

Commissioner's Network Operations and Instructional Audit Report

Lincoln-Bassett School
New Haven Public Schools
January 23, 2014



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Part I: Introduction

On December 23, 2013, the Commissioner initially selected Lincoln-Bassett School to participate in the Commissioner's Network and invited the Superintendent to submit an application for consideration. Following selection, the New Haven Board of Education established the Turnaround Committee and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) conducted an operations and instructional audit of the school. The purpose of this Audit Report is to present the findings of the audit.

Commissioner's Network Overview

The Commissioner's Network is a commitment between local stakeholders and the CSDE to dramatically improve student achievement in low-performing schools. To that end, the Network offers new resources and authorities to empower teachers and school leaders to implement research-based strategies in schools selected by the Commissioner. Network schools remain part of their local school districts, but the districts and the CSDE secure school-level flexibility and autonomy for the schools in exchange for heightened accountability. Schools participate in the Network for a period of three to five years. At present, 11 schools are participating in the Network.

Network schools make targeted investments in the following areas:

- **Talent:** Employ systems and strategies to recruit, hire, develop, evaluate, and retain excellent school leaders, teachers, and support staff.
- **Academics:** Design and implement a rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels.
- **Culture and Climate:** Foster a positive learning environment that supports high-quality teaching and learning, and engages families and the community as partners in the educational process.
- **Operations:** Create systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness, including through the use of time and financial resources.

As part of the operations and instructional audit, auditors identify school strengths and growth areas around talent, academics, culture and climate, and operations. Audits are conducted by impartial and experienced educators who produce unbiased and objective reports supporting school planning and transformation efforts.

Operations and Instructional Audit Overview

Pursuant to C.G.S. § 10-223h(c), the operations and instructional audit shall determine the extent to which the school:

- (1) has established a strong family and community connection to the school;
- (2) has a positive school environment, as evidenced by a culture of high expectations and a safe and orderly workplace, and has addressed other nonacademic factors that impact student achievement, such as students' social, emotional, arts, cultural, recreational and health needs;
- (3) has effective leadership, as evidenced by the school principal's performance appraisals, track record in improving student achievement, ability to lead turnaround efforts, and managerial skills and authority in the areas of scheduling, staff management, curriculum implementation and budgeting;
- (4) has effective teachers and support staff, as evidenced by performance evaluations, policies to retain staff determined to be effective and who have the ability to be successful in the turnaround effort, policies to prevent ineffective teachers from transferring to the school, and job-embedded, ongoing professional development informed by the teacher evaluation and support programs that are tied to teacher and student needs;
- (5) uses time effectively, as evidenced by the redesign of the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration;
- (6) has a curriculum and instructional program that is based on student needs, is research-based, rigorous and aligned with state academic content standards, and serves all children, including students at every achievement level; and
- (7) uses data to inform decision-making and for continuous improvement, including by providing time for collaboration on the use of data.

Audit Process and Methodology

The operations and instructional audit involves three phases of data collection and review:

- (1) The CSDE obtains and auditors review school artifacts, data, and documentation to gain a better understanding of the school's history and context. The CSDE collaborates with school and district leaders to administer a teacher survey.
- (2) The auditors conduct a school site visit to observe school systems and classrooms, and meet with members of the school community. During the site visit, auditors conduct interviews and focus groups with a representative set of school and community stakeholders, including school and district administrators, staff, students, family members, community partners, and members of the School Planning and Management Team and Turnaround Committee.
- (3) The auditors synthesize and use all available data to generate the operations and instructional audit report, identifying strengths and growth areas around talent, academics, culture and climate, and operations.

Please note that while this Audit Report identifies areas for improvement, it does not prescribe interventions or offer recommendations. The Turnaround Committee is responsible for developing a Turnaround Plan that builds upon the strengths and addresses the growth areas identified in the Audit Report.

Part II: School Information

Lincoln-Bassett School is located in the Newhallville neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut. The school served students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 8 until just before the start of the 2013-14 school year, when Grades 7 and 8 were cut from Lincoln-Bassett due to low student enrollment and a district-wide budget deficit. As a community school, Lincoln-Bassett enrolls students in Grades Pre-Kindergarten through 6 from the greater New Haven Public Schools attendance area; however, most of the school's students are from the Newhallville neighborhood. Approximately 67 percent of the students are Black and 17 percent are Hispanic. Eight percent of the students are identified as needing special education services and five percent are English Language Learners. Just over half of the students in the school are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Recent student achievement on Connecticut standardized assessments in reading and mathematics ranks the school among the lowest in the district and well below the state average. As of December 2013, Lincoln-Bassett is among those designated as a Tier III priority for redesign and improvement support by the district. The current principal assumed leadership of the school in the summer of 2013. The previous administration was in place for sixteen years.

