



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	421800010000
District	Syracuse City School District
District Address	725 Harrison Street, Syracuse, New York 13210
Superintendent	Dr. Sharon L Contreras
Date(s) of Review	April 13-14, 2015

District Information Sheet					
Grade Configuration	PreK-12	Total Enrollment	20,328	Number of Schools	30
District Composition (most recent data)					
% Title I Population	75	% Attendance Rate	92		
% Free Lunch	72	% Reduced Lunch	03		
% Limited English Proficient	14	% Students with Disabilities	19		
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native	1	% Black or African American	49		
% Hispanic or Latino	13	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	8		
% White	23	% Multi-Racial	5		
Personnel (most recent data)					
Years Superintendent Assigned to District	4	# of Deputy/Assistant Superintendents	6		
# of Principals	36	# of Assistant Principals	46		
# of Teachers	1743	Avg. Class Size	24		
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate	0	% Teaching Out of Certification	0		
% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience	13	Average Teacher Absences	0		
Teacher Turnover Rate – Teachers < 5 years exp.	29	Teacher Turnover Rate – All Teachers	17		
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2013-14)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	8.5	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4	8.4		
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (4th Grade)	60.7	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (8th Grade)	27.9		
Student Performance for High Schools (2013-14)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	43.2	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4	17.3		
Credit Accumulation High Schools Only (2013-14)					
4 Year Graduation Rate	51.1	6 Year Graduation Rate	55.9		
% of earning Regents Diploma w/ Advanced Des.	7.6				
Current NYSED Accountability Status					
# of Reward Schools	0	# of Priority Schools			
# of Schools In Good Standing	0	# of Focus Schools			
# of LAP Schools	1				

District Accountability Status

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

DISTRICT PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE DISTRICT

1. To provide all students with equitable access to rigorous curriculum with aligned instructional materials and assessments in all subjects and all grade levels.
2. To recruit, develop, support and retain effective teachers and school leaders.
3. To develop an infrastructure to support student success.
4. To build a district culture based on high expectations, respect, and co-accountability for performance that recognizes and rewards excellence at all levels of the organization.
5. To communicate effectively with all district stakeholders.

Information about the Review

- The review of the district was conducted by two Outside Educational Experts (OEE), a representative from the New York State Education Department, a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) representative, and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) reviews of six schools in the district also informed the district review.
- During IIT school reviews in the district, reviewers made 285 classroom visits across the six 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.

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 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 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	OVERALL RATING FOR TENET 1:			X	

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

#	Statement of Practice	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	and nurture a school environment that is responsive to the needs of the entire school community.				
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	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"/>
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	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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	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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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	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>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>Stage 2</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>Stage 2</p>
<p>Overall Finding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district has made efforts to build on its recruitment system and improve how it screens applicants; however, these systems are new, and the district has not yet determined the effectiveness of these efforts. In addition, the district has struggled to provide accurate feedback to staff that would result in improved practices. <p>Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district has appointed a Director of Recruitment and Selection, and the district now requires all teacher candidates to complete an online, 90-minute multiple-choice assessment, which was developed by a third-party vendor. This process allows the district to prioritize certain attributes it values, and the assessment is intended to predict a candidate’s ability to succeed in the district. However, these systems are new, and the district has not yet determined the effectiveness of these efforts. The district stated it will use the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) ratings it receives from the state at the end of the summer to examine the effectiveness of the screening instrument; however, by then the district will have already used the instrument to hire new staff for two school years. While this analysis will allow the district to look for trends between the screening assessment and student achievement on state assessments, this approach would not reveal the effectiveness of the instrument in predicting the specific instructional characteristics of new staff. The district has not created protocols that allow it to analyze the perspectives of the school leaders and instructional coaches who routinely visit new teachers’ classrooms and compare their insights against the predictions made by the assessment to determine the validity of each of its components and its ability to predict how effective the teachers will be in Syracuse schools. School leaders, during discussions with reviewers, spoke of how they were involved in the district’s recruitment procedures. Two school leaders stated that they were pleased with their most recent appointments from the online system, which allows school leaders to select their preferred candidates. They said this process was an improvement on previous recruitment processes utilized by the district. The district leader acknowledged that the district’s (APPR protocols have resulted in ratings that do not always provide accurate feedback to teachers. During the 2013-14 school year, 85 percent of teachers were considered Highly Effective on the Locally-Selected Measures component of the district’s APPR protocols. During the 2014-15 school year, New York State Education Department (NYSED) conducted 		

