

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	320900011404
<b>School Name</b>	School for Excellence
<b>School Address</b>	1100 Boston Road, Bronx, NY 10456
<b>District Name</b>	NYCDOE CSD 9
<b>Principal</b>	Jeffrey Houston
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	April 30 – May 2, 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:

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	1	1	1	2	2	1	1

School for Excellence serves 290 students in grades nine to 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 36 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited four 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, 25 staff members (92 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

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

1. During the 2018-19 school year, staff have continued to make sure that students know their credit requirements, their on-track status, and what they need to achieve in order to graduate. Several students mentioned that they receive beneficial support from the guidance counselor to keep on track with their credit load and courses required for graduation.
2. The school has a well-established system maintained by staff throughout the school year for students to check in their cell phones, so they do not carry them during the school day. Students shared that they like the system because it helps to avoid disruptions and distractions that can arise when students use cell phones in school. The IIT did not observe any instances in which students were distracted by cell phone use in classrooms or in hallways.
3. School leaders and staff have continued their work this academic year to develop and maintain a positive and supportive learning environment for all students. Students, teachers, and parents talked about how they value the small school environment and often referred to the school community as similar to a close family. The team noted during discussions and in classroom and hallway observations that relationships between staff and students and between students were typically positive and respectful. Students talked about feeling well supported and cared for by staff. Students and parents said that the principal and staff are approachable, responsive, and helpful.
4. The principal has continued to program English as a new language (ENL) teachers so that they work directly with teachers in an academic block. As result, they are able to co-plan with content-area teachers and co-teach in classrooms to support the learning needs of English language learners (ELLs). The team's review of 2017-18 New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) data showed evidence of growth in ELL students' academic achievement.

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

### Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders will need to establish formal systems that allow them to frequently monitor progress toward achieving identified school improvement goals and adjust actions if necessary.** The IIT noted that the 2018-19 Continuous Education Plan (CEP) includes school improvement goals with June 2019 deadlines. Action plans in the CEP include some incremental steps toward achieving identified improvement priorities but no checkpoints to monitor progress toward goals, apart from February 2019 benchmarks. In discussions with the IIT, the school leaders verbally described progress toward June 2019 improvement goals in general terms rather than providing specific, quantifiable evidence produced by formal monitoring systems. As a result, it was not evident how closely or frequently the school leaders monitor progress toward achieving goals, so they are able to determine whether their actions are achieving the intended impact and adjust action steps, if necessary.
- **The principal should review and strengthen formal systems to monitor schoolwide practices.** During discussions with the school leaders, the team learned that there are few formal systems in place to monitor schoolwide practices and gather data to inform schoolwide decision-making. For example, there is no formal walkthrough system that school leaders use to regularly and frequently monitor instruction and provide

detailed written feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice. The team learned that information is also not systematically collected and analyzed regarding the work of social-emotional support staff with community-based organizations such as City University of New York (CUNY) Arts and the on-site Montefiore clinic to ensure that programs are organized to support students and allow school leaders to monitor their effectiveness.

## Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should delegate more responsibilities to individual staff and staff teams in order to strengthen schoolwide leadership capacity, develop individual staff leadership skills, and release school leaders to focus on key leadership areas such as monitoring the quality of instruction.** During discussions with the team, the principal acknowledged that he takes on many responsibilities without enlisting the aid of individual staff members or teams. For example, school leaders currently spend a lot of time on issues related to student behavior and well-being that other staff could potentially deal with. He acknowledged that delegating some of these responsibilities would allow school leaders to attend to schoolwide improvement practices such as visiting classrooms more frequently to provide teachers with frequent and detailed feedback to help them improve their teaching practices. The principal said that he has begun the initial planning to establish committees structured to work on specific areas of school improvement.

## Learning at the School

- **The principal should work with staff to establish schoolwide positive and preventive social and emotional support systems and programs for all students.** Staff and school leaders talked about how they often identify students in need of support for their personal well-being through observation and their personal knowledge of individual students. However, the team learned that there are no schoolwide systems to identify, refer, and support the social and emotional needs of all students. Staff also reported that there are no schoolwide curricula or programs, such as character-building programs, or other support strategies that would provide positive and preventive support for all students' social and emotional needs.
- **Teachers should improve their questioning skills to engage students and to deepen and extend their learning.** In many observed classes, the IIT found that teachers did not ask many questions over the course of instruction and typically asked general whole-group questions that only a few students answered. The few questions asked by teachers usually only required brief answers and did not include higher-order questions that would provide opportunities for students to develop their thinking skills. As a result, questioning typically did not provide all students with opportunities to explain their ideas or deepen their learning, and many students were not regularly engaged in answering or asking questions.
- **Teachers should provide students with more opportunities to actively engage in their learning by talking to each other and participating in group discussions and group problem-solving.** In some classrooms, the team observed students in groups engaged in discussions about learning tasks and recording text-based evidence to support their conclusions. However, in other classrooms, the team found there were often missed opportunities for students to discuss their learning and problem-solve together during lessons. As a result, students typically had limited opportunities to engage in activities such as turn and talk, group discussion, or group problem-solving. Teachers told the IIT that they have received little support to help them with instructional strategies to actively engage students in their learning. During interviews, students shared that

they would like to take part in more debates, discussions, and group activities with classmates during their lessons.

- **Teachers will need to improve their use of data to plan instruction that matches the learning needs of all student groups.** During classroom visits, the team noted a few instances in which groups of students were provided with learning tasks that matched their needs. For example, in one class, two groups of students worked on different levelled tasks. In another class, groups of ELL students worked on different tasks based on their language proficiency level. However, in most observed classrooms, the team noted that students, including students with disabilities and ELLs, were not typically provided with varied levels of data-driven learning tasks closely matched with their learning needs using, for example, different texts and worksheets. Some students shared that even when working in groups in their classes, they usually complete the same task at every group table. The IIT observed few instances where higher-achieving students received more challenging work that matched their abilities. Several interviewed students confirmed that learning tasks are often easy, and they only receive additional challenge in classes such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes. In several classrooms that included ELLs or students with disabilities, the IIT observed that the teacher did not provide manipulatives or scaffolds to provide learning support for these groups of students.

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

- **Students would like more organized activities and instruction during gymnasium time.** During discussions with the IIT, several students shared that they feel frustrated that gymnasium time lacks organization and does not provide them with meaningful activities. They expressed the view that some students often treat gymnasium periods as free time. For example, they told the team that they believe some senior students often sign in for the gymnasium lesson and then leave. Students said that they need gymnasium credits for graduation.
- **Students would like to be provided with more options for clubs.** During interviews, students told the IIT that they appreciate the additional learning experiences provided through after-school clubs and activities, such as cooking, robotics, and dance. However, they said that they would like to be able to choose from a wider variety of options. Some ELL students told the IIT that they were not aware of available clubs and additional activities.
- **Some students said that they do not receive enough homework to support their learning.** Several students told the team that they often do not receive homework to help them practice learning skills and extend their knowledge. While they appreciate the support that teachers provide for them during their lessons, they said they would appreciate and value more homework to help them with their studies.