

### III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Curriculum Audit™ is basically an “exception” report. That is, it does not give a summative, overall view of the suitability of a system. Rather, it holds the system up to scrutiny against the predetermined standards of quality, notes relevant findings about the system, and cites discrepancies from audit standards. Recommendations are then provided accordingly to help the district improve its quality in the areas of noted deficiency.

The auditors were invited by the district administrative team to conduct a curriculum management audit of the New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) during the week of March 25, 2019. NHPS policies, plans, curriculum, access to the educational programs and activities, student achievement and productivity of the support offices and programs were analyzed and evaluated against a set of pre-defined standards and indicators of quality, noting any discrepancies from the standards. These constitute the *findings* of the audit. The auditors then provide recommendations to help the district address the discrepancies noted in the report. The recommendations represent the auditors’ “best judgment” regarding how to address the discrepancies contained in the report. It is expected that the superintendent and her staff will review the findings and recommendations and make decisions regarding how and when to address the suggested steps for resolving the discrepancies in relationship to the audit standards. The recommendations serve as the *starting point* for a discussion of how to deal with the documented findings.

Standard audit practice is that the superintendent and the district’s school board (board) *receive* an audit, but they do not *accept or approve* it. After review of the audit report, the board may request the response of its superintendent of schools to the audit recommendations. When the superintendent’s response is received, then the board and administrative team decide how they will act upon the recommendations. Such actions generally require a minimum of 5-7 years to implement. In this manner, the administration and the board become accountable for what occurs in the school system after an audit report

The New Haven Public Schools is a large urban school district and is comprised of a majority minority student population that is culturally and linguistically diverse. NHPS has many challenges and issues related to student achievement, complicated by rigorous state standards and demanding state assessments. Historically, the school district has had plans to improve student achievement outcomes dating back over 15 years, and has been unsuccessful in improving the achievement of its poor students of color over that time. The implementation of those plans has been fraught with challenges, in both political and practical aspects. Board policies have not been updated regularly and the organizational structure is not sufficiently governed by clear lines of authority and job descriptions. Such documents are necessary to provide direction and assure accountability in implementing assigned tasks to effect needed changes. The current administrative staff reported challenges in gaining board approval for adding needed positions and for eliminating redundant ones. The school district continues to see serious achievement gaps between various student subgroups in comparison with state and national performance and standards, and the goal of equal success in learning for all students has not yet been realized across the system.

As the district embarks on the process of developing a strategic plan, six district-developed strategic objectives have been initiated in the effort to provide direction to teachers, principals and central office staff as well as other stakeholders (see Introduction).

The school district is facing strong challenges, among them solidifying the direction of the school district; addressing a significant operating budget deficit; addressing equity issues in the distribution of financial and human resources to schools; and closing the achievement gap among its linguistically and culturally diverse student populations when compared to state and national peers.

The superintendent was prudent in requesting an external, objective, and incisive scrutiny of the system. If the New Haven Public Schools is to enhance the quality and performance of its curriculum and impact student achievement outcomes, then an external, standards-based review process can assist the district in prioritizing its direction and improvement strategies. This audit report will help clarify issues confronting the system that are worthy of focus and attention that need improvement in the future in order to take the entire system to the next level of effectiveness.

Most notably, included in the audit findings are issues pertaining to inadequacy of existing board policies that either do not exist or have not been updated in nearly two decades; inadequacy of organizational structures and job descriptions; gaps and weaknesses in clear policy and procedures across the system; inequity in educational opportunity and success; inconsistent educational programming across the system; insufficient quality of curriculum documents and assessment tools and their alignment to standards and state assessments; ineffective use of feedback in instructional and budgetary decision making, and inconsistent attention to student needs, equity, and services in establishing processes and in allocating resources to schools.

The audit team visited all schools in the district, and the audit team also interviewed approximately 102 individuals during the site visit that took place the week of March 25-28, 2019. The auditors also analyzed data from surveys administered to principals/assistant principals, teachers and parents to collect additional information regarding practices being implemented in the school district. Survey responses were received from 35 principals/assistant principals, 585 teachers and 123 parents. Findings from these surveys were incorporated in the audit report. Over 1,000 documents were obtained from the system, which the auditors reviewed. A list of those documents is found in [Appendix B](#) of this report.

