

**SOUTHBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
NOVEMBER 29, 2005**

**TURNAROUND PLAN**

**Submitted by**

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Superintendent  
TURNAROUND PLAN**

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**PART I**

The Southbridge School District has been identified by the Educational Management Audit Council to be an underperforming school district. As the new Superintendent I reviewed the major reports and findings leading to the district's underperforming status (Tier III School District Examination Report, District Leadership Evaluation Report, Report of NEASC for Southbridge High School, the 2004 and 2005 M.C.A.S. scores, AYP status for each school and subgroup). I met with the major stakeholders in the schools and community including the interim Superintendent, school committee members, the business manager, the administration, parents, the town manager, town council members, staff, and students to gain an understanding of the issues in Southbridge Public Schools.

I have determined the following areas to be the central problems that have contributed to the underperformance of the schools:

1. Leadership – there has been no clear leadership to guide the district, administration and staff in the pursuit of quality educational programs and instruction for the students of Southbridge.
2. Standards-based Curriculum – the district and school leadership lacked the capacity to develop and implement a system-wide standards-based curriculum, PreK-12.
3. Local Fiscal Support – there has been a significant lack of commitment from the town to support the schools in Southbridge.
4. Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community – there is a communication disconnect between parents, community, and the central office.
5. District and School Vision, Mission and Goals - the current vision, mission and goals were written in 1994. They are outdated and do not reflect the needs of the students in the school district.
6. Data-Driven Action Plans for Improvement - there have been no concentrated, coordinated efforts of time provided to staff and administration to review the data at a level that would allow them to develop clear pathways for improving student improvement.

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**ROOT CAUSES OF CENTRAL PROBLEMS**

Leadership - There are no clearly defined roles for leadership in the district. The responsibilities for administrative positions are often in conflict, do not always reflect the positions in place and in several instances place an inordinate amount of responsibility on secondary leadership positions. These issues are not limited to a small number of positions but appear to infiltrate the entire system:

- a. School Committee - The School Committee members have not had a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. They were unaware of many of the changes in their responsibilities resulting from the Mass Education Reform Law of 1993. They made decisions regarding inquiries from staff, community and or parents about school practices, heard and ruled on Level III grievances, voted on the adoption of School Improvement Plans, and on the hiring of staff. Conversely, the former Superintendent did not work with the Committee to establish a salary range for many non-union positions. As a result, the Committee was not aware of yearly salary increases approved by the former superintendent. The Committee did not hold the Superintendent or Business Manager accountable for spending. Therefore, they did not receive clear and accurate information relative to the fiscal activities within the budget. In 2003-2004 this lack of accountability resulted in deficit spending of \$2,000,000.
- b. Superintendent– The former Superintendent did not take a leadership role in evaluating or acting on critical information regarding budget spending. There was no effort to control special education services and/or spending. There was no process to monitor and manage grant spending resulting in the regular occurrence of closing out grants months past the deadline and ultimately in turning back funds that could have benefited the district. There was no leadership in the areas of curriculum development or professional development tied to effective teaching models. The central office relationships with the town manager and town council were adversarial and ultimately totally cut off.
- c. Director of Special Education - Shortly after I assumed the role of Superintendent, I discovered the district had programs without students enrolled and positions which have no defined or clear idea of the services to be provided to the students. The Director of Special Education was terminated in the fall of 2004 and replaced within the department by a staff member who was not certified and lacked the experience to address the in-depth issues in the department. There has been a dramatic increase in the SPED costs in the past three years associated with program mismanagement and the absence of a qualified, experienced Director to lead the district programs. There has been a serious failure of the district to comply with regulatory requirements.
- d. Business Manager – The business manager was terminated in June, 2004 due to a total mismanagement of the district budget. At the time the business manager was relieved of his position, the budget had a \$3 million dollar deficit. The current manager was hired in August, 2004 but was not a Massachusetts certified business manager at that time.

