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QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Ansonia Public Schools

Quality Review Report

Ansonia Public Schools

**42 Grove Street
Ansonia
Connecticut
06401**

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the district

Ansonia is a small semi-urban district, located in New Haven County, Connecticut. It has five schools, in which nearly 2,750 students are enrolled. The five schools are: the John Prendergast Elementary School, a kindergarten through grade 2 school with 750 students; Mead School, a grades 3 through 5 school with 620 students; Ansonia Middle School, a grades 6 through 8 school with 600 students and Ansonia High School with 730 students from grade 9 through 12. The fifth school, Pine Academy, provides alternative education provision for approximately 35 students with the majority of students moving there from either the middle or the high school. This facility is also attended by students from two other local districts.

The proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, at 47.9 percent, is above that in similar districts, that is those in the District Reference Group (DRG)* where the average is 41.8 percent and well above the State average of 28.7 percent. The proportion of students with special education needs, at just over 10 percent, is slightly lower than DRG and State averages. The district has an increasingly diverse student population. Currently, approximately 45 percent of the students are from minority ethnic groups. About 22 percent have a Hispanic heritage, 21 percent are Black and 55 percent are White. A further 2 percent are Asian American and less than 1 percent of students are American Indian. While 25 different non-English home languages spoken in total, the main foreign language is Spanish. Three percent of the students are not fluent in English, which is a significantly lower percentage than is found in either the DRG or the State.

Sixty-two percent of the students enter school with pre-kindergarten experience, which is much lower than either the DRG or the State average. The attendance figures for Prendergast and Mead Schools at 98 percent and 96.7 percent are very close to the State average while attendances at Ansonia Middle School, 93.5 percent and Ansonia High School, 92.8 percent are below the State averages for middle and high schools which stands at 96.5 percent.

** Districts whose families are similar in terms of education, income, education and need and that have roughly similar enrollment.*

Part 2: Overview

What the district does well

- The superintendent and her leadership team have a suitably accurate understanding of the things that the district does well and the main areas that need to be improved.
- The new superintendent has worked very hard, to good effect, to develop effective links with city leaders, the local community and professional associations.
- Effective action has been taken by the district to encourage gains in math at grades 3 through 5.
- There are good systems and controls for managing financial resources and for reporting their uses.
- There are good systems and procedures for ensuring compliance with State directives and for supporting disadvantaged students.

What the district needs to improve

- Improve the quality of leadership and management throughout the district by:
 - Developing the vision, mission and goals of the district, after consultation with stakeholders, communicating this to schools and the wider community;
 - Developing and implementing consistently and rigorously a District Improvement Plan, linked to the budget setting process, that identifies priorities, sets timelines for completion, allocates responsibilities and has interim benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of the implementation;
 - Developing policies and procedures to underpin the work of the district and which provide a clear rationale for leadership and management both in the district office and in schools;
 - Developing the effectiveness of the school board so that they can concentrate more of their attention on increasing the achievement of the students in the district; and
 - Clarifying lines of accountability so that roles are clearly understood and district officers are enabled, empowered and held accountable for completing designated tasks.
- Raise achievement and improve test results for all students by:
 - supporting schools to further develop data teams and common formative assessment so that better use is made of data to inform the planning of teachers, and lessons are better matched to the needs of the students; and
 - developing a comprehensive curriculum for grades kindergarten through 12.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The district's overall performance

Ansonia School District has been identified as a district requiring improvement under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. With the exception of a flurry of activity, about 8 years ago, when the district reorganized its school buildings and adopted its current structure with four relatively large schools and a small alternative high school, the district has failed to keep pace with almost all of the changes that have taken place in many other districts in the State for the last ten years. It has, for example, only just begun to analyze data effectively and is only now beginning to develop a curriculum for use in its schools. Two important factors have now come into play which should lead to a swift change. Firstly, the district has a new superintendent who is passionate about the education in the city and is determined that the schools will improve and that standards will rise. Secondly, the district is now receiving support from the State Department of Education who are investing time and effort into supporting the work and ensuring that appropriate progress is made. Standards in Ansonia are not now declining and there have been some pleasing improvements in the achievements of students in math at grades 3 through 5, but as the expectations of NCLB now really begin to rise, it is important that there is a significant rise in student performance.