The audit examined functions, processes, and procedures across the district designed to manage the design and delivery of curriculum and its evaluation across the entire system, using five standards or areas to organize the analyses:

1. **CONTROL:** The school district demonstrates its control of resources, programs, and personnel.
2. **DIRECTION:** The school district has established clear and valid objectives for students.
3. **EQUITY AND CONSISTENCY:** The school district demonstrates internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation.
4. **FEEDBACK:** The school district uses the results from district-designed or -adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs.
5. **PRODUCTIVITY:** The school district has improved productivity.

Findings were determined within each standard; these findings summarize areas of weakness in the system that is impeding the system's ability to support improved teaching and learning and to increase student achievement.

## **FINDINGS**

An abbreviated summary of the findings in the above five standards include the following:

### **Standard 1: Control**

The auditors found the New Haven Public School's board policies, rules and regulations to be outdated and inadequate in both content and specificity to guide all necessary aspects of the management of curriculum and of the educational program. Specifically, the auditors found that 72 of the policies related to curriculum management were over 20 years old, with adoption dates going back to 1999 or 1995. Of the 80 curriculum management-focused policies reviewed, only eight by-laws and two policies had been adopted in since 1999. Board policies scored a 6 out of possible 78 possible points in meeting the criteria for quality curriculum management (8%). Adequacy requires a score of 70%.

Auditors found that the district level organization chart has current positions delineated but lacks positions that are critical for curriculum design and delivery. Auditors also noted that several critical positions were vacant. Effective school districts have established clear roles and lines of authority, which appear to be missing in New Haven. Policy guidance regarding job descriptions is weak and most are missing linkages to curriculum design, delivery, and evaluation functions and the categories of personnel who report to them. There were multiple job descriptions for the same positions, particularly for teachers. Hiring processes also appeared to be implemented inconsistently.

The auditors also reviewed documents and conducted interviews relative to planning processes in the school district. There are a lot of plans at the department and school levels in the district, however, plans and planning do not meet audit standards. There are no policies, regulations, or other comprehensive, written guidance on

planning functions at the district or department level. There is a 2015 planning guide for the school improvement planning process, and the *New Haven Public Schools District Continuous Improvement Plan 2018-2021* is incomplete. Plans and planning are not visibly linked to budget or resources. The use of actual student achievement data is inconsistent across departments and school improvement plans. In general, planning in the New Havens Public Schools District does not meet audit standards.

The auditors collected information from interviews and surveys regarding elements related to the direction, control and clarity of the school district in terms of the processes being implemented to guiding the work of district employees. The auditors summarized perceptions when they were identified as a concern by at least three of the school districts stakeholder groups (board members, central administration, principals/assistant principals, teachers, parents, students, and community partners). Feedback from interviews and surveys indicate that there are significant, perceptual concerns of stakeholders regarding the direction and nature of relationships in the New Haven School District. Specifically, concerns were raised regarding: 1) Board-Administration dysfunction, politics, tension, and inappropriate behavior; 2) Low morale, poor climate, fear, and lack of trust; 3) Poor communication; 4) Lack of cohesion/disconnect among departments/levels; and 5) Lack of vision, protocols, clarity, and accountability. These negative perceptions seem to have created a culture of fear which has impacted the levels of trust, clarity and morale among stakeholders regarding the direction of the New Haven Public School District.

### **Standard 2: Direction**

The auditors found a strong foundation for curriculum at K-8, with 100% of core and non-core courses having corresponding curriculum. At high school, less than 20% of all the core and non-core courses offered have a corresponding curriculum. Almost all guides have the recommended components, but the formats are inconsistent, and the specificity of the components is not sufficient to meet audit standards for adequacy. The guides especially need greater clarity concerning what mastery of the concepts, knowledge, and skills looks like; no guides except for world languages received fully adequate ratings.

