitoring and evaluation processes are established, but actions to improve schools based on findings and feedback from these processes are limited. During school visits, the review team found that while school leaders were completing evaluation templates and providing feedback to teachers, there was limited evidence of the implementation of practical strategies and structures for improving practice.
- The district has been identified by NYSED as “needs intervention” district for the second consecutive year to implement the requirements of Part B of IDEA. The district’s data shows, for the subgroup of students with disabilities, a graduation rate of 29.2 percent; a dropout rate of 34.3 percent; overall low performance results in the areas of English language arts and math and a 90 percent participation rate of students with disabilities in English language arts and math State assessments at the high school level; 4.4 percent of its students with disabilities suspended for 10 days or more; and placement of 11 percent of students with disabilities, ages 5-21, in separate settings.
- District leadership currently lacks a plan to address the above areas of concern regarding students with disabilities. To that end, the district may need to allocate more resources to the special education administrative team. Additionally, such special education administration must be situated in the overall district administration so that they have the ability to implement, across all schools in the district, the depth and breadth of systemic change to increase the outcomes for students with disabilities.
- The district commissioned the Council of Great City Schools to review their special education programs. The resulting report identified that the service delivery system for students with disabilities requires substantial reform and improvement. These findings are consistent with the concerns identified by the NYSED Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) office. The report noted a high identification rate of students with disabilities, particularly in the district’s priority and focus schools. Additionally, the report cited a lack of a consistent special education data system for both programming and reporting purposes. The Council team felt that evidence-based instructional practices were not reliably implemented in schools across the district or that the evidence-based interventions were being implemented with fidelity. They also found that co-teaching models were not effective, professional development was inadequate and special education programming was

rarely evaluated for its effectiveness.

- The district has been identified for six years as having a higher rate of suspension of students with disabilities as compared to the State average. Additionally, the district is disproportionate in the number of African American students with disabilities who are long term suspended for 11 or more days.
- Ineffective and inconsistent implementation of tiered levels of support (RtI, PBIS) in schools across the district has contributed to high suspension rates and high rates of special education classifications.
- The review team found that the district is developing strategies to improve student achievement. The district submitted documentation to show that graduation rates and college matriculation improved by almost ten percent from 2012 to 2013. Improvements were also visible in career and technical education results. Compared to 2010-11 when only one accountability group out of ten reached made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), in 2012-13, five, seven, and ten groups made AYP in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science, respectively. The district also saw improvements between two and five percent in the Regents examination results in those subjects. Similarly, in terms of student social and emotional development, indicators showed improvement, with decreases of 12 percent in short-term suspensions, 19 percent in dropout rates, and ten percent in severe absenteeism.
- While English Language Learners (ELLs) are concentrated in a small number of schools, there appears to be no apparent purpose for this placement, since the ELLs are not benefitting from rich instruction designed to support their specific language needs.
- The district lacks focused professional development designed to systematically improve staff capacity at addressing ELL student needs. In addition, translators are used in the classroom to provide access to native language to ELL students in a haphazard way that does not benefit the students in attaining English or content area instruction.

Impact Statement:

Monitoring and evaluation at district and school levels do not consistently lead to purposeful actions and, therefore, do not contribute consistently to the community's drive to raise the levels of student achievement.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Ensure that procedures are in place to rigorously implement, monitor, and evaluate all strategies and initiatives intended to drive improvements in school and student achievement. Provide compelling evidence, using statistical data where appropriate, that demonstrates gains in student progress.

Statement of Practice 1.3: The district is organized and allocates resources (financial, staff support, materials, etc.) in a way that aligns appropriate levels of support for schools based on the needs of the school community.

Tenet Rating

I

Debriefing Statement:

While some funding streams and grants have been secured, the district cabinet reported that the district has been slow in determining how to use these resources to build sustainable capacity. Mechanisms to ensure improvements in student achievement and social and emotional developmental health are not sufficiently evident. Although the district is beginning to collect and analyze data, the information is not yet being used effectively to drive improvements in instruction and student learning. Consequently, students are not progressing quickly enough in reaching higher standards in their learning and development. Further, the district has been unable to take advantage of numerous funding opportunities and/or has often underspent its grant funding, including in particular school improvement funds provide through 1003(a) and 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

