

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	131101040006
School Name	Webutuck Elementary School
School Address	175 Haight Road, Amenia, NY 12501
District Name	Northeast Central School District
Principal	Jennifer Hengen
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
1	-	1	2	1	2

Webutuck Elementary School serves 202 students in pre-kindergarten through grade three.

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, who was also the school principal.
- The team visited a total of 21 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited ten 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 and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 19 staff members (86 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. After piloting the iReady program in 2017-18, the principal and teachers fully implemented the program in September 2018. In addition to using the program to support instruction in reading and mathematics, teachers are also using iReady to track student progress. Teachers benchmarked student performance in September 2018 and have assessed student progress quarterly. The team examined the latest iReady assessment data, which showed that students have made significant gains in reading and modest gains in mathematics.
2. At the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, the principal began tracking students who were referred to the school office because of behavior infractions. The principal analyzed this information and used the results to identify students who would benefit from additional behavioral supports. She implemented a check-in, check-out system as a way to connect with individual students during the day and introduced individualized behavior management strategies for students who had received multiple referrals. The team examined the data from office referrals, which showed approximately a 75 percent reduction in serious incidents since September 2018.
3. During 2018-19, the principal and teachers reminded students and parents of the importance of students taking the New York State assessments in preparation for future education and career prospects. The principal reported that the opt-out rate for the 2019 State English Language Arts (ELA) assessment was 5 percent as compared to 29 percent in 2018.
4. In September 2018, in conjunction with a new writing curriculum, teachers introduced student portfolios to track student progress in writing across content areas. These portfolios were shared with parents at the recent parent-teacher conferences, and interviewed parents reported that they were pleased with the progress their children had made in developing their writing skills. The team examined a sample of portfolios and noted that most students had made significant progress in their writing skills since the beginning of the school year.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should develop a system to analyze schoolwide data to identify areas for improvement and inform the development of focused and measurable school improvement goals.** The principal reported that in 2018-19, the implementation of the iReady program has allowed for the collection and analysis of student performance data in reading and mathematics. The principal also reported that she has been tracking office behavior referrals and has used this data to target students in need of behavioral support. However, the principal reported that the school does not have a system for using data to identify schoolwide areas of need and to develop specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely (SMART) goals for school improvement. In the future, the principal should develop a system to make effective use of all the available data to identify areas for improvement and establish SMART goals to address them.
- **School leaders need to develop a comprehensive system to ensure that students needing additional supports are receiving them.** Teachers reported that the school does not have a system to regularly analyze data to identify individual and groups of students in need of academic supports and interventions. As a result, the IIT found that many students are not receiving the supports they need to make sufficient progress in their learning. The team examined a range of information relating to subgroups represented in the school,

particularly students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs). These data indicated that students in these subgroups are not performing as well as general education students. General education teachers reported that there is no designated time in their schedule to meet with special education teachers and as a result, they often do not know what supports students with disabilities or English language learners are receiving during pull-out sessions. Special education teachers reported that the current schedule sometimes prevents them from providing support because students are attending specials at the same time they are scheduled to receive supports.

- **The principal must ensure that staff, students, families, and community members have opportunities to be actively involved in the school improvement process.** The principal and teachers reported that there has been significant turnover of school and district leaders in the last five years. Teachers shared that as a result, they have not had opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process and some teachers stated that they do not feel as if their views have been heard. Interviewed students reported that they do not currently have a student council or other means of sharing their views with teachers and school leaders. Parents reported that although the school does have a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the school provides limited opportunities for parents to meet with school leaders to discuss ideas for school improvement.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should clearly communicate her vision for the school to all stakeholders.** Interviewed parents were not able to articulate the principal's vision for the school. Some teachers shared that they did not have a clear understanding of the school's mission or the principal's expectations for academic achievement, effective instructional practices, or her core values. Although the IIT saw some examples of the district mission statement posted in the school, the team did not see evidence of a school mission statement. Interviewed grade three students reported that they were not aware of a school mission or vision statement.
- **The principal should use information gathered from classroom visits and student performance data to determine the impact of professional development (PD) on teacher practice.** The principal reported that due to district responsibilities, such as overseeing student services, class visits have not occurred as regularly as she would have liked. Although teachers received training on strategies to assist ELL students in accessing the lesson content, such as bilingual instruction, the team did not see any of these strategies being used during class visits. Interviewed teachers reported that they have not received any feedback related to their implementation of the strategies learned through PD. In the future, the principal should use the information gathered from weekly walkthroughs to monitor the impact of PD on teacher implementation of instructional strategies and use this information to inform plans for future training.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should use questioning strategies to actively engage students in rigorous thinking and challenge them to develop higher-order thinking skills.** During class visits, the IIT observed few lessons in which students were asked questions that required them to consider possible alternative answers or build on other students' responses to deepen student understanding. The IIT observed some instances during small group instruction when higher-order questions were asked to probe student understanding, but this was not common practice. In the future, teachers should plan and implement higher-order questioning to develop student thinking skills.

