



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	662300010000
District	Yonkers City School District
District Address	1 Larkin Center Yonkers New York 10701
Superintendent	Dr. Michael Yazurlo
Date(s) of Review	June 2 -3, 2015

District Information Sheet for: Yonkers City School District per 2013-2014 report card

District Information Sheet					
Grade Configuration	PreK-12	Total Enrollment	24,967	Number of Schools	39
District Composition (<i>most recent data</i>)					
% Title I Population		% Attendance Rate		93%	
% Free Lunch	68%	% Reduced Lunch		6%	
% Limited English Proficient	12%	% Students with Disabilities		16%	
Racial/Ethnic Origin (<i>most recent data</i>)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0	% Black or African American		21	
% Hispanic or Latino	55	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		5	
% White	18	% Multi-Racial		1	
Personnel (<i>most recent data</i>)					
Years Superintendent Assigned to District	2	# of Deputy/Assistant Superintendents		3	
# of Principals	43	# of Assistant Principals			
# of Teachers	1545	Avg. Class Size		26	
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate	0%	% Teaching Out of Certification		0%	
% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience	2%	Average Teacher Absences			
Teacher Turnover Rate – Teachers < 5 years exp.	13%	Teacher Turnover Rate – All Teachers		16%	
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (<i>2013-14</i>)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4		Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4			
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (4th Grade)		Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (8th Grade)			
Student Performance for High Schools (<i>2013-14</i>)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4		Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4			
Credit Accumulation High Schools Only (<i>2013-14</i>)					
4 Year Graduation Rate	73%	6 Year Graduation Rate			
% of earning Regents Diploma w/ Advanced Des.	7				
Current NYSED Accountability Status					
# of Reward Schools	0	# of Priority Schools		8	
# of Schools In Good Standing	0	# of Focus Schools		6	
# of LAP Schools	7				

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

DISTRICT PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE DISTRICT

Ninety percent (90%) of all students In Grade 3 will finish the grade reading at proficiency or mastery level
 Sixty percent (60%) of all students in Grade 3-8 will score at proficiency (level 3) or higher on the NYS ELA and math assessments
 Eighty percent (80%) of Grade 12 (2011 Cohort) students will meet all graduation requirements and apply to a post-secondary institution
 Full implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) using the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) to gather evidence
 Institute a positive, supportive and respectful school and central office culture mindful of all stakeholders

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, a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SESIS) representative and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN). The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) reviews of three schools in the district also informed the district review.
- During IIT school reviews in the district, reviewers visited three 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 student survey that over 8,700 students (35%) completed.
- The district did not provide results of staff or parent survey.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 and nurture a school environment that is responsive to the needs of the entire school community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

#	Statement of Practice	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 strategies and structures in place to recruit qualified staff; however, the professional development (PD) provided to teachers and the teacher evaluation system are not leading to sustained improvements in instructional practices in the classroom. <p>Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district leadership reported that the district has established procedures to recruit qualified staff. District leaders indicated that district collaborated with the Yonkers Federation of Teachers to establish a posting process that includes placing announcements on the district’s website and advertising positions on the district’s cable TV channel. In addition, district staff worked with local colleges and universities to recruit student teachers for the Teachers of Tomorrow program. During discussions with the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) district staff acknowledged that there is a need to broaden the scope of advertisements and extend the district’s partnerships beyond local universities to address teacher shortages in areas such as career and technical education (CTE), foreign languages, English as a second language (ESL), and earth science. The district leader stated that staff turnover is low, and when a vacancy occurs, new positions are often filled by internal candidates. District staff, school leaders, and teachers interviewed indicated that some of the incentives to work in Yonkers include good benefits and favorable working conditions achieved through a strong collective bargaining unit. District leaders reported in interviews that the district is instituting more stringent criteria for earning tenure. School leaders use the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) to evaluate and provide feedback to teachers and to differentiate PD for teachers; however, both district leaders and reviewers had concerns about school leaders’ ability to accurately evaluate staff, in part because approximately 98 percent of staff have received ratings of Effective or Highly Effective on their evaluations, even though student performance remains low. District leaders recognized that implementation of the approved APPR plan is not currently providing an accurate evaluation of teacher performance in schools throughout the district. District and school leaders stated in interviews that the district staff provide a range of PD opportunities for new and tenured teachers, but district staff have not made clear the expectations for how new learning, garnered from PD, should be implemented in practice. The IIT found that systems for monitoring the impact of PD in bringing about improvements to student outcomes are at an early 		

stage of development and not embedded in schools across the district.

