

Harrisburg City School District

Amended Recovery Plan

Report for Quarter 3

January 1 – March 31, 2023



Dr. Lori A. Suski, Court Appointed Receiver

Harrisburg School District

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1. Authority & Purpose

In accordance with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Financial Recovery Act 141 of 2012, the Harrisburg City School District entered Receivership in June 2019 for a period of three (3) years. During the next two (2) years, former Receiver Dr. Janet Samuels worked with Public Financial Management (PFM) and the District's Act 141 Advisory Committee to draft the Amended Financial Recovery Plan which was approved by the Honorable William T. Tully in July of 2021.¹

With less than one year remaining to accomplish the goals of the plan, Judge Tully issued an order pursuant to Section 671-A of the Pennsylvania Public School Code on June 17, 2022, placing the Harrisburg City School District under Receivership for a new three (3) year period. Dr. Lori Suski, who was appointed Receiver on January 29, 2022, upon the retirement of Dr. Samuels, was reappointed to the role in June 2022. Dr. Travis Waters was appointed Chief Recovery Officer on August 29, 2022, on a part-time basis to monitor the

¹ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:6c0d0d10-537e-380d-97fd-23ed775e1bda>

implementation of the Amended Recovery Plan and serve as an advisor to the Receiver.

Section 672-A (b) (2) of the Pennsylvania Public School Code requires the submission of a quarterly report to the Secretary of Education. This report reflects the period from January 1 through March 31, 2023, which is the third quarter of the 2022-23 fiscal year. This report also provides context for the upcoming submission of a proposed revision to the Amended Recovery Plan in the month of May 2023. Dr. Suski met virtually with Judge Tully of the Dauphin County Court of Common Pleas on January 9, 2023 to discuss the Receiver's intent to propose revisions to the plan, namely due to the need to exceed the recommended salary increase threshold of 1.5% noted in the plan, in order to attract and retain qualified candidates for hire at all levels within the organization. Additionally, the academic goals set forth in the approved plan have proven to be unrealistic and unattainable, given the 17 months of remote learning that students at the Harrisburg School District experienced from March 2020 through August 2021.

2. District Demographics

Student enrollment in Harrisburg School District has increased in the first three (3) months of 2023. A total of 6,410 students are attending District schools K-12, which is an increase of 42 students from the prior quarter ending December 31, 2022. As noted in the chart below, enrollment in the District’s cyber program, Harrisburg Virtual Learning Academy (HVLA), continues to rise while brick-and-mortar enrollment declines. In the month of March 2023 HVLA enrolled 49 more students.

DISTRICT ENROLLMENT BY MONTH

Month	Conventional	HVLA	Total
January (1/3/23)	5804	564	6368
February (2/1/23)	5809	574	6383
March (3/1/23)	5765	632	6397
March (3/31/23)	5729	681	6410

Enrollment in other cyber/charter schools increased by 22 students in the third quarter of the 2022-23 school year. The chart below reflects the enrollment in each charter school broken down by regular and special education students:

Building	Enrollment Caps	Type of School	Jan		Feb		Mar	
			REG ED	SPEC ED	REG ED	SPEC ED	REG ED	SPEC ED
21st Century Cyber Charter School		CYBER	1	0	2	0	2	0
ACHIEVEMENT HOUSE		CYBER	1	1	1	1	1	1
AGORA		CYBER	27	14	26	14	29	14
ASPIRA BILINGUAL CYBER CHARTER		CYBER	1	0				
CASA		BRICK & MORTAR	21	3	22	3	22	3
COMMONWEALTH CHARTER ACADEMY		CYBER	422	142	418	152	416	155
INFINITY		BRICK & MORTAR	9	1	9	1	9	1
INSIGHT PA CYBER		CYBER	29	9	30	9	29	10
PA CYBER		CYBER	53	23	59	23	58	25
PA DISTANCE LEARNING		CYBER	15	4	16	4	13	4
PA LEADERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL		CYBER	2	0	3	0	3	0
PA Steam Academy	120	BRICK & MORTAR	116	16	114	16	114	16
PA VIRTUAL		CYBER	8	0	9	0	9	0
PREMIER ARTS	191	BRICK & MORTAR	118	11	119	11	119	12
REACH		CYBER	80	29	81	29	80	32
SYLVAN HEIGHTS	220	BRICK & MORTAR	155	25	158	25	156	25

B & M Subtotal	419	56	422	56	420	57
Cyber Subtotal	639	222	645	232	640	241
SUBTOTAL	1058	278	1067	288	1060	298
GRAND TOTAL		1336		1355		1358

Public Financial Management (PFM) presented an analysis of charter school enrollment in Harrisburg School District to the Administration on January 3, 2023, in an Act 141 team meeting.² This year the District has paid \$21.9 million in charter school tuition.

