



New Jersey Department of Education/Paterson Board of Education Transition to Local Control Report II

Please note that this report has been modified from its original version to be more accessible.

Overview

On January 9, 2020, the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) presented the first of three transition reports to the New Jersey Board of Education (BOE) regarding Paterson Public Schools (PPS) implementation of the approved Transition Plan for the return of full local control under N.J.A.C 6A:30-7.2. The Report which was comprised of two parts; a quantitative scorecard from the Comprehensive Accountability Office (CAO) for State Supervised School Districts and a qualitative report from the Highly Skilled Professionals (HSPs) with the authority under N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14(e)(2) to provide oversight, guidance and technical support to PPS and the BOE in the implementation of the Plan expressed optimism that the District was making sustainable progress in the transition plan for a return to local control.

Of the 28 indicators on the Score Card to measure progress in implementation of the District's transition plan to regain local control, the District fully implemented 13 of the indicators with a score of 4; substantially met 10 indicators with a score of 3, and partially implemented 4 indicators with a score of 2. One indicator could not be rated in the first of the three evaluation reports that determine whether the school board regains full local control in the 2-year timeframe. Indicators with scores of 4 denote all elements of the standard are substantially implemented, sustainable, and have a process for ongoing evaluation. Indicators with scores of 3 denote most elements of the metric are being met and are sustainable but require further evaluation from the HSP's until their full implementation is imbedded. Indicators with scores of 2 denote a partially implemented standard is being met in only a limited way and will require additional guidance and support in the development of sustainable systems embedded in policies, practices, and procedures "that will protect the District from regressing on its efforts to improve; and return to the circumstances that led to State intervention".

The concept of sustained progress forms the basis of the transition plan. The initial report documented roles, responsibilities, actions, and timelines used by the District to exhibit progress in the areas of transition. The current and next HSP reports will focus on indicators scored at 3 or 2 and discuss programs, policies, and procedures that demonstrate the capacity or lack thereof from the District to sustain progress through the transition and beyond. This report continues to review documents and benchmarks that



are outlined in the scorecard and conceptualizes processes and actions overtime based on the HSP's observations and interactions with District staff, administration and the BOE.

Fundamental Considerations

State Engagement with the District during the Transition:

The HSPs, Superintendent, Leadership Team and BOE have continued to enjoy a cooperative, transparent and engaging relationship allowing for the ongoing monitoring of progress towards the implementation plan as well as the openness to receive technical assistance and constructive criticism when needed. In addition to all ongoing regularly scheduled meetings between the District and the HSP's; the HSP's have also assisted in the agenda development and participated in 3 subsequent Board Retreats that focused on areas of need as identified in the transition plan and observed by the HSP's.

It is important to note that the roles and responsibilities of the HSPs have evolved through collaborations with the NJDOE, Rutgers University, the BOE, Office of the Superintendent, and needs of the District. The HSPs are continuously engaged in communications and discussions with the aforementioned entities thereby establishing protocols for 'transparency and accountability'. The quality of these associations enhances opportunities for HSPs to deliver technical and actionable recommendations with confidence. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic a commitment to maintain consistent and collaborative relationships with the HSPs has proven invaluable in the HSPs effort to provide the adequate support for transitioning the District back to local control as outlined in the Plan.

Consequences for Not Meeting the Expectations of the Full Transition Plan:

In January 2020, the BOE swore in 2 new members who both had previously served in the past. Although these members have participated in past ethic trainings it was important for them to be brought up to date on the Transition Plan and the specific consequences if the BOE should fail to meet the Plan's goals and benchmarks. At the January Board Retreat, the HSP's reviewed and discussed all ten scenarios in which progress is seen as interrupted through action or inaction by the BOE, including a failure to meet the benchmarks and goals outlined in the Plan. Although the majority of the BOE had already participated in this training it was important that it be revisited and reinforced. The BOE has continued to fully embrace the stipulations under the Plan and persist to demonstrate their readiness for full local control.

