

To: Commissioner Chester and the Receiver of Southbridge Public Schools  
From: Southbridge Local Stakeholders Group (LSG)  
Date: April 5, 2016

Attached to this memo is a list of recommendations that have emerged from our conversations and deliberations. We believe that these recommendations will provide helpful guidance as you and your team craft a Turnaround Plan for the Southbridge Public Schools.

The LSG met on five occasions:

- Tuesday, February 23, 4:00pm – 6:30pm
- Monday, February 29, 4:00pm – 7:00pm
- Monday, March 7, 4:00pm – 6:30pm
- Monday, March 14, 4:00pm – 6:30pm
- Monday, March 21, 4:00pm – 6:30pm

We reviewed school data, DESE’s District Review Report (October, 2015), as well as other prior studies about the district. The Southbridge Educators Association (SEA) also provided a set of recommendations based on their own discussions with their stakeholders. Their ideas are listed in Appendix A and many of them have been incorporated into this report. Also included in this document are a number of recommendations that emerged from conversations and interviews that the LSG student representative, Ashleigh Prince, conducted with fellow students and teachers.

One paragraph from the SEA’s report struck at the core of many of our conversations,

“Over the years the lack of consistent leadership in the district has resulted in a patchwork of disparate approaches to attempt to meet students’ needs. Our students deserve better than that. Teachers and staff can, and will, deliver a comprehensive education so long as there is a shared vision and common goals between educators and district leaders.”

Finally, we would add that this work will require a significant increase in collaboration with all parents, community members, town officials and all the organizations, non-profit agencies, and businesses that serve the citizens of Southbridge. Without a more comprehensive *team* effort, we will not be able to close the gaps this report has examined.

Sincerely,

The Southbridge Local Stakeholder Group

- ★ **Anna Tsitsilianos** – Teacher, West Street Elementary School
- ★ **Heather Bish** – Special Education Supervisor, Southbridge Public Schools
- ★ **William K. Bishop** – School Committee member (designated by School Committee Chair Scott Lazo)
- ★ **Kristin Mayotte** – Director of Educational Services, Y.O.U, inc.; South Central System of Care
- ★ **Donna Joyce** – Career Center Business Representative, Central MA Workforce Investment Board

- ★ **Michael Keough** – Teacher, Southbridge Middle/High School
- ★ **Maria Murray** – Assistant Principal, West Street Elementary School
- ★ **Lillian Ortiz** – Vice President of Strategic Enrollment Development and Student Engagement, Quinsigamond Community College
- ★ **Amelia Peloquin** – Parent representative
- ★ **Ashleigh Prince** – Southbridge High School senior (designated by Interim Superintendent Connors)
- ★ **Juli Robb** – Teacher, Eastford Road Elementary School
- ★ **Ron San Angelo** - Southbridge Town Manager
- ★ **Pat Spinelli** – Parent representative
- ★ **Joan Sullivan** – President, Southbridge Education Association
- ★ **Rebecca Sweetman** – Associate Principal, Southbridge Middle School
- ★ **Evelyn Velez** – Co-Director of Head Start, Worcester Community Action Council, Inc.
- ★ **Kerry Walker** – Parent representative
- ★ **Dave Williams** – Teacher, Southbridge Middle/High School

# SOUTHBRIDGE LSG RECOMMENDATIONS

April 5, 2016

Numbers within parentheses indicate # of LSG votes

Recommendations below dashed line ( ---- ) did not receive any votes at the final meeting but were discussed at prior meetings.

