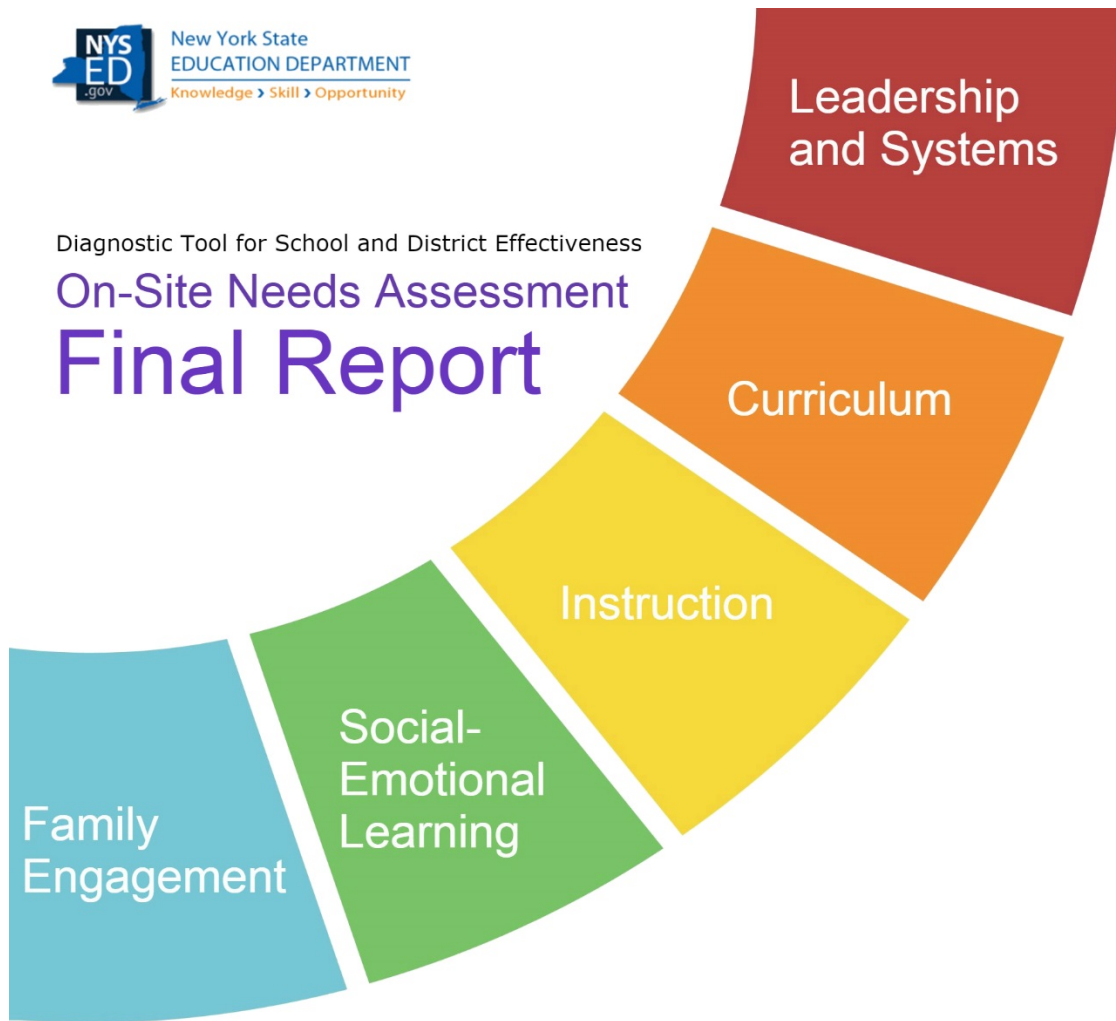


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	161501060015
School Name	Malone Middle School
School Address	15 Francis Street, Malone, NY 12953
District Name	Malone Central School District
Principal	James C. Knight, Jr.
Dates of Visit	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
2	1	1	-	1	2

Malone Middle School serves 545 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, a district consultant, and a district representative shadow.
