

# VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**TO: Richard Paskiewicz**  
**FROM: Debbie Murasso**  
**DATE: March 2010**  
**RE: Monthly Report on Actions to Improve Student Achievement**

With the approval of our 2010-11 school calendar, conversations and planning now turn to the scheduling of our **four professional development days** for next year. While there's never enough time for all that needs to get done, administration is examining how best to allocate our professional development time to deepen our implementation of the **"practices of improving schools"** as defined in **Connecticut's Accountability for Learning Initiative**.



Of critical importance in establishing **a guaranteed and viable core curriculum for all students** will be the development of standard-based curriculum and assessments, K-12. It is our goal to provide time for each grade/content area/course to develop at a minimum two such standard-based assessments during the 2010-11 school year with the expectation that assessment data is reported back to the grade/department/school and district level for analysis to guide the improvement of curriculum and instruction. Vernon's administrative team will meet for a full day of professional development on June 28<sup>th</sup> to participate in such a process of developing standard-based curriculum and assessments using **Vernon Public Schools' Essential Elements of Curriculum**. See attached. Time to address other professional

development needs (differentiated instruction, classroom management, and NEASC) will also be provided.

With one year's implementation under our belt, the Vernon Schools are preparing for a full implementation of **AESOP, an automated substitute placement and absence management service** from Frontline Placement Technologies. Effective July 1, 2010, all employee groups will be able to use a combination of the internet or the phone to report and/or request absences for sick time, vacation time, personal time, or professional time. Thank you, Tammy Salminen, for setting us up to be more efficient and paperless. Training opportunities and letters of invitation will be published soon.

And finally, while we have just completed the administration of the **Connecticut Mastery Testing Program** and results will not be known until the summer, it is important for us to plan now for potential consequences as mandated by federal law. To that end, parents of children at Maple Street, Northeast, and Skinner Road School will receive information about **Vernon's Public School Choice Program** and will be asked to declare now their intent to transfer their children to another Vernon school. All school choice applications received will be conditional based on the results of the school's **Adequate Yearly Progress** report, the preliminary results of which are due in July. **(Special note: The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind, will be carefully monitored for changes that may impact state and district implementation.)**

At Rockville High School the **In-School Suspension Team** met early in the month to continue the conversation surrounding the development of a potential program. The district has yet to hear the status of this legislative mandate from Hartford... The **RHS Attendance Committee** met yet again to propose and draft a new grant proposal for the 2010-11 school year. This year's proposal titled **PACT (Partners on Attendance with a Community Team)** builds on previous attendance initiatives by deepening partnerships with community agencies and with parents. Thank you to Attendance Committee members for securing incentives. To date forty students have been recognized for perfect attendance in all classes with a gift card to Subway and two students have received a "free night of bowling for six" from Spare Time for perfect attendance for the entire month of March... In support of a **positive school climate** a team of educators conducted a site visit to Housatonic Valley Regional High School, a **model PBS (Positive Behavior Support)** high school in the state... CAPT was successfully administered at the start of the month and again, RHS posted a 100% participation rate!.. Preparations for the **2013 NEASC site visit** continue as staff work on revising core values, beliefs, and learning expectations... Preparations for the **2010 summer school program** have also commenced... **Data teams** report the following:

- *The percent of child development students scoring at/above proficient in **categorizing developmental tasks** will increase from 49.4% to 90% as measured by a common assessment given on/by April 26, 2010.*
- *The percent of creative foods and food choices students scoring at/above proficient in **kitchen measurements** increased from 47.8% to 75% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 24, 2010.*
- *The percent of physics students scoring at/above proficient in **similar triangles** increased from 26.8% to 86.8% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 27, 2010.*
- *The percent of chemistry students scoring at/above proficient in **adding integers** increased from 18.9% to 83.4% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 29, 2010.*
- *The percent of earth science students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding convection** increased from 48.9% to 77.6% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 29, 2010.*

- The percent of grade 9 English students scoring at/above proficient in **making connections** increased from 15% to 64% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 29, 2010.
- The percent of grade 11-12 English students scoring at/above proficient in **demonstrating knowledge of MLA documentation standards** increased from 34% to 67% as measured by a common assessment.
- The percent of grade 9 world history students scoring at/above proficient (score of 4 on a scale of 0-6) on a **CAPT simulated essay** increased from 55% to 84%.
- The percent of Algebra I students scoring at/above proficient in **solving systems of equations** increased from 37% to 62% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 29<sup>th</sup>.
- The percent of geometry students scoring at/above proficient in **solving proportion equations and word problems** will increase from 47% to 70% as measured by a common assessment given on/by April 26, 2010.

