

Focused Monitoring Report for Hartford School District



On-site Review: March 8-12, 2010



Student Support Division
Assigned Monitoring Facilitator: Ernest Wheeler
(802) 828-0564

Table of Contents

- I. Description of Monitoring Authority and Focused Monitoring**
- II. Focused Monitoring Methodology**
- III. Supervisory Union Background**
- IV. Commendations for the LEA**
- V. LEA Areas for Improvement Related to the Priority Indicators**
- VI. Areas of Concern Related to the Indicators**
- VII. Non-Compliance with State and Federal Rules & Regulations**
- VIII. Improvement Plan Process**

Hartford School District Focused Monitoring Team Members

- Mary Wills, Parent Member
- Mary Nelson, LEA Peer Member
- Alicia Hanrahan, VTDOE Monitoring Team Consultant
- Troy McAllister, VTDOE Monitoring Team Consultant
- Kate Rogers, VT-DOE Essential Early Education Consultant
- Josh Souliere, VTDOE Education Support Systems Consultant
- Joan Holcombe, VTDOE Educational Consultant
- Michael Bailey, VTDOE Data and Reporting Coordinator

The Focused Monitoring Team wishes to thank everyone in the Hartford School District for being gracious and flexible hosts.

I. Description of Monitoring Authority and Focused Monitoring

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (20 U.S.C. 1400 (c)(1)), provides federal funds to assist states in educating children with disabilities and requires each participating state to ensure that school districts and other publicly-funded educational agencies in the state comply with the requirements of IDEA and its implementing regulations. Further, Section 616 of IDEA states that the primary focus of Federal and State monitoring activities shall be on improving education results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities and ensuring that States meet the program requirements with a particular emphasis on those requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities. Vermont state law requires local education agencies to provide appropriate special education and related services and requires the Vermont Department of Education (VTDOE) to establish, monitor, and enforce regulations governing special education programs in the Vermont public schools and all institutions wholly or partly supported by the state. The state has adopted regulations implementing those requirements which are administered by VTDOE. VTDOE supervises and conducts the general supervision process in furtherance of the state's obligations under IDEA and Vermont law.

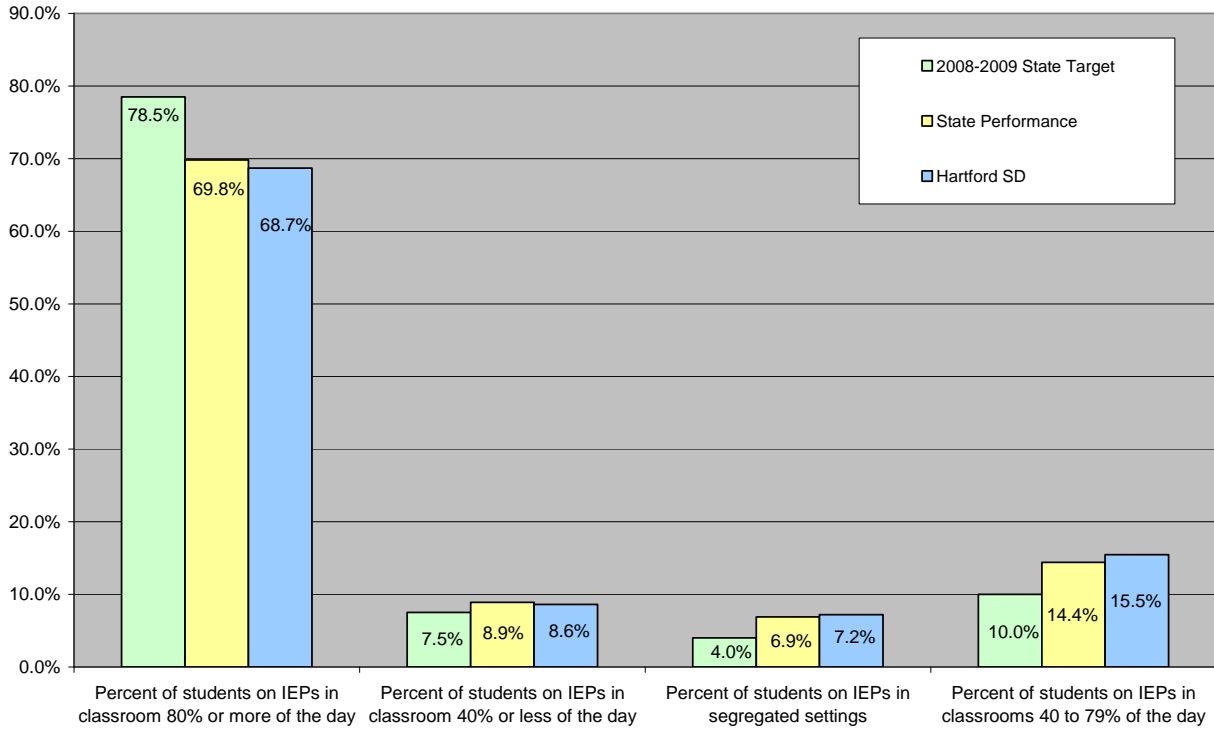
Focused Monitoring is a new approach to assess compliance with federal and state special education law and regulations while also addressing critical performance areas. It is a shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of accountability. It places the focus of a monitoring review on results versus process. The principles of Focused Monitoring are identified as follows:

