



Office of Innovative School Models
 Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) Schools
 School Improvement Grant (SIG)
 Monitoring Report

School:	Bennett High School – Transformation	School District:	Buffalo City School District
Date of Site-Visit:	March 29, 2011 (Second Visit)	Members of Site-Visit Team:	Andrew McGrath, Jennifer Span, Patrick Roche

STAFFING	
Collective Bargaining	<i>Negotiations are continuing regarding revision of the collective bargaining agreement in order to support: development of a teacher evaluation system, removal of staff based on the evaluation system, and changes in work day, duties and hours.</i>
Teacher Evaluations linked to Student Performance	<i>Teacher evaluations linked to student performance have been put into place. The system and data used must be consistent with State APPR system.</i>
Identify and Reward staff or Remediate/Remove Staff	<i>A clear and transparent process for identifying staff for rewards and remediation is in place (a process must be in place immediately upon the development and implementation of the Teacher Evaluation System).</i>
Implementation of Strategies to Recruit, Place, and Retain Qualified Staff	<i>Activities are funded to recruit, place, and/or retain highly qualified teachers.</i>

Findings:

- District staff indicated meetings and discussions continue to take place with the Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) and the Buffalo Council of Supervisors and Administrators (BCSA) regarding the development of a teacher evaluation system. The collective bargaining agreements for teachers and administrators lapsed in 2004.
- School leadership indicated teachers are aware of regulation 3012(c), and realize the intended goal of the district is to enact a teacher evaluation system in September, 2011.
- The district's data warehouse is currently being developed, in collaboration with leadership from the district's persistently low achieving (PLA) schools. Bennett High School and Burgard High School will pilot the data warehouse during the remainder of the 2010-11 school year. The remaining PLA schools will begin to utilize the system in September, 2011.
- School leadership indicated specific professional learning opportunities have been provided to selected staff in an effort to remediate instructional needs. Examples of these opportunities include lesson plan development, data analysis, and classroom management techniques. Some teachers have been targeted using the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) discipline data.
- During their focus group session, leadership indicated the importance of being highly-involved in the selection process of new staff.

PLANNING	
Implementation of Timeline	<i>The district/school is on track to complete activities in accordance with the approved timeline for implementation, or to submit an approvable School Improvement Grant (SIG) application. Identify elements that are off-track.</i>
Performance Targets	<i>The district/school is implementing activities which will help them meet the school's performance targets. (Performance targets are tied to the school's achieving "In Good Standing" by the end of the 3 year grant period. Refer to the school's Performance Plan Template, as available.)</i>
Implementation of JIT Recommendations	<i>The district and school are implementing the plan based on the JIT recommendations. The recommendations of the JIT are addressed as delineated in the SIG application or Restructuring Plan, as applicable.</i>

Findings:

- School leaders reported the school has established three main goals for turnaround (improve attendance, improve civility, and improve achievement) and four focus areas (teaching and learning, data analysis, engaging students, and parent/community involvement). Each goal has identified strategies for implementation and measures for evidence of success. During their focus group session, teachers indicated they are aware of the goals and focus areas.
- An assistant principal shared a separate "Administrative Action Plan" for the Freshman Academy which includes goals and tasks, their related measures, and the current status of each goal.
- Common curriculum planning time (CCPT) is scheduled daily for core subject departments. Documents were provided to the site visit team showing meeting minutes and agendas. According to teachers and leaders, CCPT is encouraging higher levels of collaborative planning throughout the building.
- During their focus groups session, teachers reported coaches are currently in place for all core subjects. They also stated the level and amount of coaching varies depending on the subject area and coach. The science coach was recently hired and has been mostly unavailable due to meetings and development activities.
- Teachers stated they hope to see a more comprehensive plan for how coaches are to be used during the next school year.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	
Quality, On-going, Job-embedded Professional Development	<i>Implementing job-embedded professional development, as defined by the USED, and as approved by NYSED.</i>
Supportive of Instructional Needs	<i>All professional development is researched based and supportive of the instructional needs of the school.</i>
Monitoring and Analysis	<i>Professional development is monitored and analyzed to ensure staff participation and classroom implementation.</i>

Findings:

- Leadership shared a professional development (PD) plan document written in response to NYSED JIT report findings. The plan, for the 2010-11 school year, identified four focus areas (teaching literacy in content areas, explicit instruction, engaging classroom activities, and use of higher order questions and activities). Teachers indicated the main focus for their PD this year is around technology, explicit instruction, and departmental use of data to plan instruction.
- A plan provided for the 2011-12 school year includes PD topics aligned with proposed future initiatives (i.e., a move to block scheduling would include PD on designing block lessons).

