

VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of the Superintendent
30 Park Street • P.O. Box 600
Vernon, CT 06066-0600



Richard J. Paskiewicz
Superintendent of Schools
(860) 870-6000 ext. 124

Deborah Murasso
Assistant Superintendent of Schools
(860) 870-6000 ext. 143

TO: Richard Paskiewicz
FROM: Debbie Murasso
DATE: August 2009
RE: Monthly Report on Actions to Improve Student Achievement

We approach the beginning of the new school year and even with two summer months to prepare, it seems we could use more time. And while this appears pretty obvious when it comes to school renovation projects, it also applies to our work to improve teaching and learning. It's been a busy summer.

Status of (SIP) DIP Initiatives (successes, challenges)

- In mid-July the results of the CMT and CAPT were released and the first level of number crunching and data analysis began. A review of our district results reveals many positive trends in the improvement of student achievement which reflects well on the actions of our **District Improvement Plan**. Evidence indicates we are on the right track in our implementation of the **"practices of improving schools."** But our journey is a long one and as educational researchers point out time and again, **school improvement is a marathon, not a sprint. It is a process, not an event.**
- In spite of incremental and significant growth for whole groups and subgroups of students, the preliminary **AYP** results released in August 2009, were mixed. On a positive note, four of our schools achieved AYP: LSS and CRS met the ambitious targets where approximately 8 in 10 students scored at/above proficient in reading and math. And VCMS and SRS achieved AYP through the **"Safe Harbor"** provision by reducing by 10% the number of students who achieved at/below the basic level from 2008 to 2009. Three of our schools did not achieve AYP (MSS, NES, and RHS) nor did the district and in compliance with the regulations of **No Child Left Behind**, much time and energy was/is being directed in the implementation of identified consequences.
- **School Choice:** As Title I schools in need of improvement, Vernon is obligated to and has prepared for the public school choice transfers for nine (9) students from Northeast School and an additional fifteen (15) students from Maple Street. This brings to 70 the number of students who have opted for public school choice transfers over the past two years. In addition to school choice, the students at Maple Street School will also be eligible this year to receive **Supplemental Educational Services (SES)**. Upon their return to work, educators throughout the district will begin the process of reviewing, revising, and refining our **School and District Improvement Plans**.
- The summer also provided tremendous opportunity to plan our first steps in the implementation of **SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions)**. Beginning this September, universal screenings will be administered to all students in grades K-6 and, based upon identified cut points, identified students will receive tiered interventions. With the availability of funding through the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

(ARRA), there will be a few more hands on deck not only to provide these important supplemental services to our students but also to increase our capacity to handle and manipulate the data to inform our instruction.

In other work,

- (1) Administration processed the paperwork required from those parents seeking to **home school** their children. The opportunity to participate in a **portfolio review** was provided and **notices of intent** to provide home instruction for the 2009-10 school year were obtained. Currently, approximately 67 children (34 Vernon families) are home schooled;
- (2) In collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education, twelve **student teachers and interns** have been placed for the fall semester with Vernon educators; and
- (3) Administration is also preparing for the implementation of the new BEST Program. Pending legislative approval, the new program **TEAM (Teacher Educator and Mentoring)** will require new teachers to work with mentors in the completion of five modules.
- (4) And finally, Vernon administrators completed their required summer readings: The first, **Response to Intervention: A Planning and Implementation Guide for School Practitioners** by Ellen Cohn and the second **Ahead of the Curve: The Power of Assessment to Transform Teaching and Learning** edited by Douglas Reeves will serve to deepen our collective wisdom and understanding of “**best practice.**” Research summaries from both of these titles will be prepared for monthly distribution to all staff.

In late June, **Rockville High School** achieved word that it had been awarded the **Attendance Grant** sponsored by the **Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance**. Based on a successful pilot, the grant has allowed administration to secure a four year subscription to **NovaNET** and to consider revisions to its current alternative education program. On August 24, 2009, the Vernon Board of Education approved a proposal to change CHOICE to **REACH (Rockville Educational Achievement through Cooperative Help)**. The program will focus on ninth grade students who have accumulated fewer than 2 credits... With the release of CAPT scores in mid-July, high school administration and district leadership brainstormed strategies to support the achievement of economically disadvantaged students... The high school welcomed three new members to its certified staff... (Mike Maltese, Assistant Principal; Katie Pitts, English; and Stephanie Davidson, Special Education)... and the TALC program to its RHS community!

