

Review of the LaFayette Big Picture School: Findings and Recommendations



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Table of Contents

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| I. | Introduction | 3 |
| II. | Review process..... | 3 |
| III. | Background | 4 |
| IV. | Brief description of current program..... | 6 |
| V. | NYS requirements for graduation | 9 |
| | Finding 1..... | 11 |
| | Finding 2..... | 12 |
| | Finding 3..... | 13 |
| | Finding 4..... | 14 |
| | Finding 5..... | 18 |
| VI. | Learning through Internships..... | 18 |
| | Finding 6..... | 20 |
| VII. | Assessing college and career readiness | 20 |
| | Finding 7..... | 21 |
| VIII. | Recommendations | 22 |
| IX. | Additional comments..... | 23 |
| X. | Conclusions..... | 24 |

I. Introduction

The LaFayette Central School District is located in Onondaga County and has approximately 900 students Pre-K to 12 in four buildings. The Grimshaw Elementary School houses students in grades K – 6, the LaFayette Junior-Senior High School serves students in grades 7 – 12; the Onondaga Nation School serves students Pre-K to 8, and the Big Picture School provides an alternative school setting for students grades 9 – 12. Developed in the spring of 2008 and first opened in September 2008, the Big Picture School was initially begun as an “attempt to attract and engage at-risk students who are in danger of dropping out.” (Syracuse Post Standard, August 13, 2008).

As the program has evolved and grown, questions have been raised in the larger school community regarding the manner in which the school meets the rules and regulations of New York State. In order to have these questions answered, the LaFayette Central School Board of Education requested a review of the activities and offerings of the Big Picture School to determine consistency with Part 100 of the New York State Commissioner’s Regulations with regard to graduation requirements and related areas. The review was to focus on the program as it is being delivered in the 2013-2014 school year.

II. Review Process

The review of the program began with a meeting with several members of the Board of Education and superintendent to discuss the scope of the program review. In order to develop a clear understanding of the program, the review process included, interviews, student records reviews, and program visitation and observations.

1. **Interviews.** Individual interviews were held with members of the district administration including Peter Tigh (Superintendent), Paula Cowling (Director of Curriculum and Instruction), and Laura Lavine (CSE Director). All staff currently working at the Big Picture School was interviewed including Susan Osborn (Principal), five teachers (Lenny Oppedisano, Ken Keech, Walt Nowey, April Palmer, and Jim Graham), two teaching assistants (Kym Weil and Christine Kane), the school psychologist (Tara Spicer Powless) and the LTI advisor through Morrisville State College (David Stablein). Also interviewed individually were twelve students representing all four grades. One interview was held with a group of

three parents and another was held with four members of the LaFayette Teachers' Association.

The focus of the questions for those interviewed was on program descriptions, course offerings, and individual perceptions of the program's strengths and weaknesses. The interviews were conversational in nature and all of those interviewed were told that their responses were confidential.

2. **Document review.** The consultant requested a series of documents and materials to review prior to the initiation of the study. These included:

- Student demographics
- Policies on attendance, code of conduct, credit, and grading policies
- Curriculum and program documents
- Data reports on grades, attendance, discipline, and graduation
- List of suspensions
- Master schedule
- Teacher certifications
- Attendance records
- Previous program evaluations and reports

In addition, individual student records including attendance, transcripts, individual education plans (IEP), and learning plans were also reviewed on site. During the interviews with students, individual student learning plans and other examples of student work were discussed and reviewed.

3. **Visitation and observation.** During the course of the review, the consultant was at the Big Picture School for a total of three days while school was in session and students were present. This offered an extended opportunity to observe student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions.

III. Background

The Big Picture School has been in existence for five and a half school years, growing from fifteen students, and 2 staff members to 50 students, one administrator, 4.5 teachers, a Learning through Internship counselor and 2 teaching assistants. Since its initial 9th grade class entered in 2008, 27 students have graduated.