- The leadership team indicated they guide and monitor professional development by leading departmental CCPT sessions for ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Additionally, the team is monitoring for use of PD tools and techniques when they conduct formal and informal classroom observations, using a new monitoring/observation form.
- During their focus group session, teachers stated they are aware of professional development monitoring and receive appropriate feedback.
- School leaders indicated each member of the team has a goal of conducting four informal (15 to 20 minutes) observations per day.
- During their focus group session, teachers stated release days for PD often have low student and teacher attendance. They believe full day events would be a more effective use of time.
- Teachers stated district-wide PD events on Superintendent Days are not well coordinated. They would prefer separate days and events for primary and secondary teachers. Additionally, district observers have sometimes faulted teachers for using text book strategies, which are part of their PD training.
- Teachers stated although they are not typically given evaluation forms for half-day sessions conducted at the school, they are surveyed by the leadership team during CCPT to get their input for planning future sessions.
- Bennett High School is paying to send several teachers to the Teacher Leader Certificate program at Niagara University.
- Business teachers have been able to attend industry training at Buffalo area businesses to ascertain skills and knowledge needed for the current work environment.

DATA ANALYSIS	
Data to Inform Instructional Programming	<i>Data is used to identify and implement research-based instructional programs that are aligned with state standards</i>
Data for Instructional Decisions for Student Achievement	<i>A system is being implemented which allows for the continuous use of data to make instructional decisions for students.</i>

Findings:

- The district's data warehouse is under development. It is designed to allow district and school staff the opportunity to monitor and analyze student, teacher, school and district data. It is aligned to the common core standards.
- During their focus group session, school leaders stated a data coach was hired in March and at the time of the visit was in the process of undergoing twenty days of training supervised at the district level. Additionally, school leaders indicated that School-Wide Information System (SWIS) is in use.
- According to school leaders, the district sends data directly to the school. Additionally, the leadership team and instructional coaches have access to the data warehouse.
- During their focus group sessions, teachers and leaders stated core subject departments analyze data during CCPT to review student information and plan appropriate instruction.
- The principal reviews updated data related to the three school goals at least once per week. Additionally, the leadership team has begun to review on a weekly basis data gathered using the Time Track system to analyze time spent on curriculum and instruction.
- The Freshman Academy team reviews relevant attendance and academic data with students every five weeks, and then uses the information to conduct

individual “Kid Talk” sessions and parent meetings. “Kid Talks” are conducted by the Freshman Academy Student Support Team (SST).

- The principal maintains a comprehensive “data wall” which uses graphs to track student test performance, attendance, and discipline referrals. All categories were disaggregated and represented in a color coded format.
- The CCPT room used by all core subject departments is equipped with a machine that scores multiple choice assessments and disaggregates data by test items, individual students, etc.
- School leadership shared an ELA benchmark assessment, the resultant data on student performance, and a second, shorter assessment administered after a subsequent remedial lesson.

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING	
Increased Learning Time	<i>The school has implemented a longer school day, week, or school year to significantly increase the total number of school hours to provide additional time for instruction in core academic subjects, or in enrichment subject areas, or added time for teacher collaboration.</i>
Mapped and Paced Curriculum	<i>The written district/school level curriculum is aligned to NYS standards, performance indicators, the core competencies and is being implemented. Pacing guides are developed, used and monitored.</i>
Instructional Programming is Linked to Needs Assessment	<i>Curricular decisions have been made to meet the needs of all students.</i>
Effective Teaching	<i>There is evidence of rigor, relevance, pacing, and alignment of curriculum to State Standards, and student engagement from Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT).</i>
ELL/SWD	<i>The necessary instructional programs and highly qualified staff are in place to support the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD).</i>

Findings:

- Bennett High School has increased the time built into its schedule to accommodate common planning from three times per cycle to every day.
- The SED site-visit team observed school leaders conducting classroom observations using the Bennett High School “informal observation feedback form.”
- During their focus groups session, students indicated that they feel as though some of their teachers are not prepared to teach. Students reported teachers don’t have high expectations for them, and some classrooms are not organized and therefore not conducive to learning.
- The SED site-visit team observed some classrooms in which students were not academically challenged or engaged. In one class, students were given ditto sheets to complete without assistance or adequate direction (i.e., a student asked the teacher the definition of polynomials, and teacher response was, “I don’t know. You look it up.”).
- The SED site-visit team observed varying degrees of rigor and engagement throughout the building. The team considered the teacher-student academic interactions to be an improvement as compared to the December, 2010 site-visit.
- During their focus groups session, teachers reported that the co-teaching model is less effective than desired. This is due to “special education teachers being pulled in too many directions.” It was also reported special education teachers do not have a common planning time and therefore do not provide transitional planning for special education students.