School Data Profile

The following chart provides a summary of Lincoln-Bassett's current and historic data, including information about student enrollment and demographics, personnel, school climate, school performance, and student academic achievement.

Enrollment Data (2013-14):			
Grades:	PK-6	5-yr Enrollment Trend:	10/1/09: 275 10/1/13: 349
Student Enrollment:	355	Mobility Rate:	35%
Personnel Data (2013-14):			
# of Administrators:	2	% of Teachers "Below Standard":	0
# of Teachers:	28	% of Teachers "Developing":	0
# of Support Staff:	21	% of Teachers "Proficient":	50.0
# of Psychologists:	1 (Part-time)	% of Teachers "Exemplary":	7.1
		% of Teachers "Not Rated"	42.8
# of Social Workers:	1 (Part-time)	3-yr Teacher Retention Rate:	NA
School Day Per Year (2013-14):			
Total # of Student Days/Year:	182	Instructional Minutes/Day:	310
Total # of Teacher	186	Extended Day Program	YES

Days/Year:			
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Student Demographic Breakdown (2013-14):				
% Black:	67.4	% Male:	55.1	
% Hispanic:	16.7	% Female:	44.9	
% White:	1.3	% ELL:	4.8	
% Other:	14.6	% Special Education:	8.2	
% F/R Meals:	54.3	% Eligible for HUSKY Plan, Part A:	NA	
School Climate Data:	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Student Attendance Rate:	92.5%	94.8%	92.8%	90.3%
Chronic Absenteeism Rate:	16%	17%	15%	21%
Total # of ISS/OSS/Expulsions:	13/58/1	11/38/6	8/35/2	3/35/1
Teacher Attendance Rate:	NA	NA	NA	NA
School Performance Index:	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
SPI:	62.3	69.1	45.5	45.1
CMT At/Above Goal:	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Grade 3 – Reading	14.3%	60.9%	10.2%	6.7%
Grade 4 – Reading	31.3%	58.3%	12.0%	9.1%
Grade 5 – Reading	66.7%	23.1%	14.3%	14.3%
Grade 6 – Reading	68.4%	50.0%	35.0%	31.6%
Grade 7 – Reading	34.8%	80.0%	33.3%	46.7%
Grade 8 – Reading	45.5%	54.2%	40.0%	35.7%
Grade 3 – Math	62.2%	47.8%	14.0%	15.6%
Grade 4 – Math	35.3%	60.7%	23.1%	13.6%
Grade 5 – Math	68.4%	61.5%	34.8%	9.5%
Grade 6 – Math	72.2%	26.3%	22.7%	45.0%
Grade 7 – Math	41.7%	80.0%	40.0%	33.3%
Grade 8 – Math	47.8%	70.8%	50.0%	35.7%

Part III: Audit Findings

Part III of the Audit Report provides a summative analysis of audit findings in the areas of talent, academics, culture and climate, and operations.

1. Talent: Employ systems and strategies to recruit, hire, develop, evaluate, and retain excellent school leaders, teachers, and support staff.				
Sub-Indicators:	1	2	3	4
1.1. Instructional practice				
1.2. Evaluation and professional culture				
1.3. Recruitment and retention strategies				
1.4. Professional development				
1.5. Leadership effectiveness				
1.6. Instructional leadership				
2. Academics: Design and implement a rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels.				
2.1. Academic rigor*				
2.2. Student engagement*				
2.3. Differentiation*				
2.4. Curriculum and instruction aligned to CCSS				
2.5. Supports for special populations				
2.6. Assessment system and data culture				
3. Culture and Climate: Foster a positive learning environment that supports high-quality teaching and learning, and engages families and the community as partners in the educational process.				
3.1. School environment				
3.2. Student attendance				
3.3. Student behavior				
3.4. Interpersonal interactions				
3.5. Family engagement				
3.6. Community partners and wraparound strategy				
4. Operations: Create systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness, including through the use of time and financial resources.				
4.1. Adequate instructional time				
4.2. Use of instructional time*				
4.3. Use of staff time				
4.4. Routines and transitions				
4.5. Financial management				

*Ratings for these four sub-indicators are based largely on a composite or average score generated from all classroom observations.

1	Below Standard
2	Developing
3	Proficient

Talent

The following section provides quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the cumulative ratings provided in the chart on Page 7.

