

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	321211111684
School Name	WINGS Academy
School Address	1122 East 180 th Street, Bronx, NY 10460
District Name	NYCDOE CSD 12
Principal	Tuwanna Williams-Gray
Dates of Visit	February 26-28, 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:

High School Performance Indicators

4 Yr Grad. Rate <67%	Composite Performance Achievement Level	Average of 4-, 5-, and 6-year Graduation Rate Levels	Combined Composite Performance Achievement and Graduation Rate Level	English Language Proficiency Level	Average ELA and Math Academic Progress Level	Chronic Absenteeism Level	College, Career, Civic, Readiness (CCCR) Level
No	2	1	1	4	1	1	1

Wings Academy serves 464 students in grades nine through twelve.

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 representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 30 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited six 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.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. To provide more targeted feedback to teachers on their instructional practices, this school year school leaders and staff agreed to adopt a new walkthrough tool, which is aligned to professional development (PD) training and is specific, actionable, and focused on how to improve instructional practices. Teachers stated that they feel more invested in the school's success because they are clear about the school leaders' expectations.
2. Recognizing that chronic absenteeism was impacting student learning, school leaders invested in attendance management software during the 2018-19 school year so that staff could track and analyze attendance data throughout the day. As a result, school leaders can engage families through two-way text messaging about issues pertaining to student attendance during the day.
3. The school leaders revised the cell phone policy for the 2018-19 school year to minimize interruptions in learning time. The school invested in magnetic pouches that enable staff to maintain a phone-free learning environment while permitting students to keep possession of their cell phones. Teachers stated that generally students are less distracted and more engaged in classroom activities.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders need to identify implementation benchmarks for the 2018-19 School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) or develop a plan to monitor the school's progress toward benchmarks throughout the year.** The team learned that the school adopted the district's annual goals in the 2018-19 SCEP. One of the goals in the school's plan states that teacher teams will work together to produce unit plans that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS); utilize depth of knowledge (DOK) level 3 activities and performance tasks; and engage students in higher-order thinking and discussion that will result in a two percent increase in the number of grade nine students earning ten or more credits by June 2019. However, the plan to monitor progress does not identify a mid-point benchmark that school leaders can use to guide implementation. The team found that support staff were not aware of the percentage of grade nine students who were on track to graduate after four years at the same point last school year. Similarly, teachers were not certain if the school was on track to meet the goals identified in the SCEP. Benchmarks or a plan to monitor progress would help school leaders determine the effectiveness of the strategies identified in the SCEP to enable the school to meet its improvement goals.
- **School leaders need to develop a plan that would inform them of why goals and benchmarks were not reached so that they can make appropriate revisions.** The team found that the school's 2017-18 and 2018-19 SCEP goals, action plans, and progress benchmarks are similar. They need to be updated or adjusted to reflect progress or revised using new data to establish new baselines, and SCEP monitoring needs to be considered a school priority. As a result of these issues, it is unclear what progress was made toward implementing last year's SCEP, if current benchmarks should be adjusted, or what lessons school leaders learned after reflecting on unexpected challenges.
- **The principal should closely monitor the implementation of initiatives such as the positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) program to ensure fidelity and to communicate revisions and adjustments to staff.** The Wings incentive program for uniform and positive behavior was adopted in 2014. However, the

IIT learned that there was a need for an updated, documented plan for the roll out of the PBIS program during the 2018-19 school year. Interviewed staff shared that the PBIS program was discussed at a staff meeting. But there was a need for clear guidance documents outlining systems, processes, and expectations so that teachers would have a guide they could refer to when they need to clarify an aspect of the program or when unexpected issues occur. For instance, teachers reported that in the first months of implementation during 2018, school leaders gave teachers tickets and told them to distribute them to students. A few months later, staff indicated that a resource staff member was selected to give the tickets to students. The team learned that this change and the reasons for it were not clearly communicated to staff and that some teachers, other staff members, and students did not fully understand how PBIS was supposed to work.

