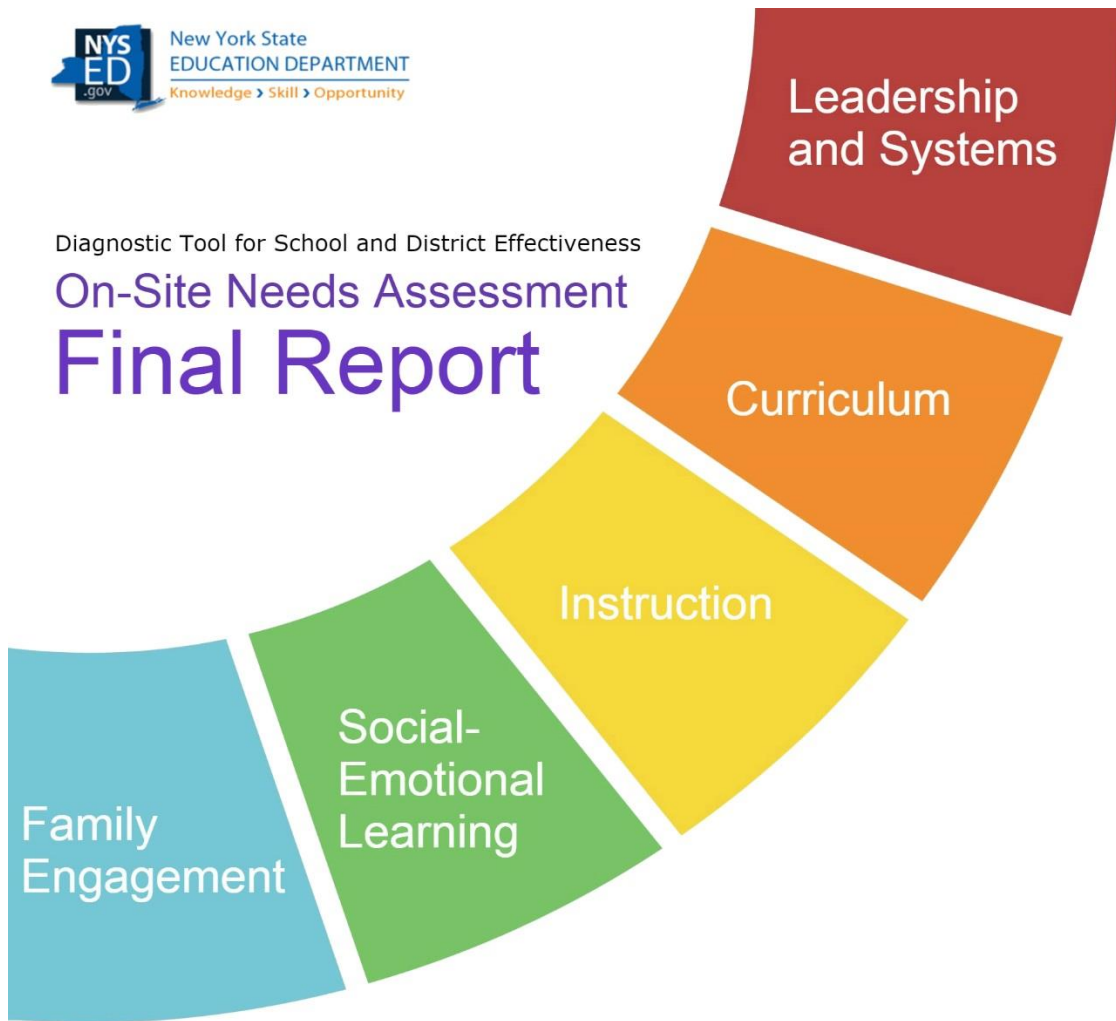


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	211003040004
School Name	Dolgeville Middle School
School Address	38 Slawson Street, Dolgeville, NY 13329
District Name	Dolgeville Central School District
Principal	Ruth Leavitt
Dates of Visit	May 14-16, 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
2	1	1		1	4

