



Office of Innovative School Models

**Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) Schools
School Improvement Grant (SIG)
Monitoring Report**

School:	Bennett High School - Transformation Model	School District:	Buffalo Public Schools
Date of Site-Visit:	December 9, 2010	Members of Site-Visit Team:	Linval Foster, Kalimah Geter and Andrew McGrath

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 stated that meetings and discussions have taken place with the Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) and the Buffalo Council of Supervisors and Administrators (BCSA) regarding the collective bargaining agreement and the development of a teacher evaluation system.
- During focus group sessions with teachers and school leaders, staff indicated that teachers are aware of state education law 3012c which links teacher evaluations to student performance.
- The Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) created and is implementing a new Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) system for the 2010-11 school year. Teachers and school leaders stated that they have received training and have begun to use the new system.
- Positions funded by the School Improvement Grant (SIG) have been or are in the process of being filled. School leaders indicated that they had input/flexibility regarding the hiring process.
- Evidence regarding a clear and transparent process for identifying staff for rewards and remediation was not requested during this on site visit.

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:

- The on-site team observed that the school has begun to implement several of the activities outlined in its transformation model plan. As an example, teacher training has begun to help teachers plan and implement teaching of the district approved curriculum. English language arts (ELA) teachers are involved in professional development five days a week.
- Administration has hired coaches in the areas of English language arts, mathematics and social studies and are interviewing for a science coach. At the time of the visit, coaches were in the process of mentoring newly-hired teachers and had not yet begun their specific coaching duties.
- Evidence regarding the school's performance targets was not requested during this site visit. The performance plan template is under development at SED.
- As per JIT recommendations, teachers and school leadership stated that an increase in common planning time from three to six times per six-day teaching cycle has provided the opportunity to better align classroom activities to the curriculum and pacing guides.

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:

- Staff stated that assistant principals facilitate professional development sessions and provide group and individual feedback to teachers. They also stated that the feedback is valuable and respectfully delivered. Assistant principals stated that individual meetings regarding specific practices are addressed in collaboration with each identified teacher and follow-up is conducted to monitor progress.
- Teachers stated that they attend district staff development opportunities and find them valuable.
- School leadership stated that assistant principals and non-tenured principals are receiving professional development via the NYC Leadership Academy.
- Leadership stated that professional development from JP Associates (listed on the FS-10 fiscal statement) is not currently being conducted.
- Teachers and school leaders stated that three full-time substitutes are assigned to the school. This allows newly-hired staff to shadow current staff. It also allows staff to participate in lesson-shares with colleagues. Both practices are supportive of the instructional needs of the school.

- School leaders stated that funds are provided to allow for extra professional development time on Tuesdays from 3:00 to 5:00 for interested staff.
- Evidence regarding the monitoring/analysis of staff participation and classroom implementation, as related to professional development, was not requested at the time of this on-site visit.

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:

- Staff and school leaders stated that common planning time is used to create five-week interim assessments. These assessments are comprised of test items acquired from JMaps and Castle Learning. Test items are referenced directly to NYS performance indicators (PI).
- Staff and school leaders stated that common planning time is used to conduct item analysis of interim assessment data. This item analysis is then used to explore instructional practices.
- District administrators shared the data dashboard currently under development. The dashboard is to be rolled out to school leaders of the PLA schools in January, 2011.

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:

- Assistant principals stated that students are invited to mandatory and voluntary after-school sessions from Monday through Thursday of each week. Mandatory sessions are for students who have failed more than one course during a marking period. Additionally, parents stated that students who play on athletic teams are not allowed to participate if they are failing required courses. However, after-school tutoring is provided for these students to catch up and pass the required courses in order to play on the athletic teams.

- Evidence regarding curriculum maps and pacing guides was not analyzed during this on-site visit.
- Teachers and school leaders stated that staffing reductions have adversely affected their ability to deliver academic intervention services (AIS). Class sizes are far too large to attend to student needs on a more individual basis.
- The SED site visit team members observed that instructional rigor was limited and varied from class to class. There was a tendency towards lower level questioning and dialogue in the classrooms observed.
- Specific evidence regarding instructional programs and highly qualified staff for ELL and SWD students was not requested at the time of the site visit.

