



**CSDE**

**QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

## **Danbury Public Schools**

# **Quality Review Report**

**Danbury Public Schools**

**63 Beaver Brook Road  
Danbury  
Connecticut  
06810**

**Superintendent: Sal Pascarella**

**Dates of review: January 26 – 30, 2009**

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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the district

Danbury is a town of approximately 75,000 people which lies in northern Fairfield County Connecticut. There are approximately 9,900 students enrolled in Danbury Public Schools. The Danbury Public School district consists of 18 schools. There are 14 elementary schools (grades kindergarten-5), including the Western Connecticut Academy for International Studies (AIS) Magnet School. There are two middle schools (grades 6-8), Broadview Middle School, and Rogers Park Middle School, with each serving over 1,100 students. Rogers Park Middle School is also home to The Exploration Academy which currently serves 100 6th and 7th graders from Broadview and Rogers Park. There is one comprehensive high school (grades 9-12), Danbury High School (DHS) which serves 3,000 students and a small alternative high school, The Alternative Center for Excellence (ACE). The district also has two English as a Second Language (ESL) school-based reception centers that welcome its non-English speaking students and are designed to help students and parents adjust to the culture of Danbury schools.

The district is demographically diverse. Thirty-three point four percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which is below the figure of 41.8 percent found in similar communities but higher than the State average of 28.7 percent. Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including 52 percent White students, 30 percent Hispanic students, 10 percent Black students, and 8 percent Asian American and American Indian. Thirty-seven point five percent of the district's students come from homes where English is not the primary language. The number of non-English home languages is 46. Ten point five percent of the student population receives special education services, which is slightly below the 11.5 percent average for both similar districts and the State. Sixty-five point two percent of kindergarten students attended preschool, nursery school or Headstart, which is below both the 76.8 percent for similar districts and the State average of 79.2 percent.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the district does well

The district leadership team has a good understanding of the district's strengths and areas for improvement based on an increased awareness and use of student data.

There are good operational and management systems for human resources and finance.

There are good systems and procedures for ensuring compliance with State directives and for supporting students with disabilities.

The district is implementing a coherent elementary literacy program, supported by effective professional development.

### What the district needs to improve

Raise achievement and improve test results for all students and subgroups, particularly English language learners by:

- o reviewing and revising the comprehensive curriculum for grades kindergarten through 12 in all subjects to provide enhanced guidance to teachers on pacing, differentiated instructional strategies, assessment techniques and expected learning outcomes;
- o developing a shared understanding of what constitutes high quality teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students in all subject areas;
- o supporting schools to further develop data teams so that better use is made of data to inform the planning of teachers, and lessons are better matched to the needs of the students; and
- o embedding the frequent use of formative assessment data to inform planning and instruction.

Enhance consistency and develop unity of purpose across the district by:

- o further developing the culture of the district to ensure that all stakeholders are empowered to actively engage in the strategic planning process resulting in wide spread ownership and commitment;
- o establishing structured forums for all stakeholders to have the opportunity to regularly share feedback, including satisfaction surveys, to reflect on the district and school strategies for improving achievement;
- o improving the coherence and quality of communication at all levels within the district; and
- o continue to support and nurture the fledgling administrative union while enhancing the working relationship with the teachers' union to ensure that all groups in the system are working to implement and monitor improvement strategies.

Develop and consistently implement a rigorous accountability structure which includes:

- o ensuring that all strategic plans include explicit links to the budget and are supported by clear action plans which include results indicators and timelines for regular monitoring and reporting;
- o establishing clear lines of accountability which ensure that the roles and responsibilities of district and school administrators and teachers are clearly understood and that they are enabled and empowered, to complete designated tasks;
- o regularly evaluating the impact of programs and services and acting on outcomes; and
- o holding people, at all levels, accountable for the efficient implementation of agreed upon strategies, policies and procedures to ensure consistency across schools and all grade levels.

