



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

School:	Albany High School	School District:	Albany City School District
Date of Site-Visit:	March 23, 2011 (Second Visit)	Members of Site-Visit Team:	LoriAnn Curtin, Major Capers, Susan Gibbons, Andrew McGrath

Introduction:

Albany High School was named a Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) school for the 2010-2011 school year. As such, they were asked to choose and develop one of the four United States Department of Education intervention models to put in place for the current school year. However, The New York State Education Department (SED) disapproved Albany High School's School Improvement Grant (SIG) 1003(g) application, and the district subsequently applied for and received SIG 1003(a) funding. Therefore, one of the four intervention models is not in place this school year.

SED conducted a one day site visit to Albany High School in December 2010, and returned for a second site visit on March 23, 2011. The purpose for these visits was three-fold: to determine if the school was implementing the use of SIG 1003(a) funds as approved; to ensure that the school was implementing a restructuring plan that was aligned to its Joint Intervention Team recommendations; and to ensure Albany High School was building the capacity to implement a USDoE intervention model for the 2011-2012 school year.

As Albany High School did not receive SIG 1003(g) funding to fully implement an intervention model, some of the sub-topic sections listed in this report were not reviewed during this visit.

Additionally, given the time limits involved in a site visit of this nature, this report represents a snapshot of evidence gathered and is not meant to be viewed as a comprehensive body of evidence.

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	<i>Activities are funded to recruit, place, and/or retain highly qualified</i>

Strategies to Recruit, Place, and Retain Qualified Staff	<i>teachers.</i>
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Findings:

- According to school leaders, the Albany Public School Teachers' Association (APSTA) has had additional conversations with the district regarding revising the collective bargaining agreement which expires June 30, 2011.
- District leaders stated teacher evaluations currently are not based on student performance. The district is awaiting a pilot evaluation system to come from the New York State Education Department Board of Regents and to also be backed by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT).
- Albany City School District is participating in the statewide development of a performance based compensation system through the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. The district provided a draft Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) Summary evaluation form for the site visit team to review.
- The Principal for School Improvement reported the district is piloting a comprehensive teacher evaluation system developed in cooperation with NYSUT and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) as part of the Innovation Initiative. Representatives from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including Higher Education and SED were involved in the design project for the past two years. It is expected that the rubrics will be approved by SED under the new Teacher Evaluation Regulations.
- The Principal for School Improvement stated the administrative team at Albany High School is using rubrics and protocols to evaluate faculty during the 2010-2011 school year.
- Processes for identifying, rewarding, remediating and removing staff were not discussed due to the school's 1003(a) status.
- Funded activities to recruit, place, and/or retain highly qualified teachers were not discussed due to the school's 1003(a) status.

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:

- Through document review, focus group interviews, and classroom observations it appears that the school's 1003(a) a grant will be fully implemented, as amended. The SED site visit team noted the family engagement coordinator position delineated in the 1003(a) was not filled until January 2011; therefore, the use of the full funding for this position may need to be amended.
- The Performance Targets template is still under development at the State Education Department; therefore, no evidence was requested during this on-site visit.

- School leaders stated the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) was written prior to the Joint Intervention Team (JIT) visit. Therefore, the CEP is not fully aligned with the recommendations of the JIT report. However, the Magnet School Program Assistance Grant, which was awarded to the district by the federal government, is closely aligned with JIT recommendations. In addition, the district completed an analysis of remaining gaps in addressing JIT recommendations and School Improvement Grant design, and this document was submitted to the SED site visit team. The document demonstrates how JIT recommendations are being addressed by the small learning communities, which will be in place beginning in September 2011, along with the magnet school grant, the SIG 1003(a) funding, and the CEP.

