

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	310300011494
<b>School Name</b>	High School of Arts and Technology
<b>School Address</b>	122 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10023
<b>District Name</b>	NYCDOE CSD 3
<b>Principal</b>	Mariela Graham
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	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

- High School of Arts and Technology serves 496 students in grades nine to twelve.
- The visit was led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE) and a representative from NYSED. The team also included a district representative, a district representative shadow, and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team made 38 visits to 29 different classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 10 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 333 students (70 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 35 staff members (97 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a parent survey that 67 parents (14 percent) completed.

## Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal shared that when she arrived at the school in August 2017 her priority was to improve the quality of the climate for learning. Interviewed teachers, parents, and students credited the principal with successfully developing a safe and orderly environment. Teachers and students shared that last year many students roamed hallways, at will, and were frequently late to class. In response to this issue, this school year the principal has successfully instituted a new lateness policy that gives students two minutes to get to their next class. Students are now rewarded for punctuality with Pride Points that they can redeem for school supplies and gifts. Hallways are now mostly clear of students during instructional periods and lateness to class has been greatly reduced.
2. While the principal's efforts to change the culture of the school have not yet been fully realized, there is growing evidence that the culture is improving. After the 2017-18 school year, the principal hired 16 teachers who share her vision for student-centered classrooms. While some teachers continue to focus primarily on delivering the subject content, as opposed to concentrating on the quality of student learning, a growing number of teachers now measure the effectiveness of their teaching practices based on student learning outcomes. The student learning-centered approach is also promoting more trusting relationships between students and between students and adults. For example, students shared that this year they feel they have a higher proportion of teachers who care about them and are interested in their welfare.
3. The principal has increased the empowerment of teachers by distributing leadership and delegating greater responsibility. The principal created five teacher leader positions, one of which is the peer collaborative teacher who coordinates mentoring in the school, demonstrates model lessons, and mentors the 11 first-year teachers two periods per week. Four of the five teacher leaders chair the core subject area departments, and the fifth chairs the special education department. The principal selected the teacher leaders because other teachers respect them, and the teacher leaders indicated that they wanted to expand their teaching practices. Teachers shared that they were happy to take on more leadership responsibilities in the school and thankful the principal trusted them in this new capacity. Teachers added that greater leadership roles provide them with a stronger voice and sense of ownership for moving the school forward. The principal also eliminated the position of dean, replacing it with a restorative justice coordinator, and has hired a social worker to specifically support students who live in temporary housing.
4. The principal closely monitors students' credit accumulation and progress toward graduation. Students in grades 11 and 12 knew the number of credits they had earned and how many credits they still needed to graduate. They knew which Regents exams they had taken and which exams they still needed to pass. These students also shared that they take advantage of the weekly after-school Regents preparation sessions. Students said they had received four transcripts thus far in the current school year and that they always had access to their school grades via the online Jupiter program. The principal shared that 70 percent of seniors are on track to graduate, compared to the 57 percent four-year graduation rate achieved in June 2018.
5. The principal has expanded learning and support opportunities for both staff and students. For example, the principal has affiliated the school with Urban Assembly, a community-based organization that she had worked with in her previous school. Urban Assembly has provided the school with professional development on restorative justice practices, which teachers said they enjoyed and found helpful. Grade nine students are participating in Urban Assembly's Resilient Scholars program that helps students address their social-emotional

needs. The principal also introduced AP For All to the school to expand the number of students enrolling in advanced placement (AP) classes. As a result, 43 students are now taking grade 11 AP English, compared to just 12 students taking grade 12 AP Literature, and 11 students taking grade 12 AP United States History.

## Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

### Systems for Improvement

- **The school leaders should have fully developed systems in place to drive school improvement.** The IIT found that many of the necessary systems to improve school practices have not yet been established. These include practices related to the development of goals, action plans and benchmarks, regular monitoring and evaluation, and making adjustments based on strategic analysis. For example, of the six goals in the school's 2018-19 School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP), only one had a mid-year benchmark requiring students to write at least one argumentative essay in ELA and three in science and social studies. The other goals in the SCEP did not contain mid-year benchmarks or other progress monitoring criteria, and progress toward the achievement of these goals through other systematic means has not been regularly monitored or evaluated. The IIT reviewed students' writing portfolios in classrooms and noted that few students had completed the four essays by mid-year. Some classrooms did not keep writing portfolios and it was impossible to determine how many essays those students had written. The school leaders acknowledged that essay writing had not been monitored during the fall semester, so progress in every class toward the stated mid-year or annual goal could not be evaluated.
- **The school should provide additional supports for its lowest achieving students.** The school conducts weekly after-school Regents preparatory sessions and after-school tutoring for a week after progress reports are issued. However, most struggling students do not receive the sustained support they need to succeed. While the teachers of ELLs reported that they did not have access to their students' language proficiency levels, the IIT did not see evidence that access to these data alone would enable them to adapt instruction to meet these students' needs. Teachers have access to their students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) via the Special Education Student Information System (SEGIS), but there is no system to monitor whether teachers access and apply the information. The IIT saw no evidence that students were routinely offered adapted instructional activities based on their students' learning disabilities and annual goals.
- **School leaders need to build a sense of urgency among staff for school improvement.** Teachers and school leaders stated that the school's 16 newly hired teachers, comprising 40 percent of the staff, and some veteran teachers share the school leaders' sense of urgency for school improvement. However, the principal shared that a sense of complacency remains among some staff about the school's improvement status and advancing the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

### Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should clearly communicate a vision for the school's future development.** Although the principal has clear core values and beliefs that inform her vision for the school, the team found that that the school vision was not clear to all stakeholders. School leaders, teachers, students, and parents all identified and attributed different core values and beliefs to the school. For example, despite the school's core values being printed on the Pride point cards, **Perseverance**; **Rigor**; **Inquiry**; **Diversity**; and **Empathy**, school

constituents did not universally recognize these attributes as the school's core values. Additionally, although school leaders shared with the IIT that they had clear expectations for teaching and learning, teachers, students, and parents did not always understand with sufficient clarity what those expectations were or what their roles were in improving student achievement.

- **The school's curricular program should expand elective offerings, including progressive courses of study in arts and technology.** Students and parents were disappointed that the school offered few courses in art and technology, one of the key aspects that attracted them to the school. Students shared that they would like more electives to choose from and stated that they were sometimes programmed for elective courses they had not selected. Going forward, school leaders should develop a two to three course progression in art and technology. Further, the school leaders should consider sharing staff with one or more of the other five schools in the building to expand the number and types of electives offered to students and also consider expanding after-school clubs, such as robotics and electronic gaming, into elective courses.
- **School leaders should ensure that all instructional staff analyze data to inform their strategic decisions.** The principal shared that she and the assistant principals meet twice a week to analyze a range of achievement data, including academic, attendance, and referral data. However, these data are rarely used to inform classroom planning and instruction. The IIT saw no evidence that data was routinely used to group students or to provide leveled instruction to address the diverse needs of their students. Going forward, school leaders should model for teachers the process by which they analyze data to inform their strategic decision-making.
- **The school leaders need to standardize the classroom observation process.** The principal shared, and teachers confirmed, that two school leaders conduct most of the classroom observations. This practice was implemented to allow leaders to assess and standardize the quality of their observations and make certain that leaders prepare observation reports that are consistently detailed and comprehensive. As a result of this ongoing process, leaders have identified inconsistent practices that the principal is now addressing.

## Learning at the School

- **Teachers should make the curriculum interesting and connect it to the lives of their students.** The IIT observed that students generally lacked enthusiasm about what they were learning, and when asked, many students could not explain why they were studying the topics contained in lessons. The IIT also observed that most lessons were not relevant to students' lives. Students were offered few hands-on experiences, such as conducting science experiments themselves rather than watching a demonstration. Many classrooms contained one or two students who put their heads down and disengaged from what was going on around them. The team noted only a few classrooms in which students were provided with a voice in assignments using strategies such as offering students options for long-term project topics or allowing them to demonstrate their understanding through authentic assessments other than paper and pencil tests.
- **Teachers should plan and deliver student-centered instruction that focuses on student understanding.** Teachers shared that their priority was covering the curricular content, particularly in Regents courses. As a result, the team found that there was often not enough emphasis on student learning. For example, the team did not observe checks for student understanding during the lessons in most classrooms so that lessons could be adjusted and students who were confused or uninterested could learn the content before proceeding. There were few opportunities for students to work together or to engage in thoughtful discussions. Some teachers attempted Socratic circles and talk-and-turn, but students often did not speak freely or use strategies to build on their classmates' responses. Going forward, teachers should incorporate more student-centered

activities in which students have an opportunity to work together. Teachers should model accountable talk and how to make arguments by citing evidence to help students develop discussion skills.