The LaFayette Big Picture School is affiliated with the national Big Picture School organization of more than 40 schools in 14 states. The Big Picture School organization assisted in initial training and support and continues to provide professional development through annual conferences. The LaFayette Big Picture School was one of the first programs to be located in a rural area. Since that time, additional programs have been implemented in rural schools in New York State. Currently, there are 11 Big Picture Schools in New York State including 3 programs in rural Cattaraugus and Alleghany Counties through the Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES, a school in Kenmore-Tonawanda, and one in Oswego. In addition, there are several in the New York City region.

Information on the national Big Picture School program (www.bigpicture.org) indicates that Big Picture schools are based on the following foundational principles:

- Learning must be based on the interests and goals of each student
- A student's curriculum must be relevant to people and places that exist in the real work; and
- A student's abilities must be authentically measured by the quality of her or his work.

The intention of every Big Picture School is to help students learn how to learn and how to reason, problem solve and be members of the community. Rather than using a set curriculum of subjects, each student has an individualized learning plan using a framework of learning goals that include:

- Empirical Reasoning
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Communication
- Social Reasoning
- Personal Qualities

The physical environment, class structure, and activities found in a Big Picture School differ significantly from a typical high school. The Big Picture Program identifies the environmental characteristics as school distinguishers that provide an integrated structure differing from typical schools. The ten distinguishers are designed to exist as a comprehensive, interrelated whole and include:

1. Learning in the real world-learning through internships (LTI)
2. One student at a time: personalization
3. Authentic assessment
4. School organization
5. Advisory structure
6. School culture
7. Leadership
8. Parent/Family engagement: adult support
9. School/college partnership: college preparation and support
10. Professional development

It is apparent from a review of the informational materials and discussions with staff of the LaFayette Big Picture School that the challenge is to be true to the Big Picture philosophy while meeting New York State Board of Regents requirements. It is clearly not an easy proposition to align unit of study requirements with the individualization and personalization that is inherent to the Big Picture School philosophy.

IV. Brief description of current program

In its 6th year of existence, the LaFayette Big Picture School has grown from its first class of 15 at-risk students to a program of 50 students in grades 9 – 12. The program has moved from its initial location at the Grimshaw Elementary School to a temporary location at the high school to a rented former church located about four miles from the high school.

The population of students in the school has become more diverse including both those students who are at-risk for dropping out and students who are looking for an alternative to the typical way of experiencing learning. Almost one-fifth of the students are from other districts and their parents pay a non-resident tuition of \$1,000 to attend. The current enrollment is ethnically diverse with 34% of the students being Native American and 6% African American. A high percentage of the students have been identified as having disabilities (34%) and almost half (48%) are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. Table 1 provides a summary of the significant demographics of the 2013-2014 enrollment.

| Table 1 LaFayette Big Picture School Demographics 2012-2013 | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Enrollment | 50 | |
| Grade enrollment | 9 th graders – 12 10 th graders – 16 11 th graders – 16 12 th graders – 6 | |
| Gender | Male – 30 (60%) | Female – 20 (40%) |
| Ethnicity | White Native American African American | 30 (60%) 17 (34%) 3 (6%) |
| Students with Disabilities | 17 (34%) | |
| Free & Reduced Lunch | 24 (48%) | |
| Non-resident students | 9 (18%) | |

One of the reasons often cited for beginning the Big Picture School in LaFayette was a persistently high drop out rate and lower graduation rate than similar schools in the county. A review of the graduation rates in the LaFayette Central School District from 2006 to 2012 was done using publicly available data on the New York State Education Department website (www.nysed.gov). It is apparent that as the Big Picture School began in 2008, the graduation rate had been less than 70% for two years. The first class graduated in 2012. Table 2 provides a summary of that information.

| Table 2 Graduation Rate Data 9th Grade Cohorts – 2002 - 2008 | | |
|--|--|-------------|
| Entered 9 th Grade in ... 4 year graduation rate as of August 4 years later | Graduated with Regents Or Local Diploma | Dropped Out |
| 2002 (August 2006) | 84% | 5% |
| 2003 (August 2007) | 68% | 15% |
| 2004 (August 2008) | 65% | 8% |
| 2005 (August 2009) | 76% | 8% |
| 2006 (August 2010) | 86% | 2% |
| 2007 (August 2011) | 93% | 3% |
| 2008 (August 2012) | 89% | 4% |