The new incentive program at **Vernon Center Middle School** also proved successful in increasing student attendance during CMT administration from 95% (2009) to 97.2% (2010). Thank you to organizer Jason Magao and to all of our staff for donating and assembling some very creative gift baskets... CREC consultant Neil Cowan returned for a follow up to the **Common Formative Assessment (CFA)** training he conducted in January. In meeting sessions with language arts and math data teams, conversations focused on the alignment between **common formative assessments, standard-based curriculum, power standards,** and **data team** practices. Neil will return in April to meet with members of the social studies and science departments... Curriculum development was also a focus in March. Coordinator Judy Latonie met with language arts teachers at each grade level to work on **unwrapping a priority standard** following the **Eight Essential Elements of Curriculum**. Each group developed an understanding of the process and has a working document to guide future work. Mrs. Latonie also worked with a multi-grade team from the social studies department to build the capacity for **developing standard-based curriculum and assessments**... The sixth grade teachers and the **SRBI steering committee** met to review the results of the **universal screenings** and to identify appropriate candidates for the **after school intervention program**. Approximately thirty sixth grade students will be identified for intensive intervention in reading fluency, decoding, mathematics calculations, or concepts... The **VCMS Focused Monitoring Team** met on March 10<sup>th</sup> to review and analyze school suspension data. In a comparative review, the percent of special education students suspended decreased from 22% to 20% from 2009 to 2010. The implementation of **Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)** has added a significantly new mechanism and protocol to track behavior and teacher and administrator interventions... The science department has been working with CREC consultant Joe Fromme in developing **“assured lesson experiences.”** The department has also been invited to participate in the CATALYST aerospace initiative grant... Data teams report the following:

- The percent of grade 6 language arts students scoring at/above proficient in **making reader-text connections** increased from 75% to 84% as measured by a common assessment given on March 11, 2010.
- The percent of grade 7 math students scoring at/above proficient in **multiplication of fractions** increased from 72% to 87% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 10, 2010.
- The percent of grade 8 math students scoring at/above proficient in **computation with percents** increased from 70% to 80% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 10, 2010.
- The percent of grade 7 science students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding the muscular system** increased from 62% to 95% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 14, 2010.

- *The percent of grade 6 social studies students scoring at/above proficient in **finding the main idea** increased from 51.6% to 71% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 10, 2010.*

Even though March was a very long month, the days flew by at **Skinner Road School** as students in grades 3-5 dove headlong into the Connecticut Mastery Test... Data teams, in their weekly meetings, continued to examine the **universal screen and probe data** and to design super **Tier I interventions** based on student needs. **Super flexible groupings** of students in grades 2-5 have been created with approximately 4-6 staff working with students for three instructional periods (at least 30 minutes) each week... The **SRBI database** and the new tool to visualize student growth using SRBI data was presented to the staff. The tool has been important in meetings (including parent meetings) to track student progress... Data teams report the following:

- *The percent of kindergarten students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying story problem** increased from 37% to 97% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 26, 2010.*
- *The percent of grade 1 students able to **state story problem and resolution** increased from 60% to 98% at proficient and from 0% to 80% at goal.*
- *The percent of grade 2 students able to **identify the main idea** increased from 94% to 96% at proficient and from 72% to 88% at goal as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 29, 2010.*

The **Positive Behavior Support (PBS)** team at **Northeast School** has been busy creating lesson plans to teach proper behavior expectations at various locations within the school, including hallways, recess/playground, bathroom, cafeteria, bus, and classroom. Thank you PBS team members Howie Eichner, Anne Timbrell, Cindy Shea, Kristen Chepeleff, Beth Halvorsen, Jenna Guerrette, and Phyllis Winkler for your hard work in lesson development... On March 26<sup>th</sup> over 80 students participated in **Northeast School's Annual Science Fair**... **Data teams** report the following:

- *The percent of kindergarten students able to **produce a third rhyme with 80% accuracy** increased from 58% to 83% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 15<sup>th</sup>.*
- *The percent of grade 2 students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying main idea with supportive detail** increased from 67% to 80% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 15<sup>th</sup>.*
- *The percent of grade 5 students scoring at/above proficient in **forming a general understanding (Strand 1)** increased from 63% to 82% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 17<sup>th</sup>.*

