

# VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

November always seems a choppy month as scheduled events/holidays allow for only one full week of school.

On November 3, 2009, the district held its third of four full inservice days for professional development. With a focus on ***the improvement of teaching and learning***, workshop sessions focused on such topics as *Implementing a Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum; Treasures Anthology Implementation; Special Education District Data and Educational Benefit; Guidance Monitoring of Student Achievement and Attendance; Curriculum Alignment, Articulation, and Assessment*; etc. Our fourth and final inservice for the 2009-10 school year will be held on Tuesday, January 19, 2010. As designed, it is a building-based day and activities will be planned/facilitated by our building principals.

On November 4, 2009, the ***District Improvement Planning Committee*** met to finalize the 2009-11 ***District Improvement Plan (DIP)***. The DIP and building level ***School Improvement Plans (SIPs)*** are required for any Title I district/schools identified as "In Need of Improvement." On December 16<sup>th</sup> the DIP Committee will meet once again to ***conduct a peer review*** of the School Improvement Plans from Maple Street, Northeast, Vernon Center Middle, and Rockville High Schools. The committee will use a state-designed rubric to determine evidence of each of the ten required elements:

1. **Data Analysis:** Evidence that the plan is based on an analysis of data by subgroups.
2. **Annual Measurable Objectives:** Specific measurable achievement goals; Targets for each of the groups of students identified in disaggregated data; No more than 3-5 goals.
3. **Strategies:** Incorporates scientifically based research strategies.
4. **Monitoring and Measuring:** Clearly reflects how, when, and by whom implementation of strategies will be monitored and measured; Clearly reflects how, when, and by whom student achievement will be monitored and measured.
5. **Core Academic Subjects:** Addresses the fundamental teaching and learning needs in the schools; Addresses the fundamental teaching and learning needs of specific academic problems of low achieving students.
6. **Professional Development:** Addresses professional development needs of instructional staff as related to the cause of identification; Commits to not less than 10% of funds received under subpart 2 for each fiscal year identified for improvement; Is highly focused and aligned to goals and strategies; Clearly identifies the targeted audience and outcomes for each professional development.
7. **Specific Responsibility of District and State:** Specifies responsibilities of District and State, including technical assistance.

8. **Strategies for Parent/Guardian Involvement:** Includes strategies to promote effective parent/guardian involvement; Parents/guardians are part of the planning and decision making process; Training for staff is included.
9. **Activities Before School, After School, and Extensions of School Year:** Activities before and after school, during the summer, and an extension of school year.
10. **Teacher Mentoring Program:** Incorporates a teacher mentoring program

Following a successful peer review, the **District and School Improvement Plans** will be presented to the Board of Education for approval.

At **Rockville High School** the first meeting of the **Drop Out Prevention Committee** was held. With a \$5000 planning grant provided by Vernon's participation in the Governor's Summit, the committee will research best practice, examine the efficacy of current practices (i.e., REACH), conduct site visits to exemplary programs, and recommend program improvements designed to reduce the drop out rate... In support of student achievement, a list of students at risk of attaining proficiency on the tenth grade CAPT has been generated and plans to run an after school tutorial program in January and February is being designed... Our UCONN student teachers are beginning to formulate their inquiry projects and some will be designed to help RHS meet the needs of our targeted students... Data teams continue to provide teachers with valuable information about teaching and learning. Current **SMART goals** are as follows:

- *The percent of biology, environmental science, and marine science students scoring at/above proficiency in **graphing analysis** will increase from 57.9% to 70% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 7, 2009.*
- *The percent of chemistry students scoring at/above proficiency in **weighted averages** will increase from 53.4% to 68% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 7, 2009.*
- *The percent of earth science students scoring at/above proficiency in **determining whether chemical bonds between atoms will be ionic or covalent** will increase from 44.5% to 65% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 7, 2009.*
- *The percent of Food for Today students scoring at/above proficient in **halving and doubling whole numbers and fractions with kitchen math conversions** will increase from 34.4% to 66% as measured by a common assessment given on December 7, 2009.*
- *The percent of Algebra I students scoring at/above proficient in **CAPT percent problems** increased from 22% to 50% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 9<sup>th</sup>.*

