

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	660409020003
School Name	Alexander Hamilton Junior-Senior High School
School Address	98 South Goodwin Ave, Elmsford, NY 10523
District Name	Elmsford Union Free School District
Principal	Joseph D. Engelhardt
Dates of Visit	May 7-9, 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:

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	4	3	4	1	4	1

Alexander Hamilton Junior-Senior High School serves 450 students from grades seven through 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, and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 51 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 14 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.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 18 staff members (40 percent) completed.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal reorganized the use of space within the school for the 2018-2019 school year so that all grade seven classes are now held in one hall, and all grade eight classes are held in another hall within the school. These halls are separate from the space in the school where grades nine through twelve classes are held. The principal, teachers, and students reported that holding grade seven and eight classes in dedicated halls has been beneficial for the learning of these students and has reduced the number of disciplinary incidents in the hallways. Teachers noted that transitions between classes are now smooth and quick, and instructional time has been increased.
2. The principal and the grade eight teacher team used student progress and achievement data from the first two marking periods of the 2018-2019 school year to reassign students to different classes in the middle of the year. Students who needed additional support, based on performance from the beginning of the year, were placed in smaller classes, often with two teachers. The principal and teachers reported that these additional supports have allowed students who had been struggling with content at the beginning of the year to cover the same material as their peers in other classes. The IIT observed, for example, a science class that included two teachers and 12 students who were engaged in a well-scaffolded, rigorous lesson about the celestial sphere, which included a hands-component.
3. During the 2018-19 school year, the principal created student work and study space within the school, where students can work quietly and independently at the beginning and end of the school day, as well as at lunchtime. These spaces include the cafeteria, when lunch is not being served, benches outside the school, weather permitting, and selected classroom space. The IIT observed students using these spaces productively for the completion of work. Students reported that they valued the space and time to work on class assignments and homework, to read independently, and to have quiet time for themselves.

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

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal and the Leadership Team should develop systems to measure the impact of programs and key initiatives in the school.** The IIT found that the school needs to develop specific goals for school improvement programs and initiatives, with benchmarks and monitoring tools to assess the fidelity of their implementation or impact during the school year. The principal noted the need to establish explicit instructional goals for the school, and with the Leadership Team, to systematically monitor progress toward meeting these goals, making mid-course corrections as needed.
- **The school leadership needs to develop and implement systems and procedures for communicating to teachers once students have been referred for support services.** The IIT found that the school has multiple staff members who provide students with social and emotional support, including two full-time guidance counselors, a psychologist, and two administrators who also support students with particular needs. In addition, the school works with an outside agency to provide counseling services. The team learned that teachers are able to make referrals to guidance counselors; however, this is done informally, and there is no protocol in place for making these referrals. Teachers reported to the IIT that when they have referred a