Enrollment at Dauphin County Technical School (DCTS) has increased over the prior year by 41 students.

Vocational/Technical School Enrollment Jan-Mar 2023

Building	Year	Jan	Feb	Mar
Dauphin County Technical School	2021-2022	200	199	199
Dauphin County Technical School	2022-2023	236	242	240

The District is concerned about the number of students denied acceptance to Dauphin County Technical School (DCTS). Recent data received from DCTS (see below chart) shows a 55% acceptance rate for the 2022-23 school year, and only a 38% acceptance rate for the 2023-24 school year. Harrisburg School District must consider other options to meet the academic

² <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:a4056bfd-9caf-3396-bd3d-b6c5acb353bd>

needs of students at the high school level who are unsuccessful in acceptance to DCTS.

	2023-2024				2022-2023			
School District	Applications Received	Acceptance Letters Sent	Wait Listed	Denied Application	Applications Received	Acceptance Letters Sent	Wait Listed	Denied Application
Harrisburg	255	96	24	135	200	109	7	85

Students placed outside the regular education setting this quarter are noted in the chart below. This quarter thirty-eight (38) more students were placed in an alternative setting.

Outplacement Enrollment Jan-Mar 2023

Building	Type of School	Jan		Feb		Mar	
		REG ED	SPEC ED	REG ED	SPEC ED	REG ED	SPEC ED
Catapult Learning (Capital Academy)	Placement	1	30	1	31	4	38
Cougar Paws	Placement	30	1	35	0	39	0
Cougar Achieve	Placement	23	0	28	0	30	0
Cougar Excel	Placement	52	15	58	19	58	21
Merakey	Placement	0	3	0	4	0	4
New Story New Cumberland & Harrisburg	Placement	0	16	0	16	0	16
The Vista	Placement	0	1	0	1	0	1
Yellow Breeches	Placement	0	4	0	5	0	4
Cougar Middle Years	Placement	27	1	25	1	26	1
Total		133	71	147	77	157	85
		204		224		242	

3. Academic Performance

The improvement of student attendance is a priority for the District. Although percentages of attendance have not yet met or exceeded the 90% threshold, except for Cougar Academy and Marshall Math/Science Academy, overall attendance rates have remained consistent over this quarter during the winter months when attendance historically declines. SciTech's overall attendance has increased slightly from January through March, but overall has declined during the past year. Several buildings have shown slight increases in attendance over this quarter, but the John Harris campus of Harrisburg High School continues to have the lowest overall attendance in the District. Student Attendance Improvement Plans (SAIPs) are written for students whose absences exceed District policy thresholds.

2022-23 Monthly Percent of Attendance District and School Totals Chart

Schools	Jan	Feb	Mar
Benjamin Franklin	85.34	85.15	85.9
Downey	88.89	86.7	86.53
Foose	86.02	86.54	87.1
Marshall	88.14	86.88	87.4
Melrose	89.66	88.99	89.79
Scott	87.28	87	86.1
Camp Curtin	83.33	83.4	83.73
Cougar Academy	90.18	90.94	90.99
Rowland	82.28	80.81	81.87
Marshall Math/Science	91.73	91.29	92.25
John Harris	75.38	75.07	74.49
SciTech	87.62	86.66	88.27
District	84.68	84.24	84.54

Dauphin County's *Check and Connect* program, made available through PA Counseling Services, has provided the following statistics regarding cases where intervention is occurring as well as referrals that are in process (see below chart). This program has been beneficial in assisting families at risk for truancy violations. *Check and Connect* assigned mentors visit homes and work with parents to remove barriers to getting students to school.