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- e. Principals – There was no strong leadership in many of the schools. The high school principal resigned in December, 2004 and the position was filled with an interim Elementary Principal. The middle school principal was out on a medical leave for approximately half of the school year in 2004-2005 and was replaced with an interim principal.
- f. Curriculum Support Staff – the curriculum support staff positions consisted mainly of two individuals who worked at the middle and high school in the area of English and mathematics. These positions lacked key responsibilities for leadership and supervision to be effective. The high school had no infrastructure for curriculum leadership due to the elimination of department heads in 2002. The team leaders appointed in the middle school had no impact on curriculum and instruction within the building.

Standards-based Curriculum – There is no curriculum leadership within the district; therefore, there has been no capacity to align, articulate and implement a curriculum in major content areas aligned with the Massachusetts Frameworks. There is no formal curriculum-revision cycle and no planned professional development to implement standards-based curriculum. N.E.A.S.C. in its report of SHS on April 5, 2005 cited the failure of the high school to have curriculum documents in existence to prescribe content, integrate learning expectations and have assessment techniques to evaluate learning. There has been no plan for the district to have vertical and horizontal curriculum coordination so that transitions between schools are smooth and uninterrupted.

Local Fiscal Support - The School Committee, Superintendent and Town Council did not fulfill their responsibility to ensure the school budget and appropriations met the educational needs of the district's students. Due to a lack of communication between the Business Manager, the Superintendent and School Committee, the budget spending was out of control in FY 04 resulting in a 2 million dollar deficit. The budget was, as in past years, level funded. As a result of the deficit, the Town Council did not provide adequate funding for a level service budget. This action resulted in the reduction of 55 teachers for the 2005-2006 school year. This situation created mistrust between the Town Manager, the School Committee and the Superintendent and hampered open communications between them to try and resolve under-funding issues.

Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community – There has been a lack of opportunities to include the diverse parent population within the schools. There has been extremely low parent participation on numerous School Councils. Southbridge has a significant E.L.L. population and an increasing Hispanic population. Both subgroups have scored poorly on the M.C.A.S. Efforts to include these parent in the school community have been less than adequate.

District and School Vision, Mission and Goals – The district lacks clear and measurable goals incorporating identification of gaps in student performance with meaningful strategies and plans for improvement. All stakeholders were not involved in the development of the broad goals currently in place and many do not know of their existence. The current goals were written in 1994 and have not been revisited since that

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year. There has been no link between district and school goals and the evaluation of administration. School Improvement plans were not focused on student performance.

Data-Driven Action Plans for Improvement – The district has had no formal accountability system for measuring student performance through analysis of M.C.A.S. with follow-up plans for improvement. There has been little evidence that any analysis of student assessment data has been linked to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks at the instructional level. Efforts to improve curricula, instructional practices and provide remedial programs have been inadequate. These initiatives were not systematic, well-monitored, consistently implemented in all grades or evaluated for their effectiveness.

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**PART 2  
Leadership**

Action	Time Frame	Progress Measures
1. Employ highly qualified, experienced, administrators in key positions: High School Principal Special Education Director Middle School Principal Elementary Principal Director of Curriculum	8/05 8/05 8/05 8/05 12/05	Employed Employed Employed Interim employed Not filled
2. Training for Superintendent and School Committee on roles and responsibilities	8/15/05 8/17/05, 9/7/05 9/14/05	Completed Completed Completed Completed
3. Identify roles and responsibilities for administrative positions	9/05	Flow chart created Job Descriptions updated
4. Develop curriculum administrative team by filling the positions: Director of Curriculum, Curriculum Supervisors, 7-12 (ELA and math) Director of Reading and Language Arts, K-6 Director of Mathematics, K-6 Department Heads Middle School Team Leaders	11/05  4/06 Ma-5/06 12/05 12/05 2/06 2/06	Positions created and job descriptions written Positions approved by the School Committee
5. Employ highly qualified, experienced curriculum administrative team (above positions)	2005	All positions have been negotiated and accepted by the SEA
6.. Provide leadership and support for the Business Manager Meet weekly to discuss budget, transportation and building maintenance Schedule training for Business Manager on procurement laws	Ongoing	Weekly meetings  9/06
7. Initiate a D.O.E. audit of the FY04-FY05 school budget	Fall, 2005	Completed – 12/05
8. Review the programs and budget with the Special Educator Director in order to identify a program that meets the needs of the students and is in compliance with state and federal guidelines  Work with Director and outside consultant to identify services, costs and staffing that must be changed  Interview staff and administration to gather feedback relative to success/failure of programs	9/05 10/05  10/05  9/05-10/05	   Report completed, 10/05  In Progress 5 spring meetings in each building (2006)

