

End-of-Year Report

This End-of-Year Report seeks to summarize major problems and concerns that have become the focus of our activity and planning during the past year. Stemming from the Level Three Report offered by the DESE, this report articulates feedback from this and other sources and outlines the recommendations that have been put forth to respond to them. This document combined with the Strategic Plan are designed to articulate the challenges and solutions that the District sees as foremost in our efforts to improve the system. We considered the Level Three Report as well as each of the audits and consults we received as vital sources of feedback that might help us improve our performance. We endeavor to overcome each deficit area through careful planning and monitoring of our efforts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE LEVEL THREE FINDINGS

Leadership and Governance

- **Decreased district leadership capacity and an erosion of district infrastructure and capacity to fulfill core functions**
- **District and school improvement plans that are not aligned**
- **Insufficient support and guidance for schools**

Curriculum and Instruction

- **Lack of coordinated curriculum leadership for developing and reviewing the written curriculum**
- **Difficulty sustaining efforts to refine and improve curriculum and improve classroom instruction**
- **Varied and inconsistent implementation of curriculum and instructional practices**

Assessment

- **Lack of a coordinated assessment system**
- **Ineffective teacher availability and use of common planning time**
- **Administrators and teachers lack sufficient skill and time to use data effectively**
- **Dracut does not use data adequately to determine which programs and services are working well**

Human Resources and Professional Development

- **Inability to maintain or expand valued programs**
- **Ineffective and underutilized supervisory and evaluation systems**
- **Uncoordinated professional development activities**

Student Support

- **Dracut has struggled to create systems to support the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners, at-risk students, and/or advanced students**

Financial and Asset Management

- **Dracut struggles to maintain capacity to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs in the face of reduced funding and rising expenses**

DETAILS OF THE CRITICAL CHALLENGES

Leadership and Governance

- **Decreased district leadership capacity and an erosion of district infrastructure and capacity to fulfill core functions**, such as curriculum development, assessment, monitoring, budgeting. Further erosion of district leadership continues as positions cannot be maintained and are eliminated through attrition. Development of present and future leadership is limited due to low or nonexistent funding for mentoring and leadership development. District capacity for curriculum development and management has been underfunded leading to disjointed and misaligned curriculum with limited or no coaching of instructional practice.
- **District and school improvement plans not aligned**, not communicated to stakeholders, and not being used to guide improvement efforts.
- **Insufficient support and guidance for schools**. Dracut has provided inadequate support and direction, leaving schools struggling to solve district-wide issues on their own. Further, schools have been left without clearly articulated expectations for performance.

Curriculum and Instruction

- **Lack of coordinated curriculum leadership for developing and reviewing the written curriculum.**
Dracut struggles to leverage the building blocks of standards-based education (aligned curriculum and assessments) to develop an aligned, consistently well-taught curriculum. Explanations include the focus of the central office on other matters, leadership capacity (e.g., reduced district staff, leaders without necessary skills, or a reduction in coaches or coordinators) or ineffective guidance or support provided by the district to its schools. For instance, districts may not provide to schools a clear understanding of what “good, effective instruction” looks like or what good student work looks like, or may not provide the necessary leadership to arrive at a district wide system that includes formative as well as summative assessments.
- **Varied and inconsistent implementation of curriculum and instructional practices**, stemming from the lack of a district-wide definition of effective instruction and insufficient supervision and monitoring of schools and classroom practice.

The consistency of the taught curriculum varies considerably across and within schools. With limited resources and staff, Dracut has cut back efforts to refine and expand the curriculum. Formative assessments, are not used consistently across schools, and assessments benchmarks are not always established to help teachers assess how well students are mastering the curriculum and to implement tiered instruction to address student weaknesses. Formative assessments are being administered at some grades. Teachers do not have access, time, and support for looking at data to make frequent adjustments to instruction.
- **Difficulty sustaining efforts to refine and improve curriculum and improve classroom instruction**, stemming from lack of focus or reduced capacity.
Dracut fails to focus staff efforts on improving instruction through the accountability levers of the supervision and evaluation process for principals and teachers. Lack of common planning time or effective structures or support for common planning time detract from the development of curricula and the improvement of their delivery. The inconsistency of standing committees

for curriculum development and team structures responsible for managing refining curriculum has led to stagnation in curriculum development. Curriculum coordinators have been given a variety of other responsibilities which distracts from their primary work. This combined with schools being given autonomy has led to variation given the lack of district oversight.

Assessment

Lack of a coordinated assessment system. Dracut does not have a coordinated assessment system leaving schools on their own to struggle in developing strategies for analyzing data and deciding how to use data to improve instruction.

- **Ineffective availability and use of common planning time.**
- **Administrators and teachers lack sufficient skill and time to use data effectively.** Teachers struggle to use formative student assessment data on a regular basis. Insufficient time is devoted to learning to analyze and use data.
- **Dracut does not use data adequately to determine which programs and services are working well.**

Schools do tend to provide diagnostic and formative assessments at the elementary school level, especially in the early grades, allowing teachers to use data to group students for targeted instruction in reading and helping teachers to determine what to reteach. But a lack of central coordination led to multiple systems being used that are not coordinated leading to confusion and a lack of common data in later grades.