Maximize the efficient and effective use of resources by:

- o reviewing and revising schedules to maximize the use of time, especially instructional time in the middle and high schools; and

- o ensuring that professional development opportunities, including time for frequent teacher collaboration, are well matched to the needs of individual staff as evidenced by student outcomes, and school and district improvement strategies.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation: The district's overall performance

In November 2007, the Danbury Board of Education adopted the following mission statement:

*“Our mission is to develop in all children the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable them to live a productive and self-fulfilling life and engage in responsible citizenship in an ever-changing global society.”*

They also adopted Guiding Principles and Five Year Goals for the Board and the executive staff for the period 2007 to 2012 which places service to students at the heart of the district's roles and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of unity within the Board and the actions of some of the key stakeholders, including the teachers' union, have not consistently reflected the commitment to putting students first. This situation is further exacerbated by certain structures, policies and procedures adopted by the district. Given the current economic climate, such unity of purpose is needed more than ever to ensure that the stated mission is fully implemented. The superintendent has therefore articulated an updated model of instructional leadership and support which very coherently addresses the need for balancing fiscal responsibility with the need to maintain a high quality educational experience for students. The model proposes a combination of building-based daily support at the high school, a middle school model that promotes greater cohesion between the clusters and content areas and a district wide kindergarten to grade 12 approach that promotes vertical alignment and an increased focus on curriculum, teacher training, data-driven assessment and instructional leadership. At the same time, the model reduces the district wide administrative structure from 19 full time equivalents (FTEs) in 2007-08 to 14.4 FTEs for 2009-10 and the school-based instructional support positions from 44.5 FTEs in 2007-08 to 29.2 FTEs for 2009-10. If fully implemented, the updated instructional support model provides a creative, responsible and insightful approach which has the potential to improve the instructional leadership at the district and school levels.

Based on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) results, Danbury Public Schools has not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for six years and is currently designated as being in need of improvement, Year Five. White and Asian American students met AYP targets for both CMT and CAPT, but all the other subgroups, including Black, Hispanic, students with disabilities, English language learners and economically disadvantaged, failed to meet AYP in both CMT and CAPT. The district is tracking changes in performance year by year for all subgroups at each grade level and, while there are indications of overall growth, the trend varies significantly between the subgroups, grades and subjects.

While there has been some effort to update curriculum, there is not a sufficiently robust system of curriculum renewal or practice to guide the regular and routine revision of the district's curriculum. Furthermore, the district's culture of autonomy has, until recently, permitted independent interpretations of guidelines set forth at the district level and the delivery of the curriculum has varied dramatically. Consequently, curriculum documents vary in format, value, alignment to State standards and capacity to effectively guide instruction across subjects, grades and schools.

Compared to similar districts, Danbury was late in adopting a policy of inclusion. However, there are good systems and procedures for ensuring compliance with State directives and for supporting students with disabilities. Similarly, there are good processes in place to identify English language learning students, including two school-based ESL reception centers and well-resourced bilingual Spanish or Portuguese programs. However, these students do not have access to the broader high school course offerings until grade 11.

The Director of Human Resources is leading a team which is valued and respected at all levels across the district, including teaching and administrative unions. Given the recently agreed upon and innovative early retirement program, which will lead to the need to recruit over 70 teachers for the 2009-10 academic year, this department has a key role in ensuring that the district meets its goal of providing all students with a world class professional staff.

The district's fiscal policies and procedures are sound and secure. There is a range of budget documents, generated electronically and on paper, to assist administrators with the fiscal process. There are appropriate checks and balances and effective internal controls to ensure high quality auditing of expenditure. The district currently lacks a grant writer but is in the process of appointing a part-time consultant to undertake this role.

The district is continuing to develop its information technology (IT) systems. There are effective backup procedures in place for all key data. The effective use of technology by teachers to support student learning is an area in need of improvement. The district's technology plan, addresses many of the issues and the IT hardware and infrastructure at DHS have recently been refurbished. However, given the current budget limitations, there are concerns that it will not be possible to fully implement the recommendations across all schools.