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:

- Students stated that the staff delivers a clear and consistent message regarding behavior and academics. This message is perceived as having the students' best interests in mind.
- Students stated that they feel supported by teachers and school leaders. They indicated that the school staff is supportive both academically and socially.
- The school has a partnership with the Erie County Counsel. The school identifies students who may be involved in the use of controlled substances and refers them to counsel members who work with the students, providing medical referrals and counseling services.
- The school is working to provide students with counselors who interact with students to ensure that they have a supportive learning environment. The school has a grant funded *Family Facilitator*, who meets with students regularly to reflect on their learning for the day, and works with families to create a parent partnership.
- The school has partnerships with neighboring colleges - Medaille, University of Buffalo, Canisius and Hilbert. The colleges send their students to the school to provide peer mentoring, shadowing, internships and a speaker series to inform students about college programs of study, such as business and law.
- Students stated that there is a need for more elective courses that would appeal to the diverse student population. Examples provided include: music performance, law, driver's education, and vocational/technical courses.
- The school has a partnership with Academic Talent Search. This program assists students with college prep courses, college application preparation, and college scholarship assistance.

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:

- Parents and teachers stated that there has been continuity with the building leadership to deliver on promising changes such as *Start on Time; Safe and Civil Schools;* and school uniform requirements.
- Teachers, parents and students stated that they feel respected by the school administration.
- Teachers stated that the current leadership is fair and focused, with a clear and consistent direction. They further stated that there is an effective relationship between teachers and school leaders that allows for a positive and productive work environment.
- Teachers and administrators stated that informal walk-through's include feedback in regard to how well teachers know and implement the curriculum for the subject being taught.
- School leaders expressed their interest in receiving professional development to help them better meet the needs of their teachers' instructional practices.
- The school is being guided by an associate superintendent from the district's turnaround office.
- Evidence provided to the on-site team indicates that the building leadership structure is designed to promote the implementation of the Transformation Model. The principal and assistant principals individually oversee common planning times for each of the four core curriculum areas.

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:

- At the time of the visit, the school appeared to be clean, safe, orderly and conducive to learning. Students appeared interested in getting to class on time and teachers were available to usher late comers to class quickly.
- Teachers stated that they are highly concerned about the safety of staff and students who remain in the building on district staff development days. Teachers expressed that on most district staff development days, regularly assigned teachers leave the building and substitute teachers are left to control and teach students; this is usually very chaotic and dangerous. It was stated that students do not respect substitutes in the absence of regularly assigned teachers and this leads to an unsafe school environment.

- Parents and teachers stated that they are happy about the parent/school partnership. It was mentioned that an event held in early December garnered the presence and support of 57 parents interested in learning about student progress and the home-school partnership. 100% of the ninth grade ELA teaching staff was in attendance without being financially compensated for the additional time.
- During the focus group session, parents stated that the school has a recently formed Parent Teacher Organization. Parents are visible in the school, and in partnerships with teachers and administrators.
- The district, through collaboration and support of M&T Bank, has been awarded a Promise Neighborhood Grant from the US Department of Education (USDOE). The grant, along with matching funds from M&T Bank, is designed to bring together community institutions and organizations in an effort to address the needs of students and families of Bennett High School and its surrounding neighborhoods.

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:

- The district has received \$500,000 in grant funding from the USDOE. M&T Bank matched \$250,000 to support Bennett High School in its school improvement efforts. This is a planning grant, with an implementation grant to be completed and submitted in March of 2011.
- The district has allocated JIT implementation funds to subsidize three full-time substitute teachers. The substitutes allow teachers and staff to pursue in-class instructional recommendations delineated in the JIT report.

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 regarding 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:

- The district has created a school turnaround office and is funding an associate superintendent to work directly with PLA schools. The associate superintendent is charged with helping the school meet the requirements of their SIG application and JIT recommendations.

- The district is supporting Bennett High School assistant principals through professional development via the NYC Leadership Academy.
- Specific evidence regarding the degree to which the district is providing the school with operational flexibility was not collected during the site visit.

Summary:

The SED site visit team conducted a full-day visit at Bennett High School on December 9, 2010. The site visit team was able to ascertain information about the school's efforts to begin the implementation of their reform model for improved student learning.

The next site visit conducted will also be a full-day review, and will focus on findings related to: staffing; planning; professional development; data analysis; curriculum and teaching; student support; school leadership; school climate and community engagement; and district support and planning for development.