A close examination of learning and teaching in the district's four main schools reveals that although progress is certainly not as rapid as it could and should be, most teachers are willing to improve their practice and are waiting to be advised and supported with the introduction of data driven instruction. Much of the current teaching observed was aimed solely at those students in the middle of the class and did not meet the needs of higher and lower performing students sufficiently well enough. The planning of many lessons has improved slightly with the introduction of a common planning template but many staff will need extensive professional development before they will be able to use it properly. The introduction of a district wide data team and the formation of school data teams is an important first step in this process, but there is much work to be done.

The leadership of the district is inexperienced in leading these much needed reforms. The superintendent and her staff will need significant support as they seek to solve many of the problems that exist in the district. They will need to hold school leaders accountable for their buildings and the district staff responsible for their specific duties. With the exception of some financial management systems and the administration of students with disabilities, the district is almost totally lacking in systems and procedures to guide practice and to inform the decision making process. The school board, for example, does not concentrate enough of its attention on student achievement and will require significant professional development to inform the major shifts in perception that will be required to deal with some of the issues that face them. In addition, there is no clear link between budget setting and the improvement planning process. All these challenges face the district at a time of economic hardship and against a backdrop of budget cuts.

The news is not all entirely bad, however, and given the support of the State Department of Education and the goodwill of the teachers and the local community, the superintendent can make many quick gains once all of the functions of the district have been evaluated, some basic procedures and systems have been put in place.

Domain 1: The district's effectiveness in securing positive outcomes for students

This area of the district's work is below basic level and needs substantial improvement.

Academic Achievement and Progress

The district has not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the last 5 consecutive years, but because it made safe harbor last year, it is only identified as in need of improvement, Year 3, under NCLB legislation. In 2008, it failed to meet its AYP targets for the district overall in both reading and math on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). In the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), in the same year, the district made safe harbor for math and made AYP for reading. The 95 percent participation targets were achieved throughout in regards to the CMT and CAPT.

In the CMT, in 2008, students in grades 3 through 8 performed at a very similar level in reading to that recorded in 2007, with the overall performance increasing by one percentage point. Black students and White students both increased the percentage that achieved a proficient rating from 2007 whereas the scores for Hispanic students and students with disabilities both declined slightly. The performance of economically disadvantaged students remained broadly the same. Unfortunately, the expectations of AYP as per the NCLB legislation increased by 11 percent, so in effect the scores gained in reading declined overall by 10 percent. Some improvements in reading and writing at Prendergast School have been attributed to the introduction of the 'Reading First' program. The implementation of this program has been patchy, however, and has resulted in a very limited impact on test scores. It is only in recent months that work has been done to align tasks more closely to the requirements of the CMT. These actions are having an impact on the improved Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) and Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) scores.

In math, the expectations of the NCLB legislation increased by 8 percent which served to mask the significant gains made by students, particularly at Mead School. Overall, the proportion of students at or above proficient went up by 6.7 percent, with notable gains being all groups, particularly the economically disadvantaged, where the proportion of students that achieved at or above proficient increased by 9.7 percent. The smallest recorded increase was by students with disabilities where the proportion at or above proficient went up by 3.9 percentage points. This improvement in math is attributed to improved alignment of the math curriculum to State standards and improved guidance for teachers through the work of the relatively new advisory teacher for math. The fact that good gains are being made in math in grades 3 through 5, is supported by interim test data collected by the district. The district must now empower teachers to be self-sufficient in the development of common formative assessments and the analysis of data in instructional data teams so that the recent successes can be sustained and are not dependent upon the work of one individual.