NJ law authorizes any individual to file formal ethics charges against a member of the BOE. In 2019, a former employee filed charges against a Board member. A final decision has been issued by the School Ethics Commission finding that member in violation of the



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School Ethics Law. An appeal has been filed by the Respondent and the Commissioner of Education's decision is pending. (Documents on file in the Superintendent's office)

The BOE continues to maintain appropriate oversight, without inappropriate interference, into personnel decisions.

Governance

Ethics Training for BOE and Senior Officials:

It is observed that the BOE continues to be in full compliance with this Metric.

Professional Development for the BOE and District Leadership Regarding Governance Best Practices:

It is observed that the BOE continues to be in full compliance with this Metric.

Search for Successor Superintendent:

The District fully complied with this Metric.

Strategic Planning Expectations:

The District fully complied with this Metric.

Instruction and Program

The areas of teaching and learning within the PPS are grounded in best practices, and research-based instructional strategies for standards-based instruction, 21st Century learning, interdisciplinary connections, formative and summative assessments, integration of the arts, modifications for special education (SPED) and English language learners (ELL), technology, and applied learning. The PPS strives align content area best practices with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) and NJQSAC indicators. This effort is fostered amongst colleagues in Professional Learning Communities throughout the Paterson Public Schools.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

During the 2018-19 school year, the PPS trained all administrators and teachers in the formation of PLCs to increase the capacity of schools to identify best practices, and utilize data to make informed decisions. (See Metric #9) The PLCs establish collaborative teams that are committed to improving the levels of learning for all students. The working dynamics of human capital (knowledge) and social capital (sharing) function within the PLCs to achieve targeted outcomes.

School PLCs meet regularly to determine the effective use of curriculum and analyze data to design action plans based upon a review of the academic, social, and emotional needs of



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students. These meetings generally occur in a data room where staff can clearly observe the performance trends of cohorts and subgroups. Supported by standards, student learning objectives, and data binders-PLCs develop activities to differentiate interventions for both challenged and high-achieving students; while assessing which instructional activities were successful, and which were not effective. It should also be noted that the PLCs serve as practicable form of professional development by promoting collaborative learning among colleagues.

The following topics are common collaborations for school-based PLCs:

1. Analyze/Compare Data/Trend Analysis
2. Lesson Planning
3. Lesson/Unit Reflection & Evaluation
4. Formative/Summative Assessments/Running Records
5. Instructional Strategies
6. Differentiated Instruction Strategies
7. Test-Tasking Strategies
8. Modifications for Special Education and English Language Learners
9. Chronic Absenteeism
10. Resources for Support
11. Intervention and Referral Services

As previously noted, one of the functions of the Paterson Public Schools PLCs is to identify interventions for students. (See Metric #14) Primary among them is ALEKS. An adaptive mathematics program that provides one-to-one interventions to assess and reassess student competencies levels, and provide teachers and students with effective feedback. The implementation of ALEKS, and the professional development in its usage, has expanded into middle schools, Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. The number of students serviced in ALEKS has surged from 5,500 to 11,000 as its implementation and training has markedly increased.

ALEKS data informs PLCs on student thinking and comprehension of learning objectives; while consistently revealing areas for individual and aggregate interventions. A review of logs, agendas, and instructional strategies during HSP school site visits document the rigorous efforts of PLCs to share expertise on proven practices, and establish core missions for student improvement.

Student Achievement Data and Curriculum Decision-Making

The initial CAO report detailed District strategies for the analysis and utilization of performance data to make informed decisions. The PPS Academic Services Department (ASD) utilizes performance data to foster improvements in teaching and learning; and increase the capacity of instructional leaders to align curriculum and instruction to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS).



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The PPS receive aggregated and disaggregated data from the District. The aggregated data provides summary information on student performance; while disaggregated data separates the results by groups and demographic variables measured on formative assessments, the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA), Dynamic Learning Maps (SPEDS), Access 2.0 (ELL), Evidence Statements, PSAT, SAT, ACT, and AP testing. (See Metric #9)

The District Evidence Statements are item analysis tables depicting student mastery on the NJSLA by school, District, State, and Cross-State. (See Metric #13) Published by the NJDOE, the District presents this data to principals with added resources to identify student performance gaps, and build instructional supports aligned with the NJSLS. The District's response to the NJSLA is also captured and formatted in an annual report presented to the Board, staff members, and stakeholders. (See Metric #9)

The District exercises transparency and access to all data through shared drives. This continuous cycle of information enhances the knowledge and capacity of the HSPs to collaborate in activities for the improved focus of teaching and learning, and programmatic decision-making.