Resources are allocated across the district through structures aligned to plans that support schools in meeting their community's needs; however, the organization and administration of these resources are not effectively promoting school improvement and student success.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- The district uses structures, such as school leader meetings and school-based budgeting, to inform its deployment of resources. Efforts have been successful in bringing increased levels of funding to the district and its schools. The district offers school leaders generic support, such as training for school-based leadership teams from the Director of Budget and Grant Management, a school-based budget handbook, and an Observation Tracker to collect data on teacher practices. Staged funding has been successfully used to refurbish or rebuild the supply of materials and equipment in the district's schools. Grant funding has been received in considerable amounts via School Improvement Grants (SIGs) over four cohorts of schools. While SIGs are limited to a given time period, little has been done to use them to secure changes in practices that would sustain improvements over the long term. In addition, while BPS had successfully competed for 1003(g) grants for Lafayette and East High Schools that would have brought considerable additional resources to these schools beginning with the 2014-15 school year, the termination of the Educational Partnership Organization (EPO) agreement between Johns Hopkins University and BPS resulted in the loss of these funds.
- The district assists school leaders in allocating resources at the school level with input from their school-based leadership teams and provides funding from the Contract for Excellence (C4E) for school use. These and other sources, especially those from the C4E, are consistently described as

being based on the needs of students, staff, and families. However, reviewers did not see consistently efficient systems to deploy resources toward high impact action. Despite some indications of recent progress by some groups of students, student outcomes are still low in terms of comparative attainment. The review team found that systems across the district overlapped in terms of monitoring, which resulted in conflicting messages and expectations about curriculum and lesson planning. For example, all schools are connected to one of the four area district chiefs who each have personnel that routinely interact with the school, such as supervising principals, instructional coaches, and a director. Within each area, there is staff responsible for finance, human resources, and accountability that report to the director. Teacher leaders and school leaders are required to submit requests for additional resources through their chief. Consequently, a teacher request for additional textbooks to accommodate students entering class mid-year may become delayed in the layers of administrative rerouting. Reviewers found that these layers of people involved in processes at the district and school levels often produced disjointed structures that do not consistently meet school and student needs. Further, instructional coaches who report to the district chief's supervising principal, in addition to instructional coaches who report to the principals of each school, have caused confusion about the role of the building and district instructional coaches. This confusion has resulted in inconsistent messages being sent to teachers, and consequently, inconsistent implementation of instructional initiatives.

- Reviewers found several examples where resources did not appear to be maximized. Reviewers found layers of bureaucracy within the district, along with instances where personnel were not being used efficiently and the intended goals did not appear to be achieved. During school visits, reviewers found that both teachers in integrated co-teaching classrooms and paraprofessionals were not being utilized effectively in many classrooms. While the district has begun to use instructional coaches, under the stipulations of the teacher's union contract, coaches must be invited into classrooms by teachers. In addition, while the district eliminated neighborhood schools nearly thirty years ago to address claims of segregation, a recent report indicated that the schools within the district are just as segregated as they were when neighborhood schools still existed. As a result of the elimination of neighborhood schools, the district incurs additional transportation costs and additional obstacles concerning student attendance and parent engagement.
- Because of the failure to meet the consultation requirements of ESEA, BPS had restrictions placed on its Consolidated Application funds and its 1003(a) school improvement funds, which limited the utility of these resources during the 2013-14 school year. For example, although final budgets may revise these figures upward, BPS has currently been paid a little less than \$400,000 out of the almost \$1.7 million the district was allocated in 1003(a) School Improvement grants for the 2013-14 school year.
- In addition, the district has had funds temporarily withheld as a result of the district's failure to follow guidelines and procedures. In December, the State Education Department placed a temporary hold on \$36 million in federal aid after a complaint was filed alleging that the district did not properly consult with parent constituents on grant applications and improvement plans. As of

the date of the review, the district has not fully implemented the appropriate steps to consult with parent constituents and secure the funds being withheld.

- The district secured a \$500,000 two-year Model Induction Grant, to support early career educators in low performing schools and specific teacher shortage areas. In June 2013, NYSED contacted the district with concerns regarding the implementation of year one of the grant and concerns that the district had only spent \$6,969 of the \$195,973 set aside for the first year of the grant. NYSED outlined specific conditions that needed to be met in order for funding to continue. All of the requested conditions were met by the district, and funding was continued; however, at the conclusion of the grant in June 2014, Buffalo had only spent \$313,069 of the \$500,000 available to the district.

