

# District Coherence and the Strategies for Continuous Improvement: Vernon Public Schools

Joseph Macary, Superintendent of Schools, Vernon

Robert Testa, Assistant Superintendent, Vernon

Richard Lemons, Executive Director, CT Center for School Change

Robert Villanova, SR Leadership Consultant, CT Center for School Change



# Capacity and Coherence Review

The Capacity and Coherence Review is a process whereby a small team of external advisors work closely with central office leadership to (1) identify evidence to gather, (2) collect data and evidence, (3) analyze the data and evidence, and (4) present descriptive and objective findings of trends and patterns. The initial Capacity and Coherence Review results will not include suggested solutions, but the team is open to debriefing with district leaders about possible next steps.

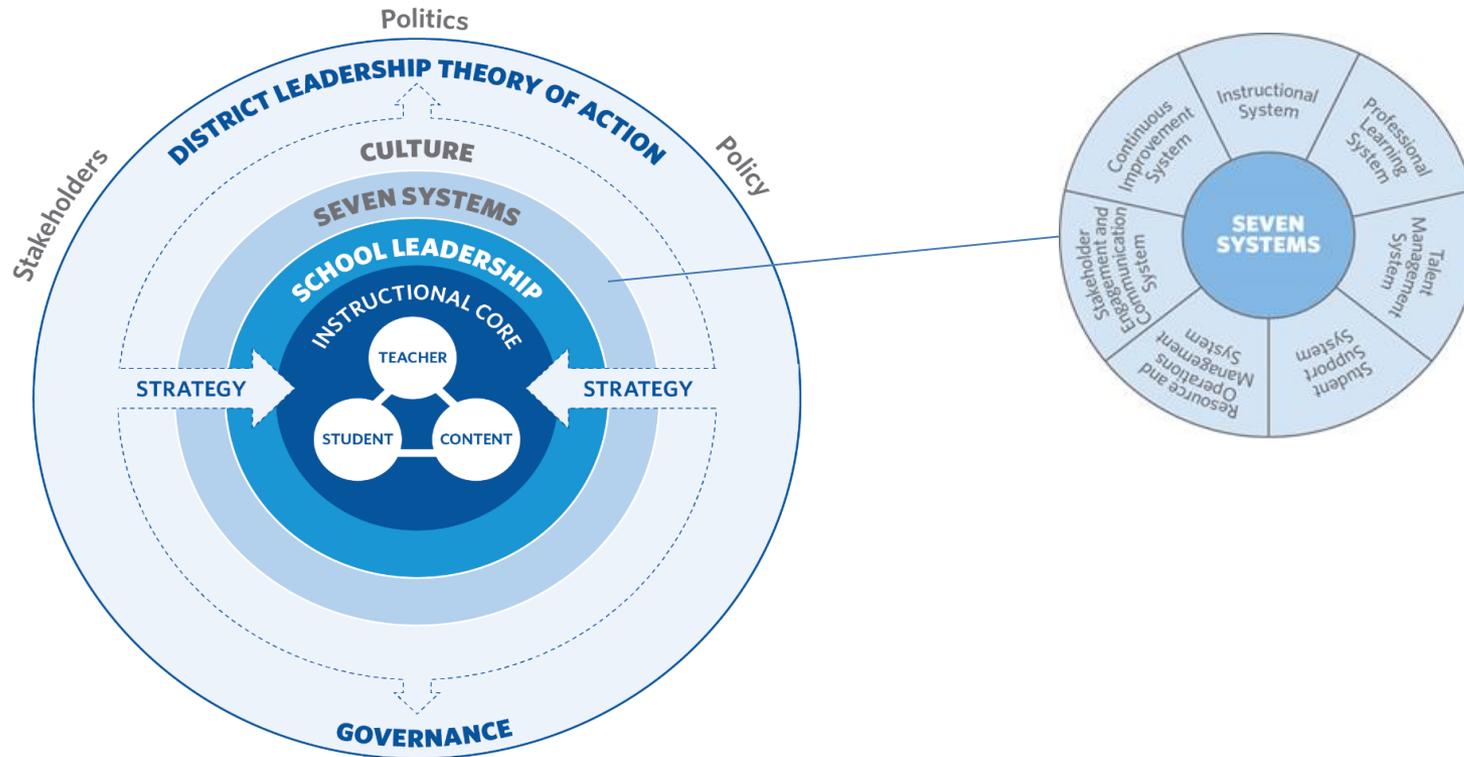
Guided by the LEAD Connecticut Capacity and Coherence Framework, the purpose of the review is to understand the degree to which the district (1) is approaching improvement in a coherent and aligned fashion and (2) possesses the necessary capacity to achieve its improvement aims.

