



CTDOE

QUALITY REVIEW DISTRICT FINAL REPORT

East Hartford Public Schools

Quality Review Report

East Hartford District

**1002 Main Street
East Hartford
Connecticut
06108**

Superintendent: Marion Martinez

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Part 1: The District Context

Information about the district

The East Hartford Public School District provides education for 7,472 children and young people. The community in which students live is increasingly diverse and approximately 76 percent of youngsters come from minority ethnic groups. Thirty-five percent of students are Black, 35 percent are Hispanic, 22.5 percent are White, 6 percent are Asian American and 0.5 percent are American Indian. Approximately 18 percent of students speak a language other than English while at home.

There are nine elementary schools: Goodwin (320 students); Hockanum (354 students); Langford (348 students); Mayberry (406 students); Norris (299 students); O'Brien (464 students); O'Connell (317 students); Pitkin (357 students); and Silver Lane (324 students).

Children transition from elementary school at the end of grade 5 and attend Sunset Ridge School for their grade 6 year. There are 453 grade 6 students attending the school at present. The East Hartford Middle School provides education for just over 1,000 grade 7 and 8 students. From here they move to the East Hartford High School for grades 9 to 12, where there are currently just over 2,000 students. The Stevens Alternative School provides education for 154 students in grades 9 to 12. There is also a hosted Magnet School, The Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy (CIBA), which offers the International Baccalaureate for students from East Hartford and surrounding districts. Woodland School offers a program for emotionally disturbed kindergarten through grade 12 students, and includes children from other districts.

On average, across the district, approximately 60 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals although this can vary from 35 percent to 80 percent from school to school. There is a very high level of mobility within the community and students move in and out of the district, as well as between East Hartford schools. Approximately 35 percent of graduating students progress through the grades from kindergarten to grade 12 with minimal transitions.

Of the total student population, 13.2 percent of students are identified as requiring special education. This is higher than comparable districts (11.9 percent), as well as the statewide rate (11.8 percent).

Approximately 50 percent of children attend preschool, nursery school or Headstart prior to commencing kindergarten.

Part 2: Overview

What the district does well

- Teachers and principals recognize the need for change and believe that the district is moving in the right direction. There is a strong focus on improving achievement and an urgency amongst the district and schools.
- The District Improvement Plan has been collaboratively formulated by principals and district office staff and effectively guides and informs strategies. Principals see a direct link between the District Improvement Plan and their own School Improvement Plans.
- The Positive Behavior Support program has been implemented throughout the district and has had a significant impact in a number of schools.
- Professional development hours have been increased and teachers have additional time for collaboration within their school.

What the district needs to improve

- Distribute leadership more widely, based on increased trust and shared responsibility, so that principals have a greater role in decision making and a level of professional autonomy that is commensurate with their school's performance.
- Strengthen communication between the district and schools so that principals and teachers have genuine opportunities to significantly shape professional development strategies and curriculum initiatives.
- Review organizational structures to increase leadership capacity, particularly in elementary schools, so that accountability models are strengthened and curriculum improvement strategies have greater impact.
- Strengthen professional development in order to raise achievement in reading across all phases of schooling, with specific emphasis on diagnosing reading difficulties and expanding strategies to support individual students.
- Implement more rigorous evaluation strategies that focus specifically on measuring the impact of additional resources and interventions that are aimed at improving children's learning and/or mental and social wellbeing.
- The board of education needs to be more effective in discharging its public duties.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The district's overall performance

East Hartford Public Schools is in its fourth year of needing improvement under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. During the past three years the district has made considerable progress. The superintendent has a clear vision for children and young people, which is sharply focused on improving learning. The district team has established sound systems around financial management and human resources and buildings are well maintained. There has been a strong focus on professional development for principals and teachers and as a result there is greater confidence in judging the progress of subgroups of students, based on achievement data.

Addressing the lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum package has also been a major focus. Now that the core elements are in place, greater attention needs to be paid to evaluating how effectively the materials are guiding and informing instruction and learning.

Schools are well resourced in terms of additional support personnel and class sizes are generally lower than in similar districts. Most schools have several paraprofessionals, an educational psychologist, social worker, school nurse, resource support staff, several literacy/priority tutors, teacher/s to support English language learners and specialist staff to teach music, art and physical education. Staffing levels for food services, custodians and administrative support are also generous.

There is a very strong sports program in the high school, which is highly valued by students.

