

DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR ACTION PLAN

Outline of Distinguished Educator's Action Plan

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Part One

The following is a brief overview of the key issues in the Buffalo City School District and key areas delineated for improvement.

Introduction

Over the past several weeks, I have met in small groups, as well as individually, with each of the 28 Priority School Principals. Additionally, I have met with personnel in the Central Offices (e.g. Budget – General fund and Federal, Operations, Purchasing and Contracts, Instruction, Community Superintendents, Instructional Technology, Data and Accountability, Support Services, Special Education, English Learner, Adult Education, Student Placement, Human Resources).

Superintendent Brown and I have met frequently, had several conference calls, and exchanged e-mails to discuss and review my observations of the current status of the 28 Priority Schools.

Based on the information I have gathered over the past 45 days, this plan reflects a set of recommendations that are intended to address underachievement and improve student outcomes in the 28 Priority Schools. The following narrative reflects the current status of these schools based on my observations from August 6 through September 20, 2012.

Narrative

There are consistent themes and issues that have clearly emerged. In general, there is an overall lack of differentiated accountability in and service and support to schools. Additionally, there is little evidence of the use of data to drive decisions, which is shown in the lack of data reports and system for schools; coherent professional development and leadership development; or coordination of the Central Office's role and functions. Additionally, practices that have not demonstrated effectiveness (e.g., instructional, operations, budgeting for student achievement) continue to be implemented.

In general, fiscal expenditures and personnel allocations that are used to staff schools are not based consistently upon data or a set of budget assumptions. For example, there is not a consistent practice of assigning assistant principals based upon student enrollment.

Federal budgets are allocated centrally. The Central Office distributes Title I funds to schools in the form of full-time equivalents (FTE) without input from principals to ensure these resources align with the needs of the students. There is no evidence that Title I funded Literacy and Math coaches who are allocated centrally to schools receive any Central Office oversight or training.

There is no per pupil Title III allocation to schools. As with Title I funds, these resources are allocated centrally to schools. Hence, the funding does not necessarily follow the students, and

there are inequities across schools. Evidence of an evaluation of the impact of these resources on student achievement is lacking.

There is a lack of coherence and consistency of the Central Offices' implementation of role, function and accountability for results. Schools report that their inquiries and calls for assistance receive little or no response. Yet schools are called upon frequently to complete a report or reply to a directive with short notice. There is no evidence of coherent support or oversight from the Central Office for Priority Schools.

The current culture of the Central Office is one of compliance, rather than support to schools. Departments are siloed and incoherent practices exist within each silo.

As a result of observation, inquiry and initial assessment of the 28 Priority Schools and Central Office personnel, Superintendent Brown and I have identified areas that are in immediate need of attention in the Buffalo City School District. The areas include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Evidenced-based accountability;
- Differentiated accountability for and support to Priority Schools;
- Aligned and coherent systems that are student-focused and provide return on investment in improving student outcomes;
- Equitable and consistently implemented staffing ratios;
- Title I and Title III school-based per pupil budget allocations where the funds "follow the students";
- Professional development for teachers and school leaders;
- Student placement (both general, English language learner, and special education) based upon written procedures that are consistent and equitable across all schools in the district, regardless of criterion or special programming;
- Staffing and hiring that includes and is respectful of principal input and needs of individual schools, including assignment of .4 and .6 FTE for coverage as required by the teacher contract;
- Leadership development, both Central Office and on-site, that builds instructional leadership capacity, data-based decision making, and a culture of service and support.

Part Two

The following section is a review of the District that includes an assessment of findings, a description of supports and elements that may be impeding each deliverable area listed below.

Deliverable Area

- **Governance** – Buffalo City School District is a centralized system that provides little school autonomy. The structure of governance has historically yielded poor student outcomes. Priority School principals uniformly voice that they are disconnected, unguided, and unsupported due to a lack of service and support from the Central Office. Absent is a system of differentiated accountability and support for schools.

Budgets for Title I, II, and III are centralized. There are no school-based budgets, based on per pupil expenditures using these funds, including a set-aside for professional development. There are currently 15 Targeted Assistance Schools. Due to personnel attrition in the Central Office that oversees these grants, no information could be gained as to why 15 Targeted Assistance schools exist or how these schools are monitored to ensure delivery of services to students. Information was not readily available to indicate when these schools became Targeted Assistance and whether any discussion about applying for a School-wide Program was ever pursued. The last documented effort to convert Targeted Assistance Schools to School-wide was 2009-10¹.