Data provided by the school on the success rate of students who have attended the program provides a picture of the success of the program in keeping students in school

until graduation. Slightly more than one-third of the students who were at one time enrolled in the program transferred out of the program indicating a very transient population of students. Of the remaining 37 students, almost three-quarters have graduated. Recognizing that the population of students involved, especially in the first two years, was at high risk for not graduating, this data shows significant success. Table 3 provides a summary of the data on student success.

| <p align="center">Table 3 Success Rate of Students Attending the LaFayette Big Picture School 2008 – 2013</p> | | |
|--|--------------------|------------|
| | Number of students | Percentage |
| Graduated | 27 | 73% |
| Dropped Out | 8 | 21% |
| GED | 1 | 3% |
| Still Enrolled | 1 | 3% |
| Total (Excluding transfers) | 37 | |
| Transferred | 21 | 36%* |
| <p>*The percentage of students who transferred was calculated on the basis of the total number of students enrolled in the program since it began. Of those who transferred, 3 moved back to the LaFayette Junior-Senior High School. All others moved to other school districts, 12 to districts outside of the region, and 6 to districts within the BOCES region.</p> | | |

Students in the LaFayette Big Picture School are offered a program that has components aligned with the national Big Picture program. This includes academic time on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays with Tuesdays and Thursday being used for Learning through Internships (LTI), individualized work, service learning, and college coursework. The daily program for the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year provides for one hour long workshops (courses) in Algebra 1 and II, English, Global History, US History, and Living Environment I and II. Also provided during a 75 minute class period is the Exploratory period during which a variety of elective courses are taught as seminars and project-based topics. Physical education is also provided for students during the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday schedule.

Teaching staff is highly committed to an individualized approach to learning, motivating students to discover “their passion” that is used to provide inter-disciplinary connections for students to learn the academics. At the LaFayette Big Picture School,

students are organized in 15-student advisories that allow a strong relationship to occur between the teacher (advisor) and the students who are assigned to that advisor and advisory for the entirety of their four-year high school career. Each student and his or her advisor develop a unique learning plan that identifies the goals and learning that is to be achieved. It is this unique approach to the educational process that is at the heart of the program. It is also the piece that raises questions regarding consistency with the state regulations regarding seat time, credits, and teacher certification because it does not fit the model that is typically used in high schools.

V. New York State Requirements for Graduation

The requirements that New York State public schools follow in planning and delivering education are found in the Commissioner’s Regulations in Part 100. (Part 100 regulations may be found at www.p12.nysed.gov/part100.) For this review, sections of Part 100 dealing with earning credit, academic intervention services, second language, Regents examinations, and other similar areas were reviewed.

a. Earning Credits

The first question to be addressed is whether the LaFayette Big Picture School provides the appropriate amount of “seat time” for courses for which credit is awarded. In other words, given the individualized nature of the instruction, do students receive the equivalent of 180 minutes a week or 108 hours a year of instruction? Part 100 provides some guidance in the definitions that are provided for a *unit of study* and a *unit of credit*.

100.1 Definitions

- a. Unit of study means at least 180 minutes of instruction per week throughout the school year or the equivalent.
- b. Unit of credit is earned by:
 1. The mastery of the learning outcomes set forth in a New York State developed or locally developed syllabus for a given high school subject, after a student has had the opportunity to complete a unit of study in the given subject matter area; or
 2. Pursuant to section 100.5(d)(1) of this Part, a passing score of at least 85 percent or its equivalent on a department-approved examination in a given high school subject without the completion of a unit of study, and the successful completion of either an oral examination or a special project.

Determination of unit of study and unit credits was done through a review of individual student programs, the daily schedule, and interviews with staff and students. It is clear that the core academic classes that are being offered during the 2013-2014 school year meet the unit of study and unit of credit requirements. Courses including Algebra 1, English, Global History, Living Environment I and II, and US History are offered 3 days a week for 60 minutes a day. This is equivalent to the required 180 minutes a week of instruction that is identified in the definition of a unit of study. Awarding of credits for the courses is a combination of meeting the unit of study requirement and demonstration of mastery of the learning outcomes.