The analysis of data is not limited to student performance. The PPS also organizes to examine the interactions of qualitative and quantitative data in the area of instruction. The Teacher Observation Report gathers this data through observations of the following indicators: (See Metric 11)

1. Preparation for Instruction
2. Use of Data to Inform Instruction
3. Delivers Quality Instruction
4. Interventions to Meet Diverse Needs
5. Classroom Environment
6. Leadership
7. Professional Responsibilities

The observation sample for the first CAO report numbered 1,705. The current report ending on January 15, 2020 included a sample size of 2,016. The report is reflective of tenure and non-tenure instructional staff, and provides a review of practice. Each teaching standard is evidenced independently and quantified in a summary report. Administrators provide feedback and recommendations to improve teaching and learning based on an analysis of the report.

To enhance curricula decision-making, on September 25, 2019, the ASD drafted a SOP approved by the Superintendent to establish District guidelines for developing and revising curriculum and assessments. A key feature of the curriculum SOP is the ongoing review of curriculum feedback surveys from students, staff, parents, and the community. The survey is a tool for understanding the perceptions of the various stakeholders. It differs from the qualitative and quantitative data typically evaluated by the District-because it is perceptual-and abides by the opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints of the school community.



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An important feature of PPS curriculum survey is that it can be re-administered to assess changes in perceptions over a given period, re: year to year. The survey responses are reviewed routinely by the ASD for input into the development and modification of the District's curricula. (See Metric # 11)

Data Informed Decision-Making

The PPS utilizes data to enhance relevant and insightful decision-making. Data streams expansively and continuously from District offices to the Board of Education, schools, and the Paterson community. Feedback is acquired through workshops, retreats, Board meetings, surveys, and PLCs. District presentations are organized to provide an understanding of results, analysis, and responses to data to advance informed decisions at various organizational levels.

The PPS projects a systematic reliance on data, and views student performance within different models to formulate action plans. Previously described in the first HSP report, the Office of Assessment (OA) continuously collects and analyzes data, and makes it available to all faculty and administrators through a data warehouse and shared drives. A review of performance data is essential for informed decision-making. Within the PPS, communicating data is an ongoing process for affecting decisions and solutions. The District utilizes multiple methods to establish a clear vision for the use data by board members, administrators, and staff. A series of presentations are designed with visual elements, concepts, and narratives to convey data, and provide insight for inquiry and resolutions.

On November 6, 2019 the AO and the ASD presented NJSLA results to the public during a workshop meeting of the Board of Education. On November 12, 2019 the Board received a performance data review at a Board Retreat. The NJSLA Science results recently obtained by the District were presented at the virtual Board Workshop meeting on May 13, 2020, which was also open to the public.

These sessions provided essential information for collaborative decision-making in I&P. Participants were briefed on New Jersey Standards and assessments used to test those standards. The sessions provided a general overview of performance and growth measures, formative and summative assessments, and disaggregated of data for subgroups. The presenters discussed the PPS five-year achievement and growth data, academic barriers, and best practices for improvement. (See Metric #13) The barriers listed in the presentation included inadequate resources, attendance, a shortage of extended learning opportunities, and large class sizes. Best practices cited were staff collaboration, peer observations, and testing taking strategies.

Most significantly, on December 18, 2019 the ASD presented NJSLA data to building administrators. (See Metric #13) The presentation focused on assessment items, areas of strength and improvement, and standards by grade. The purposes of the presentation were to assist teachers with student support, establish mechanisms for informing parents and students on student progress toward college and career readiness, and identify



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professional development needs. The District presented an analysis of the District Evidence Statement (NJDOE) and NJSLA results, and provided recommendations based on the data. Among the recommendations offered was a continued use of best practices, heightened professional development (PD) through PLCs, grade level meetings, vertical articulation meetings, data meetings, and summer and Saturday PD workshops.