- **Organizational Structures and Systems** – Current systems are not aligned to support schools in a coherent and consistent manner. There are significant systems issues, ranging from hiring of school-based staff to allocation of federal funds to schools (Title I, II, III) and the use of those funds.

Student placement, particularly for special education students and English learners (EL), is a primary issue for Priority Schools. Currently the ESL office determines the schools where the placement office should enroll EL. Hence, there are schools with inordinately high numbers of EL, students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), and migrant students that are unable to provide these students necessary supports.

At the time of this report, there was an absence of coherent, consistent communication to schools. Schools report they do not know whom to call or e-mail for support, and when they do, it is reported that often there is no response.

District-wide there are “have and have-not” schools based on current staffing practices as

¹ The approved ESEA Flexibility Waiver allows LEAs with Priority/Focus Schools that do not meet the 40% poverty threshold for Schoolwide Program (SWP) eligibility to become a Title I SWP school if the LEA is implementing interventions consistent with “turnaround principles” or interventions that are based on the needs of the students in the school and designed to enhance the entire educational program in the school. The clear benefit of operating as a SWP is that the school is able to consolidate all of its federal, state and local funds to upgrade the education program. The school is also able to implement programs and activities that are aimed at meeting the needs of all students and teachers in the building. Prior to the ESEA Waiver, legislation (Section 1115) required schools that did not meet the 40 percent student poverty requirement to operate as Targeted Assistance (TA) schools and as such must use Title I funds to address only the supplemental educational needs of identified eligible students.

well as the existence of ‘Criterion’ schools. Criterion schools are those that have a formal admittance procedure and in which only those students who meet the criteria may enroll. These schools do not have any seats reserved for open enrollment students. While students who attend Criterion Schools may transfer to another school, students may not transfer into a Criterion School unless they meet the enrollment criteria. As a result, Priority School principals report that they receive a disproportionate number of credit deficient, low skill, and behaviorally challenging students for whom they do not receive adequate resources (e.g., support staff with relevant skills, professional development for staff).

- **Articulation and Coordination** – There was not any formal principal meeting structure in place for the 2011-12 school year. However, a plan is currently being developed to conduct meetings this year, beginning in October.

In general, there is a lack of written direction and communication to principals. As a result, principals and school staffs interpret differently the verbal messages and directives they receive.

Schools with similar programs, e.g., bilingual academies, do not meet as a group to discuss triumphs and challenges. Currently, there is not a structure for elementary, middle school, or high schools to meet as groups to work on common themes, challenges, and professional development.

- **Leadership** – There is an overall lack of coherent leadership at the Central Office as it pertains to Priority Schools. Schools report little support or responsiveness when they call/e-mail for help. It is reported that Central Office personnel are not regular visitors to campuses. Often when they do visit, the purpose is seen as for compliance rather than instructional support.

Principals are desirous of leadership, professional development, differentiated support, and communication in order to have the information they need to improve student outcomes.

- **Use of Data** – There is little evidence of past or current use of data to drive instructional decision making at the Central Office. Principals are sent an e-mail with a link to the SED website to find their state assessment results or given a data disk (e.g., SUPERA) to unpack information regarding English language learner assessment results. In general, the use of data to inform decision-making at schools is not a widely held practice.

A data system or unified data platform is not readily available, and principals are left to interpret the meaning of their data (e.g., suspensions, attendance, state assessments, graduation). Even when data is available, there is not a single portal for schools to easily access that data. Consequently, different offices send reports on their data to schools (e.g., suspension, staff attendance).

There is a dashboard² that has been in development for the past two years, but it is not yet fully complete or rolled out to schools.

² NYSED aims to deploy an Education Data Portal (EDP) as of October 2013. As part of the EDP, NYSED will procure 3 Data Dashboard Solutions that present educators, students, and families with timely and relevant data that

- **Curriculum** – Training on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) took place over the last school year. Priority School staff indicate that they are in need of more in-depth training to address the transition to CCSS, unpacking of the standards, and support for the pedagogical shifts that are required to implement the standards.

A Prek-12 Curriculum Guide has been developed. It is comprehensive and aligned to the CCSS. There is a full complement of textbooks and materials (e.g., Science Kits) aligned to NYSED standards across core areas of instruction (Science, Social Studies, Math, English language arts).

- **Instruction** – There is little evidence of support and supervision of classroom instruction. Absent are professional development opportunities aligned with the instructional needs of school staff, particularly pertaining to instruction of students with disabilities, English learners and at-risk general education students. The lack of formative assessments for frequent progress monitoring has left schools unable to evaluate on-going student learning. Several of the Priority Schools have developed common assessments and assignments that allow them to have student data that is current and responsive to daily instruction.