## **Domain 1: The district's effectiveness in securing positive outcomes for students**

**This area of the district's work is at basic level and needs improvement.**

### **Student Academic Achievement and Progress**

Danbury Public Schools has not made AYP for six years and is currently designated as being in need of improvement, Year Five. Six of the district's schools are in need of improvement, an increase from the 2006-07 school year. During that time, one elementary school was removed from the list of schools identified as being in need of improvement due to their improved performance. The performance of students from Danbury on CMT and CAPT is below that of their counterparts across the State on all tests and while there has been some year-on-year growth, only Asian American and White students have achieved their AYP targets. The performance of Hispanic students, English language learners, students with disabilities and those qualifying for free and reduced price lunch lag behind that of their peers. The percent of Danbury students at or above proficient on the CMT and CAPT is markedly lower than that of students from high performing districts. However, Danbury students generally perform at or slightly above students from similar districts on the majority of CMT and CAPT. Trend data for the SAT Reasoning Test (SAT) reveal little growth over the last seven years and consistent performance below that of State and national averages.

Comparisons of the percent of students achieving proficient or above on the CMT from 2007 to 2008 reveal that overall performance has increased slightly in mathematics, reading and writing. CAPT scores increased by between three to six percentage points. However, apart for reading, the percent at proficient on the CAPT was below that on the CMT, indicating a decline in proficiency at the secondary level. The district lost ground in closing the achievement gap on the CMT for Black students, English language learners, students with disabilities and boys. The reduction in the gap for Hispanic students on the CMT was above that of the State in all subjects, especially reading. On the CAPT, good progress was made by Black students in closing the achievement gap in all tested subjects, as compared to the State. Similar progress overall was made by boys in mathematics and by students with disabilities. On the other hand, significant widening of the achievement gap occurred among English language learners and Hispanic students. On both the CMT and CAPT, the achievement gap for students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch widened on most tests.

The district has produced extensive analysis of its achievement and its inconsistent pattern of increases and decreases in measures of learning based on CMT and CAPT data. The impact of increasingly consistent approaches to instruction in mathematics is a probable cause for some improvements at

district elementary schools, although this has not been analyzed extensively. Similarly, a more unified research based approach to literacy instruction at the elementary and middle school levels is being instituted to address learning needs in reading and writing. It is too soon to see the impact of these initiatives. The district points to student mobility among some subgroups, highest among English language learners, as a challenge to improving learning outcomes but has only just begun to analyze student mobility data.

The district has recently established a unified schedule for administering benchmark assessments of student learning across schools, subjects and grades so that it can better understand interim achievement and gauge progress. It is intended that this data will be merged with the developing student assessment reporting system that has brought greater clarity to the understanding of student and classroom progress. Capacity for the analysis of progress across schools and subjects is growing, and could be even more robust if all professionals willingly contributed to this effort. While the volume of data is increasing and its organization is becoming more sophisticated, this information is not yet linked to district improvement goals for the short and medium term to tightly monitor achievement against targets.

### **Student Personal Development**

Overall, Danbury students are well supported in developing their character and are engaging in many opportunities to broaden their horizons through extensive academic electives as well as clubs, activities and athletics, especially at the high school. Several groups afford opportunities for civic engagement. It is common for adults and students to express a value for the diversity of the population in Danbury and its schools. However, subgroups are not represented proportionately in clubs and activities and there is only minimal socialization among and between groups.

Data relative to student behavior is in line with State averages, although Black and Hispanic subgroups are somewhat over-represented. Suspensions and expulsions have decreased over the last three years, due to improvements in approaches to behavior management at some sites. Historically, district attendance averages are at or above those of the State, as is the graduation rate. Four-year trend data indicate an increase in proportions of students, including Hispanic and students with disabilities, pursuing higher education or vocational training. Nonetheless, Asian and White students are disproportionately more likely to continue their education after high school. The district has only anecdotal data regarding the post-secondary activities of students with disabilities and English language learners. It does not currently study the success of its graduates in carrying out their educational or career intentions.

The district is attuned to the needs of its at-risk students and has several education programs that are designed to provide alternative settings for those who need specialized approaches to increase their chance for success and graduation. Likewise, school-based reception centers for newly arrived and non-English speaking students provide support and assistance during their time in school as well as providing helpful supporting links to the community. The district has an effective health and social service programs that provide good care to students and their families through school-based programs and extensions to community resources.

