

**Bolton Public Schools
Strategic Coherence Plan**

2015-2020

A descriptive vision of the critical challenges facing the Bolton Public Schools.



Mission, Focus
And Constancy
Of Purpose

Bolton Public Schools Strategic Coherence Planning

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Planning Context

Incorporated in 1720, Bolton Connecticut is located in Tolland County and has a population of just fewer than 5,000. The Bolton Public Schools enrolls 835 (as of 4/6/15) students from the town of Bolton, Columbia as well as other surrounding Open Choice communities. All of these students are housed in two school facilities; an elementary/middle and high school. Bolton Public Schools have earned a reputation as a nationally recognized, high performing school system in their comparison group with students who consistently perform at or above the levels of districts with similar demographic and economic profiles.

Over the past few years, district leadership has created goals and plans dedicated to improving achievement for all students. These documents included a wide-ranging vision and very comprehensive goals for learning. As the pace of change has accelerated, however, the work of sustaining excellence has become ever more complex. Among the new challenges that have emerged in the intervening years are a new set of more rigorous Connecticut Core standards in language arts and math, deeper accountability for staff through a new educator evaluation process, new assessment challenges and testing protocols, the growing impact of digital tools for learning, declining enrollment, and waves of additional Connecticut school reform legislation. All of these new developments have created imperatives for change that have or will impact every facet of public school education in Bolton.

As new Superintendent Kristin B. Heckt became more familiar with the workings of the district and began to align internal systems, she decided the district would benefit from crafting a new framework that would build on past district successes while facing these new systemic challenges head-on. A planning consultant was hired to design a process that would accomplish this goal. In the winter of 2015, the Superintendent convened key staff members, Board of Education members, and a diverse group of community representatives and launched this planning effort. The representatives of this Strategic Coherence Planning Team and their affiliations are listed on the following page:

The Strategic Coherence Planning Team

Kristin B. Heckt	~	Superintendent of Schools
Karen Bergin	~	Board of Education Chair
Alison Romkey	~	Board of Education Member
Beth Goldsnider	~	Director of Student Services
Sarah Malinoski	~	Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Technology
Joseph Maselli	~	Bolton High School Principal
Mary Grande	~	Bolton Center School Principal
Joseph Jankowski	~	President BEA/BHS Science Teacher
Joyce Teed	~	BHS English Teacher
Alexis Cavanaugh	~	BHS Social Studies Teacher
Wendy Pagani	~	BCS Teacher
Elisha Rose	~	BCS Teacher
Heather Warner	~	BCS Teacher
Christina Morra-Tiu	~	PTA President/Parent
Chris Davey	~	Parent
Denay Johnston	~	Parent
Sharon Snuffer	~	Parent
Robert DePietro	~	Board of Finance Member
Bruce Dixon	~	Fire Chief
Robert Morra	~	First Selectman
Jonathan P. Costa	~	Education Connection Process Facilitator

Work Process and Organization

The Strategic Coherence Planning Team convened and began their work with an introductory retreat held in the Bolton High School Library/Media Center in January of 2015. At this session there was an orientation to the three phase planning process: 1. Preparation for planning by reviewing all of the most important changed and requirements in the public school arena, 2. Organizing into productive content theme groups that connect all of the work that needs to be done and completing an assessment of the current efforts being undertaken in the district, 3. Revisiting the district's current Vision, Mission, and Beliefs, setting goals, planning for how to bridge the gap between what is needed and what exists currently and finally, identifying how to measure the success of the plan long-term.

After this process orientation, it was agreed that when the plan was completed, the group would strive to create a product that would:

- Inspire respect and support from a broad cross-section of the Bolton Public Schools community.
- Articulate 3-5 priority strategic goals that will serve as key areas of developmental focus over the next five years.
- Provide suggested indicators of success and strategies and for improving performance and/or building capacity in those areas of focus.