School	Open Cases	Referrals that are being processed
Downey & Foose	23	2
Ben Franklin & Foose	29	7
Rowland/ John Harris	25	2
Camp Curtin	36	6
Scott & Melrose	39	0

As the District works to improve accountability for student performance, quarterly benchmark data reveals ongoing concerns about the lack of growth and achievement. Mid-year STAR Reading data shows low growth in Grades 3 – 8. Mid-year Kindergarten Acadience Math and Grades 1 – 8 STAR Math data reflect low growth and low achievement. At mid-year, Reading is predicted to be about 15.4% Proficient Districtwide and Math 8.8% Proficient Districtwide. The learning loss realized after the COVID-19 pandemic is real. After-school tutoring programs have low enrollment, and there is a sense of urgency going into the

annual state assessments in April 2023. The new Chief Academic Officer, Ms. Portia Slaughter, invited Education Elements to lead a strategic planning meeting on March 9, 2023, to discuss the development of an instructional framework, multi-tiered system of supports, and data collection process to inform classroom practices. The ideas gleaned from this meeting will be aligned to the District's comprehensive plan. The goal is to have an explicit District academic improvement plan in place effective July 1, 2023, to begin the new school year.

The District began its comprehensive planning process on January 17, 2023, at a full group stakeholder meeting with the goal of aligning the Comprehensive Plan with the building level school improvement plans and the Amended Recovery Plan. School improvement plans are monitored regularly with the support of Education Elements who is contracted through June 2023.

The District has engaged in various conversations with the Act 141 Advisory Committee, School Board and District employees about the academic thresholds delineated in the Amended Recovery Plan. The 2022 PSSA and Keystone Exam data indicated severe academic decline which the Administration correlates to the 17 months of virtual, at-home instruction. The

District's decision in 2020 to keep the Harrisburg School District fully remote for the entire 2020-21 school year, despite all surrounding school districts returning to brick-and-mortar, in-person learning in August 2020, was not prudent. The additional year away from school was detrimental and contributed to increased learning loss. This has mounted frustration for District teachers and administrators who know the trajectory to achieve academic plan goals may be insurmountable. For this reason, and because of both Scranton SD and York SD recently coming out of recovery with amended academic goals, the Receiver is proposing an amendment to the Harrisburg School District's academic goals for submission to Judge Tully for review and consideration in May 2023. The amendment would refocus the academic goals on the implementation of foundational systems, structures and supports necessary to achieve academic growth, rather than on the attainment of unrealistic scores on PSSA and Keystone Exams as currently required of the plan.

The District has advertised and begun interviewing for a Director of Early Childhood Education. With the intent of creating additional pre-k classrooms for the 2023-24 school year, the submission of the Pre-K Counts grant also occurred this quarter.

Paramount to the academic success of the District is the mental health and emotional well-being of students. The District is now fully staffed at all buildings with one or two clinical therapists from Effective School Solutions who provide individual and group therapy as well as regular check-ins on identified at-risk students as a Tier 3 service. Each clinician carries a caseload of ten (10) students.

This quarter the Receiver met, at the request of Judge Royce Morris, with District Attorney Fran Chardo, members of Dauphin County Juvenile Probation Office, and Judge Morris to discuss with the District Administration the creation of diversionary program models for implementation in Harrisburg School District effective the 2023-24 school year. During this meeting Superintendent Eric Turman expressed his idea to form a police force within the Harrisburg School District. The new Director of Safety & Security Wendell Morris is a retired PA State Police trooper. Mr. Morris agrees with Superintendent Turman that it is necessary to establish the District's own School Police Officer (SPO) program. This report³ that Mr. Morris presented to the Superintendent substantiates the

³ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:US:b52dcdd5-eb79-36a3-baa2-d6192f677e75>

need for a regular police presence in Harrisburg School District schools, particularly at the high school level. The City of Harrisburg has not been able to provide a School Resource Officer (SRO) despite the Superintendent's request for a designated officer since the fall of 2021. The response time from the Harrisburg police is unreliable. Per the attached report, when the unit on call is unavailable, it could take as long as 30 minutes for police to respond to a large fight. Non-emergency calls may take as long as 90 minutes for a response. While the District acknowledges that the local police force is remarkably busy, certain situations in the schools warrant an immediate response by law enforcement. The Receiver respectfully requests that Judge Tully consider the Administration's need to form a District police force to ensure the safety and welfare of District students and staff. The Chief Financial Officer has included proposed costs for this initiative in the preliminary draft of the 2023-24 budget.

The Superintendent and Receiver met this quarter with leadership at Temple University Harrisburg to discuss an initiative called Cure Violence. This is a violence prevention program that relies upon trained credible messengers within the community to prevent major violent incidents from occurring. The success of such a program is contingent upon cooperation with the city and

its police force, but having a District police force would increase the chance of a successful implementation through a collaborative effort.

