

Integrated Field Review Report

REPORT

January, 2017

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union

Final Report

Site Visit: November 7, 2017

Submitted by Josh Souliere



Schools & Enrollment

School	Approximate Enrollment	Grade Span
Bennington Elementary	272	K-5
Molly Stark	374	K-5
Monument Elementary	118	K-5
Mount Anthony Middle School	594	6-8
Mount Anthony Union High School	857	9-12
Pownal Elementary	223	K-6
Shaftsbury Elementary	209	K-6
Woodford Hollow	19	K-6

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU) participated in the Vermont Agency of Education's Integrated Field Review (IFR) on November 7, 2017.

During the afternoon of the IFR training, the Visiting Team reviewed artifacts provided by SVSU. 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 SVSU 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.

Visiting Team

Name	Role	Organization
Amy Fowler	Deputy Secretary	Agency of Education
Ernie Wheeler	Special Education Coordinator	Agency of Education
John Nelson	Education Systems Developer	Agency of Education
Kevin Doering	Education Quality Coordinator	Agency of Education
Jesse Roy	Education Quality Coordinator	Agency of Education
Ron Ryan	Program Manager for Licensing	Agency of Education
Brian Howe	Teacher	Battenkill Valley SU
Donna Bazyk	Teacher	Battenkill Valley SU
Jennie Russo	Teacher	Bennington-Rutland SU
Mary Ann Caraco	Teacher	Bennington-Rutland SU
Skyler LaBombard	Principal	Bennington-Rutland SU
Rosanna Moran	Principal	Bennington-Rutland SU
Elizabeth Warnecke	Teacher	Bennington-Rutland SU
Betsy Memoe	Teacher	Bennington-Rutland SU
Jen McKusick	Director of Curriculum	Windham Central SU
Craig Roach	Principal	Windham Central SU
Rachel Doty	Teacher	Windham Central SU
Bethany Barton	Teacher	Windham Central SU
William Anton	Superintendent	Windham Central SU
Sandy Pentak	Principal	Windham Southwest SU
Barb Barrett	Principal	Windham Southwest SU
Tate Ericson	Director of Special Education	Windham Southwest SU

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:

Curriculum Coordination

1. SVSU features online standards-aligned curriculum documents across content areas and grade levels.
2. SVSU has identified research-based elementary curriculum options, though programs in place vary widely between schools and classrooms. Administrators describe ongoing instructional “audits” to determine exactly which schools are implementing which programs in the hopes of building more coherence.
3. Across SVSU schools, staff describes the creation of common planning time as a priority in the design of schedules.

Instructional Practices

1. A number of SVSU teachers were observed using differentiated, small group instruction to meet individual student needs.
2. The use of technology in teaching and learning is inconsistent across elementary schools, per observations, student, and staff reports.
3. Per staff reports, SVSU is working to identify and align best instructional practices through the work of an SU-wide team featuring teacher participants.

Local Assessment System

1. SVSU has a documented common assessment plan, K-12; including an SU-developed writing assessment delivered three times each year.
2. Per staff interviews, data is used to drive instruction and interventions SU-wide, though processes vary by building.
3. SVSU has a comprehensive student data platform and a data coach who is available to support collection and analysis.

Proficiency-Based Learning

1. Proficiency-based grading is in the piloting phase in some schools.
2. A number staff, parents, and students expressed confusion about Proficiency-based grading practices. Some reported not understanding the rationale behind the shift, while others were unclear on how grades were determined or should be interpreted.

Commendations

1. SVSU has adopted a local comprehensive assessment plan.
2. SVSU schools are using data to make decisions about instruction and interventions.

Recommendations

1. SVSU should continue to promote the alignment curriculum and instructional best practices across the SU to promote excellence and equity in learning.
2. SVSU should continue to develop understanding across stakeholder groups concerning the practices of and rationale for proficiency-based learning and grading.

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. SVSU has drafted a detailed PLP process for students in grades 7-12
2. Per interviews, a number of students and parents expressed dissatisfaction with the PLP process, citing a lack of communication, little say in goal writing, and a minimal relationship between PLPs and instruction.
3. Teachers report a need for more student involvement and investment in the PLP process.

Flexible Pathways

1. Middle/High school provides an informational letter to parents describing flexible pathways options and a matrix of opportunities available by grade level.

Full Breadth of Courses

1. Elementary school parents at several schools expressed a desire for more enrichment opportunities.

Student Voice and Choice

1. Observations in several buildings indicate opportunities for student choice and voice, through methods of demonstrating proficiency, selection of work activities and project-based learning.
2. Parents and students report attention to multiple learning styles in teaching, though some also expressed a desire for more student choice.

Commendations

1. SVSU has developed Personal Learning Plans (grades 7-12) and defined Flexible Pathways.
2. Students in a number of SVSU classrooms are afforded opportunities for voice and choice in their daily learning.

Recommendations

1. SVSU should revise their approach to communicating and implementing its Personal Learning Plan initiative, to ensure that staff is supported in incorporating PLPs into instruction, parents are engaged, and that plans reflect students' interests and goals.
2. SVSU should explore additional opportunities for enrichment across elementary schools.