With these foundational understandings in place, the group engaged with content related to all of the current changes that have been designated for public schools as a result of recent changes in federal, state, and regional legislation and standards. These included the impact of Connecticut Public Act 12-116 and the new Regional Accreditation Standards from the New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. Finally, the group explored the ever changing world of digital information and global competition that students will be entering after they leave the Bolton Public Schools. Through these interactions, it was recognized by the Strategic Coherence Planning Team that at a minimum, over the next few years a thoughtful district plan would assist the district in navigating:

- Language arts instructional challenges including higher standards and expectations related to new Connecticut Core Standards
- Mathematics instructional challenges including higher standards and expectations related to new Connecticut Core Standards

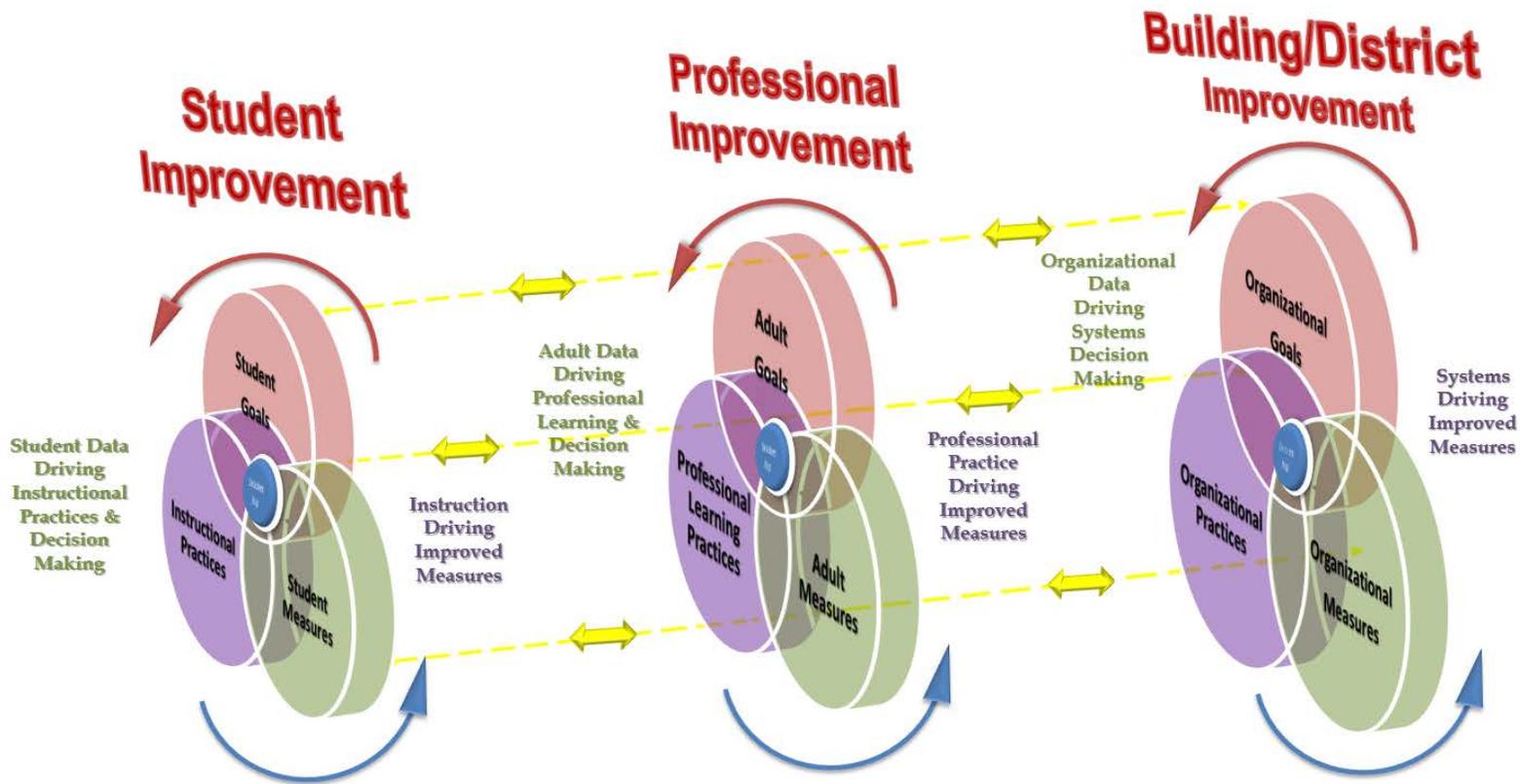
- Social Studies instructional challenges including higher standards and expectations related to the new Connecticut Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Frameworks.
- Anticipated science instructional challenges including higher standards and expectations related to the new Next Generation Science Standards.
- Transition from the legacy Mastery Test to a new generation of computer based adaptive assessments (the Smarter Balanced assessments).
- Support and refinement of a state mandated teacher and administrator evaluation models that will, for the first time, include student performance data from state-wide tests.
- New models of professional learning and support including a new set of voluntary state-wide professional learning standards.
- The inevitable transition from a primarily print based learning environment to one that features ready access to digital resources.
- The challenges of meeting the social and emotional needs of all children.