- School leaders stated they were in the process of identifying innovative ways to adjust the schedule to meet the needs of incoming freshman and “repeaters.” Leaders indicated flexibility and support from the district in this regard will prove important.

STUDENT SUPPORT	
Additional Support	<i>Students are receiving extra academic and developmental support based on student need (AIS, character development, PBIS).</i>
Counseling	<i>Student support services are in place to provide students in need with additional social support (education/career counseling, social work, drug/alcohol/violence counseling, school psychologist, health/mental health professional)</i>
Enrichment Opportunities	<i>Students have opportunities to participate in academic and social enrichment activities during and after the school day and during the summer.</i>

Findings:

- Morning announcements encourage students to look ahead towards higher education. Scholarship awards are announced, and a \$1.5 million scholarship goal was established by the school to promote efforts in this regard.
- Morning announcements and hallway displays encourage students to be aware of their learning experiences (i.e., number of days remaining in the quarter/year, acquired credits, college fair, after school tutoring, etc.).
- The SED site-visit team observed a lack of rigor and differentiation of instruction in the AIS classes visited.
- During their focus group session, students reported the following:
 - Teachers do not always have high expectations for them.
 - Some classrooms are unorganized and disheveled, and therefore not conducive for learning.
 - They do not feel adequately supported due to the high number of suspensions and detentions for “low-level” infractions (i.e., wearing a jacket).
 - Students do not meet with guidance and career counselors on a regular basis; and appointments are difficult to arrange. Additionally, college application materials are not sent out in a timely manner.
- A member of the SED site-visit team observed a teacher using twenty minutes of classroom instruction time to have a student removed for wearing her jacket in class.
- An assistant principal reports the Freshman Academy has a separate Student Support Team (SST) staffed by a Social Worker, a Counselor, a CSE Evaluator, and a Psychologist. The SST monitors attendance, discipline, and academic standing; and schedules individual sessions when appropriate.
- A full-time college/career readiness counselor was hired in January. Although the senior class students have been the immediate concern, school leaders indicated efforts will need to expand to accommodate the needs of all students, grades nine through twelve.
- During focus groups sessions with school leaders, teachers, parents and students, it was stated that attendance remains an issue. A half-time attendance officer was hired in January. Collectively, the aforementioned stakeholders expressed their desire for the attendance officer to be full-time.

TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Effective Leadership	<i>The school leader has the experience and skills needed to successfully implement a turnaround model and to act as a change agent for the school.</i>
Leadership Development	<i>School leaders receive appropriate and timely professional development. Mentoring or coaching programs are in place and effective.</i>
School Improvement Manager/External Providers	<i>The school is being guided and informed by its partnership with its School Improvement Manager or external provider.</i>
Building Level Leadership Team	<i>The school is utilizing its Building Leadership Team to implement the intervention model.</i>

Findings:

- During their focus group session, teachers indicated school leaders are highly visible throughout the building. They stated the leadership team has created a school culture that is collaborative, respectful and highly-conducive to school improvement efforts.
- Teachers and school leaders state the principal and assistant principals conduct walk-throughs on a timely basis, and are present in the common areas to ensure that students transition to classes appropriately.
- During their focus group session, the leadership team shared a clear and concise schedule/plan for walk-throughs and observations. Two formal observations are conducted for non-tenured teachers and one formal observation is conducted for tenured teachers. Walk-throughs are unlimited, and feedback is provided in written form.
- School leaders shared *TimeTrack* data with the site visit team. This data tracks the specific duties of the principal and assistant principals, helping to ensure that they spend fifty percent on instructional activities. This data is reviewed on a weekly basis.

