



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

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## DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



<b>BEDS Code</b>	660900010000
<b>District</b>	Mount Vernon City School District
<b>District Address</b>	165 North Columbus Avenue, Mount Vernon, New York 10553
<b>Superintendent</b>	Dr. Kenneth Hamilton
<b>Date(s) of Review</b>	May 28-29, 2015

District Information Sheet					
<b>Grade Configuration</b>	PreK -12	<b>Total Enrollment</b>	8,274	<b>Number of Schools</b>	16
District Composition (most recent data)					
<b>% Title I Population</b>	73.3%	<b>% Attendance Rate</b>	91.48%		
<b>% Free Lunch</b>	66.1%	<b>% Reduced Lunch</b>	7.2%		
<b>% Limited English Proficient</b>	8.0%	<b>% Students with Disabilities</b>	17.2%		
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
<b>% American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	0.2%	<b>% Black or African American</b>	82.1%		
<b>% Hispanic or Latino</b>	19.6%	<b>% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	1.4%		
<b>% White</b>	16.3%	<b>% Multi-Racial</b>	0%		
Personnel (most recent data)					
<b>Years Superintendent Assigned to District</b>	1	<b># of Deputy/Assistant Superintendents</b>	3		
<b># of Principals</b>	16	<b># of Assistant Principals</b>	17		
<b># of Teachers</b>	627	<b>Avg. Class Size</b>	18		
<b>% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate</b>	0%	<b>% Teaching Out of Certification</b>	0%		
<b>% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience</b>	2%	<b>Average Teacher Absences</b>	8 days		
<b>Teacher Turnover Rate – Teachers &lt; 5 years exp.</b>	18%	<b>Teacher Turnover Rate – All Teachers</b>	16%		
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2013-14)					
<b>ELA Performance at levels 3 &amp; 4</b>	419	<b>Mathematics Performance at levels 3 &amp; 4</b>	522		
<b>Science Performance at levels 3 &amp; 4 (4th Grade)</b>	508	<b>Science Performance at levels 3 &amp; 4 (8th Grade)</b>	113		
Student Performance for High Schools (2013-14)					
<b>ELA Performance at levels 3 &amp; 4</b>	373	<b>Mathematics Performance at levels 3 &amp; 4</b>	69		
Credit Accumulation High Schools Only (2013-14)					
<b>4 Year Graduation Rate</b>	48%	<b>6 Year Graduation Rate</b>	72.9%		
<b>% of earning Regents Diploma w/ Advanced Des.</b>	4%				
Current NYSED Accountability Status					
<b># of Reward Schools</b>	0	<b># of Priority Schools</b>	1		
<b># of Schools In Good Standing</b>	9	<b># of Focus Schools</b>	6		
<b># of LAP Schools</b>	0		0		

### District Accountability Status

Met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA (indicate Y / N / N-A)			
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	N-A	<b>Black or African American</b>	N
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	Y	<b>Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</b>	N
<b>White</b>	N	<b>Multi-Racial</b>	N-A
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	N	<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	Y
<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	N		
Met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Mathematics (indicate Y / N / N-A)			
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	N-A	<b>Black or African American</b>	Y
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	Y	<b>Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</b>	N
<b>White</b>	Y	<b>Multi-Racial</b>	N-A
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	N	<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	Y
<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	N		
Met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Science (indicate Y / N / N-A)			
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	N-A	<b>Black or African American</b>	N
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	N	<b>Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</b>	N-A
<b>White</b>	N	<b>Multi-Racial</b>	N-A
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	N	<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	N
<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>			

#### DISTRICT PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE DISTRICT

1. To prioritize systems development to promote and increase student achievement.
2. To improve buildings and grounds facilities.
3. To rebrand the district to restore community confidence.
4. To create a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment.
5. To plan a districtwide dynamic music and arts program.

## Information about the review

- The review of the district was conducted by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE), a representative from the New York State Education Department (NYSED), and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) reviews of two schools in the district also informed the district review.
- During IIT school reviews in the district, reviewers visited 75 classrooms across two schools and IIT reviewers conducted focus group interviews with students, staff, and parents.
- District reviewers conducted interviews with district leadership, central office staff, and a focus group of principals.
- The district provided results of a parent survey that 132 parents completed. No information regarding staff or student surveys was provided by the district.

