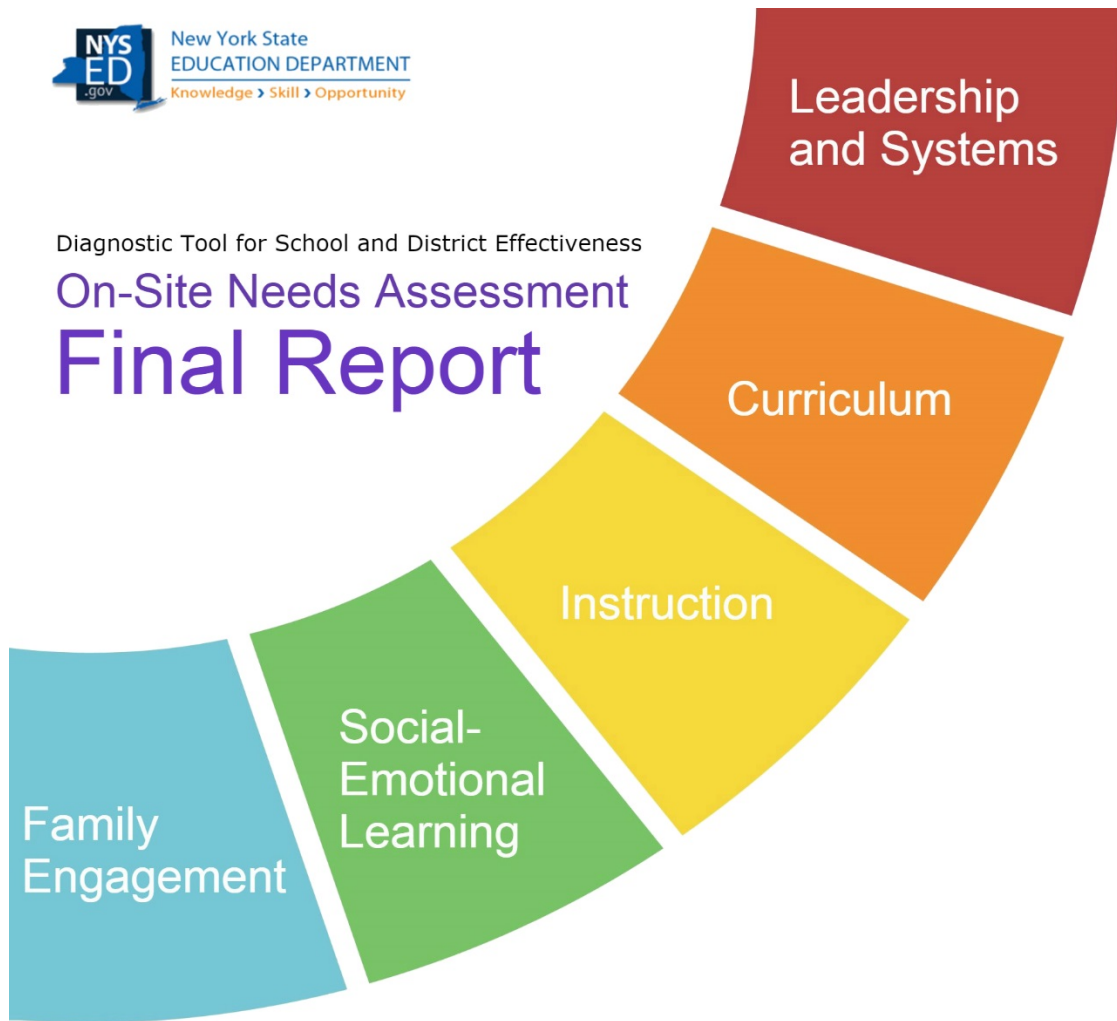


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	310100010332
School Name	University Neighborhood Middle School
School Address	220 Henry Street, New York, NY 10002
District Name	NYC CSD 1
Principal	Laura Peynado-Castro
Dates of Visit	January 7-9, 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.

Information About The Visit

- University Neighborhood Middle School serves 201 students in grades six through eight.
- The visit was led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE) and a representative from NYSED. The team also included a district representative and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 34 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 186 students (93 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 26 staff members (100 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a parent survey that 155 parents (81 percent) completed.
- No school self-reflection document or any of the requested pre-visit documents were provided prior to or during the school site visit.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The school is developing interdisciplinary projects in some content areas. All students attend either art, music, or foreign language for four periods each week. In collaboration with humanities teachers, arts teachers have developed interdisciplinary projects to support core class curricula. Students in upper grades reported working on a music rap video modeled on the Broadway musical Hamilton while studying a unit on the American Revolution. Grade six students shared how they learned a variety of techniques in art class to create ancient maps for their world cultures unit. Several students reported that working on interdisciplinary projects makes coursework more interesting and easier to learn.
2. The principal has focused on developing a culture of distributive leadership and collaboration. Interviewed teachers and students reported that they regularly participate in decision-making processes at the school, such as serving on this year's hiring committee. Students reported that they regularly meet with the leader to provide their input on policies and events. During the team's visit, several students met with the principal to discuss issues with food service in the cafeteria. Surveys and interviews revealed that most teachers and

students feel that the principal has created a culture of mutual trust and respect that is positively impacting the tone of the school.

