What We Believe

A ROADMAP FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation
Bringing Learning to Life
What We Believe

Mission

Excellence in Student Achievement

Vision

Providing Outstanding Educational Opportunities through Shared, Committed Responsibility

Core Values and Beliefs

- Students Come First: Our driving force
- Intentionality: Decision making, processes, and infrastructure aligned to student success
- Responsibility: Duty to perform at high levels as reflective individuals
- Collaboration: Collectively and effectively working for our students
- Great People Matter: Matching the right people with the appropriate opportunities

Ultimate Goal

Every student at every grade level is on track to graduate ready for college or career.

Priorities

1. Ensure student learning is the focus of highly effective teachers and school leaders who guarantee the delivery of a rigorous common curriculum, through engaging, differentiated instruction while monitoring learning and adjusting instruction based on ongoing data cycles

2. Develop a human capital strategy focused upon the development and retention of effective teachers and leaders

3. Develop the infrastructure to support student success
Our Commitment

“What you do is simply proof of what you believe.” Simon Sinek

We are proud that every day, in classrooms and hallways and offices across the corporation, we see this belief turned into action. Every day, we are driven by the belief that each one of our students has the ability to be excellent, and every day, this belief spurs our teachers and school staff to commit to finding the most effective ways to help our students grow and succeed.

We also believe that, while we have achieved much that is worthy of celebration, we will not settle. We aspire to be great: to become the model for high-performing districts in Indiana and across the nation, delivering a high-quality education that equips our students to be leaders in a global community. To this end, just as we ask our students and faculty to continuously improve, as a district we must also engage in a process of self-reflection and improvement.

Our belief in the importance of continuous reflection and improvement is the driving force behind this report. Moving forward, this Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) will serve as the mechanism that allows us, as a school corporation, to reach our goals of providing the best education possible for our students, maintaining a laser-sharp focus on the most important priorities facing EVSC today, and strategizing proactively to turn challenges into opportunities.

The CIP will allow us to hold ourselves accountable for constantly reflecting on our practice by evaluating our current state, identifying our challenges, brainstorming strategies to address those challenges, and turning those strategies into action. Our corporation’s commitment to the CIP ensures that we make decisions that align our efforts and resources with our vision and goals and the strategies that enable us to accomplish our objectives.

We formally began this process in the fall of 2012 with a district diagnostic assessment to pinpoint our organizational strengths and areas for improvement. As part of that diagnostic, more than 1,000 individuals across our school community – including teachers, staff, school leaders, students, families, community partners, and central office leadership – contributed feedback, input, and support that helped us understand our current state.

Informed by that response and by district-wide data, the Superintendent and Executive Leadership Team engaged in an intensive process of reflection that sought to establish our mission, vision and core values, and then to operationalize the mission and vision of the corporation.

The results of this process form the foundation for our Mission, Vision and Ultimate Goal:

- **Mission:** Excellence in Student Achievement
- **Vision:** Providing Outstanding Educational Opportunities through Shared, Committed Responsibility
- **Ultimate Goal:** Every student at every grade level is on track to graduate ready for college or career

In this report, we are excited to share how we are going to work toward realizing our mission and vision and achieving this ambitious goal, detailing our guiding priorities and strategies for our work as we go forward.
Our Process

Great things are happening throughout EVSC, but even as we recognize and celebrate the progress we’ve made, we refuse to accept the status quo.

We believe that the first step in our commitment to continual improvement is to assess our current realities objectively. A three-year analysis ending Spring 2013 of ISTEP+ pass rates, shows student outcomes trending upward at every grade level – some as great as 15%. Also, students who passed both English/Language Arts and Math increased by 5 percentage points from 2012 to 2013. The number of students taking and passing AP exams has also increased. However, the EVSC is not content with growth that mirrors statewide improvement; rather, we intend to set the pace for Indiana.

