

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	090201040005
School Name	AuSable Valley Middle School
School Address	1490 State Route 9N, Clintonville, NY 12924
District Name	AuSable Valley Central School District
Principal	Christopher Fey
Dates of Visit	April 23-25, 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
2	1	1	-	1	4

Ausable Valley Middle School serves 184 students in grades seven through eight.

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 23 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited seven 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 and student work.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a student survey that 163 students (93 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 21 staff members (78 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a parent survey that 62 parents (36 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, 24 staff members (89 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The 2018-19 school year marks the beginning of the district's three-year plan to provide one-to-one computing to middle and high school students. In the middle school, grade seven students were given their own Chromebooks. As part of the roll out, the middle school principal established a student help desk, and students who were interested in providing technology support to the school completed a job application outlining their skills and were later interviewed. Five to ten students currently provide support to students and teachers by troubleshooting any issues they may have with the Chromebooks. Students told the IIT that they enjoy working on the help desk, especially because they are learning more about technology as they troubleshoot problems with the Chromebooks. Staff told the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) that it is helpful for them to have this resource available. A parent stated that the opportunity to serve on the help desk has given her son an increased sense of responsibility and boosted his confidence. Plans to increase the number of students on the help desk are underway as the school adds Chromebooks to grade eight for the next school year.
2. This school year, the middle school is working with College For Every Student (CFES) Brilliant Pathways, which is a non-profit organization that partners with school districts to help students become college and career ready. Working with the school, the organization runs a weekly mentoring program, which is currently focusing on team building activities. Approximately 20 middle school students are learning how to work together and practice skills needed to be successful in post-secondary education and to become leaders. Students told the IIT that the program is especially valuable because they are learning skills they can apply to real world situations. They noted they particularly appreciated learning how to communicate more effectively and being able to help others. The principal told the IIT that the students are currently producing an anti-bullying video that will be shown in local movie theatres.
3. The 2018-19 school year is the principal's first year in this role. Teachers and students told the IIT that they appreciate that he is visible around the school and often visits classrooms. The principal noted that he has used the 20-minute lunch study halls (F-Set) to share important information with students about what is happening at the school. He has also urged teachers to use the time to acknowledge students who have contributed in a positive way to the culture and climate of the school. Teachers stated that these informal assemblies help them learn more about their students and what is happening in other classes.

Area Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leadership will need to ensure that the school develops a formal referral process and data system to record and monitor the academic and social-emotional supports provided to students.** The principal and staff reported that the school has academic and social-emotional supports in place for students, such as Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and help with homework after school. In addition, counselors and a therapist are available five days a week as part of the on-site mental health clinic. However, the IIT learned that the school does not have a formal referral system with specific criteria or a data system to review supports. The principal explained that teachers meet during team time every two weeks, but they only have time to discuss one or two students who are having difficulty. Teachers reported that when they observe a student having difficulty either academically or behaviorally, they often contact a counselor on an informal basis who

will then work with the student. In the future, the principal should ensure that support staff develop and implement a referral system with documentation to address student issues, create an action plan for the student, and monitor progress leading to improvement.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should schedule and ensure that there are formal departmental meetings to discuss agenda items that focus on curriculum alignment and other content area issues.** The middle school principal told the IIT that he and the high school principal request, but do not always receive, agenda items from content area teachers that identify areas to be discussed at monthly meetings. Teachers noted that when agenda items are not indicated, the meetings are cancelled by the principal and usually not rescheduled. When department meetings are not held, middle school and high school teachers are unable to discuss content standards with their colleagues and ensure curriculum alignment between middle school and high school subjects. In the future, the middle school principal, in conjunction with the high school principal, should have standing agenda items, such as curriculum alignment for grades seven through twelve or data analysis, and ensure that the monthly meetings take place.
- **The principal will need to develop and communicate to staff specific school goals with benchmarks in order to monitor progress towards those goals.** The IIT found that to date, the principal has not been required to develop a School Comprehensive Educational Plan (SCEP) or to identify specific goals. When asked by the team about school priorities, the principal indicated that his priorities include the effective use of Chromebooks and data and a better understanding of New York State’s accountability system. He noted that the school needs to place more emphasis on reading to ensure greater student success. In the future, the school leadership should identify goals, develop strategic points in the year to collect relevant data as benchmarks, and modify actions accordingly to reach the goals.