an audit of the district's APPR system and found that the Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) the district uses do not have targets that are ambitious, measure growth, and/or help ensure that students are prepared to advance in future coursework. NYSED also found that the SLOs submitted for review do not articulate how standards are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) or State standards. While the evaluation component of the district's APPR protocol has resulted in 60 percent of teachers rated Effective and 37 percent rated Highly Effective, Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) reviewers who visited the district's Focus and Priority Schools found that school leaders consistently had difficulty providing specific, actionable feedback. Teachers interviewed also shared that the feedback they received was not always helpful. District staff acknowledged in interviews that the number of teachers who are on Teacher Improvement Plans (TIPs) has declined significantly under the district's APPR protocols. Furthermore, the district's evaluations of school leaders that were reviewed by the IIT were primarily descriptive, and did not provide sufficient guidance for improvement. Without systems that can accurately capture the abilities of district personnel, the district is unable to rely on its evaluation process as a means of developing and supporting all staff and ensuring that personnel throughout the district are able to meet the needs of students and improve student achievement.

- Information provided by the district to NYSED shows that the teacher turnover rate for teachers with fewer than five years of experience has been between 25 percent and 34 percent for each of the past four years. Teachers and school leaders who resign submit an online form that requires them to identify the primary reason for their resignation. From this data, the district learned that relocation and the acceptance of another position are the primary reasons teachers and school leaders are resigning. Among beginning teachers, the primary reason is that the teacher has decided to leave the profession. While the district has done some data collection regarding retention, the information collected does not yet delve into the data to identify what factors in the district may have contributed to staff looking for positions elsewhere, or in the case of new teachers, deciding to leave the profession. The district acknowledges that there is additional work to be done with the data collected to further identify trends and to examine how various factors such as class size, school performance, or principal experience, might be impacting retention rates. As the district further develops these systems for data collection and analysis, it will be better able to understand the factors that contribute to its turnover rate so that it can look for ways to proactively address these factors.

Impact Statement:

- Without fully developed systems to ensure that the district can accurately identify staff who will be successful in the district, and systems to ensure the district provides ongoing feedback to further develop and retain staff, the district cannot ensure that all schools have personnel who can effectively address student needs.

Recommendation:

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

- devise systems to monitor the degree to which the teacher screening assessment accurately predicts teacher performance;
- adopt a plan to ensure that school leaders are able to accurately evaluate teacher practices and provide actionable recommendations;
- revisit the SLOs to ensure that they are aligned to grade-level expectations; and
- develop a system to gather feedback from staff who leave the district regarding their experience, analyze the data, and look for ways to modify conditions to address reasons shared by teachers.

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 Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP) is not being utilized as a tool to drive improvement in schools because rigorous implementation of the DCIP is not prioritized by district leaders or embraced by schools. The district is in its third year of its five-year plan, but student academic outcomes have remained low, behavior remains a significant issue in some schools, and systems to evaluate the qualities and competencies of district personnel are unreliable and inaccurate.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- The district leader shared that the district communicates its high expectations for addressing the needs of students and families through its five-year plan entitled “Great Expectations.” While the district is in the third year of its plan, the district does not appear to be on track to meet the targets identified in the plan. The district targets are based on surpassing by 2016-17 the student results from the other large, urban districts in the state that include Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, and New York City; however, the district has made little progress toward narrowing the gap between the district’s performance and the performance of the other districts. District leaders have not addressed the disconnect between the rhetoric in the document and the minimal improvement made since the document’s inception. The timeline in the plan identifies when the district will begin various initiatives during the five years of the plan; however, the language in the plan only connects to the initiatives the district will implement annually, and there is little mention of how these initiatives will result in improved student outcomes each year. As a result, district leaders articulated that they have been able to meet or exceed the expectations of the plan, even though gains in achievement have been minimal. The district has begun to look closer at impact and desired outcomes to better operationalize the strategic plan this year, the third-year of its five-year plan. For example, the district has partnered with an Urban Policy Development to initiate a more robust performance management system. The district is hopeful that this work will result in an improved DCIP for 2015-16 that will lead to improved student outcomes. However, because the district has focused its work on what it needs to initiate during the first two and a half years of its five-year plan, it has not been able to address issues concerning fidelity of implementation and the quality of implementation that may have arisen during the first half of the