Beginning in Spring 2013, EVSC’s Executive Leadership Team (ELT) took on the task of reviewing the state of the district, identifying priorities, and developing the strategies and metrics that would move the corporation to its ultimate goal. The ELT worked from the understanding that change requires capacity and people’s time is limited. In a time of fewer resources, it is critical that we focus our efforts on a refined set of strategically-identified priorities and on the strategies that are most instrumental to advancing student achievement.

As part of its work, the ELT determined that it needed a guiding framework to zero in on those key priorities and strategies. In accordance with EVSC’s practice of aligning our work with research-based best practices, the ELT selected Harvard University’s Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework to guide its work. Developed in partnership between Harvard’s Graduate School of Education and Business School, this framework recognizes the many competing priorities that impact an educational organization. It then translates how educational organizations like EVSC can filter multiple factors to remain focused upon that which matters most: the instructional core.

The instructional core tells us that in order to achieve success, all our efforts at every level of the organization must connect to the work of teachers and students in classrooms. It tells us that student learning will improve
Source: Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Framework, a program of the Harvard Business School and Harvard Graduate School of Education
only when we increase the rigor of our content, the capacity of our teachers to engage students in that content, and the readiness of students to fully engage in learning. This framework provided the ELT three guiding principles as its members worked through the continuous improvement process and developed strategies:

1. Increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of improvements in the level of rigorous content, teachers’ knowledge and skill, and student engagement.

2. If changes are made to one element of the instructional core, corresponding changes must be made to the others.

3. Only initiatives that impact the instructional core should be undertaken.

With this framework and these principles as our lens, and guided by our commitment to data-driven decision making, the ELT next engaged in a cycle of feedback and reflection to understand the state of EVSC. We believe that each member of our school community can tell us something valuable about our work; accordingly, EVSC engages in continuous cycles of feedback, reflection, and improvement. Every year at every school, we solicit feedback from stakeholders – teachers, staff, students, school leaders, families, community partners and the greater Evansville community. Furthermore, at specific points in time we also work with objective third-party partners to analyze the state of our district and our alignment to national best practices.

Most recently, in Fall 2012, we worked with our partner Mass Insight Education – a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap – to execute a diagnostic assessment of our district and to create a shared understanding of our starting point and our priorities going forward. Mass Insight’s diagnostic process began with collecting and analyzing data from a variety of sources, chief among them being feedback from all members of our school community.

Simultaneously, Mass Insight evaluated our central office-level infrastructure, policies, and processes and their impact on our schools. The result of this work was a detailed picture of the state of our district and our community, including our biggest challenges, our readiness to address our most pressing priorities and our ability to successfully tackle the work of continuous improvement.

Following this process of reflection on the state of the school corporation, the ELT next focused on identifying and crafting the supporting strategies that would set us on a path to our ultimate goal. The ELT recognized that the strategies developed needed to address district and school culture, systems, structures, resources, and stakeholders while at the same time taking into account the external environment. At the conclusion of this intensive and purposeful process of analysis, reflection and discussion, we identified three priorities to guide the work of our district going forward:

- Student Learning
- Effective Teachers and Leaders
- Developing Infrastructure

We firmly believe that through a commitment to these three priorities and the supporting strategies designed to address them, we will accelerate learning for all students in the EVSC.
Our Challenge

Over the last decade, the city of Evansville and the EVSC have undergone dramatic changes. While Evansville continues to be the commercial and cultural hub of Southwestern Indiana, our city – like other urban areas around the country – has seen an exodus of manufacturing jobs, rising unemployment, and increasing economic stratification. These changes are reflected in the circumstances of the students and families we serve: from 2006 to 2012, the percent of students receiving free or reduced price lunch increased by 11 percentage points. Yet even as the needs of our students have grown, EVSC has absorbed $60 million in funding reductions over the last three years. The aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 is still being felt in public schools across Indiana as school corporations continue to grapple with fewer dollars from the state and decreasing local tax revenue. At the same time, we operate in an environment of increasing accountability and competitiveness, with more state and national mandates and greater competition for students.

