

Sussex Avenue Elementary School
5-23-2005 to 5-24-2005

Introduction

The New Jersey Department of Education conducted a CAPA (Collaborative Assessment for Planning and Achievement) review of Elementary School on 5-23 to 5-24-2005. This school is designated as “in need of improvement” for four consecutive years as defined in the *NJ Accountability Workbook. No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) §1117: School Support and Recognition requires that the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) create and maintain a statewide system of intensive and sustained support for those Title I schools designated as “in need of improvement” for four consecutive years. As part of this required support system, the NJDOE developed the CAPA review process, which assigns teams of skillful and experienced individuals to provide schools with practical, applicable, and helpful assistance, increasing the opportunity for all students to meet the state’s Core Curriculum Content Standards. CAPA is required for all Title I schools in corrective action.

During the district pre-CAPA visit meeting, an agreement was reached between the Newark Public School District and the NJ Department of Education that Sussex Avenue Elementary School would have a review focused on mathematics and bilingual education. The rationale provided by the district indicated that the school had made significant gains in language arts literacy and mathematics on both the ASK4 and GEPA. In addition to the focus, the number of indicators would be reduced in collaboration with the district and New Jersey Department of Education representatives. As a result of this collaboration, 33 indicators were used in the review. The CAPA team spent one and one-half days at Sussex Avenue Elementary School.

The CAPA review team activities included:

- A review of the documents collected for the school portfolio and data profile;
- classroom observations;
- General observations, such as morning and afternoon arrival and dismissal, lunch in the cafeteria, and student restrooms;
- interviews with teachers;
- interviews with building leadership and administrators;
- interviews with district administrators;
- interviews with students;
- interviews with school and student support staff; and
- interviews with parents.

Following the study of documentation, and the conducting of interviews and observations, the team discussed each standard and its indicators. Based on these findings, the team offered its recommendations.

Team members and their affiliation included:

TEAM POSITION	NAME	AFFILIATION
Team Lead	Beth Hyre	Educational Consultant
Principal		
Lanugage Arts Literacy Specialist	Sandra Winick	Educational Consultant
Mathematics Specialist	Margo Gelman	
Special Education Specialist		
Bilingual Education Specialist	Dan Dantas	
Community Representative	Pat Cooper	Educational Consultant
District Liaison	Margo Gelman	
DOE Liaision	Lisa Schnall	NJ Department of Education

Academic Performance Standards

The following Academic Performance Standards address curriculum, classroom evaluation/assessment, and instruction.

- Standard 1:** The school develops and implements a curriculum that is rigorous, intentional and aligned to state and local standards.
- Standard 2:** The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient student work.
- Standard 3:** The school's instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

Learning Environment Standards

The following Learning Environment Standards address school culture; student, family and community support, professional growth, development and evaluation.

- Standard 4:** The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.
- Standard 5:** The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students consistent with 6A: 10A-3.6 Supports for Parents and Families and NCLB §1118 Parental Involvement.
- Standard 6:** The school provides research based, results driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

Efficiency Standards

The following Efficiency Standards address leadership, school culture and resources and comprehensive and effective planning.

- Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creating a learning culture, developing leadership capacity.
- Standard 8:** There is evidence that the school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.
- Standard 9:** The School Leadership Council and district planning team develops, implements, and evaluates a three-year operational plan/school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction and action plan focused on improving teaching and learning.

Summary Findings in: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION)

STANDARD 1-CURRICULUM: The district P-12 curriculum is rigorous and aligned to state standards.

1.1b The district initiates discussions among schools regarding curriculum standards and frameworks to ensure they are clearly articulated across all levels (P-12).