Credit for courses in the exploratory period including courses as Qualitative Reasoning, Environmental Science, Photography, Robotics, Art and similar courses present some issues in determining seat time for a unit of study. The philosophy of the Big Picture School is that learning is not segmented into separate courses but is integrated across disciplines. In a typical high school, a student takes a course in English and may read a novel and write a research paper on character development. In a course in the Big Picture School, a student will learn through considering a question or a problem through lenses that include several different academic disciplines. Those courses are scheduled

for 135 minutes a week in addition to guided and individualized instruction that occurs on an ongoing basis during the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday schedules as well as on Tuesdays and Thursdays during LTI or individual instruction. The individual student learning plans specify the outcomes to be achieved; assessment of outcomes is accomplished on an ongoing basis by the teachers as well as through regular exhibitions.

Instruction is defined in the Big Picture School as direct teaching, guided small group teaching, and one-to-one advising. If earning a credit is based on time being instructed and achieving mastery, then the individual learning plans combined with the direct class instruction appear to ensure that credits are being awarded appropriately.

There are sections of the New York State regulations that offer support for giving credit in an integrated fashion in the regulations for career and technical education. Recognizing that it is sometimes appropriate to provide math, science, or English language arts content as students are learning career skills, the Board of Regents approved specialized and integrated credits for career and technical education programs. The regulations require an analysis of the integrated content as well as oversight or direct teaching from a teacher certified in one of the content areas. These integrated credits are similar to those in the Big Picture School.

It should also be noted that students may earn a unit of credit by earning an 85 or higher on a Regents exam and completing a project or an oral examination. This option should be used when appropriate.

Finding 1:

The LaFayette Big Picture School provides academic credits in a way that is consistent with the regulations.

The second question to be addressed relates to the number of credits that students earn in one year. As part of the review of the program, the student records for current sophomores, juniors, and seniors were reviewed to determine the number of credits that had been earned in the 2012-2013 school year. To earn 22 credits in a four-year high school program, a student would need to earn an average of 5.5 credits a year. Thirty-seven records were reviewed with the number of credits earned ranging from .5 to 10.5. The median number of credits earned was 5.5. A special review was done of the

records of the students who earned more than 7.5 credits. Those students who earned a high number of credits did so because they had taken incompletes in a number of courses in the previous years or because they attended the Big Picture School summer school and earned additional credits. Since students who do not complete their individualized learning plan objectives receive an incomplete rather than a failing grade, the opportunity is there to earn more credits than usual in a year through make-up or credit recovery.

| Table 4 Number of credits earned 2012-2013 | |
|---|--------------------|
| Number of credits earned | Number of students |
| .5 | 1 |
| 1.0 | 0 |
| 1.5 | 1 |
| 2.0 | 0 |
| 2.5 | 3 |
| 3.0 | 1 |
| 3.5 | 4 |
| 4.0 | 1 |
| 4.5 | 6 |
| 5.0 | 0 |
| 5.5 | 6 |
| 6.0 | 2 |
| 6.5 | 6 |
| 7.0 | 1 |
| 7.5 | 3 |
| 8.0 | 0 |
| 9.0 | 0 |
| 9.5 | 1 |
| 10.5 | 1 |
| Total | 37 |

Finding 2:

Half of the students earned 5.5 credits or more during the 2012-2013 year with credit accumulation ranging from .5 to 10.5. Students earning more than 7.5 credits had attended summer school, recovered credits that were not completed in previous years, or earned credit through examination.

A third question that has been raised relates to student attendance. Although the Part 100 regulations do not require a baseline level of student attendance in order to earn credits, Part 104.1(i) requires that each district develop and implement a comprehensive attendance policy. The LaFayette School District has such a policy and the Big Picture School follows it. Student attendance records were reviewed for all students who were currently enrolled in the program. Four years of records were reviewed for the current 12th graders, three years for the 11th graders, and two years of records were reviewed for the 10th graders. Attendance for the 9th graders was reviewed for September through December 2013. Based on this review, it appears that the majority of students (61%) attend more than 90% of school days but there are approximately 13% of the students whose attendance is 70% or less. Attendance is a continuing issue for the Big Picture School.