While the overall achievement within the district does not meet AYP in either mathematics or reading, three schools did make AYP, and a further three reached safe harbor during the past year. However, throughout the district as a whole, the achievement of Hispanic and Black students continues to be at least 20 percentage points below the achievement of White students in both mathematics and reading. The achievement of students with disabilities is more than 45 percentage points below proficiency in both the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT).

Systems to support students with special education needs have been strengthened and there is an increasing range of high quality services to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of students. There has been a focused professional development program to increase the level of inclusion, which is at a comparatively low level overall. However, students with special education needs continue to be suspended and expelled far more frequently than their peers.

The Positive Behavior Support strategy has been implemented throughout the district and is having a significant impact in a number of schools. However, greater attention should be paid to supporting students from minority groups in order to address the disproportionately high number of suspensions and expulsions, particularly amongst Black males. The School-Wide Information System (SWIS) is being implemented in some schools which will assist schools and the district in monitoring behavior incidences.

An Equity Framework has been developed and schools have participated in professional development on Courageous Conversations. There remain some significant challenges in ensuring that all schools are effectively responding to the ethnic diversity within their community and narrowing the attainment gap for students from minority groups.

At present, there is no systematic process for collecting attendance data throughout the district. While schools have responsibility for recording the data, it is not aggregated or monitored to ensure that regular attendance is enforced.

Domain 1: Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment

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

Since taking up the role three years ago, the superintendent has recognized the importance of professional development and has vigorously encouraged principals to participate in the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI). Her attendance at courses has served to model the importance of principals actively engaging in school initiatives if they are to be seen as curriculum leaders within their schools. There has been a strong drive to improve the capacity of schools to monitor the achievement of subgroups of students and principals which generally feel more confident about data analysis and data driven decision making. Changes to the teachers' contract were successfully negotiated with the Union, which has resulted in two additional planning periods each week. As a result, there are increased opportunities for collaborative planning and assessment, as well as greater flexibility in providing school-based professional development.

Over the past three years considerable efforts have been made to ensure that there is a comprehensive curriculum package in the core areas of mathematics, English, science and social studies. A science coordinator works across both the high school and elementary schools and some excellent common assessment tasks have been implemented in both the middle and high schools. Additional resources have been purchased in mathematics and reading which should provide the basis for a more consistent approach across schools.

While the lack of curriculum needs to be addressed, it is important that there is a more systematic approach to implementing changes and communicating these to schools. Teachers and principals are feeling overwhelmed by initiatives and do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of each element that makes up the total curriculum package. A clear cycle of review that links with identified priority areas should be established in order to reduce the burden on schools. In developing curriculum materials the district may wish to consider entering into collaborative partnerships with other nearby districts so that the demand on both district office staff and teachers could be reduced.

The real challenge now is to improve pedagogy so that teaching strategies are of a consistently high standard and appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of individuals. Within the English language area the quality and range of professional development must be strengthened in order to address the poor achievement of subgroups, particularly in reading. Teachers and principals indicated that while the professional development on data driven decision making has honed their skills in identifying under-achieving groups, they have a limited repertoire of strategies for diagnosing children's reading difficulties and addressing these in a way that improves individual achievement. The Early Intervention Program (EIP) has supported children in the very early grades; however, there is limited support for older children who fail to make steady progress. Given the very high level of mobility within the district there are many children in the elementary grades who require more intensive reading intervention. This continues to be a problem in the middle and high schools, where poor reading skills are significantly impacting on the overall achievement of pupils. Programs to address the needs of adolescent learners which embed literacy within the curriculum should be considered, together with a parallel program for students in the elementary grades.

Library resources in the elementary schools are very limited. Given the low achievement in reading it is vital that students and teachers can access fiction and non-fiction books that are engaging and culturally diverse, as well as appealing to reluctant readers.

Most elementary schools have a literacy coach. Teachers in this position have a key role in supporting colleagues to improve the quality and consistency of the English language program. Given the small class sizes and the number of support staff in each school the progress of children within subgroups should be greater. Because elementary schools do not presently have an assistant principal, responsibility for quality assurance and accountability rests solely with the principal. Without a critical mass of leadership within each school, implementation of new strategies is likely to be diluted and

monitoring processes such as “*walk-throughs*” will be inconsistent in frequency and impact. The issue of increased leadership capacity needs to be addressed if the standard of teaching and learning is to be improved.

