

VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: Richard Paskiewicz
FROM: Debbie Murasso
DATE: September 2009
RE: Monthly Report on Actions to Improve Student Achievement

The month of September flew by. With the late start after Labor Day, there seemed so much to accomplish in this 17-day school month. Amazingly, Vernon administrators and educators rose to the challenge. We have a dedicated staff.

Status of (SIP) DIP Initiatives (successes, challenges): In support of our 2009-10 goals in implementing **SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions)**

Goal 1. Deepen Our District's Understanding and Implementation of SRBI/RTI, K-12;
Goal 2: Strengthen Core Instruction and Tier I Interventions, K-12; and
Goal 3: Implement Universal Screenings in K-6 for Math and Reading.

teams of educators and administrators (affectionately known as SWAT: School Wide Assistance Teams), were trained in and then administered universal screenings in reading and math. Similar to the prevention model used to guide public health policy and screen (blood pressure, temperature, eye and hearing exams) for early detection and treatment, our universal screens for reading and math were administered in September to the entire K-6 student population to "identify" and "treat" early academic learning problems. And with results already in hand, teams are engaged in evaluating and assigning the types of intervention needed... Types or "tiers" of intervention are similar to the levels of medical care: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. The difference between the tiers of intervention in the academic setting is the frequency, duration, and intensity of instruction. **Frequency** is described as how often instruction occurs. **Duration** refers to both the length of the instructional session as well as the length of the instructional "cycle." And **intensity** denotes the student-teacher ratio as well as the targeted focus of instruction... In support of our goals and our work, we are fortunate to be working with Ellen Cohn (author of **Response to Intervention: A Planning and Implementation Guide for School Practitioners**). Her research and experience-based knowledge will guide us monthly in support of our goals.

Rockville High School kicked off the school year with two successful professional development programs: iTEACHER and **data teams**. Data teams have since met twice and all are off to an excellent start. SMART goals include:

- *The percent of physics students scoring at/above proficient in **measurement** will increase from 27% to 75% as measured by a common assessment given on October 19th.*

- The percent of biology, marine science, and environmental science students scoring at/above proficient in **answering compare/contrast questions** will increase from 33% to 43% as measured by a common assessment given on October 16th.
- The percent of earth science students scoring at/above proficient in **converting between metric units** will increase from 75% to 80% as measured by a common assessment given on October 19th.
- The percent of child development students scoring at/above proficient in **classifying** will increase from 72% to 80% as measured by a common assessment given on October 19th.

CAPT scores were mailed to parents early in the month and an update on meeting performance standards was sent a week later. DPT (District Performance Tasks) dates have been set and the first one is scheduled for October... Teachers in the Freshman Academies have been discussing student transitions to the high school. Some are considering using a grading model that allows for students to go back and review material after an assessment and therefore improve their grade by demonstrating a deeper understanding of skills and knowledge, a practice discussed in **Ahead of the Curve**... Administrators and staff have begun meeting to establish Professional Growth Objectives (PGOs) for the year; classroom observations of non-tenured teachers have begun... With the introduction of **We Are the ROCK** posters and the weekly **FRIDAY Rocks** news update, a new and exciting school climate campaign is underway!

Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) is in full swing at **Vernon Center Middle School** with **SOAR** assemblies and songs promoting a shared understanding of core values (**Safety, Organization, Achievement, Responsibility/Respect**). Teachers have explicitly taught what the behavioral expectations are for students in the hallways, the cafeteria, the bathrooms, the buses, and the classroom. The demonstration of unacceptable and the modeling of appropriate behaviors was enjoyed by all... Department **data teams** have held their first meetings. Time was spent reviewing the results of the CMT and establishing new **SMART goals**. The “techie” data team will be working to enter discipline data into **SWIS** for monthly analysis... The Focused Monitoring Data Team will closely examine disciplinary data and suspension rates for students with disabilities. Other SMART goals include

- The percent of sixth grade math students scoring at/above proficient in **ratios/proportions** will increase from 57% to 62% as measured by a common assessment given on October 8th.
- The percent of seventh grade math students scoring at/above proficient in **addition of fractions** will increase from 41% to 50 % as measured by a common assessment given on October 8th.
- The percent of eighth grade special education math students scoring at/above proficient in the **pictorial representation of numbers** will increase from 57% to 62 % as measured by a common assessment given on October 7th.
- The percent of eighth grade reading students scoring at/above proficient in **making reader-to-text connections** will increase from 54% to 59% as measured by a common assessment given on October 14th.
- The percent of seventh grade social studies students scoring at/above proficient in **making reader-to-text connections** will increase from 34% to 39% as measured by a common assessment given on October 2nd.
- The percent of eighth grade science students scoring at/above proficient in **distinguishing chemical and physical changes** will increase from 47% to 52% as measured by a common assessment given on October 13th.
- The percent of special education students **being suspended** will decrease from 20% to 12% as measured by analyzing the ED166 reports on a monthly basis.