In the 2008 CAPT, the picture was better in reading than in math. In reading, students exceeded the required 81 percentage points at or above proficiency by 4.8 percent overall. A larger proportion of White students scored at or above proficient. There were particularly good gains in the proportion of economically disadvantaged students achieving at or above proficiency which rose by nearly 9 percentage points. The district achieved Safe Harbor for the overall proportion of students at or above proficiency. This was mainly fueled by an increase of 7.3 percentage points by economically disadvantaged students. This subgroup, which failed to make AYP in 2007, did much better in 2008, making safe harbor. The district's SAT Reasoning Test (SAT) scores for 2007 for math, critical reading and writing were well below the State figures. The number of students entered for advanced placement (AP) or honors courses is low. In 2007, only 5.4 percent of graduates achieved at least one AP with a score of three or more, which is required for college credit and only 31.8 percent of all the AP examinations taken scored three or higher. The strategic profile shows the district's statistics on physical fitness to lag behind its DRG and the State. Currently, the district acknowledges that its focus is on academic achievement and that this area is not being addressed directly.

The district has only just begun to support its schools in their use of achievement data and different buildings are at very different stages. Very little analysis has taken place so far at either Prendergast

School or Ansonia Middle School, whereas more recent progress has been made at both Mead School and Ansonia High School. Some good work has been done at Mead to identify 'hot lists' of students that have not made sufficient progress but insufficient work has been done to investigate the comparative performance of either ethnic or gender groups. As a result, for example, the leadership teams at both the middle school and the high school have no clear idea why girls are significantly outperforming the boys at both math and reading. Further concerted action is also required on a number of fronts, however, to tackle the serious underachievement of higher achieving students, particularly the gifted and talented throughout the entire district system. Although systems to identify and track the progress of English language learners and students with disabilities are now much improved, these are all relatively new and have had little impact, as yet, on the scores of these students, which remain very low.

The district's goals are based on NCLB targets; that is, to increase by 10 percent the proportion reaching proficiency in reading and math, with the exception of students with disabilities, which are a particularly low performing subgroup. In this case the target increase is 20 percentage points in the proportion of students reaching proficiency. The district does not yet have student level data which would enable it to provide realistic goals based on students' starting levels and aggregated to provide cohort targets for school and district.

Personal Development

Some good work has been done throughout the district's schools to increase attendance and to improve behavior and this has been largely effective. More work, however, needs to be done to identify trends and to improve attendance at both the middle and the high schools since current procedures to ensure good attendance lack the required rigor to be wholly successful. Student graduation rates are improving steadily, but at 88.4 percent are still below the State average of 92.6 percent. Although the district's drop-out rate has gradually declined between 2004 and 2007, the four year cumulative rate remains above the State figure. The percentage of students pursuing higher education has increased slightly but at approximately 73 percent is still well below the State average of 83.4 percent. The proportion of students employed either in civilian employment or the armed forces, including the most disadvantaged, however, is more than twice the State average. The district needs to do far more to increase civic engagement in the school and wider community.

Domain 2: The effectiveness of the district's support for student learning

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

Learning and Teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching in the district is not as good as it could be, and should be, and this is mainly due to the insufficient emphasis that has been given to the use of data to plan lessons that are accurately matched to the individual needs of the students. The schools in the district have received some professional support from the State Department of Education and have now established data teams. These are beginning to provide teachers with the information that they will need to plan differentiated lessons. The effectiveness of these data teams varies from school to school, and the superintendent and her staff will need to be vigilant if they are to ensure that developments at the four main schools proceed at a similar pace. At the present time too much of the teaching is aimed at the middle of the class and fails to meet the needs of either higher achieving students, who find the work set to be lacking in challenge, or those students who have disabilities and require further support. Too little regard is given in most classes to the needs of students who are learning to speak English. Although there are pockets of good teaching in all of the district's schools, in too many classes the range of teaching styles is limited and fails to either engage or enthuse many of the students, irrespective of their prior achievement. The district has introduced a new template which is intended to support and guide teachers in the planning of their lessons. This model has the potential to drive improvements in this area but there has not been enough professional development to support its use and implementation across the district is uneven.

Schools are generally well resourced and any weaknesses in teaching and learning cannot be attributed to any lack of financial support. School buildings are generally bright, safe and clean and with the

exception of Ansonia Middle School, which is located in the old high school building, are very well maintained. School leaders have worked hard to change the culture within their schools and part of that planned push has been the creation of a positive and stimulating learning environment in many classrooms and shared areas.

