



**Gary Community School Corporation**  
*Strong. Resilient. Built for Education.*

# 2022 Academic Action Plan

**DISTRESSED UNIT APPEAL BOARD**

**MARCH 2022**

**Prepared by**



**Gary  
Schools  
Recovery, LLC**



## Introduction

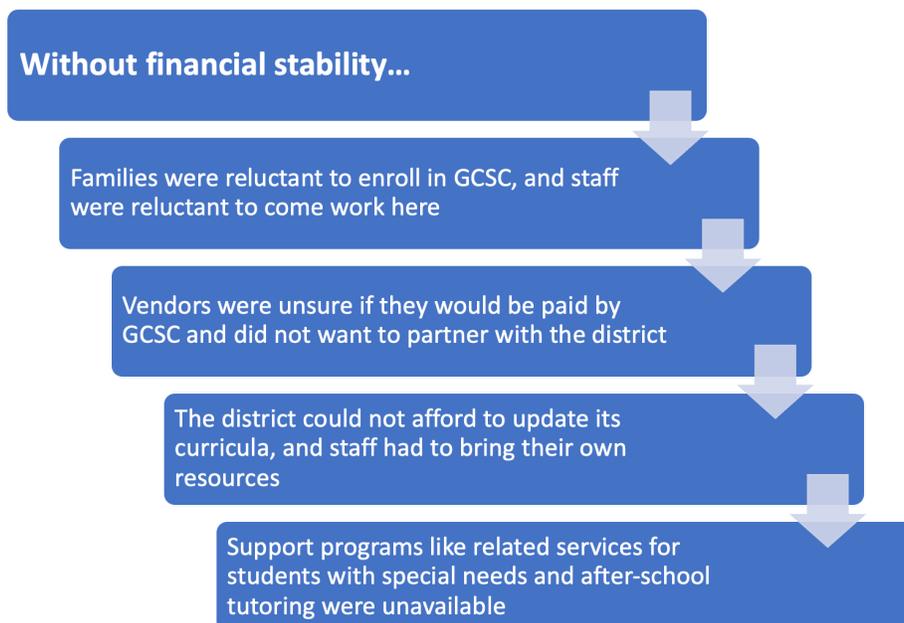
Academic outcomes for students in the Gary Community School Corporation (GCSC) need to improve. Our community knows it. Administrators know it. Teachers know it. Parents know it, and students know it.

What fewer people know is that GCSC has a rigorous plan for academic improvement, and the plan is already yielding progress.

The Academic Action Plan below describes the strategies, key actions, and progress measures that the current GCSC leadership team has developed and implemented over the past two years. Every day, amidst the disruptions of the pandemic, GCSC teachers and administrators are doing the work of academic improvement, continuously refining and iterating on their approaches to best serve students and equip them with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets critical for success in the 21st century economy.

GCSC leadership has worked closely with school leaders and families to stabilize and create the learning conditions our students and families deserve while focusing on student achievement. The work ahead is about building on this infrastructure, redoubling our efforts, and ensuring we are maximizing the critical work between teachers and students, everyday, in every classroom across our city.

For far too long, the learning environment in GCSC schools has been suboptimal. Going back for years, the district careened from one crisis to another. Schools closed. Roofs leaked. Enrollment plummeted.



Through the state's intervention, MGT Consulting began working with GCSC in 2017. Through this partnership, GCSC eliminated its \$22 million deficit. It sold more than a dozen abandoned school buildings. It stabilized enrollment. Through hard work, GCSC created the conditions for academic improvement to flourish. Research shows that appropriate spending and financial stability impact academic performance in low-performing schools.

Today, there is progress:

- The school calendar has been redesigned to create regular professional development opportunities for teachers.
- The special education department has improved its state accountability score for compliance from 59.79 to 93.83 and achieved the end of state oversight.
- And on the most recent formative assessment, all elementary and middle schools increased their performance in both math and reading.

**Across the district, the percentage of students who are reading at or above grade level doubled; in math, it more than quadrupled.** The graduation rate has increased as well, and we are working to assess and analyze the many factors that matter to families, such as safety, school climate, and achievement on formative assessments.