L=Leadership  
R=Recruitment& Retention  
I=Instruction  
C&C=Climate & Culture  
SI=Specialized Instruction  
T=Technology  
C&I=Curriculum & Instruction

PRIORITY	AREA OF FOCUS	RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS	CATE- GORY
1 (22)	<b>Closing the Achievement Gap</b> (Curriculum & Instruction)	1. Establish a multi-year cycle to review and implement curriculum that is aligned vertically and horizontally throughout the district. (8) 2. Develop curriculum that aims high by focusing the rigor and expectations to challenge our skilled and confident students and then provides scaffolding that supports the learning of all students to reach those expectations. (8) 3. Develop common skills (e.g., in reading and writing) and strategies that can be used by students across multiple subjects and contexts. (8) 4. Provide free pre-school program to accommodate 100% of eligible children and offer transportation. (6) 5. Expand the alternative curriculum for students who want to stay in Southbridge but will not be attending college. Seek out collaborative opportunities with town businesses to help craft these alternatives. (5) 6. Deploy more special educators who would collaborate with regular education teachers to provide more inclusive learning environments for students. (4) 7. Maintain or increase current levels of funding for arts, music and other non-core academic programs. (4) 8. Provide time and support for middle school and high school teachers to work on curriculum development during the summer. (1) 9. Partner with Quinsigamond Community College or other institutions to provide early college, dual-enrollment or access to college-level courses in the evenings or weekends. (1) 10. Establish policies that ensure balanced classroom assignments of English language learner (ELL)	C&I

		<p>students and students with disabilities. (1)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>11. Use outside consultants to help guide the development of curriculum as a means of insuring that curricula represent the most current research and highest quality.</p>	
2 (20)	<p><b>Climate and Culture</b> Develop &amp; strength a culture of continuous improvement</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop and strengthen an inclusive culture that allows all to raise concerns openly and honestly without fear of recrimination. (9)</li> <li>2. Provide support for teachers in managing challenging behaviors and support for them when they discipline students appropriately. (9)</li> <li>3. Provide more support for students with behavioral issues by increasing support staff such as psychologists &amp; school adjustment counselors as well as by providing alternative programs for students to gain a rigorous education. (8)</li> <li>4. Develop a clear set of expectations with accountability of what all stakeholders (students, staff, leaders) can expect of each other and what is expected of them. (7)</li> <li>5. Review and evaluate the recommendations of the 2002 Southbridge School Safety report and address persistent areas of need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Create School Safety and At-Risk Youth Task Force that includes teachers, education support personnel, students, parents, community members and representatives from public agencies.</li> <li>o Create Faculty-Administration School Safety Committee.</li> <li>o Establish a formal pathway of communication with the Student Councils on issues of safe and secure learning environments. (6)</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Increase the number of bilingual translators, faculty, and staff across the district. (3)</li> <li>7. Find ways to support student voices and encourage more student participation. (2)</li> <li>8. Utilize learning walks with fidelity. (1)</li> <li>9. Create a policy requiring school uniforms. (1)</li> </ol> <p>-----</p> <p>10. Better utilize teams and team structure by allowing team members to select the leaders of those teams.</p>	C&C
3(19)	<p><b>Student Behavior-</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore alternative classroom settings for students with significant behavioral challenges. (12)</li> <li>2. Increase the number of school-based psychologists and behavioral intervention specialists at each</li> </ol>	SI, C&C

