

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	590501060002
School Name	Fallsburg Junior Senior High School
School Address	115 Brickman Road, Fallsburg, NY 12733
District Name	Fallsburg Central School District
Principal	Dalila Serrano
Dates of Visit	February 20-22, 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	4

High School Performance Indicators

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	2	2	3	1	2	1

Fallsburg Junior-Senior High School serves 619 students in grades seven to 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 27 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 6 classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with 12 students, 10 staff, and 4 parents.

- Team members examined documents provided by the school, including lesson plans, teacher-prepared instructional documents, professional texts, teacher feedback, school policies, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 32 staff members (60 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- On day one of the visit, the school closed early due to inclement weather conditions. As a result of the early dismissal, the IIT conducted no classroom visits due to an abbreviated class schedule that shortened periods to 16 minutes each. On day two of the visit, the school started two hours late due to inclement weather. As a result of the late arrival, the IIT conducted the principal interview by phone, which provided the team additional time for classroom visits and parent, student, and staff interviews.
- The school is currently led by an interim principal who has been in position for six months. The status of the interim principal's position is uncertain as contracts have been awarded in three month increments since August 2018. At the time of the visit, district representatives were in the process of interviewing principal candidates and had not yet selected a permanent replacement.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. An English language arts academic intervention services (ELA-AIS) class was created during the 2018-19 school year to provide academic support for students who had not yet passed the ELA Regents exam. Of the 18 students in the class, ten students comprising 55 percent of the class passed the Regents exam in January 2019.
2. School leaders and staff directed a renewed focus on the school's positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) program during the 2018-19 school year. School staff reported that this focus has resulted in improved behavior and more positive relationships between students. For example, school data from the same time period in the 2017-18 school year showed that discipline referrals decreased by over 100 referrals and there were fewer student absences.
3. The interim principal has spearheaded a newcomer's program for students who have been in the country for six month or less. The program provides English language learner (ELL) students with added supports to help them to learn English and access academic content.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The school should develop systems and build staff capacity to ensure progress is made towards achieving the current School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) goals and towards implementing the most recent DTSDE recommendations.** The school is currently without a permanent principal. The interim principal is in a state of flux and has been assigned rolling contracts in three-month increments since August 2018. This has made it difficult for her to make plans, set expectations, and maintain a respected presence as the leader of the school. The principal stated her main priorities were to learn the new systems, such as the Marshall teacher evaluation tool, SchoolTool, the student information system, and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) student assessment tool used by the district. As a result, little time has been dedicated to schoolwide improvement efforts, such as redirecting instructional practices. In the future, the principal should use teacher leaders to build capacity and to help implement and progress monitor the goals and recommendations for improvement as outlined in the SCEP and DTSDE reports.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should schedule regular collaborative planning time for teachers.** Teachers shared that they would like more dedicated time to meet with subject area team members to share ideas and instructional strategies but are limited by the constraints of the school schedule. The assistant superintendent shared with the IIT that there are funds available through the School Improvement Grant (SIG) budget that would allow for teachers to meet before or after school. The interim principal should work with district staff to develop a sustainable program of collaborative meetings for instructional staff as soon as SIG funds can be set aside for this purpose.

Learning at the School

- **School leaders need to regularly monitor schoolwide and individual teacher practices to ensure that all staff implement agreed upon initiatives consistently.** Teachers shared that many initiatives have been introduced recently, including PBIS, differentiation, and higher-order thinking skills, but frequent and regular monitoring to ensure that initiatives are implemented with quality and consistency and result in the planned impact does not occur. Teachers also reported that the many, wide-ranging initiatives have not been prioritized to identify areas of immediate focus. For example, the IIT was told that because discipline policies are often inconsistently enforced, many students do not believe that there are consequences for misbehavior.
- **School leaders should ensure that teachers plan and deliver differentiated learning activities that are accurately matched to the learning needs of individuals and different groups of students.** Students are typically all taught the same content, in the same way, with the same expected outcomes at the end of the lessons. During class visits, some students of average or higher ability were observed by the team completing the classwork quickly, quietly, and correctly and then laying their heads on their desks or engaging in off-task conversations. The team observed minimal evidence of engaging instruction that resulted in student enjoyment or enthusiasm for the subject matter. Observed instruction typically followed a traditional model with the teacher as leader, main speaker, and director of student activities. Teachers led students in reviews for upcoming tests, led discussions using question and answer discussion prompts, and supported individual students while other students worked independently.
- **School leaders should provide teachers with a clear instructional framework to guide classroom instruction.** In the majority of the classrooms visited, the purpose of student learning was not clearly identified and few compelling openings were presented to prepare students for instruction. The team also found little evidence of classroom agendas, formative assessments, checks for understanding, or lesson closure activities. Teachers were observed guiding students through practice activities, step-by-step, instead of gradually releasing responsibility so that they could develop independence and mastery of the content. In the future, school leaders and teachers should consider consistently adopting a gradual release model as a framework for instruction.
- **Teachers need to provide regular opportunities for students to engage in lessons or to process new information.** In visited classrooms, instruction was predominately teacher-led and there were few opportunities for student discussions. For example, strategies to elicit student discourse, such as think-pair-share and turn-and-talk were not observed. While the IIT observed some small-group activities, there was little evidence of student-led discussions or the demonstration of independent higher-level learning. The IIT

observed well-behaved, compliant students who listened to their teachers and responded to their questions; however, students were rarely given an active role in learning.

- **Staff members need to raise expectations for student achievement.** Interviewed teachers shared that many students have difficulty learning because of socio-economic challenges they face outside of school, such as poverty and high levels of need. The IIT found that there has been a lack of training provided for teachers on cultural competency and awareness. In the future, the school would benefit from training in cultural awareness, competency, and diversity.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students would like leaders to be more responsive to student suggestions and concerns.** Students stated that the president and vice president representatives of various clubs and the student government meet with the superintendent and school leaders every six weeks to update leaders on club activities and share student concerns and perspectives. However, students said that there is little follow-through by leaders on the student-generated suggestions brought to these meetings by club advisors and student representatives. Students also said that they would like to discuss topics other than bullying, such as suggestions for spirit week activities.
- **Parents were concerned about academic eligibility requirements restricting students' ability to participate on sports teams.** Interviewed parents stated that they would like the academic eligibility policy re-examined to address ways that students might remain involved in a sport until they are academically eligible to play on the team again. Parents believed that this would provide motivation for students to improve their grades to regain active eligibility status.
- **Teachers would like additional training on interpreting the standards to enhance their content knowledge and improve their teaching practices.** Lesson plans reviewed by the IIT showed a lack of scaffolding and differentiation of content standards to meet diverse learning needs and allow students to access the learning standards. During classrooms visits, the IIT did not see evidence of lesson objectives based on standards. Interviewed teachers stated that they were provided with the learning standards to include in their lesson plans but would like more assistance with content integration of the new standards for instruction.
- **Parents would like to receive information about their child's progress between report cards.** Interviewed parents stated that they would be like to made aware of problems that their child is having academically so that they can provide assistance before they receive a failing grade.