This Academic Action Plan describes the road ahead. This plan is designed to meet the needs of Gary students and families. It is designed to target the areas where we have the most challenges, like middle school math, and turn them into strengths. **It is actionable and reflects the improvements that will move the needle on student outcomes and experiences.** Lastly, our approach and this plan is envisioned **as an adaptive system of supportive structures that will create virtuous cycles of improvement** — and translate to high-quality academic experiences and the great schools our community has deserved, but not received.

After years of laying a strong foundation, GCSC is now ready to excel. It's up from here.

## Context

For too long, academics in the Gary Community School Corporation (GCSC) have suffered from lack of resources, ineffective use of funding when it was available, and dysfunctional operations. In the years leading up to state takeover, academic outcomes and student achievement were an afterthought, there were always more pressing crises.

For instance:

- Fall 2009
  - GCSC had 56 administrators (not including principals or deans) [making more than \\$4 million](#) (not including benefits, bonuses, or travel).
- Summer 2012
  - [Enrollment at GCSC has decreased](#) “more than in any other urban area of the state.”
- Summer 2015
  - [Residents express anger](#) about “21 boarded-up and decaying school buildings” that the district did not have the funds to maintain.
- Fall 2016
  - The school board and superintendent were warning [the district would be dissolved](#) if Gary voters did not approve a referendum (the referendum failed).
- Summer 2017
  - The [state intervened in GCSC](#) and chose MGT Consulting to take on “full responsibility and authority related to financial and academic matters of GCSC.” At that point, the district had a \$22 million deficit and was \$104 million in debt.
- Winter 2019
  - The state invalidated some GCSC test scores for “[blatant cheating](#)” that took place in spring 2017.
- Spring 2020
  - The pandemic struck, forcing GCSC students and staff to [shift to remote instruction](#) and creating academic and mental health challenges for students across the country.

GCSC has not been operating in the best of circumstances for years, but today, the situation has changed. Students are learning in-person. Schools are offering a longer school day. Voters supported the 2020 referendum, and GCSC now has a balanced budget. The district has stabilized.

As a result, the public is beginning to see the impact of the academic-focused plans put in place by GCSC’s leadership team, including Dr. Paige McNulty, GCSC’s Manager, and Kimberly Bradley, GCSC’s Chief Academic Officer. Bradley joined the district in January 2020, and McNulty became Manager in February 2020, just before the pandemic hit. Yet the team has instituted top-to-bottom changes, including reforming the special education department (which has dramatically increased the department’s accountability score and ended state oversight)

and altering the academic calendar (to significantly increase the amount of time dedicated to professional development).

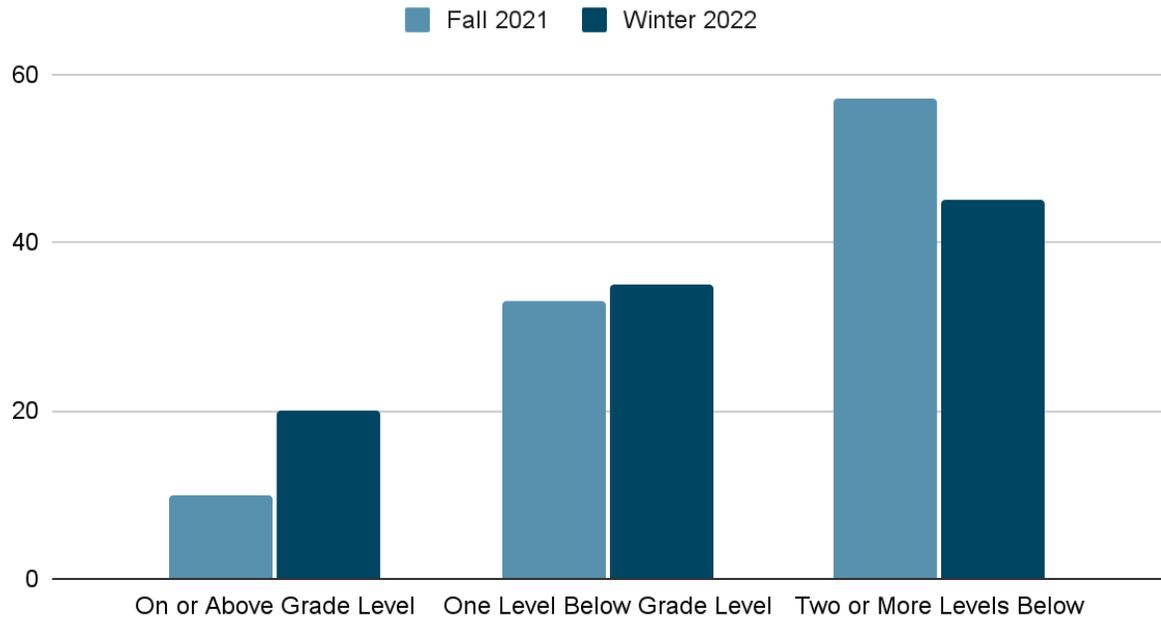
The systems and structures the team has put in place, coupled with strategic investments in increased training, new curricula, and additional resources, are beginning to bear fruit. Teachers, administrators, and school staff are working hard and working together to drive academic improvements in GCSC schools.

