

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	270100010006
School Name	RJ McNulty Academy
School Address	60 Brandt Place, Amsterdam, NY 12010
District Name	Greater Amsterdam School District
Principal	Mr. Todd Giagni
Dates of Visit	February 5-7, 2019



Purpose Of The Visit

This school was identified as needing additional support by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Because of this identification, NYSED arranged for an Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) to visit the school. The visit is intended to help the school identify areas of need that are making long-term success a challenge and provide several visible Quick Wins that can be accomplished and demonstrate the school’s commitment to improvement.

The report provides a critical lens to help the school best focus its efforts.

School Performance

New York State uses multiple indicators to determine the identification status of schools across the state. For each of these indicators, schools receive a number of 1 (lowest), 2, 3, or 4 (highest) that corresponds with how the school performed in relation to either other schools and/or performance targets. More information about how these levels are determined can be found at: <http://www.nysed.gov/accountability/essa-accountability-designation-materials>

The most recent results for the “All Students” group at the school are as follows:

Elementary/Middle School Performance Indicators

Composite Performance Achievement Level	Student Growth Level	Combined Composite and Student Growth Level	English Language Proficiency Level	Average ELA and Math Academic Progress Level	Chronic Absenteeism Level
1	1	1	2	1	2

The school serves 447 students in grades pre-kindergarten through five.

Information About The Visit

- The visit was led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE) and a representative from NYSED. The team also included a district representative.
- The team visited a total of 38 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited nine classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with students, staff, and parents.
- Team members examined documents provided by the school, including schoolwide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 36 staff members (86 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The staff at the school offer a variety of programs for students to support their learning and to foster an interest in the arts. In addition to the regularly scheduled fine arts programs, the school provides a wide range of more specialized music and arts offerings. For example, students are able to participate in the Orff Ensemble and chorus or can assist the art teacher when she is creating a new mural for one of the hallways of the school. This school year, the principal and the music teacher also have begun a band with a small group of students, and their first performance was during the holidays.
2. School leaders and staff have embraced the schoolwide social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. The team observed the principal leading students in grades three through five in a mindfulness activity in the gymnasium. This activity is done every day before students go to class. The IIT found that through the development of this curriculum, school leaders and staff have created a culture and climate where students feel secure, generally behave well, and respect teachers and each other. The vice principal stated that the number of suspensions thus far for the 2018-19 school year have decreased by 20 percent when compared to the last school year because of the school's focus on SEL.
3. School leaders have established during the 2018-2019 school year, a before and after school tutoring program to support students who are struggling academically and need additional assistance in reading and math. The school leaders, teachers, students, and parents stated during interviews that this tutoring program has been very successful. The school leader shared with the IIT that this fall many of these students improved their scores on the STAR assessments, which are administered three times a year.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders should try to adhere to a schedule that allows them to conduct focus walkthroughs and provide feedback to teachers on a consistent basis.** The team learned that focus walks are not always done consistently throughout the school year. The principal stated that he conducts focus walks during the year, but sometimes it is difficult to fit in due to other priorities that come up unexpectedly. Teachers indicated that they need more specific, targeted feedback on how to improve their instructional practices. In the future, the principal should schedule regular walkthroughs so that he can give actionable feedback to teachers to increase academic standards and student achievement.
- **School leaders need to implement a schedule to enable general education teachers and English as a new language (ENL) teachers to collaborate and plan together to meet the needs of ENL students.** The team found that due to scheduling constraints and the assignments of ENL teachers to multiple grade levels, co-planning time for general education teachers and ENL teachers does not usually occur. Teachers and school leaders indicated that collaboration time is not allocated for general education and ENL teachers to meet to discuss student and curricular issues. General education teachers also stated that they would like to learn new strategies from the ENL teacher to assist them when working with English language learner (ELL) students. Collaboration during the school day is limited, and the IIT observed during class visits that there is a need to

address the learning needs of ELLs more effectively. Some ENL students continue to perform below their peers on the STAR and State assessments.