4. Administration and Governance

The new structure of the academic services team has begun forming this quarter. With the retirement of MCIU's Dr. Susan Sneath as Chief Academic Officer in February, Ms. Portia Slaughter has recommended a restructuring of the Office of Academics. Mr. Eugene Spells was promoted to Director of Schools on February 28, 2023. His many years of experience as a well-respected building leader at all levels in Harrisburg will assist him in supporting the building principals in their daily responsibilities. The following job descriptions for newly created, budgeted positions for 2023-24 to support the work of the Office of Academics were approved by the Receiver on January 24, 2023:

- Director of Early Childhood Education
- Supervisor K-12 ELA and Social Studies
- Supervisor K-12 Math and Science
- Supervisor of Professional Development

- Supervisor of School Improvement

The existing Act 93 Agreement called for a compensation study to be completed by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) in the fall of 2022. PSBA advised the District on Act 93 compensation via a study of administrative salaries regionally. Results indicated that 91% of the District's administrators' salaries were found to be significantly lower than school districts in surrounding counties (Dauphin, Cumberland, York, and Lancaster), considering internal equity and external competitiveness, based on the experience formula that PSBA uses to drive out minimum, midpoint and maximum salaries for each range of positions within the Act 93 group.

On January 9, 2023, the Receiver had a virtual meeting with Judge Tully to discuss a proposed amendment to the existing recovery plan to allow for compensation adjustments. The Receiver explained the astronomical cost of turnover among employees and the need to attract and retain quality employees to meet the goals of the plan. Although the District is in financial recovery status, the proper management of District funds by the efforts of Dr. Marcia Stokes, Chief Financial Officer, has stabilized the financial landscape of the Harrisburg School District. With proper oversight and

budget management, as well as fair funding from the Commonwealth, the District can provide affordable salary increases that exceed the 1.5% threshold contemplated by the existing Amended Recovery Plan. It was decided that it was more efficient to submit both the academic and financial proposed amendments to the plan simultaneously than separately once PFM completed the updated 5-year projections. The proposed amendments are being finalized for submission in May 2023.

As a result of the study, the Receiver authorized salary adjustments retroactive to January 1, 2023 (as required by the Act 93 Agreement) to be paid on March 2, 2023. Salary ranges were also corrected to reflect supervisory relationships. Future increases will be driven by performance ratings and market movement using a 5-year average to make any increases sustainable. The Receiver has demanded the need for a strong level of accountability for results while investing in the existing leadership who are critical to the success of the District moving forward.

As part of ongoing leadership development for the administrative team, Attorney Tim Gilsbach of Fox Rothschild provided training on March 7, 2023, regarding the proper way to conduct informal student disciplinary hearings

and prepare for formal expulsion hearings before a hearing officer. The Receiver requested this training to address some noted deficiencies in protocol involving less experienced administrators.

Board policies are updated according to the recommended revisions from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association via Policy News Network and the District solicitor. This quarter the following policies were revised:

- Policy 011: Principles for Governance and Leadership
- Policy 610: Purchases Subject to Bid/Quotation
- Policy 611: Purchases Budgeted
- Policy 626: Procurement
- Policy 630: Debt Management

5. Operations

A meeting was held on January 9, 2023, to inform the community of the District's plans to renovate Steele Elementary School using ESSER III funds. With every elementary school at full capacity or beyond, the reopening of the vacant Steele building would allow for the District to more evenly distribute students across all District elementary schools at 90% capacity instead of the

112 – 115% capacity that currently exists. The renovation will also address energy efficiency needs with replacement of all mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. Filtration systems will be designed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The project was bid with prime contracts awarded in February 2023 to eci Construction (general contractor), Matchline Mechanical (HVAC), Jay R. Reynolds (plumbing), and McCarthy & Son (electrical).

A decision was made to have Trapani Communications (contractor) handle crisis communications so that the District's Coordinator of Public Relations, Kirsten Keys, can focus on external marketing, positive promotion of District events, and responding to media inquiries. Internal communications to staff still need increased and refined. External communications to parents and stakeholder groups also need to be increased. The goal of developing a Districtwide communication plan should reach completion by the end of the next quarter.

The Business Office personnel have been working to develop a contract administration database via a migration to new financial software. Additionally, performance standards are now being tracked for contracted vendors on a quarterly basis for projects funded by ESSER. Administrator Dr.

Christy Thompson has created a new tool that has been provided to vendors for tracking deliverables. Dr. Thompson was invited to present this tool at the PA Federal Programs Coordinators Conference in April.

