

# SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE

## ON-SITE REVIEW REPORT

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***Lincoln County  
School Reviews***

June 2021

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Office of Support &  
Accountability



**West Virginia Board of Education  
2020-2021**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....2

Onsite Review Team Members.....2

Background .....3

County Level Priorities .....3

    Duval PK-8.....5

    Hamlin PK-8 .....6

    Harts PK-8 .....7

    Midway Elementary .....7

    Ranger Elementary .....8

    West Hamlin Elementary School.....9

    Guyan Valley Middle School .....10

    Lincoln County High School .....11

# Introduction

As part of the continuous support being provided to Lincoln County Schools during the State of Emergency deemed by WVBE November 16, 2020, a Team consisting of staff members from the WVDE Offices of Accountability and School Improvement, accompanied by county and school leadership, observed classroom instruction and conducted interviews at each of Lincoln County's eight schools. The inclusion of county administrators in this process is intended to provide support and sustained improvement. WVDE staff then compiled the information gathered during the onsite review and provided findings and non-compliances outlined in this report. The report acknowledges identified strengths and provides recommendations and corrective actions related to the districtwide and school level implementation of the WV Standards for Effective Schools. The West Virginia Standards for Effective Schools can be accessed through the WVDE website: <http://wvde.state.wv.us/>.

The WV Standards for Effective Schools address seven areas:

- Clear and Focused Mission
- Instructional Leadership
- High Expectations for Success
- Positive and Safe Environment
- Equitable Opportunities to Learn and Effective Instruction
- Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
- Family and Community Partnerships

## Onsite Review Team Members

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# Background

On March 11, 2020, a report of the findings from a Special Circumstance Review conducted by the WVDE at Guyan Valley Middle School was presented to the WVBE. Based on the findings in that report, the WVBE directed the Office of Accountability to conduct a Special Circumstance Review of the Lincoln County School System. This commenced with a review of the Lincoln County Schools Finance and Transportation Offices. The report of the findings from that review was presented to the WVBE on November 16, 2020. Following consideration and review of the Finance and Transportation Report, the WVBE moved to declare a State of Emergency in Lincoln County Schools pursuant to W. Va. Code §18-2E-5(m)(2). The State Superintendent was directed to appoint designees to be employed pursuant to W. Va. Code §18-2E-5(j) to coordinate on-site school improvement efforts and to provide recommendations for the correction of the extraordinary circumstances. Two designees, one with extensive superintendent experience and one with expertise in school and system financial practices were appointed by the State Superintendent and approved by the WVBE on January 13, 2021, for this purpose. The WVBE further directed, if progress in correcting the extraordinary circumstances is not made within six months, the WVBE shall intervene in the operation of Lincoln County Schools.

Additionally, the Office of Accountability has conducted reviews of Lincoln County Schools' Personnel and Special Education Efficiency Indicators. The Personnel On-site Review was held beginning January 20, 2021, through March 1, 2021. The Special Education On-Site Review began on January 27, 2021. Both the Personnel and Special Education On-Site Review Reports were presented to the WVBE on April 14, 2021.

## County Level Priorities

***The areas denoted as requiring improvement were determined based on classroom observations, written evidence, and consistency of comments describing conditions and practices throughout the district through the interview process.***

### **Purposeful Planning for School Improvement**

FINDING 1: School leaders and teachers did not articulate a clear direction and focus for each school. Inconsistent answers were provided regarding schoolwide areas of focus, the role of the school leadership team in the improvement process, and the creation, monitoring, and evaluation of the strategic plan.

*WVBE Policy 5800, 5.2.b; WVBE Policy 2322, Section 4.1*

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Team recommended the district adopt a comprehensive, districtwide school improvement approach based on the WV Standards for Effective Schools. Once this is established, communicate the process with all building-level administrators in order to directly align the improvement efforts at each school with the district's school improvement expectations.