- Focused Monitoring includes a limited number of priorities chosen by a diverse group of stakeholders.
- Available data are used to select priorities that will improve student educational performance, increase independence for children with disabilities, and lead to full participation in society.
- A limited number of indicators are identified within each priority area and are used as the basis for district ranking and selection for on-site reviews.
- A Focused Monitoring system is data and information-based. Data-based information is used to allocate limited resources in the direction of most need, which are determined by identifying what is most likely to lead to improvement in student performance.
- There is a relationship between monitoring and corrective actions—solutions are linked to identified problems. Corrective actions are designed to create systemic changes that result in improved student performance.
- Families have the opportunity to provide information on a continuous basis.

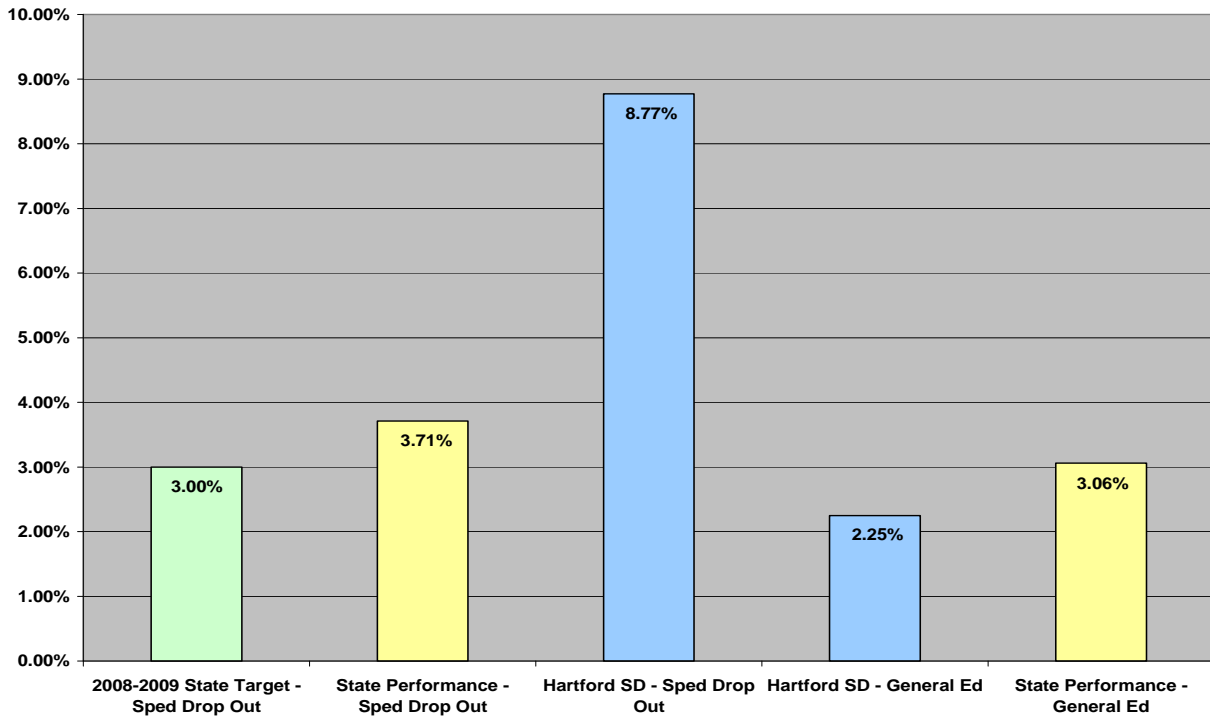
II. Focused Monitoring Methodology

The Hartford School District (HSD) was selected for an on-site visit based upon their performance on the 2008 State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicators 5 and 2 regarding Least Restrictive Environment and Student Dropout Rate. See the graphs on the following page which document the 2007-2008 state target our average performance as a state and HSD's performance in regards to the indicators:

Least Restrictive Environment Data 2008-2009



**Hartford School District
Sped and General Ed Dropout - 2007-2008**



The on-site Focused Monitoring review was conducted during the week of March 8-12, 2010. The team visited the Dothan, Ottauquechee and White River Elementary Schools, the Hartford Memorial Middle School and the Hartford High School, The team also visited the Essential Early Education Pre-School programs located within the White River and Ottauquechee elementary school buildings. The Focused Monitoring Team reviewed and analyzed the following data prior to and during the on-site review.

Data Reviewed

- Indicator data by disability, grade, and school building.
- LEA Profile information as submitted by the director of special education.
- Vermont Agency of Human Services Community Profile 2007.
- Local Report of State Performance Plan indicators.
- Special education policies/procedures/forms/practices.
- Family/school collaboration related to the indicator(s) via parent surveys and interviews.
