

Syracuse City School District – 2007-2008 Contract for Excellence

Achievement Issues

The Syracuse City School District was identified in 2004 as a District in Need of Improvement for English Language Arts achievement for the student with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) subgroups. Currently, we have no middle level schools or high schools identified as Schools in Good Standing and the majority of our elementary schools are identified at various stages of improvement status. Elmwood and Dr. King Elementary Schools and Clary Middle School were identified as SURR schools this year, joining Fowler High School and Seymour Elementary that were identified in 2006. In addition, Shea Middle School was closed in June 2007 due to poor performance. NYSED has notified the District in June 2007 that 4 schools were in jeopardy of being identified as SURR schools in the coming school year due to poor student achievement. Although our graduation rate increased from 50% to 65% as reported on the NYS school report cards for our 4 high schools, we continue to have large numbers of students not graduate in four or five years and/or drop out. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced meals for the 2006-07 school year was 77.8 %. The percentage of students in poverty has increased every year. More than 19% of our students are identified as SWDs and 8% of our students are ELLs. These high risk students are found in all of our schools. Therefore, any interventions or initiatives that are implemented are done so District-wide to improve student achievement in all schools.

Our struggling students need more time to close the achievement gap through after school programs, summer school, and individual and small group tutoring. Academic Intervention and AVID teachers use differentiating instruction to meet the needs of these at risk students including those with disabilities and ELLs.

The District is organized by quadrants with each quadrant consisting of a high school and the middle and elementary schools that feed into that high school. In the past there has been little articulation of instructional practices and communication of student information between the quadrant schools. In addition, transitions from pre-k to kindergarten, elementary to middle, and middle to high school have not been well organized and differ from school to school and quadrant to quadrant. Schools will be asked to explore different grade configurations for their quadrant. There is a need to ensure communication between schools in each quadrant including the sharing of successful practices, student achievement data and professional development to improve teaching and learning, as well as strengthen the transition process for students and their parents.

The District began a pilot this year to transition from the use of IEP Plus to IEP Direct with all special education teachers using IEP Direct District-wide this coming school year. This was a huge undertaking and will need oversight in the coming year to ensure teachers of SWDs are trained in its use, and that there is ongoing communication between the District's Special Education Department, its Information and Technology Division, and the IEP Direct vendor to problem solve technology issues and the use of the program.

One of the issues that was identified in the DINI Curriculum Audit was the District did not use formative assessment data to drive instruction. In the past there were teacher written milestone assessments used District-wide K-12, but these assessments were not valid, did not align well with the State assessments, and the results were not given to teachers in a timely manner so they could be used to make instructional decisions. The District reviewed several interval formative assessment systems during the summer of 2006 and piloted Acuity in April 2007.

Finally, the District must provide ongoing mentoring for new teachers and administrators to ensure they gain the skills in research based practices necessary to improve student achievement.