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

School:	South Park High School	School District:	Buffalo Public Schools
Date of Site-Visit:	March 29, 2011 (Second Visit)	Members of Site-Visit Team:	LoriAnn Curtin, Mark Barth, Alice Roberson

STAFFING	
Collective Bargaining	*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 workday, duties and hours.*
Teacher Evaluations linked to Student Performance	*Teacher evaluations linked to student performance have been put into place. The system and data used must be consistent with State APPR system.*
Identify and Reward staff or Remediate/Remove Staff	*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).*
Implementation of Strategies to Recruit, Place, and Retain Qualified Staff	*Activities are funded to recruit, place, and/or retain highly qualified teachers.*

Findings:

- School leaders stated collective bargaining agreement negotiations are in process, and they are currently awaiting clear guidance from the State Education Department, as they have not yet seen a model teacher evaluation system. District leaders stated they are currently working with the Buffalo Teacher's Federation to create a new teacher evaluation system.
- School leaders stated the current teachers' evaluation system does not include components based on student performance or student growth.
- School leaders stated there is not a system in place to identify and reward staff, based on the evaluation system. However, a teacher can be placed on a teacher improvement plan, which addresses specific areas in need of improvement. This improvement plan can be used for both tenured and non-tenured teachers,. The school's instructional team works closely with the teacher to provide necessary support and explicit training.
- At the time of the SED site visit, the school leader had not received notification of a need to recruit and hire for any positions in the building and was not aware of any positions that would need to be cut.

PLANNING	
Implementation of	*The district/school is on track to complete activities in accordance with the*

Timeline	approved timeline for implementation, or to submit an approvable School Improvement Grant (SIG) application. Identify elements that are off-track.
Performance Targets	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.)
Implementation of JIT Recommendations	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.

Findings:

- The district provided a copy of its amendment to the SIG 1003(g) to the SED site visit team. On the date of the site visit, the amendment had not yet been approved by SED.
- According to school leaders, and as delineated in the original FS-10, the district hired a data coach. The person filling this role splits her time between South Park High School and Bennett High School. Currently, she is completing training on the data dashboard, which is being developed by the district.
- A data teacher position delineated in the school's original SIG 1003(g) budget was filled in February, 2011. The data teacher began working with the school the week of March 21, 2011. She will work at South Park High School as needed, and will also work with other secondary schools.
- School leaders stated the 0.5 attendance teacher was hired in late January 2011, and is at the school three days out of a six day cycle. The principal stated there has been a two percent increase in attendance since the attendance teacher was hired. The attendance teacher makes calls and conducts home visits. He links students and families to partnerships that will work with them to help increase the child's attendance.
- The Performance Plan Template continues to be developed at the State Education Department (SED). Therefore, no evidence was requested during this on-site visit.
- Once again, the plan was found to be aligned with the Joint Intervention Team (JIT) recommendations at the time the School Improvement Grant Application was approved.

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

Findings:

- Teachers remarked they receive the following job-embedded professional development including, but not limited to:
  - o 99 Ideas for Working with ELL students;
  - o Common Planning (Monday & Friday-co-teaching, Tuesday-group, Wednesday and Thursdays-department); and
  - o Technology training (including the use of Whiteboards) – next one scheduled April 4, 2011.

- Teachers received guidance and support from coaches who train staff on how to utilize item-analysis to inform instruction to improve student performance.
- Teachers expressed a sense of empowerment by learning how to assess data to see how it aligns with the curriculum.
- The principal stated some professional development opportunities are differentiated, according to the specific needs of teachers and/or departments.
- Teachers stated Professional Learning Opportunities (PLO's) were held after school, despite pending collective bargaining negotiations.
- During the class observation of ELA V, the teacher was conducting an SAT preparatory session with a Princeton Review staff member. However, the representative stated the teacher was adept at the vocabulary section and did not require her assistance.
- Teachers praised white board training as an effective tool and visual aid.
- School leaders stated monitoring and analysis of professional development occurs between the administrative teams who conduct walk-throughs and provide informal feedback to teachers. School leaders conduct walkthroughs on a daily basis, and have pre-observation and post observation meetings for formal observations. Additionally, a conference is held with teachers for their final evaluation.

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

Findings:
- School leaders and teachers stated common summative assessments, based on previous Regent's exams, are administered quarterly in all core content areas. Item analysis is conducted to determine if students are reaching or exceeding the benchmarks, and to determine what concepts need to be re-taught. The first two quarterly assessments have been given, and it was noted by the school's staff that they are seeing progress in ELA results for the 2007 cohort.
- Teachers stated they are also administering summative assessments published by Castle Learning and are conducting item analysis on the resulting data. They use the data from these assessments to restructure student placements and to increase AIS services to six days per cycle, rather than three days per cycle.
- Teachers stated they would like to have more tools to gather data to inform instruction in addition to the current resources such as, NovaNet (credit recovery,), Castle Learning (AIS tool), TI Navigator (calculators and instruction tools for math), and technology training.