- Educational Support Team policies, procedures, and current plans.
- District disciplinary policies and procedures.
- 504 Plans, Individualized Education Programs, Evaluation Plans and Reports.

Parent Surveys

An online survey based on families' educational experiences in the Hartford School District was available for all parents of students within the supervisory union. The Hartford School District provided documentation of adequate and appropriate public notice regarding the survey. The online survey was completed by seventeen parents. In addition, ten parents were interviewed in person or over the phone.

On-Site Interviews

Interviews were conducted with nine general and special education administrators from the district schools and supervisory union level, twenty-one general and special education teachers, five paraeducators, three guidance counselors, three related service providers, three planning room personnel and five Educational Support Team coordinators. While on-site the focused monitoring team also interviewed eight students.

Record Reviews

Focused file reviews were conducted for thirty-seven students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Section 504 Plans, Educational Support Team (EST) Plans, Behavioral Plans and Functional Behavior Assessments.

Classroom/Program Observations

Classroom observations were conducted in each of the following schools and/or programs:

- 1. Dothan Brook Elementary School**
- 2. White River Pre-School Program**

3. **Ottauquechee Pre-School Program**
4. **Hartford High School**
5. **Hartford Memorial Middle School**
6. **QUEST Program**
7. **Hartford Autism Regional Program**
8. **Regional Resource Center**
9. **Regional Alternative Program**

III. Supervisory Union Background

Hartford School District		
School Name	Grades Served	2008-09 Enrollment
Dothan Brook Elementary School	(K - 5)	305
Hartford High School	(9 - 12)	670
Hartford Memorial Middle School	(6 - 8)	327
Ottauquechee School	(Pre-K - 5)	194
White River School	(Pre-K - 5)	205

The following information is taken from the 2007 Agency of Human Services (AHS) Community Profile. The AHS profiles utilize supervisory union boundaries when presenting data for a particular community. Thus, the information below concerns the town of Hartford which solely comprises the Hartford School District. According to the Agency of Human Services, the total population for this community was 10,829 in 2006.