**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	Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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"/>
	<b>OVERALL RATING FOR TENET 1:</b>			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	Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	community.				
<b>Tenet 3 - Curriculum Development and Support:</b> 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	Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
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"/>
<b>Tenet 4 - Teacher Practices and Decisions:</b> 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	Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
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"/>
<b>Tenet 5 - Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health:</b> 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	Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Tenet 6 - Family and Community Engagement:</b> 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	Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**District Review – Findings, Evidence, Impact and Recommendations:**

<p><b>Tenet 1 - District Leadership and Capacity:</b> 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><b>Overall Tenet Rating</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 2</b></p>
<p><b>Statement of Practice 1.1:</b> 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><b>Tenet Rating</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 2</b></p>

**Overall Finding:**

- The district recently implemented strategies to recruit staff, to identify new staff positions based on student need, and to analyze staff capacity. However, the district does not have a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan to ensure that all staff are able to meet students’ academic and social-emotional developmental health needs and has not yet evaluated the impact of the human resource work accomplished during the 2014-15 school year.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources (HR) assumed her position at the start of the 2014-15 school year; at that time, there were approximately 60 open positions that needed filling. She reported that HR staff and school leaders reviewed applications received through the regional Online Application System (OLAS) for Educators, held a recruitment day, and successfully filled all positions. The Assistant Superintendent for HR also reported being in the process of creating a comprehensive plan to create systems that enable the district to attract, develop, and retain highly qualified, effective personnel. As part of this process, HR staff intends to examine the district’s teacher retention policy and determine strategies for incentivizing effective and highly effective teachers to stay in the district. Evidence showed that the district has developed a process in which the credentials of all staff members can be reviewed and shared with district and school leaders to enable them to make better staffing decisions. The Assistant Superintendent of HR noted that StaffTrac, a teacher-principal evaluation management tool, is used to review all teacher observations and assess the quality of observations districtwide; the data is also used to determine priorities for summer professional development (PD) and PD for the coming year. District staff recognized that more work needs to be done to ensure that the district’s teacher evaluation system provides more guidance and actionable feedback to teachers so that instructional practices improve. District staff also acknowledged that PD it is not always tailored to school needs and systems are not in place to evaluate the impact of PD on improving professional practices; therefore, the quality and impact of PD is also a district focus for improvement.
- The district leader has established a new school leader evaluation process that includes a self-assessment, a pre-observation conference, a school visit, and a post-visit conference. As part of this process, school leaders are asked to present artifacts of their work to justify their self-assessment ratings. The district leader shared that this process has allowed him to develop relationships with school leaders that allow an understanding of the supports needed to enable school leaders to be

successful.

**Impact Statement:**

- The district has not yet completed development of a comprehensive plan to recruit and retain staff within the context of quality performance, and, therefore, cannot yet ensure that all staff efforts lead to student success.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- develop a districtwide, shared understanding of effective teaching and leadership that includes attention to Common Core aligned instructional shifts, priority student learning experiences across classrooms and grade levels, and expectations for monthly student achievement progress based on multiple measures. Use this definition to inform the work of the HR office and support all district recruitment and retention efforts; and
- develop a comprehensive written plan for the recruitment, evaluation, support, and retention of high-quality teachers and school leaders. Share this plan with all district and building leaders to bring a districtwide focus on quality staff that address school needs.

**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**

**Stage 2**

**Overall Finding:**

- The district has communicated overarching goals and high expectations that have been widely shared and understood throughout the district and wider community; however, the district has not yet developed Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Results-oriented, and Timely (SMART) goals connected to a theory of action that incorporate all constituents' needs and target work toward high levels of student success.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- The district leader reported that district goals include increasing student achievement; improving buildings and grounds facilities; rebranding the district to restore community confidence; creating a 21st century learning environment; and developing a plan for a districtwide dynamic music and arts program. The district leader shared that communication between the district and community has focused on these overarching goals with emphases placed on building positive community perceptions and establishing a vision for high achievement for every child. District and school leaders reported that they understand the district leader's mandate for high expectations. However, school leaders simply described the district theory of action as the notion that every effort must connect to student outcomes; the district leader noted that the district has not yet communicated a clear theory of action or specific goals for student achievement that guide work across the district. Given the district's poor student performance data, the district leader recognized that development of a clear theory of action and SMART goals to define expectations for specific student achievement progress is paramount.
- The district held many events during the 2014-15 academic year to communicate district interest in