	Provide support for students who struggle meeting appropriate behavioral standards	<p>school. (10)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Update, streamline, and communicate an updated handbook that spells out behavior expectations. (7)</li> <li>4. Evaluate the current procedures for tracking students in need of behavioral evaluations, interventions and ongoing supports. (7)</li> <li>5. Provide more in-class support for students who struggle. (7)</li> <li>6. Focus on developing a small number of behavioral expectations appropriate for each development stage that are universally embraced and applied at each level (the key is implementation). (4)</li> <li>7. Institute trauma-sensitive classrooms. (2)</li> <li>8. Restructure and appropriately staff the in-school suspension room. (2)</li> </ol>	
4(18)	Improve and strengthen processes that are linked to <b>recruitment and retention</b> of effective administrators who will commit to investing in Southbridge over a reasonable period of time.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop recruitment &amp; retention protocols and faithfully adhere to them. (7)</li> <li>2. Use the evaluation system as a source of growth rather than as a punitive tool. (7)</li> <li>3. Strengthen the mentor program. (5)</li> <li>4. Commit to using the protocols with fidelity. (4)</li> <li>5. Ensure there are adequate checks and balances for accountability purposes and also provide sufficient time for growth and development. (4)</li> <li>6. Compensate educators appropriately and competitively based on their job descriptions. (4)</li> <li>7. Hire qualified professionals based on credentials and skills, not friendships. (4)</li> <li>8. Institute a well defined and proven process for hiring superintendent and principals. (3)</li> <li>9. Hire (or share with town) a professional HR director that can effectively manage resources and human capital (healthcare, salary scales, discipline, negotiate contracts, manage employee assistance issues, etc.). (3)</li> <li>10. Adjust and balance the stipends educators are paid for taking on additional responsibilities. (Currently, stipends for mentoring are not as high as coaching athletic teams). (3)</li> <li>11. Develop clear job descriptions. (3)</li> <li>12. Provide ongoing mentoring and support for leaders including the superintendent. (2)</li> <li>13. Better activate our in-house capacity to develop a pipeline of future skilled teachers and teaching assistants. (2)</li> <li>14. Do a prompt search when there is a teacher vacancy. (2)</li> <li>15. Provide opportunities for teacher leadership. (2)</li> <li>16. Search process for leadership positions needs to include stakeholder voice. (1)</li> <li>17. Expect that administrators will be visible in buildings frequently. (1)</li> <li>18. Offer apprenticeships as a means of developing future teachers and teaching assistants as well as a</li> </ol>	L R

		<p>means of strengthening current teachers (e.g. apprenticeships for science teachers). (1)</p> <p>19. Strengthen relationships with college preparation programs. (1)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>20. Expand the search parameters to reach out to leaders beyond the local region.</p> <p>21. Establish a professional library that educators (and parents) could utilize.</p> <p>22. Create ways for educators to transition to retirement.</p>	
5(17)	Significantly strengthen <b>ELL instruction</b> throughout the district.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Audit current services for students. Based on service delivery, craft an improvement plan that ensures that all students receive the supports they need. (11)</li> <li>2. Hire licensed English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to provide pullout and push-in English language development to ELLs (11)</li> <li>3. Establish a transitional bilingual education program as a supplement to dual-language and sheltered English immersion programs. (7)</li> <li>4. Establish a dual-language program to build language proficiency in both English and Spanish as a featured program for the Southbridge Public Schools. (5)</li> <li>5. Support teachers as they implement new strategies from the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) course. (5)</li> <li>6. Hire an ELL director. (4)</li> <li>7. Review the placements and service delivery models for ELLs on Individualized Learning Plans (IEPs) and 504s. (4)</li> <li>8. Provide professional development programs leading to ESL licensure for current teachers. (2)</li> <li>9. Provide effective professional development for teachers. (1)</li> </ol>	SI
6(15)	Significantly strengthen and communicate opportunities to support students' <b>social and emotional learning.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hire a wraparound coordinator for each school to align all external support systems. (13)</li> <li>2. Hire School Adjustment Counselors for each school. (11)</li> <li>3. Revamp in school suspension model to effectively address students' academic and social needs. (9)</li> <li>4. Provide professional development on working with students who have been impacted by trauma. (8)</li> <li>5. Investigate implementing a restorative justice model of school discipline at the high school. (6)</li> <li>6. Find the right balance between wraparound services (counseling, support, etc.) and accountability (consequences). (4)</li> </ol>	C&C
7(12)	Strengthen <b>professional development</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a multi-year district-wide plan for professional development programs based on district curriculum and technology needs. Include professional development that focuses on content area pedagogy. Such a plan must reflect and incorporate teacher voices, student data, and needs of the</li> </ol>	I