To give just one example, consider these increases across all elementary and middle schools in reading and in math between Fall and Winter 2021:

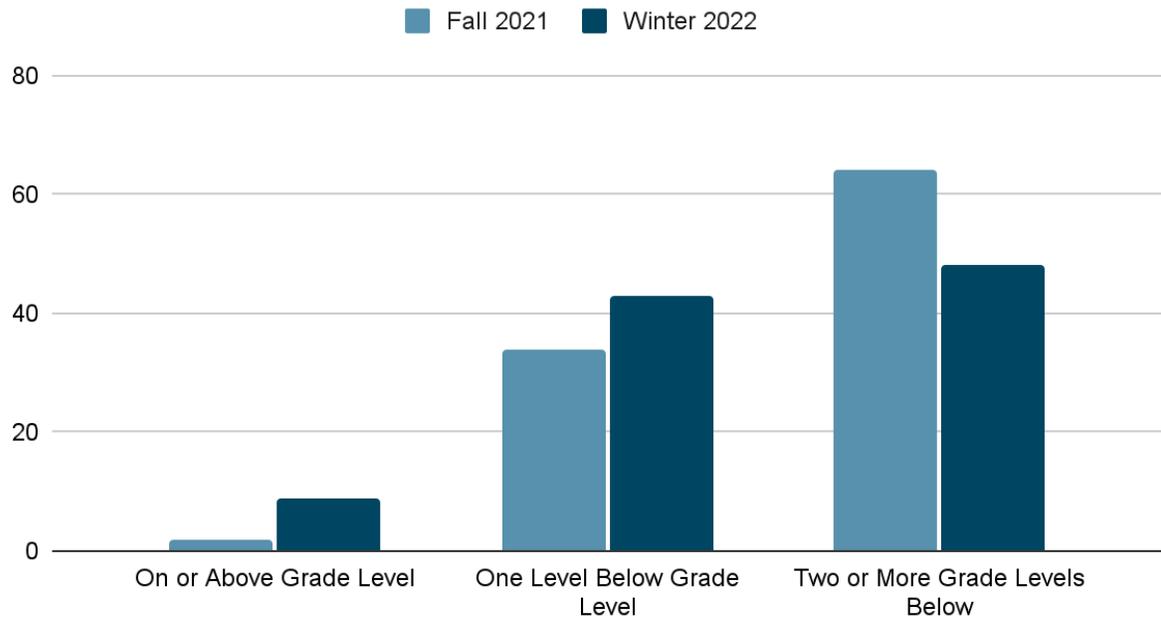
READING	GRADE LEVEL PLACEMENT	Fall	Winter	Growth Fall to Winter	BIG PICTURE
District	Mid/Above Grade Level	3.00%	7.00%	4.00%	+10%
	Early on Grade Level	7.00%	13.00%	6.00%	
	One Grade Level Below	33.00%	35.00%	2.00%	+2%
	Two Grade Levels Below	26.00%	20.00%	-6.00%	Decreased by -12%
	Three or More Grade Levels Below	31.00%	25.00%	-6.00%	

MATH	GRADE LEVEL PLACEMENT	Fall	Winter	Growth Fall to Winter	BIG PICTURE
District	Mid/Above Grade Level	0%	3%	3.00%	+7%
	Early on Grade Level	2%	6.00%	4.00%	
	One Grade Level Below	34.00%	43.00%	9.00%	+9%
	Two Grade Levels Below	30.00%	23.00%	-7.00%	Decreased by -16%
	Three or More Grade Levels Below	34.00%	25.00%	-9.00%	

## Reading Progress



## Math Progress



## GCSC Academic Action Plan - 2022

While there is much work to do, there is substantial progress to be noted. The Academic Action Plan that follows is how GCSC intends to build on those gains. By continuing to partner with community members, families, teachers, and students, GCSC is confident it can build on this progress.

