



Duquesne City School District

A Vision of Hope and Promise for the Future

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

—**President Barack Obama**

Executive Summary

Introduction

“The Duquesne City School District will prepare our students to be successful, ethical, and caring members of a global community.”

The Mission Statement of the Duquesne City School District is supported by a Comprehensive Plan, a Special Education Plan, and a Technology Plan approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Further, to ensure the academic and financial successes of the School District, **the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas** have acted accordingly and approved a Recovery Plan under Act 141 of 2012 with associated Amendments that provide for enforcement of Board policies and procedures, academic and financial matters, including oversight of District operations and compliance of state and federal regulations.

Background

The Duquesne City School District is a suburban public school district located 12 miles south of Pittsburgh in the east hills of Allegheny County, and serves the City of Duquesne, a former mill town on the banks of the Monongahela River. Census figures indicate that Duquesne had a population of 11,410 people in the early 1970’s when the steel mills employed thousands of people and provided good-paying jobs.

The Duquesne City School District encompasses approximately 2 square miles. According to the 2000 federal census data, it served a resident population of 7,352; however, according to the 2010 federal census data, the resident population declined to 5,566 people. The median household income in Duquesne was \$21,714 compared to \$51,651 statewide, according to the same Census year. The educational attainment levels for the Duquesne City School District population (25 years old and over) are 89.5% high school graduates and 9.2% college graduates. (Wikipedia Website, 2019)

The Duquesne City School District and the City of Duquesne take great pride in their heritage, culture, and traditions of a once-booming Mon Valley industrial town. That pride in school and community is still quite evident as citizens reminisce about the “glory days” of many employment opportunities, fraternal club activities, a thriving business district, multiple church denominations, and school and community activities, especially noting the long, rich history of WPIAL and PIAA football, track & field, and basketball championships.

City of Duquesne

Since 1991, the City of Duquesne has been designated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as “distressed” under the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act of 1987 and a state-appointed coordinator assists the city with a Recovery Plan, as amended in 2014. The state provides municipalities experiencing financial difficulties in order to ensure the health, safety, and general welfare of its citizens. The City can levy certain taxes it otherwise could not, and it can tax non-residents who work in the community.

The City provides municipal services for fire, police, and emergency medical services and other municipal government services including public works, water and sewage, recreation and parks. The City of Duquesne works with the Regional Industrial Development Corporation (RIDC) of Southwestern Pennsylvania which has a bilateral approach to economic and workforce development opportunities by attracting new

industries and by sustaining existing jobs and creating new jobs. By the very nature of this bilateral approach, expansion of the tax base bodes well for the local economy, government services, and its citizens.

Historical accounts indicate that after taking control of the former Duquesne Steel Works site in 1987, Allegheny County asked the RIDC to acquire and redevelop a 240-acre site in conjunction with the McKeesport Area Recovery Plan. RIDC embarked on redeveloping this site when the adaptation of existing industrial sites was not common, and the framework RIDC developed for addressing this site led to new state legislation.

Since then, the RIDC has renovated six existing buildings and recently built a new 30,000 square-foot flex building that is now available for lease. In total, RIDC's City Center of Duquesne is home to 15 companies, employing nearly 700 people. Seventy-eight acres remain available for development. (RIDC, Website, 2019)

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf recently announced seven new projects funded by the Industrial Sites Reuse Program (ISRP) that will clean up former industrial sites in several counties, including Allegheny County, to prepare them for use as parks, and business and residential properties. Refurbishing an old property for the benefit of the community is a vital step in attracting business investment and job creation, noting that these projects will provide a clean and safe environment for communities and businesses.