For the first time since 2005 there was no summer construction at **Vernon Center Middle School** ☺ and on July 6th the **Summer School Program** began with a total class enrollment of 47 students. We are grateful to the four VCMS educators who comprised the summer school staff: Gina Weber, Joanna Pantages, Patricia LaPointe, and Todd Giansanti. Having staff members who are familiar with both the school community and its students supports a more successful experience for teaching and learning. In addition, VCMS administration once again collaborated with the **ARC Program (Alternate Route to Certification)** to place six student teachers. This collaboration with ARC facilitates small group and one-on-one differentiated instruction which can be vital to a student’s success. Successful student completion of the summer school program supports this school’s **SMART goal** targeted at **increasing the number of students who meet the promotion criteria**... Over the summer many participated in the planning for the September professional development day activities: the school-wide implementation of **Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)** and training in the use of **iTEACHER** for tracking student data. The importance of a positive school climate to support teaching, learning, and student achievement is well-documented in the literature... The middle school welcomed two new members to its certified staff: Katie Pallotti, Social Studies and Margaret Wagner, Mathematics... VCMS achieved **AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress)** through the **Safe Harbor Provision** of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Although it remains a school “**In Need of Improvement – Year 1,**” significant growth in the achievement of all students and subgroups of students supports the adult actions and strategies as defined in the **School Improvement Plan**.

The late summer at **Skinner Road School** was also highlighted with the notification that **AYP** had been achieved through **Safe Harbor**. Congratulations to our staff! The process of continuous improvement in reading achievement will be assisted tremendously as the new **Treasures** reading program is implemented this school year... To support the district's goals in the implementation of **SRBI**,

- Goal 1. Deepen Our District's Understanding and Implementation of SRBI/RTI, K-12;**
- Goal 2: Strengthen Core Instruction and Tier I Interventions, K-12; and**
- Goal 3: Implement Universal Screenings in K-6 for Math and Reading.**

staff will be provided copies and engage in a book study of **Response to Intervention: A Planning and Implementation Guide for School Practitioners**. Teachers have already begun to analyze CMT data to determine areas of strength and weakness. The first data team meeting will be used to explore the functions of www.ctreports.com so that all may explore data on a deeper level. This analysis will serve as the foundation for updating the **School Instructional Plan**.