Findings for this indicator based on:

- Review of lesson plans
- Local curriculum documents, units of study and lesson plans
- Teacher interview
- District interview
- Classroom observations

Findings:

The principal provides scheduled time for teachers to meet both horizontally and vertically. Particularly in the middle grades (5, 6, 7 and 8) teachers work together, often under the guidance of the most experienced teacher to articulate concerns, plan lessons, and align instruction. Through Project Grad, vertical articulation is strengthened, connecting middle grade mathematics to the mathematics studied in high school. Since there are generally only 2 teachers per grade level, more than one grade level is encouraged to meet to discuss mathematics and the foundation that must be in place so children will be successful in the next grade.

1.1g The curriculum provides access to a common academic core for all students including, but not limited to, special education and ELL students.

Findings for this indicator based on:

- Review of lesson plans, mathematics local curriculum documents, units of study and lesson plans
- Teacher interview
- Classroom observations

Findings:

Everyday Mathematics and Connected Math provide a challenging, implemented curriculum that addresses a common academic core for general program students. Bilingual students in grades K-2 do not receive mathematics instruction in their native language, but excel in general education mathematics classes. This year, some bilingual students were taught mathematics in the regular 8th grade mathematics class, and excelled. Special Education students who were preparing for GEPA were offered the same opportunity later in the year, but it was noted that this placement paralleled each student's IEP. In addition, these students are instructed by a special educator highly qualified in mathematics. Expectations for high academic performance of all students are in place throughout the school, with course offerings providing opportunities for most students to access NJCCCS.

STANDARD 1

NEXT STEPS

Include special education in vertical and horizontal grade level meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide mathematics instruction for bilingual students in grades K – 2 in their native language or English as appropriate to their identified English proficiency level. Continue to include bilingual and special education children in general education mathematics instruction.
2. Schedule or provide for the regular education, bilingual, and special education teachers to plan collaboratively, with time for discussion and reflection built in.
3. Continue to provide opportunities for additional training in mathematical content and pedagogy at school, district, state, and national conferences and seminars.
4. Implement the plan to have a part-time mathematics coach for the 2005-06 school year.
5. Mainstream bilingual and special education children in regular mathematics instruction when developmentally appropriate.

STANDARD 2 -CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION: The district and school use multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient student work.

2.1a Assessments created by teachers, school and district are frequent, rigorous, aligned with NJ CCCS, used to gauge student learning and adjust teaching to individual needs.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Review of lesson plans, local curriculum documents and units of study
Teacher interviews
Classroom observations

Findings:

Assessments in mathematics are aligned the NJ CCCS. Teacher designed assessment is varied and includes, but is not limited to, the use of a test generator included with Everyday Mathematics and Connected Mathematics, open-ended projects and explorations, student directed presentations of problems and their solutions, and district created mid-terms, final exams, and practice ASK and GEPA tests. Students use inquiry, problem-solving and higher-order critical thinking skills to investigate mathematics in a meaningful and productive manner.

2.1c Students can articulate the academic expectations in each class and know what is required to be proficient. Academic expectations are clearly communicated, evident in classrooms and observable in student work.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Teacher interview
Student interviews
Classroom and hallway observations

Findings:

Evidence of rubric use is present both in the halls and in each classroom, with student work prominently displayed, graded using a rubric, and supplemented with teacher comments. When asked, students describe quality work using the mathematics rubric scoring scale of 0-3. Students are exposed to a variety of assessments, both formal and informal. Students reflect upon their work, and are encouraged to share thinking and justify answers.

2.1d Test scores are used by the district and school to identify curriculum gaps.

Findings for this indicator based on:

District and teacher interviews
Classroom observations

Findings:

School staff members use the results of data analysis for collaborative purposes, but there is some evidence of a systemic use of the data to modify curricular, instructional and assessment practices.

STANDARD 2

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teach children to use rubrics to evaluate the work of peers and to self evaluate, using rubrics, and providing suggestions for improvement when appropriate.
2. Analyze areas of strength and weakness across the grade levels, and plan staff development that specifically addresses these areas. Staff development geared to assessment results will provide focus on effective strategies and approaches to eliminate weaknesses and build on recognized strengths.

