

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	400701060004
School Name	Colonial Village Elementary School
School Address	1456 Saunders Settlement Road, Niagara Falls, NY 14305
District Name	Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District
Principal	Marissa Vuich
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		2	1

Colonial Village Elementary School serves 400 students in kindergarten to grade 5.

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 (SEIS).
- The team visited a total of 46 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, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 26 staff members (68 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. During the 2018-19 school year, to build upon the district math common assessment initiative, the principal extended her instructional leadership support to assist staff in the areas of English language arts (ELA) assessment and instructional planning. Grade three teachers accepted the principal's assistance and collaboratively developed an ELA assessment aligned to the New York State (NYS) standards and administered the assessment to students. The grade three teachers use the data from this assessment to inform their instructional decisions by collaborating to develop instructional plans and student activities aligned to the curriculum resources according to student needs.
2. School leaders and staff have prioritized social-emotional learning supports and positive relationships through decisions regarding school resources, the fostering of a positive learning environment, and the use of learning time. For example, the principal advocated for a dean of students who was added to the staff this school year and supports the principal and teachers with behavior management. The team found that the dean was visible throughout the building and was regularly conferencing with students to affirm and motivate positive behavior. The IIT observed that teachers, staff, and administrators enjoy a positive rapport with students and that students were well behaved in the classrooms and common areas and interacted positively with one another during lessons. The school counselors push-in to classrooms bi-weekly to implement lessons with students, and the IIT observed students engaged in a lesson targeting relationships, including the characteristics of relationships between good friends. School discipline data reflects a decrease in the number of out-of-school and in-school suspensions for the 2018-19 school year.
3. The school staff and students believe the school principal has improved the climate and morale of the school. The IIT learned during student interviews that students know who the principal is because she is visible around the building and makes a genuine effort to get to know them well. Students shared with the team that the school environment is calmer this school year, as student conflicts have decreased. Staff told the IIT they appreciate that the principal advocates for the staff, students, and school.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders should develop measurable goals for the academic achievement and attendance of students.** During interviews with the principal, the IIT learned that the current school goals are aligned with the district goals, which target vertically aligning the curriculum, implementing common math assessments in grades three through five, and increasing community engagement. While the goals are aligned to school and district initiatives, the goals do not reflect an intended impact on improving student achievement in a measurable way. In the future, the principal should collaborate with the instructional leadership team to review the school's performance data provided by NYSED and set, monitor, and respond to measurable school goals for attendance and proficiency and overall growth in ELA, mathematics, and science and for each classroom.
- **School leaders should develop and implement a system to collect and monitor school effectiveness and student performance data.** The IIT found that school leaders and staff currently collect attendance, STAR Reading, STAR Math, and Fountas and Pinnell reading data. In addition, triangulation meetings are held three times per year to discuss student performance and needs. While these systems are securely in place, the

school does not have a system to track and monitor student proficiency and growth data as it relates to mastery of the NYS standards. The principal explained that a data tracking platform for academics, behavior, and attendance is in the development phase and should be finalized this school year. In the future, the principal should implement a data tracking system to enable the frequent monitoring and the development of structures to inform decisions regarding student performance, attendance, and behavior.

- **The school should structure its intervention system so that all struggling students in the school have equal access to high quality intervention instruction.** The IIT learned from interviews with the principal, teachers, and interventionists, as well a review of progress monitoring data, that the school has many students categorized as requiring urgent intervention. During conversations with district staff and the principal, the IIT learned that the programs used to provide tiered instruction at the classroom level vary by classroom, based on teacher preference and their levels of qualification. The IIT also learned that while the district has provided reading intervention training opportunities for Colonial Village teachers on the Orton-Gillingham program, not all teachers have been trained. The IIT learned from interviews with teachers that the students with disabilities receive intervention services from special education teachers, but not all special education teachers have been trained to implement programs such as Reading Recovery or Orton-Gillingham. In the future, the principal should collaborate with the instructional leadership team and district staff to streamline intervention programs to ensure each grade level and subgroup have access to the most appropriate intervention.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should establish an instructional leadership team to promote shared decision making and a schoolwide understanding of instructional initiatives.** While there are various teams in operation in the school, the IIT found that there is not a group of instructional staff that are consulted when instructional decisions are made and communicated to staff. During interviews with the IIT, teachers shared that they have been asked to implement numerous instructional initiatives in recent years, but they do not always know which initiatives are current school priorities. For example, the principal shared with the IIT that her instructional priorities for this school year are student engagement, evidence of learning, and student dialogue. However, during conversations, teachers did not share or explain these same instructional priorities to team members. Additionally, during classroom visits, the IIT did not observe these instructional priorities being implemented with fidelity in most classrooms.
- **School leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to take part in frequent and ongoing vertical planning and collaborative meetings with a focus on the NYS standards.** During conversations with teachers, the IIT learned that there are regular opportunities for teachers to meet in horizontal teams, but few opportunities exist for teachers to meet in vertical teams with a focus on the NYS standards. Teachers shared that it would be helpful to have ongoing, dedicated time to discuss issues such as what students need to know at each grade level and which standards are the most difficult to master. District staff shared that an upcoming superintendent's conference day would focus on providing teachers with support related to the NYS standards. In the future, the principal should collaborate with the newly formed instructional leadership team to facilitate a vertical planning meeting at least once each quarter to ensure that skills and concepts are being developed and built on progressively as students move through the school.
- **School leaders should expand the district and school math common assessment initiative to include English language arts (ELA), math, and science at all grade levels.** The IIT found that the school does not currently have a system to progress monitor student, classroom, and grade-level mastery of the NYS standards through

regularly administered common assessments that reflect the rigor set forth by NYS practice assessments and exemplars. While the team learned that school-level common unit assessments are administered in math and ELA to assess students' mastery of NYS standards at some grade levels, this is not a universal practice schoolwide.