**Vernon Center Middle School** recognized students who demonstrated the **SOAR core values** during the first marking period with an activity period on the day before Thanksgiving vacation. Students could chose among many activities including computer games, bingo, making cards for soldiers, Broadway sing-a-long, scrapbooking, volleyball, board games, and a great new release movie in the auditorium. Students who did not meet criteria for participating were involved in retraining activities to reinforce the core values. Thirty-three out of 804 students or 4.1% of the population had one minor offense (referral). They participated in a 30-minute retraining and were then able to join in their selected activity. Sixty-one students (7.6% of the population) had one major or two or more minor offenses and participated in retraining throughout the activity period. Students participating in retraining made a commitment to follow the core values and upon completion of all of the training received a clean slate towards the next recognition activity. In total, 11.7% of the school population had one or more referrals during the first marking period which is lower than the nationwide norm of 15%. The goal is to reduce the number of student with referrals, especially those with multiple referrals... **Data teams** continue to record positive results.

- *The percent of grade 6 students scoring at or above proficient in **ratios and proportions using graphic representations** was 81%, exceeding the goal of 70%.*

- The percent of grade 6 social studies students scoring at or above proficient in **forming a general understanding** of the reading increased from 61% to 76%.
- Grade 8 science students increased proficiency in **phases of matter** from 50% on a pre-test to 76% on a post-test.

Following a meeting with CREC consultant Neil Cowan, plans for the January professional development day at VCMS are being finalized. While still targeted at **CALI (Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative)**, the focus of the day has changed slightly. Staff will examine how creating **common formative assessments** will **clarify curricular standards, improve the data team process and analysis of student work**, and ultimately **improve instruction**. Mr. Cowan will follow up with each of the grade level/subject specific data teams for two-hour sessions to analyze the effectiveness of the common formative assessments... The VCMS science department participated in grade level **“assured experience”** workshops. Each grade level spent a day researching and planning activities to be used to enhance student learning. These lessons involved the use of the portable computer lab which VCMS was able to obtain as part of the technology grant awarded for the 2009-10 school year. The department continues to meet monthly to examine recent results from the grade level common assessments and continues its work to identify student strengths and obstacles to better prepare for the spring 2010 CMTs... Following the distribution of the November report cards, guidance and administration worked with teacher teams to identify students who require additional support and assistance. Those students who have failed two or more subjects are “flagged” and **Student Success Plans** are developed to address needs. Developed in collaboration with teachers, support staff, parents, and individual students, interventions (Tier 1 & 2) and strategies are implemented and reviewed every two weeks... On November 12<sup>th</sup>, the **Focused Monitoring team** met to examine its most recent student discipline and suspension data. On a positive note VCMS continues to make strides in addressing behavior at the classroom level. On a discouraging note, the percentage of special education students suspended has not decreased significantly. VCMS staff will continue to examine data, discuss reasons, and brainstorm solutions to further decrease suspensions and office referrals. **FBA (Functional Behavioral Assessments) and BIP (Behavior Intervention Plans)** will be generated to drill down to root causes and plan accordingly.

**Center Road School** continues to emphasize the importance of **“homework and practice”** from the list of **research-based strategies** presented in the book **Classroom Instruction that Works** by Marzano, Pickering, and Polluck. The **Homework Hall of Fame** is proudly displayed and celebrates students who have completed all of their homework for the month. In one first grade class, Mrs. Wilde’s, 100% of the students completed and returned their homework every day. Administration looks forward to displaying the results for all classes for the month of November... Continuing its emphasis on **research-based strategies**, staff is also focused on **“reinforcing effort and providing recognition”** on a school wide basis. At its monthly meeting in December, all students who received an “E” in effort and/or conduct on their report cards will be recognized... The **SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions)** process is progressing nicely. Interventionists are beginning to see some positive trends through their **progress monitoring**... **Data teams** report the following:

