

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Level 4 Monitoring Summative Report**

District: New Bedford Public Schools

Plan Monitor: Peter Davies

School Year: 2011-2012

Date of Report: October 24, 2012

Introduction

The New Bedford Public School District began work on its Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) last year. The former superintendent and her team reviewed achievement outcomes and other data and identified the following issues that the district needed to address:

Issue 1: Meaningful learning experiences and student engagement through positive learning environments.

Issue 2: Core instruction throughout the district.

Issue 3: Data analyzed to inform meaningful student-based instruction. And,

Issue 4: Student ownership and empowerment through higher expectations

The district developed and submitted to ESE an AIP designed to address these broad goals. The NBPS AIP was not approved by ESE on its first submission, but in January 2012, a set of revised Objectives were accepted as working guidelines. A revised AIP with a tightened work plan was accepted by ESE in June 2012.

During the 2011-2012 school year, there were many changes in the district, including: the superintendent's retirement on May 13th; the appointment of an interim superintendent; key principal positions becoming vacant at three schools; Hayden-McFadden Elementary School being identified as a Level 4 school¹; and the AIP Plan Manager (Cambridge Education) being replaced by a Plan Management Team (District Management Council). Despite the challenges of revising the Plan while executing it and of establishing a path toward accelerated improvement during major leadership changes, district leaders – including the interim superintendent, the assistant superintendent of accountability and school improvement, the assistant superintendent of special education and student services, and others – continued to revise the Plan and ensured that several Initiatives in the Plan were executed. The year was one of growing professional reflection on the part of the district leadership team, as evidenced by monthly discussions about progress and challenges in implementing the Plan.

The district did not achieve the outcomes of the AIP in the first year of implementation, but district leaders believe that strong foundations for doing so are in place. Significant progress was made in communicating AIP priorities to district stakeholders, and steps were taken to develop

¹ The other Level 4 school in New Bedford, John Avery Parker Elementary, was identified as a Level 4 school in 2010.

leadership capacity among directors and principals. Progress was also made in aspects of organizational management and putting systems in place so that the AIP can be effectively implemented in the 2012-2013 school year.

AIP Objectives

Objective 1: Prepare all NBPS students for college and career success by implementing rigorous standards

The district made progress in developing and implementing the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics curriculum aligned to the latest Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and Writing prompts in ELA, math, social studies and science were administered and graded. The District Curriculum Council was well established by June 2012 and had become a collaborative forum to guide and ensure the vertical alignment of the curriculum.

Planning to implement and monitor the implementation of the curriculum rigorously, however, remains a work in progress. For example, the math support specialist provided strong communication and planning to ensure consistent expectations across all schools, but this needs to be replicated in other areas. Writing prompts need to be assessed consistently, and expectations for teaching and assessing students' writing must be more explicit. Also, sufficient common planning time needs to be planned and provided so that teachers can engage in analysis and collaborative planning of rigorous curriculum during the school day.

Objective 2: Develop a culture of using data to improve instructional practice and decision-making

Administrators reported that data teams had been *established* in all schools. Data teams will need to become *active* in all schools as part of the implementation phase during the early part of the 2012-2013 school year. It will be important for the district to continue to build principals' capacity to use data to guide their decision-making, and to effectively support and monitor teachers' use of data so that the regular use of data to inform planning and instruction is consistent across the district, as it was not yet common practice in more than 50% of the district schools. District leaders recognize that an important next step will be for district principals to assess teachers' needs for professional development in the use of data as part of the Educator Evaluation system that will be implemented in the 2012-2013 school year.

Schools that had not yet participated in the *Power of Collaborative Inquiry* program received this training over the summer. It is hoped that the appointment of fifteen instructional performance specialists to work in all Level 3 and Level 4 schools beginning in the 2012-2013 school year will support the implementation of data analysis protocols and the use of data to inform instruction. The District has some strong resources in the form of experienced personnel and has made some important organizational decisions that should make this kind of professional engagement possible.

Objective 3: Expand school and staff capacity to deliver effective engaging instruction to all students

The district's development and use of a Learning Walk protocol that is aligned with its AIP Objectives has been a significant accomplishment in supporting instructional capacity, and it is now in regular use in all schools across the system. Over 500 classrooms were observed through

Learning Walks in the 2011-2012 school year, and the district thoughtfully developed and refined the Learning Walk protocol. District leaders recognize the need to build on this success by increasingly engaging in professional feedback to principals and by communicating with principals about improving instruction and building instructional leadership at all levels in their schools. The reporting system instituted in the 2011-2012 school year, which requires principals to submit a monthly report about instruction that is reviewed by district leaders, is an important step in this process.

