

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	190301040001
School Name	Cairo-Durham Elementary School
School Address	424 Main Street, Cairo, NY 12413
District Name	Cairo-Durham Central School District
Principal	Christopher Stein
Dates of Visit	April 16-18, 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	2

Cairo-Durham Elementary School serves 592 students in pre-kindergarten to grade five.

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 district consultant.
- The team visited a total of 39 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 11 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.
- In advance of the visit, 38 staff members (79 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 school leaders acquired the services of a school resource officer who has established a school safety patrol made up of students in grade five. Students reported that they felt that this has provided them with the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the school community. Teachers reported that they have noticed some improvements in student behavior in the hallways, and the principal provided the IIT with evidence from incident logs showing that there has been a significant reduction in hallway incidents since the introduction of the school resource officer and the safety patrol.
2. This school year, the school leaders added several new features to their zone room strategy to help students de-escalate their behavior, including social-emotional learning sessions. Students reported that they found the color-coded system helped them to manage their behavior and reduce stress levels. School leaders reported that there has been a reduction in the number of referrals to the school office and the in-school suspension room this year, as teachers are now using the zone room more frequently to manage student classroom behavior.
3. The student council has been strengthened this year and two new teachers have taken on the job of supporting this new structure. There have been several successful events, such as the Snow Ball, which was entirely organized by the students. Students reported that the student council has increased their contribution to the school community. Teachers reported that students who are class representatives have shown growth in their confidence and levels of responsibility since they have become part of the council.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders need to ensure that school data can be accessed and used to identify individual and groups of students in need of academic supports and interventions.** Teachers reported that they have not been able to access the data from the first two benchmark periods so that they can develop appropriate interventions for students. They reported that the system was changed at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, and they have not yet been trained to use the new system. School leaders reported that teachers are now accessing some of the information. The IIT did not observe any data being used to adjust planning at the classroom level or any specific groups of students that had had been identified as needing additional support.
- **The school leaders should establish a comprehensive response to intervention (RtI) process.** The team learned that the school's approach to intervention services, including eligibility criteria and collaboration on explicit instruction between special education and general education teachers, has not ensured that all students receive needed supports. Teachers reported that there is little communication between special education staff and general education teachers and that, many times, general education teachers do not know what supports students need when they are returned to class. They also reported that the eligibility criteria identified by the district were not being implemented in the school. The IIT observed that the quality of instruction in some academic intervention service (AIS) sessions for mathematics, in which students had been withdrawn from their class for instruction, did not provide students with the support they needed to accelerate their learning and close the gap in their knowledge and mathematical skills.

- **School leaders must ensure that teachers plan specially designed instruction to provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum.** The IIT observed that, in many classrooms, students were not provided with explicit and specially designed instruction so that they could make progress in the school curricula. The IIT also observed that lessons did not typically incorporate teaching assistants, support staff, and aides to ensure that students with disabilities had the extra support needed during general education classes. Teachers reported they were provided with inadequate time to plan instruction and strategies with aides and support staff to ensure that all students, including those with special needs, worked on tasks that were well matched to their specific needs and prior learning.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders will need to communicate clear expectations to teachers for the content and quality of lesson planning.** The principal reported that teachers' planning had not been monitored and that explicit expectations for lesson plans had not been shared with teachers. The IIT noted great variation in the quality of lessons, and in some classrooms, there did not appear to be a clear plan for the structuring and delivery of lessons. For example, few lessons included opening activities to inform students of lesson content and key skills, such as discussing learning objectives. In none of the visited classrooms was the lesson closed with a culminating activity, such as a formative assessment, discussion, student reflection, or referring back to the purpose of the lesson.
- **School leaders should carry out systematic, frequent visits to classrooms to assess the quality of instruction and provide teachers with feedback.** The principal reported that formal evaluations had been carried out for some teachers, but regular, informal, non-evaluative visits to classrooms to ensure that all teachers are delivering high quality lessons had not been conducted. The principal also reported that his expectations for instruction had not been communicated to teachers. Some interviewed teachers reported that their classroom had been visited by school leaders once this school year, and others said they had not been visited. Teachers confirmed that they receive feedback following formal evaluation visits by leaders but added that typically this feedback has not been helpful in improving their instructional practice. In the future, school leaders should schedule regular weekly classroom visits to monitor the quality of instruction in all classes and provide teachers with specific feedback to improve their instructional practices.
- **School leaders should establish a system to ensure that professional development and training is translated into effective classroom practices.** Teachers interviewed by the IIT reported that they had received no follow up support to the training sessions provided at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. They also reported that the sessions were not always helpful or relevant to their needs. The IIT observed that many of the practices that school leaders had said visitors to the school would see implemented in classrooms were not in place. For example, elements of the phonics training, such as planning for primary grade students to do word studies, were observed in only a few classrooms.
- **School leaders will need to ensure that the curriculum is aligned both horizontally and vertically across all grades.** The principal reported that some progress had been made in aligning the curriculum horizontally within grade levels, as required by the district. The team also learned that the curriculum had not yet been aligned vertically, so that learning builds progressively as students move up in each grade level. The principal told the IIT that school leaders had been unable to provide teachers with the planning time required to