rebranding the district as one focused on academic achievement, the arts, and culture, and to support forward planning by developing relationships with and gathering input from the schools and community. For example, the district staff conducted monthly information sessions about district and school performance and events, broadcast a weekly superintendent television show, published a district newsletter, and placed many visits to community centers and businesses. The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) also learned that district communications were translated into pertinent languages, as needed. District and school staff and interviewed parents reported that they had observed increased involvement because of these efforts.

**Impact Statement:**

- The district’s many recent efforts have not been connected to a commonly understood theory of action with measurable goals and outcomes; therefore, efforts have not yet been specific enough to drive the work and outcomes of every stakeholder.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

Engage the district leadership team in:

- the development of a concise theory of action;
- the development of one overarching SMART goal each in the areas of recruitment and retention of high quality staff; the equitable, needs-based allocation of resources; Common Core curriculum implementation; PD for teachers, staff, and school and district leaders; districtwide social-emotional developmental health programming; family and community engagement; and student achievement progress; and
- monthly action planning and data review to determine progress and next steps aligned to the SMART goals.

**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**

**Stage 2**

**Overall Finding:**

- The district has implemented a new resource allocation process to ensure that resources are distributed based on the student achievement and social-emotional developmental health needs identified by school leaders. However, this newly instituted system does not include a systemic look at data and has not yet resulted in consistent increases in student achievement.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- The district leader stated that his 2014-15 focus was on assessing the state of the district by determining program and system strengths and needed areas of change, and determining an effective method for resource allocation. Reviewers learned that particular school leader resource needs, apart from student enrollment, were not factored into school budget allocation decisions.

- The district leader instituted a process called “budget defense rounds,” in which each school leader was asked to prepare a detailed budget request, inclusive of a rationale, for the 2015-16 school year. The district leader then met with each school leader to discuss proposed building needs. The Assistant Superintendent for Fiscal Affairs noted that district personnel reviewed these requests through visits to buildings, conversations with staff, and the budget defense process. Based on this assessment process, resources were then mobilized to begin to address many districtwide needs. District staff reported a number of staffing and usage changes underway in many areas for the 2015-16 school year, as well. For example, the district intends to stop outsourcing the management of buildings and grounds services and the PreK program will use upgraded facilities in the high school. Full-time nurses and guidance counselors will be placed in each school building in 2015-16 to respond to the preponderance of student health and social-emotional needs, six district instructional coaches deployed to honor school leader requests for more in class support for teachers, and additional vocational programs are to be resourced in the coming year for secondary school students.
- District and school leaders expressed confidence in district resources changes and decisions; however, the work was discussed within the context of planning for the 2015-16 school year and, therefore, will not have an impact on student achievement for this academic year. Additionally, the IIT was informed by district leaders that systems are not in place to analyze district and school needs or to measure the effect that the deployment of resources has on improving student outcomes. Additionally, at the time of the review, no evidence was available to show that school leaders are held accountable for how they deploy available resources; without this information, the district will not be able to evaluate spending and resource decisions that have produced the greatest, or least, gains in terms of school improvement.

**Impact Statement:**

- The district has established new systems to allocate resources based on the actual needs of each school; however, these efforts do not include a mechanism to assess the impact of the resources on student achievement progress.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- build upon the “budget defense rounds” process by developing a system to monitor the impact of prioritized, deployed resources to support district and school leader progress in relation to the theory of action and prioritized SMART goals; and
- ensure that the Assistant Superintendent for Fiscal Affairs is involved in key district cabinet discussions that focus on teaching and learning, so that all resource deployment connects to the improvement of teaching and learning and student outcomes.