The ISRP program is designed to foster the cleanup of environmental contamination at industrial sites, thereby bringing blighted land into productive use. The RIDC was granted \$33,700 for environmental remediation of the former Open Hearth building, a 3,200-square-foot building located at the City Center of Duquesne. RIDC plans to redevelop the site into a planned urban industrial park. (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Governor's News Release, November, 2019)

A new high-tech Aquaponics indoor farm industry, under the ownership of a Minnesota-based company In City Farms, will construct a 180,000 square foot facility -- with an initial investment of \$30M for phase one -- which will employ 130 people with another 100 workers as the industry expands. The facility will be constructed on the former Duquesne Steel Works property as an indoor city farm that will raise edible fish (trout and Arctic char) for commercial wholesale and will also grow and produce vegetables year-round. (Machosky, Michael, City Design, November, 2019)

The City and School District leaders believe the new high-tech industry will provide a boost for full-time employment and will expand the tax base over time which will benefit the City and School District. As well, leaders believe the expansion of the Mon/Fayette Expressway will give an economic boost to the Duquesne City School District and the City of Duquesne; and, they are optimistic that economic, community, and workforce development efforts will have a positive impact on the greater Duquesne community.

The Mon/Fayette Expressway (MFE) system consists of four independent but interconnected projects between I-68 near Morgantown, WV and I-376 in Monroeville, PA. The MFE is completed and open to traffic from I-68 in WV to PA Route 51 in Jefferson Hills Borough in southeastern Allegheny County creating 54 continuous miles of expressway. (Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, 2019)

The remaining project, PA Route 51 to I-376, will extend the current MFE system 14 miles north from PA Route 51 in Jefferson Hills through West Mifflin, Dravosburg, Duquesne, North Versailles, Turtle Creek and Wilkins before connecting to the Parkway East, I-376, near Thompson Run Road in Monroeville. This will complete the 68-mile MFE system allowing continuous travel from West Virginia north to an interchange with the Parkway East in Monroeville. The acquisition of land between

the City Duquesne and I-376 will begin in 2020. (Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, 2019)

Duquesne City School District

In 2000, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) acted under state legislation and appointed a Board of Control for the management of School District budgetary and educational policy. The School District was officially certified as a “Financially Distressed” School District. (Financially Distressed Determination, Pennsylvania Department of Education, October 2000)

Since that time, the Board’s membership changed every few years and more than a dozen administrators have served to address academic and financial matters. Pittsburgh Public Schools provided oversight for one year (2006-2007) and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) managed all academic and business operations for four years (2007-2008 to 2010-2011). Throughout those years, there were frequent changes in superintendents, principals, teachers, and support staff.

Similar to the City of Duquesne under an Act 47 Recovery Plan, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania issued a Declaration of Financial Recovery Status for the Duquesne School District in November 2012, noting that Duquesne eliminated its senior high school program in 2007 and its junior high program beginning with the 2012-2013 school year in an effort to reduce overall expenses. The School District was not able to offer comprehensive educational programs and services such as advanced placement courses, foreign languages, extracurricular activities and competitive athletics, especially at the high school level.

Further, during the 2012-2013 school year, the Department of Education, working in conjunction with the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, placed the School District in Receivership and the Court appointed a Receiver to provide oversight and management of academic and financial matters to ensure children and families are

provided adequate educational programs and services. (DCSD Financial Recovery Status, Act 141 of 2012)

The Duquesne City School District is not governed by an elected school board, but continues to be a state-controlled initiative for oversight of academic and financial matters. Under the direction of a Court-appointed Receiver to ensure compliance with district-wide systems, policies and procedures, the District's nine school board members are elected by the community at large and serve in an advisory role. The Chief School Administrator (Superintendent of Schools) is contracted by the Receiver and is commissioned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A Chief Recovery Officer, appointed by the Department of Education, serves as an advisor to the Receiver and Superintendent for academic and financial matters. (Financial Recovery Status, Act 141 of 2012, Pennsylvania Department of Education, November 2012)

The Receiver has authority to take certain actions that streamline approval processes to meet state and federal compliance; to act as the elected Board of School Directors; and to take formal action for all School District matters at the scheduled monthly Receiver Business meetings. School Directors vote semi-annually, in June to set the Real Estate and Act 511 tax levies and in December at its Reorganization Meeting. (DCSD Financial Recovery Status, Act 141 of 2012)

Today, the School District operates one elementary school, Pre-K through 6th grade and provides a continuum of educational programs and support services for approximately 419 students (as of September 30, 2019) and employs 80 employees. Students in grades 7 to 12 are given the choice to attend either the West Mifflin Area School District or the East Allegheny School District for a total enrollment of 342 students as of September 30, 2019. Duquesne City provides transportation and tuition payments for students who attend the secondary school of their choice. Current charter school enrollment in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade is 210.