We face these challenges even as we continually renew our commitment to our students and families to provide the best education possible and attempt to execute several new and complex initiatives. As a result, staff at every level of EVSC, from the classroom to the central office, are facing greater pressure than ever before to raise student achievement, and to do more with less.

Significant Progress

Despite the changing policy landscape and the fiscal reality, EVSC has made significant progress over the last 10 years that frequently places the corporation at the forefront of innovation and excellence in public education.

People

We continue to invest in our people; EVSC’s collaborative relationship with employees is a model for other school districts. EVSC’s long history of labor-management collaboration is a solid foundation for cooperation even as EVSC and districts throughout Indiana are required to adopt new state mandates around evaluation, compensation, and tenure in future labor agreements.

Data-Driven Decision Making

With our investment in robust data systems and processes, we are driving accountability and collaboration at every level of our organization. Our District Data Team analyzes district-wide data to understand and identify strategies to address the most pressing and widespread district-wide needs; the EVSC’s Performance Management sessions bring together school administrators and district leadership for an open dialogue about each school’s unique challenges and how the central office can support schools in answering those challenges; and school-based leadership teams use the Data Wise and School Improvement Planning processes, as well as daily Professional Learning Communities, to dive deeply into each student’s growth and develop innovative strategies to ensure that every child succeeds.
Expanding Academic Options

Our innovative school models offer students nearly 20 unique options to pursue their interests and provide extraordinary educational opportunities for students and families in our community. From Early College High School to the Randall T. Shepard Academy for Law and Social Justice to our High Ability programs, EVSC students experience rich learning opportunities that ensure all students are performing to their highest ability and reaching their maximum potential in a manner that best suits their learning styles.

Today, we are also making a greater commitment to early childhood education than at any time in our history, because we know that it is critical to support each child’s development at an early age. More recently, we have begun implementation of a breakthrough, scientifically-based academic and behavioral initiative in all 39 schools – Response-to-Intervention – that provides early, systematic assistance to students wherever they are having difficulty learning and developing while simultaneously pushing the EVSC’s high-achieving students to reach their full potential.

State-of-the-Art Facilities and Technology Integration

In the last five years, we have made significant investments in our facilities and technology, ensuring that our students and teachers have access to rich learning environments with state-of-the-art learning tools. For example, our one-to-one netbook initiative in grades 6-12 engages students in learning and provides teachers with a powerful tool for bringing learning to life.

Family-School-Community Partnerships

We continue to make commitments aligned to our core belief that students come first and to our initiatives designed to support the needs and aspirations of every student. Through our School-Community Council and Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships, EVSC students benefit from over 70 partnerships that assist every child in succeeding in school and life. For example, our community schools, started over a decade ago, provide health and social-emotional support to our students and families so that every student comes to school ready to learn.

Time and again, we demonstrate our willingness to reflect and innovate to meet the needs of our students; the development of this Continuous Improvement Process is one example. Our families and our community put their faith in EVSC every day to provide the highest quality education to our students. That trust and the complex challenges we face require nothing less than our continued commitment to a process of constant reflection, refinement, and improvement.
OUR Priorities
We believe that while it is essential to understand our priorities and have a clear strategy, this is only the first step in a process; how we execute will ultimately determine our success. It is through the continuous application of the CIP – implementation, reflection, and re-adjustment – that we will know if we are on track to be successful. Strategy alone, without effective execution, will not drive EVSC toward its goal. Over the next 18 months, the following roadmap of priorities and strategies will guide our actions and decision-making at all levels of the corporation.

**Student Learning**

*We must ensure that student learning is the focus of highly effective teachers and school leaders who guarantee the delivery of a rigorous common curriculum, through engaging, differentiated instruction while monitoring learning and adjusting instruction based on ongoing data cycles.*

We believe that curriculum, instruction, and assessment sit at the heart of the instructional core – they are what we do and the mechanism for student learning and success. EVSC’s previous approach to curriculum and instruction was decentralized. While this resulted in pockets of excellence, our staff was not appropriately trained for this additional responsibility. This led to a fragmented approach to instruction across the district and a teaching staff without the supports necessary to differentiate for the twenty-first century student.