The combined weight of all of these challenges will put heavy pressure on all of the existing systems of the Bolton Public Schools. The planning design for the Strategic Coherence process was purposely designed to recognize this reality. For a district to maintain and improve its performance amid all of these transitions while helping to prepare students for their life and work beyond school it must be able to explicitly connect its core systems and ensure alignment throughout the levels of the organization.

Connecting Core Instructional Systems:



Aligning Systems throughout the Organization:



To gauge the district’s readiness, the Strategic Coherence Planning Team was divided into four research and data collection groups. Each group was tasked with collecting data that would explore the status of the district to each of the above identified challenges as framed through the lens of goals, measures, and practices required to meet these needs. Provided with guiding questions, these groups worked with volunteers and district staff to answer the questions, identify what the district was already doing to meet these challenges, and finally to report back what was needed to close the gap between what was desired and what was actually happening in the district. The four groups and their organizing frameworks follow.

Area One: Goals for Learning

Organizing Question: How do Bolton's district-wide goals for learning align with Connecticut Core Standards and 21st Century/Digital Learning Skill Priorities?

1. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) and community (parents' et. al.) awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the primary learning goals (skills and knowledge) associated with the Connecticut Core Standards.
2. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) and community (parents' et. al.) awareness, knowledge, and understanding of key 21st century skills that are the focus of the districts community-wide learning expectations (NEASC).
3. Core academic curriculum areas are aligned to integrate and focus on Connecticut Core and 21st century content and skill goals.
4. All curriculum areas are aligned to support and integrate key Connecticut Core and 21st century skill goals.
5. There are easily accessible electronic instructional resources for staff and community in all academic areas that support the implementation of these updated and aligned curriculum frameworks.

Area Two: Teaching and Learning

Organizing Question: How do our teaching practices, improvement mechanisms and instructional evaluation systems align with our goals for learning?

1. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) and community (parents' et. al.) awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the desired Information Age higher-order instructional and engagement practices that lead students to mastery of the identified Connecticut Core and 21st century skill goal areas.
2. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) knowledge and understanding of how to design and facilitate digitally supported instructional experiences that maximize the desired Information Age higher-order thinking and engagement.
3. There is a high degree of alignment and coherence among and between grade levels and schools regarding what successful practices would look like if these behaviors were occurring regularly across the district.
4. Leadership practices and educator evaluation systems are consistently promoting and aligned with the indicators of successful Information Age higher-order thinking and engagement identified in this area.

Area Three: Assessment Practices

Organizing Question: How do our assessment and measurement systems align with our goals for learning, teaching practices, and the demands of data driven instruction?

1. There is a high degree of faculty agreement and alignment regarding the standards and practices (terms, definitions, rubrics etc.) used to measure student growth and development in the key Connecticut Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.
2. There is a high degree of agreement on the value and appropriateness of the assessments used to measure student progress (we measure what we value and we value what we measure).
3. There is a high degree of alignment and agreement among and between grades and schools regarding the assessments and data points used to track student progress toward key Connecticut Core and 21st century skill practices.
4. Appropriate performance data is easily accessible to all stakeholders, is reflective of district priorities, and is used regularly to improve practice in real-time.
5. Leadership practices and supporting resources are consistently promoting and aligned with these measures and practices.