five-year plan. While the district has begun to address the disconnect that allowed the district to accomplish the goals of its five-year plan with very limited gains in student achievement, it remains to be seen if the new focus on student achievement will translate into improvements in student outcomes.

- During IIT visits to Focus and Priority Schools in the district, school leaders and teachers spoke of an awareness of the district's expectations as outlined in the DCIP and in the Great Expectations plan. However, reviewers found that the district's goals, such as having high expectations for success, were not reflected in the practices observed within schools.
- During interviews, district staff indicated that too few teachers exhibit high expectations for student achievement and that this contributes to the continuing low academic performance of schools. The review team found that district leaders have faced challenges with establishing a connection between professional practices and student outcomes. For example, the district has not been able to address significant anomalies in a teacher evaluation system that rates teachers effective or highly effective, even though the practices observed during IIT school reviews showed inconsistent implementation of the CCLS instructional shifts, and there has been minimal student academic growth. The district has placed instructional coaches in all schools; however, this is done irrespective of the needs of specific schools. In addition, practices to support the successful implementation of the CCLS have not been rigorously planned or monitored, and the targets for improving student achievement and engagement have not been set. As a result, the district has struggled with being able to use its Great Expectations document as a means of improving teacher practices and increasing student achievement.

Impact Statement:

- Without measures of impact to determine the success of the Great Expectations plan, the district has not been able to address the reasons why improvement has been minimal and to ensure that its five-year targets can be met.

Recommendation:

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

- identify measures of student outcomes for the Great Expectations document that allow the district to know if it is on track to achieve its goal of surpassing the other Big 5 districts. For example, since one of the goals is to have more students score proficient on the grade three ELA test than the other Big 5 districts by 2016-17, the district should identify benchmarks to indicate the amount of annual progress expected to narrow the gap that currently exists. After identifying these student outcome benchmarks for each goal, the district should identify the benchmarks needed by each individual school in order to achieve the district benchmarks; and
- establish a system that monitors and evaluates progress toward the district benchmarks each quarter to determine how near they are to being reached and take remedial action if goals are not on track to be met.

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 1

Overall Finding:

- Budgetary spending has had little impact on improving student achievement. Procedures to monitor the impact of resource allocation are ineffective and contribute to the long-standing barriers hindering academic success for all students.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- District officials shared that there are structures in place for deploying resources effectively; however, this is not supported by school leaders or by the minimal improvement in student outcomes and teacher practices. Evidence from school reviews and assessment data indicate that the allocation of resources in key areas, such as improving instructional practices, developing curriculum, and addressing student behavior, have not resulted in significant improvements to academic standards or measures of performance in the intended areas. The district has faced challenges deploying resources where the need is greatest and based on the needs of the school community. In addition, the district has not developed adequate monitoring and accountability systems to evaluate the effectiveness of spending decisions and connect those allocations to desired improvements in professional practices and student outcomes.
- The way that the district allocates resources has changed in response to issues raised in the previous district review when resources were described as central-office driven. School leaders stated they are now given opportunities to advocate for resources that are specific to their schools; however, reviewers found that the district at times operates a one-size-fits-all approach. For example, all schools have been allocated two instructional coaches irrespective of academic need, goals, or the demographics and size of the student population. In addition, evidence from school reviews and discussions with school leaders indicate that no structures are in place, or planned to be put in place, to evaluate the impact of the coaches' work on instruction and student achievement. Consequently, the district is unable to evaluate where best practices are evident or to hold schools accountable for resources spent.
- Discussions with school leaders during the district review and during DTSDE review visits show varying levels of satisfaction with regard to the support school leaders receive from the district staff in relation to resource allocation and the impact that it has in driving school improvement. School leaders stated that the district pays too little attention to providing schools with support or innovative strategies on how to use allocated resources to address the unique needs of individual schools. School leaders also stated that too little focus is directed to schools where there is a high population of students with disabilities or English language learners (ELLs) and that supports, resources, or forward thinking strategies to meet the needs of these students are not forthcoming.
- The district leader stated that significant funds have been spent on materials and training related to the implementation of CCLS-aligned curriculum across all schools in the district; however, no

