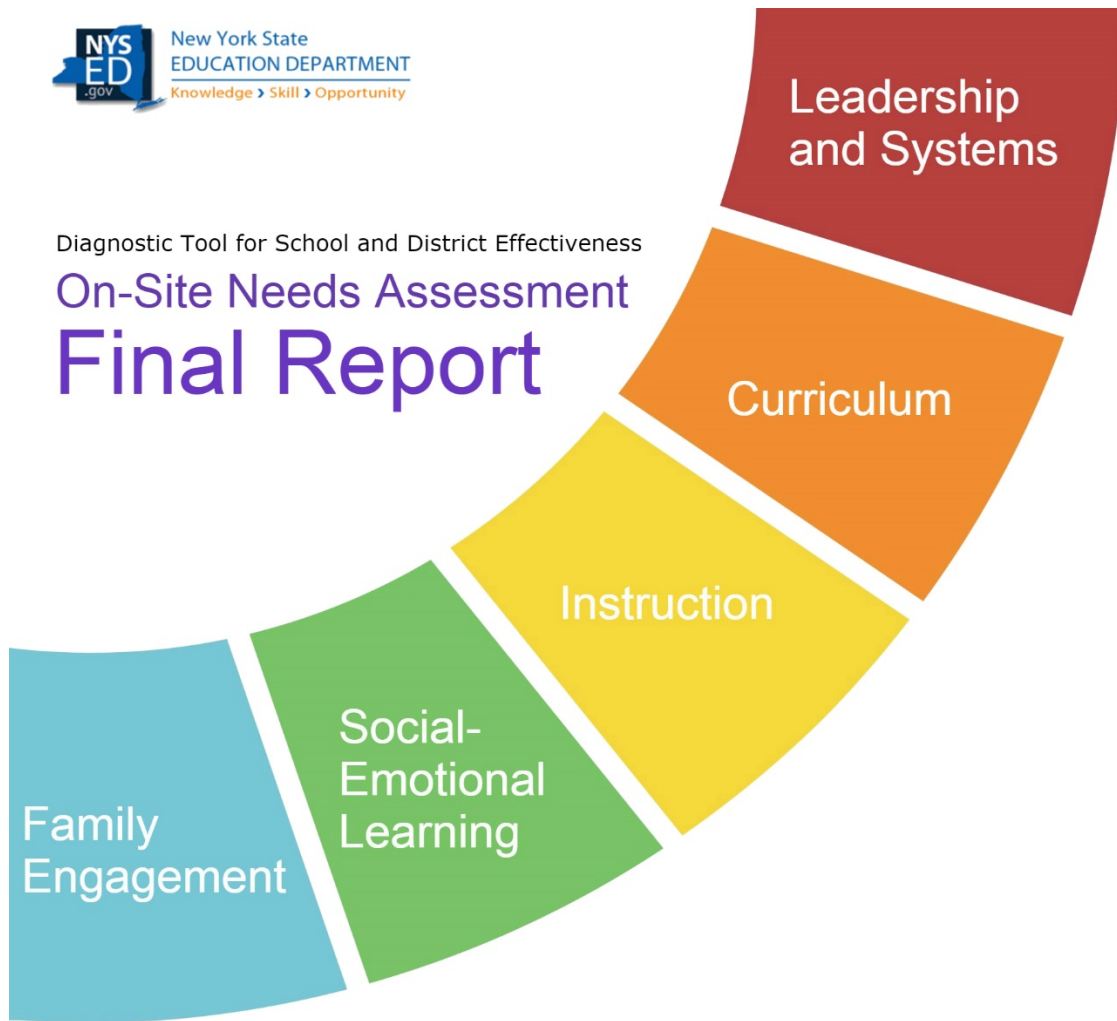


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	610501040001
<b>School Name</b>	Groton Junior/Senior High School
<b>School Address</b>	400 Peru Road, Groton, New York 13073
<b>District Name</b>	Groton Central School District
<b>Principal</b>	Billie Downs
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	April 23-25, 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		1	3

### 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	1	2		2	3	4

Groton Junior/Senior High School serves 425 students in grades six 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 Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SESIS) representative.
- The team visited a total of 35 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited five 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, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a student survey that 329 students (79 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a family survey that received 100 responses.
- In advance of the visit, 31 staff members (82 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- Shortly before the IIT visit, the principal learned that she would be reassigned to another position in the district at the end of the current school year. In addition, four teachers' contracts were not being renewed.

## Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. School leaders reported that the school has increased its participation rate in statewide English language arts (ELA) testing in grades six through eight from 70 percent in 2018 to 96 percent in 2019. School leaders used several strategies this school year to build participation including using the 2017-18 opt-out list to contact parents to encourage them to participate, creating an after-school program to build ELA and math skills, and providing incentives to encourage students to participate. School leaders and staff also designed a highly motivating challenge activity that featured shaving a volunteer teacher's head, if students could match the 95 percent participation rate for the math assessments in late April 2019.
2. School leaders reported that the percentage of all students chronically absent had decreased from 16.7 percent in 2017-18 to 12.9 percent as of April 2019. Improved attendance was also noted in two subgroups, with a 2.5 percent decrease in the percentage of students with disabilities who were chronically absent, and a 6.8 percent decrease among economically disadvantaged students. School leaders said they had focused on improving attendance by raising the awareness of parents and students of the need to attend school, adding perfect attendance celebrations, shifting from full-year recognition to semester recognition, and by providing students with their own attendance information through personalized default portal windows when they sign in on their Chromebooks.
3. The school formally opened its science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) lab and learning center in the late fall of the 2018-19 school year. The STEAM program provides students with opportunities to develop skills in the building trades, computer science, engineering and electronics, communication and media arts, and agriculture. Courses take place in a newly renovated basement level area designed to accommodate each program's unique needs. According to STEAM staff and school leaders, the agriculture module is expanding in response to farming community members' requests to train local students for careers in farming, and enrollment in all but the engineering program has grown for the 2019-20 school year.

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

### Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders must develop goals and benchmarks to improve the quality of education provided by the school and raise the academic performance of students.** Although there were several recommendations made in the 2015 district-led DTSDE report, the school has made minimal progress in addressing identified areas of need, including developing a mission targeted to improving student achievement; unpacking

curriculum standards and developing lesson plans that meet the needs of diverse learners; using data to inform instruction and set student goals; and developing protocols for identification, referral, and interventions for students with academic, social-emotional and behavioral problems. School leaders acknowledged that newly established data practices for the grade six team were an initial effort by the school to address some of these DTSDE recommendations and not a comprehensive plan for school improvement. Teachers in grades seven through twelve told the IIT that there was not a clear mission and vision for the future development of the school and that continual leader turnover has led to confusion about district goals and the action steps required to achieve them. In the future, school leaders will need to develop clear and cohesive goals for improvement, complete with measures to log progress towards their achievement.

- **School leaders need to establish systems and practices to analyze and use data for school improvement.** Except for the grade six pilot project, the school has not yet been able to establish systems to collect and analyze data to check on student progress and use the results to make changes in programs, policies, and procedures required to raise academic standards. For example, the principal told the IIT that CAMPS, the team composed of counselors, administrators, medical staff, the school psychologist, and the probation officer, does not analyze data on at-risk students that would enable them to identify patterns in their performance or to assess the impact of interventions. Similarly, while students in grade six currently receive a double block of ELA each day, there are no processes in place to measure the impact of this initiative or to determine if it is meeting student needs. Plans to implement formal data-driven instruction protocols in grades seven through twelve have not yet been developed.
- **School staff should work together to make improvements in the quality of education provided by the school.** Teachers noted that many, frequent changes in school leadership have led to confusion about priorities and resulted in staff feeling disengaged from work toward common improvement goals. Both groups agreed that communication is poor between leaders and staff and that this issue adds to the reluctance by some staff to take risks and share improvements in practices. While staff meetings are scheduled periodically, according to leaders and teachers, they are not reportedly used effectively to build a positive climate for school improvement.
- **The school needs to develop a system to provide interventions for students who are struggling academically or with social-emotional or behavioral problems.** The school provides some students with academic intervention services (AIS). However, according to the school leader and teachers, access to these classes is driven by the master schedule, and some students who need academic supports are not provided with them. According to teachers, after-school tutoring is less structured than in the past, and according to students, specific content-area teachers that students need to see may not be available after school to provide academic support. Teachers, parents, and students described the school's approach to dealing with social-emotional issues and discipline as being variable by teacher and by school leader. The IIT learned that there is no system-wide coordination of services to provide students with cohesive and incremental levels of support. In the future, school leaders will need to evaluate the effectiveness of current services and coordinate them to provide a more comprehensive and dependable network of academic, and social emotional and behavioral supports for students.

## Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders need to develop effective structures for teachers to meet across grade levels and content areas to review curriculum, analyze data, and improve instructional practice.** Although teachers

contractually have 20-30 minutes before the start and end of the school day, according to teachers, this is not enough time to co-plan curriculum and instruction, especially when many teachers have after-school club or sports commitments. Some teachers said that the change from department chairs to teacher leaders removed a key source of support for developing and implementing high-quality curriculum and that collaboration is now informal and infrequent. Special education staff do not have scheduled opportunities to co-plan with classroom teachers, although they are assigned to co-teach in many classrooms. Leaders and teachers reported that no opportunities have been provided for vertical articulation of the curriculum in recent years.

- **The leadership structure in the school should be well-defined, known by all, and organized to promote effective problem solving.** For example, teachers could not point to any one person, such as the principal or assistant principal, as their instructional leader, and said that they often relied on colleagues for guidance about curriculum and instruction. The dean of students is a teacher on assignment who, in addition to handling behavior referrals along with the assistant principal, also serves as the athletic director. The team found that the roles of the assistant principal and dean are not well understood by all stakeholders and, according to staff, parents, and students, discipline is administered differently depending on who handles the infractions. CAMPS, the one group that regularly meets to discuss at-risk students and includes school leaders, does not include the dean of students. In discussions with the principal, assistant principal, and the dean, the IIT learned that there is not a shared common mission and vision nor a unified approach to problem-solving. In the future, the school leader will need to work to promote a shared vision for learning, achievement, and discipline among the leaders and establish structures that promote collaboration across all the grades.

## Learning at the School

- **The curriculum should offer students depth and breadth of learning.** While most lessons are based on the New York State modules, the team found that many lessons are not sufficiently developed to include challenging learning objectives and do not provide opportunities for students to access and interact with content. Teachers and school leaders reported that the learning standards had not yet been unpacked in all curricular areas and teams had no regular opportunities to do this work. In a few classes, learning objectives and tasks were significantly below grade level, such as students working on test review packets that contained a simple vocabulary word finding task. Many lessons focused on operations rather than concepts, with a concentration on students' accuracy in operations rather than their understanding of complex ideas. Additionally, many lessons featured factual questions rather than questions designed to prompt students to compare, contrast, analyze, or synthesize ideas.
- **Teachers need to provide instruction that engages all students.** Almost all observed classes consisted of teacher-directed instruction with few opportunities for students to talk together about the content. Some lessons consisted of students copying notes from the board or watching the teachers solve problems. Many lessons were not differentiated and because all students completed the same tasks, some struggled, some appeared bored, and some did not try at all. In one such class, some students did not take part in the lesson because there were not enough materials for all students. When student understanding was not sufficiently checked, some students could not keep up with the pace and became disengaged.
- **Classroom management practices should create a learning environment in which students can succeed.** The team found that a lack of skill in classroom management sometimes prevented productive learning. For example, some instruction was not organized with set guidelines for smooth transitions, which resulted in off-task student discussions and lost learning time. In other classrooms, lessons were completed with several

minutes remaining and students socialized for the remainder of the time. Some students said that they found it a challenge to learn in classrooms in which distracting student behaviors were not managed.

## Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents said that the school's systems for communication should be improved.** For example, parents shared that they needed more information about the criteria for enrollment in BOCES and college-credit programs and more guidance on preparing their children for college and career planning. Parents said that while SchoolTool could be an effective system for communication about their children's progress, school staff did not always keep student information up to date. Some parents also said that they were not clear which school leader they should talk to if they had a question or wished to discuss a problem.
- **Teachers would like consistency in the handling of student discipline by school leaders.** Teachers reported that although there was a code of discipline, leaders and other school staff did not consistently follow it. They cited a lack of follow-through and a lack of communication about how discipline referrals were resolved. Teachers shared with the team that students' hallway behavior is not always managed effectively and that this often interferes with teaching and learning in their classrooms.
- **Students would like a supportive climate for learning in the school.** Interviewed students said that most teachers are approachable and willing to help with academic and social problems, but in most cases, the student must initiate outreach. Several students viewed the guidance counselors as a source of support only for scheduling and obtaining information about academic programs. Students told the team that in most classes they do not receive help in goal setting and do not get regular feedback about how they can improve their work. Some students said it was difficult to get extra help after school because the staff member they need help from might not be available.