student for guidance, they do not receive feedback or information regarding what progress the student has made. Teachers noted the need to be informed about services students may be receiving and how they might expect these services to impact classroom behavior and support academic performance.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal will need to meet with the Leadership Team and teacher leaders, such as the Lighthouse Team, to create an agenda and schedule of meetings to improve teachers' instructional practices and student learning for the 2019-20 school year.** The IIT learned that during the 2018-2019 school year, the school had not developed and shared an instructional vision or specific pedagogical goals for staff. While school leadership conducted formal observations, teachers and school leaders noted the need for regular, informal Learning Walks and targeted feedback to teachers. The IIT found that to improve student learning, the school needs to focus on several areas to improve student learning, such as emphasizing consistently high expectations for schoolwide pedagogical practices and providing exemplars of these practices, which are shared and promoted throughout the coming school year. These practices could include developing student friendly learning targets; pre-planning higher-order thinking questions; providing better and more frequent opportunities for peer-to-peer conversations and discussions about content; and ensuring that there are ongoing checks for student understanding. School leaders also noted the importance of classroom inter-visitations, modeling, and other opportunities, which are designed for teachers to observe best practices in action.
- **The principal should meet regularly with the assistant principal to review the goals and benchmarks that they set for themselves as a leadership team for the 2019-20 school year.** During the 2018-2019 school year, although the school leaders had multiple roles, regular meetings were not scheduled to discuss and review these roles and the progress that was made. The IIT found that in some cases, the principal and the assistant principal were not certain of steps the other had taken in carrying out specific tasks. During the 2019-20 school year, the principal and assistant principal should consider holding weekly meetings to assess whether the distribution of leadership roles has been working effectively to address the instructional, social- emotional, and management needs of the school and its students. If changes are warranted to maximize the strengths of team members and increase effectiveness, these changes should be discussed and implemented, as appropriate.
- **The principal will need to work with the assistant principal to develop a common Learning Walk protocol that they implement consistently throughout the 2019-20 school year.** The IIT found that the school did not use a common Learning Walk protocol during the 2018-2019 school year. A few informal Learning Walks were conducted over the course of the school year, and some general feedback was provided. Beginning in 2019-20, a Learning Walk protocol should be developed to reflect the essential component on which the school leaders will focus each month. It should specify what type of feedback will be provided and how it will be delivered. In addition, the school should consider developing a menu of where and how teachers can get support with the elements of an effective lesson, sharing it with teachers at the beginning of the year. It could include, for example, the school's already-existing "Pineapple Chart," where teachers can volunteer to showcase practices in their classroom. The Leadership Team should follow up with teachers after the Learning Walks are conducted to see how they are progressing with implementing the suggestions made by the school leaders.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should increase opportunities for student engagement and ownership of their learning.** The IIT observed that although students in all classes were on task and compliant in completing work packets or other assignments, opportunities for active student engagement were limited. In most classes, questions were low-level and required only brief answers, with few opportunities for student discussion. In several classes the IIT visited, the teacher asked a question and accepted one solution. Discussion about whether a problem could have been solved in a different way was limited. In some classes, the materials that were being presented might have been used for meaningful student conversations, but these opportunities were often not pursued. In one class, for example, students were studying how different ethnic groups had been discriminated against at different points in history; however, students were not specifically encouraged to make connections to what is happening in the world today or to their own lives.
- **Teachers will need to develop differentiated tasks and scaffolding to address the learning needs of all students.** The IIT observed that while students in many classes were sitting in groups, in some cases, the students could not articulate how and why the groups were formed. The team did not find evidence to indicate that data was used to form groups. The IIT observed that differentiation in the work that various groups were doing was needed as well as student interaction and discussion. In one classroom that included special education students and English language learners (ELLs), all students engaged in the same assignments with little to no modifications and/or adaptations for the diverse learners in the class.
- **School leaders and teachers should support and encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning through setting goals and documenting their work and growth over time.** During discussions, the IIT found that students often did not know how well they were doing academically in a particular class or in some cases, in school, overall. Students told the IIT that some teachers provided a rubric for assignments and graded student work using that rubric, but others did not. In a few classes, the IIT observed that students were encouraged to go to their computer to check their grades and then the teacher and student had a brief conversation about the student's work and what the student needed to do next. However, this was not typical in most classes. In Honors classes and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, on the other hand, Google Classroom was routinely used for students to submit work and receive feedback from the teacher. In these advanced classes, the documentation of the evolution of the student's work in Google Classroom served, in effect, as a portfolio of a student's growth and progress. However, the IIT did not find this type of documentation in most other classes, and some teachers indicated that they did not routinely engage students in setting goals.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Teachers and students indicated that they would like more frequent and more advanced notice about activities that are happening during the school day.** Although there is a school website that includes some of this information and an electronic notice board lists events in the foyer of the school, students noted that the information listed in not always complete and current. Students stated that they would appreciate regular email or text alerts that they could access on their cell phones.
- **Students reported that they would like more after school opportunities.** Students indicated that there were sports activities available after school at different times of the year and that many students participated in

them. They shared that they appreciated options such as the drama club, the Raiders games, and the community service volunteer opportunities. They noted, however, that they would like a greater range of choices. One student suggested, for example, that he would like the school to organize a discussion group where you could talk about what was going on in your life.

- **Teachers indicated that they would like better opportunities for vertical communication and articulation between the grades.** They suggested that these conversations could take place within department meetings to discuss subject content across grades but stated that time should also be built into the schedule to discuss students and their needs as they move from grade to grade.