### **Instructional Leadership**

FINDING 2: The Team identified a lack of consistent, timely feedback conversations to support improvement in instructional practice. Teachers described inconsistent classroom visits and did not articulate a clear understanding of the difference between instructional walkthroughs and classroom observations. Further, teachers did not articulate how walkthrough and evaluation data, paired with feedback and conferencing, support growth for teachers and progress toward identified schoolwide areas of focus.

*WVBE Policy 5800, 5.2.c; WVBE Policy 2322, Section 4.1*

RECOMMENDATION 2: A clear and consistent plan for supporting instructional leadership from the central office should be established. Professional learning to support an understanding of the role of the school administrator as instructional leader should be provided. Implementation of instructional leadership practices should be monitored for effectiveness by central office staff, and the impact on student achievement evaluated.

### **Effective Instruction**

FINDING 3: While standards-based instruction was pervasively observed, standards were not taught to the appropriate level of rigor in most instances. Lessons lacked evidence of purposeful planning, high-yield instructional strategies, and personalized instruction.

*WVBE Policy 2322, Section 4.1.; WVBE. Policy 2510, Section,3.2.d*

RECOMMENDATION 3: Central office staff prioritize the monitoring of districtwide instructional practice. Utilizing appropriate data, determine needs for districtwide and school level professional learning. Once those needs are established, set clear goals and expectations for each professional learning session provided, monitor the implementation of the learning, and evaluate the results to ensure an impact on educator growth and student achievement. Provide embedded support from county staff and school leaders.

### **High Expectations**

FINDING 4: While most conversations with staff revealed a belief in their ability to successfully teach all students, the team noted a lack of differentiated instruction in most classrooms and did not observe responses and adjustments to assure mastery when some students did not learn or had already mastered the concept.

*WVBE Policy 2322, Section 4.1.c*

RECOMMENDATION 4: Provide expectations and appropriate professional learning experiences to build staff understanding of the role of differentiated instruction and adjustments to instruction when students do not learn or have already mastered the concept. Staff could benefit from the opportunity to observe teachers who excel in providing differentiated instruction. Task school level administrators with monitoring the implementation of differentiated instruction during instructional walkthroughs and formal observations.

# Individual School Reports

## ***Duval PK-8***

### **Overview:**

The school staff identified family involvement as a strength and indicated the staff is involved with the community. The perceptual survey and interviews confirmed the school's commitment to support the needs of students and families in the community. The WV Standards for High Quality Schools Perceptual Survey was provided to the staff prior to the visit. Results revealed all staff do not perceive they are involved enough in decision making at the school. The Team did not observe shared leadership to be a pervasive practice.

"Think, Pair, Share" was the only high-yield instructional strategy observed and was noted as an area of focus in interviews. Instructional feedback provided to students did not clarify learning, and opportunities for increasing depth of knowledge were not maximized. High-level questioning and student learning conversations were not observed in the majority of classrooms. The Team also noted a lack of differentiation based on individual needs of students. Intervention and special education schedules did not optimize instructional time for students.

Consistent schoolwide goals and initiatives were not articulated by the administration or leadership team. Teachers shared inconsistent understanding of walkthrough visits to classrooms and observations for the purpose of evaluation.

### **Identified School Priorities:**

**Clear and Focused Mission** - In collaboration with the leadership team, utilize available data sources to determine schoolwide goals and initiatives that improve student achievement and engagement by completing a needs assessment. Develop a monitoring process to measure effectiveness.

**High-Yield Instructional Practices** - After determining the schoolwide goals, provide quality professional learning opportunities to support those initiatives. Consider focus areas such as differentiation, student engagement, questioning, and high-yield instructional strategies.

**Instructional Leadership** - Create a consistent walkthrough schedule that includes all instructional staff regardless of evaluation progression and provide timely feedback that informs instructional practice.