At **Lake Street School** students demonstrated concentration and effort in completing the Connecticut Mastery Test... Toward the goal for all children to reach proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics, staff has been busy reviewing **progress monitoring** data for all students currently receiving interventions. Students who have demonstrated excellent growth will be dismissed from programming and other students who need additional support will be added... **Data teams** report the following:

- *The percent of K-1 students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying the main idea with a supporting detail** increased from 72% to 87% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 17<sup>th</sup>.*
- *The percent of grade 2 students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying author's purpose** will increase from 45% to 70 as measured by a common assessment given on/by April 14<sup>th</sup>.*

- The percent of grade 3 students scoring at/above goal in **subtraction with borrowing/regrouping** will increase from 74% to 88% as measured by a common assessment given on/by April 27, 2010.
- The percent of grade 4 students scoring at/above goal in **text-to-self connections** will increase from 50% to 80% as measured by a common assessment given on/by April 7, 2010.
- The percent of grade 5 students scoring at/above goal in **identifying the main idea and details in “following directions” passages** increased from 8% to 75% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 17<sup>th</sup>.

Participation in the **Maple Street School Learning Fair** was good again this year. While students in grades 3-5 are required to complete projects, projects are optional for students in grades K-2. Two help sessions – one after school and one in the evening – are provided by staff to provide support for students who need help in gathering materials and researching information... The first grade **data team** has been tracking students' ability to **write to a prompt** and to **read fluently**. Progress from month to month has been modest but positive. *In writing, the percent of students scoring at/above proficient increased from 55% in February to 64% in March. In reading fluency, the percent of students scoring at/above proficient increased from 56% in February to 59% in March... In grade 3 mathematics, the percent of students scoring at/above proficient in EDM Chapter 5 skills and concepts increased from 43% on the pre-test to 81% on the post-test. In Chapter 6, the percent of grade 3 students scoring at/above proficient increased from 5% on the pre-test to 70% on the post-test... Positive Behavior Support (PBS) data from the month of March was analyzed. Results indicate that 85% of MSS students are functioning successfully. Every student included in the 15% who continue to struggle behaviorally will receive either **Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions**. Tier 2 includes such interventions as check-in, checkout system. Students requiring Tier 3 intervention will have an individualized **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)**... Selected students in second grade have been targeted to receive tutoring either individually or in very small groups (groups of 2 or 3). Tutoring for some students will occur after school; others will receive tutoring before school. MSS has a very intensive reading intervention program in place for first grade students. The **tutoring intervention** has been modeled after that intervention, with a focus on key skills needed for second grade students to make a more successful transition into third grade. Student progress will be carefully monitored. Tutoring will occur three days per week.*

Most of the month of March was spent focusing on the CMT at **Center Road School**. For almost three weeks students in grades 3, 4, and 5 participated in both regular administration and/or make-up administration of the subtests. Classroom teachers are confident that students were prepared and are proud of their students' efforts... The **after-school math academy** continues to run smoothly. Teachers have been trained in using the **SRBI data base** and **progress monitoring system**... In grades K-5, **data teams** continue to focus on their **SMART goals**. Results are as follows:

- The percent of grade 1 students scoring at/above goal in **alphabetical order** increased from 57% to 97% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 12<sup>th</sup>.
- The percent of students scoring at/above goal in **Strand C: Making Connections** increased from 19% to 66% in grade 2, from 58% to 60% in grade 3, from 49% to 60% in grade 4, and from 24% to 37% in grade 5 as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 12<sup>th</sup>.
- The percent of grade 1 students scoring at/above goal in **fact families** increased from 8% to 89% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 12<sup>th</sup>.
- The percent of students scoring at/above goal in **integrated understandings** increased from 32% to 40% in grade 2 and from 12% to 39% in grade 3.