The Office of Human Resources underwent an audit by the Pennsylvania Association of School Personnel Administrators, at the request of the Receiver, to analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of the department due to historic complaints from District employees. With the transition from the MCIU to a District Director of Human Resources, the time was appropriate to engage in this analysis. Recommendations were provided that reflect the need for additional training for Human Resources employees, as most have less than three years of experience in their respective roles (apart from the new Director who is highly experienced). Recommended changes in process and procedure have been determined and a plan will be developed to execute those changes for the 2023-24 school year effective July 1, 2023.

Position control has been updated over the past several months as a detailed analysis of each position has been done as part of the budget development process. Information from the Office of Human Resources has improved dramatically over the past six months with the change in

leadership of the department. Processes and procedures are being reviewed and documented. Exit interviews have been conducted for most resignations, but there are some instances in which employees depart with little notice and the opportunity to meet does not occur. The recent audit recommended that at a minimum, the District should have a form for exit interviews but try to meet with those leaving the District to be able to quantify data for their reasons for leaving. This data could be charted to help make decisions on places that the District needs to focus on to eliminate unwanted turnover.

6. *Financial Management*

BBD, LLP presented the results of the audit of the financial statements for the year ending June 2022 at the January 10, 2023, Committee of the Whole meeting.⁴ The ending fund balance was \$24,558,305. The School Board indicated opposition to any proposed tax increase for the 2023-24 budget given the surplus from the previous fiscal year. Since the current recovery plan calls for tax increases to the Act 1 Index, this is another area of the plan that the Receiver would like to amend in May 2023. Latitude to make decisions on the

⁴ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:cabc831c-a4dc-3351-9e5a-68fc89a70adc>

need for a tax increase should be contingent upon the long-term financial forecast of the District as well as the availability of surplus funds from prior years to avoid overtaxing District residents if unnecessary.

Public Financial Management (PFM) met with the Chief Financial Officer and the Receiver on February 23, 2023, to review the draft of the 5-year projections using historical data and the 2022-23 budget. The finalized projections will be submitted to Judge Tully along with the proposed plan amendments to provide a full fiscal picture of the Harrisburg School District.

The Administration met with Conrad Siegal Actuaries on February 23, 2023, to discuss the possibility of moving to Lincoln Benefits Trust (LBT) to leverage more purchasing power for health care. Structured for self-funding with predictable rates and less risk, LBT requires a minimum reserve of two months' worth of claims to join the Trust. Long-term forecasting to manage risks, accurate data, rate stability and transparency are the anticipated benefits of moving to LBT, but no decision has been made since the District has not received a proposed rate and is awaiting a vote on being accepted into the Trust.

The Treasurer's Report for the period ending January 31, 2023, in the amount of \$60,257,100.07 was approved at the March 28th School Board/Receiver General Business meeting.

Chief Financial Officer Dr. Stokes participated in a review meeting with Moody's on March 29, 2023. The reporting of the District's 2022 Audited Financial Statements and 2022 Operating data submitted to comply with the District's continuing disclosure requirements prompted this review; specifically, the District's marked financial improvement. Although Moody's will not issue an official rating for the District, the unofficial rating was set as an 'A'.

7. Revenue

Chief Financial Officer, Dr. Marcia Stokes, identified that PlanCon Part J for the SciTech High School building had not been submitted to the PA Department of Education back in 2008 by the former business manager. Dr. Stokes submitted the document upon Receiver approval at the January 24, 2023, School Board/Receiver General Business Meeting.⁵

⁵ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:691c6eda-e281-3756-b112-4568a93e0ead>

The District contracted with John Hansen to serve as a grant writer. The contractor is working on several grants with the potential to bring forth significant revenue for the District. An example is the Renew America energy grant of \$11 million. The District was recently notified that the application has been moved to phase two.

The Amended Recovery Plan calls for the sale of vacant District buildings by June 2023. The sale of the Woodward property for \$240,000 is in process this quarter with settlement to occur in the month of May 2023. The Wayne Avenue property has been offered to Susquehanna Township School District, but the sale price remains under negotiation. The William Penn property continues to present a liability to the Harrisburg School District. Fires, vandalism, and squatters continue to affect the property. The insurance carrier has threatened to terminate liability insurance coverage due to the recent fire in the basement of the abandoned building. The District must act as soon as possible regarding this vacant building; however, the elected School Board does not support the sale of the property. This is the only land available to the District should it ever need to expand in the future. The Administration, at the direction of the Receiver, is investigating the cost of selective demolition of the building with

the possibility of salvaging parts of it for restoration in the future as fewer students are admitted to Dauphin County Technical School. The Receiver will be requesting an amendment to initiative R08 in the Amended Recovery Plan that would allow the District to retain the William Penn property. The District does have the funds available in its Capital Reserve Fund to demolish the building, but the Receiver is awaiting additional information from the architect of record regarding the potential to salvage the laboratory/shop wing of the building. The District is unable to borrow for at least ten years; therefore, it may not be possible to reconstruct a portion of the building.