Finding 3: Student attendance shows a significant percentage of students whose attendance is 90% or higher as well as 13% of the students whose attendance is 70% or less.

b. General school requirements. Part 100.2 identifies more than 30 specific requirements under the category “General School Requirements.” These include areas such as the administration of elementary and secondary schools, school conduct and discipline, annual professional performance review, high school program offerings, transfer students screening, availability of speech and language, students with disabilities, professional development, and academic intervention services among others. With the exception of the one area mentioned below, the Big Picture School is in compliance with the components of Part 100.2 that are required.

The one area that does not seem to be in compliance is Part 100.2(j) that refers to the availability and access to a certified guidance counselor and a program that includes individual annual review of educational programs and career plans. While the junior-senior high school has two guidance counselors, access to a certified guidance counselor is somewhat limited at the Big Picture School. Although one of the counselors from the high school has met with students in groups on several occasions during the fall semester to access a college planning technology tool (Naviance), Part 100 requires individual

review of programs by a guidance counselor with students. This issue may be addressed in the short term by additional time from one of the guidance counselors and in the long-term when the program is moved back to the Junior-Senior High School.

Finding 4:

Students at the Big Picture School do not have adequate counseling services from a certified guidance counselor.

c. Part 100.5 Diploma Requirements describes the general requirements for a Regents or a local high school diploma. Part 100.5 identifies a requirement for students to earn at least 22 units of credit including two credits in physical education to receive a Regents diploma or local diploma. Such units of credit shall include:

- English, four units of commencement level credit;
- Social studies, four units of credit;
- Science, three units of commencement level science, at least one course shall be life sciences and at least one in the physical sciences, the third may be either life sciences or physical sciences or technology;
- Mathematics, three units of credit of mathematics, which shall be at a more advanced level than grade eight, shall meet commencement level learning standards as determined by the commissioner, provided that no more than two credits shall be earned for any Integrated Algebra, Geometry, or Algebra 2 and Trigonometry commencement level mathematics course;
- Visual arts and/or music, dance, or theatre, one unit of credit; and
- Health education, one-half unit of credit in accordance with the requirements set forth in section 135.3(c) of this Title.
- Physical education, two credits

In order to graduate, students need to be able to access courses in all of these areas. To be able to offer the courses, the school needs teachers appropriately certified to provide these courses. New York State teachers and administrators are required to hold a New York State certificate in order to be employed by a school district to teach. A listing of teacher certifications was provided through the New York State Education

Department's TEACH system. Staff in the LaFayette Big Picture School is certified in the following areas:

- Biology 7 – 12
- English Language Arts 7 – 12
- Mathematics 7 – 12
- Physical Education
- Social Studies 7 – 12
- Special Education
- Students with Disabilities – Grades 7 – 12 – English
- School District Administrator
- Teaching Assistant

There are currently no teachers certified in art or music, technology, foreign languages, health or sciences other than biology employed at the LaFayette Big Picture School. These are courses that students will need credit in to graduate from high school. It appears that in the past, teachers in the Big Picture School have taught these courses that are beyond their certification area. During the first semester of this year, this seemed limited to courses in art and theater.

Questions have also been raised regarding the awarding of credit that is required in a foreign language (languages other than English). Part 100.2 (d)(4) requires:

“Public school students first entering grade nine in the 2001-2002 school year and thereafter shall earn at least one unit of credit in a language other than English, as defined in section 100.1(b) of this Part, in order to complete the language other than English requirement for a high school diploma. Students may earn one unit of credit by having passed the State second language proficiency assessment when available.”

Transcripts indicate that there are several students who are securing this credit through language courses at the Onondaga Nation. The majority of students in the past, however, used a technology solution (Rosetta Stone) for instruction in foreign language. Current New York State regulations do not allow for credit to be given for initial instruction through on-line instruction unless there is a New York State certified teacher of record. In order to be in compliance with the regulations, during this year students are not earning any credit for foreign language. It is expected that there will be instruction

provided by a New York State certified foreign language teacher next year. In the meantime, students are still using Rosetta Stone as a way to develop some understanding and fluency to aid them when they do take the course. No credits are being awarded for students taking a foreign language this year (except for those students taking a language at the Onondaga Nation).