## **Hamlin PK-8**

### **Overview:**

The school staff indicated on the Perceptual Survey analysis they “celebrate working together for the good of the students.” Evidence supported decision making at the school was student-centered. In reviewing the results of the Perceptual Survey, the following were identified as school improvement concerns based on a lack of mutual agreement among the staff:

- all staff do not feel empowered by the school administration to take part in the decision-making process;
- there is a perceived lack of parental involvement and understanding of expectations for student achievement and performance;
- providing constructive feedback to staff members does not occur in a timely manner; and
- students are not engaged in leadership roles or opportunities that develop leadership skills.

Technology was used as a means of instructional delivery in a majority of the classrooms, and in many cases, instruction was teacher-led. Differentiation of instruction and adjustments to lessons in response to student learning were not observed in most classrooms. The Team observed low-level, recall questioning and minimal discussion in many classrooms. Some support staff were not engaged in providing students with instructional support during classroom observations.

During interviews, school staff did not articulate consistent schoolwide areas of focus. Multiple programs and instructional practices were mentioned by both school staff and students. However, inconsistent implementation was noted across grade levels. Although staff members indicated the administration frequently visits classrooms, students mentioned these visits are typically short and occur during the designated “Math Challenge” time.

### **Identified School Priorities:**

**Schoolwide Focus** - Create an inventory of programs, instructional practices, and processes. Conduct a needs assessment to determine the impact of each on student achievement and determine agreed-upon, schoolwide areas of focus.

**Monitoring** - Once agreed-upon, schoolwide areas of focus have been established, create a plan to monitor implementation, provide training and support, and assess the impact on student achievement.

**Professional Learning** - Develop a plan for professional learning to support the agreed-upon, schoolwide areas of focus. Through observation, walkthroughs, and follow-up conversations, determine which teachers need training, which teachers need support, and which teachers can serve as models. Based on these results, develop individualized professional learning plans for teachers.



## **Harts PK-8**

### **Overview:**

The Team noted during classroom observations procedures were not in place to maximize time on task. A strong reliance on packets of worksheets for content delivery was observed as pervasive. Lesson presentation often lacked introduction, checks for understanding and closure. The Team observed missed opportunities to provide high-yield instructional strategies, formative assessments, and quality questioning. Differentiation based on individual needs of students was not observed. While co-teaching is occurring, the Team observed few examples of effective implementation.

Based on consistency of interview responses, administrators are visible in the school. However, there was inconsistent evidence of monitoring instructional practice and providing constructive feedback. Schoolwide goals and initiatives focusing on math and attendance were identified by interview respondents. Some responses revealed co-planning time is provided with limited consistency. School Leadership Team members did not articulate having input on instructional decisions beyond the selection of programs, and a schoolwide process of data analysis to determine individualized supports for students was not discussed.

### **Identified School Priorities:**

**Instructional Leadership** - Create and implement a system for monitoring schoolwide classroom procedures and instructional practice to provide constructive feedback. Develop roles and responsibilities for school administrators.

**Purposeful Planning for Improvement** - With support, complete a comprehensive needs assessment based on various data sources to identify a schoolwide instructional focus.

**Effective Instruction** - Provide targeted professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators based on the identified instructional focus.

## **Midway Elementary**

### **Overview:**

The Team established shared leadership as a strength of the school, noting the leadership team is functional and active in the decision-making process. The school leadership team's analysis of the Perceptual Survey revealed the need for a consistent schoolwide behavior plan and the development of Professional Learning Communities with the opportunity for consistent data conversations.

The Team observed teacher-directed instruction and a lack of differentiation in the majority of classrooms. Instructional time was not effectively utilized. Students, while compliant, were not actively engaged in learning activities. Instructional activities did not effectively address the standards to the appropriate level of rigor. The principal, who is currently away from her duties, did not complete all of the required components of the educator evaluation process. While the acting administrator is visible throughout the school, there is no evidence of a system for monitoring instructional practice, implementing programs, reviewing data, or providing feedback.

