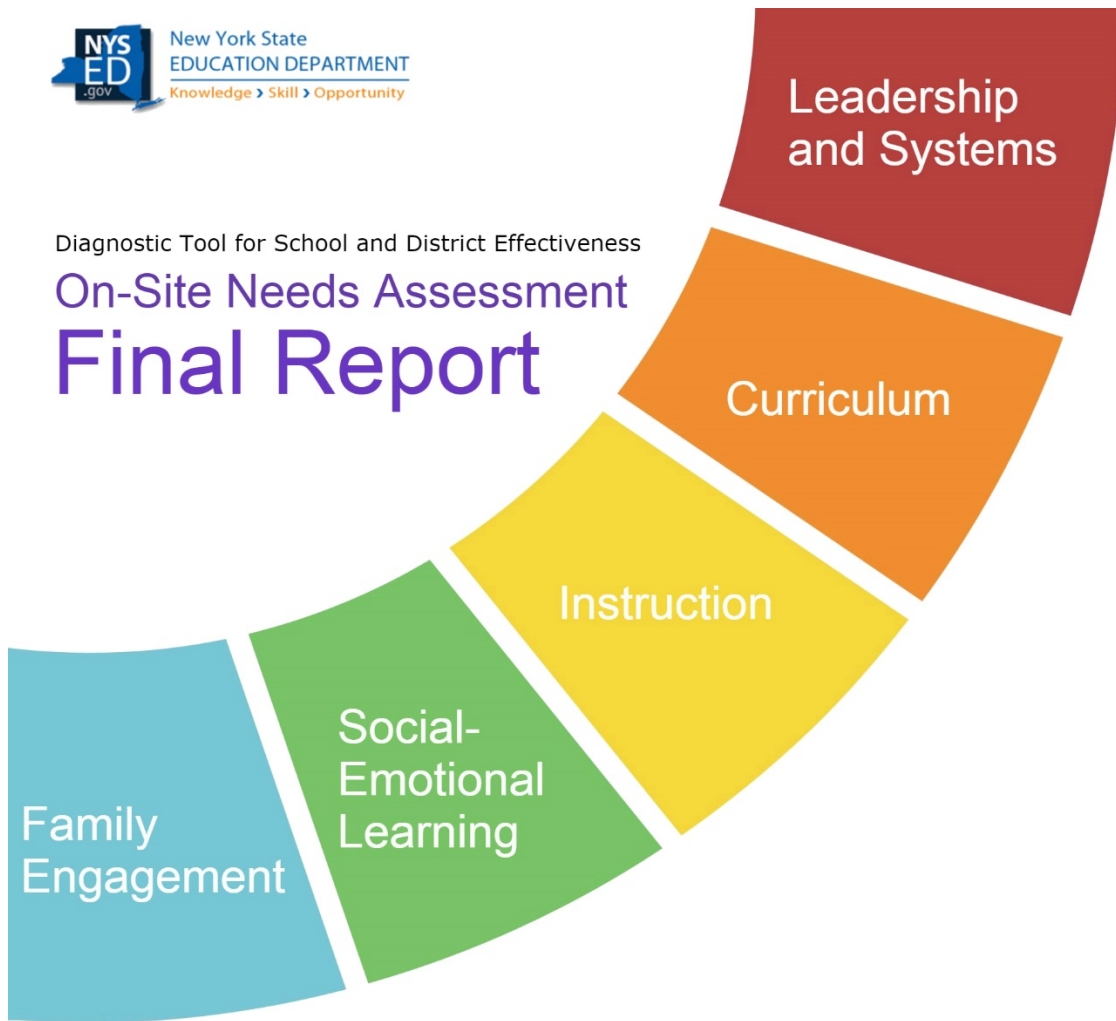


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	580512030020
<b>School Name</b>	East Middle School
<b>School Address</b>	70 Hilltop Drive, Brentwood, NY 11717
<b>District Name</b>	Brentwood Union Free School District
<b>Principal</b>	Barry Mohammed
<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
1	1	1	3	1	3

East Middle School serves 1144 students in grades six to 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 and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 52 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited ten 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 lesson plans, schoolwide data, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 74 staff members (80 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