Human Resources and Professional Development

- **Inability to maintain or expand valued programs.** Dracut eliminated or cut back on valued teacher mentoring programs as the result of financial restraints.
- **Ineffective and underutilized supervisory and evaluation systems.** Principals are often overwhelmed by a large volume of teacher evaluations to accomplish without much support. Principal and teacher evaluations are not generally used to hold teachers accountable or to improve instruction. For example, principals and teachers are consistently rated “satisfactory” on annual performance evaluations. Too often, inadequate time and attention is dedicated to effective supervision, evaluations are not regularly conducted and supervisors do not provide suggestions for growth, and few distinctions are made along the range of professional practice, from novice to exemplary (rather, principals and teachers are consistently and routinely rated “satisfactory” on annual performance evaluations).
- **Uncoordinated professional development activities.** Professional development has been a potpourri of opportunities without regard to focused district priorities or teacher needs. In general, practices related to human resources are adequate to ensure staff are hired to fill open positions and maintained as employees, but not well developed to ensure the best qualified candidates are identified and recruited, or to ensure that existing staff are mentored, coached, and supported to meet high professional standards. , Supervision and evaluation systems rarely target the improvements necessary to increase the achievement of the students in the district.

Student Support

- **Dracut has struggled to create systems to support the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners, at-risk students, and/or advanced students.** There are limited funds

to begin the development phase for such new programming even though it could offer cost savings later. A continuum of supports is lacking to provide an adequate safety net for high-needs and at-risk children. Districts tend to lack a methodology to determine the effectiveness of these supports, so all too often, support programs and services are among the first to be cut when resources are dwindling. Further, the reliance on grants—to fund support programs and services—results in a churn of these programs and a non-strategic collection of programs rather than a systematic and systemic approach to student support services.

- Increased dropout rates and the identified need to develop 9th grade academies and programs to support at risk students.
- Developing inclusive classroom support for special education students when professional development and schedules of general and special education teachers are uncoordinated

Financial and Asset Management

Dracut struggles to maintain capacity to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs in the face of reduced funding and rising expenses. Limited funds for student services leaves Dracut vulnerable to legal problems due to inadequate services and a thrifty approach to spending on student services.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Level III schools tend to spend 5% to 15% less than the state average in per pupil spending of \$13,006. Dracut spends the minimum per pupil of \$9,606 which is the lowest of the Level III schools in the state by far, 74% of the state average and 0% above the net school spending requirements. Poverty and Special Education levels in Dracut are moderate or average at 14.2% and 11.7% respectively. Nevertheless, teachers have pressed forward and Dracut continues to perform at the state average in English Language Arts. In Math, Dracut at 50% proficiency rating performs significantly below the state at 59%. This average and below average performance overshadows the more important challenges of a lack of improvement and the program vulnerabilities fueled by limited resources and depth of programming. Resources do impact the quality of the program and sustainability of efforts.

The FY 2011 budget called for a \$300,000 increase over FY10. This budget led to significant shortages in paraprofessionals, a decimated professional development budget and several teaching and leadership positions not being filled despite apparent need. The FY12 budget request was a \$473,000 increase from the prior year. This increase appears to be large on the surface but it masks the significant shortfall in services that will occur as a result of this limited increase. Entering FY11 with significant limits on spending in vital areas is no surprise given the current fiscal crisis. Yet, as costs continue to rise the lack of increase in state and local spending places Dracut in a hidden fiscal crisis that quietly erodes the capacity of Dracut to fulfill its educational mission.

Despite the fact that Dracut Public Schools is requesting only a \$473,000 increase from the prior year, there have been numerous increases in unavoidable costs. Contractual increases in teachers' salaries will cost \$600,000 in FY12 not including an increase in salaries of \$137,000 due to salary increases related to advanced degree credits. Additional Special Education obligations including legal costs and services will be no less than \$89,500. Dracut's textbook funds will be severely limited next year with only an increase of \$21,997 over last year. Accreditation will cost \$10,000. Three positions no longer funded

by ARRA that cannot be absorbed by the federal Jobs Bill will cost \$177,000. Adding an additional Kindergarten teacher will cost \$43,000. Beyond these known increases in costs, projected increases include increase utility costs of at least \$50,000 and additional Special Education costs budgeted at \$221,594, a highly conservative estimate of a 1% increase in costs.