Interview responses addressed the lack of a schoolwide behavior plan. A schoolwide, uniform process to determine data sources, analyze data, set goals, and monitor progress was not articulated during interviews.

### **Identified School Priorities**

**Instructional Leadership** - Lack of consistent leadership has negatively impacted all aspects of the school: culture, cohesiveness, and instructional practice. Develop and implement a system for monitoring instructional practice, implementing programs, and providing feedback.

**Depth of Instructional Knowledge** - Develop and implement a process to collect and analyze data and establish and monitor goals based on the data results. Provide professional learning focused on instructional strategies, effective use of instructional time, and student engagement.

**Schoolwide Behavior Plan** - Develop and implement a schoolwide behavior plan to maximize instructional time.

### ***Ranger Elementary***

#### **Overview:**

The school staff identified family involvement as a strength and described many events, outreach activities, and collaboration with community agencies to support the needs of students and families in the community. Perceptual survey responses indicated the staff agree the focus of the school should be student success. During observations, low-level questioning techniques and inadequate wait time were observed. Grade level standards were addressed during instruction, but not to the appropriate level of rigor. The Team noted multiple missed opportunities to support engagement through active learning conversations and cooperative learning activities. Intentional planning for lesson delivery was not evident to the Team.

During interviews, some teachers discussed their knowledge of families and how this impacts their expectations of students. Some responses to questions communicated the belief that the parents in the area do not care about education. Staff members were unable to articulate schoolwide instructional goals but shared the current area of focus was educating the whole child. Interview respondents described feedback as inconsistent in both frequency and quality. The Team determined teachers have not been actively engaged in conversations regarding data analysis to support instructional decision making. Concerns in the areas of differentiation, rigor, and high-yield instructional strategies were communicated to the Team.

#### **Identified School Priorities:**

**High Expectations for Success** - Provide professional learning opportunities focused on recognizing a lack of high expectations.

**Clear and Focused Mission** - In collaboration with the School Leadership Team, utilize available data sources to determine schoolwide goals and initiatives that improve student engagement and achievement by completing a needs assessment. Develop a monitoring process to measure effectiveness.

**Effective Instruction** - Ensure intentional planning for high-quality instruction targeting rigor, differentiation, and collaborative learning strategies.

## ***West Hamlin Elementary School***

### **Overview:**

In the Perceptual Survey analysis, the school staff identified positive relationships as a strength and indicated the staff has been building a more positive culture within the school and community. Interviews with students, administration, leadership team, social worker, and counselor provided evidence of the school's commitment to building positive relationships. In reviewing the results of the Perceptual Survey, the following were identified as school improvement concerns based on a lack of mutual agreement among the staff:

- all staff do not feel empowered by the school administration to take part in the decision-making process;
- the school leadership team does not share responsibility for overall academic success of students;
- all teachers do not consistently analyze student performance and engage in student-specific instructional conversations during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); and
- all teachers do not use assessments for learning daily to measure student performance and plan instruction.

During observations, the Team noted learning expectations were not communicated to students in the majority of classrooms. Low-level questioning and discussion techniques were utilized in most classrooms. The Team observed grade-level standards addressed in most lessons; however, not to the appropriate level of rigor. Teacher-led instruction was pervasive, with few opportunities provided for student learning conversations. Differentiation based on individual needs of students was not observed.

### **Identified School Priorities:**

**Instructional Leadership** – Administrators may benefit from seeking additional knowledge of the elementary programmatic level to increase their capacity to support instruction. Create a schedule, conducting intentional walkthroughs, and monitoring instructional practice. Providing constructive feedback consistently and effectively.

**Curriculum Focus** - Determine the implementation of schoolwide instructional strategies. Provide targeted professional learning experiences regarding lesson design, classroom procedures, and maximizing instructional time to increase student achievement.

**High Expectations for Success** - Utilize data to determine schoolwide expectations for behavior, lesson design, and the SAT process. During interviews, the Team noted staff provided varied responses when asked about schoolwide areas of focus and the purposes of the SAT process.

