

As the last remaining obstacle to returning the Jersey City Public School District to full local control, documents show compliance with the system's District Improvement Plan (DIP) for "Instruction and Program (I&P)," places many obligations on teachers.

For they show the process subjects most of its approximate 2,700 teachers to detailed analyses of their work, familiarity with the requirements of their state-mandated job evaluations and tracking student academic progress - while still educating the children within the confines of the school day.

The district's current I&P status continues assuring that Trenton bureaucrats, not the teachers' immediate supervisors in central office at 346 Claremont Ave, will be looking over their shoulders as the final judge.

The district still has been judged not in compliance with Instruction and Program. It is one of five aspects of school system operation scored periodically on New Jersey's Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC). The other four: Fiscal Management, Operations, Personnel and Governance, have been returned.

In fact, the district is now almost four months overdue reaching its I&P target. The estimate is based on an initial goal stated in early October 2015 by then-state Commissioner of Education David Hespe.

"Commissioner Hespe also established a working group that is tasked with establishing a plan for returning the final area of instruction and program that would provide full local control to the district by as early as the end of the (2015-16) school year," his release stated at the time.

Despite the optimism etched in Hespe's words stated in the Oct. 7, 2015 press release, 376 days later, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Marcia Lyles told JCEA.org the district still has not established a target date to see I&P put back in its hands.

The state did approve the working group's DIP, covering 2016-18, last Feb. 22, a little over four months from Hespe's ideal deadline for returning I&P to central office.

The board voted to accept the plan for submission last December. Its I&P compliance mandates entail 122 pages, affecting four curriculum areas: Math (38 pages), English Language Arts (31), English Language Learners (30) and Special Education (23).

Virtually all address the expectations of teachers, their supervisors, and ultimately, the students - based on the guidance educators receive - as a condition for the state's relinquishing I&P. Earlier in the month, Lyles stated the remaining issue that will end I&P state intervention is "readiness," and that getting to the goal is part of "a process."

JCEA.org more recently tried asking Lyles to cite some examples of where she feels the district must demonstrate more I&P "readiness." The superintendent declined.

"It's all part of a process," she reiterated, speaking after the board's Oct. 18 caucus.

During the session, Lyles reported Acting Bergen County Executive Superintendent of Schools Monica Tone will visit the district Nov. 2 to monitor and evaluate its latest efforts in two QSAC areas, including I&P.

Later, she did acknowledge, "The visit (to review I&P) is part of that process," in judging district progress on moving toward its goal: retaking I&P.

State Department of Education Press Secretary David Saenz, in an email, said that, while the regulations require a certain level of state I&P monitoring under the current circumstances in Jersey City, "District curriculum decisions are made at the local level."

Still, he acknowledged the fact that Trenton still controls the district's I&P component means the state's second largest school system is still under "partial state intervention" in that area.

Saenz cited New Jersey regulations under 6A:30-6, titled, "Evaluation of Performance of School Districts" - for further guidance.

They subject districts - under state control in anywhere from one to four of the five QSAC components ("I&P" in Jersey City's case) to additional monitoring and guidance from people not connected to the district - but who are tasked with reporting back to the state education commissioner.

For example, a regulation under the partial intervention scenario enables the commissioner to affect the "appointment of one or more highly-skilled professionals (HSPs) to provide direct oversight in the public school district."

In Jersey City's case, the HSPs' would help local staff try satisfying the system's remaining I&P requirements to help the district regain control.

Regulation 6A:30-6.9, titled, "Assessment Activities During the Period of Intervention," states that, depending on a district's progress, "Compliance reviews," pursuant to state law, "shall continue." Further, depending on the pace of the system's progress in improving I&P, the regulation says, "Public school districts (subject to state intervention) shall be monitored at six-month intervals."

Under the four curriculum areas subject to the DIP, 122 pages of documents show teachers and administrators will be subject to numerous requirements and paperwork, as well as - for teachers - significant investments of time beyond their normal instructional duties to try meeting them.

Each expectation for satisfying the state's requirements to help regain control of I&P cites a "Goal," defines "Indicators/Objectives" for meeting the goal, sets a "Timeline" for achievement, defines the required "Interventions," lists the "Persons Responsible" and specifies "Evidence of Completion." For instance, a goal repeated in the ELA component is "to prepare students for college and career," and says "teachers, students and administrators will focus on deepening the ELA/Literacy Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to build student reading, writing and research with both informational and literacy text."

According to the document, part of the focus will be to follow CCSS in all areas, with having students "focus on reading for informational text across all content areas."

The first goal indicator/objective, expected to have been met between last June and September, was "to improve administrator and teacher understanding and implementation of the CCSS (reading, writing, research) to present knowledge across all content areas."

It continues, "Administrator and teacher development will focus on three power areas," as defined on the CCSS website for Grades K-12.

To show evidence of completion, teachers will have to have demonstrated they successfully completed professional development in the area last September over a two-day period. Further, they had to view a video, pertaining to their professional evaluations, called "The Danielson Method," regarding "rigor" in learning.

The teachers also had to "complete reflection" over the concepts taught them while a member of their "Professional Learning Community" during its "post-observation" period.

The second indicator/objective that this ELA goal is being met is two-fold and must be finished between September and December: 1.) Have teachers focus on Narrative Writing and Literacy Analysis tasks during midterm and final assessments. 2.) Offer a research simulation task on the Social Studies/Science/Health assessments.

In demonstrating evidence of completion of the objective, teachers must meet four defined requirements, including demonstrating "their lesson plans and instructional activities" do "reflect the appropriate level of rigor for their students."

Throughout all four curriculum areas of the DIP, teachers must spend hours following numerous other requirements related to professional development and evaluation, and in helping measure student achievement.

Given all these requirements, JCEA President Ron Greco has alleged teachers were offered little opportunity to give input into the I&P component of the improvement plan late last year.

He claimed his district working group designee, 2nd Vice President Tina Thorp, was not even invited to participate in such meetings until after a June special school board meeting - but about three months after the state already approved the DIP.

Yet Lyles said after the meeting, "The association was represented on the transition team," referring to the team of local representatives established, as part of the working group, after Hesse's announcement a year ago. "They (association) were involved in the process."

To view the four parts of the I&P DIP in vast detail, log on to:

<http://www.boarddocs.com/nj/jcps/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=A538447E9B6F>

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