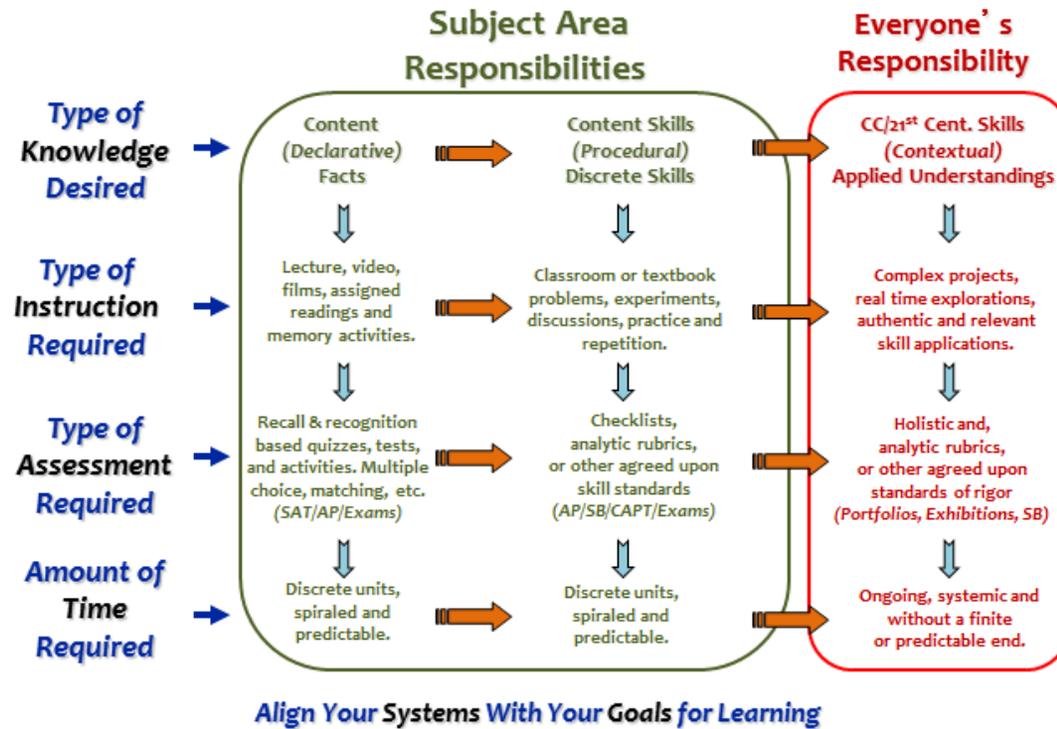
Area Four: Alignment and Coherence

Organizing Question: Systems Alignment, Coherence, and External Factors - how do all other supporting systems align with these priorities and what, if any external factors should we be aware of moving forward?

1. There is a high degree of alignment regarding remaining major organizational systems with the Connecticut Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.
2. There is a high degree of alignment between student, adult, and organizational goals, practices and measures aligned with the Connecticut Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.
3. Are there any external factors (demographics, economics, cultural, etc.) that may impact the Mission of the district in the foreseeable future?

SYSTEMS ALIGNMENT

Areas One, Two, Three and Four



Over 12 weeks, these groups researched and collected data to inform the planning process on the answers to these questions. During a series of retreat meetings in February and March of 2015, the research groups shared their results with the Strategic Coherence Planning Team. Each group presented their findings while all of the participants tracked his/her own reactions and questions to the data. All of these individual reflections were then displayed, organized and prioritized. The results highlighted several areas of commendation and admonitions for current practice in the district. These included:

1. Maintain a focus on what is right and best for kids.
2. Curricula are meaningful to student learning and prepare them for life outside of school.
3. Technology tools for learning are integrated into regular teaching and learning processes.
4. Differentiation will meet the needs of all students.
5. The importance of having the right people in the right places.
6. Professional learning and growth is meaningful, embedded and connected.
7. Communication needs to continue.

There was broad consensus on the need for a variety of required systemic responses that form the foundation of this Strategic Coherence Plan. Starting with a refinement and refocusing of the district's Vision, Mission and Beliefs, the group dedicated itself to four areas of strategic focus for action moving forward. The updated Vision, Mission and Beliefs as well as each of these goals with their associated indicators of success and recommended strategies for moving forward are listed on the following pages.

Refined Foundational Assumptions

Mission Statement

The Bolton Public Schools provide a safe, engaging and challenging environment in which all students develop essential skills and values.

Vision Statement

Educate students to become capable, ethical, healthy, responsible and thoughtful citizens.

We believe:

- Quality education is an indispensable community investment for the future of students and society.
- Quality education is a partnership that requires commitment, communication, and collaboration among the student, family, school and the community
- All students are valued and have the right to an education that meets their academic, physical and social/emotional needs.
- It is important for students to recognize and value excellence.
- High expectations and shared accountability are essential for the success of each student.