Feedback from schools about the quality of professional development from the district office literacy team is variable. In designing and implementing the professional development program consideration should be given to seeking input from principals and teachers so that their needs are better met. Additionally, it is important that the schedule is set well in advance and adhered to, so that schools are able to plan accordingly and principals and teachers can attend sessions without undue disruption to the learning program.

At present students move from elementary school to a separate grade 6 school, transition to middle school for grades 7 and 8, and then move onto the high school. It is clear that the number of transitions is having a negative impact on the learning of a significant number of students, as their achievement drops as they move from one school to the next. It is therefore strongly recommended that the grade 6 school is incorporated into the middle school to address this issue.

On entering kindergarten less than 50 percent of children have attended a preschool, nursery school or Headstart program, which is significantly below the rate in similar districts (75.5 percent) or across the state as a whole (79.2 percent). Given the challenges in early literacy, there should be a priority on increasing the participation rate, particularly within vulnerable groups where school achievement is low. Those children with disabilities who *do* currently attend a pre-kindergarten program are totally separated, which is inconsistent with the requirements of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act and not in the children’s best interest. Efforts to integrate these children should be given the highest priority. It is worth noting that the pre-kindergarten programs that are in place are highly regarded and there is a rigorous approach to monitoring and reviewing each child’s progress, which subsequently informs future learning experiences. Consideration should be given to structuring opportunities for sharing these strategies with other early childhood teachers at kindergarten and grade 1 level. However, a full day kindergarten program has been recently implemented in the district and has been well received.

Domain 2: Leadership, Culture and Accountability

This area of the district’s work needs improvement.

Throughout the district there is a strong focus on the need for improvement and a definite urgency at both a school and district level. The superintendent is a resilient, authoritative and knowledgeable leader who has a clear vision for moving the district forward. Through her efforts community and business leaders recognize the imperative to improve educational outcomes of East Hartford’s children and young people and increasingly contribute to this agenda. There is a clear commitment to narrowing the achievement gap between subgroups of students and incremental progress is acknowledged and celebrated. While there is some resentment at the pace of change over the past three years, in general principals agree that there was need for a significant shift and that the district is moving in the right direction.

The District Improvement Plan has been collaboratively developed by principals and district office staff and is a living document that guides daily practice. Principals recognize the value of strategic planning and there is a direct link between the District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plan of each school. There is a much sharper focus on priorities being linked to student achievement data, primarily derived from the CMT and CAPT scores. The lack of a comprehensive student information system limits the extent to which individual student and cohort achievement can be monitored over time. This is particularly significant given the high level of mobility and the marked differences in outcomes between groups of students. The District Improvement Plan could be strengthened by identifying specific resources that are to be targeted at priority areas. This should feed into the annual review cycle, with a clear focus on measuring the impact of specific interventions.

The superintendent has meetings with principals every two weeks and the agenda for this meeting is jointly developed. These meetings are used as both an opportunity to complete specific tasks such as developing the District Improvement Plan, as well as for professional development. In addition to these meetings, there is a monthly Administrators' Council. Principals expressed the view that the amount of meeting time was burdensome. In order to build leadership throughout the district it is recommended that greater decision making be vested with principals. Building a culture of distributed leadership at both a district and school level will ensure that there is shared ownership and accountability and a greater commitment to initiatives.

There is also a perception by the principals that district office staff members have a limited understanding of the pressures that principals and teachers contend with on a daily basis. In order to strengthen the partnership between the district and schools, it is recommended that the superintendent and assistant superintendent visit schools more frequently and facilitate discussions about improving children's learning at a school building level. Improving communication with teachers should also be a priority.

Accountability models for principals have been established but these have not been consistently applied. Support for principals should be linked more directly to student achievement and proportional to the professional needs of the individual. A formal induction plan for beginning principals and those new to the district should ensure that a strong collaborative partnership is established between the superintendent and principals. This is particularly important for elementary principals who have no senior leadership colleagues within their schools. All principals should have regular accountability meetings that provide an opportunity for reflection and feedback as well as reviewing achievements in relation to improved student outcomes.

There are some very serious issues with the board of education and members are not effectively discharging their public duty. Meetings often times involve vitriolic and personal attacks on fellow board members and officers, including those from the district office and schools. It was reported that on occasions there have been highly inappropriate remarks made about groups of children. Relationships between senior managers and the board are adversarial rather than collegial and communication is no longer based on mutual respect. Given that this climate has pervaded the board over a long period of time, it is inevitable that a number of groups within the community do not feel able to bring forward issues. There is also little confidence in the board's capacity to tackle the significant challenges in raising student achievement, particularly amongst children from minority ethnic groups.