Teachers reported using a variety of resources to direct instruction. Teachers have not had or attended trainings in using the curriculum; several others reported not having access to resources referenced in curriculum documents and others were not sure how to access the curriculum that does exist. Overall, the auditors determined that the guides are not all user-friendly and offer teachers varying levels of support depending on the content area.

The auditors closely examined the reading program and determined that district leaders have identified strong, research-based components for the program, but not all components are clearly defined, especially in the structure for instructional time and how teachers should use that time. In a deeper analysis of the assessments provided in the curriculum, alignment with the standards was inconsistent, and the contexts and cognition types of the assessments were not adequately (deeply) aligned with the Smarter Balanced assessment (SBA). There was a far greater rate of misalignment with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests (SBAC) than with the standards; alignment with the SBAC tests was lowest in math along the context dimension.

### **Standard 3: Equity and Consistency**

The auditors found that inequities exist across the district in access to programs and services, in disciplinary actions, and in special education and gifted referrals and identification. Resources are not allocated with an intent to level the playing field; funding to schools is insufficiently monitored, resulting in students' unequal access to programs, resources, and services. Although offering schools of choice can be a strength, the monitoring and supervision of the various magnets and programs has been insufficient to maintain equity and ensure all students' needs are served. Instructional practices observed in classrooms did not align with district expectations for rigor and high student engagement; whole-group approaches were the dominant modes of instruction and differentiation of content or process and product was seen in a small percentage of classrooms. Cognitive demand of classroom activities and student samples of work was low, overall, and contexts were not found to be of the more engaging, authentic types.

Programs that serve specific student subgroups are not clearly defined and are inconsistently implemented across schools. The (English learner) EL program is not serving students effectively; direction for its implementation is not clear and half of school-based administrators reported viewing the EL program as poor or mediocre. Most

EL students are not taught by trained teachers. The identification of gifted students lags behind the state by a wide margin; white and Asian students are identified at a much higher rate than their African American and Hispanic counterparts, resulting in disproportionate representation.

Professional development is ongoing and frequent across the district but is not coordinated by any single office nor designed to support the delivery of district curriculum. This vital function for improving instructional capacity is not driven by observed need. Monitoring practices are inconsistent; there is little direction in district documents concerning expectations and guidelines for monitoring and no consistency concerning the purposes of it.

#### **Standard 4: Feedback**

When focusing on planning for assessment, scope of the curriculum covered by assessments, assessment trends, and the use of assessment and program evaluation data, the auditors found that the New Haven Public Schools would benefit from a singular and focused comprehensive assessment plan that specifically defines the critical characteristics essential for directing the district's efforts in assessment and student achievement.

The auditors found that the scope of formal assessment in New Haven Public Schools was inadequate to guide decision making about the written and taught curriculum in all core and non-core courses. For a district to achieve adequacy for scope, 100% of core courses and at least 70% of non-core courses must have an assessment instrument. Overall, 17% of New Haven Public School courses had a formative assessment and 9% had a summative assessment, which did not meet the requirement for adequacy.

New Haven Public Schools score lower than both state and national averages on assessments in all student groups. Data indicate widening achievement gaps between special education and general education, English Learner (EL) students and general education, and between Black/African American and White students. There are disparities in achievement between these student groups with no indication that this situation will change unless current conditions in the district are improved.

The auditors found that the district does not have a program evaluation plan to guide decision makers in using data regarding the selection, implementation, monitoring, or termination of instructional programs. The auditors also determined that the use of data to inform decision making is inconsistent throughout all schools and at all levels of the system. There is no systematic process to train educators in the use of data and no assurance that data are being used effectively in the classroom to influence teaching and student achievement. The auditors did note that the district has begun a data improvement process initiative to guide the use of data for improved student achievement.

#### **Standard 5: Productivity**

The auditors found that budgeting in New Haven Public Schools did not use formal assessment procedures to verify program efficacy or results, and there is no systematic linkage between funding and board-adopted priorities. Without connections to the system's mission and focus cost-effectiveness data on allocations for programs and service, the system could end up apportioning fiscal resources indiscriminately and serving the students and community ineffectively, inequitably, or inconsistently. Current budget development and decision-making processes of New Haven Public Schools are not yet fully adequate in assuring system-wide cohesion and productivity.