Budget and Finances

The following highlights provide a perspective of budget and finances in the Duquesne City School District:

- The 2019-2020 Duquesne City Education Budget is \$20,470,000
- Duquesne City receives \$12.1M in Basic Education Funding and \$682,000 in Special Education Funding. Overall Local Tax effort is \$1,968,561
- Federal funding: Title I \$663,000; Title II \$56,700; Title III \$538; Title IV \$49,800
- As of June 30, 2019, the General Fund Balance is \$4,436,138 (\$3.7M Assigned and \$500,00 Unassigned)
- Outstanding debt service is \$4.5 M for 2019-2020 (Debt service payment of \$1.4M was made on January 4, 2020)
- Annual tuition for students attending schools elsewhere is \$9,504,725 (\$3.9M for Charter-Cyber)

Under the current state regulations governing Charter and Cyber-Charter Schools, the School District spends approximately 20 percent of its budget, noting Duquesne spent \$3.9M in 2018-2019 for tuition payments for students who attend these schools. Based on the PDE formula, Charter-Cyber tuition equates to \$15,466 for regular education and \$32,705 special education tuition payments. This expenditure has a major impact on the general operating budget for tuition and also transportation, as applicable. The School District is active with the Urban League of School Districts which supports the significant reform of the 23 year-old Charter-School law and continues to advocate for alignment of funding with actual costs for a more fair and equitable funding formula.

Every fiscal quarter since 2013-2014 under Receivership, the Duquesne City School District consistently has been in good financial standing. There have been no unpaid or contested invoices and all payroll, benefit expenditures, debt service obligations and tuition payments have been made in a timely manner.

Under the Financial Recovery Status Act 141 of 2012, the Duquesne City School District received two interest free Transitional Loans to sustain operating expenses:

- \$1M 2019-2020 (Issued 2014)

(\$850,000 remaining balance due based on a Loan repayment plan of four years)

- \$1.335M 2019-2020 (The 2015 Loan was paid in full in 2016 and 2017)

The Department of Education authorized an Empowerment Grant for \$1M in 2018-2019 to sustain educational programs and services. The Department of Education provided Empowerment Grants totaling \$300,000 for 2019-2020 to support continuation of the Communities in Schools program. (School Improvement Grant ended) However, the greatest financial challenge is the repayment of bonds and notes, fiscal years ending June 30, as follows:

- 2020 \$1,549,000* / \$60,000 *Original 1998 Renovation Bond Issue
- 2021 \$1,516,000* / \$60,000 *Original 1998 Renovation Bond Issue)
- 2022 \$78,000 / \$665,000
- 2023 \$78,000 / \$0

Educational Programs, Services, and Professional Development

Duquesne School District students have scored below the state average testing results on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments. During the past decade or more, Duquesne's academic performance on the state assessment was ranked among the lowest in the state and there is little increase each academic year. In 2018-2019, more than 90 percent of elementary students scored below proficient in math and approximately 80 percent below proficient in reading on the PSSA. While measures in achievement have yielded minimum results, academic measures of growth in reading and math through PVAAS have been consistent and in some areas substantial growth has occurred.

For the first time since 1999, Duquesne City School District is not a designated school for targeted improvement. This year, the school is not a CSI, ATSI, or TSI school as

designated by PDE guidelines. To that end, Duquesne has implemented strategies to improve academic growth and achievement, including student services to increase attendance, math and reading support programs, and after-school programs for children, youth, and family support.