Impact Statement:

Stated planning objectives are beginning to show some impact, but resources are not appropriately aligned and used to promote or sustain school improvement and student success.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Ensure that resources, in particular staffing, are allocated throughout the district to meet the needs of schools; provide training experiences with rigorous monitoring and evaluation of impact at building and classroom levels so that efficiencies are maximized to meet the needs of students, parents, and staff more effectively.

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.

Tenet Rating

I

Debriefing Statement:

The district offers PD; however, PD is not driven by an overall PD plan or vision, and the offerings are not based on data. In addition, follow-up support is not rapidly improving instruction. A calendar listing district PD opportunities is established based on staff surveys, evaluations, and interests, but except in a few circumstances, teachers are not empowered to explore and create their own opportunities for modeling, mentoring, and sharing best practices. Therefore, the rate of improvement in teacher effectiveness across the district is slow.

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

While PD is offered across the district in a number of ways, training is not based on a vision for professional learning, nor is it tailored to the needs of individual schools.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- A review of district documents illustrate that while some PD is connected to the district's goals, there is not an overall vision that identifies what the district wants staff to know and how it will achieve that goal. The district uses the Professional Growth System (PGS), an online learning management system, to review APPR feedback and to monitor PD. The district shares available PD opportunities with staff through PGS and a course catalogue that contains 564 entries for the 2013-14 academic year. An examination of course content and conversations with subject specialists indicated that the interdisciplinary needs of students are not being addressed consistently through PD. Furthermore, it is unclear how the numerous PD offerings were developed through a systematic review of data to ensure that the courses addressed the needs of its staff. Additionally, the review team found that PD does not consistently lead to improvements in instruction across the district. In addition, PD sessions are conducted away from students and classrooms and deal strictly with principles and ideas, which hinders implementation. As a result, PD does not seem to have had a substantial impact on instructional practices.
- While instructional coaches are used within the district, there are significant obstacles that have not been addressed that limit the impact coaches have at improving instructional practices. For example, coaches are only permitted to work with staff who have requested the assistance of a coach.

Impact Statement:

PD is not adaptive or monitored in ways that lead to increases in teacher effectiveness.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Develop a written comprehensive plan for professional development and technical assistance to ensure a robust transition to CCSS. The PD plan should be based on student data and reflect targeted instructional strategies that will accelerate student achievement across multiple measures.
- Accelerate improvements in instruction by having school leaders and coaches working alongside teachers with their students in classrooms, model how to implement differentiated learning strategies, and streamline training content from the theory to instructional practice in the classroom.
- Re-evaluate work rules and look for ways to increase time devoted to mandatory professional development and teacher collaboration.
- Seek agreements with collective bargaining units to revise work rules so that coaching is non-voluntary and so that instructional coaches are expected to work with teachers rated Ineffective and

Developing and with teachers with low student outcomes.

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.

Tenet Rating

D

Debriefing Statement:

Through its strategic plan, the district has communicated expectations to all instructional leaders for the use of data to set objectives, develop assessments, provide feedback to teachers, and monitor attendance. The district cabinet team is beginning to analyze district and school data to track improvement, establish goals, and set priorities for district and school leaders. Although data demonstrates some improvements in the district, the schools, and student progress, the high number of students demonstrating a lack of academic proficiency indicates that many instructional practices do not rigorously promote increased student achievement.

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

The district has set up systems and expectations for the use of data to drive the development and delivery of best practices across all of its schools, but does not hold school communities accountable for securing high levels of student success.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- The district's strategic plan, Pathways to Success includes a plan for data use at all levels. The district uses Illuminate, an assessment management resource, with common formative assessments (CFAs) and data dashboard information capabilities to enable stakeholders to access, understand, and use data to inform their practices and identify required PD. Staff in schools across the district and in the central office reported on the data available to them from various data sources. Similarly, staff reported about those available to parents and students via the parent and student portals. However, the review team found limited evidence in regard to how the district holds staff accountable for taking action based on data.
- The Chiefs of School Leadership (COSL) support schools and help them to establish goals. School leaders reported a positive relationship with their COSLs. Support is available through differentiated school support plans; however, there is limited evidence of how these plans bring remedial action when there are practices of differing quality within the same building. The district uses data, such as the NYS District Report Card and AYP data to create district-wide targets and benchmarks for student achievement. This data demonstrates positive developments in attendance and graduation rates and in reducing dropout rates and suspensions. These developments also include significant improvements in the number of students passing Regents examinations, including a five percent increase in mathematics from 2011-12 to 2012-13.