- **The principal should develop and implement an academic intervention process that includes timelines, expectations, a documentation process, and referral and exit criteria, as well as a data-driven approach to identify skill gaps of incoming grade nine students and a schoolwide plan to prevent students from falling behind in math and English language arts (ELA).** The team learned that there is a need for the school to develop a plan that delineates how to provide individualized instruction through academic intervention services (AIS) or a data-driven approach to prevention and early detection in math and ELA. Staff reported that the school does not have the capacity to support all the students who need AIS. Consequently, they can only offer ELA AIS classes to grade ten students and some grade eleven students. For students not able to receive AIS ELA services, a special education teacher-technology specialist pushes into grade nine algebra and portions of grade eleven ELA classes. Going forward, school leaders need to develop a data-driven system to identify foundational skill gaps of incoming grade nine students and then ensure teachers are implementing tier I interventions in the classroom, based on the student’s grade eight performance data, rather than focusing on AIS for intervention supports.
- **School leaders need to prioritize classroom observations or monitor implementation of PD to determine the impact of PD and the improvement of teachers’ instructional practices.** The principal indicated that because of time constraints, she is not able to conduct informal observations as frequently as she would like. The team learned, for example, that although teachers have received some guidance and PD on integrated co-teaching (ICT) best practices, ICT teachers typically choose the one teach/one assist co-teaching model, which may require less planning than other more complex models. The team found that there is a need to more clearly communicate a vision or provide teachers with additional guidance on which co-teaching model (parallel, station, team, alternative, one teach/one assist, one teach/one observe) they should use, so that ICT teachers consistently function as coequal instructors. To improve teachers’ pacing and lesson structure, the principal also arranged for all teachers to receive PD training on the “chunk, chew, review” instructional strategy. However, some teachers indicated that although they were trained on the new strategy, they do not usually use it in their classes because it was not communicated to them that the new strategy would be an expectation or a focus of observations.
- **School leaders should consider developing action plans that include celebrations for students who, although they may have low attendance, may also have the most improved attendance.** The school uses a data system that allows for the analysis of individual and group attendance, and school leaders develop and implement plans for the most chronically absent students. The team found that the action plans only include celebrations and recognitions for students with perfect or good attendance. Students who only show growth, often those who struggle the most with attendance, are left out of such awards. The school’s attendance team meets weekly to review long-term absence reports for students who are chronically absent and schedules special events on days that are often low attendance days. The attendance team recommends home visits or other

interventions based on the individual student's status or family circumstances. However, there is a need for staff to use the data system to tier students so that they can develop and implement targeted solutions and incentives for specific groups of students. Going forward, the school should consider exploring ways to use positive peer pressure to create healthy competitions among and across sections and grade levels so that students are competing to be on the team with the most improved attendance. Staff should also use the bulletin board at the front door to highlight specific students and groups of students who demonstrate significant and moderate growth week to week and month to month.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal needs to develop and effectively communicate expectations for school organization and operation.** Although the school previously developed a staff handbook, the IIT learned that there is a need for an updated handbook for the current school year that explains organizational norms and overall expectations. The team's interviews with teachers and other staff indicated the need for additional clarity regarding the content, timing, and frequency of staff communications. The IIT found the need for clear expectations for initiatives such as PBIS, common planning time, or what high quality first-instruction looks like. For instance, teachers' use of checks for understanding is a priority identified in the SCEP; however, the team learned that teachers need additional information concerning the background or purpose as to why checks are important. As a result, the team observed some teachers giving exit tickets because they were told to do so, rather than because they understood why checks are important. Consequently, some teachers shared that they were not sure that they were going to commit to using them. As teachers are not consistently provided written expectations for greater clarity, the IIT found that some teachers are relying on their memory when they are trying to implement an initiative or program. In the future, the principal, in collaboration with teachers and non-instructional staff, should create an updated staff handbook so that staff can match their behavior with communicated expectations found in the handbook.
- **School leaders should implement a systematic data-driven approach to monitoring teacher effectiveness linked to student growth, to enable individual teachers to determine if they are making progress toward meeting grade-level or content area goals.** The IIT learned that the school does not have an easily accessible data-driven monitoring system that provides teachers and school leaders with the information they need to identify improvement or progress.
- **The principal should develop formal structures and procedures that promote focused and results-oriented meetings.** Although the school provides some rolling agendas, teachers interviewed by the IIT shared that there is a need for additional communication regarding agendas when they meet in inquiry team meetings. Staff also stated that for the attendance team and school leadership team meetings, there is a need for formal meeting structures, including agendas, and the sharing of meeting notes. In discussions with teachers, the IIT learned that teachers have been encouraging each other to use Google Docs for their meetings; however, this is not a consistent practice because some teachers are more knowledgeable about technology than others. In the future, the principal should clearly and consistently communicate an expectation that all scheduled meetings have a shared agenda and a way to share meeting notes as well as next steps.
- **School leaders need to establish a set of schoolwide behavioral expectations that include common rules and incentives.** For example, the team learned that the school attempted to establish PBIS incentives without clearly communicating schoolwide behavioral norms so that students could gauge and monitor their own behavior. Some students interviewed by the IIT stated that they are not sure what they have to do to earn PBIS