The Curriculum

The district does not have a common, rigorous curriculum that is aligned to State standards and covers all grades and subjects and currently does not serve the academic and personal needs of the students in its charge. The curriculum found in the schools, usually loosely based on State Guidelines often does not give sufficient breadth and relevance and does not ensure that there are enough systemized and high quality experiences to engage and motivate the students. All students are equally disadvantaged by this lack of curriculum, since teachers are not given sufficient guidance and support to plan work that meets the needs of students of all achievement levels, including English language learners, students with disabilities and those with higher levels of achievement. The district is now starkly aware of this significant shortcoming and has made a start to resolving this matter by implementing some useful changes in the curriculum for math in grades 2 through 6 by linking the work set to data provided by an analysis of the grades gained in the CMT tests.

Assessment

The district has only just begun to provide students, teachers and school leaders with a structure for developing, administering and analyzing results from common formative assessments that can be used to measure the progress that students are making and its work in this area requires improvement. The data required to support these assessments is now becoming available and teachers and the schools are only just beginning to gain an understanding of what teaching and learning must be like to meet the needs of students in all ability groups, including English language learners, students with disabilities and those with higher achievement. The district provides a suitable range of supplementary assessments for teachers to check the progress of those students identified as being English language learners and those having disabilities. No specific work has been done by the district to enable teachers and school leaders to support students in assessing their own learning against agreed criteria, although there is some localized good practice in two of the schools.

Considerable professional development will be required to develop robust assessment procedures throughout the district. A start has been made with the assessment based approach adopted in math at Mead School. Here regular benchmark testing and the use of formative assessments at the end of each learning cycle enable staff to have a clear picture of the gains made. This has worked well in math, but efforts to replicate this work with reading have shown only minimal success so far. Now that a structure has been developed, teachers must be given additional support so that they can develop their own common formative assessments to make the data team process fully effective. Assessment data is used well at Mead to generate a 'hot list' of students who will need targeted support if they are to move up a level within the year. Almost all these students made the required gains last year and gained proficiency.

Building Instructional Leadership and Capacity in Schools

This area of the district's work is currently weak and requires substantial improvement. The leadership team is new and relatively inexperienced and is only now beginning to gain a clearer understanding of the full range of its roles and responsibilities. Procedures for managing and improving the performance of principals are relatively new, and lines of accountability are still being defined that will eventually lead to intervention and support for principles, where required, and increased freedoms for others, as earned. As a result, despite the general willingness of the principals to cooperate in the performance management process, there has been little progress against agreed criteria to date. Once a process which defines sharp criteria has been developed it must be implemented consistently in each school so that clear evaluative comments can signpost improvements for the future. With more explicit links between goals and resource the District Improvement Plan has the potential to serve as a useful model as schools develop their own improvement plans to bring desired district aims to effect.

The district has, with the support of the State Department for Education, introduced data teams into all of the schools and, as a result, schools have a growing awareness of the need to match teaching more effectively to the individual learning needs of the students. While there is a clear understanding of the

need to improve the quality of teaching in the district's schools, and a small start has been made with the introduction of a common planning template, there is a general agreement that much more needs to be done to raise the achievement levels of all the students. This will inevitably require significant amounts of district led professional development. Work should begin with each school using class data to identify centers of best practice that can be built upon to the greater advantage of more students. Where weaker teaching exists the district is aware of the need to provide improved mentoring and coaching for both new and veteran teachers to begin to make up for the weaknesses that developed when little or no professional development was available for teachers. The district has already begun negotiations with the teaching unions to create regular and effective opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other.

Domain 3: The effectiveness of the district's leadership and management

This area of the district's work needs substantial improvement.

Vision and Culture

The central office team is dedicated and hard working, committed to collaborative planning, and is just establishing a value-driven culture based on a shared understanding that all students can and should achieve to their full potential. They agree that a focus on English language arts and math is the main vehicle for enhancing student achievement, but have not yet encapsulated this commitment into a clear and well-articulated vision that can be easily understood by school leaders, teachers, parents, students and the wider community.