## Approach

This approach is steeped in research and best practices and is based on the tenets in educational expert Larry Lezotte’s landmark book, *Correlates of Effective Schools*. The Academic Action Plan was developed by Manager Dr. Paige McNulty and Chief Academic Officer Kimberley Bradley in partnership with the district’s instructional coaches, administrators, and experts from MGT.

The Academic Action Plan includes seven priorities; six priorities support the point of emphasis, which is instructional leadership. The fundamental idea is that academic improvement is driven by what Richard Elmore of the Harvard Graduate School of Education refers to as the instructional core – the interplay between student, teacher, and content. The more that principals can focus on and improve that interaction, the more students will learn and grow. The plan that follows is intended to further create the conditions where school leaders—with targeted assistance by instructional experts—can drive continued progress.



## 1. Clear and Focused Mission

In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to the school's goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The staff in the effective school accepts responsibility for the students' learning of the essential curricular goals.

### Ongoing or Completed Actions:

- Communicating to stakeholders the focus on growth for all students through parent meetings, test talks with students and data shared on our websites and parent communication systems
- Communicating the desire to infuse technology into instruction daily bringing our instruction into the 21st century by supporting staff, students and parents through technology training sessions throughout the year.
- Communicating the high focus on collaboration and team building through PLC's and school-based focus on collaboration.

### Plan for Forward Movement:

- Increase public awareness of our commitment to high-quality education and continuous improvement through the 2022-23 enrollment campaign.
- Clearly communicate the district's vision.
- Work with teachers, staff, students and parents to rebrand our district. We will have focus groups to discuss expectations and realities related to who we are now and what we expect of ourselves and others. ([GCSC Reimagined](#))

### What Success Looks Like:

- Principals communicate to teachers and families the importance of student growth, 21st-century instructional strategies as it relates to technology, and collaboration/team building.
- The school building is full of examples of growth data – for example, data posted on bulletin boards in school hallways – and alignment to the mission and vision of the district. Growth data is easily accessible for students and families and informs evidence-based decision making.
- Principals and district administrators conduct regular walkthroughs and provide support where necessary around a shared, clear mission.

**Progress Report:**

What	Who	When	How
Notes and meeting dates of rebrand meetings	By district/school leaders to stakeholders	Following each meeting	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

## 2. Safe and Orderly Environment

In the effective school, we say there is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning. Mental health needs are taken seriously and are supported.

We recognize that in all of our schools, a safe environment is key to the creation of a climate conducive to optimal learning.

**Ongoing or Completed Actions:**

- Positive Behavioral Interventions with Supports (PBIS): Administrators and teachers were trained in PBIS. We are focusing on a positive culture in every building.
- Focus on Routines & Procedures: Each school has a set of clearly communicated routines and procedures that are revisited regularly.
- Focus on behavioral interventions: Interventions and alternatives to punitive suspensions and expulsions have been implemented through restorative justice training.
- Alternative School: There is now an alternative school setting for students in the very small percent who have repeatedly had challenges being successful in a regular setting.
- Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): We have a district coordinator for MTSS. Each school has an MTSS team that meets regularly to develop interventions for students who may experience struggles in behavior, academics, attendance etc. We have also employed an Attendance officer to assist on the MTSS district team.
- Social Emotional Learning: Restorative practices are utilized in our schools to support students as they learn effective ways to self regulate.

**Plan for Forward Movement:**

- Continue to monitor the implementation of PBIS at each school and support staff with additional professional development.
- Continue to monitor our MTSS school-based teams and offer support, PD, and additional interventions.
- Continue to share our updates to the physical security of our students and buildings.

**What Success Looks Like:**

- Survey data on student and family perceptions of school safety shows positive trends for subgroups and across GSCS.
- Each school team evaluates their monthly behavioral data looking for trends and working to seek solutions to areas of concern and ways to celebrate those trends that have a positive trajectory, including fewer suspensions and more time in school.
- This same data is shared with district administrators to provide support and interventions to staff for dealing with students with behavioral needs.