The following information comes directly from the AHS profile:

Percent of children (ages 0-4) in families receiving welfare (proxy for poverty) in 2006

Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
9.1%	8.1%	-1.0%

Percent of children (ages 5-17) in families receiving welfare in 2006

Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
4.3%	3.7%	- 0.6%

Percent of kindergartners who met standards of readiness in 5 domains in 2007

Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
44%	42%	- 2.0%

Teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 females ages 15-17 in 2004

Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
15.8	5.7	- 10.1

Percent of 8th grade students who have () in the past 30 days in 2007

	Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
Smoked Cigarettes	7%	12%	+ 5%
Smoked Marijuana	8%	10%	+ 2%
Used Alcohol	19 %	29%	+ 10%

Reports of child abuse and neglect per 10,000 children ages 0-17 in 2006

Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
84.5	55.8	- 28.7

2006 Custody rate for children (per 10,000 ages 10-17) deemed ()

	Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
Unmanageable	28.5	14.7	-13.8
Delinquent	52.7	8.17	+ 2.90

Socioeconomic Data

	Vermont	HSD Community	Difference
Average Annual Wage (2006)	\$34,974	\$32,023*	- \$2,951
Median Family Income (1999)	\$48,625	\$51,286	+ \$2,661
Percent of People above poverty level (1999)	90.6%	91.5%	+ 0.90%

* As measured by county, not community

IV. Commendations for the LEA

Relative to the State Performance Plan Indicator(s) 2 (Dropout Rate) and 5 (Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment), the following efforts and/or initiatives have been implemented within the district schools and the alternative program operated by the district. These activities have been recognized as effective components in Hartford's current educational systems which engage students and families as well as affecting a positive school climate and positive student outcomes.

- The Hartford School District is to be recognized for its willingness to host or support three collaborative programs within its boundaries.
- Parents, students and staff praised the positive climate and inclusive culture at the Hartford Middle School.
- The welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment at the White River School was acknowledged by parents and staff. In many instances, this positive climate was attributed to the sense of community, the vision and the leadership of the school's principal.
- The Regional Alternative Program is to be recognized for its strong linkage to a standards-based curricula and the use of MAPS data to inform instruction. These program components enable students to purposefully and successfully reintegrate into the general education environment when it is deemed appropriate..
- The Hartford School District's Essential Early Education (EEE) program is recognized as an asset and integral part of the school district and community.
- VTDOE commends the value of the Hartford School District's EEE service delivery model as well as the on-going relationships that the Pre-Kindergarten classrooms in the Ottauquechee and White River Schools have established with community-based early childhood programs.
- VTDOE observed evidence of educational technology (i.e. communication devices, laptops sound field systems, Smart Boards) throughout the district that supported student access and performance within the general education curriculum and environment.
- The "looping" guidance counselor model in place for students moving from the middle school to the high school was cited by parents, staff and students as having a positive impact on student transition between the buildings.
- The special education and Educational Support Team files that were reviewed were well-organized, which made for easier review by the monitoring team and, we are certain, makes for easier access to records by district staff when necessary.

V. LEA Areas for Improvement Related to the Priority Indicators

The Monitoring Team must validate a concern through three separate sources of data to determine that the concern is an area for improvement. These Triangulated Areas For Improvement

(TAFI) make certain that the information is truly valid and reliable. During the Focused Monitoring Team's review of the Hartford School District, one issue was triangulated requiring the implementation of an Improvement Plan.