The superintendent has good knowledge, especially in relation to the elementary curriculum, where she is able to hold high level discussions with principals and instructional leaders. The middle school has taken advantage of small classes in grades 6 and 7 to enhance teaching and learning in reading and math. They have not evaluated the impact of this strategy either in terms of the outcomes in core subjects or the possible adverse effect, in terms of student motivation, due to the associated elimination of certain electives including, for example, world languages in the middle school.

Strategic and Action Planning

The District Improvement Plan sets out five main goals, two of which relate to increasing proficiency in reading and math core subjects as measured by CMT/CAPT, the two others relate to reducing suspension and the fifth related to increasing parental and community engagement. The District Improvement Plan has not been monitored with sufficient rigor as many strategies that are delineated have not been completed and the document is not used sufficiently to guide district action. The District Improvement Plan must now be strengthened through the addition of well articulated strategic vision and by linking it to the budget setting process so that specific resources can be targeted to the priority areas identified. It must also be monitored at regular intervals to ensure that progress is taking place in a timely manner.

The district has established a district wide data team, which provides genuine opportunities for district leaders at all levels to participate in the planning process. However, both the District Improvement Plan and the individual School Improvement Plans lack consistency in setting specific success criteria and performance indicators for all proposed actions. The district should consider establishing a more robust system for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the impact of policies on student achievement; including creating a master calendar of all monitoring actions, by dates and groups so that monthly ongoing progress can be tracked more easily.

Governance

Under the previous superintendent a culture of open hostility and mistrust had developed between the Board of Education and the superintendent which led to many stakeholders believing that actions do not meet the stated intentions. A wide range of stakeholders do not view the district as one that is moving toward being 'an exemplary' district characterized by a cohesive and coordinated academic system with a set of clearly defined performance based outcomes for all students. Nor do they believe that the district

actively sought the input and involvement of staff, parents, students, and the community, when making educational decisions necessary to ensure every student's success.

The current superintendent has therefore rightly focused her efforts on building a collaborative partnership with the Board and the wider community. As a native of the city, she is well-placed to gain the support of all stakeholders and rebuild the trust and commitment between the Central Office, the Board and the community. Under her guidance, the Board members are becoming increasingly aware that they need to perform an executive function and play a strategic role in setting and monitoring goals, which inform policy and is fundamentally concerned with raising academic standards.

Accountability

The district has not had a culture of accountability and there is no effective system for performance management and no means of holding district staff, school leaders and teachers accountable for improving student achievement. Similarly, there are no effective systems for evaluating the performance of non-certified staff.

The superintendent is establishing accountability processes and procedures for principals; however, these have not yet been consistently applied. All principals should have regular accountability meetings that provide an opportunity for reflection and feedback as well as reviewing achievements in relation to improved student outcomes. The performance management and evaluation of teachers should be revised and an evaluation process should be established for non-certified staff.

The district needs to consider further enhancing its data collection processes and to establish formal systems which enable it to analyze trends against all statutory requirements, including NCLB, which will enable it to hold schools accountable on an annual basis for student achievement. At present, the district does not have a formal system in place for tracking complaints and does not undertake stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

Domain 4: The effectiveness of the district's management of human and fiscal resources

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

Human Resources

There is a clear recognition within the district leadership that the quality of staff is a key variable in improving educational outcomes. The recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers has been problematic and teacher absence is a significant issue. The Board does not, however, have a human resources policy and the district does not have a human resources department. Consequently, the human resources function is very limited in its scope and responsibilities.

The superintendent is committed to ensuring that the highest level of professional integrity followed in undertaking staff selection and that all senior managers and Board members take responsibility for ensuring that effective recruitment, selection and retention policies and procedures are established and adhered to, which will enable students to benefit from quality principals, teachers and support staff. In light of the historical context, the relationships between the unions and the superintendent are generally positive and negotiations are conducted within a climate of mutual respect and open communication.