Impact Statement:

- The district has systems in place to recruit, evaluate, and retain staff; however, inconsistencies in the evaluation system and in the staff's process for monitoring of PD limits the district staff's ability to ensure that teachers instructional practices are high quality and lead to improved student 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:

- link monitoring and evaluation of PD implementation with shared and explicit criteria about how new learning from PD should be applied to lead to student growth.
- develop a plan to ensure inter-rater reliability among school leaders evaluating staff across the district. Develop specific practice and criteria based on student outcomes for earning tenure, so that tenured teachers have a record of achieving positive outcomes for students.

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 established five priorities targeting improvements in school achievement, but the priorities have not yet resulted in significant and sustained improvements in student outcomes.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- District leaders reported in interviews that the district articulates high expectations for student success through its vision and mission statements. District leaders indicated that district staff established five goals for students: "to have a love of learning," "to have a commitment to life-long learning," "to achieve their full potential," "to be prepared to live with the challenges of a world characterized by interdependence and diversity," and "to be prepared to live in a world characterized by change." District leaders also stated that the district's long-term priorities for improving achievement in ELA and math and student graduation rates are widely distributed across the community in booklets and through electronic formats. While the district staff stated that these priorities direct the work of school and district School Support Services (SSS) teams, the IIT found limited evidence of how these priorities are specifically used to guide improvement efforts across the district. A review of recent assessment data shows that math scores have increased for most students and that graduation rates and English language arts (ELA) scores have increased for students with disabilities. Results from the 2014-15 Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) interim assessments show that most students are making progress, but most students are not achieving the accelerated growth needed to reach the district's academic targets or to address the legacy of underachievement that still exists.

- The district has begun the process of implementing its vision and mission with the intention that they will be reflected in all aspects of district, school, and classroom initiatives. While school and district leaders stated that goals at the school level align to the district’s priorities and that SSS teams are beginning to monitor the schools’ progress toward achieving the goals, the review team found limited evidence of how goals are measured against priorities to ensure improvements. During discussions with the IIT, members of the SSS acknowledged that district leaders and SSS teams have only recently implemented interventions to drive a culture of transformation throughout schools. District leaders reported that district staff are aware that many policies, including the district’s code of conduct, need to be updated. In addition, district staff reported that the district understands that urgent actions are needed, such as those taken in appointing the Director of Special Education, whose work with support staff resolved a backlog of student referrals. However, school and district leaders’ interviews indicated that there is not a close enough alignment between expectations for professional and instructional practices and improved student outcomes.

Impact Statement:

- The lack of a clear and strategic district plan for driving actions to raise student achievement hinders district and school efforts for 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:

- ensure that the district’s strategic plan specifically outlines how the district’s current priorities and goals for improved and measureable student outcomes are to be achieved in practice.
- narrow activities and focus on evidence-based practices to ensure achievement of those stated priorities, including rigorous checks that all SCEPs align with the goals of the district’s strategic plan.

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:

- The district staff organizes and allocates resources through an enrollment-based formula. The district staff lacks monitoring protocols to ensure school and district staff consistently align resources to meet the needs of all students and the school community.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- Although the district has structures to identify and deploy resources to schools, district leaders reported that funding is low and schools are thinly resourced in terms of student support staff. District leaders shared that a funding formula is used to address schools’ needs equitably. The formula is based on overall student enrollment and the number of students represented in subgroups such as English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged. The district leadership reported that district leaders and the SSS team have a “needs analysis conversation”

with every school leader as part of the budget process. The school leaders reported in interviews that they could make requests to the district staff for additional resources but recognize that some requests may not be honored because of limited funding. Evidenced gathered from district and school leader interviews indicated that the district staff do not have rigorous procedures in place to evaluate how spending and resource decisions impact improvements in student achievement or to identify the spending decisions that are providing the best value for money. District leaders stated in interviews that district staff are aware of the weaknesses in how resources are being monitored and have identified monitoring and evaluating resources, as well as providing additional support to school leaders to help them better manage available resources, as priorities.

