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Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment
Final Report

Leadership and Systems

Curriculum

Instruction

Social-Emotional Learning

Family Engagement

BEDS Code	321100010287
School Name	North Bronx School of Empowerment (The Forward School)
School Address	3710 Barnes Avenue, Bronx, NY 10469
District Name	NYCDOE CSD 11
Principal	Magdalen Neyra
Dates of Visit	January 15-17, 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

- North Bronx School of Empowerment (The Forward School) serves 571 students in grades six to 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 24 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited five classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with 38 students, 15 staff, and 4 parents.
- Team members examined documents provided by the school, including unit plans, lesson plans, student work, administrative cabinet agendas, parental calendar flyers, principal calendar, ELL Data Analysis Tool (EDAT), teacher schedules, reading club schedules, data sheets, exit tickets, teacher worksheets, and teacher professional resources.
- In advance of the visit, one staff member (one percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal has prioritized the development of a restorative justice process to help promote a positive school culture, reduce suspensions, and build relationships between students and staff. Teachers interviewed by the team stated that the process is a non-punitive way of addressing student behavior and is helping to build teachers' relationships with students through better communication. Teachers stated that the restorative justice process has resulted in fewer suspensions this school year, as all suspensions are now reviewed by the new suspension committee, formed in the 2018-19 school year, before any student is suspended. Students reported that the restorative justice process allows their voices to be heard.

2. This school year the principal implemented a structure to address literacy across the school by including a reading club block in the school schedule that helps increase student engagement in reading. The IIT observed students participating in homogeneous reading groups based on results from the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment. The team observed reading programs including LightSail, Just Words, STARI, Wilson Reading, Guided Reading, and Book Club implemented during the reading club block, all of which correspond to the individual skill levels of students.

3. The principal has created a positive school culture that promotes teacher development and student learning. Staff stated that the principal provides valuable feedback, has an open-door policy, and is accessible. They also shared that the principal is able to navigate the various personalities of staff, solve problems, provide solutions, and remain even tempered. Students reported that the principal makes them feel comfortable, listens to their ideas, and talks to them. Recognizing the need to provide informal feedback to students and teachers, this academic year the school leaders implemented a system of glows and grows to provide quick, informal, and immediate feedback from school leaders to teachers and from teachers to students. Interviewed students reported that this system allows them to know what they do well and where they need to improve. Interviewed teachers stated that they appreciate the immediate feedback that school leaders provide when they visit classrooms.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal needs to develop a system for monitoring progress toward achieving the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) goals, including a timely and progressive sequence for completing actions steps.** The IIT noted that the majority of the action plan items in the SCEP were scheduled to take place from September 2018 to June 2019, without identifying any interim benchmarks. The principal said she feels overwhelmed with accomplishing improvement goals as she has an idea of where she wants to go but no specific steps to guide the work.

- **The school should develop systems to regularly inform and monitor how students are meeting grade-level standards for reading club.** Teachers and school leaders told the IIT that they use the DRP assessment to monitor students' reading growth during the reading club block, but the school does not use an assessment to measure students' mastery of grade-level reading standards. The team noted that although teachers and school leaders presented the reading club as a Tier 2 intervention, the frequency of progress monitoring or a process for moving students from one level to another after they achieve mastery was not clearly defined. In

the future, the principal should consider identifying a reading standard to focus on during the reading club block, creating a tracker to biweekly measure the progress toward meeting that standard, and developing a system for more frequent progress monitoring other than the use of the DRP three times a year.

- **School leaders should clearly communicate the school vision and SCEP goals**. The principal stated that the school vision and goals had been communicated to staff but had not been revisited with any regularity. Teachers interviewed by the team were unfamiliar with the school vision and specific school goals and priorities. The IIT also noted that SCEP goals posted on the front hall bulletin board had not yet been updated to reflect 2018-19 goals. The principal acknowledged that replacing these goals with new goals from the 2018-19 SCEP had not yet taken place.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should develop a process to align all leaders' instructional walkthrough practices.** The principal stated that, although she conducts some walkthroughs, she has not had the opportunity to conduct walkthroughs with other school leaders. The principal acknowledged that school leaders have not yet developed a shared agreement defining the practices they should look for when they conduct classroom walkthroughs. She added that school leader meetings focus primarily on compliance and professional development (PD), and that more time needs to be devoted to instructional leadership topics.

- **School leaders should provide regular, content-specific support to the departments they supervise.** The principal reported that each of the school leaders is assigned specific departments to supervise. However, teachers shared that the substance of content-specific feedback varies among school leaders. Interviewed teachers stated that in certain content areas, the school leader support is valuable to their practice, while in other content areas the support provided is not as effective as it might be. For example, the school does not yet provide school-based support for the math department. Math teachers interviewed by the team stated that they receive coaching support from Metamorphosis, an outside school partner. The principal stated that school leaders are in the process of developing instructional look-fors for mathematics classrooms.

- **The principal should encourage all school staff and students to adhere to the student uniform and cell phone policies**. The team observed building signage that stated no hoodies or cell phones are allowed in school. However, some students were observed wearing hoodies and using cellular devices. Parents interviewed by the IIT stated that they would like to see the uniform policy more consistently enforced.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should monitor instructional pacing and manage student behaviors in order to maximize instructional time.** The team found that in many classes the intended lesson content was not always covered, leading to a loss of student learning time. For example, the IIT observed that the "do now" portion of the lesson continued throughout the entire period in several classrooms. The team observed agendas written on boards in classrooms that outlined the learning activities planned for the instructional period, but not all topics were covered during the lesson. Students interviewed by the team reported that the misbehavior of students often disrupts their learning time in the classroom. Students mentioned that classrooms are typically noisy, and they sometimes cannot hear each other talk because behavior in the class is not always addressed. Additionally, teachers and students reported, and IIT the observed, that issues with hallway transitions often delay the start of each instructional period.

- **School staff need to develop a process to ensure that students arrive to class on time.** The IIT observed students congregating in hallways, hiding in stairwells, and arriving late to class after the bell rang.
- **Teachers should plan instructional strategies that engage students in their learning.** The IIT observed that many teachers implement whole-group instruction. Interviewed students stated that they would like teachers to break down instruction with different activities and to provide more opportunities for them to engage in the lesson. The IIT observed mostly teacher-led instruction, with few opportunities for student-to-student interaction during lessons. When interviewed by the team, students stated that they learn best when they are engaged in more hands-on activities.
- **Teachers should check for student understanding throughout each lesson.** In one observed class, the IIT noted an exit ticket on the table, but it was not distributed for students to complete. In another classroom, the team observed a check for understanding chart on the wall describing a process for students to self-report their level of understanding of the information taught, but the chart was not referenced during the lesson. The principal stated that she would like to see teachers conducting checks for understanding throughout the lesson instead of just at the end of the lesson. However, she acknowledged that this expectation had not been clearly communicated to teachers.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students would like more opportunities for their voices to be heard in the school.** Students interviewed by the IIT stated that they would like to form a student council to represent their views, share ideas, and plan events for the school. Students also suggested that a student newspaper would be a good way to communicate information to the students.
- **Teachers would like more time to plan instruction with co-teachers.** Interviewed teachers stated that they work with several co-teachers but do not always have adequate time to plan with each one. Special education teachers reported that lesson plans from content area teachers are often shared at the last minute, which does not provide them enough time to properly prepare.
- **Students would like to be recognized for their academic accomplishments.** Interviewed students stated they would like academic assemblies to be held for students achieving honor roll and reaching other academic milestones. These students also said that they would like to have their accomplishments displayed in the school.