At the **district level**, coordinators and supervisors are working hard to support teaching and learning and to improve curriculum and instruction:

- **K-12 Health and Physical Education** teachers continued to work on data and curriculum revision. VCMS's mini smart goal was 80% of eighth graders in the push up test will increase 3 push ups as measured by a common assessment given on April 14<sup>th</sup>... The Elementary PE teachers shared data for March's 10 minute challenge, 75% of the students have met goal... RHS sophomores are finishing the **Connecticut Fitness Test**, those who were not tested during the fall physical education semester.
- At the recent **Connecticut Association of Athletic Directors** (CAAD) Conference, Module #15 was presented – Concussions and Neck Injuries. This module must be taught by only Connecticut Coaching Education Program (CCEP) approved instructors which include both an Athletic Director and an Athletic Trainer. An act concerning student athletes and concussions will be enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly. For the school year commencing July 1, 2010, and each school year thereafter, any person who holds or is issued a coaching permit by the SDE and is a coach of intramural or interscholastic athletics shall complete an initial training course regarding concussions and head injuries.
- The **School Wellness Council** met on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at RHS. Thank you to the LSS community for hosting the **Lion's Leap** on Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup>. It was a beautiful day and a terrific turnout. Prior to the event, the LSS community received a banner to display at the school in recognition of being the 2008-2009 school year champion based on student participation in different events throughout the year...The **school wellness policy** revision was not approved at the recent BOE meeting. The council will continue to research how to best address the limitations on food fundraisers.
- A letter has been developed to inform student athletes and other interested groups in the community that on May 6<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm. in the RHS auditorium, Sarah Panzau will share with audiences the power of making good and bad decisions. By sharing this story, Sarah hopes to impress upon adolescent audiences the importance of making the right choices, not drinking before age 21, respecting parents, learning the meaning of "real" friends, and rising above disabilities.
- Three members of the **World Language Department** (Jaya Vijayasekar, Alba Osorio, and Babacar Ndao) attended the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages where presentation topics included **standards, differentiation, public relations, assessment,** and **advocacy for early language programs**... Data teams continue to work on readings as well as on common assessments for French, German, and Spanish classes. At the middle school, classes continue to focus on **building vocabulary** and report the following data: *The percent of grade 8 French students scoring at/above proficient in **vocabulary** increased from 69% to 73% as measured by a common assessment given on/by April 12, 2010.*
- **Vernon's Fine Arts staff** showcased student work at the Rockville Public Library from March 1-31<sup>st</sup>. A reception and music performance kicked off the exhibit on March 1<sup>st</sup>... With a focus on **building academic vocabulary data teams** report the following **SMART goals**: *The percent of art students scoring at/above proficient in **vocabulary** will increase from 45% to 75% in grade 5 and from 61% to 75% in Photography II classes. The percent of music students scoring at/above proficient in **vocabulary** will increase from 57% to 70% in grade 5 and from 52% to 83% in grade 5 & 7 instrumental band. The percent of grade 8 General Music students scoring at/above proficient in **vocabulary** increased from 76% to 100% as measured by a common assessment given on/by March 7, 2010.*

- Goals for the 2010-11 school year were discussed and established at the March **School-to-Business Partnership** meeting. Activities include a mentor program, a job fair for freshmen, job shadowing for sophomores-juniors, and a career “meet and greet” for female students in non-traditional careers... Elementary **summer school** registration forms are being prepared for distribution with the April report card... The attendance committee at RHS has completed and submitted another grant through the **Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance**. Projects funded through this grant application (\$29,666) would (1) engage approximately 25 incoming ninth grade students and their parents in a transition program targeted at goal setting and (2) strengthen the collaboration with the Juvenile Review Board and Court Services... The **Connecticut Assessment of Career and Technical Education** will be administered between April 15 and May 15. This assessment is given to all students who take two credits in one of the following areas: early childhood, allied health, accounting, video production, and agriculture (seniors only).
  
- Skinner Road School kindergarten teacher Deb Hill presented at a “**Vernon Early Childhood Community of Practice**”. Deb shared materials and activities from **Everyday Math**. As a result, the Hockanum Valley Child Day Care Center, **Vernon’s School Readiness Program**, researched these materials more in depth and has purchased them to use in their center, thereby aligning more with the VPS math program. ESL teacher Agata Cavar also presented on teaching young children who are dual language learners... The speech/language pathology department has begun work collecting **Tier I language based strategies** to share with classroom teachers. This is similar to the work the occupational therapists completed last year. Some of the areas they are addressing first are **building vocabulary** and **listening comprehension**... A **Transition to Kindergarten** evening event was held for all Vernon families who have children entering kindergarten in the fall. Deb Hill, kindergarten teacher from SRS and Janice Bickford, kindergarten teacher from MSS, both presented and shared examples of activities. Families had a chance to ask questions and the feedback received was very positive...The “**Families and Staff Together**” (**FAST**) team continues to work on ways to build partnerships with families. A brochure is being developed that will share with families ways to be involved in their child’s education and the benefits. This group is also looking at developing a link on the Vernon school website that could include information directed specifically for parents...The **Vernon Public Schools Autism Spectrum Disorder Steering Committee** is completing all of the final preparations for the first “**Autism Awareness Fair**” to be held at VCMS on April 10<sup>th</sup>. This exciting event is a collaboration of families and professionals committed to improving the lives of children and adults with autism...The **Vernon Preschool Collaborative** continues to explore and implement the concept of the “**Big Idea/Essential Questions**” within their planning.
  
