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District Quality Review: Executive Summary

Stamford Public Schools

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Executive summary of the Cambridge District Quality Review (DQR)

Cambridge Education's District Quality Review (DQR) is a systematic review of school and district practices, processes, and systems in order to assist the Stamford Public Schools' (SPS) district leadership to determine district strengths and needs, examine its nature and causes, and set priorities for future action. The DQR is intended to provide administrators and Board of Education members with a comprehensive report of findings and recommendations in order to design and implement a long-term strategic plan. The review and resulting plan will cover a five year period from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022.

In a DQR, a Cambridge-SPS team gathers evidence through interviews, focus group meetings, direct observation and data analysis. A tailored rubric uses criteria and indicators over six overarching domains to rate the system and reveal impact on student learning and school performance. Each domain is evaluated against the four levels of performance: High Impact (4), Moderate Impact (3), Limited Evidence of Impact (2) and Low or Lack of Impact (1). The chart below summarizes Cambridge's evaluation of SPS in each domain.

Domain	Score
Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes	2
Domain 2: Leadership, Management and Accountability	2
Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment	2
Domain 4: Engagement of Families and the Community	3
Domain 5: Human and Fiscal Resources	2
Domain 6: Operational Systems	2

Main Findings That Support District Effectiveness:

- The district has provided successful targeted support to English Language learners by providing professional development for ELL strategies to all teachers and school-based administrators in the past two years. (Domain 1)
- The Stamford Board of Education and central office senior leadership are supportive of a shared value that all students can achieve academic and social success. (Domain 2)
- There is access to a broad curriculum for students at all levels. Instructional Data Teams (IDTs) and Focus Walks promote greater understanding of the quality of instruction and the implementation of agreed polices. (Domain 3)
- SPS engages in community problem-solving and collective impact with the United Way's Stamford Cradle-to-Career Initiative (SC2C) where large numbers of community members work on the STRIVE Together Framework. (Domain 4)
- SPS has established hiring and fiscal practices and processes that ensure sound human resources and financial management. (Domain 5)
- Teachers are increasing their use of technology for instructional purposes with interactive whiteboards, computer labs, Chromebooks and document cameras. (Domain 6)

Main Findings That <u>Limit</u> District Effectiveness:

- There is evidence of some academic growth over time but it is too recent to be securely embedded, and therefore there is limited data to show that academic achievement is accelerating across the full achievement range at all levels. (Domain 1)
- The district often functions as individual departments and schools rather than a whole school system, an inconsistency that impacts student success across the district. (Domain 2)
- There is no lead administrator at the central office level to ensure Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (CI&A) is updated, vertically aligned, enacted with and monitored for fidelity. (Domain 3)
- District-wide expectations for two-way engagement of families and community that support the teaching, learning and transition of students are not clear and there is significant variation in the level of engagement from school to school. (Domain 4)
- District implementation changes to the Professional Growth, Development and Evaluation (PGDE) Model results in an evaluation system that is time consuming and confounding to professional growth. (Domain 5)
- The roles and responsibilities of many district positions are neither clearly defined nor always matched to the current needs of the district. (Domain 5)
- Evidence of systems, processes and procedures around the use of data that are differentiated by department is limited. (Domain 6)
- Many of the operations rely on individuals as opposed to documented and effective operational systems. This permeates all levels of district work and creates unnecessary barriers to improving student outcomes. (Domain 6)

Recommendations for System-Wide Effectiveness

- Build a system that is united by a common vision and mission, as well as values, goals and indicators of academic success for all. (Domains 1,2,4,6)
- Develop a district-wide approach to support the social and emotional needs of all students based on equity of educational outcomes, rather than equality of inputs. (Domains 1,4,5)
- Create a comprehensive and differentiated professional development plan for all teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff to address the unique needs of struggling learners. (Domains 1,3,5)
- Develop a guaranteed, viable district-wide curriculum (including co-curricular and enrichment programming), for instruction and assessment in all subjects that is properly vertically aligned and enacted throughout the district. (Domains 2,3,5)
- Create operational and communication systems, processes and procedures around the collection and use of qualitative and quantitative data/feedback that include all departments, including the IT and research teams. (Domains 2,3,6)
- Develop data systems and dashboards that measure the impact of initiatives, policies, and the work of each Department to ensure that district goals are being met and work is aligned to be effective and efficient. (Domains 1,2,3,4,5,6)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the district revisions and implementation of the state-approved evaluation system of district school leaders, teachers and staff. (Domains 1,2,5)
- Revise organizational structure and job descriptions to address the needs of the district, support core processes and strategies, clearly define the decision-makers, and reallocate resources to ensure people with the appropriate skills are in the right roles. (Domains 1,2,3,5)
- Establish effective and timely two-way communication systems among SPS faculty, students, parents, community and the Board of Education and ensure that all stakeholders have feedback and problem solving opportunities throughout the district that are efficiently and effectively supported by human and fiscal resources. (Domains 4,6)

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