Ultimately, the review team's intent is to provide helpful, relevant, evidenced-based information for local improvement planning. This is not a system "evaluation"; it is a diagnostic process to guide district improvement planning.

# Today's Agenda

- I. Overview of Capacity and Coherence Framework and relationship between Vernon Public Schools and the CT Center for School Change
- II. The Vernon Public Schools story
- III. Takeaways and Implications
- IV. Questions and Answers

# LEAD Connecticut Capacity and Coherence Framework



Drawn from research on effective districts, the Capacity and Coherence Framework suggests that there are multiple, nested forces that interact to influence a district's relative coherence. Moreover, the more coherent a district, the more likely it will have the organizational capacity to pursue improvement strategies in ways that will benefit the learning of students.

# Core Ideas of Capacity and Coherence Framework

In addition, the Capacity and Coherence Framework suggests certain actions that districts can take to enhance their ability to pursue improvement strategies and improve student outcomes:

- Place your bets (strategically select your improvement investments)
- Focus on “how we do things around here” (culture)
- Connect the dots (alignment)
- Build leadership capacity

# CT Center for School Change

The Connecticut Center for School Change (the Center) is a statewide, non-profit organization with a mission to improve teaching and learning, to reduce achievement gaps, and to promote equity in Connecticut schools. The Center supports comprehensive preK-12 educational reform through a system-wide, integrated approach focused on improving instructional practice and developing leadership at all levels, from parents to superintendents.

# Category 1: Place Your Bets

*In effective districts, superintendents, leadership teams, and school boards have a shared theory of action, which they use to shape and pursue a small number of strategies to improve teaching and learning. These districts focus on strategies that will have the biggest impact. They then ensure the whole district is organized to support successful implementation of those strategies.*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Category 2: Focus on “how we do things around here” (culture)

*Culture can and must be a positive and powerful driver for system-wide improvement. Too often, district leaders take culture for granted. Consequently, their strategies have limited impact and traction, especially as leadership changes. In contrast, effective superintendents and leadership teams know that positive cultural practices and values — such as reminding central office staff that they are there to serve schools or reiterating that “all means all” when it comes to expecting students to succeed — have the power to infuse strategies with purpose and motivate behavior. So, they are attentive to “how we do things around here.”*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Category 3: Connect the Dots

*Superintendents and their teams must align and focus systems and structures so everyone knows how their work fits into the district's improvement theory of action.*

*Districts are complex organizations and it is no small task to ensure that each part coordinates effectively with the whole in service of schools and students. Effective districts connect the dots, making collaboration the norm so that departments can align and coordinate their work.*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Category 4: Build Leadership Capacity

*Articulating a strategy, fostering a culture, and aligning the work are critical . . . yet not enough.*

*Superintendents and their central office leadership teams must take actions that create the conditions and capacities for strong and effective school leadership.*

*Significantly improving teaching, learning, and outcomes for students will require talented and empowered building leadership.*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Vernon Public Schools



**“Together, Students  
Learn, Achieve and Succeed”**

# Core Beliefs for Vernon PS

- Advocate a “whole child” approach to student learning
- Maximize student performance and set high expectations
- Integrate family and community with the education system



# Mission Statement

The Mission of Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.



# Vernon: Place Your Bets

*In effective districts, superintendents, leadership teams, and school boards have a shared theory of action, which they use to shape and pursue a small number of strategies to improve teaching and learning. These districts focus on strategies that will have the biggest impact. They then ensure the whole district is organized to support successful implementation of those strategies.*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Theory of Action

- The district leadership *Theory of Action* is comprised of a set of strategic actions that we/I purposely and intentionally use within the district planning process for continuous improvement.
  - » If...then... Statements
  - » Action Plan
  - » Evidence