The board lacks clarity about its role and responsibilities. This is exemplified by the requirement that all purchases of more than \$5,000 must be approved by the board, which obstructs timely and efficient provision of resources to schools. It also diminishes the scope to benefit from consortium arrangements that provide competitive purchasing options within minimal time frames. Individual board members frequently scrutinize checks that have been written, placing additional demands on officers and distracting them from their core duties. The board's role should be to approve the budget and monitor expenditure at a global level to ensure that it is consistent with identified priorities, paying particular attention to the impact on student learning. It should not have a mandate to micro-manage the work of individual officers. It is therefore strongly recommended that as a matter of urgency city leaders and board members address the issue of the effectiveness of the board.

Domain 3: Management of Human and Fiscal Resources

This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.

Human Resources

During the past year a new Human Resources (HR) manager has been appointed, following an extended period of dislocation and disruption within the service. The current HR manager has placed a high priority on building positive relationships with principals, the teachers' union and the administrators' union in order

to move the district forward. There is evidence that there is improved trust between the different stakeholders and an appreciation that human resources services are professional and efficient. The HR manager is accessible to all employees within the education service and effectively mediates issues before they become problematic.

There is a clear recognition that the quality of staff is a key variable in improving educational outcomes and improved recruitment and accountability systems have been established. Efforts have been made to ensure that the best possible applicant is appointed to each vacancy. Selection criteria have been established and policies and procedures are more explicit. However, there is evidence that panels are not always impartial and that a candidate may be appointed when they are not the strongest applicant. The highest level of professional integrity is required in undertaking staff selection and all senior managers and board of education members must take responsibility for complying with the selection policy and procedures if students are to benefit from quality principals, teachers and support staff.

The district participates in a number of recruitment fairs and efforts have been made to increase the representation of teachers from minority groups. However, this remains a considerable challenge. Links with local universities should be explored as well as investigating the possibility of sponsoring paraprofessionals from minority groups to extend their qualifications to become teachers. All newly recruited teachers participate in an induction program that provides structured and ongoing support throughout the first two years of teaching.

In the past teacher absences have been a significant issue and the recruitment of substitute teachers problematic. The district has entered into a contract with an agency, which has had a very positive impact in terms of the quality and reliability of substitute teachers, greatly alleviating pressures on schools. The HR manager is working with principals to ensure that absences are monitored more systematically and where appropriate, formal warnings are issued when days are taken off without a valid medical certificate. There is an accountability process in place for all staff members and principals are being encouraged to document concerns so that there is a fair and transparent process in place to deal with poor performance. This process needs to be more rigorous and consistent to ensure that all employees including teachers, paraprofessionals, custodians and support staff (educational psychologists, counselors, social workers) are appropriately supervised and supported. It is vital that systems are in place to protect individual rights, at the same time ensuring that all employees work to a high standard of professionalism. Job descriptions should be regularly updated and accountability should be directly linked to outcomes and/or impact on children's learning and wellbeing.

Relationships between the unions and the HR manager are generally positive and negotiations are conducted within a climate of mutual respect and open communication.

Fiscal Resources

There are sound financial systems in place and the last auditor's reports did not identify any areas of non-compliance. This is a commendable position, given that there were grave concerns about financial systems when the superintendent took up her position three years ago.

The documentation pertaining to the budget is comprehensive and well organized. It includes a detailed analysis of both the adopted budget and all grant funding. There are very tight processes in place for regularly monitoring each program and program directors are supported to ensure that budget variance is managed effectively.

The 2007/2008 board of education's adopted budget was \$80,340,983 which was distributed in the following way: staff 69 percent; employee benefits 17 percent; plant/maintenance 6 percent; transportation 3 percent; tuition 2 percent; supplies/textbooks/periodicals 1 percent; insurances (non-benefit) 0.5 percent; equipment 0.5 percent; other items 1 percent.