Examples of significant academic highlights include, but are not limited, to:

- *PSSA, PVAAS, and Future Ready Index results are closely monitored, noting that assessments drive changes with instructional techniques and methods*
- *Extraordinary efforts continue to improve curriculum, instruction, assessments, and technology*
- *Educators meet regularly as Professional Learning Communities to analyze and interpret data to positively impact instruction and assessment*
- *Title I Parent Engagement, Family Resources Network, and Communities in Schools are effective*
- *English as a Secondary Language instruction continues based on ESL surveys and individual student needs*
- *Special education teachers are engaged with progress monitoring to meet state and federal regulations*
- *Students and families continue to receive support for social services based on district resources and identified intervention needs and levels*

The Superintendent of Schools leads the administration, faculty, and support staff personnel who are responsible for daily operations; school safety and security; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; innovation and instructional technology; special education; budget and finance; staff development; facilities and property services; student transportation; and food nutrition services. Educators are working

together to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth and to enhance teaching and learning based on best practices.

The School District has made great strides under the Recovery Plan and Amendments during the past several school years, based on a collaborative effort of key stakeholders who have embraced “a positive, can do attitude” with the hope and promise of re-envisioning the future of the Duquesne City School District. Parent and family engagement with school activities, after-school activities, and community youth sports programs have re-energized the school community.

Under the visionary and strategic leadership of the new superintendent of schools and administration, the **Bring Your Kids Home Campaign** has experienced positive feedback and school enrollment has increased recently for a total of 419 (as of September 30, 2019) students for the 2019-2020 school year.

The **Bring Your Kids Home Campaign** has a mission to encourage students and their families to leave their charter schools and return to the Duquesne neighborhood school. The Duquesne team went to homes of students who live in the school district and encouraged families to take advantage of STEAM maker spaces, new computer coding curriculum, project-based learning, and technology access for all students. Returning children to the neighborhood school has multiple benefits for educational programs, services, and activities for families as well as financial benefits for the School District. Parents and families have embraced the success of the new program, including activities such as a door-to-door community campaign by administrators, teachers, and staff in the summers of 2018 and 2019.

The School District has placed great emphasis on professional development by engaging staff through the concept of a Professional Learning Community. The focus continues with best practices for intentional teaching and learning, differentiated instruction, instructional walkthroughs, and a differentiated teacher evaluation system for improved educator accountability. Increased student attendance and improved

PVAAS and PSSA results in Mathematics, English Language Arts, and Science continue to be high priorities.

The School District is committed to innovation and continuous school improvement. The Superintendent, as an advocate for children and youth, has high expectations and accountability for all students, educators, support staff, and the community. Advocating for children and youth has a direct correlation to student growth and achievement through teacher collaboration; interim assessments and progress monitoring; and analyzing student data results regularly and often. District leaders have a core belief that planning and executing lessons based on best practices and understanding that assessments drive instruction are paramount to effective teaching and learning.

The Duquesne City School District participates with the University of Virginia in the “PARTNERSHIP for LEADERS in EDUCATION” professional development program for administrators and teachers. The Purpose: “Duquesne City will establish a positive, safe, and collaborative environment and through transparent communication, of which all stakeholders will be held to a high level of accountability so that all students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. The goal is to break barriers, inspire hope, and build a culture that focuses on student success.”