Strengths:

- **School Leadership:** The principal articulated a breadth and depth of understanding of Lincoln-Bassett's strengths and weaknesses. She conveyed a student-centered vision and a heightened sense of urgency to positively affect student achievement. In her description of the numerous challenges she and her staff face at this early juncture in their working relationship, she presented a "glass half-full" perspective and emphasized evidence of substantive progress since taking over the school last summer. Comments made by district leaders, teachers, students, and parents confirmed the principal's dedication and drive to improve the school. The principal clearly has the support of the district, particularly her supervisor who visits the school frequently.
- **Instructional Support by Literacy and Math Coaches:** Focus group interviews with teachers and parents indicated that the literacy and math coaches have made a positive impact on planning and preparation for instruction. The coaches facilitate and support weekly grade-level meetings on the implementation of the district's reading and math curriculum initiatives. As of this year, the literacy coach is able to work with teachers in their classrooms to model new instructional approaches such as Reader's and Writer's Workshop. The coaching is particularly important at Lincoln-Bassett because the school is behind with regard to standards of practice and service due to its late adoption and implementation of several core district initiatives.

Growth Areas:

- **Change Management:** Conversations with every stakeholder group supported the fact that Lincoln-Bassett is undergoing significant change. While everyone from the principal to the students cited evidence of progress resulting from recent change efforts, a consistent message surfaced that the urgent press to improve the school and "catch up" in basic areas is also creating a divide among the faculty. There is also some evidence that the professional rapport between the administration and some teachers has become strained. Some teachers expressed the opinion that they feel less empowered as they are being told what to do about everything from handling discipline, to instructional approaches, to the goals specified for their evaluation. If not managed carefully, this divide and tension could impede the school's short- and long-term progress.
- **TEVAL Implementation:** Although TEVAL was phased in throughout the New Haven Public Schools system beginning in the 2010-11 school year, this is Lincoln-Bassett's first reliable year of implementation. Though the school has data to suggest that 57 percent of its teachers were evaluated as *Proficient* or *Exemplary*, the school lacks thorough documentation for completed evaluations. Furthermore, the reported high level of teacher performance is not consistent with the low and declining student achievement outcomes in reading and math over the past two years. Another gap exists between teacher perception about their effectiveness and the school leadership's informal assessment of the instructional delivery. Based on survey data, 92 percent of the

teachers agreed that: “Teachers at this school engage students in higher-order thinking and push them toward content mastery.” However, administrators, district leaders, and instructional coaches separately indicated that their estimate on the same criteria would only be around 25 percent.

- **Staff Attendance:** While the district does not officially collect and report data on staff attendance, administrators reported that many staff members are accustomed to showing up late at the start of the school day. Based on school records, between two and seven teachers are absent each day (several are chronically absent). Also, teachers have not been accustomed to participating in the district-wide Curriculum and Instruction meetings, but are now starting to attend.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** The principal and district leaders made clear that the principal has hiring discretion to fill vacancies, but there does not appear to be a plan to retain and recruit the highest-quality and most capable educators needed to support Lincoln-Bassett’s improvement efforts. Given the school’s non-magnet status and performance record, the school may need to do more than hold a school-specific recruitment fair to attract strong candidates. District efforts to include incentive pay options for teachers who elect to work in low-performing schools could help serve this end.

Academics

The following section provides quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the cumulative ratings provided in the chart on Page 7.

Strengths:

- **District Curriculum and Assessment Initiatives:** The district has well-defined, structured initiatives for the implementation of Common Core-aligned curriculum and student assessments. The principal and teachers agreed that this structure serves as an instructional road map for Lincoln-Bassett’s school leadership, instructional coaches, and teachers to drive school improvement.

Growth Areas:

- **Differentiation:** Student achievement data and interviews with the instructional coaches suggest that there is a need for the faculty to increase knowledge and skill in differentiating Tier I instruction for all students. Administrators and coaches noted that more students are requiring Tier II and III instruction because of the lack of differentiation in Tier I instruction. Teachers expressed the desire and need for ongoing and embedded professional development accommodating student individual learning needs. Teachers also expressed a desire for additional math tutoring programs.
- **Special Populations Support:** School leadership and teachers indicated that special education students were generally pulled out for services in the recent past. The school’s leadership has set out new expectations for the special education teachers to provide more support for students within the mainstream classroom and to make every effort to serve them in the least restrictive environment possible. This change is still a

work in progress and not all staff members are on-board with the change. The school has a relatively small ELL student population (4.8 percent of students), but has recently enrolled several newcomers from different countries as the school has the enrollment space and the families live in the neighborhood. There is no full-time ELL support for these students because the ELL teacher is only assigned part-time to Lincoln-Bassett.