STANDARD 3 -INSTRUCTION: Instruction engages all students by using effective, varied and research-based practices to improve academic performance.

3.1a There is evidence that effective and varied instructional strategies are used in all classrooms.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Teacher, district and support staff interviews
Classroom observations

Findings:

Hallway displays are authentic and provide useful displays. Classrooms are arranged to encourage cooperative learning. However, there are some classrooms in which children work alone or are exposed to only whole class instruction. Some teachers provide accommodation for various learning styles, appealing mainly to auditory and visual learners.

3.1d Teachers demonstrate the content knowledge necessary to challenge and motivate students to high levels of learning.

Findings for this indicator based on:

District and teacher interviews
Classroom observations

Findings:

Teachers participate in the required hours of professional development. Most teachers demonstrate the necessary content knowledge consistent with the NJ CCCS to make connections for planning units of study in mathematics.

Teachers have received training in and implement protocols for analyzing student work in mathematics. Results of the analyses do not always inform and/or guide instructional practices. Staff development sessions are not planned in response to assessment data.

3.1e There is evidence that teachers incorporate technology in their classrooms.

Findings for this indicator based on:

District and teacher interviews
Classroom observations

Findings:

Although networked computers are available and turned on in every classroom and the computer lab, there was no use made of them during any of the observed mathematics lessons. Children did use calculators and teachers made use of overhead projectors. The school provides access to technology, but does not appear to monitor computer use as part of an effective mathematics program. Teachers appear knowledgeable in the use of computers, and use them to find interesting lessons and projects on the Internet.

3.1h There is evidence that homework is frequent, evaluated and tied to instructional practice.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Review of lesson plans
Teacher interview
Classroom observations
Student interviews

Findings:

Homework is assigned regularly and relates to the lessons being taught in the classroom. Homework is monitored and is designed to extend student learning and provide opportunities for authentic application. Homework assignments are collected, checked, and discussed in class, when appropriate. The school leadership has fully implemented procedures outlined in the district homework policy.

STANDARD 3

COMMENDATION

School administrators and the technology coordinator have instituted a requirement that classroom teachers who bring students to the computer lab must teach the lesson themselves (with the support of the technology coordinator). This computer lab time is closely related to the curriculum.

NEXT STEP

Incorporate computer use in the classroom as part of daily mathematics instruction.

RECOMMENDATION

Schedule an uninterrupted block for mathematics instruction.

STANDARD 4 -SCHOOL CULTURE: The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.

4.1a The principal and school leadership are responsible for and support a safe, orderly, and equitable learning environment.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator interviews
Student interviews
Classroom observations
Parent Interviews

Findings:

The principal and school leadership support a safe, clean, orderly and equitable learning environment. Administrators report that they do analyze data and use it to improve the learning environment. Policies are in place and implemented to minimize disruptions to the learning environment. Two tutoring classes are conducted in the hallways, and the media center serves as a 2nd grade classroom. Building leadership has been very successful in creating a safe building that is very well maintained, especially given its age.

Behavior standards are well-defined and communicated and equitably applied. Some students did report that disruptive behavior is distracting to them. Administrators report and observations indicate that security guards lack sufficient training to address inappropriate behavior.

The intersection of Rt. 280 and First Street presents a very serious danger to the students during times when the location is not covered by a crossing guard (who is only there on weekday mornings, leaving the 200+ students who participate in after-school and Saturday programs unprotected).

4.1b The principal and school community (e.g., teachers and parents) foster the belief that all children can learn at high levels.

Findings for this indicator based on:

District documentation
Support staff member interviews
Classroom observations
Review of the school report card
Administrator interviews

Findings:

School leadership demonstrates a commitment to high academic expectations for all students. School leaders collaborate with all stakeholders to establish a shared vision for high student achievement. Review of documents shows a trend towards higher student achievement and continuous improvement in student learning.

