New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity
.gov

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report

Leadership and Systems

Curriculum

Instruction

Social-Emotional Learning

Family Engagement

BEDS Code	580512030016
School Name	North Middle School
School Address	350 Wicks Rd, Brentwood, NY 11717
District Name	Brentwood Union Free School District
Principal	Matthew Gengler
Dates of Visit	March 12 – 14, 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:

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	4	1	4

North Middle School serves 1162 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 50 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 15 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, teacher feedback, and student work.
- One IIT member was absent from the review on day two due to illness.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. For the 2018-19 academic year, school leaders organized the master schedule to enable the teachers who deliver academic intervention services (AIS) to a given student cohort to also teach that same student group in English language arts (ELA). As a result, these teachers are now aware of the specific learning needs of individual students in both areas, making extra collaboration between AIS and ELA teachers unnecessary.

2. The principal and assistant principal have adjusted the response to intervention (RTI) schedule so that the timing of support activities is rotated within student schedules. This means that students will no longer forfeit in-class instruction time or their lunch periods to receive the additional academic supports they need.

3. The successful BOOKtober reading competition, held in the fall of 2018, has spurred gains in student independent reading. As part of the competition, students in grades six, seven, and eight competed to see which class could read the most books during the month of October. Students were required to write informational summaries, reviewed by educators, for each book read. The program coincided with an increase in the number of books, over 300, that students checked out of the school library that month. School leaders and staff are currently planning to hold another reading competition in April or May 2019.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The school should restructure the school improvement team to maximize its impact on improving school practices.** The IIT learned through interviews with teachers and the principal that, as currently structured, the school improvement team has had little success in moving school improvement initiatives forward and addressing school priorities. Teachers said attendance at meetings was irregular, making it difficult to have meaningful discussions, to vote, or to get consensus on potential initiatives. The principal agreed that it was difficult to attain regular member attendance at meetings. Teachers shared with the IIT that they felt that attendance was low because not all committee agenda items are relevant to all the members. Both teachers and the principal suggested a restructuring of the school improvement team that involved breaking the group into subcommittees that would only meet to discuss matters relevant to those groups.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should develop structures to support teachers in the planning and delivery of data-driven instruction.** School leaders have prioritized the use of data to inform instruction, but there are few systems in place to help teachers to identify and interpret available data to inform lesson planning and instruction. There are several sources that teachers could use to obtain student performance data, including assessment data, student grades, formal and informal checks for understanding and the web-based Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS) program. However, the IIT learned from teachers that many are unsure how to disaggregate the information and apply their findings to curriculum and lesson planning. Through classroom observations, the team found that few teachers are using data to differentiate instruction to match the learning needs of the students.   In some classes observed by the IIT, students engaged in group work and collaborative learning, but these groups were not created using student growth or achievement data. Instead, the team

learned through classroom observations and teacher and student interviews that most grouping decisions were based on whether students had worked together before or as a way to manage student behavior and organize the arrangement of classroom seating. The school leaders should provide staff with professional development (PD) so that they know how to find and interpret student performance data that can be used to inform the work planned and the grouping of students so that students are being given learning activities that are well matched to their ability. This effort can be further supported in grade-level and department meetings, by allowing teams of teachers to plan lessons and work through student data along with their peers while being supported by school leaders.