- In support of the district’s three **SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Intervention)** goals,
  1. **Deepen the district’s understanding of SRBI/RTI**
  2. **Strengthen Core Instruction and Tier I Interventions**
  3. **Implement Universal Screenings in K-6 for Math and Reading,**
    - Judy Latonie and eight members of the VPS Reading Department attended Central CT State University’s **Annual Literacy Essentials Conference** on Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup>
    - Vernon’s administrative team continued (1) to consult with CREC SRBI advisor, Ellen Cohn, and (2) to contribute to the draft of Vernon’s expanding **SRBI Handbook**, which can be viewed at ([www.vernonschools.org](http://www.vernonschools.org))

- Numerous meetings across the district have resulted in great discussions on how to choose students for interventions and how to apply **standard decision rules** to student progress monitoring data.
- A document that will define the five areas of reading and offer Tier I suggestions to classroom teachers in each area (**Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension**) is being drafted.
- A K-12 articulation of the **English Language Arts Power Standards** – avoiding omissions, gaps, and overlaps – is being examined.
- Work sessions with small groups of English and Social Studies teachers at VCMS are being held. Developing Priority Standards by working each standard through the **Essential Elements of Curriculum** template (A-H) - including **differentiated materials/activities** and **common standards-based assessments**.
- The application of **Instructional Rounds** and how it compares to a **Classroom Walk Through** is being researched as the district looks for more effective ways to discuss quality of instruction.
- A professional development session was held on March 12<sup>th</sup> with the K-8 reading department to preview **Read Naturally** as a possible **Tier I reading fluency intervention** that teachers could access in their classrooms.
- Spring MAZE assessments have been administered in grades 9 and 10. Data is driving discussions about how best to address student needs.
- **Universal screening** results are being paired with CMT and Common Assessment Data to produce more complete reports that support the need to **triangulate data** before doing any additional diagnostic assessments and/or offering targeted interventions.

### **Recognitions**

*Congratulations to RHS staff members who participated in a weight loss challenge for charity and lost a combination of just over 100 pounds in seven weeks. All proceeds will go to support staff member Connie Poulin who lost her home to a fire.*

*Congratulations to Linda Hahn, Darcy Davis, and the entire music department for a spectacular Spring Concert.*

*Congratulations to the Vernon Fine Arts staff for their efforts to showcase student achievements in the visual and performing arts throughout the month of March.*

*Thank you, Kim McTighe, the SSNAP team, and all those who supported another successful Volleyball Lock-In on March 5<sup>th</sup>.*

*Thank you, Jen Sansoucy and Melissa Barnett, for your efforts to help establish the VCMS afterschool SRBI intervention opportunities.*

*With thanks to Supervisor of Assessment, Grants, and Career Education Jerry Griffin and to all our building level teams (teachers and administrators) for facilitating a most successful administration of the Connecticut Mastery and Connecticut Academic Performance Tests.*

*Congratulations to VCMS language arts teacher Althea Freemer and to her four students who were recognized by Congressman Joe Courtney for their essays on Black History Month.*

*Thank you NES Remedial Reading and Language Arts Specialist Richard O'Brian for developing a Power Point presentation to assist staff in understanding and applying progress monitoring to track student growth.*

*Thank you Maple Street School teachers Kelly Browne and Linda Redekas for meeting with the administrative SRBI team and sharing your successful practices at providing intervention services.*

*With special thanks to the Vernon Police Department, Anne Fischer, Monica Pacheco, Judi Manfre, and Steve Krajewski for helping out with the LSS Lion's Leap.*

*Thank you Sue Zylberman, Diane Hurd, Jen Snyder, and Kristen Becker for donating your time to participate in the "Ready-Set-School" Fair...*

*Thank you to all the members of the Vernon School Readiness Collaborative for your hard work and dedication launching our kindergarten registration campaign.*

*Thank you to the Administrative Team for your willingness to jump into the curriculum writing efforts! Many hands make light work!*