Learning at the School

- **School leaders and staff should consider heterogeneously grouped classes in which instruction is modified to meet the needs of all students.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed that students assigned to different ability level classes, such as honors, were often completing the same packets and/or being asked to complete the same problem sheets as students in other classes. In some classes, teachers were checking the students’ answers, but instruction was not modified when all students already understood the concepts and had the correct answers. Students in classes engaged in review for upcoming assessments were given the same problems regardless of whether they were having difficulty solving the problems or clearly knew the answers without hesitation. In the future, the school leadership should consider re-examining the concept of placing students into ability levels and, instead, consider mixed ability classes. In addition, teachers should modify their instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- **All teachers will need to regularly imbed reading into their lessons.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed many students working on packets of materials that focused on answering low level questions that did not ask students to find evidence in the text to support their answers. The team also found that students were asked to complete simple problems that did not challenge the students by requiring them to explain their reasoning. School leadership noted that although reading was one of the school’s priorities, they did not ensure that teachers were assigning reading on a regular basis to their students. Teachers interviewed by the team shared

that they do not typically emphasize reading in their lessons or assignments. One teacher noted, for example, that he sometimes assigns a short reading passage with a few questions for homework. Special area teachers stated they do not usually assign activities to their students that focus on reading. Students shared that they do not often spend time reading in class or reading for homework. In the future, the principal should ensure that teachers in all content areas regularly assign reading passages to their students.

- **English language arts (ELA) and math teachers should continue developing action plans for modifying their instruction using the strategies they learned during professional development (PD) sessions.** Teachers shared that during several PD sessions they reviewed New York State assessments to determine in which areas their students were having difficulty. Based on this information, they created action plans with their content area colleagues to address these areas, including administering formative assessments, analyzing the data from these assessments, and modifying instruction based on these data. Teachers told the IIT that they were not implementing their action plans beyond the first steps they developed during PD. They indicated that they did not have the time within their schedules to plan and confer with their colleagues to develop common formative assessments or analyze data. Consequently, they were not continuing with what they had discussed in their PD sessions beyond using the action plans initially developed. During classroom visits, the IIT did not observe teachers implementing their action plans. In the future, teachers should be encouraged to check that students understood what was being taught, and modify instruction based on feedback from students.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students shared that they appreciate the orientation program they took part in as they moved from grade six at the elementary school to grade seven at the middle school.** During discussions, students stated that coming to the middle school from two different elementary schools made it difficult to get to know other students. They said they felt it would be helpful for grade six students to come to the middle school and shadow a grade seven student at the end of the school year before they entered the school the following September.
- **Students said they like using Chromebooks or other technology, but in many classes, they do not have the opportunity to use other technology available in several computer labs in the school.** In grade eight, although technology is available to them, students do not have their own Chromebooks. Students, in both grades seven and eight said that a large part of their time in some classes, is used to complete guided notes as the teacher lectures. They indicated that this is not challenging for them and results in their being bored and disinterested. Students said they would prefer to use technology so they can apply what they are learning to real world situations.
- **Teachers said that although they have planning time, the schedule does not allow for common planning time with their colleagues.** In addition, teachers shared that they feel they spend an inordinate amount of time grading papers and would like some strategies on how to more efficiently accomplish routine tasks like grading papers and to more effectively plan with colleagues.
- **Staff shared that the consultant teacher model used at the school could be used more effectively to meet the needs of all students.** They explained that the consultant teacher is responsible for ensuring that students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals are met. However, special education teachers do not often have the opportunity, during class or common planning time, to share their teaching practices with their general education colleagues. They noted that these practices and instructional strategies could be used to support all students, those with or without IEPs.

- **Parents said they appreciate the various forms of communication they receive from the school but do not know about various services available to students and families in the school or community.** Interviewed parents felt it would be useful if the school staff provided additional information to parents and families about the services available at the school. For example, parents were not aware of the mental health clinic at the school five days a week.
- **Parents stated that generally they feel the school is safe, but they sometimes think that consequences for behavioral issues are not consistent across the student body.** Students interviewed agreed with this viewpoint. Parents suggested that the school should look into creating a more consistent way to address behavioral issues, including the feasibility of implementing a restorative practices program.