- The team made 46 visits to 37 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 lesson plans, schoolwide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a student survey that 493 students (95 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 31 staff members (49 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a parent survey that 29 parents (six percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, 49 staff members (77 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- On day one of the visit, the team learned that the principal had accepted a position as superintendent in a nearby school district and was leaving the school at the end of the 2018-19 school year. As a result, the assistant principal participated in the principal interviews together with the principal and visited classrooms with the NYSED representative.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal and teachers shared that the grade-level teams are the instructional backbone of the school. In 2018-19, all core-subject teachers are organized into two grade-level teams per grade. The teams have daily common planning periods during which they discuss individual students, plan long-term projects, and discuss the improvement of teaching practices. Members of the IIT visited several team meetings during which they observed teachers discussing strategies to address the needs of individual students and planning culminating events for long-term projects that were coming to an end. In addition, the grade-level teams have focused on raising levels of student engagement in an effort to achieve one of the goals in the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP). Staff shared that student engagement has increased due to the efforts of the grade-level teams.
2. The principal and mathematics teachers believed that with some instructional modifications, students would be capable of passing the Regents Examination in Algebra I at the end of grade eight. As a result, they split the algebra course into two parts. All grade seven students are enrolled in algebra part one in 2018-19 and will complete the course next year in grade eight. The principal shared that based on assessment data, most students appear to be on track to complete part one satisfactorily and pass the Regents exam at the end of next year. Students confirmed that they were pleased to be taking a Regents-level math course and felt they were effectively handling the content.
3. The school has made a concerted effort to provide students with project-based learning experiences. During the 2018-19 school year, all grade-level teams provided their students with a minimum of two long-term interdisciplinary projects. For example, one team's grade six students completed an Egypt project that integrated social studies, English language arts (ELA), and the visual arts, and another team's grade seven students completed a project on medieval times that also integrated social studies, ELA, and visual arts. During the team's visit, one grade eight team was holding the culminating event for its Grit Untapped project. Students had created a maple sugar business and were holding a maple showcase featuring student presentations followed by the sale of products in the student-run store. Students shared that they enjoy these projects and would like to participate in more.
4. During the 2018-19 school year, the principal built on the school's positive and nurturing school environment by helping to develop a failing forward culture. The principal articulated his belief, which was echoed by some staff, that it is alright to make mistakes because that is how people learn. This message was also communicated through posters displayed throughout the school that declared, "Turn failure into success." The principal and staff shared that this approach has encouraged teachers to take risks in the classroom by attempting practices before they are perfected. Consequently, teachers are attempting to incorporate and expand student engagement strategies and project-based learning, which are the school leaders' two instructional priorities.
5. The principal is able to maximize the use of time and material resources to benefit staff and students. In 2018-19, the principal integrated daily common planning periods into the schedule for all grade-level teams. Further, the schedule includes time for special education and general education teachers to meet during the 20 minutes prior to the beginning of the school day and curriculum coordinators are scheduled to meet with their departments once per month. The principal secured laptops for all students, which they use in class and at home. Team members observed widespread use of the laptops in about half the classes visited. Each

classroom also contains an interactive white board, which most teachers use to project lesson content or material from the Internet.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The key structure which guides instructional practices at the school are the grade-level teams, and school leaders should be more engaged in team activities.** School leaders do not attend grade-level team meetings and the work of these teams is not monitored or evaluated. Although some teams are very effective due to strong teacher leaders and high levels of motivation, the IIT found that other teams would benefit from more support and guidance from school leaders. Visits to team meetings and interviews with staff revealed that school leader involvement in the teams' work would increase the school leaders' knowledge of what is happening in the school and allow them to identify teams needing additional support. Going forward, school leaders should participate in team meetings more frequently and provide targeted support to teams that could function more effectively.
- **Although the subject coordinators review lesson plans and provide staff with feedback about broad trends within their departments, school leaders should provide teacher-specific feedback to individual teachers regarding their planning.** The principal and teachers shared that the school's five core-subject curriculum coordinators collect and review teacher lesson plans. Curriculum coordinators meet with their subject-area departments on a monthly basis and provide teachers with general feedback about trends they observe in the plans. However, teachers do not receive individual feedback on their plans. Going forward, school leaders should review teacher lesson plans and provide them with targeted feedback to improve their planning.