# Theory of Action

## *District Leadership:*

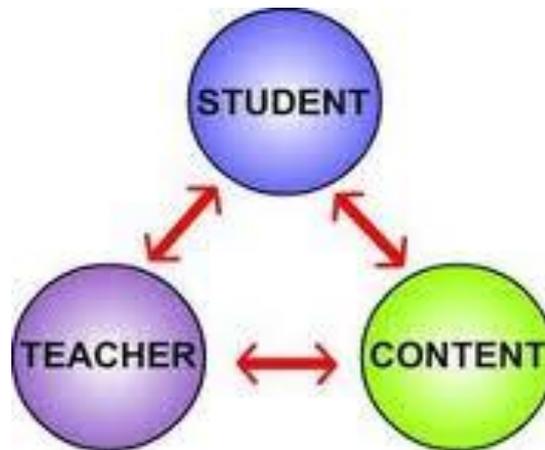
- Conduct Superintendent School Visits
- Implement Administrator Evaluation Plan
- Create Structures for Coherence
- Organize Student Support Systems
- Advocate Community & Parent Outreach



# Focus on the Fundamentals...

## Good Teaching and Learning

- Relevant CT Core Curriculum
- Tiered Student Interventions
- Academic Tasks with Rigor



# Vernon: Focus on “how we do things around here” (culture)

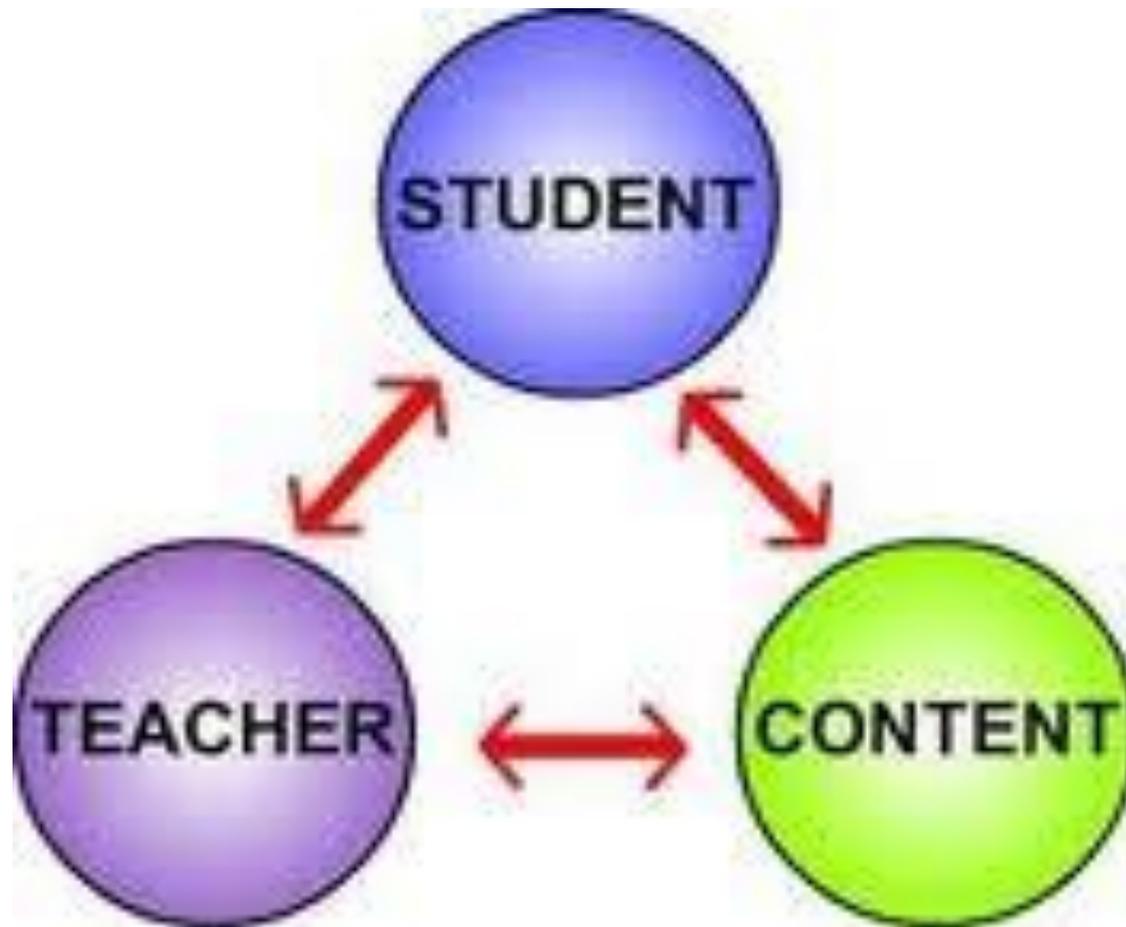
*Culture can and must be a positive and powerful driver for system-wide improvement. Too often, district leaders take culture for granted. Consequently, their strategies have limited impact and traction, especially as leadership changes. In contrast, effective superintendents and leadership teams know that positive cultural practices and values — such as reminding central office staff that they are there to serve schools or reiterating that “all means all” when it comes to expecting students to succeed — have the power to infuse strategies with purpose and motivate behavior. So, they are attentive to “how we do things around here.”*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Thoughts on Culture...