Fiscal Resources

Financial management has been improved recently, to good effect and is now an area of strength. Under the leadership of the superintendent, the School Business Administrator, the Grant Manager and the Director of Special Services have established efficient and effective systems and controls. The district is proactive in seeking out best value contracts and, for example, makes maximum use of the consortium purchasing arrangements. Audits are conducted on an annual basis, by an outside firm appointed by the city. In fact, this year's audit was arranged to coincide with the district review process, which enabled the review team to meet with the auditors. This is a model of best practice, which should be shared with other districts. The auditors indicated that the district now responds well to any audit queries and exceptions in a timely manner.

The district has been receiving just over \$4 million in kindergarten through grade 12 entitlement grants. However, this trend has been decreasing for the past two years and is expected to continue. In 2009-10, the district is anticipating \$3.7 million entitlement grant of which salaries account for 85 percent. These grants are well managed. The Special Needs Manager has established highly effective systems for monitoring and evaluating expenditure of funds, both within the district and with other outside districts and agencies.

While financial management is strong, financial planning is an area requiring significant improvement. The district should consider reviewing its approach to the budget setting process to ensure that financial planning is directly linked to the District Improvement Plan, with resources allocated against specific objectives. The district does not have formula funded approach to allocating resources to schools. Instead individual schools submit requests based on their perceived needs. For example, the superintendent's final proposed budget for 2009-10 is \$27,495,505 which represents a 7.5 percent increase on 2008-09 budgets. However, the initial requests from schools represented an aggregated 18 percent increase, and during the week of the review various meetings took place to achieve the required budget position. Because of the lack of alignment between financial planning and district development planning, many of the final reductions were achieved simply by implementing across the board reductions, for example, 5 percent across all budget headings, as opposed to strategic budgeting based on curriculum requirements. Unless the district reviews its approach to financial planning, the student allocation will be vulnerable on a yearly basis dependent on revenue shortage in a particular year and/or a fall in the district enrollment figure. This is a common approach, but the district may wish to consider revisiting the educational basis on which the differentiated payments are made between elementary, middle and high school students.

Domain 5: The effectiveness and coherence of the district's operational systems

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

Information Technology (IT) & Data Support

The school district provides an adequate level of IT in schools for an acceptable level of student and teacher access to technology for learning. However, much of this equipment is rapidly becoming out of date and does not fully support learning in ways that are fully relevant and connected to the world beyond the classroom. Many of the computers found in schools are old and since they only have limited capacity, they are not capable of running the most up-to-date learning software. The school district has an adequate IT system to support the collection of managerial data such as attendance and grades. The district's main file server is located in the high school with regular tape backups being conducted with the resultant tapes being stored safely off site.

School administrators have been trained in the use of the district's data warehousing system but report a variety of levels of usefulness and access to the system. Most often, school and district administrators contact the central office data specialist for the running of queries and reports. Principals report that the data that is being collected is limited in its usefulness and not practical for guiding curriculum and instruction. The district does not uniformly or centrally collect data about its interim assessments of student learning for math or language arts. The district needs to develop its capacity to generate, collect, analyze and disseminate data about student achievement and learning regarding standardized and formative assessments of learning. The current approach to math instruction in grades 3 through 5 has the potential to serve as a model for the generation of data. However, currently this data is not being shared across schools in a way that can be easily accessed or analyzed by all stakeholder leaders. This important and useful data is currently overseen by one leader. The district must use these early signs of promising practice and expand their strategic use of the data that are generated for the betterment of learning in other curricular areas across all grades.

Communication

Because of the relatively small size of the district and the superintendent's frequent presence in school buildings, communication between the schools and the district office is generally smooth. This is not

attributable to a robust, scheduled system of regular communication, but rather to the strong interpersonal connections throughout the district between and among the leaders. However, more formal lines of communication need to be established since currently the superintendent often gets involved in issues that would best be dealt with at building level. In addition, her early involvement in minor parental appeals, for example, undermines the integrity of the principles and makes it impossible for her to arbitrate at a later date if required.

The superintendent has made improvements in communications and relations between the district offices and local government, stakeholder groups and the community at large. She posts regular updates to the district website and has conducted community forums to welcome input from parents and concerned citizens. Internal telephone and e-mail systems of communication are strong and well maintained. The superintendent has made efforts, through a variety of media, to establish transparent lines of communication about the budgeting and decision making processes and has established this as a priority for all district office operations.