- **Although the SCEP is well-written, includes interim benchmarks, and is strategic in linking specific activities to accomplishing goals, some goals should be addressed more effectively.** The school established a focus team to meet quarterly and evaluate the school's progress toward achieving its SCEP goals. Although the principal and some staff shared that the focus team reported its findings to the staff at faculty meetings, other staff did not recall receiving these reports. The SCEP goal to raise levels of student engagement was a clear focus articulated by supervisors and teachers throughout the school. However, the IIT found that the action plans to achieve other goals identified in the SCEP, such as developing and implementing a walkthrough tool, developing a tiered disciplinary referral process, and increasing reciprocal communication with families, had not been implemented with fidelity.
- **Although the school developed a Response to Intervention (RtI) disciplinary system, school leaders should analyze why student disciplinary incidents and referrals did not decline.** The school developed a four-tiered RtI disciplinary system that categorizes student behavior offenses from least serious to most serious. The assistant principal provided the team with extensive data identifying student behavior offenses by each tier. However, the data did not show a downward trend in student disciplinary incidents within this school year or compared to the last school year. Although school leaders collect behavioral data, the data has not been analyzed to determine why the number of incidents has not decreased, identify the recidivism rate for repeat offenders, and develop student-specific strategic plans to address the underlying causes of students' acting-out behavior. Additionally, teachers shared that the steps the school takes to address the needs of students who are referred for support services are not clear. Some teachers shared that sometimes, after making a referral, they do not know what action, if any, was taken.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should clearly articulate his expectations for teachers, students, and parents and help develop a sense of urgency for school improvement.** The principal messages that it is alright to make mistakes, but the core beliefs and values that shape his vision for the school have not been communicated. Staff shared that the superintendent generally establishes the school priorities. In conversations with staff, students, and parents, the IIT found that expectations for these different constituencies had not been articulated. Although the school has been identified as needing Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), the IIT did not find a sense of urgency for improving teaching practices and raising student achievement levels.
- **Although the principal distributes leadership and empowers teachers by creating teacher-led grade-level teams and curriculum coordinator positions, he should also actively oversee teacher practices.** School leaders and teachers reported that class visits are primarily conducted as part of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process and teachers do not receive feedback on their lesson planning. As a result, the IIT found that there isn't a clear understanding of the school's teaching and learning activities to inform strategic decisions. Teachers' areas of need have not been identified to provide targeted feedback and support to help teachers to improve instruction and lesson planning. Going forward, school leaders should frequently visit all classrooms, share their instructional expertise with teachers after informally visiting their classrooms, and provide teachers with feedback after reviewing their lesson plans.
- **Although school leaders implemented new programming to better meet the academic needs of students, they should analyze its impact on student achievement.** School leaders have made several changes to academic programming to better meet the needs of all students. To better prepare grade eight students to take the Regents Examination in Algebra I, the algebra course previously taught in grade eight has been expanded to two years, with all grade seven students enrolled in algebra part one this year and taking algebra part two next year. In order to expand student academic experiences, students in grade eight are enrolled in art for one semester and technology for one semester, while students in grade seven do the same with family and career skills and technology. Students in grade six receive a period of reading instruction each day in order to improve their language skills prior to undertaking more challenging coursework in grades seven and eight. Although these programming elements are creative, there is no system to monitor their impact on student learning.
- **School leaders should provide specific and targeted feedback and follow-up support to staff regarding their teaching practices.** The principal and assistant principal shared, and teachers confirmed, that informal class visits are not conducted regularly. The district created a walkthrough tool that requires the principal and assistant principal to record what they see during their visits. However, the principal said that due to the amount of time he spends on operational responsibilities associated with running the school, he does not always have time to conduct walkthroughs and record his observations. The assistant principal shared that he is responsible for student discipline, which takes up much of his time. As a result, teachers only receive feedback regarding their teaching practices through their two required APPR observations. The team's review of a random sample of observation reports revealed few suggestions for improvement and there was no indication that the observer would return to follow-up on the implementation of the suggestions.

- **Teachers should assess the level of student learning during lessons and adapt content to address the diverse needs of their students.** During classroom visits, the team observed few assessments of student learning during the lesson. In most classes, new content was presented without checking to ensure that students understood what was previously taught. In many classes, teachers asked students if they had any questions, but students did not respond. Although the team found blank exit tickets in a few classrooms, none were seen in use during the lessons observed. Most lesson plans reviewed by the IIT did not contain adaptations and scaffolds for students. In most classes visited, all students were provided the same content, participated in the same processes and activities, and produced the same products. There were notable exceptions, including grade eight students completing different tasks for long-term projects, such as Going Green and Grit Untapped. In the future, teachers should measure student learning during lessons by having students agree or disagree with a classmate’s answer, by a show of hands, or by using other checks for understanding. Teachers should then use this information to inform their planning and delivery of instruction.