**Progress Report:**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>How</b>
PBIS data will be shared by school/district	By district office to stakeholders	Quarterly	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

### **3. Climate of High Expectations**

In the effective school, there is a climate of high expectations in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school's essential curriculum. They also believe that they, the staff, have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery. This approach is intentionally inclusive of students with disabilities.

#### **Ongoing or Completed Actions:**

- Curriculum map alignment: Each grade level has access to grade-specific, standards-based curriculum maps. These maps are used to guide daily instruction and serve as parameters for the intended curriculum.
- Inclusion/Differentiation Focus: One area of need for GCSC has been the inclusion of special education students. GCSC is committed to inclusion practices across K-12 and are improving our inclusion efforts daily.
- College and career readiness: GCSC's high school team is working on ouitsr school becoming an Early College school. The Early College program allows students to earn both a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously.
- University of Chicago Climate studies/surveys: GCSC has been working with the university to help our schools analyze the climate in each building and make changes to the climate that would ensure high expectations for all students, staff and stakeholders.

#### **Plan for Forward Movement:**

- Walkthrough Template and Monitoring: School and district administrators will continue to utilize walkthroughs to monitor that the high expectations around curriculum and climate are being met.
- Survey climate audits: As a district, GCSC will continue to utilize climate surveys to improve the climate/culture.
- District Rebranding: The district and school will work together to rebrand the district. GCSC will refocus on what it means to be a GCSC student, teacher, administrator, parent, and stakeholder.

#### **What Success Looks Like:**

- Each school administrator works with staff to ensure the intended curriculum is the taught curriculum through walkthroughs and professional learning communities (PLCs).
- Teachers are trained in differentiated instruction and will be expected to provide inclusive practices in each classroom.
- Data from the climate surveys is used to determine which areas of climate need improvement and shows an increase in student expectations over time.

**Progress Report:**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>How</b>
Climate survey comparison data for schools/district	By district office to stakeholders	Twice yearly	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

## 4. Instructional Leadership

In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. In addition, the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. Clearly, the role of the principal as the articulator of the mission of the school is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the school.

### Ongoing or Completed Actions:

- All administrators were trained on how to conduct effective PLCs focused on student data for the purpose of improving instruction and student learning.
- PBIS training was conducted with administrators to enhance student behavioral expectations in each school and improve the climate of each building.
- Learning Sciences International supported our administrators for a full year of learning to enhance elements of instructional leadership at a granular level for each leader.
- Each administrator went through intense training on curriculum development, lesson planning and school improvement development. These training sessions have bolstered GCSC's principals' capacity as instructional leaders.
- Bloomboard Microcredentials were earned by administrators in the areas of leadership, vision and mission creation and how to create climates of success in schools.
- Principals received training on best practices as it relates to civil rights, suspension/expulsion, and student due process.
- Improving the climate and culture of each building has been a focus over the past few years. GCSC has partnered with the University of Chicago to conduct regular surveys of students, teachers, and parents as a way to discuss where the district currently stands and to create plans for improvement in needed areas.
- Smekens Training: All elementary principals and their coaches were trained in this model. The focus of the training was implementing an effective 90-minute reading block. Coaches are receiving intensive training this year and next year, they will train teachers.
- All GCSC administrators participated in state professional development on school leadership through the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute

### Active Instructional Supports:

- Instructional Coaches
- Differentiated Instruction/Small Group Instruction
- Model Teaching Professional Development Program
- Technology 1:1
- STEM Instruction
- Project Based Learning
- Lit Literacy
- Reading and Math Adoptions/New Curriculum

**Plan for Forward Movement:**

- Focus on strengthening Core instruction (for leaders and teachers), with research-based, student-centered instructional strategies: project-based learning, STEM instruction, and effective collaborative grouping, deconstruction of standards, differentiation strategies to effectively address Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction in the classroom.
- Shifting principals to prioritize instructional leadership over managerial duties and fostering advocacy and ownership within the classroom (and building) for student achievement.
- Focusing leaders toward data analysis, specific and targeted planning and actionable steps to drive instruction.
- Equipping leaders with identification metrics, look fors, strategies for probing deeper and facilitating instructional discourse for staff and students.