- The percent of first grade students scoring at/above goal in **counting pennies and nickels** increased from 73% to 93% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 1<sup>st</sup>.
- The percent of grade three students scoring at/above goal in **integrated understandings (Strand 25)** increased from 33% to 78% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 16<sup>th</sup>.
- The percent of grade four students scoring at/above goal in **Strand A (Forming a General Understanding)** increased from 23% to 50% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 18<sup>th</sup>.
- The percent of grade 5 students scoring at/above goal in **Strand A (Forming a General Understanding)** increased from 48% to 72% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Skinner Road's School Instructional Plan (SIP)** for the 2009-2010 school year was finalized. The reflection on last school year's SIP demonstrated incremental forward progress. Even though some measures from last year's (2008-2009) SIP showed that the goal was not achieved, there was still significant forward progress. Through the combination of continued excellent writing scores on the 2008-2009 CMT administration (incredible and effective instruction by SRS teachers through the incorporation of **Empowering Writers**) and forward progress in reading (especially for the free or reduced subgroup), Skinner Road School achieved "**Safe Harbor.**" Teachers are extremely proud of the progress their students achieved! Teachers attribute this progress to their focused instruction, collaboration (through horizontal and vertical teaming) and successful, high yield instructional strategies used... **Tier I and II interventions** and **progress monitoring** are on-going. In mathematics, progress is being monitored for students who were identified at risk at the beginning of the year. Through Tier I intervention, 76% of students (using the fall cut scores) have successfully moved out of the high risk category for computation. Using the higher/more stringent standard of the winter cut scores, only 25% of students have moved out of the high risk category for computation. Implementation of the interventions is being closely monitored and analyzed to provide for efficient remediation of student skills... **Data teams** report the following:

- *The percent of kindergarten students scoring at/above goal in **answering the question "What is the setting of the story?"** increased from 39% to 64%.*
- *The percent of grade 1 students scoring at/above goal in **identifying or inferring setting with supporting details** increased from 0% to 89%.*
- *The percent of grade 3 students able to **form a general understanding and develop an interpretation** increased from 57% to 69% at proficient and from 30% to 50% at goal.*
- *The percent of grade 4 students scoring at/above proficient in **Strand D (Examining the Content and Structure)** increased from 12% to 88% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 24<sup>th</sup>.*
- *The percent of grade 5 students able to **identify author's purpose** increased from 66% to 89% at proficient and from 55% to 85% at goal.*

At **Maple Street School**, 58% of second graders scored proficient or higher on their November writing prompt. Results of the first quarter math benchmark assessment were mixed. Overall, 57.3% of students in grades K-5 achieved scores of 80% or higher. 73.5% of students achieved scores of 70% or higher. Students in grades K-2 performed very well (all but one class having over 80% of students scoring 70% or higher), with students in grades 3-5 obtaining relatively lower scores... Reading staff has used **progress monitoring data** to determine which students should continue with current interventions, which students should be considered for exit from services, and which students for whom the current interventions are not proving effective. The second round of meetings between the principal and classroom teachers will occur in December to **track student progress** and determine needs for changes in interventions and services...The **Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) team** is holding monthly meetings to review behavioral data and discuss initiatives to enhance functioning of the overall PBS plan. The team will organize its first school-wide behavior reward activity to be held in December. Students who have met behavioral expectations will be able to choose to participate in a variety of special activities. Those students who have not adhered to behavioral expectations will attend re-teaching sessions (either for the full time or part of the time based on the number and type of behavioral incidents they have experienced)... Students in grades 3-5 will take a math CMT-type assessment to determine their preparedness for taking the CMT in March. Results will help guide next steps for mathematics instruction. MSS is exploring options for extending the kindergarten day further for some who could benefit from more additional academic support.

**Northeast School's Improvement Plan (SIP)** was completed this month and submitted for peer review... The first **Family Reading Night** of the year for fourth and fifth grade students was a big success. Many families attended and enjoyed both a reading of the book **The Magician's Elephant** and a potluck dinner... As part of its year one participation in **Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)**, four Northeast staff members attended **SWIS (School Wide Information System)** training. SWIS is

a web-based office referral database which enables staff the ability to track and monitor problem behaviors... **Data teams** are focused on the following:

- *The percent of kindergarten students scoring at/above proficient in **differentiating between letters and words** will increase from 43% to 75% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 17<sup>th</sup>.*
- *The percent of grade two students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying plot (beginning, middle, and end)** increased from 55% to 81% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 1, 2009.*
- *The percent of grade four students scoring at/above proficient in **estimating solutions to problems** will increase from 18% to 80% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 3, 2009.*

