

Quinton School District Needs Assessment

This needs assessment for the Quinton School District is based on a School District Assessment Survey completed by the district in July 2008 and a site visit performed by a team of New Jersey Department of Education (Department) personnel¹ on December 3, 2008. A summary of the Department's observations, conclusions and recommendations is set forth below.²

Background

The Quinton School District, located in Salem County, educates about 370 children in preschool through grade 8 (325 in K-8). Students in grades 9-12 attend Salem City's high school through a send-receive relationship. Quinton has one school, the Quinton Township Elementary School. The total resident K-12 enrollment of the district, pursuant to the 2008 Application for State School Aid (ASSA) is 397.5³, and 40% of the students in the district are considered to be "at-risk" (at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines). Total K-12 enrollment has declined by 7.8% since 2000. The district is classified in District Factor (DFG) A. A detailed description of the enrollment, district wealth measures and State aid calculations for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years are detailed below and are contained in the District State Aid Profiles attached.

District Assessment Survey

In July 2008, the Quinton School District completed a comprehensive assessment survey designed by the Department to assist the district in identifying areas of unmet need in the district. The district indicated in its response that it had no unmet needs except for concerns that it would not be permitted to continue its multi-age early childhood program (combined four year-old and kindergarten classes) once it began to implement the preschool requirements of the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA). The Department notes that the curriculum models that it has approved for preschool don't have a kindergarten component and would not be appropriate for five year-olds.

Specifically, with respect to its instructional program, the district indicated that in 2006 it had embarked on a curriculum revision project that involved a curriculum mapping initiative through TechPaths. During the 2006-07 school year, the area of mathematics was mapped. It was then analyzed for content standards alignment vertically and horizontally. In 2007-2008, the areas of social studies, science and visual and performing arts were mapped. At the time it completed the survey, the district stated its intent to map the world languages curriculum during the 2008-2009 school year and then begin revising the language arts curriculum. The district further noted that its

¹ The DOE site visit team consisted of Willa Spicer, Deputy Commissioner, Rochelle Hendricks, Assistant Commissioner, Gerald Vernotica, Assistant Commissioner, Donna Arons, Special Assistant, Joan Saylor, Director, and Bob Bumpus, Salem County Executive County Superintendent.

² The district is also scheduled to be monitored by the Department pursuant to the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) system, N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-3 et seq., during the fall of 2009.

³ The resident enrollment is the count used for the calculation of state aid, and includes students in grades 9-12 (who are educated in Salem through a tuition arrangement).

textbooks, instructional materials and technology were aligned to the board-approved curriculum and the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS). All of the district's teachers are Highly Qualified as defined by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and the district stated that it had no staffing needs.

The district stated that, in order to further student achievement, it analyzes State assessment data, and works with the teachers of partially proficient students to determine underlying causes and strategize regarding means of improving performance. The district offers a variety of support services to struggling students including an Intervention and Referral Service that may assign students to after-school tutoring programs. At the time of the survey, the district also planned to implement a response to intervention program with two to five sessions per week of supplemental instruction.

According to the district's survey response, the district has a fully implemented visual arts curriculum and music curriculum in all grade levels. The school has a classroom dedicated to the visual arts and one dedicated to music. Although there is no room dedicated to the performing arts, the district indicated that theater and dance are integrated into other subject areas. The district is particularly proud of the rich music program that is provided to its students. Quinton indicated that it had no unmet needs regarding the visual and performing arts center.

The district has a media center with appropriate books. The district indicated there were no unmet needs in this area.

According to the survey, a world language curriculum is taught in every grade. The district has no unmet needs with respect to world languages.

Quinton stated that it provides gifted and talented services in all grades. It does not have an alternative education program. However, it indicated that Quinton students are provided support services such as counseling, tutoring, after-school support services, intervention/referral services and response to intervention. The district's suspension rate is 13.5%. The district also offers a before-school and an after-school program. The district cited no unmet needs with respect to the gifted and talented program or alternative education.

The district stated that it has a special education classification rate of 7% which is lower than the state average classification rate of 14.69% on which the SFRA census-based funding is calculated. One child (.28%) is sent to an out-of-district separate placement. The district does not have a backlog in conducting required activities for students referred to the child study team or students with IEPs.

With respect to facilities, the district indicated that it has adequate space to deliver the NJCCCS. While the school does not have separate rooms for the cafeteria, multipurpose room, gymnasium or auditorium, the district indicated that it has one large multipurpose room that serves all of these functions, adequately meeting the district's

needs. The district does not use trailers, and it has adequate space to meet the health needs of students and maintain confidentiality of care.

In its survey response, Quinton further stated that it has embedded technology into the learning experience in all curricular areas and that it has a technology coordinator or staff member who is responsible for supporting skill development and technology infusion into the curriculum for staff and students. Moreover, the school building has the equipment, connectivity and technical support necessary to provide e-learning opportunities in all learning environments.

At the conclusion of the survey, Quinton indicated that it had no other issues or unmet needs that impacted the district's ability to meet the educational needs of its students.