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
Environment is Conducive to Learning	<i>The school is safe, orderly and academically-oriented. Supervision is sufficient, respectful and consistent.</i>
Shared Vision	<i>School staff understands the focus/ vision of the school's improvement efforts and supports them in a consistent and effective manner.</i>
Collaboration	<i>Administrators, teachers and staff communicate openly, positively and effectively. Professional learning communities exist and affect improvement efforts.</i>
Parent Involvement	<i>Strategies are being implemented to increase the involvement and contributions of parents.</i>
External/Community-Based Partners	<i>Strategies are being implemented to increase the involvement and contributions of community partners.</i>

Findings:

- The SED site visit team observed a school community which has incorporated a “zero-tolerance” environment. During their focus group sessions, teachers and school leaders acknowledged the difficulty of balancing behavioral restrictions and social/academic opportunities.
- During their focus groups session, students suggested school attendance is adversely affected as a result of the punitive nature of the school environment. It was stated, “Why come to school if you’re only going to be suspended?”
- Bennett has an operational parent-teacher organization (PTO) comprised of various community members. The PTO works closely with school administration and counselors to meet the needs of parents and families. The parent facilitator reported she has met with over 200 families of Bennett High School.

- Academic Talent Search sponsored by Canisius College is housed in the school to provide tutoring in any content subject. However, the Canisius representative stated student attendance is low.
- Parents report the absence of print communication in Spanish and a translator for Bennett High School to Hispanic families. The PTO president reports she has met district and school leaders regarding this issue.
- The *Promise Neighborhood* planning grant committee meets bi-monthly. A planning grant was secured in September, 2010. The committee is working towards securing additional grant funds in this regard.
- A dedicated, retired teacher reported Bennett High School has an active Alumni Association. There are 1,000 members and 200 active volunteers and mentors. The Alumni Association helps fund field trips, scholarships, and tutoring. They help seniors fill out college applications and help school staff call freshman parents.

OTHER FUNDING SOURCES	
Use of 1003(g) or 1003(a) grant funding	<i>The LEA is using School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding to support the implementation of or planning for school intervention models.</i>
Use of Other Funding Sources besides 1003 (g)	<i>In addition to SIG 1003(g) and/or 1003(a) funds, the LEA is using a number of other resources to implement the school intervention models or the Restructuring Plan, as applicable.</i>

Findings:

- A document review by the SED site-visit team confirmed the district and the school are collectively using SIG funding to support the implementation of its school improvement plan.
- The district has allocated Title IID ARRA funds, as well as Math-Science Partnership funds to support the implementation of the school’s transformation model.
- The district received \$500,000 in planning grant funding from the USDOE in September, 2010. M&T Bank matched \$250,000 to support Bennett High School in its school improvement efforts through this *Promise Neighborhood*. A grant committee was in the process of developing further *Promise Neighborhood* grant material for submission to the USDOE.

DISTRICT SUPPORT AND PLANNING FOR DEVELOPMENT	
District Support Provides Operational Flexibility to the School	<i>The LEA provides or is planning to provide the school operational flexibility (such as matters staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting).</i>
District has a systemic plan for intervention and improvement	<i>The LEA has incorporated all JIT recommendations and requirements of the SIG Application into the improvement plan for the school.</i>
District has a plan to identify, recruit, place, and retain effective leadership	<i>In accordance with SIG requirements, the LEA has a plan for hiring and retaining leadership.</i>

Findings:

- During their focus group session, teachers indicated representatives from the district office are on-site on a regular basis to conduct walk-throughs and provide support to teachers, coaches and school leaders.
- The school is supported by the district through the school turnaround office. The associate superintendent of this office, representing PLA secondary schools, works directly with the leadership team to ensure the school implements its school improvement plan as delineated in the SIG application.
- School leaders indicated increased autonomy at the school level is needed in order to address the timely and unique needs of the school community.
- During their focus group session, school leaders indicated their desire to have greater flexibility in selecting and scheduling staff in order to better meet the needs of students who are experiencing academic difficulty.

Summary:

The State Education Department three member site visit team conducted a full-day site visit at Bennett High School on March 28, 2011. Although the visit was brief, the team was able to acquire information about the school's efforts to implement their reform model for improving student learning.

The site visit team met with various stakeholders and reviewed initiatives which appear to provide the school with the opportunity to make progress towards improved student achievement. The school leadership team is visible and supportive, and the school turnaround office is actively involved in the school improvement efforts. Numerous community partners are working collaboratively with the school, and the teaching staff is proactive and student-centered.

Staff, students, parents and educational partners all spoke positively of the school's efforts to improve student achievement. District and school staffs were candid with their comments and highly cooperative throughout the PLA monitoring process. The school and the district appear to be working together to coordinate their efforts and implement as much of their Transformation Model as possible.

The next site visit to Bennett High School will be during the Fall of 2011.