November was an eventful month at **Lake Street School**. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, elementary classroom teachers participated in a follow-up full day workshop on the implementation of the new **Treasures reading anthology**... On November 18<sup>th</sup>, the day began with a **school wide morning meeting** and greetings were shared in three different languages. In the form of a hangman game, fifth grade student leaders put their leadership skills to the test and reviewed the school's expectations. Following student recognitions, the meeting ended with a slide show announcing **Lake Street School's 50<sup>th</sup> Year Kick-Off Celebration**... **Data teams** are working on the following SMART goals:

- *The percent of kindergarten/grade 1 students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying story setting** will increase from 84% to 90% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 16<sup>th</sup>.*
- *The percent of grade 2 students scoring at/above proficient in **identifying the main idea** will increase from 44% to 75% as measured by a common assessment given on/by December 15<sup>th</sup>.*

**At the district level, program administrators and supervisors are working hard to support teaching and learning.**

- The process by which tutorial services are provided for families of students with chronic school phobia and school avoidance behaviors is now being addressed in a much more efficient and effective manner through the establishment of a **Tutorial Services Center** approach. Fully implemented on November 23, 2009, the centralized approach to the provision of tutorial services will result in a reduction of costs associated with the provision of tutorial services for grades 6-12. The new Tutorial Services Center, located at 30 West Main Street, is open between the hours of 9:00 AM and 12:30 PM Monday through Thursday. The center is staffed with one tutor who can provide individualized services to several students at the same time. A secondary tutor is available on an on-call basis for higher level learning in the science and mathematics disciplines. Bus transportation is provided to and from the Center at 8:30 AM and 12:40 PM. This new system eliminates the need for previous system of individually designed services, which were often costly and logistically complex to orchestrate.
- The **School Wellness Committee** met on November 17<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the past month's accomplishments. More than 100 participated in the *Family Turkey Trot* held on Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at Skinner Road School. The *Dickens' Day Stroll* is scheduled for December 5<sup>th</sup>... The Public Works Department is in the process of having a banner created to recognize this year's *Mayor's Cup Fitness Challenge Champion*... On Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, Congressman Joe Courtney will be at RHS attending a listening session sponsored by the School Nutrition Association of CT, the Vernon Board of Education, Foodshare, the CT Association for Human Services, and the CT Food Bank. The session will focus on the **Child Nutrition Reauthorization** with a priority for ending childhood hunger by 2015... Final revisions to the **School Wellness Policy** will be reviewed at the December 15<sup>th</sup> meeting.