- An accounting error discovered during the 2013-14 school year resulted in the district having a net budget deficit of approximately \$55 million. The district has received support from the Governor's office to help address the shortfall; however, the district continues to have difficulty identifying ways to offer a budget that is adequately funded and that meets the needs of its students. The number of positions in the district is less than the district had in 2010, even though district enrollment has increased by 2,000 students since then. The district struggles to provide a number of curricular and extracurricular opportunities as a result of its budget challenges. For example, the number of certified art and physical education teachers in the district makes it difficult to ensure that students, especially in elementary school, will have those classes taught by certified teachers. In addition, the ratios of guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists per pupil are much higher than the ratios suggested by national experts. Reviewers found that the district has not established the systems and structures to ensure that it can maximize resources given its financial challenges. For example, the district lacks strategic monitoring protocols to determine the effectiveness of its PD, and there are no clear protocols that ensure that staff make changes to practices after receiving PD. As a result, while the district has invested in PD, this investment has not resulted in effective instruction occurring across schools. Although the district has offered professional development on the implementation of the CCLS, school leaders are unable to collect lesson plans, limiting their ability to monitor curriculum implementation. In addition, the district has not been able to leverage its evaluation system to ensure that it provides an accurate understanding of teacher effectiveness so that supports can be provided to improve the practices of its staff.

Impact Statement:

- The district has procedures to allocate resources to schools equitably, but lacks protocols to consistently monitor resources to determine how spending impacts student outcomes. As a result, the district misses opportunities to realign and adjust resources to meet the needs of individual schools and subgroups.

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 systems to monitor the effectiveness of resources toward improving outcomes and meeting

other district goals;

- determine barriers that prohibit expenditures from achieving their maximum benefit, such as provisions within the current negotiated contract. Identify ways to address these barriers to improve the impact expenditures can have; and
- ensure that the curricular opportunities for all students, and for ELLs in particular, are being provided.

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:

- The district staff are in the process of reviewing and revising the PD plan to incorporate feedback from school staff. However, the district staff's plan lacks strategic monitoring protocols to hold staff accountable for implementing what they learn from PD in their classrooms, which limits the impact of PD on student achievement.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- District leaders reported that the district is beginning to review the PD plan and process and that district staff are making adjustments to the PD plan based on feedback from school leaders and teachers. School and district leaders confirmed that meetings are being held with each school to discuss the individual PD needs of schools; however, school and district leaders acknowledged that the district has not yet been able to ensure that PD offerings are based on data regarding student achievement or teacher practices and are matched to the needs of schools. The IIT found that the district leadership has not clearly defined expectations for how district and school leaders should use PD as a tool for improving instructional practices and student outcomes.
- The IIT found limited evidence of how the district holds teachers and staff accountable for incorporating strategies learned from the PD into their classroom instruction. Some school leaders reported in interviews that provisions in the teacher contract limits their ability to closely monitor certain aspects of teachers' instructional practice, such as lesson planning. However, some school leaders said they are working collaboratively with district staff to directly support teachers in classrooms and with planning. During school reviews, the IIT did not find evidence to suggest that PD offered has been sufficient to ensure that all teachers are able to deliver effective lessons.
- During discussions with the review team, district staff reported that SSS teams and district leaders are beginning to visit classrooms to assess the impact of PD on instruction and provide targeted feedback to teachers. While school leaders said they value this approach, school and district leaders acknowledged that improvements in student outcomes are still limited because the initiative is new and teachers are not yet being provided with consistent feedback or held accountable for implementing the feedback they receive.

Impact Statement:

- The district staff offers PD activities to support teachers; however, the district staff lacks strategic

monitoring procedures to ensure that PD results in improved instruction practices. As a result, teachers are not yet held accountable for the PD delivered.

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 and implement a strategic school-specific PD plan to meet the needs of teachers by clearly identifying PD needs based on a range of data sources, including school and student assessment as well as teacher effectiveness data; and
- deliver high quality PD that teachers are held accountable for putting into practice in the classroom, and monitor the impact of PD for the improvements it brings to student outcomes.