Health education is another area that had been problematic in the past since none of the current teachers are certified in that area. The school district has recently made arrangements for the health coordinator/teacher from the Junior-Senior High School to provide health instruction during the spring semester.

The final area of certification is in the area of science. Unlike English, math, or social studies, teachers in science are certified for specific subject areas (Biology, Earth Science, Physics, or Chemistry) and can only teach the area in which they are certified. In order to graduate, a student must pass one Regents examination in science and must take one course in the life sciences and one in the physical sciences.

New York State Education Department regulations and laws provide for some relief from this certification requirement through allowance for *incidental teaching*. Section 80-5.3 of the New York State Education Law indicates that “A superintendent of schools may assign a teacher to teach a subject not covered by such a teacher’s certificate or license for a period not to exceed five classroom hours a week, when no certified or qualified teacher is available.” In order to qualify for incidental teaching, application must be made through the State Education Department. Another option may be for staff to seek a certification extension in another science area.

Students also earn elective credits and support their core courses in a variety of areas through their work on Tuesdays and Thursdays in their Learning through Internships activities and other project based learning career programs as described in the individualized learning plans.

While questions have been raised by some on the faculty and in the larger school community regarding the acceptability of different types of approaches for earning credits, it appears that the Part 100 regulations provide for a variety of alternatives to earning credits in addition to the more typical classroom activity. Part 100.5(d) identifies the following alternatives to specific Regents and local diploma requirements:

- a. Credit by examination (up to 6.5 credits)
- b. Visual arts and/or music, dance or theatre
- c. Occupationally related mathematics and science
- d. Transfer credit
- e. Career and technical education program option
- f. Appeals process on Regents examinations passing score
- g. Making up incomplete or failed course credit
- h. Credit for independent study
- i. Credit for online and blended courses

While it does not appear that any of these are currently being formally used in the LaFayette Big Picture School, their use might be considered as the program is further developed. In particular, credit by examination, visual arts and/or music, dance, or theatre out of school credit, credit for independent study, and credit for online courses might be pursued to assist the program in maintaining compliance with the graduation regulations. Each of these requires the school to follow specific procedures to grant credit. Credit for examination has already been described. Description of the other relevant alternatives follows.

- **Independent study.** Part 100.5. (d)(9) allows for students to earn a maximum of 3 units of elective credit towards a Regents diploma through independent study as long as a school-based panel approves it. To qualify for independent study, the student needs to have passed the appropriate number of Regents examinations, accumulated the expected number of credits for his grade level, and have demonstrated readiness and have a high likelihood of success in the given subject area.
- **Visual arts and/or music, dance or theatre.** Part 100.5(d)(2) provides an opportunity for a student to earn a unit of credit in art, music or theatre by participating, only in exceptional situations, in an advanced out-of-school art or music activity. Credit for such participation requires the recommendation of the student's visual arts, music, dance or theatre teacher and approval by the school principal. Credit is given based on equivalence with unit of study.
- **Credit for online courses.** One of the newest alternatives, Part 100.5(d)(10)

allows students to take online courses, demonstrate mastery, and receive credit if the course is provided by or under the direction of a New York State certified teacher from the school district, another school district, or a BOCES. A number of BOCES through the state are offering a wide variety of courses at relatively reasonable cost. AccelerateU through the Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES is one example.

In addition to the alternatives discussed above, the Board of Regents also allows for school districts to apply for a waiver from regulations. Part 100.2 (n) allows for variances for programs and special focus schools:

Except as otherwise provided for State test or examination requirements pursuant to subdivision (f) of this section, the commissioner may grant variances from the provisions of this Part upon a finding that a variance will enable a school to implement a program designed to provide excellence in education.

Applying for a variance, either individually or as part of a consortium of other Big Picture programs in New York State will allow the program to implement the model in a way that is consistent with New York State requirements and the national program design.

Finding 5:

A review of student records and interviews with students and teachers indicated that, in general, students are completing their high school program in accordance with the requirements of Part 100.5. Arrangements will need to be made to ensure that certified teachers teach courses in the arts, foreign language, and physical science. The Big Picture School does not currently use any of the alternative approaches available to gain credit.

