

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	490101040006
<b>School Name</b>	Berlin Middle School/High School
<b>School Address</b>	17400 Route 22, Cherry Plain, NY 12040
<b>District Name</b>	Berlin Central School District
<b>Principal</b>	Dr. Catherine Allain
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	April 9-11, 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		2	1

### High School Performance Indicators

4 Yr Grad. Rate <67%	Composite Performance Achievement Level	Average of 4-, 5-, and 6-year Graduation Rate Levels	Combined Composite Performance Achievement and Graduation Rate Level	English Language Proficiency Level	Average ELA and Math Academic Progress Level	Chronic Absenteeism Level	College, Career, Civic, Readiness (CCCR) Level
No	2	3	2		1	1	2

Berlin Middle School/High School serves 382 students in grades six to twelve.

## 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 30 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited nine classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with students, staff, and parents.
- In advance of the visit, 42 staff members (70 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

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

1. This school year the district hired a communications specialist who has increased the local and regional visibility of both the middle school and the high school. She ensures that there is current information about the middle school and high school on the district's website and submits at least one article each week about the school to *The Eastwick Press*, the regional weekly newspaper. A recent article featured a story about ambassadors from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute visiting the middle school to talk with students about engineering as a career. Talks are underway with other Capital Region newspapers, such as the *Troy Record*, to include more stories about the school. Additionally, a local television station with broad regional coverage filmed an interview with students as they delivered baby sharks and jellyfish that they had raised in the marine biology class to the Via Aquarium in Rotterdam. Parents told the IIT they appreciate having the school highlighted in a variety of positive ways, and students said the news coverage raises the pride they feel for their school.
2. Recognizing the rural nature of the district, the principal encourages teachers to bring students on subject-related field trips and have them participate in a variety of competitions. During the 2018-19 school year, students have had the opportunity to visit several museums, take part in several "quiz bowl" competitions with neighboring schools, and participate in the Odyssey of the Mind program in which students are challenged to solve scientific and engineering problems. In March 2019, Odyssey of the Mind teams moved up to the State competition at Binghamton University. Students and parents told the IIT that the arts and music programs at the school are particularly important to them. They said that they not only appreciate the opportunities for students to participate in arts and musical competitions but also that counselors work with students to ensure art, band, and chorus classes are accommodated in their schedules.
3. In previous years, information for parents about the school was contained in the student planning agenda. However, the principal told the IIT that she determined the planners were not the optimum way to let families know about the workings of the school and about the faculty and staff. To this end, at the beginning of the current school year, the principal and her team created a stand-alone Family Handbook, which is also featured on the website, that contains, among other items, a staff directory that lists each staff member's position and email address, important dates and procedures, consequences of misbehavior, the dress code, college courses offered at the school, and extracurricular activities. Recognizing the need to ensure all this information is current, the principal has tasked her team with updating the handbook based on feedback given by parents, students, and staff over the course of the school year so that the handbook for 2019-20 can continue to be as useful as parents said this year's handbook has been.

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

### Systems for Improvement

- **The school leaders need to establish a system for providing teachers regular feedback.** The team learned that currently there is no established system or process for visiting classes on an informal but regular basis and giving feedback to teachers on their instructional practices. The school leaders explained to the IIT that although they complete the required Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) evaluative observations and conduct one or two informal walkthroughs per teacher each year, sometimes other duties prevent them from visiting classes on a more frequent basis to monitor teaching and learning. In the future, the school

leaders should develop, implement, and adhere to a schedule of class visits in order to provide targeted feedback to teachers on their instructional practices. In addition, school leaders should develop a system to record and review the feedback given so that on subsequent visits they can monitor teacher progress towards instructional improvement based on previous feedback.

- **The school should establish a system to identify students in need of additional services.** The IIT learned that staff are currently using a Google Docs referral form to formally refer students for services and are also referring students to the clinical support team through informal conversations. The middle school staff meet weekly to review student data, while the high school teams meet once a month. The IIT found that there is a need for high school staff to monitor student progress and revise intervention plans on a more frequent basis. In addition, the team learned in interviews that there a lack of clarity among staff in regard to Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) procedures. For example, some staff expressed a belief that RtI is solely for behavioral issues as a precursor for referring students to the committee for special education. In the future, the school leaders should consider revising the referral process for interventions, then communicate the expectations about these processes to the staff to ensure that staff have a common understanding about the procedures for these two programs.

## Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal will need to communicate her instructional expectations to staff.** The principal told the IIT that she has several goals, such as students will do well at the school, teachers will come to school prepared to teach, and teachers and staff will strive for better collaboration with parents and families. However, staff indicated that they need more clarity on the expectations. Teachers stated they are free to use whatever practices they choose and to set their own expectations for student achievement. In the future, the principal should develop specific expectations about quality teaching and learning as well as building relationships with parents, and she should communicate these expectations effectively and regularly to teachers and staff.
- **The school leaders should increase their monitoring of new initiatives.** Teachers reported that they have received professional development (PD) in several areas such as curriculum mapping; using strategies to effectively teach writing; embedding Enduring Issues, or cross-cutting social studies principles such as scarcity, equity, and human impact on the environment into all content areas; and creating a better understanding of issues surrounding poverty and its impact. However, the IIT found that new initiatives are not monitored to ensure they are being implemented with fidelity. For example, during class visits, most students were filling in worksheets instead of writing, and no Enduring Issues were explicitly referred to during lessons. Teachers stated they could not remember when they attended PD on poverty and were not clear on the specific strategies they could use to effectively interact with this population of students. In addition, the IIT learned from teachers and school leaders that staff have been working on the curriculum mapping project for two years, and that the timeline to complete this initiative has been extended several times.

## Learning at the School

- **Teachers should provide challenging assignments that allow students to think deeply about what they are learning.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed most students either taking notes as the teacher lectured or completing worksheets. Students were not typically provided with opportunities to solve problems or answer higher-order questions that required them to think deeply about the content and skills they were

learning. Often when teachers asked questions to students, they answered the questions themselves without giving the students a chance to show whether or not they understood the material.

- **Teachers must ensure that they incorporate strategies that address the needs of all students.** During classroom visits and interviews with students, the IIT learned that most instruction is whole group with all students completing the same work without modifications to meet the needs of different learners. The IIT observed students being compliant and finishing their work but not actively engaged in dynamic activities. Some students told the IIT that they are often bored and finish their work quickly, and when they finish, they play a game or keep themselves busy rather than work on some other project to enhance their learning.
- **Teachers should handle minor behavior problems in their classrooms to limit the amount of instructional time missed by students being sent to the office.** Students shared with the IIT that discipline is inconsistent across classrooms and that punishments for the same offense vary for different students. A review of disciplinary data demonstrated that many students are sent to the office from classrooms because of Level One issues, such as dress code violations. Further, the IIT found that when students are sent to the office for these minor issues, they often have to wait a long time to meet with the dean of students or other school leaders, thus missing valuable instructional time. In the future, the principal should ensure that teachers follow the code of conduct, which delineates levels of offenses, and clarify that teachers should handle minor concerns in their classrooms, so students do not miss valuable instruction.

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

- **Parents would like the middle school to provide a newsletter for parents that highlights accomplishments and celebrations along with upcoming events.** Parents stated that the elementary school produces such a newsletter for parents on a weekly basis, and they would like the middle school to send out a similar newsletter, if only on a monthly basis.
- **Parents praised the high school's weight/exercise room and said they would be willing to pay a fee to use the equipment.** Interviewed parents felt that this would benefit the community, since there is no gym in the town, as well as provide a way to meet new people and build relationships with other parents and their children.
- **Students said that teachers should be more consistent in enforcing rules in their classrooms.** They expressed the view that not all students receive the same level of praise or punishment for the same kinds of work or infractions.
- **Teachers would like the school leaders to visit their classrooms on a more frequent basis and provide more examples of effective instructional strategies.** Teachers shared that they appreciate the feedback they receive on their teaching from school leaders. However, because school leaders do not often visit their classes, these teachers said they receive few suggestions and ideas on how to improve.