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING	
Increased Learning Time	*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.*
Mapped and Paced Curriculum	*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.*
Instructional	*Curricular decisions have been made to meet the needs of all students.*

Programming is Linked to Needs Assessment	
Effective Teaching	*There is evidence of rigor, relevance, pacing, and alignment of curriculum to State Standards, and student engagement from Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT).*
ELL/SWD	*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).*

Findings:

- School leaders stated the school has a longer school day, yet, in some cases that time is not being used for academics due to staffing and budget cuts which has resulted in more study halls than administration would prefer.
- The principal indicated the school is provided with a mapped and paced curriculum through the district office.
- Teachers reported meeting with instructional coaches and school leaders to discuss next steps in school improvement efforts, suggestions for professional development based on data, and how best to make curricular decisions to meet the needs of all students.
- One teacher stated the split of faculty, necessary to have twelve periods, creates two shifts, hence two faculty meetings and a challenge to schedule common planning times.
- The SED site visit team noted the following evidence of effective teaching: lesson objectives were posted in classrooms visited and students appeared engaged. In many classrooms visited, teachers were circulating while students were producing written work. Classrooms had exemplary student work posted. Co-teaching appeared seamless, because both teachers demonstrated vast content knowledge of the subject matter at hand. A teacher revisited a topic due to concerns based on some students work that indicated they were struggling in several areas
- School leaders stated they have about fifty English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in the student body of approximately 800 students. According to school leaders, the following supports are in place for ELLs.
  - There is one, full-time, English as a second language (ESL) teacher, and one part-time ESL teacher.
  - The school offers one section of advanced ESL instruction, two sections of ESL at the intermediate level, and four sections of beginning ESL instruction.
  - In addition, general classroom teachers provide supports to ELLs via best practices strategies learned in professional development, and via curriculum differentiation
- School leaders stated twenty-six percent of the student body included students with disabilities (SWDs), and twenty-nine percent of the freshman class included SWDs. Through observations and document review, the SED site visit team noted that services for SWDs appear to meet their needs.

STUDENT SUPPORT	
Additional Support	*Students are receiving extra academic and developmental support based on student need (AIS, character development, PBIS).*
Counseling	*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)
Enrichment Opportunities	*Students have opportunities to participate in academic and social enrichment activities during and after the school day and during the summer.*

Findings:

- The principal reported a two percent increase in school attendance attributed to:
  - o a new attendance teacher (0.5) that follows up and conferences with students and parents,
  - o the partner organization Hillside which provides mentoring.
- Co-teaching was cited by teachers as effective student support.
- Students remarked teachers were accessible to provide additional explanation and instruction on assignments to ensure that students understand what is required.
- The school leadership team made a mid-year change in its Academic Intervention Services (AIS) program by doubling the number of days AIS is given, i.e., from three days out of the six day school week (days A-F) to six days. AIS is given every day, which was the standard last year (with science AIS is allotted by lab and course failure; ELLs have an ESL period). The January Regents results prompted the change.
- Teachers reported AIS is not yielding all its desired outcomes due to poor student attendance and / or lack of motivation. Disruptive latecomers and re-teaching yesterday's truants create other disincentives.
- One guidance counselor is assigned to the seniors. Two other guidance counselors are shared by houses.
- A career and college guidance counselor, new this year, is funded through the grant.

TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP	
Effective Leadership	*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.*
Leadership Development	*School leaders receive appropriate and timely professional development. Mentoring or coaching programs are in place and effective.*
School Improvement Manager/External Providers	*The school is being guided and informed by its partnership with its School Improvement Manager or external provider.*
Building Level Leadership Team	*The school is utilizing its Building Leadership Team to implement the intervention model.*

Findings:

- District leaders and teachers re-emphasized to the SED site visit team progress is being made at South Park High School under the current principal's leadership.
- The principal reported participating in the following leadership development opportunities with an assistant principal including but not limited to:
  - o the School Administrator Management (SAM) program, which provided data on how the principal was spending her time and aimed to ensure that she is not the first responder on discipline issues, but the instructional leader of South Park.
  - o In addition, the principal participated in leadership development training at Harvard University.
- During this second site visit to Buffalo Public Schools, the SED site visit team again met with the school improvement manager, both in the district office and at

the individual schools. She continues to provide management of and support for each school's implementation of its school improvement plan by meeting regularly with each PLA school's administrative team.
- The school has a building level leadership team which meets on Tuesdays to discuss school improvement efforts. The team has members from the school, district administrators and content coaches