8. Workforce

Collective bargaining with the Harrisburg Education Association (HEA) commenced in January 2023. Negotiations are still ongoing. The proposal presented by the Harrisburg Education Association for salary increases far exceeds the suggested amount contemplated by the Amended Recovery Plan. The Receiver is again seeking approval from Judge Tully to offer above-market increases to attract and retain quality employees. Initiative WF01 calls for “affordable salary increases to staff.” The Chief Financial Officer,

Superintendent and Receiver believe that investment in the existing workforce is paramount to the retention of employees and that salaries must be increased for professional employees, as was done for AFSCME support staff last fall and Act 93 employees this winter, to attract and retain quality individuals. Currently, the District still has 79 unfilled vacancies out of 565 total positions. The District needs to develop a recruitment and retention package. The Harrisburg Education Association has agreed to engage in a Memorandum of Understanding with the District to allow for a recruitment incentive for teachers who are willing to relocate to Harrisburg from other areas of the state or country. The District and Association feel that minimum teacher salaries at Step 1 must exceed \$50,000 to compete for new hires with surrounding school districts.

The mid-year report card for Effective School Solutions was provided to the Administration on February 13, 2023. Teachers' emotional regulation impacts students' flight, fight or freeze response. In addition to better salaries, the District needs to support the mental health of its teachers through various programs.

This quarter the District issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for custodial and maintenance services. The bid was awarded to Metz Environmental Services

with a transition from Aramark to take effect July 1, 2023. The District has been displeased with the service delivery from Aramark over the past few years. Cleanliness of buildings plays a significant role in staff and student morale. The Administration looks forward to working with the team at Metz Environmental Services to ensure that appropriate care is taken of District facilities.

This quarter the District also issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for cafeteria services. Several proposals have been received and are currently being evaluated by the team.

Act 141 Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

January 12, 2023

5:00 p.m.

In Attendance:

Committee Members: Melanie Cook, Doug Thompson Leader, Michele Rolko, Dr. Sieta Achampong, Jim Thompson, Dr. Tamara Willis, Tim Wendling, Dr. Andria Saia, Christine Anderson, Darnise Anderson, Beth Light, Eugene Spells, Dr. Marisol Craig, Eric Turman (via Zoom), Dr. Travis Waters, Dr. Lori Suski

Community: Charla Plaines, Kia Hansard

Director of IT: Adam Nornhold

Dr. Waters reviewed a summary of what was discussed at the last meeting about Desired Outcome #3

Dr. Waters shared that he and Dr. Craig visited York City SD the prior day to discuss early childhood. Dr. Craig provided the following summary:

- York City modeled their program after the School District of Lancaster.
- The program began in 2009.
- York has 8 elementary buildings with one (1) Pre-K class in each school.
- York is experiencing the same staffing issues as Harrisburg SD.
- Their focus is on 4-year-olds.
- 50% of students in K-5 met the criteria for academic assessment (they also use Acadience) – not sure how many of that percentage attended Pre-K.
- Using Blueprint as curriculum for Pre-K.
- They talked a lot about partnerships in York City.
- Professional development is around early literacy – now extended K – 2.
- Talked about MOU with teachers' union.
- They are using early release of students to get professional development time. Students do asynchronous work at home.
- Every classroom has an assistant.
- Libraries are focal points of schools.
- They meet with local daycares monthly.
- They have a summer PD institute.
- They run a Plan & Learn monthly for parents of students from birth to 3 years old.
- They have a Kindergarten transition team.

Dr. Craig announced that Harrisburg SD is submitting the Pre-K Counts grant application to hopefully fund four (4) more classrooms in 2023-24. There is space at Foose, Downey, and Ben Franklin. HBGSD has only one (1) Pre-K Counts class at Ben Franklin in 2022-23.

Dr. Waters shared that York City SD also works with First 10 to build partnerships for early childhood to 10 years old. They have wrap-around services. The cost is \$35,000 per building. They are trying to sustain the partnership after ESSER funds are gone.

