

Understanding our student achievement

GFSD "Focus" designation removed

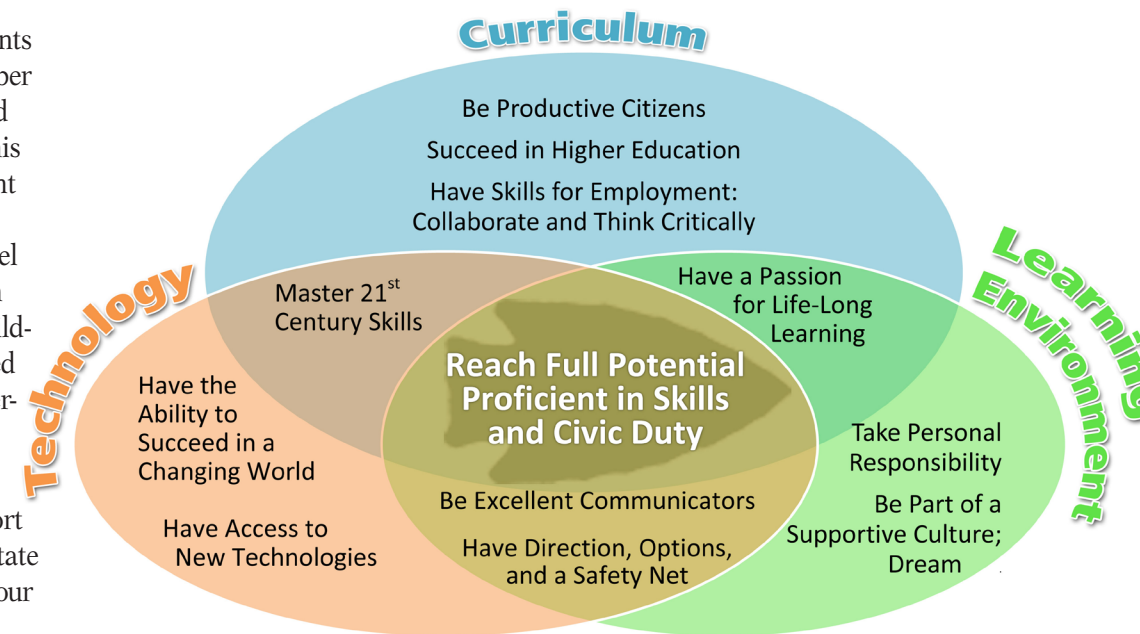
This spring, the District advanced OFF the list of NYSED "Focus" Districts, after being designated in 2016. The Focus designation for our district and high school was based on the underperformance of a subgroup with regard to graduation rate—or in simpler terms, not enough of our economically disadvantaged students finished school with a diploma. The data NYSED used to determine this designation came specifically from the 2010 cohort of students, who graduated in 2014.

For 3 years, our district team worked with NYSED to review practices, survey stakeholders, and develop action plans for improvement in six tenet areas. "We didn't simply see this designation as a mandate

to help more of our less-resourced students succeed—because frankly, not one member of our school community can be satisfied until every one of our students reaches his or her full potential," said Superintendent Paul Jenkins. "We saw this instead as an opportunity to raise the achievement level of *all* of our students. Likewise, the high school's graduation rate isn't a single-building issue, but a comprehensive, concerted effort that begins in Universal Pre-Kindergarten and carries through the middle years to Regents-level coursework."

Student success relies on strong support in each of the six tenets defined by the State and explained below, corresponding with our own district survey data and action items.

District Goals: Educate students to...



Post-Focus: Where do we grow from here?

While the district has made huge collective strides to advance off the Focus designation list, specific benchmarks must be made in future years to avoid slipping onto the list again.

One key effort that got us off the list was increasing our state test participation rate. We must continue having 95 percent of eligible students take the Grades 3-8 state tests in ELA and math, and the Grades 4 & 8 Science exams.

District and building leaders will continue with their "results first" mentality of analyzing student progress closely and comprehensively.

Professional development continues to be teacher-driven and of industry-

leading quality, exploring key culture shifts in education—from redefining lesson plans through use of technology, to research-based shifts in grading practices and academic rankings.

We take pride in our overall graduation rate rising from 79 percent in 2016, to 87 percent in 2017, to 84 percent in 2018.

Our mission-driven efforts will continue as we: "promote excellence through high expectations and evolving standards for students, staff, parents and community. The challenge is to reach one's personal best while respecting each person's individuality."