The annual budget planning process begins in October each year, at which time a series of workshops is conducted to assist schools to consider their likely needs for the following academic year. In general, schools use their budget for the previous year, plus 3 percent growth as a starting point. Meetings are then held between the director of business services and each building principal. These meetings provide an opportunity to submit a case for additional resources, including any areas that may need urgent attention such as building maintenance. Principals may request additional staff such as an educational psychologist or paraprofessional. While efforts are made by the director to be fair in the process, it is clear that there is considerable potential for inequalities. By way of example, every school has much the same allocation of education psychologist time, regardless of their enrollment. In effect, this results in vastly different access to the service. There is also little consideration given to the impact of adding in additional resources year-on-year, nor on measuring the gains that have been derived from specific programs. Part of the annual budget setting process should involve an evaluation of impact to determine whether or not the status quo should be maintained or whether resources should be redirected to different personnel, programs or resources.

The variation in budgets from one location to another ranged from -4.5 percent to +8.1 percent for this financial year. While there may be a methodology in determining these variations, the criteria for decision making are not explicit or transparent to schools and the public. The budget setting process should also respond to variations in the demographic profile of each school, particularly in view of the level of mobility within the district. It is recommended that the district consider moving to a formula-led funding regime, whereby there is a base figure for each student and additional elements added to address specific needs such as English language learners, special education services and mobility. Any changes should be thoroughly investigated, including learning from colleagues who use such a system, and implemented over an extended period so that disruption to schools is minimized.

The budget setting process is strongly driven by district office staff, with little involvement by principals. Although it is understandable that systems must be tightly controlled given the recent history, it is important to recognize that the allocation of resources is a key element within a model of distributed leadership. It is therefore recommended that principals are involved much more substantially in shaping budget decisions, given that they are the instructional leaders within the system.

The district is allocated approximately \$12.14M in federal and state grants. These substantial resources are intended to assist schools in meeting the needs of individual students more effectively. The funds enable a range of programs to be delivered, including support for gifted and talented students, English language learners and social worker services. In summarizing the budget for each location, it is worth considering differentiating resources that are provided through the adopted budget and those that are grant funded. The total budget allocation for each school, including details of positions that are grant funded, should be summarized, together with enrollment figures. This would make it easier to compare resources across schools as well as assisting in annual evaluation. While accounting procedures are thorough and systematic, greater consideration should be given to evaluating the impact of programs. Accountability systems should evaluate the benefits to children's learning and wellbeing that are directly attributable to particular funding streams. Closer liaison between the finance team and curriculum/student services teams will facilitate this process.

An additional \$275,000 of funding was secured from other organizations. A grants officer has recently been appointed to increase access to funds from the private and voluntary sectors. This is an innovative strategy that has the potential to provide significant additional resources to address priority needs.

Domain 4: Operational Systems

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

Information Technology (IT) & Data Support

The district has a comprehensive technology plan that was formulated collaboratively with schools. The plan details goals and strategies for the next three years, aimed at ensuring that all students are able to derive maximum benefits from available technologies. The IT team has a range of expertise and skills and they are highly regarded by secondary schools where the bulk of their time is spent.

During the past three years there has been a strong emphasis on improving the use of data throughout the system and all principals have participated in professional development on data driven decision making. There is a plan to purchase a comprehensive student information system and funding has been approved by the board. This will allow a much more coherent and comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis. Teachers/schools will be able to record attendance, suspensions/expulsions data as well as achievement data, which will greatly facilitate their capacity to monitor progress of students over an extended period. In order that the new system is used optimally a comprehensive professional development program will be required for principals, teachers and administrative staff. However, the purchase of the system is a significant development in strengthening management systems throughout the district.

Both the middle and high schools have benefited from a substantial investment in upgrading their computers and information technology systems. The broadband infrastructure has been expanded, with careful thought given to data security and future developments. A substantial number of new computers have been purchased and smart boards and computers are being used in lessons on a much more regular basis, which is improving the overall quality of teaching. The district IT support team has established systems to ensure that faults are attended to quickly and have also developed a range of policies that safeguard students and teachers as well as whole-school data.

By contrast, the IT equipment in elementary schools is seriously inadequate. While funding has been allocated to upgrade the broadband link, this is at a preliminary stage. Without a major injection of funds, the shortcomings of the current hardware are unlikely to be adequately addressed. This will be a significant barrier to the effective implementation of the new student information system. Additionally there are many high quality computer-based resources that students and teachers are currently not able to access because of the limitations of obsolete hardware. Computer-based resources have been shown to be particularly valuable in increasing the engagement of disaffected and/or vulnerable groups such as English language learner (ELL) students or boys with low levels of literacy, as well as for gifted and talented students. They can also greatly assist teachers in differentiating lessons to more effectively meet the needs of individual students. On this basis alone there should be a real imperative to urgently address this situation.

