



Indiana Department of Education

Glenda Ritz, NBCT

Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction

Indiana Department of Education and Gary Community School Corporation Support Plan

Background:

On February 21, 2014, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) placed the Gary Community School Corporation (GCSC) on Federal High Risk Designation due to 1. A history of unsatisfactory academic performance and 2. Fiscal Instability per the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) 34 C.F.R.80.12 (a) rules, that grants a State Education Agency the ability to intervene in a more direct fashion in regards to Federal Education Dollars and their outcomes.

The High Risk Designation allows the State Educational Agency (IDOE) to place conditions on a Local Educational Agency's (GCSC) use of federal grant dollars.

The designation was reflective of the IDOE's desire to provide support to the Gary community and assist with school improvement with intentional and aligned efforts. Superintendent of Public Instruction, Glenda Ritz, and Director of Federal Relations, Jeff Coyne, traveled to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) and to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Washington D. C, to seek guidance on high risk supports available and researched best practices from other states.

To ensure community members and stakeholders were a part of the improvement process, the IDOE team reached out to the Mayor of Gary, Karen Freeman-Wilson, and asked for input and assistance. Additionally, on May 22, 2014 and May 31, 2014, community events were hosted in the GCSC community to share improvement plans and ask for community support.

Director of District Improvement:

IDOE placed a Director of District Improvement, Daniel Bundridge, in the Gary School District to assist with on the ground support for our collaborative work. Bundridge had previously served as an Outreach Coordinator in Lake County and had assisted the district with improvement initiatives in 2013-14. The Director has assisted with a variety of school improvement initiatives:

- The development of district-wide curriculum maps/pacing guides that reflect the new 2014 Indiana Academic Standards
- Implementation of a new district-wide principal's meeting with processes and procedures that occur once a month where all central office staff and all building principal's attend

- Collaborated with the Title director in the development of the Title plan, allocation of resources, and reimbursement of expenses; provided technical assistance as needed
- Assisted with the development of the Operation Steering Team, which has begun to coordinate services between GCSC and IDOE
- Collaborated with the special education director and the Indiana State University compliance team to help develop processes and procedures
- Facilitation of monthly conference calls between Gary special education/ISU and the IDOE special education director
- Conducted 11 professional development offerings for GCSC on data analysis, differentiated instruction, Acuity, standards and assessment and math process standards
- Conducted professional development on the turnaround principles for all Focus and Priority Schools
- Conducted two regional Professional Developments, “digging into data” for Gary administrators and teachers
- Ongoing meetings with school leaders in their buildings to discuss their data, strengths, weaknesses and professional development needs
- Assisted with the Title finance office to expedite reimbursement processes while also assisting with developing the capacity of staff in this office
- Collaborated with Scholastic and International Center for Leadership in Education to design district-wide professional development to support school improvement initiatives

Financial Assistance:

The IDOE has partnered with the State Board of Accounts and Crowe Horwath LLP to conduct two financial audits:

- USDA program—This audit is complete and findings should be available and communicated soon.
- Title school programs—This audit began in December 2014 and is examining Title 1a, IIa, and III expenditures in 13 GCSC schools.

IDOE is considering the placement of an ongoing financial consultant to assist with monitoring federal programs and reimbursements.

IDOE has provided technical assistance to GCSC staff to assist with properly documenting needs to ensure tuition support is reimbursed accurately.

Nutrition Support:

As a result of the IDOE High Risk designation of the GCSC and enhanced flexibility granted by the USDA, the IDOE team mediated the food service contract with Sodexo Magic and assisted with agreement for services to continue for the 2014-15 school year. IDOE worked to ensure

payment for 2014-15 would occur by arranging for the direct payment of this vendor by the IDOE. For 2015-16, IDOE team is continuing to collaborate with all parties to ensure food services are available and continue for GCSC students. Technical Assistance was provided to GCSC staff to assist with appropriate use of food service funds.

Transportation Support:

The IDOE team worked with Illinois Central School Bus (ICSB) and GCSC to mediate a resolution on two different occasions to ensure transportation would continue for Gary students. The agreement is currently in good standing as GCSC has upheld the terms of the current agreement. Additionally, Mike LaRocco, Director of Transportation, provided on-site technical support on several occasions to assist with routing and identifying cost-saving practices.

Special Education Support:

Pursuant to special conditions attached to GCSC's eligibility for Part B federal special education (SE) funding, IDOE has used part of GCSC's federal allocation to pay for eight embedded staff at the district for two years (through a contract with ISU). Through its contracted partner, IDOE also directed the use of GCSC's mandatory federal expenditure for Coordinated Early Intervening Services.