- **Response to Intervention (RTI) and Academic Intervention Services (AIS) could be strengthened by focusing on improving the targeted supports students need.** The team learned that this school year was the first year the RTI process was school based. Previously, it was overseen by the district. The IIT observed during class visits, and teachers noted, that Tier 2 interventions need to be more consistently implemented so that interventions are based on assessment data and specific student needs. The IIT also found that during the allotted time for AIS, instruction is often focused on test preparation, which does not always align with the specific learning needs of the individual students.
- **School leaders could strengthen the management of behavioral issues by clarifying the type of misbehavior that teachers should handle and those incidents that should be referred to the school leaders.** Some teachers and students expressed confusion about the administration of disciplinary incidents and the schoolwide consequences for various issues. Teachers noted that there were some chronic behavioral problems that require additional attention, and some students indicated that they did not understand why disciplinary issues were handled differently in various classes. In the future, school leaders should consider meeting with teachers to develop a mutually agreed behavior plan that addresses the concerns of both students and teachers.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **To improve the overall success of the school, the principal should schedule and hold regular meetings with the assistant principal and the school leadership team (SLT).** The IIT found that there is a need for a system for the principal to meet more regularly with the SLT to discuss critical leadership and management issues, including for example, the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning. The principal noted that he and the assistant principal meet when needed to discuss management, behavioral, and academic concerns during the school day. However, the IIT also found that there is a need for more scheduled opportunities for the principal to meet with the vice principal to discuss the outcomes of lesson observations or to identify future priorities. In the future, the principal should schedule and hold regularly scheduled meetings with the assistant principal and the leadership team so that they can discuss emerging issues, plan strategic improvements, and measure the progress made against school goals.

Learning at the School

- **Staff would benefit from more guidance about new curricula and initiatives before they are expected to implement them.** Some staff expressed concern that new strategies and curricula for SEL, Eureka Math, RTI, AIS, and Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) were implemented before the professional development (PD) or guidance that would support their implementation had taken place. The team learned that the district's policy is to avoid pulling teachers from classes during instructional days and to offer PD for new curricula and initiatives on Superintendent's Conference days, staff development days, and throughout the summer. While the team learned that some teachers were meeting with the instructional coach to discuss curriculum and

instructional issues, the IIT found that teachers are implementing new procedures with limited guidance, resulting in changes being implemented inconsistently. In the future, the principal should work with the District Director of Testing and Assessments, who is also responsible for the implementation of the curriculum, to ensure that suitable guidance is provided for teachers before the curriculum is implemented and that supports are available while teachers are implementing new initiatives.

- **The school needs to more effectively use staff and school leaders, such as the instructional coach, master teachers, and the assistant principal, to ensure that effective practices are shared so that they can be implemented in all classrooms.** The IIT observed in their visits to classrooms that there are pockets of effective instructional practice in classrooms that could be shared with other teachers. In the future, the principal should ensure that opportunities are provided for teachers to observe and share these more effective practices so that the quality of teaching and learning is improved across the school.
- **Teachers should provide students with increased opportunities to be actively involved in their learning.** The IIT found during visits that lessons are typically teacher led and that there is a need for students to play a more active role in their learning. The IIT observed teachers demonstrating processes using the SMART Board, for example, when the students might have shared the activity with their classmates. The IIT found during classroom visits that small group instruction was not typical at the school. In the future, the principal should consider focusing his attention on the quality and frequency of the opportunities provided by teachers to actively involve students in their learning when he conducts his walkthroughs or informal lesson observations.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents and teachers reported that the new report card template was implemented by the school with limited opportunities for their input.** Parents shared that they do not understand the nine-point scale used to grade their children and do not know what skills their child needs to improve to achieve a higher rating. While the new report card was a district initiative, teachers stated that consultation on the content of the new report cards was limited to the report card committee and that they received the new report card a week before grades had to be submitted, which minimized opportunities for them to offer feedback. Some teachers also noted that they find the nine-point scale confusing and that they were not given time to collaborate with their grade level peers to discuss how to implement this new process with accuracy and consistency.
- **Parents and teachers reported that they would like to see more adults in classrooms for students in the primary grades.** Parents stated that students in the primary grades have a wide variety of learning needs and that additional adult support would be very helpful.
- **Parents and students shared that they would like the school to have more award ceremonies and celebrations.** Parents and students stated that there is a need for more academic celebrations at the school. Students also shared that they wish the school would reinstate Fun Fridays and other special activities. They noted they used to look forward to movies, popcorn, and special activities that made Fridays special for them.