Operations

Generally, the district's infrastructure and data and communication systems are in good repair and serve the current needs. The schools benefited from capital upgrades and construction projects that accompanied the redistribution of community schools into the current PK-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 distribution. Employees across the spectrum (teachers, custodians, school-resource officers, clerical support and administrators) understand their primary purpose in supporting student achievement.

The district does not regularly collect internal or external satisfaction surveys. There are no regular audits of district operations to identify strengths or areas that require improvements. Through informal procedures that are not systematized the district attempts to align human and fiscal resources to the needs of student services, facilities, and safety and security systems. However, due to the district's general lack of formal data collection in many areas, the ability to do so objectively is greatly reduced.

Domain 6: The effectiveness with which the district engages stakeholders and evaluates their satisfaction with its work

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction

The superintendent has made it a top priority since her arrival to engage actively with, and draw commitment from, the community. The superintendent is extremely visible in the schools and community. She hosts monthly roundtables that are open to all to provide opportunities for community members to discuss current issues in the school district. These roundtables have not been widely attended, but the superintendent continues to hold them to ensure an "open door policy." In addition to a district newsletter and monthly website updates on "Notes from the Desk of the Superintendent," all of the schools, with the exception of Ansonia Middle School, send newsletters home to families to provide updates on current events in the schools. While parents, community members and staff acknowledge that the district has worked hard to gain stakeholder support and trust, it does not utilize satisfaction surveys or self-evaluation instruments to measure specific areas of satisfaction and opportunities for improvement. Although there are several venues by which information is made available from the district and the schools, communication is only available in English.

Communication between the district and unions is generally positive and both unions describe the superintendent's door as "always open." However, there are currently no structures in place to hold regular meetings between the union and district leadership to ensure a clear chain of communication. The teacher's union leadership reports that while there have been recent issues with a newly adopted lesson plan template, the district leadership listened to concerns and "clarified expectations and minimized requirements." There are still concerns regarding time to complete the plans and availability of differentiated professional development.

The schools and district have built relationships with several community agencies to advocate for its most vulnerable children. The district has established links with the police department, the Boys and Girls Club, the Rotary Club, Senior Citizen Outreach, and Housatonic Community College. The district works with the North Star Parent Support Group, the Connecticut Parent Advisory Center, and New Haven Legal Aid to support families in advocating for their children. Nonetheless, there is a need to raise the level of involvement of parents and the community in their children's education to ensure that all stakeholders are working to improve student achievement.

Political and Policy Alignment and Engagement

The district has a District Improvement Plan that is in compliance with federal and State law. However, the plan is not clearly linked to the budget and so the district is unable to evaluate value for money in terms of articulated student achievement goals. As a result, the district is not positioned to advocate for resources in a manner that clearly connects needed funds with improvement strategies and desired student achievement goals. District leadership held a community forum to review the District Improvement Plan, but community members were not part of the initial development. There have not, however, been any meetings in the community to provide updates on the progress made in implementing the District Improvement Plan.

While the Board feels that they are kept informed by the superintendent, the district needs to do more to extend the Board's understanding in their role of supporting district improvement, including curriculum development and the regular and rigorous monitoring of student achievement. The Board's policies delineate regular cycles for curriculum review, school improvement planning, and district goal-setting, but they have not adhered to their established timeline for action. The Board acknowledges that there is much work to be done and they are open and willing to work in new ways to ensure that they are operating in alignment with articulated policies to further the goal of improving student achievement.

The district has few processes in place to ensure that policies are being followed in schools. With the exception of teacher and administrator evaluations, which do not include a rating of performance, and classroom walkthroughs, there are few mechanisms in place that inform the district on a regular basis as to how successfully schools are in implementing district improvement strategies. Schools do not have improvement plans, but they are currently being developed. There are no timelines in place for district policy review which limits the ability to evaluate whether or not district policies and practices are supporting the goal of increasing student achievement.