

District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools: *Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools*



Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) has improved its focus on goals and governance in recent years, which has impacted administration and planning for high priority schools. The district faces some challenges, however, including high dropout rates, the variety of alternative schools, and insufficient resources for new teachers. MNPS personnel are well-aware of these challenges. Because of district policy decisions, the district has seen improvements in some of these areas, particularly in graduation rates.

Report Findings:

- Because of MNPS's high dropout rate, the district has focused on improving attendance and graduation; the focus has begun to pay off, with the district graduation rate jumping over six percentage points between 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- While MNPS offers some support resources to new teachers, the district does not have a clear, structured new teacher induction plan, nor does it require new teachers to attend orientation.
- MNPS has successfully linked its professional development initiatives to district goals. However, MNPS lacks a stand-alone professional development plan and accessing information about professional development in the district is challenging.
- Additional assistance is available for teachers receiving poor evaluations, though MNPS neither requires nor monitors teacher participation.
- In part because MNPS has worked to build community involvement to improve schools, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the district a \$5.2 million grant to create smaller learning communities in high schools to improve student achievement and success in school.
- MNPS is not allowed to provide supplemental education services, such as tutoring, to its students based on NCLB requirements. It must contract out for these services.
- Despite the district's lack of adequate or high-quality alternative schools for struggling and disruptive students, the Metro School Board voted to close the innovative New Beginnings alternative school last year, which provided teachers and guidance counselors specifically trained to deal with challenging students.

MNPS offers short-term teacher mentoring and new teacher orientation programs, but neither is required, and MNPS does not know if they impact teacher development.

Recommendations for District Officials:

- MNPS should:
 - Continue expanding its community partnerships and relations.
 - Develop a comprehensive professional development plan that clearly articulates the district's professional development goals, processes, and activities; the plan needs to be accessible to educators and the public.
 - Create and fund a rigorous, outcomes-based orientation and induction program for new teachers that includes a strong teacher mentoring program.
 - Encourage schools to develop individual education plans (IEPs) for all students.
 - Look into filing a waiver with the U.S. Department of Education to allow the district to provide supplemental education services.