	<p>and focus on key areas to enhance instruction.</p>	<p>district. (11)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Support effective implementation of initiatives by adequate training and acquisition of materials prior to the implementation process. This is important for administrators as well as teachers. (8)</li> <li>3. Offer Spanish language courses to current faculty and staff to build internal capacity. (6)</li> <li>4. Focus Professional Development (PD) on how to work with challenging student behaviors. (4)</li> <li>5. Move away from a one size fits all approach to PD; teacher needs are varied. (4)</li> <li>6. Focus on improving rigor. (3)</li> <li>7. Educators should not be subject to more than two professional learning initiatives each year. Offer a menu of options for educators to target individual licensure, skills or content area needs. (3)</li> <li>8. Provide opportunities for vertical teams to meet and focus on common problems of practice. (3)</li> <li>9. Provide support for inclusion. (3)</li> <li>10. Develop a focus on how to effectively instruct students with dual language backgrounds. (2)</li> <li>11. Focus on how to develop trauma sensitive classrooms. (2)</li> <li>12. Increase PD opportunities beyond the small number of days allotted. (1)</li> <li>13. Focus PD efforts on developing cultural proficiency. (1)</li> <li>14. Develop a focus on effective use of technology to support instruction. (1)</li> <li>15. Another needed focus is how to co-teach effectively with inclusive instruction. (1)</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Hire math and English language arts (ELA) coaches.</li> <li>17. Tap into the potential of community resources to provide some professional development.</li> <li>18. Appreciate the benefits of providing teachers time to collaborate with colleagues who either share the same students or face similar teaching challenges.</li> </ol>	
<p>7(12)</p>	<p>Strengthen <b>parent &amp; community engagement</b> at all levels and particularly at the upper elementary through high school.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map the external resources (e.g. nonprofit organizations) available to the schools - especially, organizations that have missions that dovetail with Southbridge Public Schools’ (SPS) educational goals. Clarify how the agencies can support school goals. (9)</li> <li>2. Employ a full-time outreach worker in each school building to improve connections between home, school and community. Improve outreach services to parents so they feel welcome into schools and offer them workshops on getting children “ready to learn.” (5)</li> <li>3. Create additional parent liaison positions sufficient to meet district needs. (5)</li> <li>4. Select a student data management system and implement it effectively so that parent/teacher communication can be enhanced. (5)</li> </ol>	<p>C&amp;C</p>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Coordinate with community partners to address issues related to homelessness and transiency and to promote a safe and secure learning environment. Collaborate directly with YOU, Inc. as a partner to provide a variety of community support programs into the schools. (4)</li> <li>6. Expand staff diversity (especially educators or teaching assistants who are bilingual). (4)</li> <li>7. Expand means to have successful communication with parents (update phone numbers &amp; emails, utilize an effective student data management system, utilize the power of social media). (4)</li> <li>8. Clarify and communicate the many ways that parents can get involved and support teaching and learning – it is not just parent involvement, it is parent engagement. (4)</li> <li>9. Create a Post High School Hub with the assistance of community agencies and parents, where students can get assistance with resume development, development of portfolios, SAT prep, &amp; college readiness. (3)</li> <li>10. Develop and promulgate a handbook for parent volunteers. Offer training. (3)</li> <li>11. Explore ways to share resources between the town and the school as a means of expanding services without outstripping resources (e.g. HR, Accounting, plowing, etc.). (3)</li> <li>12. Advertise school events in downtown area. (2)</li> <li>13. Inquire through surveys and other means about parent needs. (2)</li> <li>14. Wraparound Coordinators can be a link to families and the community services. (2)</li> <li>15. Work with local community college to expand dual enrollment potential. (1)</li> <li>16. Expand the use of the buildings in the evenings by the community. (1)</li> <li>17. Establish an Adult Basic Education program that includes ESL courses, computer literacy, mathematics and workforce development training. (1)</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. Focus on partnerships that link students and families to employment opportunities and additional job training.</li> <li>19. Make parent meetings more inviting (e.g., add a social component to the focus of the meeting).</li> <li>20. Balance academic communication with relationship building (look to understand what programs have successfully drawn in parents).</li> <li>21. Strengthen the use of school councils.</li> </ol>	
9(9)	<b>“Raise The Bar” for all students</b> by	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a College &amp; Career Hub with the assistance of community agencies and parents, where students can get assistance with resume development, development of portfolios, SAT prep, college applications. (8)</li> </ol>	I C&C