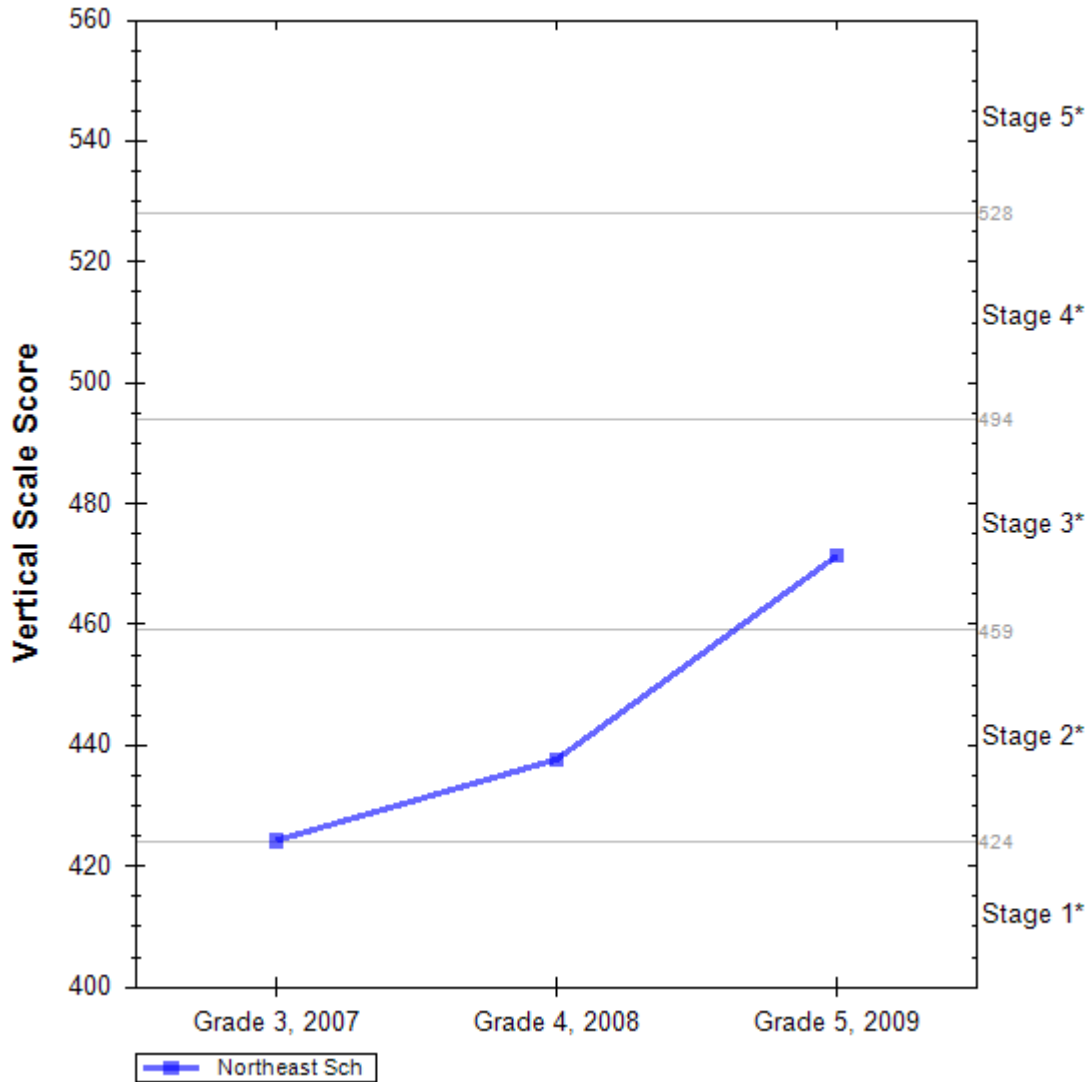
Educators at **Lake Street School** will also engage in a book study and discussion of Robert Marzano's **The Art and Science of Teaching**, a research-based protocol for getting students to deeply interact with new knowledge guided by ten key questions...

1. What will I do to establish and communicate learning goals, track student progress, and celebrate success?
2. What will I do to help students effectively interact with new knowledge?
3. What will I do to help students practice and deepen their understanding of new knowledge?
4. What will I do to help students generate and test hypotheses about new knowledge?
5. What will I do to engage students?
6. What will I do to establish or maintain classroom rules and procedures?
7. What will I do to recognize and acknowledge adherence and lack of adherence to classroom rules and procedures?
8. What will I do to establish and maintain effective relationships with students?
9. What will I do to communicate high expectations for all students?
10. What will I do to develop effective lessons organized into a cohesive unit?

Universal screenings will take place on September 21-22. This data will be used to assess students' needs, form intervention groups, and target instruction... Lake Street and Skinner Road School welcome new special education teacher Kristen DuPucchio.

Honest bad news characterized the CMT results for **Northeast School**. While year-to-year comparisons were disappointing overall, a review of vertical scales (same cohort of students over time) demonstrates increases in student achievement:

Average Vertical Scale Score, Reading
Grade 3, 2007; Grade 4, 2008; Grade 5, 2009
Northeast School



Group	Grade 3, 2007		Grade 4, 2008		Grade 5, 2009		2007-2009		2008-2009	
	N Tested	Mean VS	N Tested	Mean VS	N Tested	Mean VS	N Matched	Growth	N Matched	Growth
Northeast	41	424	37	438	36	471	34	42	35	28

Northeast educators will engage in an in-depth review of CMT results by grade, by strand, and by subgroup to determine strengths and obstacles and to plan appropriate strategies to support improved achievement.