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. SVSU has developed a comprehensive, multi-tiered system of support that is being implemented by all schools. Staff members in several schools report that SU guidance and cohesiveness around MTSS has been helpful in developing and implementing their systems.
2. A proactive, positive behavior management system is evident in most schools.

Social/Emotional Health

1. Most schools feature school counselors on staff and/or contracted mental health service providers, though the number of resources was reported and observed to vary between elementary buildings.
2. Staff in multiple buildings report that the social-emotional needs of students are more intense than in the past, which impacts learning and strains personnel capacity.
3. Many students report feeling safe in school and supported by trusted adults.
4. Clear, posted behavior expectations were observed throughout SVSU schools.

Physical Well-Being

1. SVSU has developed formal bullying, harassment, hazing and attendance policies, and a Health Wellness Action Plan. While some students and parents report incidents of bullying, other students and staff report that it is not tolerated and is consistently addressed.
2. The consistent availability of a physical education class was not clear across all SVSU elementary schools.

Physical Environment

1. Schools visited were observed to be clean, well maintained, and welcoming.
2. The MS and HS feature specialized resources and space to accommodate a range of student needs and interests, including a fitness room, woodshop, outdoor classroom, climbing wall, teaching kitchen and the Southwest Tech Center.

Commendations

1. SVSU has developed a clear, formal MTSS system that is being implemented in each building, in both academic and social-emotional learning areas.
2. SVSU schools are described by many stakeholders as safe and staffed by caring, hardworking educators.

Recommendations

1. SVSU should work to ensure that physical education and health instruction are available to all elementary students.
2. SVSU should assess the equity and availability of professional development and personnel to support students' social-emotional well-being and should continue to devise ways to support staff dealing with these student challenges.

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. Priority professional development in SVSU is coordinated across the LEA, but is also responsive to specific school and individual needs.
2. SVSU is committed to developing staff comfort with digital tools, employing technology integrationists and training teacher leaders through a Marlboro College-hosted certificate program.

Staff Evaluation

1. A comprehensive staff evaluation process based on the Danielson Framework is used to ensure quality instruction and to improve staff practices.
2. The supervisory union has indicated an interest in using student data and evaluation results to help identify individual professional development needs.

Leadership

1. Staffs at various schools describe new school leadership as promoting a collaborative, problem-solving attitude and/or a positive climate at their schools.
2. Some staff groups describe a need for more central office visibility, communication and efforts to build trusting, positive relationships with school stakeholders.

Staffing

1. The availability of personnel and resources, both for academic instruction and to support student wellness, varies by school.
2. Several staff and parents described concerns with the consistent delivery of IEP-mandated special education services, possibly attributable to challenges with hiring qualified special education staff.

Commendations

1. SVSU has prioritized sustained professional development around MTSS, proficiency-based Learning and trauma-informed practices and has adopted a data-driven approach to identifying school-level and individual professional development needs.
2. SVSU has developed a consistent system for the evaluation of staff, supporting accountability and improvements in practice.

Recommendations

1. SVSU should continue to develop strategies to attract and retain skilled professional staff members, particularly in special education.
2. SVSU should work to foster a spirit of positive collaboration and collegiality between central office and school staff.

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. SVSU and schools have engaged in a continuous improvement planning process that is data-driven and has resulted in cohesive SU and school plans, but understanding and application of plans varies.
2. SVSU's continuous improvement plan is focused on building comprehensive systems under which to implement more specific interventions to improve student outcomes.
3. Stakeholders noted that past instability at the central office has made it difficult to institutionalize past improvement efforts beyond the planning stage.

Student Data System

1. Staff report that the new data dashboard and data coach/ data team have facilitated effective teacher collaboration, intervention and instructional design at most schools.
2. SVSU hosts a yearly Data Day and each SVSU school has an established Data Team.

Financial Alignment

1. Central office and school staff report that they have 1:1 technology, though technology use in teaching and learning was only observed in some classrooms.
2. Perception at some schools is that they have the appropriate level of human resources while others felt they were under-resourced. Some stakeholders were unclear about how these decisions are made.
3. Some staff noted that demands in the community for mental health services was growing and perceived that these demands were outpacing the ability of schools to respond.

Communication

1. Various parent groups shared multiple examples of school and classroom level communication. Some parents were less pleased with levels of SVSU communication, and some staff expressed wanting more transparency from the SU.
2. Different schools and central office groups reported different understandings of how the budget for each school is built and resources distributed.

Commendations

1. SVSU has developed a cohesive data system and a model of data-driven continuous improvement that facilitates the convergence of student outcomes, resources, and professional practice.
2. SVSU parents are largely pleased with school level communication.

Recommendations

1. SVSU should work to increase LEA communication and transparency generally, and specifically to support stakeholder understanding of the rationale behind resource allocations that might appear to be inequitable.
2. SVSU should continue to strive for cohesiveness in the practices of individual schools, promoting equity and efficiency.