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

Tenet Rating

Stage 2

Overall Finding:

- The district has systems for compiling instructional data, but the district has not made clear to school staff the district’s expectations for how staff should use data to drive improvements across the district.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- Discussions with district leaders and a review of documents indicated that the district staff collects a variety of data including, school leader and teacher evaluations; student achievement and progress from NYS assessments and the district’s MAP interim assessments; staff and student attendance; special interventions; disciplinary referrals; and suspensions. However, some school leaders and district leaders indicated that the district has not provided clear expectations about how available data should be used at district, school, and class levels to support improvements to student achievement and instructional practices. The district staff have common practices to look at most components of school performance and student achievement. However, the extent to which school staff use data to identify best classroom and school practices and then disseminate information varies from school to school. According to school leaders and district staff, teachers and school leaders are increasingly using data walls within schools and classrooms to track student achievement. However, some school leaders reported that while they do receive support from the district, school leaders said they need additional support in analyzing data more precisely, particularly for subgroups such as ELLs and economically disadvantaged students.
- District leaders reported and school leaders confirmed in interviews that school-based “data teams” have been established in each school. During school reviews, school leaders and teachers stated these data teams should provide teachers with more training on how to use data in a focused and strategic manner to drive instruction and curriculum planning. The district staff reported that the district utilized a series of interim benchmarks assessments, known as MAP, to determine the extent to which

progress is being made at different schools. Some district and school leaders reported that teachers do not consistently use knowledge of students' prior learning and formative assessments to adapt instruction to address students varying needs.

- The district leadership reported to the review team that the collection of data and the use of data sources have been instrumental in the operation of the district for many years. District leaders indicated that the district contracted with vendors to provide support to Data Teams. In addition, the district made PD available to schools on the new MAP data source. However, the IIT found limited evidence of how the district systematically communicates clear expectations about data and how the district ensures that all staff are equipped to effectively analyze and use data to improve instruction and student outcomes.

Impact Statement:

- Data are not being used consistently by staff in schools in ways that effectively improve instructional practices in helping students grow and achieve.

Recommendation:

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

- clarify the priorities for data teams in schools; ensure that data teams provide interpreted data to staff to increase staff's capacity to differentiate instruction and better meet the needs of students; and
- focus teacher training on using and analyzing data to drive instruction, particularly on using knowledge of students' prior learning and formative assessments to adapt instruction to ensure mastery by students.

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>
---	----------------------------	-----------------------

Overall Finding:

- The district has established collaborative relationships with most school leaders; however, some school leaders indicated that the district's goals lack focus and that the district has not adequately defined the roles of all stakeholders in driving school improvement efforts.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- During discussions with the review team, some school leaders reported that the district has recently implemented interventions to help schools improve instructional practices and to ensure that all

schools and students benefit from the vision and mission of the district. School leaders also indicated that they perceive that the district’s priorities lack focus and vision and do not contain clear goals and responsibilities for all stakeholders, which hinders a more concerted and unified drive for improvement.

- The IIT found that school leaders have mixed views about the relationship between the district and schools. Many school leaders interviewed by the IIT reported that district staff are responsive and that the district staff assigned to their schools do a good job in helping school leaders analyze needs to plan better support structures. However, some school leaders described the relationship with the district staff as reactionary and reported that although PD is available, the quality is inconsistent. School leaders reported that most staff seem to recall the messages and research shared in PD, but have not been able to use their understanding of these messages to improve practices. School leaders also indicated that school staff do not feel adequately supported and trained on how to use data to guide, inform, and drive the planning and delivery of instruction in the classroom.
- While school leaders reported that the district has made improvements in the processing of referrals in special education, most school leaders interviewed by the IIT reported that reductions in student support staffing have affected the schools’ ability to provide necessary supports to students. School leaders shared that while they understand some decisions were made because of budgetary constraints, school leaders said that sharing social workers and counsellors across schools presents obstacles to school improvement efforts.

Impact Statement:

- District supports have not become part of a systemic plan that brings coherence to the work undertaken to improve schools and student 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:

- provide support to school leaders in aligning their vision and goals/mission to the district’s priorities; and
- incorporate a coherent and sharply focused PD plan for staff so that each leader, teacher, and support staff member can secure the professional skills and competencies needed to help bring the district’s and school’s visions closer to reality.