**What Success Looks Like:**

- District administrators walk through buildings twice quarterly using a walkthrough rubric targeted to our main areas of focus.
- District administrators closely monitor formative assessment data and whether students are meeting their growth targets.
- Ultimately, teachers set informed growth targets for students and students show increased capacity to meet those targets.

**Progress Report:**

What	Who	When	How
School-based walkthrough data on best practices	By district office to stakeholders	Quarterly	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

## 5. Opportunity to Learn/Time on Task

In the effective school, teachers and administrators allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential curricular areas. For a high percentage of this time, students are actively engaged in whole-class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activities.

### Ongoing or Completed Actions:

- An extra hour was added to the school day to address learning loss.
- After-school tutoring to focus on literacy needs.
- Success time built into the daily schedule.
- High school schedule was rebuilt to allow students to earn additional credits per semester (high school and college).
- Middle school schedule was rebuilt to allow opportunities for them to enter high school with earned credits.

### Plan for Forward Movement:

- Protect instructional time: Principals will continue to ensure that instructional time is sacred. They will ensure that instruction is protected.
- School administrators will work together to create schedules that optimize student learning and allow for small group and whole group instruction, professional learning communities and appropriate intervention times.

### What Success Looks Like:

- Principals and district administrators conduct regular walkthroughs of buildings using a rubric looking for effective strategies around after school tutoring.
- Grade and course completion audits are conducted at the middle school and high school levels to measure the effectiveness of the change in schedules at the secondary levels.
- Audits inform an evidence-based plan to increase student learning time.

### Progress Report:

What	Who	When	How
School Schedules	By school principals to stakeholders	Quarterly	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

## **6. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress**

In the effective school, pupil progress over the essential objectives are measured frequently, monitored frequently, and the results of those assessments are used to improve the individual student behaviors and performances, as well as to improve the curriculum as a whole.

### **Ongoing or Completed Actions:**

- Formative Assessments: The district uses iReady K-8 and Edmentum 9-12 to help determine growth throughout the school year. The district will focus on Reading and Math instruction for these formative assessments.
- Common Formative Assessments K-12: Each grade level at elementary and content area at the secondary level will work to create and analyze data from common formative assessments that are in alignment with the curriculum maps used in the district.
- iLearn Data Disaggregation: Teacher teams will evaluate iLearn data, identify areas of needs and create remediation plans for each student. Additionally, teachers in non-tested areas will examine the assessments so that they are aware of the level of rigor and expectations on the test.
- Exit Tickets: Each teacher creates exit tickets to check for understanding after each lesson.
- Data talks with staff, students and parents: Teachers, administrators and trusted adults have data talks with students after common formative assessment and formative assessment results. Students know their data and are aware of their growth needs. This ensures that they have a purpose for learning.

### **Plan for Forward Movement:**

- PD for leaders and teachers addressing continuous Checking for Understanding
  - Why it is important in the classroom
  - Use of data from common formative assessments
  - Analysis of trends in errors from test items.

### **What Success Looks Like:**

- Teachers are adept at interpreting and leveraging student assessment data in multiple forms, including formative and summative assessments as well as qualitative and quantitative data.
- Data walls are present in every classroom/school.
- School-based walkthroughs focus on the presence of a data rich environment.
- Copies of PLC notes/agendas that focus on data are kept at each school.

**Progress Report:**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>How</b>
Formative Assessment Data	By school leaders to stakeholders	Fall, Winter and Spring	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

## 7. Positive Home-School Relations

In an effective school, parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are given opportunities to play important roles in helping the school to achieve its mission.

### Ongoing or Completed Actions:

- Parent Camp: The district has partnered with the Parent Camp company, a nationwide, renowned organization designed to build a connected ecosystem of caring, supportive adults around our students.
- Referendum Ambassadors Committee: This committee of community and school stakeholders who support the district by sharing facts about the use of Referendum dollars and improvements that have occurred and will be occurring in the district.
- Monthly District Newsletter: This newsletter comes out regularly. It shares updates for the district with parents and community stakeholders.
- Active and regularly updated website and social media page
- Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Liaisons in every building work closely with parents and bridge the gap between the school and home.
- Events are held virtually (during the pandemic) and in person to engage the community and families throughout the school year.
- School Advisory Committees: Each school has regular advisory meetings to discuss improvements and challenges at each school. The focus of these meetings are on problem solving.
- Curriculum/Technology/Food Services Community Meetings: These meetings include key persons in our school community. The meetings are focused on improvements
- Community Partnerships: GAPS, Starbase, Purdue Calumet, NIPSCO, Edgewater: Schools have made various partnerships to improve student learning and support.