- **Teachers should have high expectations for students.** Some students shared that they have low expectations of themselves once they graduate from high school. The principal shared that she is attempting to develop a growth mindset among the staff through the school's professional development activities and through her individual interactions with staff and students. In the future, teachers and students should share in the expectation that all students are able to learn their coursework, to take responsibility over their progress, and to succeed after graduating.
- **Teachers should provide students with activities that develop their social-emotional learning.** Few observed classrooms integrated or addressed social-emotional learning. The November 2018 election day staff retreat contained professional development in social-emotional learning that teachers said was highly effective. However, the IIT observed the strategies learned at the retreat used in few classrooms. The principal created a restorative justice coordinator position in order to deal with students' disciplinary needs by addressing the underlying causes of their actions, rather than just responding to their actions punitively. However, this approach has not yet been incorporated in all classroom practices. Although school tone has improved and there are fewer disciplinary referrals, the social-emotional learning of most students is largely not being addressed.
- **The school should develop a grading policy aligned with its vision for teaching and learning.** When the principal arrived in August 2017, teachers were setting their own grading criteria. In an effort to create order, the principal set school-wide uniform grading criteria. These criteria stated that 70 percent of student grades should be based on tests, 15 percent on classwork, and 15 percent on homework. However, students shared that this policy placed too great an emphasis on test scores and not enough on the quality of their work. The principal shared that she has formed a grading committee to research and reformulate the school's grading policy. Teachers shared that they would prefer that each department collaboratively set grading criteria for its courses, as each subject area has unique characteristics. The IIT noted that the grading policy and criteria should reflect and reinforce the school's vision of teaching and learning. For example, if the school wants students to demonstrate understanding in authentic ways or if student discussion is a priority, then these should be reflected in the grading policy.

## Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students would like teachers to enforce the school's lateness policy with flexibility.** All school constituents were pleased that the school's lateness policy has had a positive impact on school climate. School leaders and teachers shared that two minutes should provide enough time for students to transition to the next class as all classes are held on the third floor. However, some students said that after the bell has rung, teachers should allow students to enter the classroom if they are approaching the door, so instructional time is not lost in the process of having to obtain a late pass.
- **Students shared that the school's cell phone collection and distribution protocols should be more orderly and less time-consuming.** Students suggested that they be allowed to keep their cell phones while in school and that phones be confiscated if students take them out or use them during the school day. Currently, students stand in one line to have their bookbags scanned when they enter the building and then stand on a second line to turn in their phones, which are then placed in individual numbered pouches. Five of the building's six schools collect phones at this time on one line. At dismissal, students again stand on line in the

cafeteria to pick-up their phones before exiting the building. IIT members observed the collection and distribution procedure and found the morning process time-consuming but orderly. The afternoon distribution went more quickly and there was no line within ten minutes of dismissal. School leaders will need to decide whether reforming the policy would be more or less time-consuming and distracting than the present system.

- **Students and teachers would like increased quality and variety of food served during lunch.** Students shared that they would like more choices as to what they can eat for lunch and the daily pizza offering needs more flavor. The IIT visited the cafeteria and observed that the posted menu did not accurately reflect what students were offered. For example, the salad bar was comprised of small bowls of salad ingredients in a three-foot section at the end of the serving line, and the food did not look fresh. No students were observed taking any food from this area. The posted menu for the day included popcorn chicken, garlic toast, mashed potatoes with gravy, broccoli trees, a New York cookie treat, and a salad bar. However, students were being served pizza. The IIT was unable to speak with the dietician.
- **Teachers believe that there should be a better system to duplicate instructional materials.** Teachers shared that there is no clear protocol for duplicating materials. They stated that copiers are often broken, and computer printers often need repair and ink. The principal shared that she is collaboratively developing a protocol for printing teachers' instructional materials. A parent suggested that a student tech squad could be formed to repair equipment and keep track of needed supplies.
- **Parents believe that students should receive textbooks or weekly study guides.** Parents and students shared that it is difficult for students to remain current with their school work when they are absent, and there should be textbooks and a guide available that contain the upcoming week's assignments. Consequently, when students return from an absence, they are further behind than if they had been supplied with resources that allowed them to complete assigned work during their absence. The principal concurred that a weekly guide would be helpful to all students and not just absentees.
- **Students would like teachers to know their students well.** The students shared that many teachers do not know students' individual situations, interests, and goals outside of school. The IIT saw few instances of classroom instruction that was connected to students' lives. For example, a math word problem involved computing parking costs when none of the students had cars. The word problem was taken from the curriculum without making it relevant to students' experiences. Students shared that they want to feel more connected to their teachers.