While several school leaders indicated the need for more staff to provide supplementary instruction to students, these schools were insufficiently focused on the delivery of good initial classroom instruction aligned to the standards. Schools have instructional coaches; however, due to the current system of allocation and lack of oversight, the actual impact of these staff on student achievement is unclear.

Currently, there is not a structure for walk-throughs or sharing of best practices among and between schools. Walk-throughs that were conducted in the past were categorized as focusing on compliance (e.g., “gotcha walks”) rather than on instruction and support.

The absence of data driven decision-making at the Central Office and school levels has resulted in the continuation of practices, procedures, and programs that have failed to result in consistent improvement in student performance. However, there are principals who have developed their own system of pulling data from multiple platforms to inform their work.

Historically and currently, there are no specific targets or expectations for improvement.

There are a number of fifth year seniors enrolled throughout the district. As these students are transferred between comprehensive high schools, there has been a significant impact on cohort graduation rates. While the district has eliminated the practice of social promotion, the current academic promotion policy lacks any differentiated programming for students

support instruction and student learning. Data Dashboard Solutions will provide district, school, grade, and classroom level aggregate and drill-through views of student demographic, enrollment, attendance, assessment, early warning indicators, and other data for all educators supporting New York’s K-12 LEA-enrolled students. NYSED will enable Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or schools to select their preferred local solution from among the 3 Data Dashboard Solutions on or around April 2013 (for use during the 2013/2014 school year). This selection process will repeat in April 2014 (for use during the 2013/2014 school year). NYSED will offer this service to LEAs during the 2013 - 2015 school years, at no cost to LEAs.

who have been retained. For example, students must repeat a grade (e.g., grade 5) or retake a course (e.g., Algebra) until they pass it.

There does not appear to be a district-wide continuum of services for students with disabilities. The majority of Priority School principals voiced concern regarding the absence of Resource Room as a service delivery option. Many of the Priority Schools reported that Resource Room services were “no longer allowed” or available for students with an IEP. A preliminary review of placement undertaken by the district indicates that a few Priority Schools have some students receiving Resource Room services, but the model is not present in other Priority Schools.

The district has moved to a co-teaching model. District staff indicate that “...the state strongly encouraged the district to use the co-teaching model.” The Consulting Teacher delivery model is the most prevalent one used in schools. However, student impact data for either model is not available. Priority School principals voiced the need for services that provide support around pre-teaching, re-teaching, and reviewing instruction taught in general education classrooms.

Based on the findings of a state investigation (May 6, 2011) regarding the lack of a continuum of services for students with disabilities the district was required to “...develop procedures to provide students with disabilities appropriate special education programs and services.” These findings underscore the lack of appropriate services available to students with disabilities in some Priority Schools.

Currently, the Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs across the district are, in general, under enrolled. While all programs have been certified by the state, they are significantly underutilized. Most CTE schools have criteria or application processes that have been in place for several years, and it has been reported that some students are transferred to these high schools even though they lack actual interest in the programs.

Most administrators have been trained and certified in the nine (9) required areas for the APPR evaluation rubric. The remaining site administrators will be certified by Oct 15, 2012 and Central Office administrators by December 2012. A ‘deep dive’ during the training was reportedly conducted on the classroom/observation component that included the use of the NYSUT evaluation rubric.

Eight school leaders attended the weeklong NYSUT training this summer and will be turnkey training and providing on-going technical assistance this fall to teachers and leaders. There is not yet a schedule set to conduct these trainings and technical assistance.

There is not yet an approved APPR process for the district. The district is in negotiations with its unions to finalize the APPR. Hence, the district had not proceeded into the implementation of the APPR at the time of this report.

- **Assessment** – On August 22, 2012, under Superintendent Brown’s leadership, a contract was approved by the Board of Education to develop a district level benchmark assessment. The system being planned is one that will have two (2) assessments per year. One will be administered in December (K-12 English language arts, mathematics, science) and the other

will be administered just before the state assessment window. At the time of this report, the project management plan for roll out of these benchmarks was being developed. Schools have not yet been informed, in writing, about this forthcoming system.

In terms of state assessments, historically, schools are sent a link to find their results on the SED website. There is no formal review or analysis of results or professional development lead by the Central Office.

- **Operations and Management** – Oversight of the federal budgeting (Title I, II, III) process is unclear. Historically, the budgets have been rolled over from year to year without discussion of return on investment of past expenditure, data based needs, and supports to schools. While there are personnel responsible for budgeting, there is not a formal process to review, plan, coordinate, or evaluate the use of these funds to improve student outcomes. Principal input is not sought.