The UVA transformational initiative is to raise educational outcomes significantly and to strengthen the school system and school leadership addressing school climate, classroom management, effective parent communication, discipline referrals, and student growth and achievement. The 2019-2020 Action Plan goals include (1) increase Language Arts proficiency and (2) increase Math proficiency. The leadership development initiative increases the capacity of the School District administrator-teacher leader teams to shape their own future and achieve lasting improvements in student learning. Through a multi-year executive education and on-site partnership, the goal is organizational learning and collaboration that empowers teams to heighten focus, improve internal ways of working, and confront difficult problems. (University of Virginia, Partners in Education Leadership, 2019)

During a recent two-day site-visit by the UVA regional coordinators, interviews were conducted of the Duquesne Elementary Principal and a Teacher Leadership Team. Focus areas included Leadership; Instructional Infrastructure; Talent Management; and Support and Accountability with an emphasis on promising practices and opportunities. Further, there was an in depth review of the Duquesne Education Center (PreK-6) of specific promising practices and opportunities, including a culminating roundtable discussion with follow-up action points with the Superintendent and Central Office Administration. Tentative plans for the summer professional development at UVA were discussed for continued intense training for administrative and faculty training.

Consistent with “turnaround school” strategies, the Administrative leadership team believes that by establishing educational policies and expanding ways to partner with and build capacity for financial and human capital through key stakeholder agencies, there will be significant gains in student achievement and a transformation to a higher-performing school over a three to five year period.

The Duquesne City School District has been a recipient of various state and federal grant opportunities and acknowledges the on-going financial support of the Pennsylvania Department of Education which has greatly contributed to the District’s success of educational programs and services. In addition to the Transformational and Empowerment grants, the Department of Education underwrites the University of Virginia “PARTNERSHIP for LEADERS in EDUCATION’ professional development program.

The School District collaborates with key stakeholder agencies and organizations including, but not limited to, Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU 3) for business operations and other regional educational services; the Grable Foundation and Remake Learning Network; Keystone Educational Services for Special Education; PDE Temporary Shelter Support; Carnegie Library-Duquesne Branch; Community Foodbank; Duquesne-West Mifflin Boys and Girls Club; Duquesne Family Center (AIU3); Early Childhood Education; Head Start; Duquesne City Public Works and Police Department; and

Communities in Schools. As well, the School District looks forward to the creation of the proposed Duquesne City Education Foundation which will help generate new revenue that will directly impact student educational programs, services, and activities.

The Communities in Schools Initiative is making a positive impact with support services for Duquesne students, educators, and families. The Mission is “To surround students of the greater Pittsburgh region with a community of support, empowering them to achieve in school and succeed in life.” The Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Chapter has an assigned specialist who works directly with the school, building relationships that empower students inside and outside the classroom. The partnership between education and community leaders collaborate to accelerate results for children and youth through integrated student support systems. (Communities in Schools, 2019)

S.T.E.A.M (science, technology, engineering, arts, and technology) programs, including digital classrooms with state-of-the-art technology and makerspaces for hands-on project-based learning have transformed teaching and learning. With the support of foundation funds and state grants, educational programs and services have been enhanced considerably and educators are focused on increased student growth and achievement. (DCSD Website, 2019) The School District initiatives are supported by the Grable Foundation and are associated with Remake Learning which is a network that ignites engaging, relevant, and equitable learning practices in support of young people navigating rapid social and technological change. (Remake Learning Website, 2019)

Duquesne Elementary School is working to be designated as an Apple Distinguished School (ADS), demonstrating continuous school improvement through the use of iPad, iMac, and MacBook devices since 2013. Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, every student has their own iPad to use during the school day; and, every teacher has the use of MacBook and iPad devices. This achievement is commonly referred to as a 1:1 School. The Maker Space Labs in the school are equipped with iMac and MacBook devices to participate in classroom activities and to complete assignments. Apple

defines ADS schools as “centers of leadership and educational excellence that demonstrate Apple’s vision for learning with technology.” Students, faculty, and administrators are working diligently to receive the Apple accreditation. (Duquesne News, Issue IV, July 2019)

Also related to innovation and instructional technology, Duquesne Elementary School collaborates with Duquesne University and participates in the Education Uncontained – Coding 4 Culture Initiative. The initiative focuses on female students in grade 6 and their families to teach the basics of block-based coding and basic website design. The initiative underscores leadership skills, lesson design, and public speaking. Participating students presented at the International Society for Technology (STE) in Philadelphia to showcase their accomplishments on an international level. (Duquesne News, Issue IV, July 2019)