procedures are in place to evaluate how effective this funding has been in implementing the CCLS or any impact it has had on improving student learning and engagement. During the 2014-15 state-led review, teams made over 280 visits to classrooms and did not see regular evidence of an engaging and challenging CCLS- aligned curriculum.

- To support a district-wide focus on improving behavior and address the New York State Attorney General’s concerns regarding the use of suspension in the district, significant funding has been allocated to implement a new Code of Conduct for students and to train teachers for its implementation. However, district leaders were unable to provide compelling or convincing statistical data to demonstrate that there have been improvements in student behavior in classes and schools. During discussions, school leaders spoke of disruptive behavior continuing to be a significant problem in some classrooms, and that this has a severely detrimental impact on learning and progress for the majority of students in the class.
- Discussions with district staff indicate that the district has not established rigorous or effective strategies to assess the impact of spending decisions on improving student outcomes and teacher practices. District leaders confirmed that despite a legacy of low academic achievement over time, little has been done to establish procedures to examine alignment between spending decisions and improved student outcomes. As a result, many significant barriers for the advancement of student learning and improvement of professional practices remain unaddressed.

Impact Statement:

- Formal monitoring and evaluating of the impact of resource allocation is limited. As a result, budgetary spending has not resulted in rapid or sustained improvement in teacher practices, student achievement, and behavior. In addition, barriers to addressing low student achievement remain unresolved.

Recommendation:

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

- carry out a thorough analysis of school needs and allocate resources strategically so that they align closely with the unique demands of individual schools;
- provide the support to school leaders that enables them to make the most innovative and effective use of resources to improve student outcomes; and
- hold district and school leaders accountable for the allocation and utilization of resources so that they match the needs of the schools, lead to sustained improvements in student achievement and teacher practices, and clearly represent value for money.

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
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Overall Finding:

- There is only limited evidence to demonstrate that the PD provided or facilitated by the district is improving the quality of instruction in schools or student achievement. The quality and effectiveness of PD is not evaluated rigorously enough to identify where follow-up, extended, or further PD is needed.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- Discussions with district staff indicate that the district's PD program is aligned with the district's goals; however, these goals lack challenge, specificity, and direct focus on raising student achievement. Although the district creates a catalogue of PD opportunities for schools, district leaders state that the catalogue is not based on a thorough analysis of statistical evidence, such as academic weaknesses identified in test results and data collated from notes from instructional coaches. The district uses information from teacher surveys and school leaders' lesson observations to identify PD opportunities; however, reviewers had concerns about the ability of the classroom observation process utilized in schools to accurately identify weaknesses in instructional practices. Once it is developed, the PD catalogue is sent to all schools for staff to view and to determine which training they wish to attend; however, due to limits in the negotiated contract, much of this training is voluntary for most teachers. As a result, teachers cannot always be directed to the training they may need.
- Discussions with district staff and school leaders indicate that no formalized systems or protocols are in place to assess the impact and effectiveness of PD that is provided. District staff do not regularly consult with school leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of PD in transforming teacher practices or student outcomes. District leaders spoke anecdotally to reviewers about how, for example, PD has improved student behavior in the district, has improved teacher practices, and has led to the successful implementation of the CCLS. However, when asked, district leaders were unable to provide any statistical or compelling evidence to support these assertions. In addition, school leaders and state-led school reviewers both indicate continuing concerns with the successful implementation of the CCLS and the use of data to drive instruction. The reliance on anecdotal evidence leads to the district's inability to have an accurate understanding of the impact of its actions and the difficulties it has faced in improving student outcomes.
- Interviews with district staff indicate that they believe they have put in place procedures to provide support and follow up for PD activities. District staff spoke of a process where instructional coaches use walkthroughs to monitor and evaluate how well PD is transferred into classrooms. However, district staff acknowledged that although these walkthroughs occur, the information is not yet used to formally identify where further PD is needed, to evaluate the effectiveness of the initial PD, or to make modifications to how future PD is delivered.