## **Domain 2: The effectiveness of the district's support for student learning**

**This area of the district's work needs improvement.**

### **Learning and Teaching**

The district is working aggressively to gather and collate common student assessment information to assist teachers in analyzing progress and plan for differentiated teaching. This is an extensive undertaking that, at present, is best developed at the elementary level in literacy, and to a growing degree in math. Until this year, the district's culture of autonomy allowed different assessments of learning across schools, limiting analysis of progress across grades and subjects throughout the district. Beyond CAPT analysis, there is not a sufficiently systematic practice of comparative analysis of student progress at the high school, even within departments and between teachers of the same subject. Data received

and analyzed at the central office does not always reach school administrators and teachers in a sufficiently timely fashion.

Robust and systemic training in techniques for differentiating instruction has not taken place across the district. Some training for co-teaching has supported the growing trend for placing students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms so that access to the regular curriculum is ensured, to some good effect at the secondary level. Teachers of English language learners are receiving training to better accommodate the needs of these students in regular education settings. Approximately one-third of English language learners are educated in very well resourced bilingual Spanish or Portuguese programs and as such, do not have access to the broader high school course offerings until grade 11. There are currently no interim assessments of student progress particular to the learning needs of students with disabilities or English language learners to gauge short or medium term progress towards learning goals and make adjustments to instruction.

The challenge and interest level of instruction varies across schools, grades, subjects and programs. Much instruction is very teacher-directed although where new programs are being instituted, such as in elementary and middle school literacy, student-centered teaching is becoming more common. The breadth and depth of interesting and challenging course electives at the high school is noteworthy. However, prerequisites limit access for all. Resources vary from school to school and in content areas. Some materials are current while others require updating. Recent technology upgrades bode well for increasing capacity to increase instructional interest and challenge. School environments are safe, well maintained and conducive to learning.

The district's capacity to improve teaching is inhibited by barriers that prohibit administrators from collecting, reviewing and providing helpful feedback on teachers' lesson plans. Further, the district lacks common expectations for lesson plan components and even for the expectation that lesson plans be written, and be current and responsive to student needs identified through data analysis.

### **The Curriculum**

Certain documents produced by the district suggest that there is a high level of coherence between the planned, taught and assessed curriculum but, in reality, this has only been partially achieved. Curriculum documents vary in format, value, alignment to State standards and capacity to effectively guide instruction across subjects, grades and schools. Few include clear scope and sequence pacing guides to inform instruction and support oversight of the delivery of curriculum. Some, but not all, provide teachers with suggestions for learning experiences that will motivate and enthuse the students. Until recently, the district's culture of autonomy permitted independent interpretation of guidelines set forth at the district level and the delivery of the curriculum varied dramatically. While there has been some effort to update curriculum, there is not a systemic curriculum renewal structure or practice to guide the regular and routine revision of the district's curriculum.

Co-teaching for students with disabilities and the inclusion of English language learners in regular education settings is increasing, but too many of these students are denied access to the regular curriculum when they are pulled out for extra support. Increasingly, teachers of these students are included in grade or content meetings to bolster curricular coherence across instructional settings. Many regular education teachers have not been trained in techniques to assist them in differentiating for these students. The district has effective practices for identifying students for early interventions starting in pre-kindergarten and several specialized programs support at-risk students well. Curricular and co-curricular programs, particularly at the high school, afford opportunities for students' personal development.

### **Assessment**

The district is increasing its commitment and capacity to use data to assist teachers and school leaders in measuring student progress. Systems for communicating this are under development and the district has only just begun to standardize measures across schools. There has not been a robust culture of inquiry into data and the development and use of comparative data to measure progress while emerging, is limited by previous inconsistencies from school to school in the types of assessments administered. The analysis of data, as well as the instructional response to the data, at the school level varies across sites.

The district plans to pilot interim assessments of the progress of English language learners to better measure short term progress. Students with disabilities are assessed alongside their regular education peers and through programmatic diagnostics aligned with their individualized education programs but there is not an additional range of supplementary assessments for teachers to use to check their progress. Records of achievement on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations and SAT Reasoning Tests (SATs) are collected but are not used sufficiently well enough to inform adjustments to teaching and programs. This is evidenced by the lack of improvement in performance.

