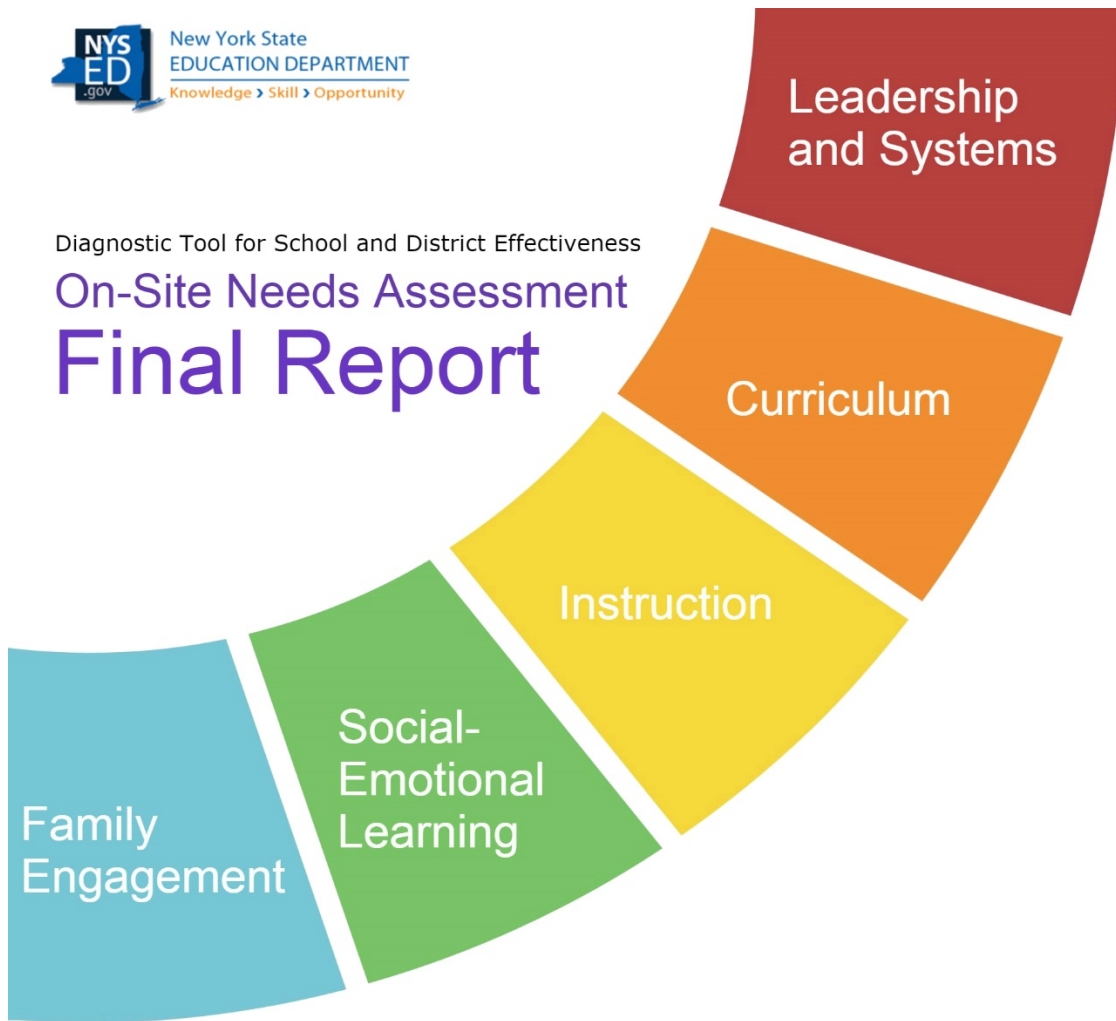


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	270100010009
<b>School Name</b>	Wilbur H. Lynch Literacy Academy
<b>School Address</b>	55 Brandt Place, Amsterdam, NY 12010
<b>District Name</b>	Greater Amsterdam School District
<b>Principal</b>	Elizabeth Hanan
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	January 22-24, 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.

## 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 31 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 10 classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with students, staff, and parents.
- In advance of the visit, 56 staff members (71.7 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- Although the school is staffed for two assistant principals, at the time of the team's visit, the school was operating with one assistant principal.
- The school had a two-hour delay on the first day of the visit due to inclement weather. In addition, school was closed on the third day of the visit; however, since the third day is dedicated to the team finalizing its conclusions, rather than collecting evidence, the team was largely unimpacted by the school closing on the third day.
- The school serves 844 students in grades six through eight.