4.1e Teachers accept responsibility for student success/failure.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator interviews
Student support staff member interviews
Classroom observations

Findings:

Classroom observations do indicate that teachers accept responsibility for student success.

4.1f The school matches teacher strengths and experience with the needs of students. The school assigns staff to maximize opportunities for all students to have access to the staff's instructional strengths.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator interviews
Student support staff member interviews
Classroom observations
Review of district documentation
Instructional Schedules

Findings:

Evidence indicates special needs and bilingual students do not have equitable access to all classes, especially in grades K-3. There is not sufficient staff who are certified in bilingual education to address the needs of that population.

4.1k The school supports the physical, cultural and intellectual needs of all students, which reflects a commitment to equity and an appreciation of diversity.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator, Student support staff member interviews
Classroom observations
Review of district documentation

Findings:

The school does have policies which address a commitment to educational equity and diversity, but the policies are not always reflected in practice. Classroom observations indicate that this is particularly true with respect to special needs and bilingual students.

STANDARD 4

COMMENDATIONS:

School leaders demonstrate a sincere commitment to student achievement and translate that commitment into instructional practice that has resulted in continually improving student achievement. This has resulted in nearly all graduates being accepted into magnet or specialized high schools.

NEXT STEPS:

1. The SLC should form a sub-committee to explore ways to improve the integration of bilingual and special needs students into the school's learning community, especially in the primary grades and especially for newly arriving bilingual students.
2. Crossing guards should be put in place immediately to cover the intersection of Rt. 280 and First Street whenever students are at the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The district should initiate whatever steps are necessary to expand available educational space including Temporary Classroom Units (TCUs).

STANDARD 5: STUDENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students.

5.1a Families and the community are active partners with the school and district in the promotion of programs and services for all students.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Student support staff, student, parent and administrator interviews
Review of school & district documentation

Findings:

Multiple strategies are in place and implemented to promote interaction between teachers and families. Staff interviews indicate that the level of parent involvement is still low, but constant efforts are being made – and new ideas tried – to involve more parents in the school's learning community.

5.1d Students receive necessary additional assistance to support their learning in and beyond the classroom.

1. The school jointly developed with, and distributes to, parents of Title I students a written parental involvement policy that describes the means for carrying out NCLB parental involvement requirements. §1118(b)
2. The school convenes an annual meeting of parents of Title I children to inform them of the NCLB parental involvement requirements. §1118(c)
3. The school has a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, staff and student share responsibility for student achievement. §1118(d)
4. The school builds capacity for parental involvement through use of the 14 mechanisms outlined in the NCLB legislation. §1118(e)
5. The school and district provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities and parents of migratory children. §1118(f)
6. The school and district inform parents of the existence of statewide parental resource and information centers. §1118(g)

Findings for this indicator based on:

School and district documentation
Student support staff and administrator interviews

Findings:

The school has a full complement of after-school, Saturday and co-curricular programs, which attracts almost 50 percent of the total student population.

STANDARD 6 – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

The school and district provide professional development opportunities based on an evaluation of individual and collective teacher needs.

6.1a There is evidence of a school wide professional growth plan that supports collaboration among staff and decreases isolation and fragmentation.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Documentation of professional development activities
Administrator interviews
Support staff interviews
District professional development documentation

Findings:

Professional development is school wide, centered on the adoption of new mathematics and language arts programs. Administration and support staff members indicate that professional development is the means to long-term growth and change, and that attendance at appropriate professional development events is encouraged. The administration also states that new educational ideas and readings are shared regularly with the staff and other materials are available in a dedicated section of the media center. Documentation indicates that many grade level meetings focus on enhancing the growth of the faculty.

In addition to professional development focused on curriculum, formal professional development to aid teachers and families with student behavior issues is limited. The support staff currently does this informally as requested by teachers.

Five teachers with less than five years tenure have received their Masters degree in Administration and Supervision. The district has a professional development plan that is current and comprehensive. All teachers are eligible to participate in the district-wide professional development offerings as well as those afforded at the building level.