There is little practice with respect to using common formative assessments across the district. In fact, the district is working to develop teachers' clear understandings of formative and summative assessment practices and their capacity to improve instruction and learning. The use of rubrics to assist students in assessing their learning is inconsistent across subjects and schools and students do not routinely receive information about their performance before report cards are distributed so that they can adjust practice and get extra help in learning.

### **Building Instructional Leadership Capacity in Schools**

The district administrative structure, currently under revision, places the management of principals under two district administrators resulting in blurred lines of authority and, sometimes, conflicting expectations. Greater structure has been added to the format of monitoring meetings this year. The district's initiative for increased consistent and unified assessment data is aimed at increasing school's capacity to understand progress and evaluate practice towards improvement. Schools have varying structures for distributed leadership, including data teams, which function most effectively when supported by the teachers' association. Data teams and the district's data initiatives are building capacity for teachers as well as school leaders to use data for instructional and other planning. These practices are not embedded across the district.

Leadership for curriculum and instruction has been centralized under a district administrator who has oversight of most of the kindergarten through grade 12 content leaders. Building administrators, particularly in the middle and high schools, have had little direct oversight regarding the delivery of instruction and the quality of instruction. Attempts to conduct non-evaluative surveys of teaching and learning have been blocked by the union. The inability to conduct non-evaluative walkthroughs of classroom practice severely limit the ability of district and school instructional leaders to provide professional development where needed. Current efforts underway at the district level during Administrative Council meetings are designed to increase school leader's common understanding of high quality teaching to increase student learning.

The capacity of the district's professional development program to effect change is compromised by the fact that nearly half of the teaching staff are working independently on self-designed growth projects and are not required to partake of district offerings. Others express a strong desire to collaborate more often with peers to share best practice and learn effective techniques from one another. Support for newly hired teachers is effective, both in inducting them into the district and in assisting them in developing their teaching repertoires. The district's in-house aspiring principals (DELTA) program supports, encourages and enables staff to become school administrators, particularly within the district. However, mentoring for new school leaders and support for those who are struggling is less structured and less effective, owing somewhat to the fractured management system currently in place.

Principals, as a matter of cultural practice, rather than resulting from student performance, have had considerable autonomy. This has exacerbated inconsistency and inhibited continuity in the district, especially for instructional leadership. The district is attempting to rectify this through the proposed reorganization structure which places greater demands for uniformity and by using schools that have effectively utilized data-driven instruction to improve student achievement as models for others.

## **Domain 3: The effectiveness of the district's leadership and management**

**This area of the district's work needs improvement.**

### **Vision and Culture**

The district leadership has a clear understanding of the district's strengths and areas for improvement. They have a clear vision for improving student achievement by changing adult practice and, at the central office, this is a shared vision. The development of the vision and belief statements did not include enough stakeholder participation and as a result there is not sufficient widespread understanding of, or broad-based support for, the critical values that underpin the District Enhancement Plan. The district leadership is working to ensure that the culture is student-focused and that all decisions are made in the best interest of children. To do this, district and school leadership must ensure that all stakeholders are empowered to contribute to the development of a district vision in a meaningful way, and that there are regular forums for stakeholder reflection and discussion of what it looks like when the vision is realized.

### **Strategic and Action Planning**

There is currently a strategic plan in place. It was modified in May 2006, but has not been formally revised since then. The planning process occurred in a top-down fashion and was not inclusive enough to ensure that unique school needs were addressed. While the district is working towards becoming increasingly transparent, there is more work that needs to be done. There was no community involvement in developing the plan and there are other plans that could be included in one document to ensure coherence of strategy and simplify communication. For example, the Board has Five Year Outcomes and the Mayor has a 2020 Initiative. There is some overlap between these plans and the District Enhancement Plan, and the existence of more than one guiding document exacerbates communication issues and complicates resource allocation decisions.