TAFI I: The Educational Support System (ESS), including academic and behavioral supports, needs to be cohesive and effective in all schools within the Hartford School District. (VT Statute 2902)

Supporting Evidence:

1. The lack of a data collection system or a data-based decision making model impedes the provision and adjustment of individualized, positive behavioral supports for students.
2. There is conflicting evidence that a district-wide curriculum exists and no evidence that it is implemented consistently across the school district.
3. Parents of students with significant emotional or behavioral challenges reported that a lack of consistent and positive interventions, as well as the frequent use of physical interactions with students, has resulted in students' negative feelings towards school.
4. Parents and staff reported that referrals for evaluations and reviews of Educational Support Team plans were not always addressed in a timely manner.

Corrective Action:

A collaborative team including general and special educators, administrators and parents shall review the Educational Support System concerns within the district and recommend procedures to improve consistency across the district that will meet the needs of the students they serve.

The collaborative team will identify the district's professional development needs regarding student data collection and analysis, as well as the use of positive behavior supports and make recommendations for future professional development training.

Required Evidence of Correction:

- Documentation of recommendations.
- Documentation of identified professional development needs and plans for providing it.
- Documentation of policies and/or procedures for operationalizing the system of supports.
- Documentation of supports and services available within each school, as described in their Parent/Student handbook.

VI. Areas of Concern Related to the Indicators

Other issues or areas of concern (see Section VI of this report) that cannot be triangulated are identified, but they do not rise to the level of an area for required improvement. The Hartford School District is encouraged to consider these issues and concerns within an Improvement Plan.

- The special education professional development opportunities for educators and paraeducators need to be strategic and focused upon the needs of staff and students (i.e. differentiated instruction, behavioral supports, co-teaching models).
- The Hartford Autism Regional Program needs to link their curricula for students to the Vermont Standards.
- Special education evaluation reports are not consistently completed in accordance with State rules. This factor may be leading to an over-identification or an incorrect eligibility decision to be made on students. Furthermore, staff indicates that the information contained within reports is not always helpful in the development of IEPs for students.
- The intended purpose of the EACH program at Ottauquechee appears to be in conflict with some actual practices. Although students in the program have access to the general education classroom, they are not always engaged with their non-disabled peers and their curriculum is not aligned with their grade level placement.
- QUEST, the district's dropout prevention and credit recovery program has great potential and is endorsed by many of its current students as an alternative means towards credit accrual. VTDOE has concerns regarding staff and student needs based upon the increasing student participation in the program this year. There is a limited amount of time for staff preparation and collaboration, a sharing of the students' educational and functional needs, and a supervision of daily student performance.

For example, the current PLATO computer program utilized at QUEST, aligned with Vermont Standards, can be manipulated by students (using a search device to seek answers from another website during unit tests) unless they can be closely supervised. PLATO also acts as the only academic tool for credit recovery and some of the classes taught last year through this program should be examined in regards to student learning styles.

- The early education programs, including Pre-Kindergarten and Essential Early Education, need greater oversight.
- The climate and morale, as reported by staff and parents, at Dothan Brook is of serious concern and needs to be addressed.
- Diligence needs to be taken in the review of HSD dropout counts to ensure that reliable and valid data is submitted to the VTDOE and also to identify when alternative pathways to graduation are implemented.
- The discipline and attendance policies are not being consistently applied and this has an effect on student success and the provision of services for students on IEPs.

VII. Non-Compliance with State and Federal Rules & Regulations

Findings of Non-Compliance

Non-compliance findings are violations of State and/or Federal rules and regulations. The following findings of non-compliance must be corrected within one year from the date of this report. The Hartford School District must include a response to each of these findings in their Improvement Plan.

