



OFFICE OF INNOVATIVE SCHOOL MODELS
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Dr. James Williams
Superintendent
Buffalo City School District
Rm 712 – City Hall
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Superintendent Williams:

Thank you for welcoming the Office of Innovative School Models Accountability Team to the Buffalo City School District on March 30-31, 2011. The team conducted productive visits to Lafayette, Riverside and Burgard high schools, and the staff in those schools should be commended for being well-prepared and supportive during the visits. The schools offered the team full access to their school improvement documents and to their classrooms.

The purpose of the State Education Department's site visits was to gather evidence on the implementation of the School Improvement 1003(a) Grants (SIG) and the Comprehensive Educational Plans (CEP). Additionally, the team sought to collect evidence which could demonstrate the schools' readiness to meet the conditions to successfully apply for and receive 1003(g) funding to begin full implementation of one of the school improvement models in the 2011-2012 school year.

Following is a bulleted summary of the school level evidence the team gathered during each of the school visits.

Lafayette High School:

- During their focus group session, teachers indicated that there was not a clear and well-delineated plan in place for the school to prepare itself for the implementation of one of the four school improvement models.
- Teachers, leaders and students indicated their concern and frustration regarding plans for the international students currently enrolled in the high school who are not due to graduate at the end of this school year.
- The staff indicated and school leaders confirmed, there is a 'grass roots' movement throughout the school to engage students and promote a sense of community. Examples include: increased use of interactive whiteboards; opening the library one hour prior to the beginning of the school day; voluntary staffing of the library two hours after the end of the school day; and after school tutoring.

- Teachers and school leaders indicated that the staff has created a collaborative environment that has led to effective common planning, student-based lesson planning, and formative data analysis.
- During focus group sessions, teachers and school leaders indicated the need for training and support to better meet the needs of ESL/ELL/SIFE students. The need for greater flexibility of scheduling was also expressed.
- Teachers and leaders stated that a school improvement team was created by the staff to address the needs of the school. The team initiated attendance rewards, created a school-wide hallway pass system, and has promoted the use of formative data throughout the school.
- Staff indicated that they have received professional development throughout the school year that has led to improvements in the use of technology. Training included the use of interactive whiteboards, interactive student response devices, and laptop computer carts.
- According to teachers and leaders, staff development has not been linked to long-range school improvement plans.
- Teachers and leaders indicated that attendance is a major issue. The NYSED site visit team confirmed this through document review and classroom observations.

Riverside High School:

- During their focus group sessions, teachers and leaders described common themes (i.e., improving attendance, attention to hallway behavior, collaborative planning, increasing the use of technology, and raising academic expectations) throughout the building to promote the school's efforts to implement one of the four school improvement models.
- The leadership team has the support and respect of the teaching staff. Equally, the leadership team has promoted a collaborative atmosphere throughout the school that is based on transparency and respect.
- School leaders indicated that district representatives have been accessible and supportive. District walk-throughs have been conducted a number of times during the year, and subject area representatives have attended common planning sessions.
- School leaders, teachers, students and parents indicated that attendance is a major concern, dramatically affecting student achievement. Challenges in this regard are numerous, and include:
 - Niagara Falls Transit Authority (NFTA) buses failing to stop for high school students, and limited bus pass hours;
 - Parents' 'cricket' phone numbers change too often to track, and phone message memory boxes are often too full to leave messages;
 - The need for a translator to assist with outreach calls and visits;
 - Students caring for younger siblings; and
 - Student engagement and/or accountability.
- Numerous steps have been taken to address the attendance issue, including:
 - Mandatory calls home (twenty calls per week) by each member of the staff to address absenteeism and behavior, and/or to promote positive behavior;

- Real-time student attendance data;
 - A part-time (0.5 FTE) attendance teacher; and
 - A school attendance team.
- Teachers stated that professional development opportunities are abundant, convenient and appropriate. Training sessions are seen as aligned to school improvement efforts.
- Students, teachers and school leaders indicated that the Safe and Civil Schools program has been universally adopted by the school and has led to improved hallway behavior and classroom attendance.
- During their focus group sessions, teachers and leaders indicated that common planning time has led to teacher-created common assessments, improved instructional planning, and increased collaboration across grade levels and subject areas.
- Counseling staff indicated that they are working with EdTrust to conduct a student survey to acquire information regarding their needs.
- Parents indicated that the parent teacher organization is active, but they would like to increase membership. They also indicated the need for more clubs and after school opportunities for students.

Burgard High School:

- During their focus group sessions, teachers and school leaders indicated their concern and frustration regarding the high percentage of students with disabilities (SWD) currently enrolled at the school (over 30%, as compared to the district average of 18%).
- Teachers indicated that the new leadership team is seen as positive, respectful, accessible and highly visible throughout the school. They have helped to foster an atmosphere of collaboration throughout the building.
- Teachers and school leaders indicated that common planning time has 'restarted,' with expectations outlined by weekly agendas and minutes. Teachers stated that common planning time is used for professional development opportunities, student data analysis and improved instructional planning.
- Teachers, school leaders, students and parents stated that safety remains an issue, both within the building and in neighboring areas adjacent to school grounds. Police have an established presence, but this influence needs to be consistently maintained. Students stated that they are impressed with the ability of the school staff to address on-campus altercations quickly and effectively.
- Teachers, leaders and parents indicated that attendance is a major concern. Teachers and school leaders stated that a full-time attendance teacher is needed to address the needs of the school community. The attendance teacher is currently part time (0.5 FTE) at the high school.
- The attendance teacher indicated that the school is currently using student data to address chronic absenteeism and to proactively deal with potential issues. Teachers stated the need for additional elective courses, enrichment activities and extra curricular opportunities to engage students.
- During their focus group session, parents indicated that a parent facilitator has been hired and that the PTO is active. Additionally, parents stated that the issue

of violence needs to be addressed, and community based partnerships must be developed to provide mentoring opportunities and after school activities.

- Teachers, school leaders, students and parents indicated that the extended school day currently in effect is adversely affecting student achievement, attendance and school-wide behavior. It was stated that students lose their mental focus, act out negatively, and/or skip classes.
- Teachers and leaders indicated that staff cohesiveness is negatively impacted as a result of the extended day due to early and late shifts, and duplicative staff meetings.
- During their focus group session, students indicated the need for more enrichment opportunities. They stated the need for advanced placement and college level courses, as well as electives.

If you or your district staff would like to submit a response to this gathered evidence, please direct your questions to Andrew McGrath via email at amcgrath@mail.nysed.gov or at the following address:

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Once again, thank you for allowing the team to gather evidence regarding the district's implementation of intervention systems. The next site visit is scheduled to be conducted in September, 2011.

Sincerely,

Sharon Holder

Sharon Holder, Ed. D.
Supervisor of Education Programs
Office of Innovation

c: Sally Bachofer
Principals