- **Academic Rigor:** A majority of the classroom observations conducted during the audit site visit demonstrated a low level of instructional rigor. Of seven classroom observations scored by the audit team, only one lesson demonstrated a focus on accessible and challenging content and students engaged in higher-order thinking through teacher facilitation. Of the other classrooms observed, half were assessed as “below standard” and half were rated as “developing” based on evidence of teacher-centered instruction and students being engaged at the comprehension level of thinking and understanding. Students and parents both expressed a desire to increase the teaching and learning expectations at Lincoln-Bassett.
- **Data Use:** Administrators and instructional coaches described the school as being at a preliminary stage of data use to guide planning and inform instruction. School leaders indicated that teachers’ technology skills are very elementary and that many teachers don’t know how to access student data (many were not even using their district email accounts, which had closed due to lack of use). School leaders reported that their initial plans to conduct data team meetings were put on hold once it became apparent that the teachers needed more support in becoming familiar with the new curriculum and the necessary technology.

Culture and Climate

The following section provides quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the cumulative ratings provided in the chart on Page 7.

Strengths:

- **Student Care and Concern:** It was evident in the tone and substance of the interviews with all stakeholder groups that there is a shared and genuine care and concern for the students at Lincoln-Bassett. Teachers talked about how they know all of the students in the school and check in with all students and not just the one’s assigned to them. One teacher said “we are a family for these kids and we would move heaven and earth for them.” This sense of caring comes through to the students, who reported that the teachers are nice and are trying to help them.
- **Community Engagement:** Similar to the shared expression of care and concern for students, the interviews with all stakeholder groups revealed growing appreciation between the Lincoln-Bassett faculty/staff and the community. The new principal was cited as being a driving force in renewing connections between the school and the community. District leaders indicated that the community has seen Lincoln-Bassett as a deteriorating school, but is now excited about the prospect of it turning around. The principal has developed strong relationships with the local alderwoman, police, parents, and community partners since coming to the school last summer.

- **Parental Support for School Leadership:** The principal has made an active and concerted effort to reach out to parents and make them feel welcome in the school. One parent summed up the sentiment of the parent focus group when she said: “It feels like the same building but a new home.” Parents not only expressed their support for the difference the principal has made in a short period of time, they also expressed a willingness to help her and the teachers overcome challenges to increase student achievement.
- **Physical Environment:** The environment is bright and generally clean, helping to create a welcoming environment for the students. Staff members have made an effort to put up student work and colorful visuals in classrooms and hallway bulletin boards. The school has spacious classrooms that all have new classroom libraries and reading rug areas as of this year. There is an effort to foster school identity through the school’s mascot (the eagle) and a school song sung every morning.
- **Community Health Clinic:** The community health clinic operating in the school is fully staffed this year. It supports the school’s wraparound efforts to meet student health and wellness needs.

Growth Areas:

- **Staff Divide:** While there is a positive rapport among the faculty as professional friends, the focus groups and survey revealed a sentiment that there is an approximate 50/50 divide among the faculty in their support for the school leadership’s effort to quickly make changes at Lincoln-Bassett. Teachers who support the new direction demonstrated positivity and optimism about the changes; those who do not talked about how things weren’t so bad before and how there was more of a “family atmosphere” last year. Overall, there appears to be some tension between teachers who are more comfortable with the pace of change and those who are not yet sure that so much change is needed.
- **Behavior Management:** Interviews revealed that the current school leadership has made it a priority to make a significant change in the way student discipline is managed. In the recent past, teachers established their own behavior rules and expectations. If students were sent to the office, they were often placed in in-school suspension in the cafeteria – many times for very long periods of time – or sent home. While the current administration came into the school with a well-developed behavior management plan on paper, the plan is not yet being fully implemented as the school is pursuing a complete PBIS planning process. For example, administrators are asking teachers to conference with students more and not just send them out of class; however, there seems to be a lack of clarity on the staff’s part as to when they may call for administrator involvement. Additionally, some teachers do not feel that they have the support of the administration in managing student behavior and that there are mixed messages about how they are supposed to be responding to inappropriate student behavior. Some teachers reported consequences are being administered inconsistently.
- **Attendance:** Student attendance rates reported on the school’s data profile indicate that attendance rates have consistently been below the district average and that chronic absenteeism has increased. In 2012-13, the average daily student attendance rate was 90.3 percent, and the chronic absenteeism rate was 21 percent. In response, this year, the assistant principal is coordinating an attendance committee. The committee has tied

attendance to student recognition, focused efforts to support and recognize families for their children's attendance, and worked with community partners to provide additional incentives. Early indicators suggest that this work appears to be paying off as chronic absenteeism was at 5.4 percent for first quarter of this school year.

