Integrated Field Review Report

REPORT January 23, 2018	Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union Final Report Site Visit: October 16, 2017

Submitted by Jesse Roy

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Schools & Enrollment

School	Approximate Enrollment	Grade Span
Currier Memorial School	94	K-6
The Dorset School	162	K-8
Flood Brook School	288	K-8
Manchester Elementary	402	PK-8
Mettawee Community School	208	PK-6
Sunderland Elementary	86	K-8

Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union (BRSU) participated in the Vermont Agency of Education's Integrated Field Review (IFR) on October 16, 2017.

During the afternoon of the IFR training, the Visiting Team reviewed artifacts provided by BRSU. During the full day visit, the Visiting Team participated in interviews of the Superintendent, Director of Curriculum/Grants Manager, Business Manager, counseling staff, intervention staff, teaching staff, students, parents, and administrators. In addition, the Visiting Team observed classroom instruction and other BRSU learning environments through observations and facilities tours led by students.

The Visiting Team gathered data regarding the implementation of Education Quality Standards across the system related to Academic Proficiency, Personalization, Safe Healthy Schools, High Quality Staffing, and Investment Priorities.

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Visiting Team

Name	Role	Organization
Amy Fowler	Deputy Secretary	Agency of Education
Donna Stafford	Education Quality Manager	Agency of Education
Ernie Wheeler	Special Education Monitoring Coordinator	Agency of Education
Susan Yesalonia	Proficiency-Based Learning Coordinator	Agency of Education
Kevin Doering	Education Quality Coordinator	Agency of Education
Jesse Roy	Education Quality Coordinator (IFR Lead)	Agency of Education
Ron Ryan	Program Manager for Licensing	Agency of Education
Deanne Lacoste	Principal	Battenkill Valley SU
Jennifer Wright	Teacher	Battenkill Valley SU
Kate Abbott	Early Education Director	Southwest Vermont SU
Tim Payne	Principal	Southwest Vermont SU
Mary Hand	Special Education	Southwest Vermont SU
Wendy Foran	Special Education Director	Southwest Vermont SU
Donna Cauley	Principal	Southwest Vermont SU
Allyson Hoffman	Librarian	Southwest Vermont SU
Bob Thibault	Principal	Windham Central SU
Jesse Riemenschneider	Teacher	Windham Central SU
Ryan Cutting	Interventionist	Windham Central SU
Mike RobbGrieco	Director of Curriculum and Technology	Windham Southwest SU

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Academic Proficiency

The Vermont Education Quality Standards prioritize a coordinated curriculum in all subjects for each Supervisory Union/District that is aligned to the standards adopted by the State, instruction in all subjects and the transferable skills, a local assessment system for determining student achievement, multi-tiered systems of support for learners in meeting those standards and participation in the State assessment system.

Findings:

1. School staff describes scheduling that creates common planning time for grade level and content-area teams.
2. SU-wide curriculum coordination and assessment development is described by administrators as a priority, and teacher-leaders are actively involved in the process.
3. Evidence of standards-based learning outcomes is observed in many classrooms.

1. The SU-wide goal of implementing the workshop model of instruction is evident in classrooms across the SU.
2. Administrative staff reports efforts to build a culture where "risk taking" in designing instruction is comfortable.

1. SU-wide use of Northwest Evaluation Association testing drives the work of data teams and informs instruction.
2. SU teams are developing additional content-area assessments to supplement math and literacy assessments already in place.

1. Proficiency-Based grading is reported across the SU, though understanding and application varies between schools.

Commendations
1. BRSU prioritizes the coordination of curriculum and instruction, and teacher leaders are supported in spearheading this work.
2. BRSU is creating a culture of instructional innovation, adopting the workshop model and emphasizing project-based learning opportunities.

Recommendations
1. BRSU should consider more clearly defining and increasing coordination of their local assessment system across schools.
2. BRSU should consider additional efforts to promote understanding and the formalization of proficiency-based grading across schools.

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Personalization

The Vermont Education Quality Standards prioritize development of personalization through the creation and use of Personalized Learning Plans, flexible pathways to graduation, Career and Technical Education and instructional strategies that personalize learning for students.

Findings:
Personalized Learning Plans
1. Personalized Learning Plans that are differentiated for students K-8 are reported and observed in several schools.
2. Stakeholders report that Personalized Learning Plans incorporate student goal setting and self-assessment.
3. The role of Personalized Learning Plans in driving student learning varies between schools, with parents, students and teachers reporting differences in how often plans are utilized or updated.
4. Some stakeholders express concern over the potential for a lack of coherence in BRSU practices and the practices of receiving schools, particularly in regards to Personalized Learning Plans.

Student Voice and Choice
1. A range of opportunities for student academic choice were observed across the SU, including self-selected books and writing topics, use of technology for personalized pace and content in ELA and math, multi-modality centers and options in demonstrating learning.
2. There is an SU-wide focus on growing project-based teaching and learning, featuring a partnership with the Tarrant institute at the middle school level.
3. Parent conferences are student-led, SU-wide.

Commendations
1. BRSU has implemented Personalized Learning Plans in a variety of developmentally appropriate formats in several K-8 schools, going beyond the EQS requirement.
2. BRSU schools feature a range of opportunities for students to exercise their voice and choice, including student-led parent conferences.

Recommendations
1. BRSU should work to explain the benefits of student voice and choice in preparing students for future success, regardless of the practices of the next school attended.
2. Though BRSU's work around Personalized Learning Plans exceeds state expectations, the SU should consider formalizing the use of plans between schools, promoting equity.