We believe it is vital that all teachers differentiate their instruction in order to ensure that all students are performing at their highest potential. In order to ensure that all teachers are highly effective in meeting the diverse needs of our students and helping each student maximize his or her potential, we will focus on three core strategies to support our first priority area.

**STRATEGY 1:** Robust implementation of Response-to-Intervention (RtI) Tier I as part of EVSC’s research-based academic and social-emotional supports for all students in support of student engagement and learning.

**STRATEGY 2:** Robust implementation of RtI Tiers II and III, increasingly intensive academic and behavioral supports to support differentiated student learning needs.

The first two strategies grow out of our understanding that we have several different kinds of learners within EVSC – from those performing below grade level to those well above. Response-to-Intervention (RtI) ensures that EVSC accelerates student learning by moving beyond simple remediation for students who have deficiencies in content knowledge to the systematic application of research-based supports that address the skill deficits underlying each student’s struggle to master content. Simultaneously, it provides the opportunity for teachers to expand their pedagogical repertoires and focus their attention on differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students...
who are performing above grade level, propelling the achievement of those students as well.

RtI is a framework for systematically applying research-based academic and behavioral supports in all EVSC schools. These supports, used in combination with the EVSC’s robust data systems and performance monitoring processes, will challenge students wherever they are in their learning and prevent students from falling behind through early diagnosis of skill deficits, frequent progress measurement, and research-based responsive measures to ensure students master standards at every grade level. For example, a fifth grade student struggling to master a science concept will reap very limited benefits from re-teaching if the root cause of his difficulty is an inability to read at a fifth grade level and comprehend textbook material. While all students will receive the same foundational academic strategies in Math and Language Arts to ensure coherent, engaging, and effective instruction, students who are struggling to master specific skills as identified by cycles of assessment will also receive increasingly intensive academic strategies to ensure they do not fall behind.

As part of this strategy, these supports extend beyond academics to social-emotional growth through the systematic application of research-based behavioral strategies, which are in place in every school in the EVSC using the Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS) framework. EVSC is also differentiating its response to students’ social-emotional needs using consistent, clearly defined, and research-based strategies that become increasingly intensive in response to greater need.

Inherent to this approach is our belief that we can effectively teach all children. We also believe that data should drive our decision making. Frequent progress monitoring through robust data collection gives us an early understanding of when a child is having difficulty. In response to that difficulty, the implementation of increasingly intensive and proven academic strategies is the best way to prevent learning challenges from derailing students from the path to graduation and college or career.

STRATEGY 3: Develop district curriculum maps for all content areas focused on literacy, defined as reading critically and writing effectively, across the curriculum.

Within the third strategy supporting this priority, we are focused on the critical importance of a rigorous, consistent, and coherent curriculum that ensures all our students are reading at or above their grade level. We have already made significant progress toward this goal. Over the past year, an intensely committed central team of teachers, principals, and district staff have created clearly-defined, standards-based curricula and content widely available to all teachers in Language Arts and Math for all grades K-12. These maps are available to teachers online to ensure easy access and to encourage communities of practice that push the rigor of our teaching. Currently, EVSC is developing quarterly common assessments aligned to these curricula so that every teacher has the ability to clearly measure learning against the skills and content knowledge we expect students to gain grade-by-grade. Simultaneously, another EVSC team is creating an online platform for digital resources that align to the curriculum and can be used to create rich, diverse, and engaging lessons for students. Next, EVSC will map district-wide curricula for Social Studies and Science.

Through the implementation of these strategies, EVSC will build a systematic method for addressing each child’s learning needs, and as a result, pushing each child to reach his or her full potential.
Effective Teachers and Leaders

We must implement a human capital strategy focused upon the development and retention of effective teachers and leaders.

We believe that having the right people in place and fully developing them to their potential is the single most important lever we have to achieve our ultimate goal. We can bring the best curriculum in the world to our classrooms, but it will make no difference without highly effective teachers and school leaders to deliver it. Our teachers and leaders are the differentiating factor; accordingly, it will be our priority to develop a human capital strategy that ensures we are developing and retaining effective teachers and school administrators. Four key strategies will help us.