The first District Enhancement Plan goal identifies that all schools must improve academic performance upon prior year's data, but does not identify specific student achievement goals for all students in the district. This limits the district's ability to monitor the extent of strategy impact on goal attainment. The district and school plans do not have explicit links to the budget and so the district is unable to clearly evaluate value for money in terms of strategy and expenditures. There are no established timelines for monitoring and reporting expectations and so stakeholders are not informed as to the progress of plan implementation or impact on student achievement. Several of the monitoring mechanisms identified in the plan, such as reviewing lesson plans, informally and formally observing classrooms, and looking at student work, are not being implemented consistently. These are all viable means of ensuring that the plan and written curriculum are being implemented in classrooms and it is critical that the district establish consistency in these practices to ensure that all students in the district are benefiting from improvement strategies.

### **Governance**

The Board belongs to the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) and through this organization receives professional development on their roles and responsibilities as members.

In 2007 the Board adopted a Five Year plan with several goals, including that Danbury students be rated in the top 25 percent of several key categories including school readiness, the scores on state assessments, and the percentage of students graduating from college. The board does not, however, have a goal related to closing the achievement gap. As a result it does not regularly monitor progress in this very important area, which is a weakness.

The Board has several subcommittees and other committees that work throughout the district. Recently, a communication issue was discovered and so the Board established a committee to address it, but it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this initiative. There is not an established system of communicating between these committees. Consequently, while the Board is in compliance with all federal and State law there is currently a lack of unity of purpose between the individual board members and across the Board as a whole.

## **Accountability**

The area of accountability throughout all levels of the district needs substantial improvement. While the associate superintendent for curriculum meets monthly with principals to discuss student performance, there are limited mechanisms in place to ensure changes in adult practice in response to the data. As a result, leadership is unable to determine specific adult causes for student achievement effects. There is no system for formal reporting on school progress to a district leadership team and this inhibits the district's ability to hold all staff accountable for implementing the District Enhancement Plan. Principals must be supported through professional development so that they are further enabled to be instructional leaders. The Administrative Council structure is increasingly serving as a professional development vehicle, but principals do not have the opportunity to learn in small groups with leaders who struggle with similar issues.

Principals must be held accountable for supporting teachers and ensuring consistency of instruction throughout their buildings, and teachers must be held accountable for ensuring that differentiated instruction is delivered commensurate with the written curriculum and student needs as identified in formative assessment data. Presently, there are inconsistencies across schools in the district with regards to the amount of time, and expectations of use of available time, that teachers have to collaborate around data analysis and lesson planning in data teams. District leadership is aware of these inconsistencies, but now must work in collaboration with all stakeholders, particularly school leadership, teachers and union representatives, to devise a plan to ensure that consistency is reached for the benefits of all students. There must be clearer lines of accountability and all leaders and teachers must have a clear job description and understanding of their responsibilities. The district has begun to tackle this issue by putting forth a reorganization recommendation for district and school leadership. Under the new structure, principals would be responsible for evaluating the teachers that work in their schools which will give them a clearer picture of the quality of instruction and empower them to be responsive to individual teacher needs.

## **Domain 4: The effectiveness of the district's management of human & fiscal resources**

**This area of the district's work needs improvement.**

### **Human Resources**

The appointment of the Director of Human Resources is a clear recognition within the district leadership that the quality of staff is a key variable in improving educational outcomes. Historically, recruitment of teachers has matched demands but it is the view of the stakeholders interviewed that this process is not sufficiently transparent and is not necessarily equitable. Furthermore, due to insufficient practice of supervision and evaluation there is little capacity to fire based on performance. As a result, most teachers stay for life.

However, discontinuity in leadership is seen both by the historically relatively short tenure of superintendents and the greater than average turnover of principals at some schools. As mentioned earlier, the DELTA program is effective in identifying and developing leadership from within, but support falls off once principals are appointed.

In the face of growing economic pressure, the Board recently approved an innovative early retirement package that will result in the need for a significant recruitment of new staff for the 2009-10 school year. It is essential that the district takes this opportunity to review and revise its policies and procedures to ensure that the highest level of integrity is followed in making staff selections. Furthermore, under the guidance of the superintendent and the Director of Human Resources, all senior managers and Board members must take responsibility for ensuring that effective recruitment, selection and retention policies and procedures are adhered to, which will enable students to benefit from quality principals, teachers and support staff. The current goal to more effectively match the diversity of teaching/leading staff with that of student body and interest in recruiting diverse new hires bodes well for increasing balance.