Impact Statement:

- The district's lack of formalized statistical evidence to demonstrate convincingly how the PD it provides or facilitates leads to higher levels of student achievement undermine its stated commitment to continuous and sustained school improvement.

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 rigorous system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of PD, which produces validated data to assess and align the impact of professional practices with student outcomes and identifies follow up and high-quality PD and support where practices continue to be less than effective.

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 1

Overall Finding:

- Although district staff have created systems and structures so that academic and other data can be accessed by district and school staff, there is little evidence that district has been effective in getting school staff to consistent use data to drive school improvement and raise academic standards.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- While district leaders informed reviewers that they have begun to communicate expectations about how data is to be used in school communities to drive instruction and to monitor the performance of the school and classes, district leaders were unable to provide examples of this communication, despite requests made by reviewers. Discussions with school leaders indicate that there is a lack of clarity on how to access data provided by the district and unclear expectations as to how staff are to use data to help track student progress and to set challenging academic targets for schools across grades and content areas.
- Discussions with district leaders illustrate a disconnect between the expectations for using data and the actual practices within the district and in schools. District staff informed reviewers that there are no systems to monitor and evaluate how well the district staff uses district-wide data to help better support schools or to help schools set challenging academic goals or goals for different groups of students. Discussions with district staff and school leaders indicate that the district has not systematically monitored how schools access, analyze, and use data, even though state-led school reviews continue to highlight significant weaknesses in how schools use data to improve practices and monitor the performance of schools and subgroups. The disconnect between the district's understanding of how data should be used and the way in which data is being used in the schools further limits the district from making adjustments to professional practices to address the district's limited gains in student achievement.
- Discussions with district staff indicate data dashboards have been introduced to enable school and district leaders to access information related to attendance and discipline incidents. However, district staff state that they have encountered difficulties ensuring that the information is up to date and

accurate. This was confirmed in discussions with school leaders, who also stated that they have great difficulties accessing any available information. The unreliable nature of the system results in very few district and school staff accessing or using the dashboard and further demonstrates the district's challenge in using data to lead school improvement.

Impact Statement:

- Weaknesses in gaining access to data, combined with the low expectation and accountability levels set by district leaders as to how stakeholders across the district use and analyze data, results in a culture where knowledge of individual student and school-wide performance is limited.

Recommendation:

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

- make academic and other data readily accessible and check that district staff, school leaders, teachers, and other school staff use the data effectively to track the performance of students and schools, drive instruction and curriculum planning, adjust improvement strategies that are not working, and hold all stakeholders accountable for raising academic standards.