Overall, auditors found school facilities in New Haven Public Schools to be adequate, but there is no comprehensive, systemic, long-range plan to maintain, upgrade, and update the varied systems in the renovated and newly constructed buildings based on prioritized needs of individual school sites. Facilities improvements are being funded and implemented without benefit of multi-year comprehensive planning and long-range projections to ensure program consistency and quality across the district. The auditors were provided the Five-Year Capital Plan and budget narratives. The district is using this documentation as a facilities plan; however, it does not meet the audit criteria for a comprehensive facilities plan nor does it follow *Board Policy 7100*, which requires development of a master facilities plan. Analysis of the district Work Order System shows inconsistent handling of maintenance issues across buildings in the district. Interviews and survey responses also indicate that some facilities are not well maintained.

Although the district has collaborated with the City of New Haven and other local and state partners to garner grants and special programs to leverage funds and discounts to obtain technology resources, the auditors found technology planning to be inadequate to guide the integration of technology in the teaching and learning environment. The auditors also found that the district lacks a comprehensive plan for instructional technology programming and technology resources are unevenly distributed throughout the district.

Finally, auditors determined that while intervention programs are being utilized by staff across the district, New Haven Public Schools lacks policy direction and a systematic process for evaluating interventions to determine program effectiveness. The district has a process in place to assist schools in identifying students for targeted instruction to improve achievement and provide general guidance regarding effective literacy strategies, recommended scientifically research-based intervention programs, and assessments to use to continuously monitor student progress, adjust teaching as needed, and to determine suitability of the selected intervention. However, there are no specific, defined procedures for monitoring the effectiveness in implementing the process at the various school campuses or determining the effectiveness of the interventions currently being used in the district.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The auditors provided recommendations for the school board and the superintendent intended to direct and improve the curriculum management system in the New Haven Public Schools and to foster quality control in teaching and learning. The key recommendations include the following:

**Recommendation 1:** Establish a clear district vision for effective student learning and engagement and make this vision the focus for all planning and decision making district-wide. Modify planning processes to have specific, focused action steps and clear linkages to budget/resources and aligned professional development to support the realization of the district's instructional vision. Improve processes for evaluation, monitoring, and support for effective implementation of school continuous improvement plans. Develop clear and integrated written plans that meet audit criteria and are communicated to all stakeholders. Establish an organizational structure to inform and direct responsibilities and focus efforts and work across the system; improve communication and clarity of roles and responsibilities through specific, high quality job descriptions and consistent communication protocols.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum management system. Redesign and direct curriculum revision to ensure curriculum documents are of the highest quality and support instruction and student learning. Deeply align current district-developed assessments to the Common Core State Standards. Define and communicate expectations concerning an instructional planning model as well as a Framework for Strategies that clarifies expectations for curriculum delivery. Connect monitoring and professional development to these expectations.

**Recommendation 3:** Establish clear expectations for equity and equal access district-wide and a commitment to serving all students in the district equitably. Assure equal access to programs, including magnet programming, and to the curriculum, and improve parent and community relations to increase involvement, enrollment, and student achievement. Establish specific goals and plans for programs serving special populations. Commit adequate resources to the improvement of these programs, and create a coordinated system for implementing them district-wide.

**Recommendation 4:** Establish a vision for effective instruction in New Haven Public Schools, and create a system to support delivering the district curriculum in alignment with that vision. Design and implement a coordinated, system-wide professional development program that is differentiated, focused on curriculum delivery, aimed at equipping teachers with effective instructional approaches associated with high levels of student achievement, and aligned with the district vision. Establish and implement consistent standards and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the delivery of the curriculum and teachers' engagement of students.

**Recommendation 5:** Develop and implement a comprehensive set of policies that direct a sound system of curriculum management and control. Develop and implement administrative guidelines that establish a framework for consistent decision making at all levels of the system. Establish expectations in policy that provide clear direction for the most critical district functions related to curriculum management.