- **Parent Involvement:** The parents in the focus group interview expressed an interest in becoming more actively involved in supporting the school. Specifically, they requested district support to clarify the volunteer application system as some parents reported filling out the forms and not hearing back about a decision. Parents currently do not participate on the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT), but parental interest in participating seems to be there. The parents also expressed interest in workshops where they can learn more about the curriculum and things they can do to support learning at home.
- **Student Support Staffing:** The school psychologist and social worker are assigned part-time at Lincoln-Bassett. These individuals spend a significant amount or all of their time on campus in meetings. Both the representatives of the SPMT and the parents interviewed during the audit site visit expressed interest in additional staffing support in these areas to enhance services for students.

Operations

The following section provides quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the cumulative ratings provided in the chart on Page 7.

Strengths:

- **Improved Student Arrival and Dismissal Routines:** Arrival and dismissal procedural changes made by the principal were acknowledged and celebrated by the parents in their focus group for making things more orderly and safe for the students. Not having the students enter through the loading dock platform in the morning also improves the climate of the school by making it more student-centered. Teachers are also now expected to help greet students when they enter in the morning. Dismissal is now done from the auditorium to better control when different groups of students leave the building.
- **Security Guard:** A long-time member of the Lincoln-Bassett staff, the security guard demonstrated care and attentiveness in doing her job. The interviews with the principal, parents, and SPMT representatives revealed a high regard for her positive impact in promoting school safety in routine and crisis situations.
- **Student Access to Books:** Parents, teachers, and students all commented on the increased availability of books in every classroom. The change in library policy that allows checked-out books to be taken home is student-centered and aligns with the goal of improving student achievement in literacy and math. In addition, the literacy coach is sending home some supplemental reading materials for struggling students that parents greatly appreciate.

Growth Areas:

- **Safety:** Security emerged as a topic of conversation with every stakeholder group. While there is agreement that safety and security inside the building has improved this year, parents, students, and school leadership voiced special concern about threats to safety from the surrounding community. With several shootings in close proximity of the school (including the parking lot), there is an evident need for the district to ensure the consistent working order of existing security equipment, door locks, and the public address system at the school. Reasonable options to improve school security offered by the principal and SPMT representatives include the allocation of a second security guard or the assignment of a school resource officer. One additional concern raised by parents focused on the maintenance and security of the playground. They reported that it is effectively unusable because it is used by drug dealers. While most of the safety concerns raised were about issues outside of the building, the student focus group suggested the need for more attention on student interactions.
- **Time:** A review of classroom schedules as well as the focus group interviews with the principal and teachers suggests that the school is struggling to meet expectations for implementing district initiatives for several reasons, including inadequate or ineffective use of instructional time. The loss of a specialist teacher when Grades 7 and 8 were pulled from the school just before the start of the school year required reorganization of the schedule to fit in daily teacher prep time for every teacher. With the current schedule, not all grade levels have sufficient instructional time to meet the district-specified number of minutes for specific subject areas. Teachers reported that they are asked to cover a lot and new requests for what they need to do with their students keep coming so there is less time to gauge what the students need. Students reported that math is an area where they feel that teachers do not have time to help them if they do not understand. They are then left to do their homework on their own, which they find frustrating.
- **Facility:** Lincoln-Bassett operates in a facility designed for a 20th Century middle school. The space is vertically spread out, which can make safety a bigger concern as the Grade 4 and 5 classrooms are far from the main office. The audit team experienced the random sounding of a bell system covered during a previous construction project. Such a distraction, while minor, is disruptive to learning. Classrooms also lack basic resources such as white boards, SMART boards, and projectors. Other instructional technology such as Wi-Fi and upgraded computer labs or computer stations in each classroom could support teachers' instruction and the administration of Smarter Balanced Assessments.
- **Transition Routines:** Observations during student transitions to and from the cafeteria suggest the need for more consistent routines and procedures in common spaces. While students were often in class lines walking to the cafeteria, they were also observed running while in line and there was a physical altercation between two students. The noise level was high during these transitions. Supervision in the cafeteria may need to be increased as well; during the audit site visit, two young girls were observed wandering outside of the cafeteria for nearly five minutes without being re-directed.

The audit team would like to express its sincere appreciation to the Lincoln-Bassett community for all of its hospitality on the day of the site visit. We appreciate the openness and transparency demonstrated by members of the school community. There is a willingness and desire on the part of staff, parents, students, and community members to improve the school.