- High Expectations for Students and their educational learning
- Accountability at all levels
- Litmus Test for all Employees
- District Equity for student learning
- Educational Shift: Teaching → Learning
- Learning Task that cognitively engages students in all classrooms

# Instructional Core



# Instructional Core

- The Instructional Core can be defined as follows: ***the relationship of the teacher and the student in the presence of content.***
- Maximizing Student Learning:  
By creating quality, core instruction in every classroom and subject area

# Vernon: Connect the Dots

*Superintendents and their teams must align and focus systems and structures so everyone knows how their work fits into the district's improvement theory of action.*

*Districts are complex organizations and it is no small task to ensure that each part coordinates effectively with the whole in service of schools and students. Effective districts connect the dots, making collaboration the norm so that departments can align and coordinate their work.*

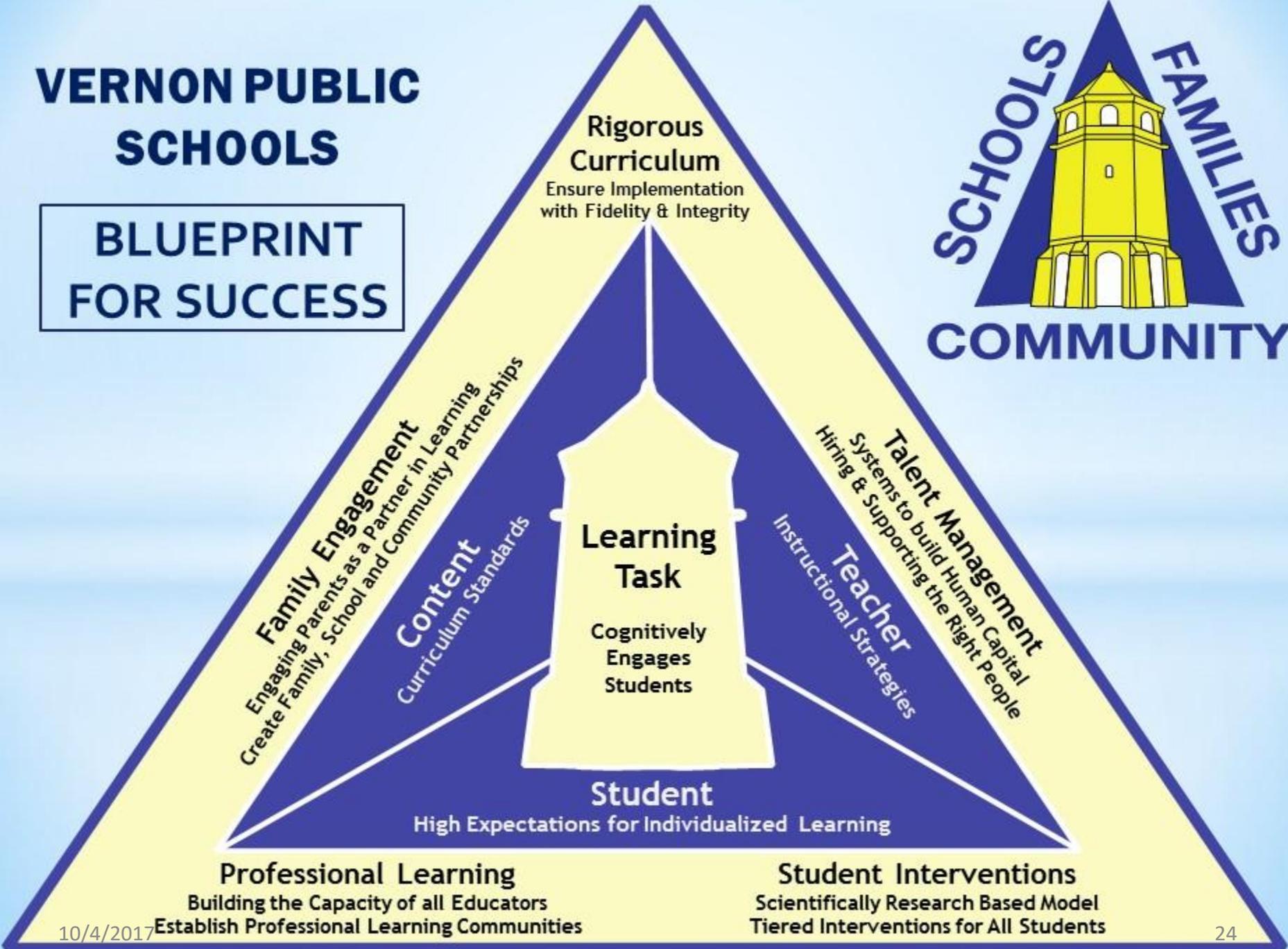
Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# Blueprint for Success