**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**

**Stage 2**

**Overall Finding:**

- PD for teachers has focused on Common Core curriculum implementation in math and English language

arts (ELA), strategies for improving student writing, and the use of a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. However, there is no system in place to determine districtwide PD priorities, to track teacher attendance at offered PD, or to monitor how PD informs and improves instructional practices and student outcomes at district schools.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- The IIT learned that the district is creating a differentiated PD plan that will attend to a continuum of professional learning based on school assessment and teacher effectiveness data; however, it is currently in the planning stages. Reviewers found that too little attention is focused on student data when determining PD priorities and district leaders acknowledged that PD in its current format is mostly generic and not closely matched to school needs or the starting skills of teachers. The district cabinet developed a district-level professional learning community (PLC) team to draft guidance on the use of data to inform curricula, teaching modifications, and the development of school-based PLC structures. Although this team has created a theory of action for how it can best influence the work of school-based PLCs, conversations with school leaders showed that PLCs, at both district and school levels, had not yet impacted student progress.
- The district has standards administrators in the areas of content, guidance, special education, and English language learners (ELLs); however, the principal focus group revealed that specific roles and responsibilities for these administrators are not clearly defined. Standards administrators reported that they provide PD in their area of expertise, but acknowledged variability across different content areas in the impact of the provided PD. Focus group interviews also uncovered a lack of adequate substitute teachers as significant barriers to participation in district PD. As anecdotal evidence of the impact of PD, district and school leaders noted an increase in teacher practice aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) when visiting classrooms, but could not produce quantifiable data to support these observations. In addition, district and school leaders provided no evidence to indicate that a thorough, formalized system was in place to hold teachers accountable for implementing PD offerings or for evaluating the impact of PD on improvements to instruction and student achievement.
- District and school leaders noted that the district has not provided a significant amount of PD for school leaders, although both school and district leaders believed that monthly administrative meetings including both district and school leaders serve as an opportunity for school leaders to learn from each other and from district personnel.

**Impact Statement:**

- The lack of a comprehensive PD plan, inclusive of a process to evaluate the impact of PD on teacher practice and student learning, prevents the district from having a strong grasp on the impact that PD brings to meeting the needs of staff and the academic advancement of students.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- convene all district staff involved in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and PD to collaboratively assess training needs across the district and design the PD plan based on these needs. PD offerings should be

prioritized through a collective review of formal and informal teacher observation data, school leader and teacher perspectives on PD needs, and a review of student achievement data. The PD plan should have a calendar that addresses potential scheduling conflicts; and

- develop a system to track staff participation in PD and monitor the impact of PD on improving classroom practices.

**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**

**Stage 2**

**Overall Finding:**

- The district leader has communicated an expectation for a data-based culture and reviewed available data to determine district goals. However, the district has not yet developed a comprehensive system to collect, analyze, and share formative and summative data to enable districtwide decision making, identify trends, and monitor ongoing student achievement progress.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- The district leader has prioritized the expectation for a data-driven culture in the district and schools and reported that he wants staff to be involved in the creation of data processes and norms to encourage staff ownership. The district leader has shared protocols, but has not communicated definitive expectations for how data is to be specifically used by all district and school staff members for supporting, instructing, and establishing goals for students, schools, and the district. Focus group interviews did not reveal any efforts to hold staff accountable for using data to improve student learning. Given the urgency of improving student achievement in ways that meet the needs of each subgroup of student, the lack of clear data use expectations is an impediment to achieving student progress.
- School and district leaders acknowledged that there is work to be done to establish a data-driven culture across schools and the district. School leaders reported that data is not routinely used to track the progress of students in schools by grade level, content area, or subgroup. School and district leaders stated that procedures for teachers to use data to drive instruction and modify curricula are established in too few classrooms; and district leaders confirmed that they have not yet determined a process to identify good practices in certain classrooms that could serve as exemplars for others to replicate.
- The district leader reported reviewing a myriad of data sources to inform planning decisions in his first year as superintendent. The review included high school graduation and dropout data, state assessment data, the number of middle graders exiting the district, and teacher tenure and turnover data. Based on this review, the district is planning a new grade six performing arts academy to prevent the current exodus of middle graders to charter and private schools and is in the process of developing plans to address staff turnover. In an attempt to increase the graduation rate for the 2014-15 school year, Regents test preparation and online credit recovery courses were offered. Guidance counselors were instructed to meet with every junior and senior to discuss what each student needed to ensure graduation and a reading teacher was deployed to work with 150 students. However, the IIT learned

that student passing rates were unimproved with the administration of the August 2014 and January 2015 exams. Reviewers learned that programming challenges had occurred with online credit recovery courses due to an unanticipated need for teacher training on blended learning and, therefore, expectations for significant improvements in graduation rates by the end of the 2014-15 year were low.