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

1. At the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, the principal collaborated with counselors to modify the structure of English as a new language (ENL) classes to better support students. English language learners (ELLs) were placed into ENL classes based upon their English proficiency levels, affording ENL teachers the opportunity to provide more targeted differentiated instruction to students. Cohort performance on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) improved for the 2017-18 school year compared to the prior year, as the number of students scoring at the Entering level decreased and the number of students progressing from the Entering level to the Emerging level and from the Emerging level to the Transitioning level increased.
2. During interviews with teachers and the principal, the team learned that this school year the two grade six 15:1 teachers collaborated with the guidance counselors and the ENL teacher supporting students in 15:1 classrooms to coordinate their schedules so that instruction for students with disabilities and ELLs could be differentiated based on their level of readiness. As a result of this scheduling, special education teachers are now able to align instruction, co-plan with the ENL teacher, and maximize ENL support by allowing students to rotate between classrooms and receive differentiated instruction based on their individual instructional needs.
3. The school librarian maintains an environment that is resource rich, accessible to staff and students, and regularly used for instructional purposes. During the visit, the IIT learned that the librarian, along with her assistant, maintain a system to ensure adequate access to the library for instructional purposes and individual student use. The team's conversations with students revealed that some students prefer to visit the library rather than participate in other activities such as recess. In addition, in an effort to increase the availability of technology, the librarian secured a grant this school year that will provide an additional laptop cart for instructional use. The librarian also expanded the Spanish section of the library in order to provide students with more culturally relevant reading material.
4. Teachers within the science department collaborate to make decisions to expand student exposure to science concepts and deepen student understanding of the subject matter. This school year, the science teachers collaborated to change the focus of the student science fair from a wide range of topics to a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) theme, and they created an engineering competition between grade levels for which students have to build prototypes of their ideas. In addition, science teachers implemented process-oriented guided inquiry learning activities. During science classroom visits, the team observed students engaged in higher-order thinking, both independent and collaborative problem solving, and creating products such as group models depicting the interactions of the earth's spheres. Students told the team that their science classes challenge them.
5. Teachers and the principal told the IIT that during the 2018-19 school year, the school built on last year's initial effort to create a culture of collaboration by giving teachers the opportunity to share best practices and learn from each other. Teachers shared that last school year, six staff members volunteered to participate in instructional rounds to identify instructional strategies that were successful and to identify areas of need. As a result of last school year's positive experience, this school year 12 teachers volunteered to participate in the instructional round process and collaborate with peers to refine their teaching practices.

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

### Systems for Improvement

- **The response to intervention (RtI) process should be implemented in all classrooms.** The IIT learned that leaders added a part-time RtI specialist to the staff to coordinate the school's RtI process. The RtI specialist shared that the RtI team supports teachers with developing support plans and identifying instructional strategies to address student needs. However, during classroom visits, the team observed few classrooms in which students were receiving small group targeted instruction, for example. In addition, students shared that while they have access to extra instructional support, these optional supports are offered during lunch or after school and are not typically embedded within regular class time. Teachers reported that they received an initial training and a follow-up training on the intervention process; however, they said that they are unsure of their role in the RtI process and need additional follow-up training. In the future, the school leaders should provide opportunities for the RtI specialist to provide follow-up coaching support to teachers to ensure they have a clear understanding of Tier I and Tier II instruction and know how to implement those practices within the regular classroom.
- **School leaders will need to set academic achievement and growth goals for grade-level cohorts and individual students to track mastery of the content standards in the areas of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.** Although the school currently tracks the proficiency and growth of ELL students, all of whom are administered the NYSESLAT, this practice has not been implemented for all students. For example, the team learned that the school has identified a goal to increase the percentage of students scoring at the Proficient and Advanced levels on the Reading Inventory assessment. However, a system has not yet been established to set and monitor individual student, classroom, and cohort goals to track mastery of the New York State (NYS) Next Generation Learning Standards for ELA and mathematics. In the future, school leaders should collaborate with department and grade-level teams to set, progress monitor, and respond to individual, classroom, and cohort growth goals.

### Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should collaborate with a focus on monitoring instruction and responding to instructional trends.** During interviews with school leaders, the IIT found that while each of the school leaders conducts formal teacher evaluations and informal walkthroughs, observation practices have not been normed to ensure that uniform feedback is provided to staff. School leaders shared that while they meet often to discuss school matters, they do not meet on a scheduled basis to discuss the instructional trends of the school and coordinate support for teachers based on need. Teachers shared that their classrooms are observed in alignment with the evaluation system requirements, but feedback for growth is typically offered in general terms, such as "increase rigor," rather than specific actions. Teachers shared that they do not receive feedback from informal walkthrough visits. In the future, the school leaders should conduct classroom walkthroughs as a team to norm observation and feedback practices and meet to synthesize teacher observation data to identify individual needs and schoolwide trends for the purpose of coordinating support for teachers.
- **School leaders will need to develop a process to coordinate guidance and support to teachers on the implementation of professional development (PD) initiatives.** The school leaders reported that they collaborated with the school improvement team to outline school reform strategies to address the needs of

the students and teachers. During interviews with school leaders, the IIT learned that many of these strategies are in the initial implementation stages. During classroom observations, the team found that practices such as reciprocal reading were fully implemented in some classes with appropriate supports for students; however, these practices were not observed in all classes. Explicit instruction was identified as an additional school reform strategy; however, the team found that in many classrooms, the lesson content was not explicitly modeled for students. School leaders shared that the school has limited access to human resources for coaching support to address the professional development (PD) needs of teachers, and alternative practices, such as identifying teacher leaders within the building who have the capacity to support other teachers, have not yet been considered.

- **School leaders should develop and implement a system to collect and monitor data on interim student mastery of the NYS standards.** The school leaders shared that they use the results of the Reading Inventory assessment and district quarterly math assessments to monitor student performance. As such, student progress is monitored three or four times per year, and the data are used to make instructional decisions for students. While the team learned that the math assessment is aligned to the district pacing guide, a review of the results from the Reading Inventory assessment revealed that the assessment does not provide standard-specific mastery levels for all ELA standards, nor does it reflect the rigor of the State assessment. In the future, the school leaders should collaborate with grade-level teams to develop a process for collecting interim student performance data by standard in ELA and math to inform decisions regarding how to address student needs.
- **Grade teams and support staff should have opportunities to collaborate during the school day.** The IIT found that the master schedule allows for some teacher teams, such as grade six special education teachers, to collaborate during the school day, while other teams, such as those in grades seven and eight, do not have the opportunity to do so. Grade seven and eight teachers stated that they currently do not have ongoing opportunities to meet with grade team members to discuss subject matter and strategies to support students' academic and social-emotional learning needs. In conversations with the team, teachers shared that they primarily communicate with fellow grade team members using various modes of technology because the master schedule does not allow for common planning. During classroom visits, the IIT found that while teachers who taught the same grade and subject were targeting the same standard, the alignment of instruction to the standard, the rigor of instruction and activities, and the level of student engagement varied by teacher. For example, during visits to math classrooms, the team found that while teachers were targeting the same standard, some students were participating in engaging discussions or hands-on activities in some classrooms and others were working independently to complete seat work with little interaction among peers.

## Learning at the School

- **Common assessments aligned to the NYS standards for ELA, math, and science should be developed and administered.** The IIT found that while all students are administered the Reading Inventory assessment and quarterly district math assessments, teachers do not have a practice of administering common assessments aligned to the content standards in the district pacing guide for instruction. Teachers shared that while they communicate with each other about what they will teach during the upcoming weeks, they do not collaborate to design and administer common assessments aligned to the NYS Next Generation Learning Standards and practice assessments. During interviews with students, the IIT learned that students find the State assessments more challenging than the teacher-made assessments. Interviewed parents expressed the view that the

material their children learn in some classes is not reflective of the material on the State assessments. In the future, school leaders should collaborate with grade-level teams to develop and administer common assessments in alignment with the rigor of the State standards and practice assessments.