Focus on the Future

The Duquesne City School District has an extraordinary opportunity to build on many of its successful educational programs and services during the next three to five years. The drive for continued future success, combined with a local effort to maintain real estate assets and school community engagement, is based on the following:

Guiding Principles for Academic and Financial Success

- Make educational and financial investments based on best practices, proven methods, and strategies for long-term success
- Enhance the quality of educational programs and services to meet the academic, behavior, emotional, and social needs of all students
- Maintain a focus on effective teaching and learning, student achievement and growth, and improved performance on state assessments
- Promote an open work environment where all employees experience empowerment, ownership, and accountability to grow professionally
- Make targeted investments, reallocate resources, and provide educational support services for learners

- Strike a balance between what is educationally sound for students and fiscally responsible for taxpayers
- Streamline operations, maximize human and financial resources, and eliminate unnecessary spending

Visionary, Strategic, and Operational Goals

1. Revise the **Five-Year Pennsylvania Financial Management Plan** annually for the Duquesne City School District and further embrace effective and comprehensive accountability and responsibilities for academic and financial success; wise investments for facility improvements and school safety; and generate new revenues and support for fiscal stability.
2. Establish the **Duquesne City Education Foundation** to promote the core belief that “**The School is the Center of the Community**” with a primary purpose of generating new revenues for educational opportunities that directly impact student programs, related facilities, services, and activities.
3. Sanction a comprehensive **Educational Assessment** for the purpose of expanding educational opportunities by returning 7th and 8th grade students to Duquesne City that will provide a Pre-K through 8 grade level configuration with an enhanced continuum of programs, services and activities; that repurposes building use space; and that reduces tuition payments paid to neighboring school districts.
4. Sanction a **Facility Conditions Assessment** for the purpose of renovating the existing football stadium for 7th and 8th grade athletics, community youth sports, and other recreational community activities through a comprehensive and ambitious fund-raising campaign; and, further identify options for short-term and long-term facility maintenance repairs, upgrades, and basic renovations that support educational specifications for a Pre-K through 8 building configuration.

5. Develop a **Collaboration Plan** that enhances the professional working relationship between and among City government, School District, Communities in Schools, non-profit, faith-based, business and community, health and human services, and other family-network agencies.
6. Establish a partnership with **Waterfront Learning**, a service offered by the **Allegheny Intermediate Unit**, to meet the growing demand for cyber education opportunities and to meet the individual needs of Duquesne City students for a more cost-effective and efficient delivery of services for on-line, virtual learning.
7. Participate in the **Mon-Valley School Districts Partnership** to continue advocating for reform of charter and cyber school formula funding reforms that produce greater accountability and transparency, including administrative changes and meaningful legislative solutions to level the financial playing field between traditional public schools and charter-cyber schools.

Conclusion

The School District has made progressive strides under the Act 141 of 2012 Recovery Plan and Amendments, based on a collaborative effort of key stakeholders who embrace the conceptual framework of re-envisioning the future of the Duquesne City School District.

Although the entities of municipal government and public education obviously each face its own set of challenges -- low-socio-economic status, poverty-stricken levels, funding, underserved populations, and societal issues similar to other urban centers -- there is an optimistic outlook that has the potential to build on many school community successes to date.

With a “positive, can do attitude” and with the support of state government in conjunction with respective Recovery Plans and Amendments, both entities have a unique opportunity to work together for continued progress.

By renewing our efforts and working towards a brighter future, the Duquesne community can further benefit children, youth, families, and its citizens. The triangular relationships among business, education, and community are an integral part of working together for meaningful progress. Therefore, it is this notion that provides the basis for a vision of hope and promise for the future, embracing the fact that **“The School is the Center of the Community”**.

“Education is not a thing apart from life—not a “system,” nor a philosophy; it is direct teaching how to live and how to work together.”— **Booker T. Washington**

March, 2020