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>Stage 2</p>
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Areas for Improvement:

Overall Finding:

- The district provides some support to schools and school leaders, but the impact and effectiveness of the support is not consistently leading to improvements in student achievement and professional practices of school staff.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- The district introduced a district-wide Code of Conduct and Restorative Justice Program in response to the New York State Attorney General's investigation into the suspension practices of the district. However, discussions with school leaders indicate that the support provided for the introduction of the new Code of Conduct was not consistent. Although a small number of school leaders found the PD to be effective, others spoke of the training being inadequate to equip teachers with the skills and strategies needed to tackle the challenging student behavior they face daily. School leaders stated that follow up training had not been identified and that the district had not put in place any evaluation processes to determine if the PD had made a difference in procedures in classrooms and schools. While the Code of Conduct outlined newly designed procedures for handling student behavior, there

remains a need to improve classroom management skills across the district, particularly now that the Code of Conduct may result in fewer students receiving out-of-school suspensions. School leaders stated that behavior continues to interfere with learning because of weak classroom management. While the district offered weekly technical assistance meetings from September 2014 to February 2015, some school leaders expressed little confidence that they would receive any additional support or guidance from the district if students in their schools continue to display inappropriate behaviors.

- Evidence from discussions with school leaders indicates that the district often adopts practices and PD that are generic and not adapted to meet the specific and unique needs of individual schools. For example, the district has placed two instructional coaches in each school regardless of school size, population, or demographics. While instructional coaches work with teachers to improve teacher instructional practices, some school leaders stated that the work of the coaches is not monitored by the district, and there is no evidence expected to be provided that would indicate that the coaches' work have led to improvements in teacher practices or any advancements in student learning.
- District staff members responsible for students with disabilities have monthly meetings with teachers to help develop teacher awareness of new initiatives, inform teachers of changes in policy, and develop their understanding of data. However, according to school reviews, this support has not translated into effective classroom practices. Teachers stated that they would welcome more guidance and support from the district on how to better monitor targets in students' individualized education plans (IEPs) so that they can track the performance of students in a more effective way.
- District staff who have responsibility for supporting staff in meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs) conduct monthly meetings that allow them to focus on NYSED data and data related to behavior. Programs to support the development of language acquisition are in place; however, these programs are not monitored and evaluated in a regular and rigorous manner to enable district staff, teachers, and parents to track student achievement.
- School leaders interviewed stated that the support they receive from the district is sometimes inconsistent, and that they feel the district does not always take account of the individual needs of schools when allocating resources, providing PD, targeting support visits, or allocating personnel. These weaknesses, together with the lack of a highly focused district vision with challenging goals and high academic aspirations, restricts the district's ability to work with school leaders to develop individual school visions that are focused on academic excellence and can be used to guide the work at each school.

Impact Statement:

- The support provided by the district is often not based on the unique needs of the schools, is not monitored and evaluated for the value added it brings to student learning, and as a consequence, student achievement and instruction are not improving at an acceptable rate.

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 system where district staff work with schools to develop a vision unique to each school that is focused on academic success;
- provide support, resources, and high quality PD that match the needs and demands of the school population; and
- monitor the impact of the work rigorously and evaluate regularly the impact it has on raising student achievement, and adjust strategies where they are not successful.

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

Stage 2

Overall Finding:

- Although the district has worked collaboratively with schools to provide PD and resources to implement the CCLS, its efforts have met with limited success, and not all students are benefiting from a curriculum in the classroom that is engaging or challenging.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- School leaders state that district staff has made efforts to develop teacher awareness of the CCLS and have directed resources, such as PD and instructional coaches, to support curriculum. District leaders state that these actions and their own school observations indicate that a CCLS-aligned curriculum is increasingly evident in many schools and classrooms. However, school leaders interviewed during both the district review and school reviews indicate that the quantity and quality of support provided by the district has been inconsistent. Only a small number of school leaders were able to assert that the district support had led to the seamless implementation of the CCLS or that there had been noticeable improvements to the quality of instructional practices. Others noted that district support had made little improvements to instruction or student engagement in the learning process. The comments of school leaders were reflected in the findings from school reviews, where the successful implementation of the CCLS was noted as a weakness in many classrooms and schools and that this weakness was contributing to the continued low academic achievement of students in the district.
- The district has not put in place rigorous or reliable systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum programs. District staff acknowledges that more work needs to be done to ensure that their evaluation of the curriculum is accurate. School leaders stated that neither they nor the district are rigorous enough in evaluating the impact of the curriculum on improving student learning and achievement, the teacher practices associated with the curriculum, or the way data is used to make curricular adjustments and modifications. During school reviews, school leaders stated that teachers do not consistently use technology to support learning. Despite the district embarking on a substantial

investment in technology resources, few checks are in place by the district to assess its impact on student learning or to determine if such an investment is providing value for money through improved student engagement, application, and achievement. The weaknesses in curriculum delivery and monitoring procedures continue to hinder district and school efforts to ensure that all students are college and career ready.