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Initiate monthly updates to School Committee Reorganize staff and resources more efficiently	Spring, 2006	5/06 – 7/06
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Standards-based Curriculum

Action	Time Frame	Progress
1. Develop a standards-based template to write curriculum in English/language arts and mathematics aligned with the Massachusetts Frameworks	8/05	Templates completed and electronically sent to principals and staff 10/05
2. Lead professional day with entire staff to work on the curriculum for English, mathematics, science and social studies	9/05	Entire staff participated in the September, 2005 professional day to write curriculum in English and mathematics
3. Provide stipends for teachers in each grade to continue the curriculum work	10/05- 4/05	Teachers have been identified and will continue to complete the curriculum Completed – 6/06
4. Work with Turn around partner, EDC and schedule professional development for staff on standards-based education	1/05	Working with Commissioner's office and D.O.E. Meet every 3 months
5. Established a 6-year curriculum revision cycle with budgetary appropriations	11/05	Purchased ELA materials 5/06

Local Fiscal Support

Action	Time Frame	Progress
1. Establish a working relationship with the Town Manager and Town Council members	Monthly meetings	Numerous meetings with manager and Council to discuss School status Spring, 2006 – voted \$1,000,000 for technology
2. Present updates to school committee regarding budgetary expenditures	monthly	Monthly as well as 4 separate meetings for Committee of the Whole
3. Schedule meetings with town council to enlist support for school and building projects	Monthly	Submitted Statement of Interest on July 30, 2006
4. Prepare a presentation for town council on the 2006-2007 school budget	12/05	Presentation in spring, 2006
5. Prepare a proposal for funding computer hardware and software for town council	12/05	Proposal presented and approved in spring, 2006

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Communication and Outreach to Parents and Community

Action	Time Frame	Progress
1. Meet with new parent organization in town (Partners for Progress) to identify needs and concerns	9/05, 10/05, 1/06	
2. Attend local speaking engagements (Lions, Rotary, Hospital, Senior Citizens)		Lions, Rotary, Public Library, Early Childhood Council, local College groups,
3. Establish Superintendent's Advisory Council to dialogue with the community	Meet 1/06, 4/06	8/06
4. Establish a district-wide School Council chaired by the Superintendent to meet twice each year to discuss budget priorities	11/06 4/06	Met and agreed upon priorities for budget cuts (1/06)
5. Establish a Curriculum Advisory Council to meet three times each year to discuss programs and curriculum		
6. Schedule building activities for all parents including Hispanic and bilingual families	Monthly	

District and School Vision, Mission and Goals

Action	Time Line	Progress
1. Schedule an administrative retreat to review District vision, mission and goals	9/05	9/05 - completed
2. Work with school committee, administration, staff and parents to write clear and measurable goals for the district.	9-10/05	11/05 - completed
3. Share goals with all community and school staff	10/05	On going
4. Principals will develop goals for their own evaluation based on the district goals	10/05	11/05
5. New School Improvement Plans were written to reflect district goals	10/05	12/05
6. Superintendent's goals will be based on the district goals	12/05	3/06

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Data-Driven Action Plans for Improvement

Action	Time Line	Progress
1. Schedule a full professional day for entire staff to review M.C.A.S. results	11/02/05	
2. Prepare packets for the analysis	11/02/05	11/05
3. Present an overview of the analysis to staff on 11/02/05	11/02/05	11/05
4. Write a report based on findings for the district	1/05	12/05
5. Teachers will write Action Plans based on their analysis	12/05	1/05
6. Principals will write Actions Plans based on the analysis	12/05	1/05

Support from the D.O.E. and External partner:

- Funding for Professional Development that focuses on the new district goals and provisions for the trainers
- Funding for continued focus group work to write the curriculum
- Funding for an additional year for Director of Curriculum
- Assistance in evaluating the condition of school buildings and applying for School Based Assistance for a new high school
- Ways to acquire funding for technology