DISTRICT GOALS 2015 - 2020

1. All students will apply critical thinking to the construction and critique of arguments.
2. All students will read, write, produce and speak grounded in evidence for a variety of purposes and audiences and utilize collaboration and digital literacy skills to enhance communication.
3. All students will use a variety of research tools to access, evaluate, synthesize and apply information effectively.
4. All students will see problems as opportunities, approaching twenty-first century challenges with ethical leadership, boldness, creativity, and responsible citizenship.

Goal One: Commit to ensuring the district’s critical high leverage goals for learning are met by all Bolton students.

- A. Refine, articulate and communicate 2014 BOE district learning goals in ways that are understandable to all members of the community as evidenced by:
 - o BOE district learning goals are focused and manageable and reflect the most important contemporaneous skills students need for life learning and work beyond school.
 - o BOE district goals frame a compelling picture of the graduate of Bolton High School.
 - o BOE district learning goals are articulated for students in age appropriate language for grades 5/8/12.
 - o The key BOE district learning goals are consistently communicated with the primary stakeholders in the district and there is an increasing level of knowledge and awareness regarding their content, importance and application.
 - o All interested stakeholders have access to information regarding the key BOE district learning goals.

- B. Align and revise all Pre-K-12 curricula to relevant district goals, associated standards and age-appropriate digital learning skills as evidenced by:
 - o All content area curricula have been reviewed and adjusted to reflect district goals, associated standards, and age appropriate digital learning skills.

- C. Communicate all curriculum documents and make them easily accessible online as evidenced by:
 - o All content area curricula have a common format and language conventions.
 - o All content area curricula are available online and are easily viewed and browsed by interested stakeholders.

Strategies for Moving Forward:

Step #	Action	Outcome	Who	When
1	Refine District Goals for Learning	To ensure clear, consistent language that reflects goals for 2015-2020 and to provide age-appropriate goal language for grades 5, 8 and 12	Superintendent, BOE, Administrative Team, Core Leaders	Fall 2015
2	Present the refined goals to stakeholders in various formats	To provide District Learning Goals in multiple venues	Superintendent, Administrative Team, Core Leaders	Fall 2015 - ongoing
3	Review and refine BHS Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations	To align Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations to NEASC requirements	BHS staff and community	Spring 2016
4	Update all curricula using common format and language	To align all curricula to reflect goals and standards and make available to teachers online	Core Leaders, Teachers, DITC	Ongoing
5	Create curriculum guides	To provide public access to guides on district website	Administrative Team, Core Leaders, Teachers	Spring 2016

Goal Two: Teaching and learning experiences for all learners support student success in a digital age.

- A. Ensure that the learning environment and student engagement, support the growth of all students and are included in curriculum and all district instructional support resources as evidenced by:
 - o The district appropriately applies extensions and interventions for all children as part of its SRBI program in all three Tiers of the program’s implementation.

- B. Staff and schedule are conducive to teacher collaboration, professional learning, and productivity (time to collaborate in learning activities, shared observations, focused course-specific instruction, sharing best practices, use of digital tools, and improving student learning) as evidenced by:
 - o Professional staff able to meet with peers to collaborate in professional learning activities that support the acquisition of the district’s learning goals for students.
 - o Professional staff able to meet with peers to collaborate in professional learning activities that support their own professional goals for learning.

- C. Technology/digital learning tools (school/home) are easily accessible for all as evidence by:
 - o Students have ready access to an age-appropriate digital learning device and online resources which enable teachers to use appropriate digital resources whenever they believe it is in the best interests of learning and student success.
 - o There is equity in access for all students regardless of socio-economic status.
 - o Teachers have ready access to appropriate digital professional learning resources.