Impact Statement:

- While the district has a goal to create a curriculum that provides teachers with opportunities to plan and deliver CCLS-aligned instruction, the district’s efforts have yet to ensure that students in classrooms receive a rigorous curriculum that will prepare them to be college and career ready.

Recommendation:

In order for the district's strategy and practices to align with the Stage 3 rating on the DTSDE rubric, the district should work with school and curriculum leaders along with instructional coaches to:

- monitor and evaluate all areas of the taught curriculum and evaluate its impact based on increases in student achievement; and
- check that teachers adjust curricula to ensure that every student is challenged.

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 2

Overall Finding:

- The district staff offers some learning opportunities to school staff to help them develop their professional practices, but the evidence of impact on instructional improvements and student achievement is minimal because monitoring of these activities in the classroom is neither systematic nor robust.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- District staff state that they are using information about student data to plan PD. They cite, for example, that algebra has been identified as a weakness in mathematics, so this has been a major focus for improvement. However, district staff was not able to provide data driven evidence to indicate that this major focus has resulted in improvement in algebra instruction. School leaders stated that much PD undertaken by teachers is voluntary and the workshops chosen by the teachers are not always the ones that address their areas of greatest need. School leaders also stated that although the district provides a catalogue of PD, these are not based on assessment data or on the needs of individual schools. Instead, the PD offered is typically based on teacher survey results and the district’s perception of need from their own class observations.
- The district is unable to provide compelling and data driven evidence to indicate that PD is having a positive impact on raising academic standards or the quality of instruction. During school reviews,

reviewers found that PD had not transformed practices, and the district had not developed a system to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of PD by evaluating its impact in classrooms. District observations do not have a specific focus on this important aspect of their support and so are unable to align the intended improvement of teacher practices with corresponding improvements in student achievement and engagement. District leaders stated that they have appointed instructional coaches to all schools to support teachers and follow up on PD that teachers have attended. However, reviewers were told by district staff and school leaders that the workload of these coaches differs considerably because the same number of coaches has been allocated to each school irrespective of size, need, performance, and student demographics. District and school leaders concurred that the capacity of coaches to drive improvements varies considerably and that no procedures are in place to check how effective coaches are in raising the performance of the teachers they support.

- School leaders informed reviewers that the district has provided PD for teachers to improve their practices in areas such as planning CCLS-aligned curriculum and implementation of the recently introduced Code of Conduct to improve classroom environments. However, during school visits, reviewers frequently found that implementing a rigorous curriculum and managing student behavior, two topics the district has tried to prioritize through professional development, were areas that schools continued to have difficulties addressing. Discussions with school leaders confirm that the training in these areas has not been sufficient to result in these areas no longer being a concern. Many school leaders consulted stated that there are still disruptive students in many classes and some school leaders shared that follow up or training that is more extensive has not been quick enough and that repeated requests for further support had been ignored.

Impact Statement:

- The district is not effective in supporting schools or their staff in developing practices that enable them to provide rigorous, engaging, and challenging learning opportunities.

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 system that informs district staff how learning opportunities provided for school staff are impacting student outcomes, needs, goals, levels of engagement, and improved instructional practices.