Historically, the District Development Committee (DDC), which is a district teacher's union committee, has made recommendations on professional development. However, not all the representatives serve on their respective school leadership teams. Consequently, professional development is not clearly matched to the district and school improvement plans or to the diagnosed needs of the district, schools and individual teachers. Funding for professional development at school sites varies dramatically, skewing equity of access to high quality professional development. There are too few collaborative professional development opportunities, both within and between schools. The lack of effective leaders, for some subjects, to support teachers' development/refinement of content expertise and alignment to standards has impacted negatively on the quality of instruction and student learning. The proposed updated model of instructional leadership and support is designed to address many of these shortfalls.

Until last year, school administrators and teachers belonged to the same union. The fact that the administrators have established a separate union is symptomatic of the increasingly different focus of the teachers' union and the school and district administrators. Given this divide between administrators and teachers, the purpose and membership of a number of committees, including the DDC, need to be reviewed and revised. Furthermore, in order for the district to achieve its stated Five Year Goals, there is a need for the superintendent and his central staff to continue to support and nurture the fledgling administrative union while enhancing the working relationship with the teachers' union to ensure that all groups in the system are working to implement and monitor improvement strategies.

### **Fiscal resources**

Financial operations and fiscal management are sound and secure. The district has appropriate checks and balances in place to ensure the effective monitoring of expenditures. Pre-purchasing is not allowed and all requisitions have to pass through at least four levels of authority. Three quotes are required for all purchases and all purchases above \$5,000 must go through a competitive tendering/request for proposal (RFP) process. The district purchases a number of its services from the city, for example, building and grounds maintenance. The district has entered into a number of consortia arrangements covering a wide range of items such as supplies, paper and energy conservation. The district has also recently entered into a new bus contract with a new provider, which will produce savings in the order of \$2 million. The Finance Office has clearly defined categories of funds so that there is consistency across schools in how to request items. The superintendent and the Board are provided with timely and accurate information on a regular basis, which enables them to fulfill their statutory and strategic functions.

While financial management is strong, financial planning is an area requiring significant improvement. The district uses a needs-based approach to allocation of resources to schools, as opposed to the age-weighted student enrollment numbers used by the majority of school districts. Unfortunately, district and school plans do not have explicit links to the budget and so the district is unable to clearly evaluate value for money in terms of strategy and expenditures.

Like most school districts across the State and country, Danbury Public Schools is facing almost unprecedented fiscal constraints. Consequently, under the leadership of the superintendent and the Director of Finance, the district should undertake a review of all financial policies and procedures in order to ensure value for money and to maximize the use of available resources.

## **Domain 5: The effectiveness and coherence of the district's operational systems**

**This area of the district's work needs improvement.**

### **IT and Data Support**

The district has a Technology Development Plan which includes ensuring that the school district provides an adequate level of IT in schools for an acceptable level of student and teacher access to technology for learning. During 2008, the IT facilities at Danbury High School (DHS) underwent a major overhaul and refurbishment; this was mainly funded through the Teach American History (TAH) Grant. Many teachers at DHS, including all teachers in the social studies, science and business departments, now have a laptop

and digital projector in their classrooms. The district also upgraded the infrastructure as DHS to include, for example, new “switches.” Technology leaders at each elementary school have laptops and the AIS Magnet School is a laptop school. A loaner laptop scheme is in operation at the two middle schools.

The district has an adequate IT system to support the collection of managerial data, such as attendance and grades, including an online grade book, which is currently used by approximately one-third of teachers across the district. However, partially due to contractual issues, not all teachers are systematically entering student assessment data on to the system. Consequently, the extent to which data is currently used to drive instruction across the district is limited.

### **Communication**

The district has identified communications as an area in need of improvement. Currently, the district lacks an effective strategy for two-way communication with employees, stakeholders, media and the public. Consequently, the Board has established a committee to address this critical area. In particular, the district needs to establish effective and meaningful ways to actively engage all stakeholders, both internal and external, in district and school planning processes.