**Impact Statement:**

- District leaders have reviewed many data sources to inform decisions that impact student achievement for the 2015-16 academic year, but the district has not developed a comprehensive system to guide the day-to-day data-based decision making and data-driven instruction needed to ensure districtwide ownership and accountability for student achievement outcomes.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- develop clear expectations and parameters for how data should be used throughout the district to ensure the ongoing student achievement progress necessary for all students and each subgroup; and
- develop a process to hold staff accountable for using data to drive schoolwide and classroom improvements. Teams such as the district cabinet, the standards administrators, the school leaders, and teachers should use required processes, such as “review common sets of data together,” “analyze work to date,” and “plan next steps.” A twenty-day action planning process should be implemented to ensure consistent data analysis throughout the year.

**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.

**Tenet Rating**

**Stage 2**

**Overall Finding:**

- The school district has established some new norms of support for schools that are designed to impact the effectiveness of the school leader, the social-emotional health of the learning community, and the academic outcomes of students. These supports have generated a sense of possibility among schools leaders, but are still in development and not fully implemented or part of an overarching plan that includes systemic support or capacity building.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- School leaders reported that district leaders are listening to their concerns and stated that the district leader and team have inspired a feeling of synergy, trust, and confidence. School leaders cited the open communication encouraged by district leaders as a sign of support and said that, as a result, they can pick up the phone and ask for help. One school leader shared that she is now more involved in decision making. School leaders commented on the positive relationship between the district team and school board and

expressed hope that this will allow for leadership stability and sustainability. Although the IIT noted optimism related to the strength of the new district team, reviewers did not learn of specific expectations targeting the sense of urgency needed to address the significant improvements in student achievement needed in some schools.

- School leaders shared that the district has begun providing support on data-driven instruction, PLCs, and formative assessments. Elementary school leaders highlighted the Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and i-Ready literacy programming, as well as the beginning, middle, and end-of-year progress monitoring protocols that have been instituted. Secondary school leaders noted a PD focus on algebra and geometry; however, these leaders reported a need for increased instructional support overall, with a particular focus on increased operational and instructional support in the area of special education. Secondary leaders also stated a lack of clarity about central office staff roles. School leaders stated that interim assessments provided evidence that many students made progress, but shared that they were not able to fully assess student achievement progress until the end of the 2014-15 academic year.
- The IIT learned that the district staff was supportive of each school’s vision, but did not have a role in working with schools to create their visions or to develop the strategies needed to make the vision a reality. School leaders stated that more district collaboration, support, and guidance was needed to ensure that PD impacts on teacher practices in the classroom, that the curriculum meets the needs of all students, that evaluation processes produce highly effective teachers and leaders, and that a data-driven learning culture was a reality and not just an expectation.

**Impact Statement:**

- The support that the new district leadership team is providing to schools is not yet fully developed and implemented to ensure student achievement gains across the district.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- schedule collaborative meetings in Summer 2015 that include each school leader, all members of the district cabinet, and the standards administrators to develop a specific action plan for each school that ensures coordinated support and clear expectations from each district office or staff member; and
- integrate leadership development and modeling into all work with school leaders, assistant principals, and teacher leaders to promote the ongoing capacity building needed to ensure stability and sustainability of efforts.

