

Integrated Field Review Report

REPORT

February 5, 2018

Windham Southwest Supervisory Union

Final Report

Site Visit: November 15, 2017

Submitted by Jesse Roy



Schools & Enrollment

School	Approximate Enrollment	Grade Span
Halifax School	53	K-8
Readsboro Elementary	54	PK-8
Stamford Elementary	75	K-8
Twin Valley Elementary	206	PK-5
Twin Valley Middle/High School	258	6-12

Windham Southwest Supervisory Union (WSSU) participated in the Vermont Agency of Education's Integrated Field Review (IFR) on November 15, 2017.

During the afternoon of the IFR training, the Visiting Team reviewed artifacts provided by WSSU. 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 WSSU 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
Nicole DelNegro	Teacher	Battenkill Valley SU
Phoebe McChesney	Teacher	Bennington-Rutland SU
Randi Kulis	Assistant Superintendent	Bennington-Rutland SU
Kraig Hannum	Teacher	Bennington-Rutland SU
Frank Barnes	Director of Technology	Southwest Vermont SU
Donna Leep	Assistant Superintendent	Southwest Vermont SU
Mary Buak	Finance	Southwest Vermont SU
Pam Bernardo	Instructional Coach	Windham Central SU
Elizabeth Brown	Teacher	Windham Central SU
Amy Fowler	Deputy Secretary	VT Agency of Education
Jesse Roy	Education Programs Coordinator	VT Agency of Education
Kevin Doering	Education Programs Coordinator	VT Agency of Education
Ernie Wheeler	Special Education Coordinator	VT Agency of Education
Ron Ryan	Manager for Licensing	VT Agency of Education
John Nelson	Systems Developer	VT Agency of Education

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. WSSU documents and administrator interviews demonstrate recent, growing efforts to align curriculum, although numerous school staff reports describe making their own choices in instructional programming, including between classrooms at the same school.
2. WSSU students and parents report varying degrees of academic rigor.

Instructional Practices

1. There is limited observed evidence of posted learning outcomes in classrooms across WSSU.
2. WSSU classrooms are largely organized around small group instruction, with a number of examples of differentiation observed.
3. Integration of technology in teaching and learning varied between classrooms and schools, though WSSU professional development artifacts and the hiring of an SU-wide Director of Curriculum and Technology Integration points to this being a growing priority.

Local Assessment System

1. Per staff interviews, academic benchmarking has been implemented SU-wide, though application still varies between schools.

Proficiency-Based Learning

1. SU has adopted and implemented a proficiency-based report card that is consistent SU-wide, supported by past and ongoing professional learning.
2. Some students expressed understanding of proficiency-based learning and grading, and described classroom practices that support this shift, while some parents and students expressed confusion or concerns about the move away from traditional grading.

Commendations

1. There is significant evidence of early steps towards increased consistency in curriculum, instruction, and assessment across WSSU.
2. WSSU has implemented a proficiency-based report card SU-wide, with students and staff expressing a growing understanding of proficiency-based learning practices and benefits.
3. Many SU classrooms are organized to support small group instruction, including in multi-grade settings.

Recommendations

1. WSSU should continue work to develop, map, and implement an SU-wide curriculum, promoting equity in learning opportunities and rigor.
2. WSSU should continue to develop an SU-wide assessment system, supporting the coordinated development of instructional practices, professional learning, and continued efforts towards SU cohesiveness.

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. Per artifacts and staff interviews, past and ongoing professional development is provided by WSSU for PLP implementation.
2. Knowledge and opinions of PLPs vary between schools and stakeholder groups, with some expressing an appreciation for their value and others questioning their importance.

Flexible Pathways

1. Per staff reports, an agreement with Landmark College creates dual enrollment opportunities for students.
2. Per artifacts, staff and student reports, a number of pre-professional arts and technical education options are available to students.
3. Some students, staff, and parents express limited access to Flexible Pathways options as a result of geography.

Full Breadth of Courses

1. An emphasis on science and social studies was observed in many elementary classroom and reported by many students, including opportunities for cross-curricular, hands-on, and student-directed project-based learning.
2. Stakeholders report that the availability of documented course options can be limited due to class size, student interest, or scheduling conflicts.

Student Voice and Choice

1. Stakeholders at several buildings described a teacher-led after school program featuring opportunities for academic support and enrichment, as well as parent-led projects.
2. Several WSSU schools are in the process of implementing student-led conferences.

Commendations

1. Early implementation of Personalized Learning Plans has occurred across WSSU, at various grade levels, exceeding the expectations of Vermont's Education Quality Standards.
2. Despite limitations of scale, WSSU schools actively pursue options to offer individualized programming.

Recommendations

1. WSSU should further formalize the PLP process between buildings, in order to support and assess implementation, streamline communication and to promote equity.
2. WSSU should consider evaluating course, enrichment, and extracurricular offerings between buildings, to promote equal access for all students.