Strategies for Moving Forward:

Step #	Action	Outcome	Who	When
1	Revise and/or develop SRBI process and protocols	Functional SRBI program as evidenced by student growth/achievement	Administrators, Teachers	Fall 2015 - ongoing
2	Create and refine PLC schedule	Professional learning activities to support the needs of both teachers and students	Administrators	Fall 2015 - ongoing
3	Provide appropriate and differentiated PD for all certified staff	Extensions and interventions are in place	Administrators, Teachers	Ongoing
4	Provide technology professional development	Technology integrated into regular and meaningful classroom practices	Administrators, Teachers	Ongoing
5	Continue to seek funding for technology resources	Students have regular access to technology that will be utilized for meaningful learning activities	Superintendent, District/Building Administrators, Teachers	Ongoing
6	Secure additional IT support	Increased integration of technology into curriculum and instruction	Superintendent, BOE	2017 - 2018 school year
7	Secure funding for transportation to create one schedule at BCS	Common arrival and dismissal times at BCS	Superintendent, BOE	2016 - 2017 school year
8	Secure additional transportation funding to support after-school activities at both schools	Equal opportunity for all students to access teacher help, clubs, and athletics	Superintendent, BOE	2017 - 2018 school year

Goal Three: Assessments are meaningful, aligned with what the Board of Education values, and support improved practice for all learners.

- A. Regularly review and revise assessment, grading and reporting practices to ensure alignment with district goals, values and beliefs about learning as evidenced by:
 - o The purpose and value of district sponsored assessments are communicated to all stakeholders.
 - o There are common rubrics (continuum) that reflect District Goals for Learning.
 - o Professional staff engaged in calibration activities designed to ensure an appropriate level of reliability and accuracy in the application of the common rubrics to actual student work performances.
 - o There are regular efforts to communicate to parents the current status/progress of students toward attaining the grade level and District's Goals for Learning.
 - o District PreK-12 reporting of student performance is age appropriate and aligned to standards and District Goals for Learning.

- B. Multiple meaningful data sources are utilized in making decisions to improve curriculum and instructional practices as evidenced by:
 - o Program decisions are focused on student performance growth and are based on a well-rounded set of measures and observational evidence.

- C. Revise graduation requirements to align with NEASC and District Goals for Learning as evidenced by:
 - o Bolton High School's community expectations for learning and Graduation Requirements are aligned with the District's Goals for Learning.

Strategies for Moving Forward:

Step #	Action	Outcome	Who	When
1	Identify purpose and value of district sponsored assessments	Assessment information communicated through newsletters and district webpage	Core Leaders, Teachers, Building/District Administrators	Fall 2015
2	Refine, focus, re-align common rubrics by grade level and/or discipline with District Goals for Learning	Common rubrics that are aligned to District Goals for Learning		Fall 2015 - ongoing
3	Professional Development focused on assessment practices and calibration	PLC/Data Team review and refinement of assessment practices		Fall 2015 - ongoing
4	Communicate student status/progress with students and parents	Students and parents are regularly informed		Ongoing
5	Develop standards-based grading practices	Implementation of standards-based grading practices		2018-2019 school year
6	PD on using data to inform instruction and improve student performance	Regular PLC/Data Team meetings to address student growth over time		Ongoing
7	Revise and align BHS Graduation Requirements to District Goals for Learning	Revised BHS Graduation Requirements	BHS Staff, Administrators	Spring 2017

Goal Four: Aligning supporting systems to ensure student success.

- A. Allocate resources to support the district goals and strategic outcomes as evidenced by:
 - o Budget frameworks and requests reflect district priorities.
 - o Allocation decisions reflect a commitment to supporting district goals.

- B. Continuously seek to acquire alternative and additional funding from outside sources to enhance extensions of the educational program as appropriate as evidenced by:
 - o External sources of enrichment funding are pursued.

- C. Align teacher evaluation/support and professional learning with District Goals for Learning as evidenced by:
 - o Teacher and administrator evaluation and support goals (45/40) are aligned with district goals.
 - o Professional learning plans support collaboration and professional learning activities and are aligned with District Goals for Learning.

Strategies for Moving Forward:

Step #	Action	Outcome	Who	When
1	Continue to utilize zero-based budgeting	Budget reflects district priorities	Core Leaders, Administrators, Superintendent	Annually
2	Develop BOE Budget based on Superintendent's recommendations that supports District Goals for Learning	Approved BOE budget which reflects district priorities	Superintendent, BOE	Annually
3	Identify external funding sources	Grants secured as awarded	Superintendent, DITC, DSSS	Annually
4	Develop administrator and teacher goals aligned with District Goals for Learning	Administrator and teacher goals aligned with District Goals for Learning	Administrators, Teachers	Annually
5	Revise and refine professional learning plans	Professional Learning Plans that are differentiated and aligned with District Goals for Learning	Superintendent, PDEC, Administrators, Teachers	Fall 2015 - ongoing