3. The principal continues to establish strong community partnerships that enable her to expand opportunities and services for all students. For 2018-19, the principal obtained a Building Options and Opportunities for Students (BOOST) grant to provide enrichment classes and guidance to students who want to apply to the specialized high schools. New York University and Hunter College supported the school in opening a program to provide integrated collaborative teaching (ICT) classes for students on the autism spectrum, and in the fall of 2018, the school opened two classes. Both universities offer free on-line and summer courses to support the implementation of this program and many teachers have enrolled. Parents of students in these classes stated that they are extremely pleased with the supports and attention their children receive.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders need to develop action plans to achieve the goals identified in the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) and establish benchmarks to measure progress.** In reviewing the 2018-19 SCEP, the IIT noted that several sections contained separate goals for different content areas, but individual benchmarks and action plans were not explicitly developed for each content-area goal. In addition, action plans typically did not articulate specific timelines but rather indicated start and end dates of September 2018 and June 2019, respectively. The principal reported that staff and parents receive a summarized copy of the SCEP, but teachers were unable to identify the practices they were using to reach the goals.
- **Professional development (PD) should be differentiated or tiered to ensure all participants can put presented theories into practice.** The school provides weekly PD on an array of topics, but classroom observations revealed that workshops have yet to systemically impact teachers' instructional practices. In interviews with teachers, the IIT learned that many teachers need more explicit examples of application strategies and on-going targeted coaching and feedback to help them internalize and implement practices presented.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal provides a wealth of human resources to support student learning but needs to ensure that teachers are maximizing the use of these resources.** Most visited classrooms had a classroom teacher and additional support staff, and some classes had two teachers and additional paraprofessionals. However, in many classes visited, the team saw one teacher delivering the lesson while the other adults were not being utilized to support students during the lesson. In the future, the school leaders should ensure that teachers create lesson plans that delineate the roles and responsibilities of each adult in the classroom so that they are providing targeted instruction that meets the needs of each child.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should monitor student understanding throughout lessons to inform and adjust instruction.** During class visits, the IIT saw few efforts to assess student learning during the lesson, and students frequently displayed misconceptions about content and procedures. Students were not asked to summarize the important concepts of the lesson, paraphrase instructions, or teach a fellow student what they had learned. The team did not observe the use of strategies such as hand signals or exit tickets in most classrooms. When asked by the team, several students in one class could not explain what they needed to do to complete the assigned task. Others could explain the task but did not understand the underlying concept the task was designed to demonstrate. The team observed few lessons in which checks for understanding led to modeling of alternative strategies or reteaching of concepts to ensure all students could access the lesson.
- **Teachers need to provide actionable feedback to students to ensure that students have a clear understanding of the steps they need to take to improve their work.** The team’s review of student work folders and notebooks revealed few grades and little actionable feedback. Students reported that teachers typically put check marks or encouraging comments on their work, such as “good work” or “nice job.” Students stated that they are sometimes asked to reflect on their work and communicate their reflections to the teachers on-line. However, when asked what they did well and what they needed to do to improve their work, most students could not respond. Two interviewed students reported that they are always told to add more details to their writing in humanities, but they could not remember any other feedback.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Teachers would like support in designing lessons that contain entry points for all students.** Interviewed teachers stated that they need to spend more time focusing on interpreting data and looking at student work. Teachers added that a better understanding of error analysis could help them design more strategic interventions.
- **Students would like activities to be matched to student abilities.** Interviewed students shared that they would like teachers to group students with similar needs together more frequently so that students who find the work to be easy could be given more challenging assignments and teachers could work more closely with students who are struggling. Some students also reported that students who do not understand assignments frequently disrupt lessons, making it difficult for others to learn.
- **Families would like to have a clearer understanding of what their children need to do to improve their performance.** Interviewed parents reported that the school provides them with report cards and progress reports, and teachers are typically available to talk to them about their child’s progress. However, most parents were not aware of their child’s strengths and learning gaps and shared that they do not know how to help their child academically at home. The school uses a standards-based grading system that evaluates student progress rather than proficiency. Many parents stated that grades are difficult to understand and suggested that progress reports should be written in parent-friendly language.