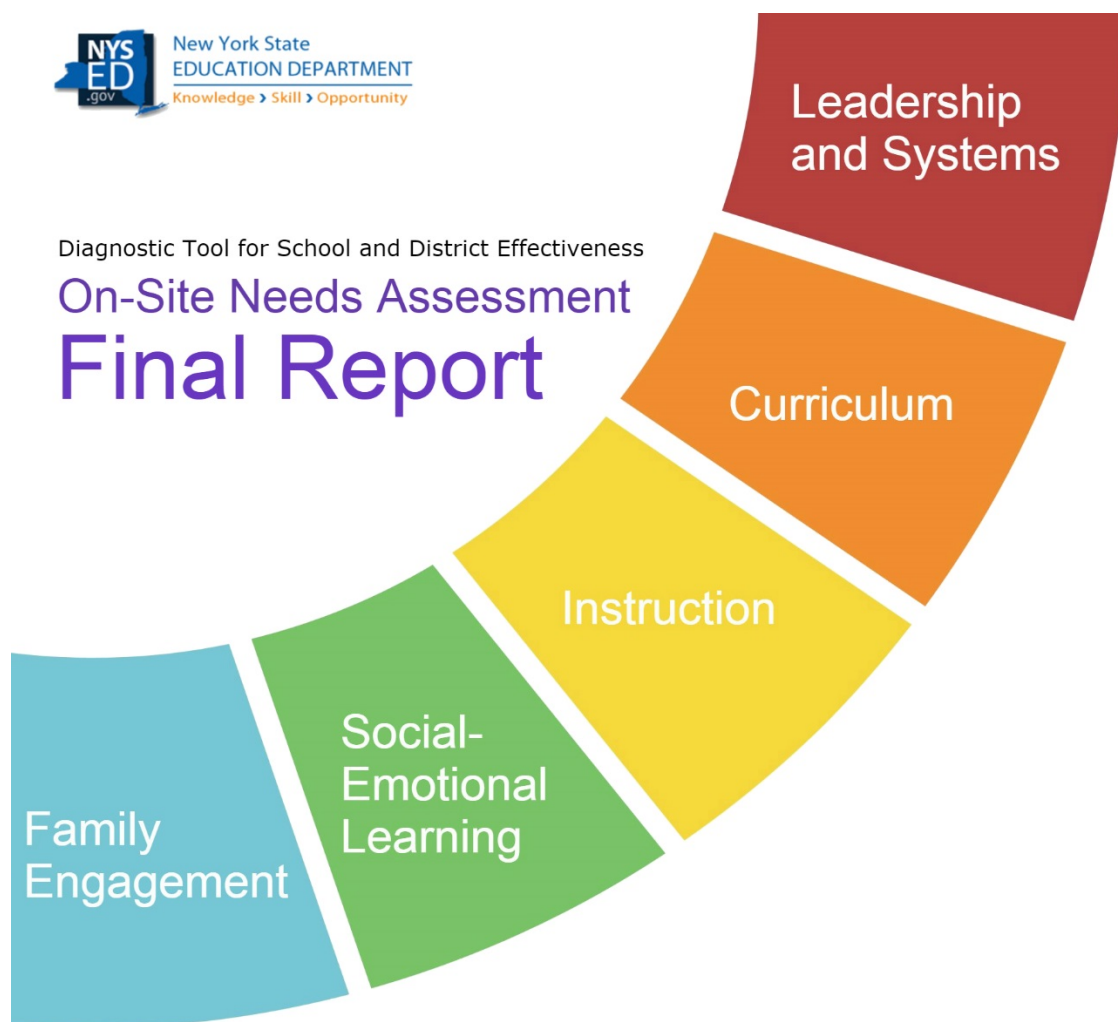


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	490601060002
School Name	Knickerbacker Middle School
School Address	320 7 th Avenue, Troy, NY 12182
District Name	Lansingburgh Central School District
Principal	Carrie Phelan
Dates of Visit	March 19-21, 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	1