Hiring a new instrumental music teacher (Welcome, Kelly Gansenberg), writing the annual report, completing the narrative for the strategic school profile, scheduling specials, making up duty rosters, ordering supplies and materials, analyzing CMT results, and meeting with construction managers were some of the many activities that were the focus of administration at **Center Road School** this summer... While **AYP** was achieved, CMT results were mixed and somewhat disappointing. On an encouraging note, it appears some progress is being made in **closing achievement gaps** for the subgroup special education. For example, current fifth grade special education students showed a 46 point growth in reading compared to last year. Their non special education counterparts showed a 19 point growth. Special education students

were addressed through the **School Instructional Plan** last year and included in all **Data Team** activities. Math scores were satisfactory given that a new math program was introduced last year... Scheduling was very different this year. A master schedule was created to include common planning time for all grade levels, uninterrupted reading and math instructional blocks, reading support time, and math support time. This was done to implement with fidelity the **SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions) framework**.

Administration at **Maple Street School** spent summer months analyzing results of the Connecticut Mastery Test. Analysis was conducted at the grade, classroom, subgroup, and individual student levels. Although Maple Street School did not achieve **AYP**, improvements in several areas were noted:

- The small class sizes in fifth grade, coupled with intensive support, resulted in a much improved performance by those students in reading and math over their performance in fourth grade.
- All grades performed well in mathematics, with each grade having over 70% of students scoring proficient or higher (71.7% in grade 3, 78.4% in grade 4, and 75.8% in grade 5).
- Strong writing prompt performance continued to result in solid overall writing scores across the grades.

Planning for increased support across the school involved scheduling a two-hour literacy block and at least a one-hour numeracy block for grades 1 through 5. Within the **SRBI framework, Tier I and some Tier II interventions** will occur during this time. In addition, blocks of time when students at each grade level can receive additional **Tier II and Tier III interventions** were identified... Maple Street School will be the first school to participate in the **universal screening** assessments to be administered to all students in grades K-5. Students will be assessed (on September 8-9) in key reading and mathematics skills.

At the district level, all members of the administrative team are working hard to improve teaching and learning:

- Improving long term educational outcomes for children at risk must include access to **high quality early childhood programming**. As such, the majority of the work this summer for Sally Sherman, Supervisor of Early Childhood Education & Special Programs focused on planning and preparing for the implementation of the **“Vernon Public Schools Preschool Collaborative.”** Where discussions were first initiated in March 2009, she is pleased to report that...
 - One hundred and thirty preschool students will enter school on September 8th.
 - All five elementary schools will offer a preschool program.
 - Ninety-seven preschoolers, the majority of whom qualify for free and reduced meals, will be provided a preschool program within the public setting.
 - All classes will offer our students with disabilities increased time with non disabled peers, as all classes have increased numbers of typically developing preschoolers.
 - Many families will receive a minimum of two home visits per school year, facilitating their connection to the public school system.
 - The establishment of the **“Vernon Early Childhood Resource Center”** at Skinner Road School will house an adult space for program consultants as well as a library of resources for families. In addition, the **Vernon School Readiness Collaborative**, as well as the **Vernon Early Childhood Community of Practice**, plans to hold meetings there.
 - Monthly family events and/or trainings will be provided during the evening hours.
 - Implementation of the **SRBI framework** at the preschool level will support intervening early using the national model of **“Recognition & Response.”**
 - Monthly professional development will be provided by the EASTCONN Early Childhood Initiative, at no cost to the district.

Throughout the fall, energies will focus on (1) developing consistency across classrooms with regard to curriculum, lesson planning, daily schedules, data collection, and assessment; and (2) exploring National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. The Preschool Program welcomes two new teachers to its staff: Karen Champagne at NES and Meena Aithal at LSS.