Individual Findings of Non-Compliance

- The Least Restrictive Environment category checked on the IEP did not reflect the actual amount of time the student was in the general education environment according to a calculation based upon the services page of the IEP. *State Regulation 2363.1(b)*
- The Present Levels of Educational Performance section of the IEP was missing in one file. *State Regulation 2363.8 (a)*
- A special education file contained information that the student was not receiving a related service as prescribed on the IEP and that no formal meeting or attempts had been made to amend this IEP during this implementation period. *State Regulation 2363.3*
- Goals and objectives for a student remained nearly identical over a three year period. *State Regulation 2363.8 (b)*
- Barriers to the participation of students with disabilities in general education environments, as would be addressed through the provision of accommodations, modifications, supplementary aids and services prior to placement in more restrictive educational environments was not well-documented in many files. *State Regulation 2363.8 (c)*
- Transition from Essential Early Education to Kindergarten occurred, in some instances, without the required formal meeting 3-6 months prior to the student's entrance into Kindergarten. *State Regulation 2361.1 (a)*
- Several Evaluation Reports did not appropriately identify the primary disability category for students based upon their most recent evaluation and the IEP did not correctly identify the disability category as determined by the evaluation report. *State Regulation 2362.2.5 (a)(1)(i)*
- Post-secondary transition plans did not always include a list of the age appropriate assessments that should have been the basis in the development of the transition plans. *State Regulation 2363.8 (1)(i)*
- A suspected area of disability, as described in the Evaluation Plan, was not addressed by the Evaluation Planning Team in the final Evaluation Report. *State Regulations 2362.2.4(e) and 2362.2.4 (k)*

- Attendance of required school-aged and pre-school IEP Team members was frequently not documented on the IEP cover page. *State Regulation 2363.4*
- In one instance, Form 6 (Consent to Initial Special Education Services) was signed by the parent but was dated well beyond the initiation date of IEP services. *State Regulation 2360.5.7(f)*
- Two initial evaluations did not meet the 60 day timeline and the notices of delay did not document a reason that would be considered an exceptional circumstance for the delay. *State Regulation 2362.2.3 (b)*
- Four re-evaluations were not completed within the three year anniversary date of the previous evaluation. *State Regulation 2362.2.4 (a)*
- Initials of all or some of the required Evaluation Planning Team members were not found on 14 of the completed Evaluation Reports indicating their agreement with the team's eligibility decision. *State Regulation 2362.2.5(5)*
- The Adverse Effect section on 11 Evaluation Reports lacked appropriate documentation for the -1.0 standard deviation or lowest 15th percent as proof of an adverse effect in a basic skill area. *State Regulation 2362 (d)*
- Adverse Effect section did not include the team's conclusion statement on the completed Evaluation Report for four files. *State Regulation 2362.2.5(a)(1)(ii)*

VIII. Improvement Plan Process

Upon receiving the final report following a Focused Monitoring visit, the LEA is required to initiate the development of an Improvement Plan (which includes improvement activities related to the priority indicator and correction of non-compliance) with your VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator within a period of 30 calendar days from the date of the final report. The Improvement Plan should be a comprehensive, interdisciplinary plan that targets LEA-wide improvement. In developing the plan, the LEA should consider the "areas for improvement related to the indicators," "areas of concern related to the indicators," "findings of non-compliance," and the "supporting evidence," "corrective actions," and "required evidence of correction" contained within the findings. The VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator will provide technical assistance and consultation during the development of the Improvement Plan. It is important to note that improvement activities may extend beyond one year, but the correction of non-compliance must happen within one year from the date of written notification via the final report.

In order to assure that the Improvement Plan is comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and LEA-wide, the plan must be developed by a collaborative team which includes general and special education stakeholders. This plan must not be a uniquely special education response developed in isolation from other LEA initiatives. The VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator provides technical assistance to the team in the vein of a facilitator. The Monitoring Facilitator may not provide the technical assistance that the LEA identifies it needs, but rather functions as a liaison for needed services.