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:

- According to the district's professional development plan which was submitted, "Job-embedded professional development for teachers and staff occurs during the regular school day. Support for instructional programs and teaching is achieved through the Coaching model at the Elementary and Middle School levels."
- The school staff submitted evidence of planning for professional development which is supportive of the school's instructional needs. Evidence submitted and reviewed includes:
 - an outline of school and district professional development needs based on the Joint Intervention Team recommendations, small learning communities, and the Quality Improvement Plan;
 - an agenda for a March 15, 2011 professional development committee meeting and minutes from the December 21, 2010 professional development committee meeting;
 - evidence of professional development opportunities for teachers of English language learners; and
 - the Albany High School professional development plan for the 2010-2011 school year, and the district professional development plan for years 2010 through 2013.
- District staff stated professional development is monitored and analyzed for staff participation and classroom implementation in the following ways:
 - department leaders are supporting the building-wide initiatives;
 - the embedded small learning communities coaches follow-up on professional development initiatives;
 - administrators conduct daily walk-throughs and provide written feed-back to teachers frequently; and
 - the Center for Secondary School Redesign staff meets with the professional development committee to develop professional development plans and they are considering the Collaborative Coaching

and Learning model as another method for ensuring that professional development is monitored and analyzed for implementation.

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:

- District leaders and teachers stated quarterly benchmark assessments are administered in all core content areas. These assessments are written by department leaders and teachers.
- The first quarter's benchmark assessment summary data was provided to the SED site visit team. Many other forms of data were provided as well. Some examples include: PSAT Cohort Data, "Albany High School Comparative Data for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2" and "Albany High School Quarter 2 data", however, the source for the data used to populate these charts is unclear.
- Through focus group interviews with teachers, the district and school leaders, the SED site visit team collected the following list of evidence which explains how data is being used continuously to make instructional decisions for students.
 - Students are being offered the opportunity to participate in extended learning time and in Saturday Academy when assessment data shows the need for increased learning time.
 - "Tracking teachers" make scheduling changes for students with disabilities when necessary to meet their needs and to ensure that all are on track to graduate.
 - "Tracking teachers" also make scheduling changes for 9th grade students when it is deemed necessary.
 - Attendance data is being used to identify students with chronic attendance issues. School staff members are working with the truancy abatement program to make improvements in attendance. School leaders reported there is a 5% increase in attendance this year, and that the attendance rate is close to 90%.
 - Student discipline data is being used to determine future placement of students in the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program.

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, 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:

- Through interviews and observations, the SED site visit team was informed the school offers extended learning time via the Apex digital learning system, and also offers a Saturday academy, which took place on March 5, 2011 and March 12, 2011. Attendance records submitted for these initiatives show attendance is poor - less than 60%.
- District leaders reported the curriculum is mapped and paced for all core content areas and that these curriculum maps are available online. Some of the maps include NYS standards, resources, skills to be learned, and possible assessments, others only include lists of course topics to be covered. None of the curriculum maps include possibilities for differentiating instruction.
- The district also submitted notes from a January 2011 meeting of the instructional supervisors which showed evidence that plans were being made for further development of the districts curriculum maps, including plans to align them with the Common Core State Standards in the summer of 2011.
- The SED site visit team collected the following evidence of curricular decisions being made to meet the needs of students.
 - Assessment data and student's course grades are being analyzed to determine which students are offered extended learning opportunities and to determine which students attend Saturday academies.
 - Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals are evaluated to ensure that students with IEPs are given integrated support.
 - There are some Academic Intervention Services classes in the master schedule; however, as these classes are non-credit bearing, attendance is an issue.
 - A senior academy is being offered at the district's Abrookin Vocational Technical Center four days per week from 4:00-6:30 P.M. The purpose of the senior academy is to offer additional learning time to ensure that students pass Regents exams and graduate on time.
 - Planning is well underway for the small learning communities to ensure they will be supportive of all student learning needs.
- The SED site visit team witnessed evidence of rigor, relevance, pacing, and alignment of curriculum to state standards, and student engagement from highly qualified teachers. However, in many classrooms visited, poor attendance was noted. In some classrooms, attendance was half of the expected enrollment.
- District and school leaders provided evidence that the following supports are in place for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs).
 - Small learning community information was sent to student's homes in both English and Spanish.
 - English language learners are receiving additional support during the extended learning time hours.
 - "Tracking teachers" ensure that SWDs are receiving the necessary services and their placement in courses is appropriate.
 - The district is moving into a Response to Intervention model according to its CEP, and Academic Intervention Services training materials that were submitted.