- Because the best schools are those that never stop learning, summer readings and a thought-provoking book talk (***Restitution: Restructuring School Discipline***) helped educators consider actions to improve school culture relative to both academic achievement and behavioral/social growth... In collaboration with students and their families, special education administration helped facilitate positive transitions for ASD students from elementary to middle to high school... ARRA planning continued through the summer months and project initiatives were fleshed out to better define purpose and function.
- The ***Elementary Summer Academy*** enrolled a record breaking 131 students. Thirteen were enrolled in the low ropes elements course... CMT/CAPT results were received; a cover letter is being prepared for distribution of student reports to parents during the week of September 21st.
- Coordinators in the ***Office of Curriculum and Instruction*** made progress on all three district ***SRBI goals***: In support of Goal 1, they have read extensively on the topic; have begun to use SRBI terminology and language in all documents generated, and have worked with the Director of Special Education to develop SRBI procedures and forms that reflect and support the implementation of the SRBI framework. In support of Goal 2, Judy Latonie has worked with the MacMillan consultants to frame professional development that emphasizes the implementation of strong core instruction and of Tier I and some Tier II interventions as part of the general education curriculum. In support of Goal 3, our curriculum coordinators chose and obtained ***universal screening instruments*** for reading and math, established cut scores, and designed an ***SRBI database*** that will house the ***universal screening/progress monitoring data***.
- The Fine Arts Coordinator completed the art bid for the district and facilitated the purchase of all art supplies and music requests. A ***K-12 Standards-Based Professional Development Plan for Art and Music*** was developed. Elements included (1) aligning data team, curriculum work, and SIP/DIP initiatives through arts literacy; (2) building a standards-base scope and sequence; (3) establishing 2009-10 department and data team meeting schedules; (4) preparing art and music data team content and SMART goal plan; and (5) planning for professional development workshops on September 3-4.
- In World Language, two RHS teachers, Montserrat Ferres and Babacar Ndao, attended summer workshops at the University of Connecticut and subsequently completed their course syllabi required for all ***ECE (Early College Experience)*** instructors... Curriculum was developed for French and Spanish IVB courses... Data team and department meeting time for 2009-10 will continue to focus on ***examining standards, reviewing curriculum, and defining assessment practices***.
- The ***CIAC Athletic Program Evaluation Report*** was received on July 10, 2009. Its findings (both commendations and recommendations) will return to committee and will be presented to the Board of Education (BOE) at its September 28th meeting... A monthly 2009-10 meeting of the ***School Wellness Council*** was established. Recognitions for both the ***Mayor's Fitness Challenge Cup*** and the ***Vernon Gets Moving*** initiatives will also be presented to the BOE... Planning for this year's Vernon Gets Moving challenge is underway!

Recognitions

*We welcome and congratulate new administrative leadership at Rockville High School.
Congratulations, Eric Baim, on your appointment as principal.
Congratulations, Mike Maltese, on your appointment as Assistant Principal.*

Congratulations Center Road School principal Mary Jo Myslinski on the announcement of your retirement effective January 22, 2010. Thank you for many years of dedicated teaching and school leadership!

Thank you, David Rhoades, RHS Counselor, for your leadership in assuming administrative duties for the RHS summer school program.

Thank you, Jim Harrison and Tammy Salminen, for facilitating our annual substitute teacher orientation program at VCMS and for demonstrating AESOP, our new web-based absence management and substitute service system.

Thank you, Monica Pacheco, for your assistance in helping plan and implement the VCMS breakfast program.

With thanks to the VCMS PBS Committee (Terrie Schmitt, Julie Bilyak, Christina Roy, Alicia Stewart, Sherri Nevins, Marty Schwartz, and Ryan Kupferschmid) for your hard work this summer planning the PBS roll-out! SOAR with Eagle Pride!

Thank you, Kent Batchelder, Kim Sass, Mike Savignano, and Jen Slater, for your leadership in facilitating iTEACHER training.

With thanks to our entire Vernon community for organizing and hosting a benefit to support the Morrin children.

With thanks to all (Richard Paskiewicz, Stan Karasinski, Chico Parrott, Joe Ganges, Custodial, Maintenance, School Building Advisory Commission, & others) who worked together to prepare the opening of schools for the important work of teaching and learning.

With thanks to all Vernon employees (both certified and non-certified staff), especially at MSS, NES, and CRS, for their patience, flexibility, adaptability, and creativity in preparing for the opening of school with minimal access to their classrooms, supplies, and key school information and records.

Many thanks to ALL who made the Vernon Public Schools Preschool Collaborative possible.

Thank you, Dennis Timberman and Jill Goldberg, for creating the 2008-09 Profiles in Professionalism recognition poster.