## ***Guyan Valley Middle School***

### **Overview:**

Administrator capacity was cited by the Team as a strength of the school. The principal has a realistic perception of the current state of the school and a clear vision for school improvement. She verbalized and produced evidence of areas she had identified as needing improvement and support.

The Perceptual Survey results yielded the following school improvement concerns based on a lack of mutual agreement among the staff:

- the staff does not feel that all students have age-appropriate leadership roles that are effectively utilized within the school community;
- the staff does not feel empowered by the school administration to take part in the decision-making process;
- the school leadership team does not share the responsibility for overall academic success of the students; and
- the staff does not believe all students have the ability to master grade-level standards, regardless of circumstances.

The Team observed classroom procedures were inconsistently implemented, leading to lost instructional time. The method of instructional delivery was teacher-directed in the majority of classrooms. While standards or essential questions were posted in most classrooms, they were rarely discussed or referenced to reinforce the intended instructional outcome. Quality feedback, designed to clarify learning, was not observed to be a pervasive instructional practice. While co-teaching was built into the master schedule during core content classes, it was not observed to be utilized effectively.

Interview responses indicated a leadership team is established at the school, but the members were unclear about the roles and responsibilities of a functional leadership team. A uniform process for data analysis and goal setting was not articulated by the school leadership team. Feedback designed to improve instruction was described as inconsistent in both frequency and quality.

### **Identified School Priorities:**

**Leadership Roles and Responsibilities** - Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the Principal, Dean of Students, Leadership Team, and Professional Learning Communities. Create and implement a framework for shared leadership. Provide professional learning to the school leadership team to support the team's role in the school improvement process. Re-vamp the School Leadership Team as necessary to support school improvement goals. Increase opportunities for student leadership roles within the school.

**Feedback at all Levels** - Create and implement a system for providing consistent, quality feedback both from administrators to teachers and teachers to students. Provide professional learning focused on providing quality feedback to students.

**Effective Use of Time and Resources** - Maximize learning time by providing professional learning focused on effective instructional strategies. Implement schoolwide classroom procedures. Develop a master schedule that effectively utilizes staff members.

## ***Lincoln County High School***

### **Overview:**

The Team observed a positive and safe environment during the visit to the school and noted a safety-centered simulated workplace experience has been established for Career and Technical Education (CTE) classrooms. The Perceptual Survey yielded many neutral responses and inconsistency in teacher perceptions on key areas of improvement such as clear and focused mission and instructional leadership.

Direct instruction was pervasively observed, with few examples of formative assessment and subsequent adjustment of instruction. A low level of rigor, including teachers reading aloud directions, problems, and passages to students, communicated low expectations for student achievement. The Team observed very few examples of high-yield instructional strategies, and quality questioning and discussion techniques were lacking during most observations. Differentiation based on the needs of the students was not observed.

The Team noted a schoolwide academic focus was not consistently articulated by the administration or the leadership team during interviews. Evidence of monitoring instructional practice and providing constructive feedback was inconsistent. While administration and leadership team members shared the process employed to develop the strategic plan, it is unclear how goals are monitored. The school master schedule and course offerings were a concern expressed to the Team; specifically, the timely completion of the master schedule to allow the appropriate preparation for the start of school.

### **Identified School Priorities:**

**Clear and Focused Mission** - Revisit the core beliefs, mission, and vision to develop a shared understanding and commitment to schoolwide areas of focus that will guide the school improvement process.

**Instructional Leadership** - Conduct a needs assessment to determine the schoolwide instructional focus. Develop and implement a process to monitor instruction and provide regular feedback. Conduct regular administrative team meetings to determine progress toward schoolwide goals.

**Effective Instruction** - Provide targeted professional learning experiences for teachers based on the identified instructional focus. Develop a common understanding of elements of rigorous instruction, including strategies and methods to assess and adjust instruction when some students do not learn.







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