complete curriculum plans. In the future, school leaders should work with teachers to ensure that curricula are aligned to learning standards both horizontally within grade levels and vertically schoolwide.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should plan extension activities that build on what students have already learned.** The IIT observed that in many lessons, students were not provided with opportunities to learn at different rates. Typically, all students were expected to complete the same task. Interviewed students reported that if they finish their work before the end of the lesson, they often do not have additional work to complete. Some students reported that they do not find the work they are given challenging and generally finish assignments quickly. In the future, teachers should ensure that they provide appropriately challenging extension work that is linked to the main lesson objectives for students who have completed the main lesson tasks.
- **Teachers need to plan lessons that provide students with opportunities to develop their higher-level thinking skills.** The IIT observed that in nearly all lessons, students were asked to reproduce information rather than to interpret it, draw conclusions, make inferences, or support their opinions. For example, worksheets with blanks that students fill in from a word bank at the top of the paper were often used. Probing questions that encouraged students to think deeply about the material they were studying were not often asked. Occasionally, as in one English language arts (ELA) lesson, students were encouraged to think about subjects for a debate they would be holding later by asking open-ended questions. However, this practice was rare, and most questions were closed, low-level, and only required one-word answers.
- **Teachers should structure lessons to make effective use of instructional time.** The IIT observed several lessons in which the lesson started several minutes after the beginning of class, and once started, the pace of the lesson was slow, students lost interest, and instructional time was lost because of issues with classroom management. In other lessons, a clear lesson structure was not evident. For example, the IIT observed that few lessons included a closing activity to provide time for a lesson summary and for students to reflect on the purpose of their learning. In some observed lessons, irrelevant or non-essential information was introduced, which led to some students becoming confused and slowed learning for all students in the class.
- **Teachers should use a schoolwide common language and consistent approach to develop students' social and emotional learning.** The IIT observed that many valuable opportunities for developing students' core social and emotional competencies were missed. For example, the IIT observed that some morning meetings were used to give out notices, complete homework, or practice basic mathematics skills, rather than focusing on the key character objectives identified in the school's positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) chart. Interviewed teachers reported that no clear direction had been given to staff about how they should implement the PBIS expectations.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents would like their children to get the support they need in class.** Several parents shared that their children have special needs, but despite several requests for support, the needs had not yet been addressed. Some students with disabilities confirmed that they sometimes do not understand the work classroom teachers give them and need more support to complete assigned tasks.

- **Parents, teachers, and students reported that student behavior in some classes disrupts lessons.** Teachers stated that a small group of students displays challenging behaviors, mainly in the primary grades, which sometimes disrupts learning.
- **Parents, teachers, and students would like more opportunities to discuss school improvements with the school leaders.** Interviewed parents stated that school leaders are often unavailable and do not always address their concerns. Teachers also reported that school leaders do not always respond quickly, or at all, to their inquiries and suggestions. Members of the student council reported that they have not yet had an opportunity to meet with the principal this year to share several ideas for improving the school, some of which they shared with the IIT.
- **Students, teachers, and parents reported several concerns about the management of recess and lunchtime.** Students reported that it takes so long to get into the cafeteria that some students at the end of the line do not have time to eat their lunch. Students also reported that fights sometimes occur during recess, which are not always dealt with by staff quickly. Interviewed teachers confirmed that recess is a problem area and said that school leaders should be present more often during recess to reduce incidents. Parents added that they believe staff should provide more supervision of children during lunchtimes.
- **Parents and some students would like the school to provide extension activities to address students' higher order learning needs.** One parent commented that teachers had not challenged her child sufficiently with the provided coursework. This was confirmed by other interviewed parents who also added that they thought some of the work given to their children was provided to simply fill time. Many interviewed students shared that they often do not find the work they are given challenging and that they are frequently bored.