	enhancing offerings and support for our students.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Address insufficient curricular offerings at the high school (an impediment to higher expectations). (7)</li> <li>3. Address preschool opportunities that are uneven or do not reach all students (an impediment to higher expectations). (7)</li> <li>4. Address very large class sizes at the middle school (an impediment to higher expectations). (5)</li> <li>5. Allow for flexible grouping so that more students can benefit from accelerated learning in one area (5)</li> <li>6. Offer an expanded range of after school opportunities/choices. (4)</li> <li>7. Strengthen college and career planning. (2)</li> <li>8. Work with local community college to expand dual enrollment potential. (1)</li> <li>9. Clarify expectations around entry into accelerated classes. (1)</li> </ol>	
10(9)	Strengthen the <b>technology</b> infrastructure and the ways that technology can support improved instruction, communication, assessment, and data collection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Select a student data management system and implement it effectively so that parent/teacher communication can be enhanced. (12)</li> <li>2. Strengthen professional development so that educators feel equipped to both access and use technology effectively in their instruction and communication (12)</li> </ol>	T
11(8)	<b>Hire additional leaders</b> to effectively manage key areas of learning and support to maximize instructional focus.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Key Support Areas Where Leadership is Most Needed <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ELL Director (14)</li> <li>b. Grant Writer/Community Resource Director (10)</li> <li>c. Director of Social &amp; Emotional Services and/or Wraparound Services Coordinator (9)</li> <li>d. Technology Director (5)</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Recruit school-based administrators who have proven records of working in districts with ELLs, and a wide variety of special education programs. Leaders must be skilled and knowledgeable about successful programs and techniques to meet needs of this district. (3)</li> <li>3. District and school level leadership must have a responsive structure in place to support the entire school community and provide timely feedback and interventions when necessary. (3)</li> <li>4. Recruit school-based administrators who have demonstrated ability to create supportive environments and are committed to collaborative model of decision-making. (2)</li> </ol>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Establish a professional learning network for educators to collaborate on best practices and communicate shared needs with administration. (2)</li> <li>6. Hire Team Chairs. (2)</li> </ul>	
<b>12(6)</b>	Increase the <b>extra-curricular</b> offerings for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve after-school transportation. (15)</li> <li>2. Require that every student participate in an after school option once a week. (6)</li> <li>3. Gather input from students to determine the interests and needs for after school programming. (6)</li> <li>4. Offer an expanded range of after school opportunities/choices (tutoring, clubs, sports, community service). Reframe after school possibilities as a way for students to better themselves. (4)</li> </ul>	C&C
<b>13(3)</b>	Provide <b>professional development for members of the school committee.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SC members need to be prepared to govern effectively and within appropriate boundaries. (3)</li> </ul>	L

## APPENDIX A

### **Southbridge Education Association's Recommendations to the Receiver**

The key to any success is collaboration. Problems that begin in the school do not end at the close of the school day. Conversely, problems that begin in the neighborhood do not end once the first bell rings to start school. There is no substitute for a broad based community-wide effort. *Southbridge School Safety Report 2002*

The inclusion of educators in decision-making is vital to any successful improvement plan laid out for Southbridge Public Schools.

Over the years the lack of consistent leadership in the district has resulted in a patchwork of disparate approaches to attempt to meet students' needs. Our students deserve better than that. Teachers and staff can, and will, deliver a comprehensive education so long as there is a shared vision and common goals between educators and district leaders.