- District and Building Leadership Collaboration includes: established formal process and procedures as foundation to address special education compliance related issues; work with principals to improve processes within their building; and implemented Scholastic's iRead as the district's Coordinated Early Intervening Services (academic intervention program – data shows student improvement).
- Technical assistance and professional development includes: established and support building compliance teams; 67 PD events, (216.5 hours of training including compliance procedures, inclusive practices, legal issues, evaluation timelines, assessment processes, transition, teacher of record responsibilities; and parent outreach).
- Data Collection and Reporting assistance includes: add SE data fields into SunGard; trained staff on IDOE data submissions; established data entry roles, responsibilities, expectations and submission timelines; and helped IT staff with conflict resolution/data error corrections. Worked with community organizations and district to create professional/community partnerships.
Assisted in the SE evaluation process/eligibility determinations by: updating evaluation tools, collaborated with school psychologists on roles/responsibilities; recommended procedure revisions.

Dunbar and School Improvement Support:

IDOE partnered with AdvancED and provided an intensive diagnostic review of eight of the Gary schools in need of school improvement planning and support. The review team worked with the schools from April-October to provide a robust review process which included:

- Internal Review

- Executive Summary
- Self-Assessment
- Stakeholder Surveys
- Student Performance Diagnostics including classroom observations
- Interviews with Staff

The schools were each provided with ongoing technical assistance and with a \$20,000 grant to assist with professional development and school improvement planning. Each school also received a detailed report from the review team outlining school improvement progress and identified areas for improvement along with a tool to guide planning. IDOE school improvement staff members have continued to monitor these plans and have worked with schools on identified needs.

Dunbar was intentionally included in this diagnostic review group to provide IDOE and GCSC with a needs assessment for school improvement work. Additionally, GCSC Superintendent, Dr. Cheryl Pruitt, intentionally provided additional supports to Dunbar due to her sense of urgency to improve the achievement and support for the Gary children.

Dr. Pruitt replaced the principal at Dunbar. She also instituted a partnership with Scholastic to provide for instructional and leadership coaching at Dunbar and in the other district schools. Further she worked with Scholastic and the Director of District Improvement to ensure new Indiana College and Career Standards were being used by teachers in every classroom with intentional maps and pacing guides. Additionally, district leaders are working with the Dunbar staff to implement a nationally researched behavior intervention program, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Program (PBIS). Dr. Pruitt is currently working within her leadership team to make some bold changes in staffing for Dunbar for 2015-16, which is possibly due to the newly expired (December 2014) collective bargaining agreement.

The High Risk Operational Steering Team will continue to monitor progress at Dunbar and intentionally provide support as the district and school staff implements improvement initiatives.

Federal Programs Support

The USED requires the IDOE to closely monitor Federal grants, plans, and expenditures for all schools. Due to the High Risk Designation related to financial instability and enhanced regulatory flexibility directly from the USED, including the use of excess federal funds from the prior year for services to students, the IDOE has significantly increased the level of accountability and support for GCSC federal programs. The Title 1, 2, and 3 offices at the IDOE have had frequent and routine conversations and provided high touch support for GCSC staff. Program specialists have made several on-site visits to Gary and provided staff with technical assistance to increase their comprehensive understanding of systems and processes for Title allowable expenses while also assisting GCSC staff with amending the Title grants to support school improvement work. IDOE staff have assisted GCSC staff with completing reimbursements in a timely manner and have provided professional development on how to

liquidate funds within the required 72 hours as well as which expenses are allowable for reimbursement. IDOE staff members have also verified Title 1 personnel expenses by conducting an on-site team visit in January 2015.

Technical Assistance and Professional Development:

Data Analysis

Curriculum Mapping

Leadership and Instructional Coaching with support from Scholastic

Leadership Development professional development

Financial: Reports and appropriate use of funds

Nutrition: Appropriate use of funds

Transportation: Bus routing and program analysis

Special Education: Established and support building compliance teams; 67 PD events, (216.5 hours of training including compliance procedures, inclusive practices, legal issues, evaluation timelines, assessment processes, transition, teacher of record responsibilities; and parent outreach)

School Improvement: Identifying needs and creating plans to address areas from diagnostics Federal Program

Data Entry: IDOE staff member conducted on-site training of data entry to improve reporting accuracy

School Discipline: IDOE staff assisted with establishing appropriate procedures for suspension and expulsion processes

Long Range Planning:

The Operational Steering Team will continue to meet during the 2014-15 school year to engage in long-range planning and develop a district support structure for the schools identified as needing intentional support in a "Transformation Zone." By August 2015 the support structure will be in place and district services will be coordinated for the schools in improvement status.

Exiting High Risk Designation Status:

The corrective actions GCSC must attain in order to have this designation removed are: two consecutive years of fiscal stability and an accountability grade for two consecutive years of "C" or above. Both conditions must be met for removal of this designation.