VI. Learning through Internships

The previous parts of this report have discussed the ways that the Big Picture School meets graduation requirements during the three days a week that workshops (classes), advisories, and exploratory are held. Since schools are required to provide 180 days of instruction, questions must be asked about what students are doing on the two

days a week reserved for Learning through Internships and how this time helps students to earn the equivalent seat time.

Informational materials for parents on the Learning through Internships (LTI) time define the LTI time as one of the basic structures of the school where “students spend two days a week out at an internship site. By Learning Through Internship (LTI), the student will learn math, science, reading writing and many more skills that he or she cannot learn in a classroom. LTIs are not meant to help students pick out a particular career. At their LTIs, students will learn the skills needed to go on to college and beyond.”

Just as the core academic program is individualized for students, so too is the LTI process. Students go through a process with their advisors and with the LTI coordinator to identify an area of interest or “passion,” find places to shadow, and then identify and secure an internship placement. The internship experience is designed to help students explore their passions and is designed around projects that are also linked to individualized learning plan goals in career planning, math, science, English, and social studies. Part of a student’s learning time (and achievement of “seat time”) is linked to the learning goals that are to be accomplished during LTI experiences.

At the time of this review during mid-January, it was apparent that there were students who did not have two full days of internships each week. In the case of the 12 first year students, only five had two-day LTIs. The others were in the process of identifying shadowing experiences and internship sites. The 14 second year students (201s) were more involved in internships with 10 involved in internships of at least one-day a week. Eleven of the thirteen 301s were involved in either internships or Morrisville college classes and all of the 401s were currently involved in internships or college coursework. During the Tuesday and Thursday time, students were involved in one-to-one work with their advisor or with other staff, individual work on learning goals, or small group learning activities.

Finding 6:

Learning through Internship experiences are not consistently two full days a week for all students in the program. Students who are not involved in LTI experiences use the Tuesday and Thursday time for meeting individual learning goals.

VII. Assessing college and career readiness

Students in the Big Picture School are assessed in a variety of ways, both formally and informally. As all students in New York State, Big Picture School students take at least five Regents examinations in order to graduate. Individual assessment is done through the exhibition process during which a student presents accomplishments, projects, and achievement of learning goals to a panel of adults and other students. In addition to these measures, students at the Big Picture School participate in the Work Keys assessments. Working with the TED Center at Syracuse University, all students must take and pass Work Keys assessments. Developed by ACT to create a job skills credential measuring career readiness (foundational and soft skills), Work Keys has a series of exams including Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information. Depending on test scores, students are awarded certificates of platinum, gold, silver, or bronze work readiness. These certificates are recognized nationally. Currently, five of six seniors have passed the assessments (1 Gold, 2 Silver, and 2 Bronze). Thirteen of the juniors have passed the assessments (1 Gold, 6 Silvers, and 5 Bronze). Eight of the sophomores have passed – 4 at the Silver level and 4 at the Bronze level.

Also a measure of college and career readiness is the participation and completion of college courses. Through a Science and Technology Entry (STEP) grant from New York State, students at the Big Picture School have no-cost access to college courses. Students, who have completed appropriate Regents exams successfully, are eligible to take courses at Morrisville State College. Students are transported by the school and are supported through mentors at the college. Over the past two years, a number of students have taken and passed courses through Morrisville and have gained college credits. In

addition, during the spring semester of 2014, students will also be offered a 1-credit college course at the Big Picture School given by college faculty.

| Table 5 Dual Enrollment Courses Morrisville State College | | |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Semester | Number of Courses Taken | Number of Courses Passed |
| Spring 2012 | 7 | 6 |
| Fall 2012 | 2 | 1 |
| Spring 2013 | 6 | 5 |
| Fall 2013 | 3 | 3 |

Finding 7: A variety of formal and informal measures are used to assess student's achievement of college and career readiness.