**Recommendation 6:** Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for student assessment and program evaluation that will provide meaningful data for decision making to support improved student achievement. Require systematic evaluation of major programs and interventions linked with evidence of student learning to provide feedback for decisions regarding program selection, continuation, expansion, modification, or termination.

**Recommendation 7:** Adopt a three-year plan for implementation of a performance-based budgeting and allocation system for New Haven Public Schools’ campuses, departments, programs, and services.

**Recommendation 8:** Design and implement a long-range facility planning process to provide for short-term and long-term facility and maintenance needs. Include all components of comprehensive long-range facilities planning with clear linkage to educational priorities, goals, and objectives in the district’s strategic planning, including the district’s continuous improvement plan and the Five Year Capital Plan. Incorporate planning for all operations, emphasizing information and instructional technology.

<b>Recommendations (presented in order of priority):</b>	<b>Suggested Timeline for Completion:</b>
<b>Recommendation 1: Planning, organizational structure, human resources</b>	<p><b>Five years for full completion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of strategic plan: 1-2 years, beginning immediately.</li> <li>• New Table of Organization: 3-6 months, beginning immediately; 3-12 months to fill all vacant positions.</li> <li>• 3-5 years to institutionalize the communication structures, expectations for collaboration, the district vision, and cohesive direction for the system.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 2: Curriculum management system, revision of written curriculum</b>	<p><b>Three years for curriculum management plan; 5-7 for complete curriculum guide revisions.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of curriculum management plan: 6-12 months, beginning with newly appointed administrators over curriculum and assessment.</li> <li>• Expectations for curriculum design, in preparation for curriculum revision: 6-18 months, depending on the timeline of hiring of critical leadership positions.</li> <li>• Curriculum revisions: 5-7 years for all content areas. Revisions to mathematics are most critical, followed by English language arts. Support structures for differentiation must continue to be built over the next 3 years in both content areas.</li> <li>• Expectations for curriculum delivery: 12-18 months, depending on the timeline for hiring of critical leadership positions and the completion of a district strategic plan that delineates district vision and priorities for curriculum delivery and student engagement.</li> <li>• Definitions for specific expectations for content area instruction: may begin immediately, to be completed (for congruence) immediately following the general district-level expectations for instruction and student engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 3: Equity and Monitoring Equity</b>	<p><b>Five years for full implementation and institutionalization of equity-monitoring system (if all positions are filled)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing guidelines and expectations regarding the monitoring of equity across the system: 12-18 months.</li> <li>• Developing written guidelines, plans, and expectations for programs serving special populations: 6-18 months (depending on staffing).</li> <li>• Dissemination and implementation of those guidelines: 1-3 years.</li> <li>• Implementation of various recommended support systems across the district: 2-5 years.</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendations (presented in order of priority):</b>	<b>Suggested Timeline for Completion:</b>
<b>Recommendation 4: Vision for Instructional Delivery and Its Support</b>	<b>3-5 years for full implementation of recommended actions.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations for monitoring and coaching: 12-24 months.</li> <li>• Guidelines for professional development, development of a professional development plan, in concert with the curriculum management plan: 1-2 years.</li> <li>• Implementation of guidelines for instructional monitoring, coaching, professional development: 3-5 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 5: Policy</b>	<b>5 years for full policy review, revision, and development.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeline for the review, revision, and development of policy: Beginning immediately, 6-12 months.</li> <li>• Implementation of timeline and the revision of policy: 5 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 6: Student and Program Assessment</b>	<b>5 years for full implementation of system</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a plan for student assessment and program evaluation: 1-2 years (pending staffing), subsequent to the development of a curriculum management plan</li> <li>• Implementation of new procedures and expectations: 2-5 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 7: Program-based budgeting</b>	<b>3 years for full implementation (pending staffing).</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish procedures for program-based budgeting and collaborative budget-building to assure equity: 12-18 months</li> <li>• Implement steps in budget process: 1-3 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 8: Facilities Planning</b>	<b>2-3 years for full implementation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a facilities plan: 12-24 months, pending initiation and completion of district strategic plan.</li> <li>• Implementing the facilities plan: 2-3 years.</li> </ul>