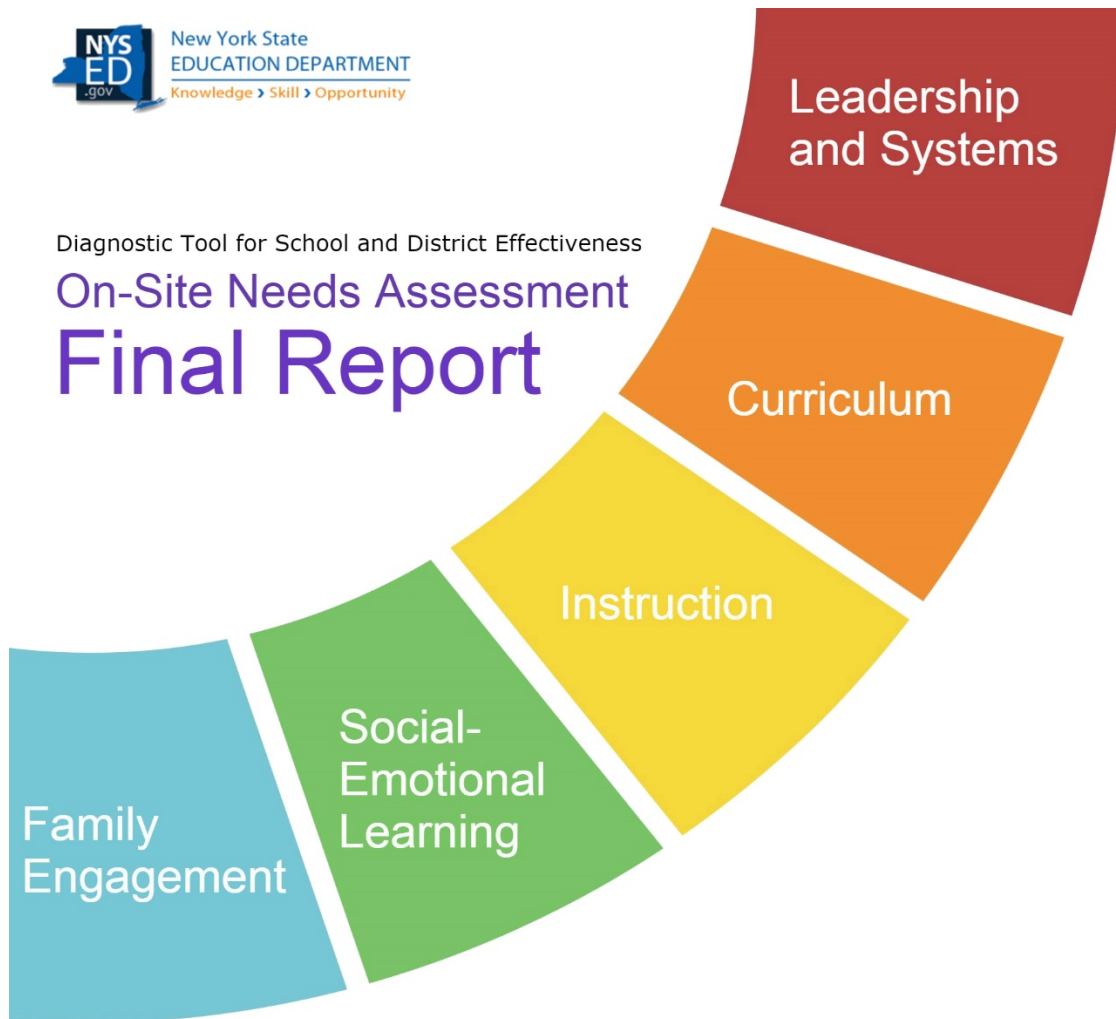


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	333200011556
School Name	Bushwick Leaders High School for Academic Excellence
School Address	797 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11221
District Name	NYCDOE CSD 32
Principal	Catherine Reilly
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

- Bushwick Leaders High School for Academic Excellence serves 303 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 and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 35 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited seven 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 curriculum maps, lesson plans, schoolwide data, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, no staff members completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. Building on successful advisory program practices, school leaders and teachers make sure that all students have daily advisory lessons. The schoolwide advisory program guides teachers' work with students during lessons, and students continue with the same advisory teacher through all grade levels. Interviewed students were very positive and appreciative about the support they receive from advisory lessons. An IIT member observed during an advisory lesson that students appeared confident and were open with and supportive of each other as they expressed and discussed their feelings using the mood meter scale of one to ten.