6.1c District-wide professional development priorities are set by aligning the goals for student performance with the evidence of achievement and with the Professional Improvement Plans (PIP) of teachers and principals.

Findings for this indicator based on:

District professional development documentation
Administrator and support staff member interviews

Findings:

The professional development opportunities offered by the district are determined based on results of analysis of student achievement data. All staff professional development is on-going and occurs monthly or onsite through demonstrations and coaching. Information was not observed to assess the connections between the PIP, plan and the school's learning goals.

STANDARD 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Leadership should consider greater use of support services to provide the instructional and non-instructional staff with formal professional development on their areas of expertise.
2. The SLC professional development subcommittee should discuss current research, identify best instructional practices, structure teacher discussion groups, and turnkey professional development events for all staff, particularly addressing student behavior issues.

Summary Findings in: EFFICIENCY (QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM MODEL, EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL)

7.1a There is a shared vision that is understood and ingrained in the school's culture.

Findings for this indicator based on:

- Review of SLC agenda and notes
- Administration interviews
- Observations of hallways and classrooms

Findings:

The school has recently rewritten its mission statement to reflect a changing understanding of the school. There was input from all the various stakeholder groups in creating this statement. It is posted throughout the school building and is reflected in the interview discussions about pride in new achievements and visions for future growth.

7.1d The leadership team analyzes disaggregated data that are used to assist teachers to adjust their instruction and to develop PIPs.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Review of SLC meeting agendas, notes and three-year operational plan
SLC member and administrator interviews
Review of grade level meeting agendas

Findings:

The information provided indicates that the leadership team provides disaggregated data to guide grade level meeting discussions. No information provided indicates that this data informs the overall three-year operational plan or is used by the SLC to establish timelines for addressing targets.

7.1f Leadership ensures that time is protected to focus on curricular and instructional issues.

Findings for this indicator based on:

- Support staff and administrator interviews
- Classroom observations and entry of students, restrooms and lunch

Findings:

Leadership has established procedures to assist teachers to easily remove disruptive students from the classroom as it occurs, allowing instruction to continue. There are also numerous opportunities for students to obtain tutoring outside of the classroom (after school, Saturday and summer programs) so that they can perform better in the classroom. Substitutes are also available while faculty is engaged in professional development

7.1k The principal gives highest priority to academic performance.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator and SLC interviews
Review of grade level meeting agendas, professional development documentation and three-year operational plan

Findings:

Improved academic performance is viewed as the way to change the culture of the school and improve the lives of its students. The principal fosters discussion about student achievement at grade level and vertical staff meetings. The principal conducts regular classroom observations and encourages the peer-to-peer observations of the teaching staff.

STANDARD 8: The school maximizes use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.

8.1c The instructional and non-instructional staff members are assigned to serve the learning needs of all students.

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator and teacher interviews
NCLB highly qualified information

Findings:

At Sussex School, 92 percent of the teachers are “highly qualified”. Instructional assistants are assigned to early childhood grades as required. Classroom assignments may allow resource sharing, mentoring, and collaboration among teachers and students but such initiatives are generally informal. Success in meeting the instructional and non-instructional needs of all students may be affected by the number of vacancies, the need for longer-term substitutes and insufficient bilingual instructors.

8.1d There is evidence that the staff makes efficient use of time to maximize learning and that the school schedule reflects instructional priorities (e.g., uninterrupted 90 minute block of literacy instruction in primary grades, classes begin on time, and classes continue until the end of the time period).

Findings for this indicator based on:

Review of master schedule
Teacher interviews
Classroom observations of student work

FINDINGS:

The school schedule and classroom observations indicate that there is a 90- minute block of literacy instruction across all grades. There are interruptions to the mathematics block. Instructional priorities are producing a trend towards increased student achievement. Extensive in-school and field trip activities exist and classes begin on time with orderly movement throughout the hallways during class changes.