- **The principal and assistant principal of curriculum and instruction should prioritize time for informal classroom walkthroughs.** Through interviews with school leaders and teachers, the team learned that classroom walkthroughs are not regularly completed and written or verbal feedback to teachers about the implementation of key teaching and learning strategies or the quality of their instruction is not typically provided. During joint classroom observations with the OEE, the principal saw little evidence of teachers implementing strategies and techniques in the classroom that they had learned through professional development. In the school's self-assessment, school leaders noted that as a result of the teacher training, visitors to the classrooms would see examples of reciprocal reading, SMART goals, student choice, and what the school described simply as best practices. However, during classroom observations, the team saw little evidence of these programs or strategies in practice. For example, while the team did observe some teachers using timers to support pacing, with one teacher using whiteboards to gather student responses and check for understanding, these were not schoolwide practices. Goals were written and posted in several rooms, but there was no evidence to show that goals were being used consistently across the school. During student interviews, few students could speak to the purpose of their own goals or the process to attain them. Students also noted that few lessons or assignments included student choice. One teacher gave students the choice of completing an assignment by drawing rather than writing. Aside from that example, the team observed no other classrooms in which students were provided with choices. Reciprocal reading strategies were not evident in any classroom observation. The principal acknowledged that this is most likely due to a lack of monitoring through frequent informal observations. Both the principal and assistant principal stated they recognize the need to get into classrooms more frequently to rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and provide constructive feedback to teachers, but both find that they are often pulled away to handle disciplinary or logistical matters that take up much of their time. School leaders also noted that having more purposeful teacher-led grade-level and department meetings could allow teachers to better plan ways in which specific teaching strategies or school initiatives could best be implemented.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should plan and deliver lessons that encourage students to think deeply about the content or encourage student debate.** During classroom observations, the team saw teacher-led lessons that required students to focus quietly on the teacher's lecture or presentation. Teachers were typically observed relaying objective information to students through lecture and then asking questions on a given topic and awaiting student answers. The questions did not typically require students to think beyond simple recall or memorization. Most classes had students raising their hands to speak and it was not uncommon for the same hands to be raised during these question-and-answer sessions. In such instances, students who did not have their hands up simply waited for the answers to be provided by their fellow classmates. Once an answer was

verified by the teacher, students then simply copied those answers down in a graphic organizer or on a worksheet. On many occasions, team members observed questions asked that could not be answered correctly by any student in the class. Instead of asking students to refer to the text or encouraging students to discuss and debate possible answers to these questions, the teacher typically answered his or her own question, which the class then copied down.

- **Teachers should plan classroom activities and tasks that engage students in their learning.** The IIT observed many classes with students on task and partaking in the directed lesson or activity. However, in most instances, students participated in daily instruction, but showed little interest or engagement in the lessons. Team members noted that most observed activities required little critical thinking from students and did not lead to higher order written or verbal responses or independently synthesized student products. The IIT observed few opportunities for student choice regarding how students preferred to learn, gather information, or engage in the lesson. In most classes, all students were given the same worksheets or classwork and were expected to interact with it in the same way.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents would like information about student progress shared in ways all parents can access.** Parents stated that in the 2018-19 school year the district stopped mailing report cards and progress reports home and instead began posting student reports via the online portal system, eSchoolData. For various reasons, many families were unable to log on or did not know to access the portal system and were therefore unable to access their children's grades and interim progress information. While the district later reinstated the mailing of report cards in response to parent complaints, progress reports remain accessible only through the eSchoolData portal.

- **Teachers would like student progress reports to generate important home-school conversations.** Teachers said the new district system for communicating progress report information to parents restricts valuable conversations between teachers and family members. Teachers told the team that the new system adopted by the district for distributing progress reports has reduced the number of parents who are reaching out to teachers. In the past, with mailed reports, parents with students who were underperforming would often contact teachers to see what their children could do to raise their grades. Teachers stated that parents now rarely respond at all when progress reports are posted.

- **Teachers would like more feedback on their implementation of various instructional initiatives promoted by district and school leaders.** The IIT learned from staff and teacher interviews, school leader interviews, and a review of the school self-assessment document, that teachers have received training for a number of programs, initiatives, and strategies. While many teachers said that they initially worked to implement these initiatives into their lessons, few have had school leaders visit their classrooms to observe their practice and offer feedback on the strengths of their implementation or to identify any areas for improvement. Teachers shared with the team that they need further guidance and support from school leaders to help them improve their professional practice.

- **Students would like to be challenged by their learning assignments and lessons.** Students told the team that they feel the work they are asked to complete is too easy and often boring. They shared that they often do little more than copy down work or fill in worksheets as directed by teachers. They would like more interesting assignments that are better matched to their learning needs.