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:

- The district has established protocols and processes for implementing curricula that align to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS); however, implementation is just beginning, and clear accountability

measures are lacking.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- School leaders reported in interviews that the district has made efforts to collaborate with schools to develop and implement curricula that align to the CCLS. School leaders reported to the IIT that PD on the CCLS is provided, and teachers are permitted to attend training during the school day. In addition, the school leaders indicated that improvements in outcomes are limited in part, because the district has not made clear what teachers should do differently following PD. School leaders also shared that although the district offers after-school paid opportunities for teachers to attend PD, many teachers do not attend.
- School leaders stated that the district offers a wide variety of PD tied to the creation of curricula aligned to the CCLS. School leaders also stated that teachers benefit from many opportunities to work collaboratively on planning the CCLS through common planning time or grade-level meetings. School leaders and teachers indicated that district-approved curricula materials are used for ELA and math, and one school leader cited the example of the deputy superintendent for secondary education connecting schools with a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOECS) for training in science, reading, ELA, and math as evidence that PD was going well. However, evidence from school reviews and from discussions with school leaders indicate that CCLS planning remains weak in the areas of differentiation and higher-order questioning, and during class visits, the IIT found that teachers had not consistently incorporated the CCLS shifts required in ELA and math to meet the needs of students. Discussions with school and district leaders indicated that school and district leaders do not carry out rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure that CCLS is planned for and delivered effectively across the district. School leaders reported that the provision in the teachers' contract that prohibits lesson plans from being collected limits their ability to monitor curriculum implementation, and the district has not been able to assist school leaders with finding ways to work around this provision so that school leaders can ensure that quality planning occurs. As a result, district and school leaders are limited in their ability to identify the weaknesses in curriculum implementation that are preventing students achieving at a higher academic level.

Impact Statement:

- The district provides some assistance to school staff in developing and implementing curricula that aligns to the CCLS. However, the lack of rigorous monitoring procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of CCLS implementation in all schools limits school leaders' ability to ensure that students experience instruction that prepares 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:

- establish rigorous procedures for monitoring the planning and implementation of CCLS in all classrooms, use the information from these monitoring processes to identify and address weaknesses

in instructional practices, and provide additional support as needed.

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 collaborates with school leaders to provide opportunities and supports for teachers. However, the lack of focused goals to guide PD planning results in inconsistencies in the implementation and monitoring of PD.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- School leaders reported in interviews that they are beginning to work closely with the district when determining what PD to offer. However, some school leaders stated that the absence of focused goals for PD results in school leaders sometimes functioning independently in providing PD for teachers that does not align to district priorities. Some school leaders expressed positive views about the district's efforts to help lead improvement through the district's SSS teams, but some school leaders also reported that the lack of a consistent message concerning expectations for PD implementation results in some teachers, especially tenured teachers, not incorporating strategies from PD into their routine practices. School leaders also indicated that while collaboration is, at times, strong between the district personnel and school leaders, the district has not created opportunities for collaboration between teachers and support staff in different schools to share best practices and learn from one another. School leaders and teachers reported in interviews that collaboration efforts of this nature are usually initiated by individual teachers rather than by district staff as part of a concerted effort to identify and share the best practices.
- School leaders stated that the district provides substitute teachers to cover the classes of those teachers doing training during the school day. School leaders said that some teachers are becoming more empowered as they refine skills and turn-key practices to other colleagues. However, school leaders reported that not all teachers consistently incorporate the information learned from PD in classrooms, which limits the impact of PD on improving student achievement. Furthermore, reviewers concluded that the PD has yet to result in high levels of instruction occurring across the district. During IIT visits to schools in the district, reviewers found an overreliance on direct instruction, in addition to finding that student engagement was inconsistent across classrooms.

Impact Statement:

- The lack of focused goals for PD that includes expectations for effective instruction limit opportunities for targeted planning between the district and school leaders in order to build teachers' capacity to improve instructional practices.

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 strategic PD plan that includes clear expectations for staff implementation of PD strategies in order to raise student achievement.
- increase opportunities for regular collaboration between schools in order for staff to share best practices that have a track record of raising student achievement.