### Plan for Forward Movement:

- Increase engagement across the district by increasing the number of community members actively participating in our school advisory sessions
- Continue to send out the newsletters and messages via social media and our website.
- Work with classroom teachers to keep regular logs of parent contact. Ensure that all parent notification applications are kept up to date

### What Success Looks Like:

- Every FACE Liaison surveys parents monthly about areas of focus from each school and also what resources the parents need to assist students with learning.
- Each Parent camp meeting is evaluated for levels of participation using sign in sheets and next steps.
- More families and community members participate in school advisory sessions over time.

**Progress Report:**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>How</b>
All newsletters, announcements and meetings	By district office and school leaders to stakeholders	Monthly	Via a section on the website entitled "Academic Action Plan Progress"

## **Conclusion**

As GCSC developed the Academic Action Plan, administrators called on the expertise of local stakeholders. Specifically, Dr. Vernon Smith gave input during the beginning stages of the core plan, and his input has been adopted in this final form. In addition, Dr. Mark Sperling, Dean of the School of Education at Indiana University Northwest, has also reviewed the plan and is supportive of the work done here. Ronald Sandlin, the Senior Director of School Performance & Transformation at Indiana Department of Education, has reviewed the plan and given his input on the plan, too.

GCSC is grateful for the advice it has received and for the commitment of so many community leaders to the continued improvement of GCSC schools. To be sure, the road to sustained academic improvement is long, but make no mistake - GCSC schools are heading in the right direction.

## Leading Indicators of Progress

Along with our focus on growth data, we will use the following leading indicators to signal success for our students:

- Climate Surveys
- Enrollment Data
- Student Access to AP Courses
- Student Internships
- Formative and Summative Course Assessments
- High Leverage Teaching Strategies

### Executive Summary

<p><b>Goal 1:</b> By Spring 2023, 80% of K-8th grade students will meet or exceed their individual growth targets in Reading as measured by iReady.</p> <p><b>Goal 2:</b> By Spring 2023, 70% of K-8th grade students will meet/exceed their individual growth targets in Math as measured by iReady.</p> <p><b>Goal 3:</b> By Spring 2023, 75% of 9th- and 10th-grade students will show growth on the Reading Common Formative assessment for ELA.</p> <p><b>Goal 4:</b> By Spring 2023, 70% of 9th- and 10th-grade students will show growth on the Math Common Formative assessment for Math.</p>			
Instructional Strategy	Professional Development	Funding	Monitoring
<b>All teachers will increase the use of small group and differentiated instruction</b>	Beginning May, 2022, PD sessions will begin twice a month for K-12th grade content teachers, Ongoing throughout the 23-24 SY	Title I ESSER	School/District Administrative walkthroughs beginning August
<b>Project-based Learning and STEM instruction will increase at each school</b>	Teachers at Bailly, Beveridge, Williams and GPA will be trained in STEM education. Training in Project Based Learning will be a focus for all teachers beginning Summer 2022	Title I ESSER	School/District Administrative walkthroughs beginning August
<b>Data focused instruction and PLC's will occur with fidelity at each school</b>	Teachers will receive additional training in data focused instruction and PLC's	Title I ESSER	School/District Administrative walkthroughs beginning August
<b>A focus on early literacy K-2 will occur at each</b>	Fountas & Pinnell training for K-2 teachers training will	Title I ESSER	School/District Administrative

<p><b>elementary school and at the Pre-school</b></p>	<p>begin in April and be ongoing</p>		<p>walkthroughs beginning August</p>
<p><b>Each school will build a Positive Climate/Culture with a focus on PBIS with fidelity.</b></p>	<p>PBIS School teams will receive intense training beginning in spring, continue into the summer and will be ongoing. These teams will then meet with school personnel</p>	<p>Title I ESSER</p>	<p>School/District Administrative walkthroughs beginning August</p>