<p><b>Statement of Practice 3.1 - Curriculum Development and Support:</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>Tenet Rating</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 2</b></p>
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**Overall Finding:**

- The district has made strides in implementing the CCLS through collaborative work with school leaders. However, there is no system in place to ensure that the CCLS are being implemented with fidelity across

subject areas or to ensure that schools have all the resources needed for successful curriculum implementation.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- School leaders stated that the district has not had a Director of Curriculum for at least two years; this has presented challenges that include outdated courses and a mismatch between course offerings and student needs at the high school, for example.
- School leaders cited that the district provides schools with PD workshops focused on the CCLS in ELA and math and a district writing initiative; however, the IIT learned that the amount of PD provided was not consistent across schools or areas in need of support. One school leader noted that the district offered ELA training, but not a similar amount of math support. School leaders noted that the district is requiring the use of EngageNY modules, but has not yet provided all of the resources necessary to support implementation. School leaders stated they are beginning to see instructional shifts in some classrooms, but acknowledged that this work is just beginning to emerge and continued support is needed. Both district and school leaders acknowledged that although CCLS curriculum work is taking place, at this time it only includes ELA and math. School leaders are encouraged by the district leadership team’s support of expanded course offerings in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, which provides increased options for students. However, school leaders identified a need for school and district leaders to work collaboratively to better monitor and evaluate CCLS implementation in schools to determine how it is, or is not, meeting the needs of different groups of students.
- School leaders shared that they need more support with the CCLS and differentiation to meet the learning needs of different subgroups and the majority of their students. The IIT learned that the district has put in place a Response to Intervention (RTI) committee that includes participants from each school, some with strong RTI programs. This committee developed a common RTI model for the district; training for staff will begin in Summer 2015.

**Impact Statement:**

- The district has provided some support to schools in the area of CCLS curriculum implementation in ELA, math, and writing; however, this work has not yet included all subject areas or the comprehensive capacity building and resource deployment support necessary to ensure effective CCLS implementation.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- hire a Director of Curriculum to establish clear curricular expectations and ensure the incremental and focused implementation of the CCLS, so that students have access to resources and strategies at their CCLS grade level, as well as their current Lexile level;
- clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of standards administrators, with a focus on implementation of curricula and in-school professional development; and
- schedule a meeting for all school leaders and standards administrators, so standards administrators can explain their strengthened roles and responsibilities. Reestablish collaborative relationships to ensure the

effective implementation of CCLS curricula across subject areas, school levels, and the district at large.

**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**

**Stage 1**

**Overall Finding:**

- The district has targeted improved student success as a priority, and members of the district leadership team provide some direct support to school leaders and teachers. However, there is little evidence to suggest that measures of district support reflect a collaborative, team effort to improve student achievement or that these efforts connect to prioritized instructional or student learning strategies.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- School leaders confirmed that the central office manages a great deal of the PD offerings and that only some PD meets the needs of staff. School leaders shared that the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) provided a significant amount of training, as well, and that this training was also of uneven quality. Some school leaders stated that teachers could not attend many of the PD sessions because of inadequate classroom coverage or because requests to be out of the classroom occurred on too many occasions.
- Despite the availability of PD, classroom observations during IIT school visits revealed inconsistent implementation of rigorous learning opportunities in classrooms. Additionally, although there was evidence of district support with formative assessments, teacher meetings and classroom observations showed that data is not consistently used to group students effectively. School leaders expressed a need for more in-school support from the district team, primarily the standards administrators, to support their work with PLCs and help teachers learn to analyze data to guide the implementation of curricula and classroom instruction.
- School leaders expressed that they are not always able to focus on their role as instructional leader, due to the many crises they manage, such as student discipline infractions and urgent health needs.

**Impact Statement:**

- Limited support is being provided in schools to impact instructional improvement and the use of data to support student growth.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- enlist the standards administrators to work with school leaders to establish common expectations for goal setting; and identify priority learning strategies to ensure student engagement and ongoing progress. Strategies may include 20-day goal setting for students based on formative data or monthly student work products that demonstrate learning across subjects.