- **Although the school leaders’ instructional priority to raise student-engagement levels was evident throughout the school, teachers should provide more opportunities for student-led discussions.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed teachers using specific strategies listed in the SCEP to increase student engagement, such as partnering, random calling, and students using a personal whiteboard. However, the IIT observed few open-ended questions or prompts that led to student discussion. Most questions required students to give a factual or detail-based answer, and students provided one-word answers, choral responses, and low-volume responses. In most classes, wait time was not utilized after asking questions to allow students to think about their answers, and many students spoke very softly which prevented other students from building on their responses.
- **School leaders and teachers should establish shared expectations for student work in each subject area, at each grade level.** The principal shared, and teachers confirmed, that student work has not been analyzed to norm expectations for student learning. Thus, the skills and content students should learn in each subject have not been agreed upon, and standards for evaluating student work have not been established. The principal shared that the same course grade from two different teachers can reflect two very different levels of student competency and achievement. Going forward, teacher teams should use an analysis of student work to calibrate their expectations for students. Their findings should be shared with the other team for their grade-level and then with the teachers in the other grades to ensure a vertically coherent development of student skills and levels of understanding from grade to grade.
- **Students feel connected to their teachers and the school, and teachers should use their relationships with students to provide them with student-specific feedback on their work and increase student ownership of their learning.** While students shared that they feel connected to their teachers and the school, the IIT found that teacher-student relationships are not being used to provide students with specific feedback on their work. The IIT saw very little student work displayed in classrooms and hallways, and most work reviewed by the IIT did not contain student-specific actionable feedback with clear next steps. Students shared that most of the feedback they receive from teachers consists of comments such as, “Very Good,” or “Well done,” but does not include suggestions to improve their work. Students shared that most of their teachers care about them and cited more than one adult they feel comfortable approaching in a time of need. However, the IIT found that these relationships are not used to encourage students to take ownership of their learning. Students shared

that they do not conference with their teachers, do not know their strengths and needs as learners, and do not collaborate with their teachers to set individual academic goals.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students suggested that the silent sustained reading period could be used in a more meaningful way.** Students currently have a 20-minute silent sustained reading period that occurs at the same time as lunch. Students suggested, and some teachers agreed, that this time could be better used for student socialization, mindfulness training, study hall, or academic support from teachers. Many students expressed their desire for this time to be used to relax and take a break from academics.
- **Students would like more after-school clubs.** Students were pleased with the number of athletic teams the school offered but said they would like more options for non-athletic after-school activities. They stated that the school offered more clubs in previous years and asked that the school create clubs such as chess, drama, and debating.
- **Teachers would like school leaders to publish a weekly and daily calendar of events in hard copy and online.** Teachers shared that having a central and easily accessible calendar of planned events would increase the sense of community in the school. They explained that the calendar would help staff to know what events other teachers and grade-level teams were sponsoring. They suggested that if the calendar was an online document, staff members could easily add events to the listings.
- **Teachers and parents would like the school to develop additional interventions for students who engage in frequent misbehaviors.** Teachers and parents shared that there is a small number of students who continually act out, disrupt classrooms, and bully other students. They shared that current interventions have not been successful and explained that after a student receives a consequence for bullying one student, that student often moves on to a new target. Teachers and parents suggested that the school should develop additional interventions to manage the behavior of these students and address the underlying issues that cause them to act out.
- **Parents would like teachers to receive training in restorative practices.** Parents explained that some teachers struggle to manage student behavior and would benefit from developing a non-punitive response to student misbehavior. Parents shared, and staff agreed, that currently, only the guidance counselors and the assistant principal sometimes utilize a restorative approach when dealing with student behavior and suggested that students would benefit from more adults being trained in these techniques.
- **Parents would like the school to provide more opportunities for parent involvement.** Interviewed parents shared that the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) currently includes one officer, a president-treasurer, and very few members. Parents explained that the PTO does not offer parent workshops and does not work with the home-school coordinator to develop programming for parents. Parents suggested that the school include a parent table at all school events to solicit parent input and provide parents with information. They also suggested that the school capitalize on well-attended sporting events and student performances by integrating a school-related activity in which parents and students can participate together.