Safe Healthy Schools

The Vermont Education Quality Standards prioritize the establishment of learning environments that promote the social and physical health of students, facilities that promote learning and security, support for preventing disciplinary infractions and responding appropriately when transgressions occur and engaging in inter-agency work to support students beyond the school day.

Findings:
Multi-Tiered System of Supports
1. Academic data teams are established at most schools, though purposes vary, with some stakeholders describing data-driven protocols for entrance into tiered interventions and others describing data as mostly informing core instruction.
2. Analysis of social-emotional learning data and the availability of Tier 2 social-emotional interventions differ across buildings.

Social/ Emotional Health
1. Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is being implemented in most schools, with varying degrees of fidelity observed. Some schools or classrooms incorporate elements of Responsive Classroom and Developmental Design.
2. Most stakeholders describe school environments that are safe and respectful, while a few express concerns with student behavior disrupting the learning environment at some schools.
3. Some schools reported teacher advisories focused on social-emotional learning and transferable skills.

Physical Well-Being
1. Most stakeholders described their schools as safe, with little bullying.
2. Schools feature a range of approaches to addressing students' basic needs, from training around trauma, to dental care, to winter clothing drives, to a food-to-home program.

Physical Environment
1. All schools feature student work samples in common spaces.
2. Schools are described as and observed to be clean and well kept, with some evidence of recent maintenance or upgrades of physical spaces.
3. Most classrooms feature multiple small group seating options, and some students describe opportunities for movement and choice in workspaces to accommodate their learning needs.

Commendations
1. BRSU schools have adopted a range of social-emotional learning programs and supports for positive behavior.
2. BRSU schools are welcoming, well maintained and described as safe by most stakeholders.

Recommendations
1. BRSU should consider formalizing expectations for the use of data in informing Tier 1 instruction and interventions, both academic and social-emotional.
2. BRSU should consider assessing that a universal social-emotional learning program is being implemented with fidelity at each school.

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High Quality Staffing

The Vermont Education Quality Standards prioritize the role of all school leaders in improving student learning and establish the expectation that school leaders will have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities in order to focus on improving student learning by ensuring that professional staff are appropriately licensed, a system of appropriate needs-based professional learning is available and aligned with staff evaluation and supervision policies, continuous improvement.

Findings:

Professional Development
1. At most schools, there is a coordinated system for mentoring new teachers.
2. The contract for teachers allows for yearly tuition reimbursement of two graduate level courses, up to the UVM rate.
3. There is a consistent professional development emphasis on project-based learning and student-centered teaching across the SU.

Staff Evaluation
1. Some staff report that there are annual teacher evaluations based on Marzano.
2. Some schools are exploring possible new evaluation methods for teacher evaluation.

Leadership
1. BRSU hosts monthly Principal meetings focused on aligning educational priorities between schools.
2. An Administrative Leadership Retreat is held annually with a focus on long-term action planning.
3. There is a cross-SU teacher leader team involved in the coordination of curriculum and assessment.

Staffing
1. School staff report voice and choice in guiding their buildings towards SU goals.
2. Many stakeholders describe staff as diverse in their approach and committed to what is best for kids.
3. Administration at some schools reported difficulty filling some staffing positions, including special education and paraprofessional staff.
4. Student to staff ratios are consistently low in BRSU classrooms.

Commendations
1. BRSU emphasizes developing project-based and student-centered learning approaches, supported by professional development initiatives and collaborative partnerships.
2. BRSU has prioritized increased coordination between schools, both at the administrative and classroom levels.
3. BRSU works to achieve a balance between shared goals and priorities and the autonomy of school staff.

Recommendations
1. BRSU should consider assessing the impacts of low student to staff ratios through a lens of efficiency.

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Investment Priorities

The Vermont Education Quality Standards require that Supervisory Unions carry out their work in accordance with the fundamentals of accounting procedures, provide the full range and breadth of resources, and facilities to support student learning while doing so at a funding level supported by the local community and conduct the business of schooling in accordance with laws that govern education.

Findings:

Continuous Improvement Planning

1. BRSU Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) identifies three areas of focus (academics, learning environment, and community) that are present in each of the school CIP plans.
2. Several schools report that they have improvement plans that they cannot implement due to insufficient funding or other priorities for spending.
3. All schools include data from assessments (Smarter Balanced, NWEA MAP, other) as reference points for their Continuous Improvement Plans.

Student Data System

1. Staff at several schools reports the importance of using data to inform instructional decisions either in the classroom or through the Educational Support Team process.
2. Staff at different schools describes different tools used for tracking student data/performance, including Alpine, Haiku and the Smarter Balanced Portal.

Financial Alignment

1. Most buildings and classrooms have ample evidence of expenditures in English Language Arts and Math such as manipulatives, leveled readers, technology, and additional staffing for literacy and math support.
2. Some schools report having less access to staff resources (interventionists, librarian, and counseling) than others, though there is evidence of some positions being grant-funded through individual district efforts.

Communication

1. Staff at several schools report that the SU is working to establish shared expectations for teaching and learning across schools and that the school system is moving with greater cohesiveness as a result.
2. Parents in multiple schools report a disconnect in their understanding of what was happening at schools. For example, some parents did not fully understand Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports implementation, the data reporting system, grading systems and/or student-led conferences.

Commendations

1. BRSU schools have data-driven Continuous Improvement Plans that are coordinated with the priorities of the SU.
2. BRSU has leveraged internal and external resources to support core expenditures that support their school.

Recommendations

1. BRSU should consider formalizing the methods by which student data is collected and reported across schools, for the sake of efficiency and equity, and to facilitate opportunities for analysis.
2. BRSU should proactively communicate the rationale for perceived discrepancies in the allocation of staff between schools, as well as assess the validity of these concerns.

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