One recent area of improved communication which parents value is the Honeywell Instant Alert System. This system allows parents/guardians to register to receive instant alerts by phone, e-mail, text messaging or paging, on issues such as delayed opening, early closure as well as receiving other key messages from schools.

### **Operations**

The district has well-established operational processes and procedures. Unfortunately, these are not always aligned with its values, vision and goals. Central office staff and administrators understand the importance of their work in improving student achievement. The district does not regularly collect internal or external satisfaction surveys.

As part of the Mayor’s 2020 Initiative outside consultants have recently completed a district wide premises audit, which identifies significant shortage of facilities to meet the projected medium to long-term growth. The Task Force is currently reviewing the findings of the audit and is identifying alternative scenarios and potential sources of funding which will enable the district to meet the projected shortfall in accommodation.

## **Domain 6: The effectiveness with which the district engages stakeholders and evaluates their satisfaction with its work**

**This area of the district’s work needs improvement.**

### **Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction**

There are no regular surveys of the community, parents or students and there are insufficient structures in place to listen to and learn from the views of all stakeholders. Consequently, in November 2008, Danbury Public Schools, in association with their community partner, hosted a Community Conversation on Parental Involvement in Education. Ninety parents, guardians and community members attended, in addition to a planning committee of 12 and other employees of the district. The outcome of the conversation was an extensive list of action steps that attendees felt were important and should be considered as the district implements their Five Year Plan on parental involvement. Attendees recognized that there are some existing programs within the district that do work, such as the special education process, which can be modeled in general education, and the mentoring program, which can be used as models for other programs in the district. The district’s Public Awareness Committee is reviewing the report and will be proposing the next steps. All participants expect a follow up meeting of the result in February 2009 and many expressed a willingness to work on and participate in committee work. The superintendent recognizes that this will be important to ensure that the work of this committee is closely aligned to the District Enhancement Plan.

Although there is no community service requirement at Danbury High School, there are some opportunities for students to serve the community. The high school students are assigned advisors, but students do not view this structure as a vehicle to express their opinion or make positive changes in the school. The current high school principal established an opportunity to “lunch with the principal” as a way for students to share their viewpoints. For the past twenty years, the district has provided valuable before and after school programs that serve as academic and social enrichment for students. However, the growing English language learner population is underserved. The food service staff takes time at each school to talk with their customers, the students, to find out what they like.

At the school level, parents’ communication is done mainly by e-mail. Most of the written materials are published in English, Portuguese and Spanish. Parental involvement varies from school to school and there is considerable inconsistency in the quality of parent groups across the district. Good attempts have been made to involve pre-school parents and guardians in their child’s schooling experience.

During the 2007-08 school year, the superintendent conducted a Listening Tour during lunch time allowing certified staff members (excluding administrators) to share information on the overall climate of the district. The principals meet monthly with the associate superintendent.

There is a wide array of school, community, business and voluntary organization partnerships that support the educational process and benefit the development of students both socially and academically. The Danbury Association of Schools and Businesses (DASB) provides mentors for elementary to high school students requiring social and emotional support. DASB also offers a scholarship, currently \$2,000, for any high school graduates who had been in the mentor program for five or more years. Danbury Public Schools collaborates with Western Connecticut State University to provide a public relations intern, as well as instructional interns.

**Political and policy alignment and engagement**

The district has an improvement plan that is in compliance with federal and State law. However, it is not clearly linked to the budget. Hence, the district is unable to evaluate the best use of available resources in terms of articulated student achievement goals. Equally importantly, there is no process in place for formal stakeholder involvement in developing the District Enhancement Plan. The district needs to seek regular input in a systematic way from internal and external stakeholders to develop a systemic approach that will inform district improvement.

Although the current Mayor, Board Chair and the superintendent share a common vision for the district, there is little alignment among the district, the city and the Board as a whole. If the district is to achieve its stated Five Year goals there needs to be enhanced consistency and clarity of understanding across the district, but particularly between individual members of the Board. The development of a strategic communication plan and proactive leadership to assure its execution should be a top priority for the Board Chair and the superintendent.