Dr. Craig said parent participation is a huge component of the grant.

Ms. Rolko asked if we can extend parental support through middle school.

Dr. Waters talked about structure in placement that often changes once a student transitions back to the regular education environment. Dr. Saia discussed a partnership with United Way as a means of adding to that. Dr. Saia mentioned that there is interest among CAIU school districts to create a regional effort to have a candidate pool using non-traditional hiring for teachers and other staff. Dr. Waters indicated that he met with Shippensburg University to discuss non-traditional paths to teacher certification. Instructional strategy trainings are recommended before people begin to substitute. Dr. Suski shared that Harrisburg SD has some retired teachers mentoring emergency-permitted teachers.

The assigned small group shared the following regarding Desired Outcome 2: Focus on Growth Paired with Attainment:

Desired Outcome 2: Focus on Growth paired with Attainment	
Obstacles: Current decreased growth throughout the year for HSD students; identification of teachers that need additional supports; historic flat academic growth historically; lack of urgency among staff; students that are struggling are more difficult to help catch up	Key Strategies: Increased use of student data to improve instruction; training staff in use of data; developing leadership capacity of principals; shift focus from overall composites and away from explicit skills, give students access to grade-level content
Measuring Progress: How would the District measure annual success in growth and attainment? Would these be measured in data reported to PDE, some other measure, or a combination?	

Dr. Suski asked about the Data Wise training that were introduced to the District a few years ago. The administration explained that the protocol involves looking at a problem of practice with the Data Wise team drilling down to root cause. Research-based strategies are then developed to implement. Each building had autonomy to determine focus for each building or grade level. Dr. Craig said that not all new principals have been trained. Dr. Craig said that the action plan should show the school plan and the principals should be sharing the Data Wise plan. Mr. Spells said that not every teacher has been trained – only two cohorts with a maximum of 7 people. Dr. Willis asked if the District has Instructional Coaches and if the Coach could bridge the gap between data and practice.

It was noted that some students cannot read yet report card grades don't reflect that. Mr. Thompson Leader asked how mastery vs. compliance impacts grades. Dr. Saia said that learning outcomes and targets need to be clear. The shift is from learning to read to reading to learn by Grades 4 and 5. Dr.

Willis suggested the foundations of curriculum, data, assessment and indicators that should be in place along with professional development. A common operational vocabulary is necessary. The need to “slow down to go fast.”

As the meeting concluded, Dr. Suski shared that in lieu of the scheduled February 9th Advisory Committee meeting, she was requesting that the committee members attend the February 28th School Board/Receiver General Business meeting to hear the presentation of the Mass Insight Diagnostic report that would be provided by the company.

The meeting adjourned at 6:06 p.m.

Act 141 Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 9, 2023

5:00 p.m.

In Attendance:

Committee Members: Melanie Cook, Doug Thompson Leader, Michele Rolko, Dr. Sieta Achampong, Dr. Tamara Willis, Tim Wendling, Dr. Andria Saia, Eugene Spells, Dr. Marisol Craig, Eric Turman, Dr. Lori Suski

Director of IT: Adam Nornhold

Dr. Suski shared that Dr. Waters was at a conference in Chicago and unable to be in attendance.

Dr. Suski reviewed the minutes from the January 12th meeting and the agenda for tonight's meeting.

Dr. Suski shared that two questions were received in advance of the meeting from a committee member relative to the Mass Insight Diagnostic report:

1. *Were there any quick wins that the District can address? Is so, what were they?*

Mr. Turman shared that one of the criticisms in the Mass Insight report was that decisions tend to be "top-down." Therefore, the administration has been more intentional in its collaboration by including teachers and principals in decision-making. An example shared was the recent RFP for custodial services. Input was sought from stakeholders before a decision was made.

Mr. Turman provided another example of a strategy meeting held earlier today that involved central office leaders, principals, instructional coaches, community and School Board representatives visiting classrooms to look at instructional practices and developing a plan for personalized learning.

How will you prioritize the abundance of data provided by MI to ensure both short and long-term improvement?

Mr. Turman said that the CFO and COO are visiting schools to determine priorities for facilities and spending. Mr. Turman said that following the Recovery Plan is a priority and the Comprehensive Planning process is moving along. A main priority will be a focus on having all students reading on grade level by Grade 3 as well as growth paired with attainment. Another priority is retention and recruitment of staff.