Impact Statement:

Stakeholders across the district are developing their understanding of how students are performing, but the lack of consistency in adjusting practices at the school and classroom levels based on data limits student achievement.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Ensure that expectations, based on data, drive the work of the COSLs and school leaders in holding school staff accountable for making necessary changes in their instructional practices and actions across their communities.
- Develop a monitoring and check system to ensure COSLs are being held accountable for providing support, follow up, and assistance to schools.

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

<p>Statement of Practice 2.1 - School Leader Practices and Decisions: 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.</p>	<p>Tenet Rating</p>	<p>I</p>
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Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

The district’s guidance and assistance does not result in school leaders being consistently empowered to develop learning environments that meet the needs of the communities their schools serve.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- The district engaged with stakeholder groups to form the strategic plan for 2013-18, which is focused on key areas as determined by district leaders, the United States Department of Education (US DOE), the Race-to-the-Top initiative, the NYSED DTSDE, and a general performance analysis. While a schedule of regular meetings for school leaders district-wide illustrated an example of support, school leaders stated that much of the support they receive from the district is predetermined. School leaders see systems as already set and not responsive or flexible enough in meeting their needs. The district enacts a vision represented by the “Three Big Rocks,” which are instructional leadership, data-driven instruction (DDI), and debriefing of staff. These are viewed as

the primary leverage points to provide schools with guidance and assistance. However, the review team found that the differentiated school support plans, learning walks, and instructional rounds led by the COSLs are not producing an impact on building responsive learning environments across schools.

- Direct actions to improve schools are limited. Often SCEPs do not clearly state the actions needed to bring about the specified improvement. District and school staff members carry out and record learning walks. While the records viewed during school reviews were extensive, observation findings in classrooms showed that teachers do not take sufficient action to improve instructional practices based on the findings of the evaluations carried out. One senior member of a school leadership team described that there was little she could do to bring about direct change in classrooms beyond sharing the results of the evaluative learning walks with teachers and providing training. The district’s approach toward staff development, based on training and coaching, has often not been effective in bringing change in the classroom. This is evident in the widely different practices in classrooms in close proximity led by teachers who have had similar PD training. School staff stated that the district does not always address the needs of schools, despite the good relationships reported between COSLs and school leaders.

Impact Statement:

Plans and support systems for school leaders to create environments responsive to the needs of the school community are inconsistently executed.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Create a Principal advisory to work with District Leaders to plan, manage, deliver, and evaluate support to schools that reflect respective community needs and resource allocation.
- Create a system of differentiated accountability and support to schools based on data and needs of the community. Ensure an evaluation method is developed to monitor supports and responsiveness to school requests.
- Strengthen the quality of SCEPs at each school by making goals SMART and planned actions succinct in order to develop a shared drive to improve student achievement and well-being in collaboration with parents and the community.

Statement of Practice 3.1 - Curriculum Development and Support: The district works collaboratively with the school(s) to ensure CCLS curriculum that provide 21st Century and College and Career Readiness skills in all content areas and provides fiscal and human resources for implementation.

Tenet Rating

D

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

The district has created an expectation for schools to develop CCLS-aligned curricula; however, implementation has not been consistently successful.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- The district provides school leaders with some targeted support for the implementation of CCLS, such as curriculum development to help them align the content of their lessons in ELA, math, science and social studies to the CCLS. The district leader stated that, “the expected full implementation of the new CCLS without fully-aligned materials and limited time to provide PD,” is a challenge. The expectation is that the CCLS will drive curriculum development in lesson planning and classroom instruction and that all teachers will receive sufficient common planning time. This co-planning time includes teachers of special education and English language learners. However, the review team found that teachers do not consistently align curriculum and plans closely enough to the CCLS across schools or provide rigorous instruction that includes higher-order questioning and content appropriate to the varying needs of their students. Without consistent monitoring and follow-up at both the district and school levels, too few lessons promote curriculum content that incorporates higher-order thinking skills and requires students to analyze information.
- School leaders reported that the district does not always support initiatives at the school level to ensure that teachers work in partnership within and across grades and subjects. During school reviews within the district, reviewers found limited evidence of the development of a standards-based curriculum that integrates the arts, technology, and other enrichments areas, although some district staff reported new initiatives that are beginning to address this.
- Fiscal support for curriculum development is district based and driven by the five-year plan. While fiscal support and the district five-year plan promote coherence, reviewers found that schools lack the autonomy needed to make the curriculum relevant to different groups of pupils. In conversations with school leaders, reviewers found that the embedded centralized approach to decision making and the deployment of resources sometimes leads to a feeling that accountability is far removed from the school building.