- **School leaders need to ensure that the time allocated to the instruction of the core content areas is maximized and supports the mastery of skills and concepts in all grade levels and classes.** The IIT reviewed classroom schedules and found that the amount of time allotted for core areas of instruction varied by classroom within and across grade levels. In addition, many schedules did not allocate any time for instruction in science or social studies. The team also found that some schedules contained periods of unassigned time that were, in some instances, at least 20 minutes in length. During building walkthroughs, the team found that some teachers used the 15 to 20 minutes before dismissal for non-instructional student activities such as snack time or independent reading. In the future, the principal should ensure that the master schedule allocates time to fulfil the instructional requirements of each of the core content areas and monitor the use of time to ensure that valuable instructional minutes are used strategically.
- **School leaders should develop a process to ensure that teachers implement professional development (PD) initiatives with fidelity and are provided with guidance and supports as they adjust to new materials and practices.** Conversations with school and district staff revealed that the school does not have a formal process to monitor teacher practice and provide teachers with supports, such as in-class modeling or coaching, as a follow-up to the implementation of PD initiatives and that support is generally provided only at the request of the teacher. The principal confirmed that school leaders do not currently provide teachers with regular follow-up support and coaching related to PD initiatives.

Learning at the School

- **English language arts (ELA) teachers should consistently provide students with opportunities to think critically and to complete challenging tasks.** During classroom visits, the IIT found that students were usually engaged in whole-group lessons, which most often consisted of the teachers reading aloud from novels or short stories while students read along silently. While students appeared eager to participate in classroom discussion, the IIT found that discussions were also primarily teacher dominated. The team also noted that student learning activities and teacher questioning were often at the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Level I or at the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. However, during the kindergarten writing workshop, the IIT found that teachers actively facilitated writing activities, which allowed students to produce original writing. In contrast, other centers required students to complete activities such as identifying pictures with the indicated initial sound and pasting poems on construction paper. In the future, the principal should collaborate with district staff to provide support to the teachers as they unpack the ELA standards and design lessons that feature higher-order thinking questions and activities that are aligned to the levels of difficulty outlined in the NYS standards.
- **Teachers should plan and deliver instruction that increases student access to the curriculum.** The IIT found that some teachers used strategies such as explicit instruction and visual aids to model learning for students, but practices varied by classroom. For example, during classroom visits, the IIT found that students were sometimes provided with an explicitly modeled instructional example but were rarely provided with more than one example prior to the transition to the guided practice phase of lessons. In one such instance, the team observed that many students made errors and were unable to apply their learning in a new context. The team

observed few instances where teachers modeled their thinking through writing during ELA lessons to address both visual and auditory learners. In addition, the IIT found that while some teachers used concrete examples and supports, such as visual aids and anchor charts, many did not use such resources to increase all students' access to the content. In the future, the principal should collaborate with teachers and district staff to define and outline the components of instruction for all classroom settings and then monitor the impact of the changes in practice on the quality of teaching and learning.

- **Teachers need to provide students with a uniform social studies curriculum.** During interviews, some teachers communicated that they are unclear on the standards they are expected to teach in social studies. The IIT learned that some teachers are using resources such as the *Journeys* reading program and *Scholastic News* to teach social studies content. In addition, the IIT found that time for social studies instruction was included on some teacher schedules and that social studies learning targets were posted in some classrooms; however, no instruction aligned to social studies standards was observed during classroom visits.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Specialized support staff would like the student support structure adjusted to protect classroom instructional time and better suit student learning needs.** The IIT learned that school leaders have not coordinated the schedules for classroom instructional time, interventionist support, and related services. For example, the IIT observed a student being pulled for speech support during mathematics and a student pulled for mathematics intervention during guided reading. Interventionists and related service providers shared that, when appropriate, services would better meet the needs of students and limit the loss of instructional time if schedules were adjusted to allow for push-in services instead of students being pulled out the classroom.
- **Families would like the school to maximize the use of technology resources to improve parent communication and increase parental engagement.** Parents shared that the school provides multiple opportunities for families to engage with the school, but family participation in school activities continues to be limited. Interviewed parents believed that the school would be able to expand its reach, keep parents better informed, and increase parental engagement if the school used a social media platform to communicate with families about events, student recognition information, and school updates. In addition, parents suggested that the school leaders use the automated messaging system to send parents text messages, in addition to the robocall system.
- **Families and students would like the school to increase student access to technology.** Parents acknowledged that the school has made advances in providing students with better access to technology in the upper grades but noted that there is still a need to ensure that students in the lower grades have equitable access to technology for learning. Students agreed that they would like to use technology more frequently to complete their assignments.
- **Students would like more opportunities to engage with the school outside of the school day.** Students shared with the IIT that they would like additional opportunities to participate in clubs and attend after-school tutorials for subjects such as reading and math. Students also shared that offering school-provided transportation for intramural activities that occur before school begins and after-school activities would expand access for students who desire to participate.

- **Students believe the school needs more safety officers.** Student shared that they generally feel safe at school but expressed a desire for more school safety officers. Students said that there is only one officer who supports all of the schools and that additional officers are needed.
- **Teachers would like professional development (PD) sessions offered during non-instructional time and instructional rounds offered to deepen teacher understanding and strengthen implementation of PD initiatives.** Teachers shared that PD sessions require them to miss numerous days during the school year and that they would like PD offered during the summer months to address this concern. Teachers also said that although they have received training to support several school initiatives, implementation has proved challenging because the PD was mostly theoretical rather than practical. Teachers shared that instructional rounds at the school level would increase teacher understanding of PD initiatives.