8.1e Staff promotes team planning vertically and horizontally across content areas and grades that is focused on the goals, objectives and strategies in the report on instructional priorities (e.g. common planning time for content area teachers; emphasis on time on task, and integrated units).

Findings for this indicator based on:

Administrator and teacher interviews
Review of three-year operational plan, grade level meeting reports

Findings:

Planning occurs both vertically and horizontally across content areas and grades. There is a curriculum mapping program in place in a shared on-line environment to promote further articulation across grade levels. Review of documents indicate that student work is analyzed and discussed at grade level meetings.

STANDARD 8

RECOMMENDATION

The district must provide and train qualified long-term substitutes when vacancies occur.

STANDARD 9 – COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE PLANNING:

The School Leadership Council/NCLB Planning Committee develops, implements, evaluates and adjusts its Report on Instructional Priorities/School Improvement Plan to communicate a clear purpose, direction, and limited goals focused on improving teaching and learning.

DEFINING THE SCHOOL'S VISION, MISSION, BELIEFS

9.1a There is evidence that a collaborative process that engaged the school community was used to develop the vision, beliefs, mission, and goals.

Evidence:

Review of three-year operational plan
SLC and administrator interviews

Finding:

Representatives of all stakeholder groups collaborate to create the school's vision, mission and belief statements. Inputs and comments were encouraged prior to adoption of these statements.

9.2a There is evidence that the School Leadership Committee (SLC) or NCLB Planning Committee planning process involves collecting, managing and analyzing data to annually update the comprehensive needs assessment and to develop the Three-Year Operational or School Improvement Plan.

Evidence:

- Review of three-year operational plan
- SLC and administrator interviews

Findings:

There is a process for managing and analyzing data to inform decision-making at the school and classroom levels. While the SLC uses data analysis provided by the school and district leadership, more attention should be focused on the use of data regarding the school's special populations. The SLC has recently been reorganized to follow district recommendations, including a number of working subcommittees. The SLC has not played a central role in needs assessment and the development of goals and plans.

9.5a Strategies in the Report on Instructional Priorities or School Improvement Plan are aligned with student and school goals; identifies resources, timelines and persons responsible; and contains an evaluation plan that evaluates the degree to which it achieves the goals and objectives for student learning.

Findings:

Strategies in the three-year operational plan are aligned with student and school goals; identifies resources, timelines and persons responsible; and contains an evaluation plan that evaluates the degree to which it achieves the goals and objectives for student learning. The school leadership systematically conducts walkthroughs to assess progress toward school goals.

9.6b The principal and SLC regularly evaluate the degree to which it achieves the goals and benchmarks for student learning set by the plan.

Evidence:

Review of three-year op plan and instructional priorities report
Administrator interviews
Review of school documents

Findings:

School leadership members reports that they review assessment summaries provided by the district for evidence of school progress and informing instructional programs. There was little documentation provided that the school evaluates the specific strategies in the plan as it relates to classroom practice. There are clear indications of academic improvement in some areas although progress is slower among some subgroups and within some academic areas.

STANDARD 9

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The SLC should expand their organizational capacity in order to enhance productive relationships among the various stakeholders.

IN CONCLUSION

Members of the CAPA review team express their appreciation to the staff and community of Sussex Avenue Elementary School for their gracious welcome and for their open interaction with us during our visit. We encourage the school community to review this report in depth, asking themselves deep reflective questions about the findings of fact and recommendations for action.

We also encourage school leadership to lead long-term reflections on the following:

1. What would the school look like if every child in it were proficient in all areas? How would it be different than Sussex Avenue Elementary School today?
2. How can the school staff and students move to predicting student achievement through a comprehensive analytical instructional process?
3. How can the school take ownership of the results of the CAPA review to lead our school to proficiency?
4. What will assist teachers in moving from teacher directed, whole-class instruction to other models of teaching more suitable for meeting the needs of all students?
5. How can the school make good use of data to drive continuous improvement?