Impact Statement:

The development of curriculum and practices used, and the lack of a comprehensive professional development plan have not consistently provided teachers with opportunities to deliver CCLS aligned instruction, which has hindered student success.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Develop master schedules within schools that allow for embedded PD to be delivered during the

school day (e.g., common planning time, late start school day to allow for PD)

- Develop a road map of essential learning, based on student data, to be delivered during grade level meetings/department meetings. Ensure a method for monitoring the delivery of the essential learning and its impact on classroom instruction.
- Make the incorporation of the CCLS in unit and lesson planning a top district priority and provide systematic support and PD for increasing interdisciplinary learning opportunities within subject specific curricula.

Statement of Practice 4.1 - Teacher Practices and Decisions: The district works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and supports for teachers to develop strategies and practices and addresses effective planning and account for student data, needs, goals, and levels of engagement.

Tenet Rating

I

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

The district does not always work with schools to provide consistently rigorous learning opportunities for all groups of students, or to support and challenge teachers to raise student achievement.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- School leaders confirmed that student performance data informs communications between the district and schools, although the district vision and goals drive conversations more than student data. The district provides many learning opportunities throughout the academic year, which are published in the calendar at the beginning of the school year. Teacher attendance at PD and the implementation of training into instruction is not evaluated against classroom performance. School leaders stated that follow-up support is offered to teachers by district coaches, but it is often not offered in practical co-teaching situations, where the coach is with students and teachers in a classroom and the changes made are visible. In addition, as a condition of the current contract with the teacher's union, coaches are not permitted to work with teachers in their classes unless the coaches have been invited by teachers, thus limiting their effectiveness.
- Support for teachers to change their instructional delivery from teacher-directed styles to student-centred methods is not explicitly provided through the coaching practices. While PD broaches this topic, actions at the school level by school leaders and district staff are not bringing about direct changes in classroom instruction.
- Discussions with students and teachers indicated that students are not involved in monitoring their own progress through self-assessment. Data-based feedback to students is not prevalent in classrooms or used consistently to empower students to take greater ownership of their learning. Further, teachers across the district do not consistently connect the analysis of data with

instructional decision making, student groupings, and targeted lesson planning.

Impact Statement:

Teacher PD does not lead to sufficiently rigorous learning opportunities for students.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Ensure teachers across the district provide consistently rigorous learning opportunities for students based on data in order to improve student success.
- Develop a comprehensive PD plan that reflects student data and teacher needs and support in order to accelerate student improvement across multiple measures of achievement.
- Create a teacher advisory that informs the District's planning and allocation of resources to schools that impact student learning and classroom environment.

Statement of Practice 5.1 - Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health: The district creates policy and works collaboratively with the school to provide opportunities and resources that positively support students' social and emotional developmental health.

Tenet Rating

I

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

The district has begun to provide some opportunities and resources to support students' social and emotional needs; however, collaboration between the community and schools has not been effective in securing success for all groups of students.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- Within its strategic plan, the district has developed a clear objective to ensure that all students will be an integral part of a healthy school community and graduate from high school prepared for success in college and career. The district provides opportunities to school-based staff to develop a professional understanding of health, wellness, and student social and emotional development. This is supported through a code of conduct and the use of teams of specialists, coaches, school counselors, and social workers. Though the district graduation rate has improved to 56 percent, one school has a graduation rate near 25 percent, and two additional high schools graduate fewer than one-third of their students, indicating that the level of support provided by the district is unequal and insufficient.
- Expanding opportunities for extended learning time is one of the district's goals, with 55 schools offering after-school programs and 6000 students participating in the 2013 summer school program.