The district should continue to use this strategy to develop a common understanding across the district of what rigorous, effective instruction looks like. It will be important for the district to use trends from Learning Walks to inform and differentiate professional development planning. The district also needs to provide differentiated professional development to ensure that all teachers are supported and held accountable for continually improving their practice.

The district is aware of the need to provide tiered instruction (including strengthening core instruction) and is addressing this through its 2012-2013 Plan. As part of this effort, NBPS has invested in instructional leadership with the appointment of instructional performance specialists (IPS). It will be critically important to ensure that the efforts of all teachers in every school, supported by the IPSs, are aligned and focused on delivering effective, engaging instruction.

Objective 4: Raise expectations for student achievement and increase student ownership of their learning

The *Where are YOU Headed?* campaign was at the core of this Objective, and attracted national attention through the GetSchooled documentary Undroppable, along with similar programs in Los Angeles, Chicago and Des Moines. As part of this Objective, the district monitored attendance data and initiated a close causal analysis of absenteeism. However, despite rigorous work by attendance committees to identify significant factors relating to the data and adjust several district policies, student attendance, after early gains, decreased in June to levels consistent with previous years.

The district's creative approach to improving attendance is commendable, but the importance of consistent, high-quality instruction and strong relationships between teachers and students' families cannot be overlooked when considering the root causes of low attendance. In revising its Plan, the district has recognized that if students' learning and language development needs are not addressed, it is almost impossible to sustain student motivation and interest and to develop strong independent learners. The cultivation of student ownership must extend beyond attendance if the district hopes to develop independent, motivated learners. Moreover, it is essential that students not only know where they are headed in a general way (e.g., that they want to go to college and/or pursue a particular career), but that the district helps students to understand the specific pathway they need to follow (e.g., specific high school coursework) in order to achieve their goals.

Cumulative credit data in the higher grades were not monitored with rigor, and the district did not sufficiently review and address serious concerns regarding very high retention rates. Despite the district's efforts to provide some intervention, the number of 9th grade students lacking credit to qualify for promotion increased. Moreover, only a small number (0.5%) were slated to attend regular summer school to recover credit. The district has instituted some innovative interventions; for example, 175 incoming 9th graders participated in a summer program in conjunction with

Bridgewater State University. It will be important for the district to analyze the impact of this program and, if it is successful, to identify ways to provide similar support for a greater number of students.

Progress and Performance Ratings

As part of their quarterly reporting, ESE Accountability Monitors assign each district two categories of ratings for each Strategic Initiative in the Accelerated Improvement Plan. Each category is based on a four-level rubric designed to communicate to stakeholders the extent of the district's progress toward successful implementation of each Initiative. *Improvement Process ratings* indicate the degree to which the district has implemented and embedded the key practices of a given Initiative. In this category, districts receive one of the following ratings for each Initiative: Fully Embedded; Practices in Place; Technical Implementation; or Problematic Implementation/At Risk. *Performance ratings* describe the results the district has achieved based on the benchmarks in a given Initiative. In this category, districts receive one of the following ratings for each Initiative: Reached High Performance Goals Consistently; Reached Performance Goals; Partially Reached Performance Goals; or Performance Goals Not Reached.

The Strategic Initiatives in the New Bedford Public School District's Accelerated Improvement Plan were modified over the course of the 2011-2012 school year. By the end of the year, ten of the eleven Initiatives were only at the "Technical Implementation" stage. Six Initiatives were rated "Partially Reached Performance Goals," and five were rated "Performance Goals Not Reached." Ratings for the following Initiative improved over the course of the school year, showing that the work became more effective:

- *Initiative 1.1: Align curriculum to the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in ELA and Literacy and in Mathematics in collaboration with principals and school level staff:* Improved from Performance Goals Not Reached to Partially Reached Performance Goals

The following Strategic Initiative received a rating of Problematic Implementation/At Risk and Performance Goals Not Reached:

- *Initiative 4.2: Raise the 4-year graduation rate by focusing on student engagement and ownership in middle and high school*

In the first year of the Accelerated Improvement Plan process, the New Bedford Public School District did not meet the final outcomes established in its Accelerated Improvement Plan, which were based on student proficiency in ELA and math. 2011 and 2012 MCAS data for all students and for high needs² students are noted in Tables 1 and 2. In the second year of the Accelerated Improvement Plan process, all districts have established final outcomes based on a Progress and Performance Index (PPI) of 75.