Dolgeville Middle School serves 281 students in grades five 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, who was the school principal.
- The team visited a total of 19 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited eight 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, 29 staff members (74 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 introduced reading sessions in grades five and six. In these sessions, students are grouped according to their reading levels and given texts that match their reading skills. The principal reported that teachers conducted baseline assessments in September 2018 and further assessments in February and May 2019, and students have been moved from group to group as their reading skills have improved. According to the assessment data reviewed by the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT), many students have made gains, and teachers are closing gaps in students' reading skills.
2. The principal reported that during the 2018-19 school year, she has worked with an outside agency to introduce the Treaty Program to boost attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. This program has helped the principal and teachers to increase the average daily attendance to above 95 percent and reduce chronic absenteeism to less than ten percent.
3. The principal introduced an incentive program called All Stars at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. This award is linked to the school character objectives, which are "dream big," "make the right choices," and "succeed through hard work." The principal told the team that students chosen as the monthly All Stars have their photographs displayed on the middle school bulletin boards, and certificates are given out at an awards assembly. Students reported that the program has motivated them to emulate the school character objectives.
4. In an effort to prepare students for the move to grade seven, the principal relocated the grade six breakfast from the elementary school cafeteria to the high school cafeteria at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. Students and teachers reported that this has had a positive effect on student behavior at breakfast, as grade six students now feel more responsible for their actions. Teachers also reported that the move has also had a positive effect in the elementary school cafeteria, as there is now less crowding. The team observed that the cafeteria seemed a well-ordered environment during the breakfast session.
5. During the current school year, teachers have provided students with a wide range of field trips. The objective of these trips is to provide students with a better understanding of the world at large and to experience a number of places they might not visit with their families. For example, students went on a canoe trip and shared that they had never cooked over a campfire before. Other experiences included a trip to the Gettysburg National Military Park and the Freedom Trail in Boston. Students reported that these trips were fun experiences and that the trips helped them gain insights into the world they otherwise would not have had.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should use the school's established systems to collect and analyze data to inform decisions for school improvement.** The team learned that the principal has put in place systems for tracking student attendance, academic progress, office behavior referrals, and student suspensions. The principal reported that she has analyzed some of this information, but the results need to be used to make school improvement decisions. For example, behavioral referral information needs to be analyzed to identify which teachers make the most referrals and why, so that the school leaders can determine what needs to be done to reduce the number of referrals.

- **The principal needs to monitor the identified priority areas to ensure they are implemented with fidelity schoolwide.** The principal reported that she identified key priorities at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. These include implementing the *Leader in Me* social-emotional learning program in grades five and six, developing students' grasp of vocabulary, creating curriculum maps for core subjects, and improving communication among staff. She noted that meetings and administrative activities have minimized the time she has available to spend on monitoring the implementation of priority areas. The team learned that the principal has been spending approximately seven hours a week preparing for and attending district and other meetings, some of which are concerned with the budget deficit facing the district. Some teachers the IIT interviewed reported, for example, that they had not received feedback on how well they were implementing the professional development (PD) that was linked to the principal's priorities, such as the *Leader in Me* program.
- **The principal should identify ways in which certain responsibilities can be delegated to staff so that all the school's current priorities are implemented and monitored effectively.** Interviewed teachers reported that they respect the leadership of the principal. However, they noted the need for monitoring certain aspects of the school's priorities more closely, such as including instruction related to vocabulary in lessons on a daily basis and creating curriculum maps for core subjects. They also indicated that it is sometimes difficult to reach the school leaders and receive a response to messages in a timely manner. The principal told the team that she has many demands on her time and that she finds it difficult to identify those tasks that can be delegated to others because the school has not developed a system for delegation of tasks and responsibilities.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal needs to conduct regular classroom visits and provide teachers with targeted feedback on their instructional strategies.** Interviewed teachers reported that they had received one formal evaluation observation thus far during the 2018-19 school year and that there was a need for specific guidance on how to improve their instruction. For example, teachers said that the feedback was often in the form of general questions rather than specific actions they could take to improve their instructional practice. The principal told the team that she had planned to visit classrooms on a more regular basis throughout the school year; however, this had been difficult to accomplish because meetings and other duties minimized the time allocated for these visits. Several interviewed teachers expressed the desire to receive some positive comments on their teaching but noted that they were not certain about the principal's expectations for instructional practice.
- **The principal should communicate clear expectations for the content and quality of lesson planning to all teachers on a regular basis.** The principal indicated that she had not reviewed teachers' planning or observed teachers implementing the plans in their classrooms because of other demands on her time. Teachers the IIT interviewed reported that they were not aware of schoolwide expectations for lesson planning, and they have continued to plan as they had in the past, using plan books or calendars. Some teachers also reported they were using plans they had created a number of years ago. The team did not see any written lesson plans in classrooms but observed that some teachers had plan books that identified the topic of the lesson.
- **The principal should work with the school community to further develop the vision for the middle school as a distinct entity within the district.** The principal reported that although the middle school has been in existence for a number of years, it is physically divided between the elementary building (grades five and six) and the high school building (grades seven and eight), so that it is effectively divided in two. Interviewed teachers reported that they feel more integrated into the building in which they are located, rather than to the