**STRATEGY 1:** Strengthen delivery and execution of district-wide professional development programs.

**STRATEGY 2:** Implement job-embedded professional development directly aligned to teacher needs.

Just as the expectation for teachers and leaders in the EVSC is to differentiate their instruction for students, so too must the EVSC administration differentiate its support for each teacher and leader. We will move from our current system of offering a preset menu of centralized professional development options to PD tailored to meet the individual needs of each teacher.

In order to deliver this customized support most effectively, most PD will take place within the school, implemented by expert teachers and school leaders coaching and modeling for fellow educators in real-time as needs arise, which is how teachers – and all of us – learn and grow most effectively. We know both intuitively and from research that learning on the job is a best practice and, with more school-based coaching, it will be one of the primary ways that we bring professional development to our teachers.

**STRATEGY 3:** Develop, pilot, and implement a new teacher evaluation system.

**STRATEGY 4:** Develop, pilot, and implement a new school leader evaluation system.

A robust evaluation system serves two primary purposes: first, it assesses who is most effective in advancing student learning; second, it ascertains the specific areas in which teachers and school leaders must grow professionally in order to have the greatest impact on students.
Through a highly collaborative and purposeful process involving our teachers, principals, labor management representatives, and district staff, the EVSC has developed and is preparing to pilot a teacher evaluation system in the coming school year that aligns to Indiana statute and national best practices. It focuses on what matters – the professional development of teachers, instead of the evaluation of teachers – because we believe that investing in our people will make the greatest difference and impact on our students. It is an evaluation system that we believe measures the things that matter most and empowers school leaders and teachers with an informative process that eliminates evaluation for compliance and provides a concrete tool to drive professional development. As part of that roll out, we are preparing intensive training programs for teachers and building leaders to introduce the new evaluation system and demonstrate how to leverage it for individual growth and development.

In the coming year, we will also develop a school leader evaluation system that aligns to national best practices and helps school leaders improve their practice. As with teacher evaluation, the school leader evaluation process will be developed through a collaboration of stakeholders and will be designed to move beyond evaluation for evaluation’s sake to give administrators the support they need to develop as leaders and advance teaching and learning in their schools.

A robust professional development system, informed by a robust evaluation system, is a critical priority for the district to drive improvement in instruction, and we believe it will empower our teachers and school leaders to elevate student achievement throughout EVSC.
WHAT WE BELIEVE

Infrastructure

We must develop the infrastructure to support student success.

Finally, we believe it is the responsibility and priority of the EVSC central office to do everything in its power to support the core work of teaching and learning in our schools. Four strategies will ensure we do this to our fullest capability.

**STRATEGY 1:** Develop a predictive model that assesses student growth and progress toward graduation for each school year.

Effective central office support starts with providing schools with the tools to track where every student is on their path to graduation. Thus, we need a systematic method of assessing student growth and progress toward graduation for each grade level. Our Office of Performance, Assessment, and Research (PAR) is developing a predictive model to do just that.

Beginning with a comprehensive review of academic research and an analysis of the wealth of student data we have available, PAR is creating a system of checkpoints along the K-12 path with corresponding interventions at every point in time in a student’s education. In partnership with outside experts, including Chair of Education Policy at Brown University Kenneth Wong and Diehl Consulting, EVSC is identifying the indispensable ingredients for measuring a student’s progress on the path to graduation. We refuse to wait for standardized test results to assess student progress. Instead, through a system of early and frequent progress monitoring, we will know where each and every student is on their path to graduation. With this data in hand, our teachers and school leaders will have the information they need to differentiate their support for each student’s learning.

**STRATEGY 2:** Redesign and strategically staff the central office, with a driving focus on dramatically improving instruction and learning in schools.