Each driver is integrated into the instructional core and linked to learning. The vision of the Vernon Public Schools is to maximize student achievement, by setting high expectations for individualized learning and focusing on the Instructional Core. Leadership priorities and continuing support for high quality instruction for every child will be grounded in the Vernon Public Schools **Blueprint for Success** to take to district to the next level of educational excellence.

# VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS



# Blueprint for Success

The Vernon Public Schools **Blueprint for Success** employs five district and school-level improvement drivers that will enhance and support our work around the Instructional Core. The five improvement drivers are:

- Rigorous Curriculum
- Talent Management
- Family Engagement
- Professional Learning
- Student Interventions

# Vernon: Build Leadership Capacity

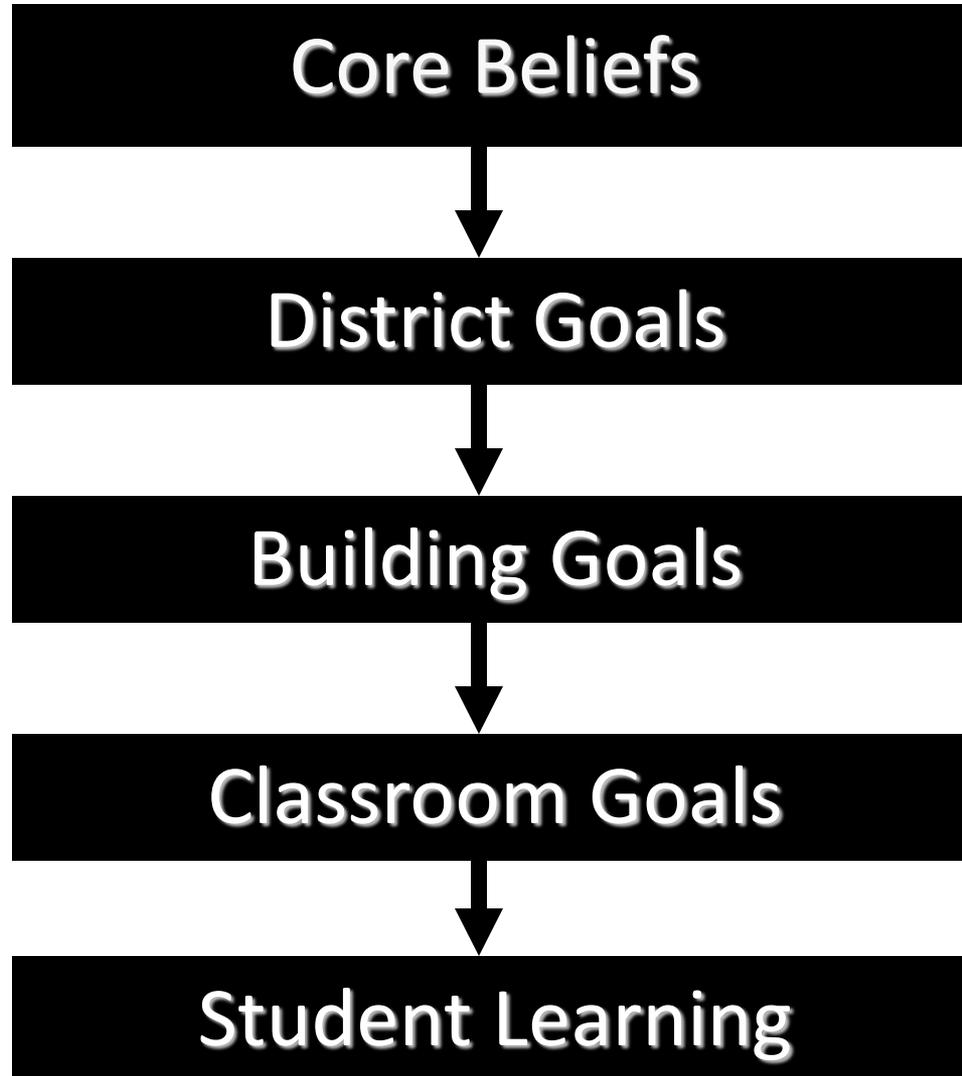
*Articulating a strategy, fostering a culture, and aligning the work are critical . . . yet not enough.*