## Success Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal has adjusted the school schedule to promote teacher collaboration and increase student learning. For the 2018-19 school year, the principal modified the schedule so that all students are receiving more interdisciplinary lessons across content area subjects. Teachers reported that they now have common planning time to work collaboratively and plan by house horizontally and by content area vertically, and they can also discuss strategies for intervention and student support. Academic opportunities for students have increased, and teacher planning is occurring more consistently.
2. The principal has prioritized the implementation of the school's social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum so that teachers are better able to provide students with monthly themes and lessons that support student social and emotional development health. This school year, teachers have implemented this curriculum by teaching these lessons during their homeroom periods every other week. Interviewed teachers stated that the SEL curriculum was needed because the school has a considerable number of students who could benefit from additional social and emotional support. Students, teachers, and the principal stated that through the use of the SEL curriculum, students are beginning to take more responsibility for their actions and behaviors.
3. To increase student engagement and promote academic success, the principal assembled a team of eight teachers who developed a project-based learning plan and curriculum. In addition, teachers received year-

long training to support the kick-off of this initiative during the current school year. Although project-based learning is in its initial stages, teachers reported that their experiences during the first round of project-based learning activities have been encouraging. Teachers stated that the available planning time has enabled them to develop project-based units with a partner teacher. In addition, teachers who were initially reluctant to participate in project-based planning noted that they have begun to embrace this initiative because they now have time to plan and work with a colleague, and the school provides on-going PD. The principal reported that students' level of engagement as well as their desire to work collaboratively with classmates toward a common goal has increased.

## Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

### Systems for Improvement

- **The school leaders will need to ensure that the school makes progress in addressing the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) goals and activities from the previous year that were included in the 2018-19 SCEP.** During interviews with the IIT, the principal referred to previous goals from the last DTSDE visit that have been continued in the current SCEP. The team learned that the school leaders have been struggling to maintain priorities in the SCEP, and the principal shared that the SCEP goals were lofty and the number of activities for each tenet made the work cumbersome and not easily attainable.
- **The school leadership should delineate clear steps for improvement in the SCEP that would enable the principal to know if the school was likely to achieve its goals.** The majority of the activities identified in the SCEP are set to occur between August and June. At times, these activities identify what staff will be doing throughout the year, but there is a need for a specific plan to make sure that staff do these activities with quality. For example, the plan identifies that staff will implement evidenced-based instructional strategies informed by data daily, but it is unclear how the school will get staff to develop skills necessary to do so. While this activity is expected to occur from September to June, the IIT saw little evidence of data-informed instructional strategies during the visit, which occurred at the middle of the school year. The school needs to outline a progression of steps in the SCEP designed to build capacity throughout the year to better enable school leaders to determine if progress is occurring at the rate anticipated and if the school is on track to achieve its goals. With sequential actions and associated benchmarks, the school leaders can closely monitor the implementation of the plan and identify when and where adjustments are necessary.
- **With several changes in school leadership over the last six years, the principal needs to focus on the challenge of developing teacher buy-in and creating a sense of urgency for initiatives for organizational change.** The principal acknowledged that she understands that some of the initiatives have been done without staff consultation or input; however, the principal shared that moving forward she wants to be more collaborative in the decision-making process. Interviewed teachers shared that teachers have seen initiatives and several school leaders come and go over the past few years and that it is difficult to get behind someone who may not be there for the long haul. However, teachers report they want the principal to stay at the school for a long time.
- **The principal should more effectively communicate schoolwide, the systems that are in place to support struggling students.** For example, although the principal introduced an SEL curriculum that is being implemented in all classrooms, the IIT's interviews with teachers showed that teachers are not aware of the levels of support that the school provides if a student is identified as at risk. A Fast Pass, for instance, is given

to a student who has been targeted by the intervention team to receive targeted social and emotional support. In this process, the student's teacher communicates with the guidance staff about what supports the student will receive and how that teacher can support the student when s/he returns to class. However, some teachers who do not teach a student identified for these services may not know that this system for student support is available. For instance, teachers interviewed by the IIT reported that they were unaware that this system existed.

## Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should address teachers' expressed need for additional verbal and written feedback that goes even further in helping them to grow their pedagogical practice.** The principal provides written feedback to teachers after she visits classrooms to meet the requirements of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process. However, the team found that there is a need for consistent targeted feedback that it is focused and actionable to enable teachers to elevate their instructional practices. Teachers report that they receive actionable feedback from the principal; however, they would like that feedback to go even further in helping them to improve their pedagogical practice. School and teacher leaders should consider giving more focused and actionable feedback to teachers so that they can more precisely improve their instructional practices in support of students.
- **School and teacher leaders need to implement and monitor the school's communications structure so that pertinent information that relates to student success and teacher instructional practice can be consistently publicized and shared across all houses.** Interviewed teachers shared that teachers communicate well and consistently with each other within their respective instructional houses, but they said that they were not clear about what goes on in other houses or across grades schoolwide. The principal reported that she is looking at a variety of ways to improve communication schoolwide in an effort to eliminate any informational vacuum that might have occurred because the current system of communications to staff may not have been as hardy as it could be.

## Learning at the School

- **Teachers and school leaders should ensure that project-based lessons provide sufficient rigor and that project-based assessments align to the standards.** The principal and teachers stated that the school is in its initial stages of implementing project-based learning into the curriculum. The principal stated that over time, with consistent support from the school leaders, teachers will cultivate and implement lessons and curricula that are more demanding and engaging for students. Teachers reported that the staff is buying into project-based learning and that part of the process is to begin revising the school's curriculum maps and lesson plans so that students are receiving more robust lessons that also provide students with real-world connections and open-ended scenarios. Teachers also noted that they need to start creating assessments that are tied to the standards, so they can more effectively assess where their students are and what they know and understand.
- **Teachers need to provide lessons that have a clear focus or purpose.** During classroom visits, the team found that students typically spent their time completing activities provided by the teachers, but it was sometimes unclear what specific skill or concept the teacher hoped students would learn by completing the activity. There is need for an increased focus on emphasizing a specific skill or concept and for learning targets that clearly connect with what students were supposed to be learning.

- **School and teacher leaders should expand opportunities for students to engage in project-based learning activities across all classrooms with the same cohorts of students.** Although interviewed teachers stated that they were initially reluctant to try to implement project-based learning, they shared that they have found students more motivated to learn and that they have gained more student buy-in through the process. Teachers noted that the process needs to be expanded. However, they reported that in some cases, students who are in their classrooms did not get the full benefit of the double block of project-based learning because they have been programmed into another section for the second period of that instructional block, and this programmatic issue has inhibited some students from participating in project-based learning fully. Parents interviewed by the IIT stated that their children are more engaged and excited about what they are doing in school. Students reported that when they worked on the Christmas Carol project, they learned so much about stage design and craft that it made them want to come to school and learn more.

## Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students reported that they would like more opportunities to engage in a variety of activities at lunch.** Students interviewed by the IIT shared that they get punished as a whole body due to the behavior of a few students. These students stated that they believe students' misbehavior increases because of the punishment since they are unable to participate in any activities other than just eating lunch or talking to another student at their lunch table.
- **Students shared that they do not always feel safe during class transitions.** Interviewed students reported that incidents between students often occur during transitions between classes because many students are in the hallways during this interval.
- **Students stated that they would like more hands-on activities that would extend their learning.** Interviewed students shared that they when complete their work, which sometimes involves completing worksheet packets, they have free time to read or sit at their seats quietly. They said that they are not aware of options of how they may go beyond their work on their own.
- **Students stated that they felt they did not have enough time to get to their classes.** Students reported that they would like the period change transition time extended to four minutes from three minutes to give them more time to get to classes because sometimes they have to travel a considerable distance between consecutive classes. For example, some students have their classes on the third floor, and the next class is in the basement on the other side of the building, making it difficult to get to class on time.
- **Parents expressed the viewpoint that their children need to have a variety of experiences and activities during lunch.** Interviewed parents reported that when their children come home, they complain that most of the students are being punished for the actions of just a few, and as a result, students don't get an opportunity to do anything enjoyable during lunch except to talk to a neighbor at the lunch table.
- **Parents reported that the school should provide workshops for parents that would teach them how they can help their children academically.** Parents shared that the school has limited opportunities for them to learn about the curriculum being taught so that they are better able to assist their children with their learning.