- **The school needs to develop a broad and relevant curriculum that is aligned to New York State Learning Standards.** In discussions with staff and students, the team learned that students had not had any science or social studies lessons recently, and that both subjects had only been taught a few times during the 2018-19 school year. Teachers reported that the primary emphasis in recent years has been on reading and writing and that mathematics, science, and social studies have not been a focus. Several interviewed students reported that although they like science, they had not had a science lesson so far in 2019. The principal reported that the school does not have curriculum maps for science and social studies, although there are plans to develop them during the upcoming summer vacation.
- **Teachers should clearly communicate the purpose of the lesson so that students understand what they are learning and why they are learning it.** Most of the lessons observed did not include an explanation of the lesson objective. In some classes, “I can...” statements were posted on the white board, but they were not referred to during the lesson. When the team asked students what the lesson was about, most were unsure of the purpose of the lesson and were unable to explain what they were supposed to be learning. The team did not observe any checks at the end of the lesson to determine if students had understood the lesson objective or whether the objective had been achieved.
- **Teachers need to ensure that lessons start promptly, progress at an appropriate pace, and include time for closure.** At the beginning of several lessons observed, resources needed to deliver the lesson were still being collected and as a result, the lesson did not begin on time. The IIT also found that several lessons did not progress at an appropriate pace. In some classes, students finished their work more quickly than the allotted time, while in other classes, students were not able to complete the task before the end of the lesson. The team did not observe any classes in which time had been allotted at the end of the lesson for students to reflect on what they had learned.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Special education staff and general education teachers would like time to plan together.** Interviewed teachers shared that although most grade-level teams have time in their schedule for teachers to plan collaboratively, special education teachers provide support to students during this time and are unable to attend these meetings. Special education support staff also reported that they do not have time in their schedule to meet with general education teachers, and as a result, they often do not know what specific supports they should be providing to individual and groups of students.
- **Parents and students would like students to be given more challenging work.** Many interviewed students shared that they often do not find the work they are given to be challenging and that they are frequently bored. Some students explained that they often finish their work early and are not given any additional activities to complete. Some parents stated that their children were not being challenged, and some parents shared that some of their children’s work seemed like it was just to keep them busy.
- **Parents, students, and teachers reported that there a lot of behavior incidents on the buses.** Students reported that older students frequently pick on younger students on the bus, and they find this distressing. Some parents reported that their children have told them that they were sometimes physically pushed around on the bus by older students. Teachers reported that some students have complained to them about other students using bad language on the buses.
- **Parents would like more information about strategies their children are learning, especially in mathematics.** Parents reported that some teachers have provided them with information about the topics being covered in

class. However, parents explained that because the current strategies being taught in mathematics are different from what they learned when they were in school, they need more information to be able to help their children complete mathematics homework.

- **Parents would like all teachers to use the same method of communication.** Interviewed parents reported that different teachers use different methods to communicate with families, and they sometimes miss important messages as a result. Interviewed teachers identified multiple means of communicating with parents, including text messages, phone calls, emails, and online systems. Teachers stated that individual teachers use the method that they are most familiar with. Most interviewed parents stated that they would prefer to receive messages from teachers via their cell phones, as this is their primary means of communication. Parents reported that they often do not receive paper newsletters and other information that is sent home with their children, as young children often have difficulty remembering to bring things home.