Development of the Improvement Plan will include:

- Use of the VTDOE template to develop the Improvement Plan.
- Review of the areas of non-compliance and the expected evidence of change in the final report.
- Coordination of the Improvement Plan with other LEA initiatives
- Addressing the following components per activity:
 - What specific tasks/activities are planned to address the targeted area?
 - Why were these particular tasks/activities deemed most appropriate?
 - When will the tasks/activities be completed?
 - Who will complete the tasks/activities?
 - Why will this activity work to bring the LEA into compliance?
 - Who will monitor the progress and completion of activities?
 - What are the needed resources (fiscal, human) within/outside the LEA that will be used to implement change?
 - What are the deliverables, products, materials, documentation or action plans that will be developed?
 - How will progress be monitored to ensure that the expected changes take place (self-assessment)?
 - What are the intended outcomes/impact related to the targeted area?

The VTDOE Monitoring Team reviews the LEA's proposed Improvement Plan, requesting clarifications and revisions, as necessary. Upon approval of the Improvement Plan, the LEA is issued an approval letter that outlines the schedule of reporting the LEA's progress monitoring to VTDOE. The purpose of this Monitoring Progress Report is to provide the LEA with a format in which to demonstrate evidence of their efforts to correct the deficiencies identified through the Focused Monitoring process. In addition, the process allows the LEA to monitor and evaluate the success of their Improvement Plan activities. The scheduling of the progress reports depends on the complexity of the Improvement Plan and the individual needs of the LEA.

Prior to the one year anniversary of notification via the final monitoring report, an Evidence of Change review meeting is scheduled between LEA representatives and the VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator to assess whether the LEA has met or is making adequate progress towards meeting the required evidence of change at the expected standard as set by the collaborative team and approved by the VTDOE. Based on the results of the meeting, the VTDOE determines whether (1) the LEA has met the standards required and the Improvement Plan is officially closed, (2) the LEA has not met the standards required and additional time will be allowed with Improvement Plan amendments or (3) sanctions will be imposed. The correction of non-compliance must occur within the one year timeline; the above refers to improvement activities related to the priority indicator.

Your Monitoring Team contact for all follow up activities is:

Ernie Wheeler
Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620
(802) 828-0564, Ernest.Wheeler@state.vt.us

Focused Monitoring Improvement Plan template

**Focused Monitoring Improvement Plan
for the
Hartford School District**



Prepared for Submission:

To:



LEA:
Contact Person:
(802) -

Table of Contents

IMPROVEMENT PLANNING TEAM MEMBERS16

AREAS OF CONCERN RELATED TO THE INDICATORS17

 IMPROVEMENT PLAN:.....17

NON-COMPLIANCE WITH STATE & FEDERAL RULES & REGULATIONS18

 IMPROVEMENT PLAN:.....18

Hartford School District Improvement Planning Team Members

NAME	ROLE	SIGNATURE AGREEING WITH PLAN
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LEA Areas for Improvement Related to the Priority Indicators

The Monitoring Team must validate a concern through three separate sources of data to determine that the concern is an area for improvement. These triangulations of data make certain that the information is truly valid and reliable. Other issues or areas of concern (see Section VI of the report) that cannot be triangulated were also identified in this report, but they do not rise to the level of an triangulated area for improvement. The HSD is encouraged to consider these issues and concerns using the following Improvement Plan template.

Areas of Concern Related to the Indicators

- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Improvement Plan:

BENCHMARKS	ACTIVITIES FOR ACHIEVING THE TARGET	RESOURCES NEEDED	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	EVALUATION PROCEDURES	DOCUMENTATION TO BE SUBMITTED TO VT-DOE
BY					
BY					
BY					
BY					

Non-Compliance with State and Federal Rules & Regulations

Findings of Non-Compliance

Non-compliance findings are violations of state and/or federal rules and regulations. The following findings of non-compliance must be corrected within one year from the date of this report. HSD must include a response to each finding in their Improvement Plan.

Systemic Findings:

-
-
-
-
-

Individual Findings:

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Improvement Plan:

BENCHMARKS	ACTIVITIES FOR ACHIEVING THE TARGET	RESOURCES NEEDED	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	EVALUATION PROCEDURES	DOCUMENTATION TO BE SUBMITTED TO VT-DOE
BY					
BY					
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BY					