Cuts were made in FY11 spending to decrease the funding request for FY2012. It was not expected that the Town would grant all the known increases. For this reason, the only program increase was related to the adding of one Kindergarten classroom teacher. Other increases were offset by cuts in programs, staff and resources. Staff cuts were made at the leadership level losing two positions by attrition amounting to \$153,000. In spite of the fact that increases at the leadership level were planned for FY12 as a priority for the district, cuts were made in this area due to the limited options for cost reduction. Cuts in the teachers sub account, school and central office resources were made despite obvious needs to increase these accounts. Curriculum coordination was made more efficient by combining two positions into one saving \$74,862. Decreases were also made in the collective bargaining (\$35,203), utilities (\$15,000), operations and maintenance salaries (\$45,501), operations and maintenance expenses (\$31,000) and central administration (\$13,277). Other cuts: at the Board level - special purpose legal, \$10,000 and in state conferences, \$1,500; payroll accrual \$14,812; a decrease in buy back expenses of \$50,000

| Increases | Cuts |
|------------------|------------------|
| • \$600,000 | • \$153,000 |
| • \$221,000 | • \$85,000 |
| • \$177,000 | • \$74,862 |
| • \$137,000 | • \$50,000 |
| • \$89,500 | • \$45,501 |
| • \$43,000 | • \$35,202 |
| • \$21,997 | • \$31,000 |
| • \$10,000 | • \$15,000 |
| | • \$10,000 |
| | • \$7,500 |
| | • \$2,500 |
| | • \$76,312 |
| 1,299,497 | \$503,145 |

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership and Governance

- Increase mentoring and leadership opportunities
- Monitor school performance for alignment with district strategy and increased ownership
- Prioritize the utility of technology to support 21st century learning and leadership
- Building district leadership capacity and infrastructure to fulfill core functions
- Aligned district and school improvement plans
- Increase support and guidance for schools
- Strengthen the relationship between municipal and school officials

Curriculum and Instruction

- Review, develop and align curriculum implementation using 5-7 year review cycle
- Enhance teacher knowledge and effectiveness through explicit training around content knowledge and pedagogy

Human Resources and Professional Development

- Create a sense that our work reflects ourselves and only the highest quality is acceptable
- Expand the notion of exceptional customer service delivery to include all staff and including the production of high quality final products such as public documents, building cleanliness
- Maintain or expand valued programs
- Refine supervisory and evaluation systems
- Continue to build district-wide capacity by differentiating PD for all staff including leadership, teachers, nurses, secretaries, café, custodians and parents
- Include sensitivity training to increase expectations, tolerance and anti bullying
- Coordinated curriculum leadership for developing and reviewing the written curriculum
- Refine and improve curriculum and improve classroom instruction
- Implementation of curriculum and instructional practices
- Create a system-wide assessment system for analyzing data to improve instruction

Assessment

- Create unified understanding on the purpose and value of common planning time and ensure the capacity of each building to schedule regular planning time
- Build administrator and teacher skills for data analysis and increase the time allotted for planning to use data effectively
- Use data to determine which programs and services are working well
- Create a transitional curriculum including social learning to build and strengthen a K- 20 learning concept
- Establish leadership teams at each building to more effectively plan and make decisions about key issues
- Review current strategies for accomplishing common planning time including use of subs during PD days
- Help all teachers embrace all the data – owning all the students
- Increase PD for data analysis
- Broaden understanding for the use of data including opening as well as closing lessons
- Build consistency between schools on the use of data
- Use distributive leadership to create ownership by teachers of the data processes
- Identify Power Standards to avoid focus on breadth as opposed to depth
- Select appropriate tool for data capture to support efficient analysis such as Galileo or Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

Financial and Asset Management

- Maintain capacity to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs in the face of reduced funding and rising expenses Broaden staff understanding of strategies and techniques for struggling, at-risk students. (If I have a hammer everything looks like a nail.)
- Create a continuum of services and supports. List our current strategies and define the plan for broadening options
- Increase match between disability profile and service provided
- Focus on failure rates at the Junior High level to avoid passing of underperforming students
- Respond to extreme suspension and low attendance rates and misuse of discipline to manage troubled students

Student Support

- Meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners, at-risk students, and/or advanced students
- Improve Guidance services through realignment and use guidance resources in the lower areas sufficiently
- Increase involvement of guidance with students in general including scheduling and MCAS
- Guidance should be a part of the team that analyzes data and student performance
- Identify students that can be served better through Alternative Services as opposed to general education services
- Shift low expectations of students, parents and teachers who are perceived to be less capable those next door
- Create regulatory systems for accountability and compliance monitoring
- Focus on early intervention and identification of young children to provide proper levels of service delivery including parent training
- Provide opportunities for staff to create strategies for increasing student success by using DI and other strategies
- Review service delivery models at each level and between levels especially elementary grades
- Assess, monitor and intervene for troubled students to change systemic pattern to pushing out students
- Eliminate the large number of repeating students in the 9th grade
- Manage and prepare students not ready to move from Intermediate to Junior High School

Student Support (Cont.)

- Show parents we can solve problem in a collaborative manner at the lowest level possible with favorable outcomes
- Use PLC approach for vertical articulation with Special Education staff. Help staff embrace each problem and see themselves as a source of the solution.
- Broaden staff understanding of strategies and techniques for struggling, at-risk students. (If I have a hammer everything looks like a nail.)
- Create a continuum of services and supports. List our current strategies and define the plan for broadening options
- Increase match between disability profile and service provided
- Focus on failure rates at the Junior High level to avoid passing of underperforming students
- Respond to extreme suspension and low attendance rates and misuse of discipline to manage troubled students