The Southbridge Education Association is committed to the improvement of the District and makes the following recommendations to the receiver preparing the district's improvement plan. We align these recommendations to the areas of concern outlined in the state statute that addresses underperforming districts.

The recommendations come from surveys and conversations the SEA conducted throughout the district:

#### **Social Service**

- Employ a full-time outreach worker in each school building to improve connections between home, school and community. Improve outreach services to parents so they feel welcome into schools and offer them workshops on getting children "ready to learn."
- Coordinate with community partners to address issues related to homelessness and transiency and to promote a safe and secure learning environment. Collaborate directly with YOU Inc. as a partner to provide a variety of community support programs into the schools.

#### **Safe and Secure Learning Environment**

- Review and evaluate the recommendations of the 2002 Southbridge School Safety report and address persistent areas of need:
  - Create School Safety and At-Risk Youth Task Force that includes teachers, education support personnel, students, parents, community members and representatives from public agencies.
  - Create Faculty-Administration School Safety Committee
  - Establish a formal pathway of communication with the Student Councils on issues of safe and secure learning environments.
  - Establish and increase support for parent teacher associations at each school.
- Increase the number of school-based psychologists and behavioral intervention specialists at each school.
- Evaluate the current procedures for tracking students in need of behavioral evaluations, interventions and ongoing supports.
- Update the district-wide student discipline policies and procedures and ensure consistency and fairness in their application.

#### **Workforce Development**

- Establish an Adult Basic Education program that includes English as a second language courses, computer literacy, mathematics and workforce development training.
- Focus on partnerships that link students and families to employment opportunities and additional job training.

#### **Closing Achievement Gaps**

- Establish a multi-year cycle to review and implement curriculum that is aligned vertically and horizontally throughout the district.
- Partner with Quinsigamond Community College or other institutions to provide early college, dual-enrollment or access to college-level courses in the evenings or weekends.
- Provide free pre-school program to accommodate 100% of eligible children and offer transportation.
- Establish policies that ensure balanced classroom assignments of ELL students and students with disabilities
- Maintain or increase current levels of funding for arts, music and other non-core academic programs.

### **English Language Learners**

- Hire district-wide English-as-a-second language program director
- Hire licensed ESL teachers to provide pull-out and push-in English language development to ELLs
- Establish a dual-language program to build language proficiency in both English and Spanish as a featured program for the Southbridge public schools.
- Establish a transitional bilingual education program as a supplement to dual-language and sheltered English immersion programs.
- Review the placements and service delivery models for English language learners on IEPs and 504s.
- Provide professional development programs leading to ESL Licensure for current teachers.

### **Leadership**

- Recruit school-based administrators who have proven records of working in districts with English language learners, and a wide variety of special education programs. Leaders must be skilled and knowledgeable of successful programs and techniques to meet needs of this district.
- Recruit school-based administrators who have demonstrated ability to create supportive environments and are committed to collaborative model of decision making.
- District and school level leadership must have a responsive structure in place to support the entire school community and provide timely feedback and interventions when necessary.
- Establish a professional learning network for educators to collaborate on best practices and communicate shared needs with administration.

### **Climate and Culture**

- Strategic planning to establish a climate that supports parents, students and educators working together for academic achievement.
- Establish district-wide practices and protocols for faculty and staff to communicate with families.
- Increase the number of extra-curricular activities and academic support services, tutoring, and community events available after school and located in the school buildings.
- Provide additional options for transportation to and from the school buildings to support extra-curricular activities and community participation.
- Increase the number of bilingual translators, faculty and staff across the district.
- Offer Spanish language courses to current faculty and staff to build internal capacity.

### **Professional Development**

- A multi-year district-wide plan for professional development programs based on district curriculum and technology needs. Include professional development that focuses on content area pedagogy
- Educator should not be subject to more than two professional learning initiatives each year. Offer a menu of options for educators to target individual licensure, skills or content area needs.