Site Visit

On December 3, 2008, members of a team of Department personnel traveled to Quinton and met with the district's superintendent and other administrators. During the course of this conversation, the team from the district discussed Quinton's goals and its strategies to achieve those goals, as well as the challenges still facing the district.

During the visit, Quinton administrators spoke with justifiable pride about the notable achievements of the district in fostering and maintaining a generally high level of student performance, and in improving the overall climate of the school. The administrators indicated that a key to the district's success was changing the school environment by implementing a disciplinary code of conduct with a system of rewards and consequences for good and for unacceptable behavior. The school uses an in-school suspension system that is very strict, but that leads to a much more productive classroom environment, according to administrators.

With regard to the instructional program, the district embarked on a curriculum mapping project in 2006, through which each area of the curriculum is revised and articulated both horizontally and vertically. The district also takes advantage of *Learnia*, a computer based assessment system provided at no cost by the State. This system provides teachers with an important tool to manage instruction and adjust it to the needs of every student.

In language arts, the district has benefited from a literacy coach for a number of years. In addition, it instituted a balanced literacy program with guided reading and makes better use of formative assessments. The district also works with a consultant to improve instruction in writing. In 2008, 77% of the students passed the ASK4 language arts assessment and 94% of the students passed the ASK8 language arts assessment. In mathematics, the district uses the Everyday Math and Connected Math programs and employs data analysis meetings to improve instruction. The district felt that one weakness in the program is that the students do not receive instruction in Algebra I, as that is not included in Connected Math. In 2008, 83% of the students passed the ASK4

mathematics assessment and 47% passed the ASK8 mathematics assessment (a decline from 73% passing the previous year). The Department notes that the steep decline in the 2008 ASK8 mathematics proficiency rate could be due, in part, to the fact that a new test was introduced that year and many districts experienced a similar decline as a result. The preliminary results from the 2009 ASK8 mathematics assessment indicate that Quinton had a 71% passing rate for that year. The district's school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as required by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

Regular class sizes in Quinton range from 19-20 students. The Department notes that the staffing ratios identified as part of the development of the SFRA are 18:1 in elementary school and 20:1 in middle and high school. Each class has art, music and world languages once a week. The district benefited from a large private donation that enabled it to purchase additional technology, including computers, mobile lab, broadcasting studio. As a result, there are adequate technological resources in every classroom and technology is well integrated into the curriculum.

The district recently implemented a Response to Intervention program in language arts for grades K-3. In addition, the district provides basic skills instruction to approximately 10% of the student population, using a combination of instructional aides and basic skills teachers. Quinton received training through the Department for its pupil assistance program, which has reduced its special education classification rate. The district also received training from the Department on Intervention and Referral Services, which it believes improved the professionalism of the teachers.

Quinton has a low special education classification rate, and at the time of the site visit, had no children in out-of-district placements. The district emphasized that it places a high priority on maintaining children in-district whenever possible. It currently has a class for autistic children with three tuition students from other districts. The district has a full-time employee who functions as the school psychologist, counselor and head of the child study team. In addition, a social worker and LDTC each work part-time for Quinton.

Students from Quinton attend Salem High School on a send/receive basis. District administrators reported that there is approximately a 10% dropout rate at the high school. In recent years, Quinton has had issues in its relationship with Salem, and particularly in its attempts to work out curriculum articulation issues with the high school.

The district currently runs a full-day preschool program for 4-year-olds. According to the district, it educates 100% of its eligible universe of 4-year-olds. Under the SFRA, Quinton is classified as a universal district for preschool, but it anticipates no problems implementing a program for 3-year-olds. The only challenge is that it will have to select one of the curricula required by the Department.

The district received a 20% increase in State aid under the SFRA in 2008-09, amounting to \$539,591. It used the increase to maintain its regular programming,

increase class trips and assemblies, increase funds to emergency reserve, and decrease the tax levy.

Facilities

During the site visit, district personnel indicated that the Quinton Township Elementary School had undergone renovations in 2002, and that there were no major facilities issues. The district applied for State grant funding pursuant to amendments to the Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act, P.L. 2008, c.39 (EFCFA), which authorizes additional funding for school facilities projects in regular operating districts. In round one of the funding, Quinton received approval for classroom renovation and installation of new fire rated drywall. The total estimated cost for the project is \$41,869, of which the State share is \$26,993 and the local share is \$14,876. In round two of the funding, Quinton received approval for six projects, including partial roof and window replacement, new exterior and classroom lights, new hot water circulating pumps, replacement of unit ventilators and new boiler, gym lighting replacement, installation of emergency generator and reconfiguration of electrical panels. The total cost of the combined projects is \$4,215,775, with a total State share of \$2,717,885 and a total local share of \$1,497,890.