tickets. The IIT found that some classrooms had individual classroom expectations posted, but this was not consistently observed in other classes.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should increase opportunities for students to collaborate with other students on challenging, engaging work.** The IIT observed that independent and whole group instruction were the primary instructional strategies. Students typically worked independently to complete worksheets or sat passively listening to the teacher talk. When students were observed working in pairs or groups, they were not often purposefully engaged in problem-solving activities that required discussion or debate; instead, they came together on their own to complete a worksheet. For example, the IIT observed a class that had four students struggling to complete a worksheet on how geography shaped the development of the North and South. The teacher rotated between them, trying to motivate them to focus on the worksheet; however, there was a need to encourage students to work collaboratively to discuss the issues of agriculture, industry, and transportation. After a group discussion was initiated, students began to share their thinking and make connections between their life today and the issues pertaining to the Civil War. The IIT found that teachers typically use one type of instructional group--whole group--when other groupings could help promote student engagement. In another class, the team observed students using the slope intercept form to graph the equation of a line. Students who understood the concepts appeared bored, and/or became distracted by friends while they waited for other students to catch up and the teacher to move on to the next problem.
- **Teachers' need to pose higher level, challenging questions to promote student analysis and critical thinking.** In one class, for example, students were coloring a map of the world while the teacher was discussing the reasons why Islam was able to spread so quickly. The teacher pointed to the map and asked, what area of the world do we call this? After waiting briefly, the teacher answered the question. In some math classes, the IIT noted that questions were often process or procedural questions such as, should we use the Pythagorean theorem to solve the question?
- **Teachers should develop lessons that have a clearly defined structure and ensure that the pace of the lesson is appropriate to promote student learning.** The principal shared that although teachers received PD on pacing and lesson structure, many teachers do not have enough time to review the lesson and provide a formative assessment such as an exit ticket, before the end of the period. Some teachers, the principal noted, spend 20 minutes on do now and bell ringer activities. In one class the team observed, some students expressed impatience that they had to wait for the teacher to reteach the four methods to solve a quadratic equation. After ten minutes of waiting, one student pointed to the anchor chart on the wall and noted that the steps were there to follow and suggested that students choose a method so the lesson can continue.
- **Teachers should increase their skills in classroom management and provide lessons that are engaging or relevant to students' lives.** The IIT found that teachers' skills in classroom management and in providing engaging lessons vary schoolwide. Some staff reported that many of the school's behavioral challenges are the result of some grade nine students misbehaving during class. However, the IIT observed that behavior was not a problem in a grade nine health class. The teacher asked students if based on the guidelines in the textbook, they felt they are making healthy choices when they are not eating at home, and why or why not. All students in the class appeared engaged, reading the guidelines, taking notes, and sketching out what a balanced meal would look like. When asked by the IIT, students explained that they were learning about a balanced meal so that they could make better choices when they eat at restaurants, and they were learning

the reasons why they need to drink more water. In another class, the team noted that all students were sitting with their notebooks open, taking notes and watching a mini biography on James Baldwin's life as an introduction to reading the novel *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Students eagerly volunteered to share their key takeaways, and the team noted that students' responses went beyond three- or four-word answers and were stated in well-developed and thoughtful sentences. However, this was not the norm in most observed classes; students were typically filling in worksheets, and most information came from the teacher without context or background. In most classes where the activity did not engage students, the team observed students talking or passively looking at the teacher. In some cases, students asked to leave the class to go to the office or to see a counselor. In some classes, the teacher was doing most of the work necessary for learning to take place.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Teachers shared that the leadership team members need to clarify their individual roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes to the staff.** Teachers noted that they are not certain who is on the leadership team or the members particular responsibilities. Some teachers expressed the view that decisions about delegating responsibilities and duties may not always be based on skill and ability.
- **Some teachers reported that the school has struggled to develop and recruit teachers to serve on an instructional leadership team to review the status of school goals and initiatives because they felt expectations have not been communicated effectively and that their input was valued.** Teachers stated, for example, that an email asking for volunteers did not include critical information they needed to decide whether to volunteer. Some staff also expressed the viewpoint that the school is not always open to suggestions for improvement and that they do not always feel valued or appreciated for their skills and knowledge. Teachers also shared that they would like more acknowledgement for specific academic growth or achievement of their students.
- **Students and staff reported that the school needs to sponsor more clubs, trips, and after-school activities.** Interviewed students shared that they would like the school to offer clubs and activities, such as dance and a student newspaper. Staff shared that in the past, proposals to organize clubs, committees, or projects were denied because of a lack of funding, and updates as to when funds would become available were not forthcoming. Some students expressed the viewpoint that the principal sometimes cancels trips and events for all students because a few students misbehave.
- **Parents shared that they want teachers to provide more hands-on learning activities instead of relying on worksheets.** One, parent, for example, shared that her son enjoyed working on a technology project where he had to create a computer game and explain how it worked. Other parents expressed concern that their children do not always use textbooks and often complete worksheets. The IIT learned that some students complained to their parents that they are bored at school because the work is not challenging.