| Table 6 Summary of Findings | |
|--|---|
| Finding 1: | The LaFayette Big Picture School provides academic credits in a way that is consistent with the regulations. |
| Finding 2: | Half of the students earn 5.5 credits or more during the 2012-2013 year with credit accumulation ranging from .5 to 10.5. Students earning more than 7.5 credits had attended summer school, recovered credits that were not completed in previous years, or earned credit through examination. |
| Finding 3: | Student attendance shows a significant percentage of students whose attendance is 90% or higher as well as 13% of the students whose attendance is 70% or less. |
| Finding 4: | Students at the Big Picture School do not have adequate counseling services from a certified guidance counselor. |
| Finding 5: | A review of student records and interviews with students and teachers indicated that, in general, students are completing their high school program in accordance with the requirements of Part 100.5. Arrangements will need to be made to ensure that certified teachers teach courses in the arts, foreign language, and physical science. The Big Picture School does not currently use any of the alternative approaches available to gain credit. |
| Finding 6: | Learning through Internship experiences are not consistently two full days a week for all students in the program. Students who are not involved in LTI experiences use the Tuesday and Thursday time for meeting individual learning goals. |
| Finding 7: | A variety of formal and informal measures are used to assess student's achievement of college and career readiness. |

VIII. Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for consideration by the LaFayette Central Board of Education, the superintendent of schools, and the LaFayette Big Picture School staff.

Recommendation 1:

The Big Picture School should continue to provide courses for credit in accordance with the Part 100 regulations relating to unit of study and unit of credit. Staff should undertake a regular review of course time.

Recommendation 2:

The Big Picture School should examine alternative approaches to gaining credit and should consider implementing appropriate approaches to maintain consistency with the Part 100 regulations related to earning credit toward graduation.

Recommendation 3:

Consideration should be given to applying for incidental teaching approval for issues relating to teaching out of certification.

Recommendation 4:

The district should consider applying for a variance from the New York State Education Department to allow for the implementation of those portions of the Big Picture School Program model that are difficult to accomplish under current Part 100 regulations.

Recommendation 5:

Develop a plan for improving communication as well as transitioning the Big Picture School to the Junior-Senior High School. The plan should involve staff, students, and parents from the Big Picture School as well as the larger school community.

IX. Additional Comments

There are several areas that were not part of the scope of this review but should be mentioned. These include special education, facilities, parent involvement, and student achievement and maturity.

Special education. While this review was focused on the implementation of the Part 100 regulations and not those related to special education (Part 200), a few comments should be made regarding special education at the Big Picture School. Currently, as Table 1 indicates, 17 of the 50 students or 34% are classified as students with disabilities. A review of the requirements of their IEP plans indicated that the current staffing is not adequate to meet the time requirements for consulting teacher and resource room. Special education services are provided by a part-time special education teacher, also responsible for physical education for the 50 students in the program. Discussions with the CSE chair indicated that Big Picture School IEPs are being

reviewed and recommendations for appropriate program service will be made for next year.

Facilities. Appropriate space for the Big Picture School to exist has been troublesome since the school's inception. Currently the school is located in a leased building about 4 miles from the Junior-Senior High School. One of the most common concerns raised by staff and students alike was the crowded facility. While it appears that the school has made the best of the situation, the lack of appropriate library, physical education, or individual classroom and office facilities for 50 students and nine adults is problematic. While everyone realizes that the recently approved referendum will provide a more permanent home at the high school in several years, there are also clearly issues related to the appropriate integration of the Big Picture School to the Junior-Senior High School. Incomplete and incorrect information about the Big Picture School requirements, program, and practices was evidenced through discussions. Strategies for dealing with increasing the school community understanding of the program will be important for continued success.

Parent involvement. It was apparent from the discussions with the parents, students, and teachers that the degree of parent involvement in the program is important to the success of the program. Teachers and other staff have regular contact with parents regarding attendance, learning goals, and student success. Staff reported that most parents are in attendance at student's exhibitions and are involved in a variety of other activities.

Students. Approximately 25% of the current students were interviewed during this review. Their ability to articulate the program's strengths and weaknesses and their own interests and learning goals demonstrated a high level of maturity and competence. Educators often talk about the importance of the 21st century skills that will create college and career ready students. The students at the Big Picture School that were interviewed demonstrated these skills and their potential for success.

X. Conclusions

The LaFayette Big Picture School provides an alternative school environment for high school students looking for an individualized and integrated approach to learning. A review of the program for adherence to Part 100 regulations was done during January and

February 2014. The Big Picture School is in compliance with the majority of the regulations and is in the process of addressing areas that are not in compliance.