



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION
ROOM 475 EBA
Tel. 518/474-4817
Fax 518/474-7558

December 3, 2012

Superintendent Thomas Perillo
Greater Amsterdam School District
11 Liberty Street
Amsterdam, NY 12010

RE: Notice of Award: Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround Grant
Award Amount: \$240,120
Time Period: September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2014

Dear Superintendent Perillo:

The New York State Education Department, School Turnaround Office (NYSED STO) is pleased to inform you that the Greater Amsterdam School District has been approved for the above referenced grant. As stated in the initial grant application, this award is contingent upon the submission and approval of the final Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the LEA and the partners no later than November 30, 2012.

The NYSED STO will serve as your lead program office for project oversight, assistance, monitoring, and reporting. Within the next several weeks you will be contacted by a representative from NYSED STO to set up an initial welcome and introduction telephone call.

We look forward to working with you and your leadership team on this innovative opportunity to improve student achievement in underperforming schools.

Sincerely,

Sally Bachofer

c: Sandra Herndon
Owen Donovan

I. Executive Summary

The Greater Amsterdam School District (GASD) is comprised of four elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. The District has been designated as a focus district with 4 of the 6 schools also designated as focus schools and one elementary school designated as a priority school. The District Accountability status for 2011-12 was ELA Improvement (Year 5), Math: Improvement (Year 1), and Graduation Rate Improvement (Year 1). With a Free and Reduced Lunch rate of 56% district wide and 5 of the 6 schools identified as needing improvement, we are committed and ready for the implementation of a systemic turnaround. This turnaround will focus on all of our students with targeted areas including economically disadvantaged, special education, English Language Learners and the Hispanic subpopulations. At the elementary level RtI is in its 4th full year and the data clearly indicates program successes. Ninety minute reading blocks at the K-5 grade level have shown marked improvements in students reading abilities along with an increased focus on small group instruction. The PBIS initiative is entering its third year and is standard practice district wide. At the Middle School level, a number of promising initiatives are taking place. The school's Literacy Coach has been working on a comprehensive Literacy Initiative, with a special focus on improving reading instruction in the special education programs. Our plans are to "ramp up" this initiative with a focus on Common Core Standards and content area literacy, and a strong writing component. A new Parent Room was created last spring with support from the Teacher's Association, to help parents to feel welcome and to share resources.

At the high school level, scores are rising, with graduation rates increasing over the last three years, particularly within the Economically Disadvantaged, Special Education and Hispanic/Latino subgroups. A content area literacy initiative will be continuing and strengthened this year, in partnership with the middle school. The high school received a grant to implement the Smart Scholars Early College High School program. We are in the third year of implementation of this program that is aimed at supporting at-risk, "first generation college" students in earning a minimum of 22 college credits while in high school. The high school participated this year in the FIRST Robotics competition, with sponsorship from NASA, Time Warner Cable and JC Penney.

Greater Amsterdam School District
Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround

Both schools have embarked on training with CASDA (Capital Area School Development Association-affiliated with SUNY Albany) with the COMPASS Tool, focusing on needs assessment and goal development for school improvement. The focus for the COMPASS work the last two years has been on using data more effectively. A curriculum mapping initiative is in the 3rd year of implementation and alignment to the Common Core standards has taken place. Both schools have begun implementing high-tech curriculum and programs, including a new Robotics club, and robotics curriculum within the Technology classes. We have collaborated with RPI on this initiative and our staff has attended a variety of workshops on robotics and nanotechnology. Both schools are involved in initiatives to improve instruction through partnerships with two colleges as part of the “Clinically Rich Teacher Preparation” grants. We are collaborating with the University at Albany’s Special education graduate program to host their interns in collaborative teaching settings with content area teachers. The University staff provides support and professional development for both the interns, cooperating teachers and content area teachers. Our partnership with Union Graduate College focuses on hosting interns in the areas of science, math and technology, and Union’s staff then provides our staff with professional development and program support. Each school has one or two teams (partners-one content teacher paired with a special education teacher) participating in Project ASPIRE through The College of St. Rose, which focuses on providing each team with intensive training on collaborative teaching and learning in special education programs. The APPR is in its final stages of negotiations and we expect to submit shortly.

The GASD is reaching out to the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) to assist in the development of systemic supports for the district and its schools. The major components of the district initiative include: support and training for the GASD Board of Education in developing a district vision and cohesive strategic plan focusing on the articulation of achievement goals and practice goals to be incorporated, utilized and understood district wide; provide the capacity and support for District leadership in developing a K-12 educational plan driving instruction and building level decisions in order to obtain said goals; assistance with developing a collaborative team structure within the buildings to embed data driven instruction including the development of a functional data driven cycle as well as professional development for building leaders and teacher leaders focusing on student achievement across all groups;

Greater Amsterdam School District
Systemic Supports for District and School Turnaround

utilization of research based COMPASS tool to develop building goals within the elementary schools that will support the District mission and be specific to each building (the high school and middle school will receive follow up training); and engage in a comprehensive audit of the current leadership structure to capitalize on district resources and ensure professional learning is in place for all administrative and teacher leaders. With the help of this audit the district can self evaluate on the ability to lay a foundation that includes the governance, financial, human resources and leadership systems that will enable schools to achieve sustained improvement. In order to move forward it is important that district take the lead in measuring system performance and conditions.

The goal is to articulate a powerful vision that will create the necessary district and school based conditions for success of all students. Accountability and data systems need to be in place to track progress and inform decisions. Principals and leadership teams need to have the resources and skills to drive the change in the demanding environments.