The analysis and reporting of performance data are an ongoing cycle for improving teaching and learning in the Paterson School District. Whether communicating to the Board, colleagues, or to the community-the ASD's efforts to enhance data informed decision-making throughout the District are substantially documented.

Finally, the District builds capacity for schools to collect and analyze data for school-based decision-making. The HSPs have observed these processes through the school site visit protocols. The first CAO report detailed the purpose, authority, terms and conditions of the HSP School Visit SOP, effective June, 2019. Since the enactment of the SOP, HSPs have conducted over 60 non-evaluative classrooms observations in 23 schools. Additionally, individual interviews were held with Principals sans classroom observations to discuss instructional models and programs.

The HSP site visitations provide a unique view of I&P at operational levels. The non-evaluative nature of the visits creates an open dialogue for transparency and professional decorum. Very often Principals will discuss assessment data, and how that data is used to determine targeted interventions for students who have to work harder than others to achieve a level of success in the classroom. (See Metric #13)

Professional Development for the BOE and Senior Staff Regarding Instruction and Program Best Practices:

The District has provided training for Board Members to develop comprehensive knowledge of content, principles, and practices in Instruction and Program. The Board will be trained in revisions to the equivalency, updates in the NJSLS, and the effectiveness of PLCs in schools. Various training options will be offered to the Board throughout the year. (See Metric #16)

Special Education and Student Support Services:

The District's Special Education Department's IEP compliance is currently at **88%** and monthly IEP tracking data is generated and shared. This data is emailed on a monthly basis to Special Education Supervisors who in turn share this information with each CST they supervise during their weekly on-site (virtual) visits. And the overall IEP compliance and number of special education students continues to be tracked for each school and discussed weekly at the Superintendent's Cabinet Meetings.

All corrective actions for the Department, not including compensatory have been closed out. The District's Special Education Department is also onboarding additional child study



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team members to address the volume of enrollment for pre-school students with disabilities.

The SPED Department is currently working to develop a partnership with William Paterson University for a Transition Certificate Program for students with disabilities from ages 18-21.

Regarding Intervention and Referral Service Plans (I&RS Plans) and Section 504 Plans, the District continues to aggressively work to ensure the I&RS strategies and accommodations are implemented with fidelity, and that staff members who are responsible for plan implementation are held accountable. (See Metric #15)

Fiscal Management and Operations

Overview:

After receiving a score of 2 in 4 of the 8 indicators under Fiscal Management for the first CAO report, the findings indicated that although the District met technical parameters of the evaluative metrics, its process “lacked maturity and institutionalized decision-making” and therefore “full compliance warrants additional progress.” Because Fiscal Management was the only area where metrics were only “partially implemented” and required additional attention, the HSP’s with the assistance of the Commissioner, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Deputy Assistant Commissioner-Finance, County Superintendent, County B.A., and State Budget Monitor have been involved with the District throughout the entire 2020-21 S/Y budget process. Through the review of several draft budget documents and a series of in-person and virtual meetings with District leadership and Board members; the DOE has been able to closely monitor the progress of the budget development process and certify the imbedded best practices used to strike a second consecutive balanced budget under transition.

Although the historic underfunding in both state aid and local tax levy according to the SFRA continue to hamper the District’s ability to provide all the resources and supports needed by a SDA district (former Abbott), the District has seen increased state aid as a result of Chapter 67 Phase-in and local aid from back to back double digit increases to the tax levy. While significant, these increases in revenue are still outpaced by cost drivers resulting in a structural deficit in the tens of millions. Despite the District’s best efforts, they find themselves forced into making tough decisions annually such as laying off staff, closing schools and cutting programs. Encouraging conversations and some action have begun to address the District’s structural deficit but even more drastic measures must be taken in the short term to stabilize the District finances in the long run and maintain that the highest priority is placed on student achievement. Although the Board has adopted its final budget under the Transition, the HSP will continue to assist the District and Board



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with planning for long-term financial stability, financial reporting; and expectations regarding additional initiatives until full local control is achieved.