Dr. Suski asked if the committee had any additional "noticings" or "wonderings" because of having time to process the Mass Insight Diagnostic report. The committee members shared the following comments/suggestions:

- Dr. Saia noted that she viewed the report positively and commented that it is nice that people are seeing the changes in the District. She suggested that the District focus on 1 – 2 goals or it becomes too overwhelming for people.
- Ms. Rolko shared that the level of academic growth in most buildings stood out, but that the District (and she as HEA president) are constantly “putting out fires.”
- Ms. Cook noted that if the District’s focus is going to be early childhood, careful messaging to the community must be developed to ensure that those with students in Grades 3 – 12 don’t feel left out.
- Dr. Craig said that the focus should be on literacy. Dr. Achampong agreed that the District once had a focus on reading. Mr. Spells said that Math scores tend to be lower, so we also need to address Math and Literacy K-3, then focus on cross-curricular work in the upper grades, as well as instructional leadership and professional development.
- Dr. Willis said that it appears from the data that the front-line folks understand the plan. Mr. Turman shared that the District is hiring a Director of Schools who will be responsible for overseeing principals.
- Mr. Spells said the focus should be academic proficiency K-12 and determining “what that looks like” at each grade level.
- Ms. Cook said that it is important that we are specific about the level at which students are performing because we have many students performing well below grade level. Dr. Suski said that it is the District’s responsibility to develop a plan for each student who is not on grade level to figure out what supports are necessary to bridge that gap.
- Dr. Saia warned that nothing happens when the teams are overwhelmed.
- Ms. Cook asked how we arrive at directed goals and determinations (guideposts).
- Dr. Craig said that we really need to look Pre-K through 12 and need to unpack it for the teachers. Dr. Craig said that Acadience reports are color-coded so parents can see where their child is performing relative to grade level standards. She said that interventions and progress monitoring need to occur and asked if we are having data meetings. Dr. Suski said that Dr. Craig is really talking about developing systems and structures for the District.
- Ms. Cook asked what the role of the Reading Specialist is.
- Ms. Rolko asked questions about what is working in other districts that could be brought in so as not to reinvent the wheel.
- Mr. Spells said that culture and climate needs must be addressed. We have curriculum in place, although some people say we do not have it.
- Dr. Achampong reminded that we should not “throw the baby out with the bath water” and that not everything is bad. Mr. Spells noted that consistency is the key and helping people to understand the “why.” Ms. Rolko said that how the building is led is also important.
- Dr. Willis agreed that culture and climate is important, but consistent leadership and setting norms is important to sustaining the culture. To avoid people “waiting it out” for the next change, people need to see consistency.
- Ms. Cook said the Code of Conduct means nothing if there is no plan for how to address the students who do not follow it.
- Dr. Saia referenced an upcoming series at CAIU called “Belonging with Dignity” and said that we cannot “discipline our way out of situations.” Dr. Saia offered CAIU to fund Harrisburg SD’s participation in this series.

- Mr. Spells said that we need to make decisions based on data and he uses SWIS to look at each student and determine how to support them. Only 5 – 8% of students consistently disrupt and are removed from the school setting. The District has PBIS, mentoring, check in/out, and relationship building as strategies to address student misconduct. Parent meetings need to occur.
- Mr. Thompson Leader asked about supports for students.
- Dr. Craig asked if teams meet regularly to review student progress. Teachers lose their power if they constantly send kids to the office. Perhaps the administration needs to provide guidance as to how those student meetings are structured (i.e., agenda).
- Mr. Spells shared how he builds rosters by involving teachers to ensure heterogeneity, equity, etc....
- Ms. Cook said that we cannot ignore misbehavior. Ms. Cook also pointed to the feedback on page 61 of the Mass Insight report where teachers are complaining that they don't have supplies. Dr. Suski shared an example in which a particular department claimed they have no money, yet a significant amount of ESSER dollars was allocated to that department and remains unspent to date. Dr. Suski said that it appears that some staff are so used to the dysfunction of the past that they want to perpetuate the narrative that “we don't have the money” or “we can't do that.” Dr. Achampong referenced that our budget process is much different now than in the past.
- Mr. Wendling commented that he has been at the table for these meetings for 10 years now, and it is the same conversation. He mentioned the need to build relationships.
- Mr. Turman said that the District is working with Dr. Barbara Moore-Williams to build understanding of different cultures. Mr. Turman also stated that we need to focus on what our kids can do well instead of on what they do wrong.
- Ms. Cook said it is also about adult accountability.

Having concluded the discussion on the report, the meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 13, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. in the Lincoln Administration Building Board Room.