*Superintendents and their central office leadership teams must take actions that create the conditions and capacities for strong and effective school leadership.*

*Significantly improving teaching, learning, and outcomes for students will require talented and empowered building leadership.*

Leading for Capacity and Coherence

# *ALIGNMENT*



# Structures for Coherence

- District Leadership Theory of Action
- Administrator Theory of Action
- School Improvement Plans
- Senior Leadership Team meetings
- Administrator Council (PD) Meetings
- Instructional Leadership Teams
- Classroom Walk-throughs (5 per week)
- Building Professional Learning Communities

# Building Capacity

- Team of Teams Leadership Coaching Model
- Central Office Transformation Work
- Collegial Calibrations for Observation Lens
- Administrator Evaluation Plan SEED Guidelines
- Teacher Evaluation Plan (PGP)
- CT Superintendent's Network & SIIP Network
- Principal's Professional Learning Community
- Executive Coaching for Individual Admin

Increase of Student  
Performance over time.

# Accomplishments...

- Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System is a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, careers and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a more holistic, multifactor perspective of district and school performance and incorporates student growth over time.

# Accomplishments...

- Every school in Connecticut is ranked from 1 to 5, with one being the highest and five the lowest.
- Schools in the Category 4 or 5 are deemed Focus Schools and require state intervention and assistance. Two years ago, both Center Road School and Maple Street School were identified in category 4 as Focus Schools for Mathematics.

# Accomplishments...

- This year, both schools CRS and MSS have exited the Focus School designation with higher rankings. There are only 16 schools in the State to exit this designation and Vernon has 2 schools.
- Congratulations to both schools and we are proud of their achievements...Great Job!



# Accomplishments...

- Schools with significant growth and achievement are deemed “Schools of Distinction”. This year Skinner Road School is a “School of Distinction” for its work in highest growth for high needs students. This is a tremendous honor and SRS is one of 124 schools in Connecticut to attain this honor. To show growth in a high needs area is an impressive accomplishment.

# Accomplishments...

- This shows significant improvement in the district accountability index due to a focus on teaching and learning for all students in every classroom. However, in education and in life, the true testament of achievement is bettering one's self. Here is a breakdown of the Vernon Schools from last year to this one:

# Accomplishments...

- This table demonstrates a significant increase in the educational level for Vernon Schools. We no longer have any Focus Schools and we have 5 schools in the second highest category as determined by the State Department of Education.

	2015-2016	2016-2017
Category 1	0	0
Category 2	1	5
Category 3	4	2
Category 4	2	0
Category 5	0	0

# Accomplishments...

- Congratulations to Rockville HS teachers and staff for being named one of the best High Schools in America by the US News & World Reports in 2018
- Rockville High School is recognized in the [National Rankings](#) and earned a bronze medal. Schools are ranked based on their performance on state-required tests and how well they prepare students for college and careers

# Accomplishments...

- Rockville High School ranked #43 in Connecticut beating out Tolland, E.O. Smith and Stafford High Schools.
- Measures include Subject Proficiency Tests, AP Testing and Performance for overall students, underserved students and college-ready



# Reflection

- “When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur... Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made. Don’t look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That’s the only way it happens- and when it happens, it lasts.”



- John Wooden

# Questions & Answers



# The Connecticut Center for School Change

151 New Park Avenue, Suite 15

Hartford, CT 06106

[www.ctschoolchange.org](http://www.ctschoolchange.org)