- **Teacher modeling strategies and instructional resources need to provide access to learning for all students.** During classroom visits, the IIT found that teachers in many classrooms addressed the auditory learners and did not provide visual examples or prompts during lessons. In addition, the team observed that students were sometimes provided with explicit modeling that prepared them to productively struggle with the content during the guided practice period, which is one of the school's PD priorities. The IIT's review of teachers' lessons plans showed that the plans of some teachers did reflect explicit modeling of content. During classroom visits, the team found that ENL classrooms were print rich with anchor charts, discourse tools, and interactive word walls, but similar strategies intended to support and reinforce student learning were not evident in all general education classrooms observed by the team. During interviews with students, the IIT learned that students learn best when the teacher explains and writes the examples during the lesson; however, students said that this does not take place in all classrooms. Interviews with ELL students also revealed that teachers sometimes speak with a fast pace during demonstrations, making it challenging for them to learn.
- **Students should be provided with ongoing opportunities to engage in writing.** While leaders identified Collins Writing as a school reform strategy for this school year, the IIT observed few instances where students were engaged in writing or completing writing tasks. The IIT's conversations with students and review of student work samples revealed that students were provided with opportunities to write paragraphs but were given few opportunities to write essays of the length set forth by the State standards. The team reviewed an activity that provided students with a scaffold for writing an argumentative essay; however, this practice was not uniform across content areas and grade levels. While the IIT saw students writing during an intervention class, the task only required them to copy an essay that they wrote as a class from their workbooks to a piece of paper. In addition, the team saw few examples of student writing or instructional material related to writing posted in classrooms.
- **Teachers should provide students with actionable feedback on assignments.** During classroom walkthroughs, the IIT found that while teachers post student work in classrooms and in the hallways, students are rarely provided with specific feedback for growth; students confirmed this in interviews with the team. School leaders acknowledged that this practice is not regularly monitored. Teacher feedback on student work posted on bulletin boards primarily indicated correct and incorrect answers and provided students with a grade that was consistent with the work samples students shared during interviews. While the team saw rubrics attached to lesson plans, students shared that only some of their work is graded using a rubric, and they said that they are rarely provided with information about how they can improve their work, especially in writing.

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

- **Parents and students would like the school to provide more after-school activities.** While the school offers numerous non-academic student activities, parents reported that they would like the school to offer students more opportunities for academically focused activities, such as writing workshops, to challenge their children. In addition, parents shared that they would like the school to provide more activities such as athletics to build student morale and school spirit. Students said that they would like to participate in clubs after school that would enable them to display their talents, such as a drama club.

- **Parents would like the school to provide their children with more equitable access to resources.** Parents acknowledged that the school is making efforts to secure additional technology resources and accommodate the needs of all students but expressed a desire for their children to have more access to technology and smaller class sizes, similar to other surrounding schools. In addition, parents shared that they would like the school to improve the quality of instructional materials and books.
- **Parents would like more access to social-emotional learning support for their children.** Parents stated that the school leaders and counselors are accessible and responsive but said that they would like their children to have more access to mental health support. Parents reported that their children attended an assembly at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year in which motivational speaker addressed students and encouraged positive behavior and perseverance. However, parents expressed the view that behavioral expectations should be regularly reinforced throughout the school year.
- **Students would like their teachers to prioritize making contacts with parents for positive reasons.** Students stated that their teachers regularly communicate with their parents using technology applications and their parents can access their grades online. However, students shared that their teachers usually make personal contact with their parents only about behavioral or academic challenges. The school leader reported that while teachers are expected to contact parents, the reasons for the contacts are not monitored.
- **Students and teachers would like the school to offer more field trip opportunities.** While the school leaders provided examples of field trips that provided outside learning opportunities in the areas of social studies, science, the arts, and a math competition, both students and teachers expressed a desire for the school to provide additional academically focused field trips. A grade eight student showed the IIT a petition that is circulating among students to secure the opportunity to take a trip to a science museum. During teacher interviews, the team learned of field trip ideas that teachers are interesting in pursuing that they believe will enhance the learning experience for students.
- **Teachers would like a more systematic approach to behavioral expectations and consequences.** Teachers shared that consequences for student behavior are sometimes inequitable across classrooms, and they said that clarity around disciplinary procedures would be helpful. Interviewed students confirmed that teacher expectations regarding behavior and consequences vary by teacher. Teachers also stated that although they have instituted student detention to decrease the number of referrals to the office, student data related to this practice are not monitored.