2. The principal communicates a clear expectation that teachers post behavior reminder charts, learning support charts, word walls, and prompts for students working in groups. As a result, the team observed in class visits that students were aware of expectations and routines and were usually calm, well-behaved, and cooperative. The IIT noted that students were willing to answer questions and express their points of view in front of other students. For example, an IIT member observed a non-English-speaking student confidently contributing in Spanish during a debate, without prompting, knowing that a translator would immediately interpret so that others could understand.
3. The principal works to make sure relationships between teachers, between teachers and students, and among students are caring and supportive. Teachers said they trust each other, and the IIT noted that teachers willingly collaborated during their own time to discuss planning and student progress and well-being. Students said most teachers are willing to provide students with extra help and support during lunchtime or after school. Students also said they were confident that they could go to at least two adults in the school for support, if needed. The team found that students were generally tolerant, inclusive, and supportive of each other. For example, during a meeting one student quietly encouraged a non-English-speaking student to take his time when the student was struggling to answer a question.
4. The school continues to provide all students in grades nine to twelve with college and career readiness guidance and support, including college trips and help with writing resumes. For example, an IIT member observed students in an advisory lesson working together, with support from the teacher, to review their resumes. Some students receive additional support from the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, and students who participate in the AVID support program spoke positively about their experiences. Parents also told the IIT that they value this assistance provided by school leaders and staff.
5. Interviewed parents said that most staff are welcoming, responsive, and supportive, and parents said that they know how to get help and advice from staff when needed. Non-English-speaking parents stated that they appreciate the current and ongoing availability of translators for parent conferences and for meetings. They told the IIT that the principal is open, willing to give parents time and support, and usually tries to speak in Spanish when meeting with them.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should re-focus improvement efforts on identifying and achieving schoolwide instructional priorities.** Instructional development areas outlined in the 2014 Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) report and in the 2018 quality review report remain as current year improvement areas. For example, the 2014 DTSDE report recommended that school leaders should improve questioning skills that trigger students' critical thinking. The February 2018 quality review report found that rubrics and checklists typically loosely aligned with the curriculum and did not always result in timely, actionable feedback to students. During classroom visits, the IIT noted that teachers often did not ask questions that challenged students to explain their thinking or check for student understanding of the learning content and provide timely, actionable, and aligned feedback. As a result, the IIT found that the quality of questioning and approaches to formative assessment vary across the school and remain identified as instructional improvement areas. Despite this, the team noted these instructional components are not included in the 2018-19 School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) as improvement priorities. In the future, the principal should consider providing further support for teachers to develop their skills in effective questioning and in the use of formative assessment strategies to provide timely, actionable, and aligned feedback to students.