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

Findings:
- During the student focus groups, students stated that they felt safe in their school and the expectation from the school leadership was one of being ready to work.
- Hallways are almost empty between classes. The cafeteria was orderly.
- The students stated there were multiple school activities available, band, track, debate team, science club, video club, book club.
- Students stated the belief that teachers push for academic excellence.
- In interviews teachers illustrated how they acquire a shared vision:
  - ○ "We are pushed to give kids more information on everything. Rubrics: I didn't want to discuss grading with kids but if you show kids how rigor can be evaluated, they do more, they see what it takes to excel."
  - ○ "We never spent so much time discussing teaching."
- There are extensive beneficial community-based partnerships including:
  - ○ Collaborating with the United Way
  - ○ Creating service learning opportunities with community organizations (Firsthand Science Learning and River Keepers)
  - ○ JROTC - working on leadership skills
- The school principal has joined district officials, neighbors, elected officials and area businesses to explore the possibility of creating an evening community center with adult education classes, computer training, GED courses and weight lifting within the school.
- The PTO office contains a parent resource book for information on local organizations that provided assistance to families in need and to educate parents and students about the community in which they live (e.g. Erie County Botanical Gardens, Habitat for Humanity, Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- During the parent focus group, the PTO vice-president said she makes contact via phone, e-mail, and the school web site, but also acknowledged challenges with parent participation.
- The leadership team submitted documentation showing the school is attempting to increase its community-based partnerships.
- A survey to community organizations suggested ways in which they can increase their involvement in the schools. E.g.:
  - ○ allowing students to complete community service,
  - ○ creating internship opportunities,

- o creating CTE work experiences,
- o creating career exploration experiences,
- o providing field trips, and
- o mentoring students.
- The first community partners meeting on January 25, 2011 had about 20 people; another is scheduled for May 9, 2011.
- The following community partners attended a focus group interview with the SED site visit team:
- St. Bonaventure has been a partner from the beginning, as part of the shared decision making which grew to be a part of the community advisory committee. The partnership now provides:
  - o a college grad student intern to help with college applications,
  - o an administrative intern to supervise with summer school,
  - o provide summer tutoring in partnership with Hillside, and
  - o places a sports medicine intern to work in the fitness room
- The Academic Talent Search program serves grades 9-12, low-income, first generation college bound, about 200 students; providing:
  - o colleges visits
  - o workshops on financial aid
  - o scholarships
  - o tracking students after college, we do
- The Hillside Work Scholarship Connect has an office in the school, it is staffed by two full-time youth advocates. Each have 30 students (walk-ins and referrals). They provide links to:
  - o tutoring and mentoring,
  - o to Wegman's work employment training,
  - o social enrichment programs,
  - o scholarship through Wegman's based on success,
  - o employment training, and
  - o teen outreach program (TOP).
- Kaleida Health is a full service clinic in the school. It has been in place for 5 years. Kaleida Health provides:
  - o a pediatrician who visits 2x per month,
  - o an LPN who is in the school every day from 9:00 to 3:00,
  - o a nurse practitioner and social worker are in the building full-time,
  - o dental screenings in collaboration with the University of Buffalo, "Give Kids a Smile" program, which buses kids to dentist's offices.

OTHER FUNDING SOURCES	
Use of 1003(g) or 1003(a) grant funding	*The LEA is using School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding to support the implementation of or planning for school intervention models.*
Use of Other Funding Sources besides 1003 (g)	*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.*

Findings:
- Through multiple observations, focus group interviews, and document review, it appears the district and the school continues to use SIG funding to support implementation of the transformation model. However, as noted in the planning section, an amendment was submitted, and at the time of the site visit, the amendment had not yet been approved by SED.
- In addition to SIG 1003(g) funding, the school is benefitting from the Hillside Work Scholarship grant which aims to increase student achievement and raise the graduation rate at South Park High School. South Park High School is the first school in the Buffalo Public School district to benefit from this grant.

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

Findings:
- The principal stated budgeting decisions are made in the central district office; however, she had some say on how the grant would be spent. She stated staffing projections are also made in the district office; however, she has the opportunity to interview potential South Park High School staff members, and sometimes gets the final decision-making authority regarding who is hired.
- During their focus group session, school leaders indicated that they continue to promote dialogue within the district about the need to decrease the number of under credited, over aged student transfers into South Park. This practice continues to negatively impact the graduation rate.
- Regarding daily scheduling, the principal indicated the decision was made several years ago to extend the day, and to have different staff working different schedules. However, as stated above, due to budget cuts there are limited electives, and students are sitting in study halls. Therefore, she would like the ability to do away with the staggered schedule unless appropriate support is given.
- During the first site visit, the SED site visit team observed alignment between the joint intervention team report and the school improvement grant; and also observed that implementation of both documents recommendations is facilitated by the school improvement manager.
- District leaders and teachers re-emphasized to the SED site visit team progress is being made at South Park High School under the current principal's leadership.

 Summary:

The State Education Department three member site visit team conducted a full-day site visit at South Park High School on March 29, 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 that 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 staff members 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 to implement as much of their Transformation Model as possible.

The next SED site visit to South Park High School will be during the fall of 2011.