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. Across WSSU, variations in the implementation of MTSS were observed. Some schools report that their system is working well, while others are looking to continue developing processes.
2. Many WSSU and school staff members describe the use of data in making instructional decisions.

Social/Emotional Health

1. Student reports and team observations reveal multiple opportunities to recognize students for positive behavior across buildings.
2. The full implementation of a universal social-emotional learning program was not observed in any school, though some schools are using components of PBIS or Responsive Classroom.

Physical Well-Being

1. Documents provided by WSSU describe a wellness policy that was recognized as a model for other state SUs. School staff report organized opportunities for fitness, staff celebrations, and supports for emotional well-being.
2. Staff describes the creation of the new middle/high school as a community commitment to safety and health for students and staff.

Physical Environment

1. In most schools, buildings were observed to be in good repair. Staff at some schools expressed concerns regarding facilities and maintenance, while others were very satisfied.
2. All schools have electronic systems for accessing the building, and staff and student stakeholders at several schools reported an emphasis on emergency protocols and emergency drills.

Commendations

1. WSSU schools are widely reported to be close-knit communities of caring and support, where close knowledge of students and families drives work.
2. Per interviews, student and staff wellness and safety are a clear priority of the SU.

Recommendations

1. SU should consider additional efforts to develop understanding and formalization of a data-driven multi-tiered system of support.
2. SU should consider adopting or developing a consistent, universal SEL curriculum to ensure equity in providing support to all students.

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. There is an annual SU-wide professional development plan, and school staff widely expressed knowledge of WSSU's PD priorities from one year to the next.
2. There is an established mentoring program for new WSSU teachers.
3. Individual buildings have the opportunity to design professional development plans around their own unique needs.
4. Some staff described funds being made available for individual professional learning.

Staff Evaluation

1. WSSU uses non-evaluative walkthroughs to foster discussions about instructional practices and has created protocols and forms to document results.
2. Teacher and administrator evaluations are based on Kim Marshall's work and the Vermont Educator Leadership Standards, respectively, and feature personal goal setting.
3. School leaders report an uptick in the consistency with which they are evaluated in conjunction with the arrival of new WSSU leadership.

Leadership

1. Many WSSU school administrators and district leaders are relatively new to their respective positions.
2. WSSU staff widely reported satisfaction with building principals.
3. The Superintendent and Curriculum Director are reported by staff to be widely visible in schools.
4. Collaborative leadership is developed and maintained through monthly leadership meetings.

Staffing

1. Parent groups largely expressed satisfaction with school staff and some emphasized the importance of retaining staff members.
2. In some WSSU schools, multiple grades are taught in single classrooms, with some teachers providing parallel instruction across grade levels.

Commendations

1. The clarity of WSSU professional development priorities is evident across schools, most recently around trauma and proficiency-based grading.
2. The work of current building and SU administrators is widely appreciated by all stakeholder groups.
3. WSSU evaluation and mentoring practices are clear and widely implemented.

Recommendations

1. WSSU should explore ways to further support rigorous and standards-driven instruction in multi-grade rooms.
2. WSSU should continue to strive for consistency in the format and regularity of administrator evaluations.

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. WSSU has a three-year, EQS-aligned strategic plan with goals related to school climate, rigorous instruction, community engagement, and economic sustainability.
2. WSSU has recently conducted a comprehensive needs assessment to supplement the existing strategic plan.
3. Evidence of school-specific planning was not observed, with some staff reporting limited familiarity with the continuous improvement planning process.

Student Data System

1. Artifacts reveal ongoing work towards the adoption of an SU-wide student data system.

Financial Alignment

1. WSSU administration expressed concern with the impact of statewide decisions on local personnel and programs.
2. Central office administration reports that a new SU-wide teacher contract has recently been enacted.
3. Local boards allow for flexibility in budgeting and spending, but some stakeholders report a perceived lack of equity in resources between the smaller schools.

Communication

1. Staff at some WSSU schools report that the hiring of new leadership has had positive effects on communications and has improved the climate within the school community.
2. School staff describes new central office staff as highly visible in their buildings.
3. Some parents expressed confusion or concern about the move to proficiency-based grading, though WSSU artifacts demonstrate efforts to communicate the rationale behind this change.

Commendations

1. New leadership at the school and SU level has led to increased communication and visibility, aiding in efforts towards building coherence.
2. WSSU has made early steps towards efficiency and cohesiveness through SU-wide action planning and the establishment of a single teacher contract.

Recommendations

1. WSSU should involve school-level stakeholders in continuous improvement planning efforts, ultimately leading to school plans that are aligned to the SU vision but that also reflect each school's unique needs.
2. WSSU should prioritize the adoption of an SU-wide data system to advance conversations about rigor in learning, consistency in instruction and equity in resources.