District Leadership + Capacity



Tenet 1: The district examines its schools' systems and makes intentional decisions to identify and provide critical expectations, supports, and structures in all areas of need so schools are able to respond to their community and ensure all students are successful.



Survey: Parents, instructional staff, and secondary students all had strongest agreement survey-wide that "students have access to computers and the internet at school for learning." Well-kept, clean, and adequately-supplied facilities are other key successes. The survey revealed a need to more "clearly explain the reasons behind decisions on key issues."



Action: District leaders are making better use of data throughout the year to see if schools are on track to meet their goals and make a positive impact on the school community. Primarily, this involves monitoring the impact of district and school initiatives, teacher practice, student engagement, and student achievement.

School Leader Practices + Decisions



Tenet 2: Visionary leaders create a school community and culture that lead to success, well-being, and high academic outcomes for all students via systems of continuous and sustainable school improvement.



Survey: Elementary students overwhelmingly agreed that they know their school's rules, and that their principal leads their school well. Parents indicated that "school leaders actively work to make this school a great place for students to learn."



Action: School leaders are taking a detailed look at key indicators of progress within their building's initiatives. The ongoing review looks for positive impacts on lesson planning, pedagogy, social/emotional supports, and family engagement. For example, the High School's action plan to increase student attendance includes a goal based on attendance data, a progress monitoring process, opportunities to adjust practice based on interim data, and regular updates to the school community on success.

Curriculum Development + Support



Tenet 3: The school has rigorous and coherent curricula and assessments that are appropriately aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) for all students and are modified for individual subgroups to maximize teacher instructional practices and student-learning outcomes.



Survey: Instructional staff most strongly agreed that "the curriculum in [their] grade/subject area is aligned with state standards," and "student progress is monitored with formative evaluations." Students at all levels agreed that "teachers expect [them] to do [their] best," and they "learn from class lessons," and "know what it takes to do well on tests" at the secondary level. Feeling challenged at school was a concern for some elementary students.



Action: District-wide, lesson plans that are developed by teachers and reviewed by school leaders better correspond to the district's curriculum and meet the needs of the teacher's learners. At every building, teachers plan a lesson objective and two higher-order questions (that involve applying, analyzing, synthesizing, creating—and are open-ended with more than one correct response) to be asked in each lesson.

Teacher Practices + Decisions



Tenet 4: Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students and pertinent subgroups experience consistently high levels of engagement, thinking, and achievement.



Survey: Nearly all instructional staff members agree they "collaborate with other teachers to ensure student success," and are "continually learning new skills that improve my teaching." More than 92 percent of elementary and secondary students agree their "teachers want me to do my best." About a quarter of parents saw growth opportunities in tailoring instruction to meet children's strengths, and regularly informing families of children's academic progress.



Action: Additional resources have been directed to the district-wide Response to Intervention system in which the lowest quintile of learners in each school receive targeted help in their weaker academic areas, with a particular focus on English language arts and math. Instructional coaches regularly provide hands-on support to classroom teachers presenting deeper-level inquiries.

Student Social + Emotional Developmental Health



Tenet 5: The school community identifies, promotes, and supports social and emotional development by designing systems and experiences that lead to healthy relationships and a safe, respectful environment that is conducive to learning for all constituents.



Survey: Strengths include parents feeling their child is accepted in school, teachers feeling students are treated fairly regardless of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender or special needs, and elementary students feeling safe in school, and that teachers are nice to students. A concern noted across some participant groups was the threat of bullying or other student conflict.



Action: In 2017, every faculty and staff member district-wide participated in the Bridges Out of Poverty and SafeTalk Suicide Prevention training programs, along with additional professional development in bullying prevention and de-escalation techniques. Additional programming has been added at each school to meet students' social/emotional needs, along with development of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Family + Community Engagement



Tenet 6: The school creates a culture of partnership where families, community members, and school staff members work together to share the responsibility for student academic progress, social-emotional growth, and overall well-being.



Survey: Parents largely report feeling welcome in their child's school. Growth opportunities include increasing parent input on how best to meet their child's needs, more parent volunteerism and attendance at school events, and increased student participation in community service projects at the secondary level.



Action: Elementary open houses have expanded to include community-based service provider "fairs" to help families access resources that will support their child's success at home. At the high school, conversations around academic resources and strategies are part of the HOPE Boutique outreach efforts.