- Evidence from school reviews indicated that schools do not consistently promote a vision for student social and emotional health and its connection to academic success. Few assessments have been used to measure the development of social and emotional health and well-being. Consequently, during the current school year, the district introduced a student management system and the Youth Behavior Risk Survey to evaluate student progress and inform decisions about which preventative services should be implemented in different schools according to need.
- African-American students with IEPs were suspended for more than 10 days at a rate that was significantly disproportionate (2.56 times more likely than peers from other racial/ethnic subgroups). As a result, the district is now required to use 15 percent of its Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds to address this disproportionality.
- There are developing partnerships with community organizations that assist schools in addressing the social and emotional health needs of students and their families. The Say Yes to Education in Buffalo program has created a task force that is laying the foundation for support work through school-based site facilitators. Additionally, every school is expected to have an implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. School review evidence shows that schools have student support teams whose members receive training in PBIS to varying degrees of effectiveness. In addition, visits to schools across the district indicate that PBIS has not been implemented with fidelity.

Impact Statement:

Students are struggling to receive the supports they need to address their social and emotional developmental health and remove barriers to learning.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Build components into existing communication systems that educate all stakeholders about supporting student social and emotional developmental health in ways that are directly connected to improving student academic success.
- Develop a method of evaluation to ensure that communication and alignment of the District work around social and emotional developmental health are impacting student outcomes.
- Work with the PBIS Technical Assistance Center (TAC) to assist in implementing PBIS with fidelity in all schools, particularly those that struggle with school climate.
- Work with the Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality to identify causes for the disproportional suspension rates and provide support that will address the causes and change practices across the District.

Statement of Practice 6.1 - Family and Community Engagement: 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.

Tenet Rating

I

Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

While the district has made some initial efforts to work closer with families and community members, the district has yet to fully partner with families in a way that allows families to be fully engaged with the education of their child and the improvement of their school.

Evidence/Information that Lead to this Finding:

- The district has two clear goals established in its strategic plan for addressing family and community engagement. The family goal is to engage and empower parents and families to increase meaningful involvement in their children’s education and in decision making at the school and district levels. The community goal is to establish, nurture, and maintain purposeful community partnerships to support student success. Evidence from school reviews and discussions with school leaders showed that the district is beginning to encourage families and the community to connect directly to schools and become involved in their development through community events and meetings. Training in local school governance has occurred and further training on how to adopt and establish a set of district-wide family engagement best practice standards is beginning.
- The District Parent Coordinating Council (DPCC), the officially recognized parent body within the district, appealed to the NYSED Commissioner regarding the lack of partnership between the parent organization and the district. In December, NYSED placed a temporary hold on \$36 million in federal aid after the District Parent Coordinating Council filed a complaint that parents were not properly consulted before district grant applications and school improvement plans were submitted to the state. As of the time of this review, the money had yet to be released to the district.
- The district has struggled to comply with Commissioner’s Regulations regarding Public School Choice and was put under Corrective Action by NYSED to ensure compliance with the requirement that students from low-performing schools are given the option to transfer to schools that are not identified as low-performing. The district’s first three proposals regarding the district’s plan for Public School Choice were rejected by NYSED on the grounds that they lacked specific details, and that parents were not properly consulted. In addition, schools in the district are unzoned, and some parents have indicated that the absence of local neighborhood schools has made it difficult to fully engage with the school.
- School leaders stated that district leaders use the district website to communicate with families and the community with regularly updated information, opportunities, and support. Furthermore, the

district communicates routinely with families in the city's six most common languages.

- Community goals are focused on increasing the effectiveness of partnerships with higher education and community-based organizations. The district created the Howard Lewis Parent University, which provides parents with courses that help them develop their own skills and abilities, while enabling them to support their children academically and socially. These courses are communicated through the district website, are supported by achievement information on the data dashboard, and are based on the vision: "Putting children and families first to ensure high academic achievement for all."

Impact Statement:

The district's difficulty adhering to guidelines and expectations has resulted in funds being withheld and students unable to access a high-quality educational program. While some partnerships have been established; the schools visited by the IIT struggled with parent engagement. Without strong partnerships between families, schools, and the community, the district will struggle with ensuring that students are receiving the level of support needed to improve student achievement.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Effective rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- Create a wide range of opportunities for to receive and share data, so that schools, families, and community constituents work together in advocating for relevant and sustainable student support.
- Cultivate a relationship with the DPCC that allows for reciprocal communication and adequate opportunities for proper consultation regarding key district initiatives.
- In consultation with the DPPC, develop a clear plan that will allow the district to comply with the regulations concerning Public School Choice.