² Defined as students who fall into at least one of the following categories: low income students, English language learners, former English language learners, or students with disabilities.

Overall, levels of student proficiency and student growth were essentially unchanged between 2011 and 2012. See Tables 1 and 2. The Composite Performance Index (CPI), which measures proficiency, remained flat in ELA (with a -1.1 CPI change) and in math (with a -2.0 CPI change). The median SGP, which measures student growth, also remained virtually unchanged in ELA (with a -3.0 change in SGP) and in Math (with a -2.0 change in SGP). The same pattern was seen in the performance of the “high needs” subgroup (71% of New Bedford’s 12, 551 students). Overall proficiency for high needs students remained flat in ELA (with a -1.3 CPI change) and in Math (with a -2.3 CPI change). Similarly, the median SGP in ELA was virtually flat (with a -3.0 change in SGP) as well as in Math (with a -2.0 change in SGP) for the high needs subgroup. Although the New Bedford Public School District achieved little improvement in student performance or growth, the district took steps to build a foundation and establish some systems necessary to create a throughline from district practice to the classroom level in order to promote improved student outcomes.

Table 1: Composite Performance Index (CPI)³

Aggregate					High needs				
Year	District		State		Year	District		State	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
2011	76.0	67.4	87.2	79.9	2011	72.4	63.6	77.0	67.1
2012	74.9	65.4	86.7	79.9	2012	71.1	61.3	76.5	67.0
Change	-1.1	-2.0	-0.5	0.0	Change	-1.3	-2.3	-0.5	-0.1

Table 2: Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)⁴

Aggregate					High needs				
Year	District		State		Year	District		State	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
2011	40.0	36.0	50.0	50.0	2011	39.0	35.0	46.0	46.0
2012	37.0	34.0	50.0	50.0	2012	36.0	33.0	46.0	46.0
Change	-3.0	-2.0	0.0	0.0	Change	-3.0	-2.0	0.0	0.0

³ Differences of more than 2.5 CPI points are more likely to be educationally meaningful than differences of fewer than 2.5 points, which are likely not educationally meaningful.

⁴ Typical student growth percentiles are between about 40 and 60 on most tests. Groups outside this range have higher or lower than typical growth. Differences of more than 10 SGP points are more likely to be educationally meaningful than differences of fewer than 10 SGP points, which are likely not educationally meaningful.

Ongoing Work

District leaders reported that toward the end of the 2011-2012 school year, the district's School Improvement Plan (SIP) template was revised and that during the summer, they worked intensively with principals on developing their SIPs in alignment with the AIP. The AIP itself was revised during the summer of 2012 based on ESE feedback, and now includes more focus on ELL students, 9th grade retention, and dropout rates, among other changes. The 2012-2013 AIP was presented to teachers at their orientation in August, and district leaders communicated the importance of establishing individual goals in alignment with the Plan as part of the new Educator Evaluation system. This is indicative of a strong and strategic effort to make the Plan central to the district's work.

The district also reported bringing all Unit B administrators together for the first time this summer, and furthering a new culture of inclusive leadership that they suggest is gaining traction. They also reported working on new guidelines for administrative representation on management committees and devising accountability measures for the work of such committees. Notably, district leaders have also developed a plan and schedule for Learning Walks for the 2012-2013 school year, in order to build on the foundation that was established in the previous year.

In early October 2012, the New Bedford Educators Association and the New Bedford School Committee ratified a contract that addresses common planning time, the new Educator Evaluation system, and hiring flexibilities.

Summary and Recommendations

The New Bedford Public School district has laid a foundation for accelerated growth, despite the many changes the district faced last year. The district developed systems and strategies focused on transforming core instruction and building instructional leadership capacity. This year, the district needs to go beyond technical implementation to truly embed this work in all classrooms. To that end, this year the district should:

- Establish consistent policies across schools, including expectations for teachers' practice and approaches to engaging and communicating with students' families.
- Implement strategies to accelerate the growth of underperforming 9th graders.
- Create sufficient professional collaboration time to ensure adequate planning of the taught curriculum and the analysis of student progress.
- Ensure that each school and district leader provides instructional leadership to guide teachers' data analysis and instructional capacity.
- Implement high quality recruitment and professional development strategies to continue to build instructional expertise within the district.
- Ensure that directors are supported and held accountable for developing and meeting rigorous goals that are aligned with the AIP.

The innovations in the 2012-2013 AIP are well-designed to help meet these challenges, and we look forward to seeing greater levels of success as we continue monitoring the implementation of the district's Accelerated Improvement Plan.