- Health and Physical Education teachers examined the results of the **CPFA (Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment)**. Sixty (60) percent of all students (grades 4, 6, 8, and 10) passed all four standards (curl-ups, push-ups, flexibility, and mile run). The grade 10 results will be finalized in April as students who did not have a PE class until spring semester will have to be tested at that time.
- On Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, Richard O'Brian and Judy Latonie attended the first session in the SRBI lecture series sponsored by the Connecticut Reading Association – *What is SRBI? Essential Components of SRBI* with Dr. Richard Allington, author of ***What Really Matters in RTI: Research Based Designs***. The next session in the series is on December 5<sup>th</sup> at the Capitol Building in Hartford... As we apply ***standard decision rules*** and consider dismissing some students from Tier II interventions, we are diving into the difficult conversations that rise when classroom teachers are asked to articulate what Tier I interventions the student is receiving and will continue to receive in the classroom. This has become an opportunity to review the current state of Tier I interventions and support teachers as they begin to develop a much needed, larger repertoire of Tier I interventions... ***Winter Universal Screenings*** are scheduled in all six schools during the month of January. With experience and confidence in our practices, this round will happen much more quickly than the fall screenings... The ***SRBI database*** is up and running and houses the fall universal screening data. It is ready to accept the winter screening data and we are ready to pilot the entry of ***progress monitoring data***.
- Through the ***Vernon Preschool Collaborative***, our efforts to ***close preparation gaps*** have increased exponentially: 129 preschoolers are currently enrolled, 71 are eligible via federal poverty guidelines, 33 children are identified with disabilities, and 25 children are eligible via lottery. In support of ***the link between healthy children and academic achievement***, all preschoolers enrolled receive either a healthy breakfast, lunch, or snack and all have received vision, hearing, and educational screenings. In support of ***the link between parental involvement and academic achievement***, most families have received a home visit and monthly family events have focused on positive parenting skills.
- On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the ***World Language Department*** learned how to use Skype, a software application that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. CREC consultant Joe Fromme facilitated the session by showing the group how to register and set up an account. While able to hear the person on the other end through microphones, technological difficulties prevented the group from being able to converse. With a quick adjustment, however, the group was able to successfully skype with Laura Franklin, Professor of French at Northern Virginia Community College. Dr. Franklin walked the group through the MERLOT website which houses a wealth of resources for all the languages taught at RHS... On November 4<sup>th</sup>, the World Language and ESL Departments organized and hosted the ***International Tea*** with over 200 in attendance.
- District administrators and special education teachers met to discuss ***vocational training for students with disabilities***. Students attending the TALC Program will be surveyed on their vocational interests and a list of possible vocational activities will be developed. A process that would involve TALC teachers, vocational teachers, vocational resources, etc., is being discussed.
- The ***Technology Department*** has a new ***articulation agreement*** with Asnuntuck Community College. Students who have successfully completed Electronics I will earn college credit equivalents that can be applied toward a technical career path in *Manufacturing Electronics & Controls Technology* or *Manufacturing Electronics Fundamentals*.
- The results of the fall administration of the grade 3 ***Otis Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT)*** have been received and will be shared with elementary principals at the December ESP (Elementary School Principal) meeting, with the Board at its January meeting, and with parents with the January report card.
- Throughout the month of November, Chris Ozmun has been working in collaboration with the Education and Math Departments at Eastern Connecticut State University and other participating districts on the ***Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Application***. The goal of

the grant is to use mathematical modeling to increase teachers' content knowledge and enhance their instructional practices. The grant will also work to integrate reading and writing with mathematics content, its teaching, and assessment.

- **Art and Music teachers** completed and shared their most successful SMART goal results from their **November Fine Arts Data team meetings**. With a focus on vocabulary development in the content area, teachers of the fine arts are connecting and contributing to their schools' and district's goals for improving student achievement in reading. Their results are as follows:
  - *The percent of grade 5 students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding art vocabulary** increased from 59% to 75% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 9<sup>th</sup>.*
  - *The percent of Foundations of Art & Design students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding art vocabulary** increased from 24% to 55% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 9<sup>th</sup>.*
  - *The percent of Photography students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding art vocabulary** increased from 33% to 72% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 9<sup>th</sup>.*
  - *The percent of grade 5 students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding music vocabulary** increased from 26% to 87% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 9<sup>th</sup>.*
  - *The percent of grades 9-12 students scoring at/above proficient in **understanding music vocabulary** increased from 21% to 88% as measured by a common assessment given on/by November 9<sup>th</sup>.*

## **Recognitions**

*Congratulations to the World Languages and ESL Departments for organizing another successful RHS International Tea.*

*Congratulations to RHS teachers Vicki Nordlund, Shawn Santos, and Katherine Pitts for facilitating a Poetry Reading with twenty student readers.*

*To the hard working VCMS PBS committee (Teresa Schmitt, Christina Roy, Julie Bilyak, Nianne Kemble, Alice Schmidt, and Jason Magao), thank you for organizing a successful activity day!*

*Thank you to all CRS teachers for working so hard on the report cards sent home in November. It was obvious that teachers spent numerous hours on the detailed and informative narrative comments.*

*Thank you SRS teachers for your dedication and professionalism in the implementation of the SRBI Framework. Thank you special education teachers for working so hard with the children and staff as we monitor the progress of students more closely with the new and comprehensive SRBI team forms.*

*Thank you MSS grade level data teams for your commitment to meeting on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in order to review data and make instructional changes as needed.*

*Thank you, Patti Buell and all of the school psychologists, social workers, and counselors, who came to Northeast School on Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> to support staff and students with the loss of fifth grade student Jesse Young.*