middle school as a whole. The team observed that grades five and six followed the elementary school schedule while grades seven and eight followed the high school schedule. Interviewed parents reported that the middle school appears divided and that the two halves have different expectations. Going forward, the principal should work with staff, parents, students, and district leaders to further develop the identity of the middle school as separate entity.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should ensure that the curriculum connects effectively with what students have learned previously and what comes next.** The principal reported that one of the priorities for the current school year had been to create curriculum maps for core subjects. However, she reported that the maps had not yet been completed because there had been insufficient time allocated to curriculum development in planning meetings. Teachers reported that there is minimal communication with grade four teachers in the elementary school and with grade nine teachers in the high school and that they do not know what curricular material students had covered in the elementary school. A parent reported, for example, that her child had covered the life cycle of a frog several times during her time in grades one through four. Teachers noted that they have a better idea of what is expected in grade nine, as some of the staff in the high school also teach classes in the middle school. The principal noted that the curriculum is in need of overall continuity and vertical alignment across all three schools.
- **Teachers should provide more opportunities for students to conduct discussions and work collaboratively so that they can take ownership of their learning.** The team observed in class visits that most lessons were teacher-led, and students had few opportunities to work together collaboratively. Few observed teachers used prompts and questions that resulted in students being actively engaged in discussions with each other or the teacher. Going forward, teachers should establish strategies that create a learning environment that allows students opportunities to work together collaboratively and to engage in extended and sustained discussions.
- **All teachers should use ongoing assessments to check for students' understanding of what they are learning.** In most of the lessons the team observed, teachers did not regularly check whether students understood the material or the main objective of the lesson. Interviewed students reported that they do not always understand the lesson and do not always have an opportunity to ask questions. Some teachers reported that they do not regularly integrate assessments throughout the lesson to check for understanding or note gaps in student learning.
- **Teachers and school leaders should make increased use of the *Leader in Me* program adopted by the school to provide students with more opportunities to develop their social-emotional learning skills.** The principal reported that at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, teachers in grades five and six had received PD in the *Leader in Me* social-emotional learning program. The team observed that few teachers were reinforcing the program in their lessons by, for example, reminding students to begin their work with the outcome or “end in mind” (habit two). The team learned that support staff, such as lunchtime monitors, had not received the training, so they were unaware of the seven key habits that the program promotes. Students in grades five and six were able to recall some of the seven habits but reported they had not been reminded of them recently.
- **Teachers should create more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning and become more self-directed.** The team observed that students were provided with limited opportunities to take the initiative in their learning. In most observed lessons, students were given tasks from packets to complete, but there were few opportunities to research or devise their own tasks based on the lesson materials. Even when

students were researching a topic, such as ancient Greece, they were given little opportunity to decide on their own particular research topic. Interviewed students reported they would be more engaged if they had more “hands-on” activities and research projects.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents reported that they would like more information about how they can support their children’s education.** Some parents noted that a newsletter would be helpful for informing parents about upcoming projects and lesson outlines.
- **Parents reported that they think their children need to develop their study skills.** Parents suggested that teachers incorporate more study skills into their lesson planning.
- **Teachers reported that they do not always receive important information and that the physical division of the middle school makes effective communication more difficult.** Teachers said that it is difficult for teachers in the two halves of the school to meet and communicate because they do not have a faculty lounge or central meeting place. They also suggested that some social engagement between the staff of the two halves might be helpful so that they get to know each other better.
- **Students shared that they would like more time in their lessons to improve their study skills.** They said they would especially benefit from “thinking time” to better allow them to absorb the content of the lesson.
- **Students reported that they would like to know how to interpret teachers’ words and crystalize them into notes.** Students reported that sometimes they do not understand some of the vocabulary words posted in the classroom.
- **Students reported that they would like to be reminded about what services are offered by the counselors and who to go to if they have issues.** Interviewed students said they are sometimes reluctant to talk about issues they are facing because they are not sure who they should go to.