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 supports some programs that address students' social and emotional health; however, reductions in funding, as well as limited PD for staff, have adversely affected the levels of support provided to meet students' social and emotional developmental health.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- School leaders stated that the district has developed community partnerships that support the social and emotional developmental health of students. School leaders and support staff interviewed by the IIT indicated that district initiatives, such as implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, providing full-day pre-kindergarten from September 2015, reducing of out-of-school suspensions, and offering therapeutic supports through Andrus, are positively impacting schools. However, school leaders and support staff reported that the implementation of many initiatives varies from school to school because not all school staff implement the programs with fidelity. School leaders and teachers interviewed indicated that they would welcome more PD from the district on how staff can better identify and meet the social and emotional developmental health needs of all students. Although school leaders stated that the district provided PD for PBIS, school leaders also stated that teachers have not received sufficient PD to help teachers respond to the challenging behavioral and emotional issues exhibited by some students. In addition, the district does not have rigorous systems in place to check that any PD delivered is assessed for the impact that it has in classrooms.
- Some school leaders reported that the district's financial challenges have adversely affected school progress toward achieving goals targeting at improving students' social and emotional developmental health. One example cited by the school leaders is the reduction in psychologist and social worker services. One school leader reported that students only have access to a social worker one day per week and have limited access to psychological support. In addition to the challenges the district faces providing the staff needed, reviewers found that the district was not strategically monitoring the staff and supports that are provided to maximize the limited resources that exist. The IIT found that the district emphasizes the services it provides schools rather than the success and impact of the services

provided, which makes it difficult for the district to identify and expand the supports having the greatest impact and revisit the supports having minimal impact.

Impact Statement:

- The implementation of programs to support students’ social and emotional developmental health varies from school to school, which results in inconsistent support and outcomes for 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:

- identify successful models of student support within schools in the district and replicate these models in schools that do not have these models. Use successful staff as facilitators or as PD providers within the process.
- provide training to build staff capacity to implement established programs and monitor staff’s implementation to hold school leaders and staff accountable for improved practices.

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 developed initiatives that promote welcoming, student-centered, and parent-friendly environments in the schools; however, the district has not ensured that all schools implement consistent communication and engagement strategies with parents.

Evidence/Information that Led to this Finding:

- The district leadership reported that the district supports initiatives that promote families engaging with their children’s schools to support student achievement. The district leader stated that Family Welcome Centers have been established in ten schools, and there is a plan for all of the schools to have a Family Welcome Center by September 2015. These centers are intended to promote and sustain a welcoming environment for families and develop opportunities for reciprocal communication, but since the opening of all of the centers has yet to occur, the impact of this initiative is visible in some, but not all, schools. School leaders confirmed that the district’s efforts to reach out to families through the family centers have increased parents’ attendance levels at events. School leaders also reported that the district has a good relationship with the Yonkers Parent-Teacher Student Association, which provides workshops for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) presidents and for parents in the district’s schools. District staff indicated that all Title I and ESL teachers are mandated to provide a minimum of four parent workshops a year. A flyer outlining all scheduled workshops is available on the Parent information table in each school. In spite of these efforts, some parents interviewed by the IIT during school visits stated that they could benefit from receiving more guidance on how they can best support their child’s learning at home. In addition, the IIT found that not all schools provide parent education workshops.

- School leaders and parents interviewed during school reviews indicated that the district provides a leaflet to parents, which includes a description of each school in the district and the school's admission procedures. The district's special education office and other departments have developed partnerships with community organizations, including mental health agencies. School leaders and parents reported that communications are translated for families who speak languages other than English, including the information on the website. During the school reviews, both school leaders and parents interviewed by the IIT reported that the district leader promotes open and reciprocal dialogue among and between the district, schools, and families. However, some parents interviewed indicated that they did not understand the student data sent home. District leaders reported that the district has to establish a better plan to ensure that all school staff consistently and effectively use available channels of communication to make clear how the district, schools and the community can work together with parents to raise student achievement.

Impact Statement:

- The district has established initiatives to promote family engagement; however, the district has not ensured that all schools implement consistent communication and engagement protocols. As a result, not all parents are aware of how they can best support their children's learning.

Recommendation:

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

- Establish a consistent approach for communication and outreach to families across the district. Monitor and evaluate the strategies used by schools to determine the effectiveness of the strategies in increasing parents' active participation in student learning.