Knickerbacker Middle School serves 492 students in grades six 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.
- The team visited a total of 32 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 12 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 27 staff members (42 percent) completed.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. When assuming responsibility as the principal during the 2017-18 school year, the principal began to change expectations in the school so that student movement through the hallways between classes would become calm and orderly. Teachers interviewed by the IIT reported that this initiative resulted in students arriving to class on time and ready to learn. Building on this success, during the 2018-19 school year, the principal established management and behavior protocols in the cafeteria that, according to both teachers and students, have continued to improve orderly movement within the school and is creating a more positive school environment. The team observed that students were respectful to staff and to one another, and class and cafeteria transitions were orderly and calm.
2. In the 2018-19 school year, the principal expanded the choice of electives that students can choose to study. Students are offered the option of participating in Spanish Exposure, a course that explores Spanish history and culture, and G-Suite, a hands-on course where students learn to use the options that are available within Google. Students, teachers, and parents stated that they appreciated the school providing students with the opportunity to make choices about courses according to their interests. The IIT observed that students in these classes were engaged in what they were doing and were working independently, with limited teacher direction, either individually or in small groups
3. To improve teacher's instructional practices, during the current school year, the principal funded a full-time curriculum specialist to support teachers within the school. The principal reported that the curriculum specialist helps teachers infuse literacy practices across content areas and supports teachers in implementing the use of data to develop targeted student groups and appropriate instructional strategies. In addition, the specialist accompanies teachers on inter-visitations to other teachers' classes and debriefs them about what they learned and how they can implement these practices in their own classes. Teachers can request to work with the curriculum specialist, or if they are struggling in a particular area, are assigned by the school leaders to work with the specialist. New and veteran teachers as well as school leaders reported that classroom pedagogy has improved as a result of teachers' collaboration with the curriculum specialist.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should establish an effective system to delegate school responsibilities, to maximize her ability to monitor school initiatives and determine school progress.** The team learned that the principal is attempting to spearhead much of the work in the school herself. The principal reported that in addition to visiting each classroom every day, she also attempts to attend all grade-level and department meetings. However, a number of programs that have been introduced have not been monitored with fidelity. For example, patterns and trends in student attendance are currently not being monitored. The IIT observed a school support team meeting where staff analyzed and discussed student attendance. The team was reviewing students who had exhibited attendance problems over the past week and considering how they might reach out to these students and their families. However, the IIT found that there is no system in place that allows the school support team to systematically monitor and track patterns of student attendance. In the future,

the principal should distribute responsibilities to other school leaders and staff for consistently overseeing and monitoring programs, and she should develop systems for implementing this process effectively.

- **School leaders should establish protocols or systems for communicating to staff the types of services provided to students when teachers have referred students because of academic or behavioral issues or absenteeism.** The team learned that there are no systems in place to inform staff about support services once a student has been referred for services. In interviews with the IIT, teachers shared that when they send a student to guidance or when a student begins to work with the psychologist or social worker, teachers do not receive feedback or information regarding what is happening with the student. The psychologist and guidance counselors confirmed that the school needs protocols or systems for sharing this information. Teachers stated that it is important for them to know what services the child is receiving as this might impact classroom behavior and academic achievement. In addition, teachers reported that when a child is absent for a period of time, they often do not receive information regarding the reason for the child's extended absence and when/whether they should expect the student to return to class.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should implement an effective schoolwide system to promote the development of teacher leadership to support improved teacher pedagogy and student learning.** While the school has a full-time curriculum specialist, the team learned that there is an internal capacity among teachers in the school to develop lead teachers and model classrooms which has not been tapped into. The IIT visited three classrooms where students were engaged with one another in discussions about content that were thoughtful and meaningful; however, this was not the norm. Supporting student discussion is a focus for the 2018-19 school year, and teachers noted that the school has not prioritized the development of model classrooms and lead teachers who could collaborate with the school's curriculum specialist to support building teachers' pedagogical capacity.
- **The principal needs to monitor the school's new and comprehensive Trauma Sensitive Schools (TSS) initiative so that it is implemented consistently schoolwide.** The team learned that a calm and mindful classroom focus has been identified as a priority for the school's TSS initiative. Classrooms are expected to include a calming corner or calm space where students can take time out in the classroom to reflect on their behavior. The IIT observed students using calming corners or calm spaces in some classrooms but not in others. In addition, although the rule that student cell phones may not be used or visible during the school day has been made explicit, the team observed students using ear buds and cell phones in a few classrooms. Teachers in these classrooms indicated that students are allowed to listen to calming music on their cell phone as part of TSS. Several students shared that they were confused as to why they were permitted to use their ear buds in some classes but not in others.

