3/2/2017
#2 Venessa Keesler

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

BRIAN J. WHISTON
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

March 1, 2017

«AddressBlock»

«GreetingLine»

I would like to schedule a meeting with you to explore implementing the Partnership Model with your district, and in particular with «Schools». Once an agreement is reached, the School Reform Office (SRO) has agreed to delay any next level of accountability actions in order to give the Partnership Model an opportunity to be successful.

The purpose of this letter is to clearly outline the Partnership Model, the process, and the next level of accountability so that the district, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and SRO have an explicit understanding of the goals and consequences if an agreement cannot be reached or if progress goals are not met within 18 months. It is meant only as a positive opportunity to work together under the leadership of the local superintendent and the local board of education to improve student achievement and outcomes, with an explicit and detailed understanding between all partners.

As a reminder, under a Partnership Agreement, the local district remains in total control of its schools with support from MDE and partners. Beginning on March 1, 2017, we will have 60 days to reach an agreement. If no agreement is reached, the next level of accountability would be implemented. The agreement will include goals and measures of progress towards achieving those goals.

The Process

1. The district agrees to enter a Partnership Agreement with MDE.
2. The district identifies partners who need to be at the table. MDE is willing to help each district identify and connect with partners if the district requests that we do so.
    a. Partners must include:
        - The local school board
        - The intermediate school district (ISD) or Authorizer
    b. MDE would like to encourage districts to also include:
        - Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA)
        - Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA)
        - Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB)

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- Middle Cities Education Association
- Institutions of higher education
- Union leaders
- Community organizations
- Parents
- Local business leaders
- Local foundations
- Tribal education departments
- Early childhood providers
- Michigan College Access Network or local college access network
- Math/science centers
- Social justice groups
- Mental health professionals (social workers, counselors, etc.)
- Arts education leaders
- Any others who are positioned to help the district

3. The district schedules the initial Partnership District meeting with MDE, SRO, the district and the partners. The purpose of this meeting is to review the district's data, its areas of strength and its areas of weakness.
    a. MDE will request that the ISD or Authorizer support the district in preparing a review of its state and local assessment data. MDE encourages the district to review its relevant data to more appropriately understand root causes of the challenges in the identified schools. These data could include:
        - Student behavior
        - School culture/climate
        - Safety of students
        - Effectiveness of teaching environments
        - School and district leadership
        - Special education participation and success
        - Graduation and postsecondary transition
        - Early childhood education
    b. MDE will make available comprehensive needs assessment templates for the district to use in diagnosing its needs, as well as suggestions and support regarding data (in conjunction with the ISD or Authorizer).
    c. MDE encourages the district to consider installing the Blueprint for Turnaround, which is an approach to rapid turnaround that MDE developed as part of the MI-Excel program. If you would like more information on the Blueprint for Turnaround (if you are not already using this), please let us know and we will provide support.
    d. MDE will review all data provided to the SRO prior to this meeting so that the work the district did with the SRO can be reflected in the plan.
4. Out of this initial meeting, the district (with MDE support) will identify 3-5 key goals for each impacted school, based on the data, and will identify potential research-based solutions.
    a. MDE will provide a list of evidence-based practices that we encourage the district to consider and will consult with the district.
    b. While some outcomes can be process-based, there also must be objective outcome measures related to student achievement identified.

5. The district (with MDE support) also will determine outcomes and data sources (at least one of which is derived from the annual state summative assessment) for each of the key goals, and will identify and agree upon benchmark measures that must be met.
6. This information will be drafted into a district Partnership Agreement and shared with all partners for review and comment.
7. The district will convene a second Partnership District meeting to review the plan, goals, and outcomes. The district may need additional meetings to come to final agreement on the plan. MDE will support the district in these meetings.
8. In order for the agreement to be finalized, it must be signed by the local superintendent, the local board, the ISD or Authorizer, MDE, SRO and other partners defined in the agreement.
9. Regular meeting dates will be set for the partners to meet with the district to determine how progress is being made toward achieving the goals. At 18 months, we would need to see the district achieve progress (as determined by the agreement); if progress is being met, we would continue for another 18 months. If the district does not meet the goals, then the agreement would be terminated and the next level of accountability would be implemented (which would be described in the Partnership Agreement so that all would have an understanding for 18 months about what would occur if the goals are not met).

MDE would like to offer to be part of the following meetings:

- A meeting with the local superintendent, the local board president, and the principal(s) of the impacted building (and anyone else the district superintendent would like to invite) to explain the process and to answer any questions about the Model and process. This could be concurrent with the initial Partnership District meeting outlined above.
- A meeting with community/schools impacted, to answer questions from parents, staff and community members about the Model. Again, this could be concurrent with the initial Partnership District meeting.

The Partnership Agreement

The initial Partnership Agreement must include the following:

1. Identification of areas of challenge/weakness.
2. Identification of key strategies to address those areas, and a timeline for implementation.
3. Identification of key goals and outcomes, and the data used to measure.
4. Identification of the next level of accountability that will be implemented if the district fails to reach its outcomes at 18 months and at 3 years, or continues to be identified in the bottom 5% of public schools at the end of the 3-year period.

MDE will provide a template for a Partnership Agreement.

After the signing of the district Partnership Agreement, the district likely will need to modify school and/or district improvement plans; conduct a more thorough comprehensive needs assessment; adjust budgets for both state and federal programs; and do other implementation aspects related to the agreement. MDE will provide support for these as well.

Each Partnership District will be assigned a liaison from MDE. This person will be responsible for supporting the district in implementation of its agreement; helping resolve problems and breaking down barriers; facilitating discussions and meetings; and ensuring that the Partnership District receives maximum support for success from MDE, as well as from the partners and other state agencies.

Next Steps

If you are interested in entering a district Partnership Agreement, please contact me immediately. As a reminder, we need to have this agreement in place by the end of April, so it is critical that we move quickly. Please email me at whistonb@michigan.gov.

Once you have indicated you are interested in a district Partnership Agreement, MDE also will send some resources to potentially utilize as you identify your needs and a plan to improve. These will include: needs assessment tools, evidence-based practices, draft Partnership Agreement, lists of potential partners and contact information. MDE recognizes that each district will be at a different phase in terms of its work with the affected schools, so we will provide support at the level needed by the district.

Should you decide to move forward with exploration of this Partnership Model, MDE immediately will assign you a liaison. Finally, we will begin scheduling immediately, as I hope to make myself and Venessa Keesler (Deputy Superintendent of Educator, Student and School Supports) available for these meetings.

Respectfully,

Brian J. Whiston
State Superintendent