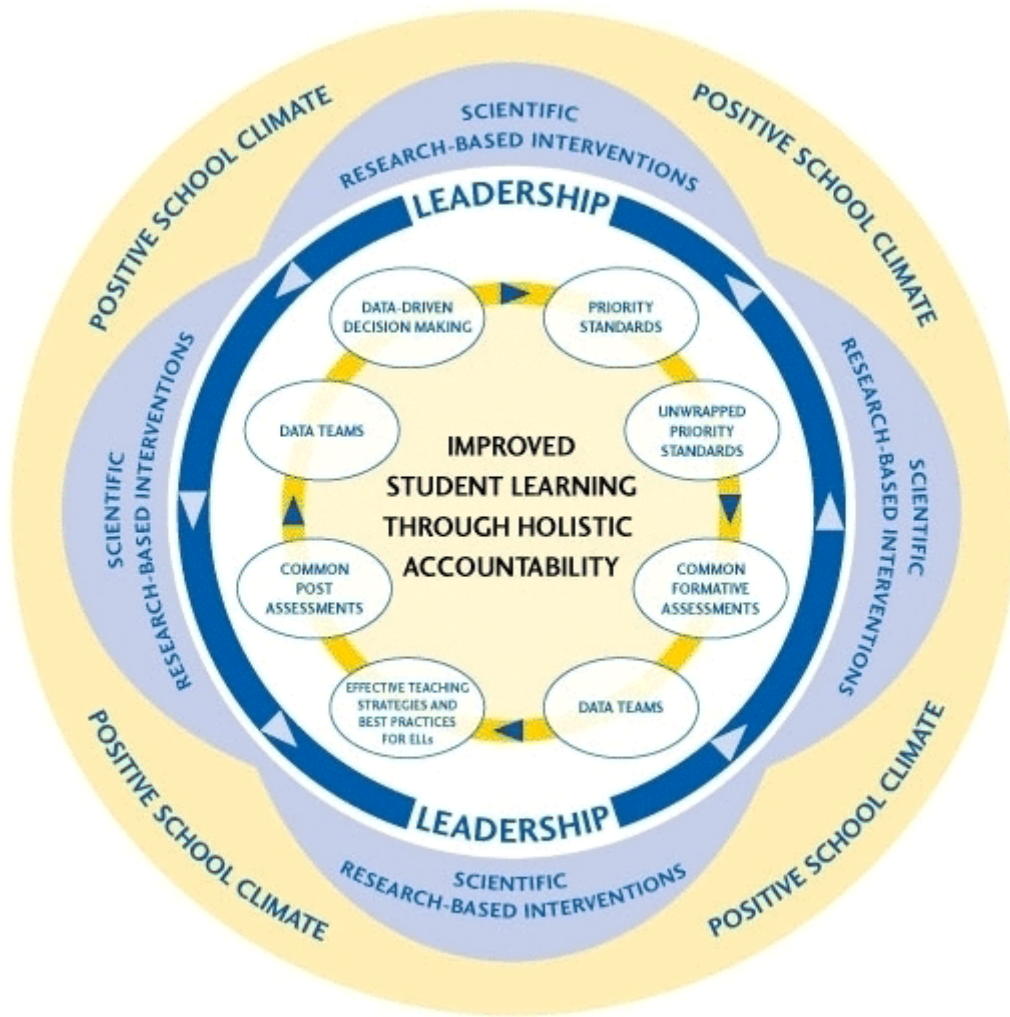
*Thank you LSS music teacher Karen Davis and fifth grade student leaders for organizing an exciting school wide morning meeting!*

*Thank you to all of the K-5 Reading/Language Arts Consultants who stepped up to share the facilitator role for the November 3<sup>rd</sup> Professional development Day.*

*Congratulations to the RHS Marching Band, director Darcy Davis, and all associated Band staff, recognized as the Outstanding High School Band in the Connecticut Veteran's Day Parade held on Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup> in Hartford.*

*With gratitude to all Vernon parents who volunteer their time to be on our school committees!  
We thank you!*

**Connecticut's Accountability for Learning Initiative**



***The best schools are those that never stop learning!***