**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

Stage 3

**Overall Finding:**

- The school district has implemented several strong programs that have positively affected the social-emotional developmental health of students in some schools; the district is in the process of expanding these programs to impact all schools and a greater number of students.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- Four schools have a partnership with the Andrus Sanctuary, an organization that provides programming and training to help students identify emotions and develop strategies to address them. When asked for evidence of impact for this initiative, school leaders pointed to an increase in the numbers of students who now self-identify emotions and reach out to adults for guidance. IIT classroom visits in participating schools showed that meetings take place each morning to address students' daily emotional needs. The IIT learned that parents also participate in Andrus training, so that students are exposed to similar strategies at school and at home.
- The district student support team shared that a priority goal was for students and families to feel safe and described efforts to support schools in creating a welcoming environment. Evidence showed that a districtwide attendance committee focuses on high needs students and reducing the numbers of students who are chronically absent or suspended from school. Reviewers also learned that the district is in the process of revising policies to better support the social-emotional health of students. To that end, school leaders stated that the district is committed to the PBIS model of student engagement, the counseling needs of elementary and secondary students, the presence of a full-time nurse in each school, behavior plans for students who exhibit behavioral challenges, and the therapeutic supports provided by the Andrus initiative. School leaders reported that implementation of these initiatives and the associated PD has resulted in an improved culture in many schools, reduced the number of suspensions and increased the number of students requesting support when they experience challenges. Additionally, a new advisory program and daily advisory class was added to middle school programming to address students' social-emotional developmental health and the connection to academics.
- District and school leaders shared that attendance efforts revealed that some parents do not always send students to school due to financial considerations. In response, the district has made efforts to contact families to determine transportation needs, to advise families about free breakfast and lunch programs, and to determine and resource other needs, such as clothing for school. In addition, ceremonies and incentives are given to honor improved and perfect attendance, the district website was updated to include an attendance section, and home visits are conducted by attendance teachers to check on absent students and connect families to service providers who can provide additional supports.
- School leaders confirmed that the district cabinet has budgeted full-time guidance counselors in each school for the 2015-16 academic year to meet the social and emotional needs of students in all schools. The plan is for the guidance counselors to serve as a liaison between the school, family, and community agencies to

ensure that students and families are linked to the services they need.

**Impact Statement:**

- The district’s many social-emotional developmental health initiatives have strengthened the culture in many buildings, have improved attendance and reduced suspensions, and have provided students with some of the skills needed to help them become successful.

**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**

**Stage 2**

**Overall Finding:**

- The district has made efforts to rebrand itself as a welcoming, child-centered, parent partner in the education and well-being of all children. However, to increase parent involvement and ensure that parents work with school staff to attain academic achievement for all students, a comprehensive plan that leads to a systemic means of parent engagement is in need of further development.

**Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:**

- The district leader has prioritized creating a new brand, feel, and spirit for the Mount Vernon City School District, which includes embracing parents as participants. As part of this new spirit, school leaders reported that facilities are being upgraded to increase utility and attractiveness, and to reflect the district’s vision for high quality education and care for students. Events and activities, such as the Parent University, the Saturday English as a second language (ESL) Academy, which provides support and advocacy skills to parents learning about the CCLS, bilingual information sessions, and a.m. and p.m. parent information meetings, have been implemented with other plans in development for next year.
- School leaders described parental involvement as a major challenge and believed that district efforts have not yet had a big enough impact on increasing parent participation. As evidence of district efforts, school leaders described the successful, district-sponsored Parent Involvement Day featuring parent workshops and increased use of the districts K-12 alert communication system to update parents on items connected to their child’s education. Both school and district leaders stated the need for a comprehensive parental engagement plan focused on the district and schools working together to implement a range of proven strategies with the intention of building and sustaining partnerships between the district, schools, and home that have at their core the pursuit of academic excellence for all students.
- School leaders informed reviewers that the district administered a parent survey that only 132 parents completed; the survey showed that parents wanted to participate in district events and workshops on topics that included anti-bullying strategies, appropriate Internet use, and the CCLS. Responding parents felt that more work needed to be done to ensure that children experience a sense of belonging at school. District leaders reported that an Assistant Superintendent for Family and Community Engagement would be hired for the 2015-16 school year.

**Impact Statement:**

- School leaders require increased district support to increase the level of parent participation and accelerate student learning and achievement.

**Recommendation:**

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should:

- implement a comprehensive parental engagement plan with the overriding goal of forging strong partnerships among the district, schools, families, and community. Enlist the support of the central office and each school to achieve the goal; and
- prioritize two districtwide parent events and provide opportunities for staff from each school to play a role in the planning and implementation of these events. Evaluate the effort and use the evaluations to inform planning for the next event(s).