...A draft of the **2009-11 School Improvement Plan** has been distributed for review, revision, and updating... As part of the district’s goal, all sixth grade students participated in the universal screenings in math and reading. Data has been analyzed and students eligible for interventions

have been identified. Administration is participating in monthly CALI-sponsored workshops (**Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative**) to broaden our collective understanding and implementation of SRBI.

Compelling Conversations took place in September at **Northeast School**. Administration met individually with each teacher to discuss each student's current reading level, expected end-of-year goal level, and then mapped backward his/her anticipated target levels for the year... **Universal screenings** in reading and math were administered. Data was analyzed and interventions were scheduled based on needs... Understanding the elements of **Tier I** and the responsibilities of classroom teachers for **core instruction with differentiation** continues... The **PBS** team will attend its first two-day training session in October.

Students at **Maple Street** were screened the first week of school using Vernon's **universal screening tools**. An analysis of the results identified students as **high, medium, or low risk** in having the requisite literacy and numeracy skills critical to school success. Further diagnostic testing of those in the medium to high risk categories was conducted and **interventions** were identified and scheduled for those identified. Students receiving interventions will be assessed every two weeks (**progress monitoring**) to determine growth. If students do not demonstrate progress, staff will re-evaluate the efficacy and appropriateness of current interventions and determine alternatives as needed... Maple Street has begun its second full year of implementing **Positive Behavior Supports**.

A host of activities at **Center Road School** focused on school improvement. At grade level meetings educators discussed **CMT results, data teams**, and the **SRBI framework**. Each CMT strand was examined with an eye toward aligning goals to **professional growth objectives** (PGOs) and to the **School Instructional Plan**... Enormous amounts of time went into the planning and implementation of the first **universal screenings** in reading and math. A newly formed SRBI building level committee will work to define the protocol for implementing the many facets of the framework.

September marks the beginning of **Lake Street School's** 50th anniversary. A committee of teachers has been formed and many exciting events are being planned as "**LSS Celebrates 50 Years of Excellence**." A kick-off event (an aerial photo of all staff and students arranged in the shape of a "50") has been scheduled for October 21st at 9 AM on the back playing field... In support of student achievement all **universal screenings** have been completed and **intervention groups** in kindergarten and grade one are scheduled to commence. There is positive energy as interventions are developed and **student progress** in reaching grade level expectations **is closely monitored**... Our new reading series has been a welcome addition as we **strengthen our core curriculum** in reading/language arts... **Data teams** have established the following SMART goals:

- *The percent of kindergarten/grade 1 students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying the main character is a story** will increase from 66% to 85% as measured by a common assessment administered on/by October 21, 2009.*
- *The percent of grade 2 students scoring at/above goal in **identifying setting and characters of a story** will increase from 41% to 80% as measured by a common assessment administered on/by September 30, 2009.*
- *The percent of grade 5 students scoring at/above goal in **making text-to-text connections** will increase from 5% to 25% as measured by a common assessment given on/by October 21, 2009.*

The AYP designation of "Safe Harbor" at **Skinner Road School** validates the coherence and concerted efforts on improving literacy. The process of continuous improvement will be supported by the **implementation of the new Treasures reading program**... At its first data

team meeting, staff worked as a group to identify CMT successes and areas in need of improvement. The importance of **vertical teaming** was reaffirmed.

At the district level, all members of the administrative team are working hard to improve teaching and learning:

- The **School Wellness Committee** met on September 22nd to continue working on policy revision... At the Town Council meeting on September 15th, the **Mayor's Cup Fitness Challenge** was presented to Lake Street School while the "**Vernon Gets Moving**" recognition goes out to all schools for finishing in one of the categories top three places...
- Health and Physical Education teachers met this month for data team and department meetings. All levels have developed SMART goals related to the 'Third Generation CT Physical Fitness Assessment.' Changes have occurred since the "Second Generation" relative to the curl-ups, sit & reach, and mile run. Schools have an option to participate in the PACER (Progressive Aerobic Cardiovascular Endurance Run), a multi stage aerobic fitness test that provides a built in warm up for children to pace themselves.
- Using **Connecticut's Guide to Curriculum Development**, the business and technology education departments are writing new curriculum that includes alignment to state standards, the identification of essential questions, the establishment of pacing guides, as well as embedded literacy and numeracy activities, where appropriate.
- VCMS, NES, and SRS are reviewing and deciding how best to use the new **Connecticut Benchmark Assessment**. Administered in October, February, and May, this formative assessment provides a status of students' grade level expectations for each of the months it is given. In order to provide for the administration of the assessment which is given online using the MIST delivery system, VCMS will need to upgrade their switching system to allow for better bandwidth for using the assessment for larger groups of students.
- Two technology professional development grants were submitted to CREC. The grants support district initiatives to train teachers in video production and in the use of interactive white boards.
- Successful professional development sessions for the K-12 Fine Arts Staff (Art & Music) were held on September 3-4, 2009. Elementary Art and Music educators initiated a process to plan a common curricular instructional unit that can be consistently delivered across the district. K-12 Art and Music educators then enjoyed an arts literacy session that focused on the themes of pattern, rhythm, and culture while employing African drumming techniques... With thanks for the professional efforts, passion, and enthusiasm of our Fine Arts educators for their willingness, patience, and support through a transition that includes many new practices and people!
- On June 26th -30th, VCMS Science Teachers attended the first five days of training as part of their involvement in the INTERDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE, INQUIRY AND LITERACY TRAINING through Central Connecticut State University. The Connecticut River Valley serves as the context for this institute designed for 25 middle school teachers from Cromwell, Hartford, Vernon and Wethersfield. Guided by biology and geology faculty, teachers explored the physical aspects of the state's ecosystems and learn to integrate science instruction and student assessment with literacy and research strategies. Field trips to Hammonasset State Park, the Thimble Islands and the trap rock ridges in Berlin were part of the initial training.
- During the months July & August members of Math Committee worked on Elementary Math Curriculum, **standards, pacing guides, quarterly benchmark assessments, and CMT review packets**. Teachers completed drafts of grade level pacing guides, standards documents, and quarterly benchmark assessments.
- On August 25th, VCMS science teachers attended a workshop on integrating technology into the science curriculum as part of the VISION grant. The training was held in the VCMS library and was conducted by Joseph Fromme from CREC.

- On September 18th, Grade 1 teachers from Lake Street and Center Road Schools were trained in the use of the FOSS inquiry-based science kit/unit - Balance & Motion. This is a new unit for grade 1 this year.
- On September 23rd, Christopher Ozmun, Rebecca Broderson, and Deb Duarte attended a meeting at Rockbestos Suprenant Cable Company in East Granby to discuss our partnership with the New England Air Museum, Rockbestos, Bombardier, Alstom, and Hamilton Sundstrand. The purpose of the group is to interest students in careers in the aviation industry. The companies involved have agreed to assist teachers with developing some degree of appropriate curriculum directed at manufacturing; offer student mentoring between a professional who is able to offer “quality” time each week and an interested student; be available for classroom discussions; and offer periodic factory tours for teachers/students.
- District leaders (in reading and math) continue to guide and to support our SRBI goals by (1) reading extensively on the topic (good information and direction coming from the National Center on Response to Intervention – rticenter@air.org); (2) analyzing universal screening data to communicate information about widespread weaknesses in core instruction and suggesting Tier I interventions to classroom teachers; and (3) working with school-based teams to analyze universal screening data and to determine what it means for core instruction and for intervention.
- Family-Student-School Relations have been enhanced through the establishment of Friday Friend’s Clubs at both RHS and VCMS over the past school year. These projects are fully established and operating with continued growth and success, each having a positive impact on student self-esteem and social growth... A Transition Committee comprised of parents and staff has been established to design a plan for the successful transition of students from VCMS to RHS who are on the ASD spectrum.

Recognitions

Thank you, Judy Latonie and Chris Ozmun, for your leadership in providing training and protocol for the administration of universal screening in K-6.

Congratulations to all of our school SWAT teams for their outstanding implementation of our new learning! Your efforts were a thing of beauty!

Congratulations to the RHS Athletic Program Evaluation Committee. The report received by the CIAC and presented to our Board of Education validates the many successes of our program and outlines opportunities (recommendations) for future growth.

*Thank you to the tireless optimism of the VCMS staff (and to all of our staff) who believe that every day they make a difference – because they do!
Special thanks to disc jockey Mr. Owens!*

Congratulation to Eric Uthgenannt of Skinner Road School, this year’s recipient of the CTAHPERD Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year Award.

Congratulations to Board of Education Chairperson Anne Fischer, this year’s recipient of the CTAHPERD Honorary Layman’s Award. This award is given to a citizen of the State of Connecticut who has given great service to the cause of health and physical activity.