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:

- The Academic Intervention Services (AIS) plan is not yet updated. However, district staff members stated plans are underway to update it.
- Students reported they would like more AIS in English and math content areas.
- Students stated the student council has started this school year; however students would like to have input in school planning as it relates to student interests. The student council is representative of the student body demographics, and represents all grade levels and student performance levels.
- The RTI model is not yet fully implemented.
- Several students reported they did not receive application information for learning academies.
- Guidance staff expressed the need to be involved in restructuring the school into smaller learning communities.
- Naviance for Success, an online career and college readiness program, is operational for the upper grade students; however the plan has not yet been implemented for ninth and tenth graders.

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:

- The Joint Intervention Team (JIT) report indicated the school did not have sufficient leadership to make the curriculum, instruction and professional development changes needed to successfully implement the plan. Some evidence of the assignment of administrators for special services and programs such as ELL-related professional development, scheduling and attendance was presented to the SED site visit team.
- The School Improvement Manager (SIM) is in place and is visibly interacting with the school community.
- This is the first year (started in August 2010) for the Building Leadership Team (BLT), which consists of the School Improvement Principal, the Principal, the Family Engagement Coordinator, a special education teacher, and three other teachers. The BLT meets twice each month, for one to three hours during the school day to discuss school issues and meets for one hour after school in a decision making meeting. Subcommittees' of the BLT address specific topics.

- The minutes of the BLT meetings reflect significant time spent on organizing itself and developing a mission and vision statement. The JIT report had recommended the BLT focus on these areas first, then on student achievement and professional development.
- BLT discussions covered a wide range of topics, including administration, professional development, student supports, attendance and review and analysis of the JIT report.
- The principals' role in the functioning of the BLT was unclear, as he was in attendance only six times since the group began.
- The BLT was provided with professional development on how to function in that configuration, and the roles and responsibilities of the team.

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:

- Parents reported they received information regarding the restructuring of Albany H.S. in January 2011. However, they have not received any recent information regarding the high school plan.
- Parents stated several incoming ninth graders did not receive small learning academy applications. They stated they would like to see more official and distinct mailers which alert them to the importance of the application.
- Several parents expressed concern with many students being placed in advanced placement classes that may be ill prepared for the rigor of the work, since they may not have prior experience of satisfactorily completing advanced course work.
- Parents stated their concern that the district may not complete the restructuring plans due to lack of funding.
- The parent resource center is now operational. The district is in the process of hiring a full time family engagement coordinator; however there is an interim coordinator providing services.
- The interim family engagement coordinator reported she has conducted a survey on parents' needs and will place this information on the school website and on Facebook.
- Parents reported the website is a benefit; however they would like to see the site updated on a regular basis.
- The school has Home Family Coordinators that provide outreach and mentoring programs for students.
- Several parents voiced a concern they would like to see the PTSA be more diverse and reflective of the community it serves.
- Parents reported in order to improve school climate, they would like to see the codes related to dress and cell phone use enforced.

- District and school leaders reported they are consulting and collaborating with the Center for Secondary School Redesign (CSSR), an external partner, to plan for school improvement efforts and use of SIG 1003(g) funding. In addition, CSSR completed a needs assessment for the district, and report – dated March 2011, was submitted to the SED site visit team.

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:

- Through document review and focus group interviews with district and school leaders, it appears that the SIG funding is being used to support planning to put one of the four USDoE intervention models in place for the 2011-2012 school year. One example of this is the partnership with CSSR to develop SIG plans.
- Other resources being used to implement school improvement efforts include:
 - the Magnet School Assistance Grant, which is being used to plan for the small learning communities; and
 - local funding which is supporting the schools consultation with the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA).

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:

- According to interviews with school leaders, they have operational flexibility to plan the use of SIG funding and to write amendments as necessary.
- The principal for school improvement/school improvement manager voiced satisfaction with the level of support she is receiving from the district.
- As stated above, the schools SIG 1003(g) plan was not approved for the 2010-11 school year. This is the document that would have been aligned with JIT recommendations. The school’s most current CEP is not fully aligned with JIT recommendations, but the school and district are addressing this issue.
- The district hired the principal for school improvement/school improvement manager for the 2010-2011 school year. Her role has been to coordinate school improvement efforts.