Learning at the School

- **All teachers' need to use data to assess students' progress and make decisions regarding next instructional steps.** Some teachers reported that common benchmark assessments are useful to them in assessing students' progress. The IIT observed that in some classrooms students were grouped according to the results of benchmark assessments and often rearranged based on the use of in-class assessments. In classes where group work was targeted to address student needs, teachers indicated that they had collaborated in their

teacher team meetings to review data and to determine next instructional steps. The lesson plans of these teachers reflected the use of data for determining appropriate instructional strategies. In one class, for example, the teacher talked with the students about how she had used the results from their previous end-of-week test to determine what they had understood and areas in which they needed support. She told the students that she had divided them into groups according to these needs and provided different tasks for each group. However, in many other classes where students were seated in groups, students were not grouped based on the teacher's analysis of data, and all students were engaged in the same task. Teachers in these classes reported that their analysis and use of data during teacher team meetings is limited. The principal noted that teachers' understanding of how to use data to make instructional decisions is varied. In the future, the principal should identify teacher teams that are using data effectively to inform instructional decision-making so that they can serve as models for teams that are less proficient in data use.

- **Teachers should provide more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning or to tackle work targeted for their level.** During discussions with the team, some students indicated that they find most science classes engaging and challenging as teachers provide opportunities for them to engage in their own learning through research and hands-on exploration. In one class, for example, students were collaborating to measure the beaks of different kinds of birds and complete a data table. They were then hypothesizing about what kind of food each bird might eat and how the bird might catch its prey. However, the team found that this was not typical in most classes and subjects schoolwide. During class visits, the team found that instruction was primarily teacher directed and although students were sometimes arranged in small groups, the work they were doing was the same for each group. There was limited opportunity for interaction, and most questions asked were low-level, with few opportunities for student thinking and discussion.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students reported that they feel that the student and/or the student's parent should be present when a student's locker is opened for a security check.** Students stated that currently their lockers are sometimes opened without their knowledge or presence, and they believe this is an invasion of their privacy. Students acknowledged that there could be times when a student's locker needs to be opened immediately because of potential threats or some other danger. However, students expressed the perspective that such occasions should be the exception rather than the rule.
- **Although parents expressed appreciation for the addition of electives for the current school year, they also expressed a desire for the school to offer additional electives and higher-level courses.** Some parents shared that they do not believe their children are given sufficient opportunities to choose courses that interest them or to take more challenging courses. They suggested that several students in the school are ready for and would benefit from high school level courses. Some students reported that they would like to be able to take more thought-provoking classes.
- **Teachers indicated that they believe it would be useful for students to have a homeroom period at the beginning of each day.** Teachers reported that currently the school leaders and some teachers greet students as they arrive at school in the morning, attempting to check students' emotional well-being as they enter the building. Teachers suggested that an assigned homeroom at the beginning of each day would allow teachers to check in with all students and help them prepare for their day. Some teachers also noted that in the future, these homerooms could lead to a more formal advisory period where each staff member has responsibility for

a group of students. They stated that this would provide common ground for discussing a child's behavior and a way to support children's academic and social-emotional development.

- **Teachers and parents reported that as the school has struggled to engage parents in a meaningful reciprocal relationship regarding student work and student progress, student-led parent teacher conferences could provide an opportunity to bring more parents into the school.** Teachers and parents noted the many and varied efforts the school has made to engage parents in their children's learning. They stated that while many of these efforts have generated limited parent participation, parents are much more likely to come to school for something specifically related to their child, such as an award or a performance. Parents and teachers agreed that student-led conferences could be an incentive for more parents to come to the school and engage in a conversation about their children's learning.