School Funding Reform Act

The Quinton School District received a 20% (\$539,591) increase in State aid pursuant to the SFRA in FY08-09, and will receive a 5% (\$161,877) increase in State aid in FY09-10. Under the formula, the district's "adequacy budget" is calculated by multiplying the district's K-12 enrollment by the base amount of \$9,649.⁴ The district's enrollment of middle and high school students are then multiplied by the additional weights of 1.04 (grades 6-8) and 1.17 (grades 9-12), respectively. The district's adequacy budget also includes an additional weight of about .50 in FY08-09 and .52 in FY09-10 for each at-risk child, which amounted to \$690,177 in FY08-09 and \$787,962 in FY09-10.⁵ The district's equalization aid is calculated by determining the difference between the adequacy budget and the district's local fair share. For FY08-09, the district's local fair share was \$1,696,247, which is based on its district-wide property wealth and total income. In per pupil terms, its property wealth was \$368,161 and its per pupil income was \$111,249. For FY09-10, the district's local fair share is \$1,842,764, its per pupil property wealth is \$374,965 and its per pupil income is \$129,756. In both years, the district's prior year tax levy exceeded its local fair share,⁶ and the district's adequacy budget exceeded its prior year spending. If these trends continue, the Department anticipates that the district will continue to receive increases in funding pursuant to the SFRA in future years.

⁴ This amount increased to \$9,971 for FY2010.

⁵ Once the components of the adequacy budget are summed, each district's adequacy budget is multiplied by a Geographic Cost index number to reflect regional cost differences.

⁶ The district's 07-08 tax levy was \$2,290,190 compared with its 08-09 local fair share of \$1,696,247 and its 08-09 tax levy was \$1,972,846 compared with its 09-10 local fair share of \$1,842,764.

The funding formula under SFRA also provides for categorical security aid as well as aid for transportation and special education. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-46, every three years the Commissioner will re-evaluate and recommend to the Governor and Legislature any appropriate changes to the funding elements of the SFRA (such as the State average classification rate for general special education students and the additional weights for at-risk and limited English proficient students). For the intervening years, the cost factors in the SFRA are updated according to the Consumer Price Index.

The SFRA also dramatically increases access to preschool education, requiring districts to offer preschool programs to eligible students within five years. As the Quinton School District is a DFG A, the district will be required to offer full-day preschool to its 3- and 4-year-old population within that time frame.

In addition to these State funds, Quinton will be receiving federal funds to support students with special needs (at-risk and special education) through Title I and IDEA, as well as additional funds through those programs pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Department agrees with the district's assessment that the district has done a remarkable job of reforming the district for the benefit of its students and that it is on a path to even greater achievement. The district has made a concerted effort to improve the environment of the school, thereby making it more conducive to teaching and learning, and it has embarked on an ambitious curriculum revision program. Quinton must be commended for its achievements in these areas.

In addition to improving its curriculum, the district has focused its resources on areas of greatest need in language arts and mathematics and has maintained high proficiency rates in those areas. The district also makes effective use of assessments and data analysis to improve the teaching in the classrooms.

With respect to facilities, the district has indicated that it has no critical unmet needs in this area. The district has sought, and obtained approval, for a number of State grants to upgrade and improve conditions in the physical plant.

In analyzing the issues facing Quinton, it is important to recognize that the district faces many increased challenges due to its small size. A district, such as Quinton, educating fewer than 400 K-8 students simply cannot realize the economies of scale that its larger counterparts can achieve. Smaller districts cannot offer diversity in programming options since they lack sufficient students to maintain reasonable class sizes for some types of offerings. As part of his responsibilities under the CORE legislation, P.L. 2007, c.63, the Executive County Superintendent is charged with recommending to the Commissioner a school district consolidation plan to eliminate all districts, other than county-based districts and preschool or kindergarten through grade 12

districts in the county, through the establishment or enlargement of regional school districts. As part of this effort, the Department will be commissioning regionalization studies. Due to the constraints facing Quinton because of its small size, this district is being treated as a high priority and will be placed in the first group of districts for regionalization studies, which will begin in September 2009 and conclude by December 31, 2009.

Like all districts in the State, there are areas where Quinton could improve. The Department has made arrangements for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Lab (REL) to work with Quinton and other rural districts to meet their needs for staff development in the various content areas as well as with special needs children who need particular attention and strategies in order to succeed. The REL should contact Quinton shortly, if it has not already done so, to provide this assistance.

In addition, the district indicated that it was having problems in its relationship with Salem High School, its receiving school. By issuance of this letter, the Commissioner directs the Executive County Superintendent to work closely with both parties in an attempt to resolve curriculum articulation issues and to effect a more seamless transition from Quinton to the high school. This will include an exploration of regionalization pursuant to the CORE legislation, on a high priority basis, as noted above.

In sum, the Department finds that to the extent that Quinton has educational deficiencies that need to be addressed, the SFRA and other complementary legislation such as CORE provide the necessary tools to address those deficiencies. Although Quinton has already made significant progress in improving the educational opportunities for its students, like many districts in the State, there are challenges facing the district and areas where the delivery of educational services could be improved. The Department will work with the district, as described above, to assist in addressing those challenges and areas for improvement.