Currently, the HR department does not have sole responsibility for staffing schools. Central Office Directors that oversee content areas (e.g., math, social studies, English language arts) are in charge of filling vacant school positions in their respective content areas. Historically, principals have not been part of the process of making staffing decisions or placing staff (e.g., teachers, coaches, administrative positions). A recent verbal directive from Superintendent Brown specified that from now on principals will be involved in the process of selecting their staffs.

There are several data platforms that are housed in different district offices and that do not communicate with each other. For example, to find the suspension rate of a school, one must contact the Office of Student Support because the data office does not have access to this information.

School-based budgets are lacking. While there are many English learners and students of poverty, principals do not have a school-based budget that reflects the needs of these populations. Consequently, principals do not have the autonomy or resources to tailor expenditures to the needs of their schools. There are no school-based professional development set-aside funds to support training needed to increase instructional capacity and skills.

Chronic student absenteeism is pervasive across all schools. While there have been some recent efforts to systemically plan for the improvement of attendance, there is a need to establish city and county-wide multi-agency efforts to coordinate the efforts of reducing chronic absenteeism as well as other factors impacting student achievement.

Part Three

Below is one goal for each of the nine deliverable areas that if addressed will assist in improving student outcomes in the Priority Schools..

Deliverable Area 1: Governance

Goal: Move from a totally centralized system to one that is more school based, with oversight, and that allows for gradual release of centrally held decision making to Priority School principals.

Deliverable Area 2: Organizational

Goal: Align Central Office departments and functions so that they are responsive, proactive, and coherent in supporting Priority Schools.

Deliverable Area 3: Articulation& Coordination

Goal: Establish and maintain monthly professional development and meeting structures for Priority School principals to further develop and enhance their instructional leadership.

Deliverable Area 4: Leadership

Goal: Establish a coherent, talented leadership team and organization at Central Office that is accountable; data driven; and able to provide immediate, responsive service and support to Priority Schools.

Deliverable Area 5: Use of data

Goal: Establish a culture of data based decision-making; align data systems and tools; and create a unified data platform for teachers and principals that is responsive and easily accessible in real time.

Deliverable Area 6: Curriculum

Goal: Evaluate and ensure that the outlined curriculum, across grade levels and content areas, is being consistently implemented and monitored with fidelity, that there are instructional materials and textbook in classes, and progress is monitored regularly.

Deliverable Area 7: Instruction

Goal: Align all efforts in Central Office to be focused on instruction, including the transition to the Common Core Standards and pedagogy, for all students, including English learners; create a continuum of services for students with disabilities; and set performance targets for the Priority Schools.

Deliverable Area 8: Assessment

Goal: Develop a written plan for implementing a comprehensive assessment system and using data for instructional decisions.

Deliverable Area 9: Operations & Management

Goal: Establish, in writing: (1) procedures, timelines for dissemination, and expectations of Central Office processes (e.g., textbook ordering, closure of under enrolled classes, student placement decisions, hiring/staffing) that directly impact Priority Schools; (2) a plan to expand

student support services to directly address chronic absenteeism that includes multi-agency efforts and city/county-wide collaboration.

See Attachment A for recommended actions for the District's 28 Priority Schools

Below is an estimate of days that will be needed to support the District in accomplishing the recommendations.

I will be in Buffalo approximately 5-10 days per month during the first semester. My time in the district during the second semester will be dependent upon the recommendations that the district will implement and its need for support and guidance. Once the Action Plan is approved and the recommendations that will be implemented are specifically identified, a timetable will set.

Attach a copy of the most recent approved District Improvement Plan.

Attached is the District Improvement Plan (2005). There is no current plan in place.

NOTE: Because of the Buffalo City School District's 'Focus' Designation, the District must submit a 2012-13 District Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP) as well as a School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) for each of its Priority and Focus School by October 31, 2012.

In accordance with State Education Law 211-c (5), the Distinguished Educator (DE) is required to review the DCIP and the SCEPs for Priority Schools. As a result of the review, the DE's role is either to endorse each plan without change or make recommendations for modifications to the Board of Education and the Commissioner.

Upon receipt of any recommendations for modification to the DCIP or SCEPs, the Board of Education has the option either to modify the plans consistent with the recommendations or to provide a written explanation to the Commissioner of its reasons for not adopting such recommendations.

Based upon the written explanation provided by the district, the Commissioner will either accept the district's proposal or direct the district to modify the plans as recommended by the Distinguished Educator.

While the recommendations that are provided in this action plan are at this point advisory, the district is encouraged to consider these recommendations while crafting its DCIP and SCEPs.