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 2

Overall Finding:

- The district support staff is developing supports to address student social and emotional developmental health needs, but there is significantly more work to do to ensure that the needs of all

students are consistently met.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- Representatives from the district support staff stated that they are focusing this year on putting infrastructure in place to support student social and emotional developmental health, but there is limited evidence that initial steps have been taken or are having an impact. The support staff stated that the district is developing plans to use data to support student social-emotional needs. For example, district support staff stated that there is regular monitoring of behavior referrals and suspensions, but school leaders stated that there is some uncertainty as to how the district is using or disseminating this data to address behavior issues and suspensions.
- District staff stated there has been a strong focus on PD for staff members who work with student social and emotional developmental health. Some school leaders interviewed stated that they appreciated how the district has assigned additional staff to assist with social and emotional health needs, such as new behavior intervention specialists and new social workers. However, some support staff interviewed during school visits shared that they felt that the district's decision to reduce positions or leave positions unfilled was adversely impacting student's social and emotional developmental health. School leaders stated that that district staff provides training and workshops for school staff concerning student social and emotional developmental health needs, but that the district does not check that the PD is resulting in improvements in how schools plan for and meet student social and emotional developmental health needs.
- District staff stated the district has been focusing on behavior and the new Code of Conduct. School leaders stated that while there have been some small, recent improvements in behavior, there is still a way to go, as school leaders stated that learning in some schools is at times disrupted by poor behavior. School leaders stated that training to support the implementation of the Code of Conduct has not always been effective, and in some instances, the training has been ineffective. While the new Code of Conduct is expected to reduce suspension rates and the amount of time students spend out of the classroom as a consequence of their behavior, some school leaders interviewed did not have confidence that teachers had been given adequate training that would allow them to respond differently when a student misbehaves. In addition, some school leaders reported that despite training on how to manage students with disabilities provided by the district, there continue to be students whose needs are not met because follow up support or additional training is not forthcoming.

Impact Statement:

- The lack of support for schools and the lack of high quality initial and follow up training to meet the unique needs that individual schools present result in the social emotional and developmental health needs of all students not being met.

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 system to monitor and evaluate the impact of the work of district support staff, particularly regarding school culture, climate, and behavior; and
- devise a strategic plan from the information gathered to disseminate good practices observed and address identified weaknesses so that the needs of students are met through targeted and proportionate support, guidance, and training for school leaders and staff.

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:

- Although the district informs some parents about events and happenings in schools, this information is not always communicated in the home language of all families and the district is less than effective at building partnerships with families whose first language is not English.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- A number of school leaders stated to reviewers that the district communication with families is not reciprocal. For example, although robo calls are in the native languages of families, school leaders say that other information provided in written form is often only available in English so many families are not kept up to date about events in the district or district policies with regard to the functioning and performance of schools. District leaders acknowledge some of the weaknesses in communication with families and, as a result, the district has appointed additional staff to facilitate better communication with parents in languages such as Spanish. However, strategies have not been put in place to assess the effectiveness of this initiative and to determine if the district has established stronger channels of communication between the district and non-English speaking families.
- The district has some partnerships and supports in place to promote family and community engagement, but the school leaders' views about them are varied. For example, one school leader claims never to have met the district representative responsible for family and community engagement, while others state the Parent University, health care facilities, and parent meetings with the district are helpful. Parent surveys administered by the district show that a significant percentage of parents had minimal or no knowledge of English as a second language (ESL) programming, or of their children's progress, and there is little evidence to indicate that the district is using this information to address the weaknesses identified. A review of district documents demonstrates there is a lack of baseline information concerning the needs of bilingual and ESL students. As a result, the district's activities and partnerships in these areas are not based on the needs of all students and their families. The IIT review of the district found limited evidence of the impact of the district staff's work on building sustainable partnerships with families whose first language is not English. School reviews and discussions with school leaders confirm that more work needs to be done in building productive

partnerships between school and home, particularly with non-English speaking families.

Impact Statement:

- As the district has not established strong channels of communication and engagement with all families, parents are not empowered to support their children’s learning or the work of their children’s school effectively.

Recommendation:

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

- collect and analyze data to establish the effectiveness of district and community engagement and identify major priorities for improvement, particularly for those families that speak English as a second language.