- **Improvement plans should identify school priorities that include action plans with clear, time-framed, incremental steps toward meeting improvement goals.** The IIT observed that improvement priorities in the SCEP include specific, measurable, ambitious, results-oriented, and timely (SMART) goals. However, timeframes for monitoring progress toward achieving these improvement goals are broad, such as September 2018 to June 2019, and do not always include interim checkpoints apart from mid-year, February 2019, testing dates. The principal explained that periodic checks are performed to monitor progress made toward achieving the identified goals. However, monitoring documents that demonstrate how school leaders track progress made toward targets were not provided. Therefore, the IIT could not determine how the principal monitors progress toward the goals or tracks whether the goals are being met. In the future, the principal should consider establishing more formal methods to monitor progress toward improvement goals.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should provide teachers with instructional feedback that results in high quality, rigorous instruction across all content areas and grade levels.** During interviews with the principal and teachers, the IIT learned that school leaders provide written feedback to teachers following walkthroughs and informal and formal observations. Teachers confirmed that school leaders talk with them after observations and provide written feedback indicating areas for improvement. However, teachers reported that they do not always receive follow up support to ensure they are able to successfully implement the improvement feedback in their classrooms. Additionally, the IIT found that the feedback process is not resulting in teacher practices that support all students in raising their achievement. For example, the IIT found that the level of challenge and quality of instruction varied across the school. The IIT observed some examples of instructional practice in which students engaged in debates and discussion that extended their learning. The team also noted examples where levels of student engagement were low and below-grade-level activities did not challenge students.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should use student performance data to plan purposeful student groupings and learning tasks that meet the learning needs of different student groups.** In discussions with teachers and the principal, the IIT learned that teachers have access to a range of student performance data. However, during class visits the IIT found that this data was not always used to plan targeted learning tasks for various groups of students. The IIT noted that some lesson plans included planned groups but no explanation or defined purpose for the groupings. In addition, during lessons the IIT observed that the scaffolding strategies and learning tasks included in lesson plans were not always implemented. As a result, learning tasks in classrooms often did not match the varied student learning needs.
- **Teachers should use formative assessment strategies to check students' understanding of their learning.** During class visits, the IIT did not typically observe teachers asking questions to monitor student learning and provide students with feedback to increase understanding during lessons. The IIT also observed that, although rubrics and checklists were evident in many classrooms, they were not referred to as tools to check students' understanding of the lesson content. Students said some teachers provide detailed improvement advice, but others provide only general advice such as "study more." As a result, most teachers are unable to fully assess levels of student understanding, provide timely learning feedback to students, or adjust instruction to better meet the needs of learners.
- **Teacher questioning should support, extend, and assess student learning.** The IIT observed many instances during classroom visits in which students were asked low-level questions that required only short answers or routine questions about tasks to check that students knew what to do. The team often noticed students being asked general, whole-group questions that required group call-out answers instead of targeted individual questions to make sure that all students were engaged in the lesson. As a result, the team found that questioning did not typically lead students to stretch their thinking or deepen their learning. In the future, school leaders should consider providing further support and guidance for teachers to improve their capacity to effectively use questioning during lessons.
- **Instruction across the school should meet the learning needs of all student groups.** The IIT observed English language learner (ELL) students and students with disabilities receiving additional support from teachers and other adults in classrooms but noted few instances in which learning tasks closely matched these students' learning needs. For example, in several classrooms, the team found that all students, including ELL students and students with disabilities, participated in the same learning tasks at the same level of challenge. In lesson plans and in classrooms, the team found little evidence of extension tasks for higher-achieving students. Only those students who participate in Advanced Placement (AP) classes reported a notably higher level of challenge than they usually experience in other classes.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students would like more choices of elective classes and afterschool activities.** Students told the IIT that they appreciate the choices they currently have for elective classes and after-school activities. However, some students told the IIT that they thought art and acting were the only elective options available to them. These students said they would value more options for additional learning experiences, including more electives and extracurricular activities.

- **Some non-English speaking parents whose children have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) would like more information about how they can be involved in decision-making for their children.** Some non-English speaking parents whose children have IEPs said that they appreciate the support that staff provide for their children. They told the IIT that staff are typically helpful and work hard to support their children’s learning needs. However, they said that even though interpreters were always available for meetings, they often felt staff only explained the educational decisions that had been made for their children instead of consulting them and asking for their views. These parents said they would like to receive more information and guidance to help them be more actively involved in making decisions about the support provided to their children.