As a district, we have made the decisions necessary to protect our classrooms and schools from funding reductions. We believe that school districts need to understand who they serve, and we understand that we serve students and families. This is the starting point from which we make staffing decisions, which means we preserve funding and positions at the school level first and then staff at the district level. This is the right approach; however, we must revisit how we organize central offices and our functional areas to ensure that we are effectively supporting the instructional core and the diverse needs of each school.
The current reality does not serve our schools well, and we are committed to ensuring that the central office has a driving focus on dramatically improving our services to schools in support of the core work we do: teaching and learning. To that end, the superintendent will be leading the process of reflecting on organizational best practices and looking for ways to optimize our efficiency and efficacy to our core mission.

**STRATEGY 3: Execute the Transformation Zone aligned to national best practices and standards.**

In Fall 2009, following a unique collaboration between the EVSC and the Evansville Teachers Association, EVSC teachers ratified the Equity School Model in three EVSC schools – Delaware and Evans elementary schools and McGary Middle School. As an equity school, these schools received greater autonomy over their school, including their school day and calendar, and courses offered. Each school added extra teaching days to their school calendar and professional development days for school staff. In addition to adding more days, equity schools could also choose to extend their school day.

While the equity model has led to significant changes in practice at the school level and generated significant improvement in student outcomes, the EVSC central office recognizes that it needs to change how central office supports schools, as well. We are not content to deliver one-size-fits-all services to our schools. Every school in EVSC is unique, and just as we expect our teachers to differentiate their instruction for each student, the central office must provide differentiated supports that meet the needs of each school. We know that some of our schools need more intensive support from the central office, particularly schools that serve large numbers of students living in poverty. Therefore, we introduced a Transformation Zone this school year, led by the Office of Transformational Support, to implement strategies designed to advance student achievement at Caze Elementary, Evans School, Glenwood Leadership Academy, Lincoln School, and McGary Middle School. In these five schools we are piloting innovative, research-based systems and structures for differentiated and intensified support. Through this crucial work we will also identify successful practices that may be scaled throughout the district: the Transformation Zone will help us assess which central office supports most effectively drive success in teaching and learning.
Finally, we recognize that to do any of our work well, we must have effective systems for communication and dialogue. As leadership expert John C. Maxwell writes, “everyone communicates, but few connect.” Meaningful communication will position us to make the most of our collective abilities and talents in support of our ultimate goal and in service to our mission. In partnership, central office and school-based staff will undertake a reflective process to identify gaps in our current communication system; investigate innovative practices for two-way communication; establish protocols for prioritizing the delivery of information so that critical information is not lost in a sea of noise; and create strategies, resources, and tools that enable meaningful dialogue and connection between employees and central office about how we can most effectively serve our students. At the same time, we believe that we must connect with all stakeholders in our school community – and in particular families – in order to effectively share knowledge and serve students. We will also undertake a reflective process to strengthen our communication throughout our school community.
Our Continual Commitment

Our ultimate goal is for every student in every grade in every EVSC school to be on track to graduate ready for college and career. Using the predictive model being developed by the Office of Performance, Assessment and Research (PAR) (see p. 13), we will measure our progress and hold ourselves accountable for moving EVSC toward our ultimate goal. The predictive model is unlike anything in place in any district in the country. Through intensive research into best practices and close collaboration with families, we will have the ability to monitor student progress at each grade level, creating an early intervention system so that every child at every grade level is on track.

As we commit to this goal and implement our strategies, the superintendent will lead the ELT in a continuous process of reflecting on our progress, identifying obstacles, and reformulating action plans. On a quarterly basis, the superintendent will report progress made in our priority areas and toward our ultimate goal during meetings of the Board of School Trustees. This will include data from the predictive model developed by PAR. Our commitment to the process and priorities outlined in this report is an expression of our fundamental belief that we have the power to engage every student in the EVSC in an excellent education. We make this commitment knowing that the process of continuous improvement does not end but rather pushes us to constantly do better. We look forward to sharing our progress in the months to come as we move EVSC from a good school corporation to a great one.
Meeting the needs of students takes a whole community