Communication

Communication throughout the district needs to improve. Parents are keen to be part of their children's education but feel that there are few opportunities for them to contribute in a significant way. The board is not inclusive of parents and there is a reticence about discussing issues for fear of some inappropriate response.

Communication between the district and schools also needs to be strengthened in order to improve the morale of both teachers and principals. Teachers and principals have the feeling that there is a top-down approach to management and that their views are not heard. Within this climate it is unlikely that the district will get the best from staff.

Operations

Transportation costs are substantial within the district, with more than \$3.5M being spent annually. Within the current contract, which has recently been extended, there is a requirement that all buses are fitted with a video camera. This has assisted in keeping students safe during their journeys although there are still occasions when the bus driver must intervene to deal with a problem. Nevertheless, the cameras are a very useful resource in encouraging positive behavior and footage is frequently used to deal with inappropriate conduct. Informal systems are in place to monitor the standard of services; however consideration should be given to evaluating the service on a regular basis, particularly prior to re-tendering or extending the contract. Feedback should be sought from students, parents and a sample of teachers to ascertain that service standards that are described within the contract are consistently met.

The food service is of a high standard and the contractor is committed to ensuring that children eat nutritional and appealing food. Students have regular opportunities to have input into planning the menus and there is a focus on educating children and their families about the benefits of a healthy diet. Kitchen staff receive regular training to ensure that they comply with health standards in food preparation and that they offer a child-friendly and positive service. Any staff issues are discussed at the building level and dealt with appropriately.

The department of facilities has established a web-based program called Maintenance Direct that assists the department in ensuring that maintenance issues are dealt with efficiently and effectively. The system allows any staff member to lodge a fault and district staff then ensure that it is followed up appropriately. There is a very large facilities team of approximately 70 staff, which includes night and day custodians and trades people such as electricians and plumbers. Schools are well maintained and processes are in place to ensure that capital improvements are undertaken systematically.

Criterion 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

Internal Stakeholder Engagement

The extent to which parents feel welcome in schools is variable. In a number of instances they feel that their child's school is welcoming and that issues can be easily discussed with either the classroom teacher or the principal. However, in other schools parents feel alienated and uncertain about how they can support their child's learning. Parents from minority ethnic groups were concerned that there was an acceptance that their children would get lower grades than their peers and that teachers did not expect as much from them. These are subtle but powerful messages that need to be addressed. They were also keen to ensure that schools had a better understanding of some of the difficulties that families faced. It is evident that greater efforts need to be made to ensure that all parents feel welcome in schools and additional strategies are explored to reach out to parents. Rather than interpreting their absence at events as disinterest it is vital that a range of communication strategies are employed to extend parent participation in children's learning.

There is an overwhelming view that the board does not currently represent the interests of parents and that members are not committed to genuine consultation. At present, the quality of communication is seen as a major deterrent to families attending board meetings.

Parents are keen to meet with the superintendent and principals on a regular basis and greatly valued the opportunity to contribute to this review. They held strong views about the things that were working well and showed genuine insight in raising concerns.

The services that are provided by the district vary enormously; however, it is crucial that every officer recognizes that their single purpose is to support the quality of learning and teaching in schools so that

student achievement improves. While there are individual efforts to seek feedback from principals and teachers there is no systematic approach to reviewing and evaluating the service as a whole. It is therefore recommended that a comprehensive service evaluation is undertaken on an annual or bi-annual basis.

The HR manager has invested considerable effort in repairing relationships between the Unions and senior management. While some progress has been made, it is vital that all parties recognize the role they play in building collaborative partnerships.

External Stakeholder Engagement

The superintendent has committed considerable effort in establishing links with key partner agencies and business groups including the local college, Rotary and Child Plan. She has had a priority of providing more detailed analysis of student performance data so that there is a clearer understanding of the progress that has been made over the past couple of years. This priority has emerged in order to counteract very negative articles in the press that are oftentimes politically motivated. There is a clear appreciation of the efforts that she has made to build these relationship and partners consider her to be a dedicated and knowledgeable educational leader. Members of the group consider that partnerships have had a direct and positive impact on children and young people. A number of collaborative projects have been implemented which have drawn together staff and resources with significant benefits.

Political and Policy Alignment and Engagement

The local political context creates additional tensions for senior managers at the district and school level. The ongoing negative press articles that are often politically motivated also serve to undermine the confidence the public has in the educational services.