Basic Fiscal Obligations; Budget Requirements and Best Practices:

For the second and final time under the Transition Plan, the District prepared and the Board adopted a balanced budget certified for taxes based on the original state aid notice on time each year to ensure financial stability. There are semimonthly meetings with the Board fiscal committee discussing budget projections and budget priorities. A budget calendar is reviewed with Cabinet and the Board Fiscal Committee and then distributed to the full Board. The Board engages appropriately with the District in the development of the budget through budget hearings and special Board meetings designed to “close the structural budget gap.” The community is engaged during the budget process with forums held in strategic locations to capture as much community input as possible. Focus groups consisting of collective bargaining units and key community stakeholder groups are also included in the process. Of special note is a focus group of students who added valuable input in the process. The Budget team meets no less than twice a month with different groups to further collaborate on budget issues and concerns. The minutes from the Fiscal Committee and Board meetings are evidenced of full engagement during the budget process. (See Metric #17)

The District Budget Team consisting of central office staff members meets jointly with all school principals in rolling out the annual budget. Schools individually request budget priorities with school allocations based on projected enrollment by grade and student type; General Ed, SPED, and new for 2020-21 Bi-lingual to distribute funding equitably to the schools with transparency based on the non-salary needs of their student population. The Budget Team implements a weighted student funding formula with increased allocations to support the needs of schools with greater numbers of students who comprise special populations. For the remaining population, a per-pupil allocation was developed based on enrollment count by grade level as of the Oct. 15th ASSA report. The allocated amounts determined, separated by grade levels K-8 and 9-12, and categorically allows for more equity with an increased amount provided at the high school level. (See Metric #18)

The monthly Board Secretary’s Report / Treasurer’s Report/ Transfer Report continue to be completed, reconciled and submitted to the Board with appropriate certification of adequate funds. This is done without exceptions and as required. The Fund Balance Review is performed in front of the full board during the months of November, February, and May. At the time of this report the HSP’s can confirm that at least 3 times per year over the course of the last 2 years under the Transition Plan, the District presented a fiscal



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forecast for the remainder of the year to the Board as outlined in the plan. (See Metric #19)

The District continues to prepare a monthly cash flow analysis to monitor their cash versus payment obligations. The Business Services team meets monthly with the Federal Grants team to review reimbursement and actual spending. Grant requirements and available balances are discussed during these meetings as well. The State Budget Monitor who has been imbedded in the Business office has been instrumental in overseeing the daily financial processes and assisting to identify potential weaknesses. Should a weakness exist, a corrective action plan goes into place and an update of the SOP happens simultaneously. With his guidance, the District has implemented an equity-based formula model for school-based budgeting. The model provided is continually updated and modified based on trends. The expertise provided has aided in the District's ability to increase capacity within the Business Office so that there is a continuing practice of execution. A monthly report is emailed to the state as evidence of our reimbursement requests and the timeliness of the request. The District has greatly improved their relationship with the County Business Administrator, and communicates regularly as a source of information and guidance to ensure progress. Requests are made monthly and the report is due each month on the 15th. (See Metric #20)

The District monitors the Board Secretary's Report, which reflects the current budget status of each line item, including the original budget, transfers, adjusted budget, expenditures, and available balance. Monthly transfer reports are provided as evidence of appropriated expenditures. As required by law, the District requests County approval for any transfer that exceeds 10% of the original budget. The District's Transfer Report for fiscal year 2019-2020, CAFR, AMR, and Certified Resolution stand as evidence in implementing this indicator. (See Metric #21)

Professional Development for the BOE and Senior Staff regarding Fiscal Management Best Practices:

New Jersey state law requires school board members to attend training in the first, second and third years of a first term, and in the first year of re-elected or reappointed term. The HSP's can attest that all required trainings by both state law and as outlined in the Transition Plan have been fulfilled. Please see year to date status of current Board Member. (Metric #22)

Personnel

Expectations Regarding Additional Personnel Initiatives:

It is observed that the BOE continues to be in full compliance with this Metric.



Conclusion

Two thirds through the Transition process both the District Leadership and BOE continue to demonstrate their willingness to improve in every area for the purpose of increasing student outcomes and operational effectiveness. Now that most goals of the Transition Plan are in full compliance or have been substantially met, the focus of the HSP's will be to continue to work with the District and BOE to ensure all gains are sustained.

Report Collectively Submitted by:

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