New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge ▶ Skill ▶ Opportunity

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	320900011263
School Name	Validus Preparatory Academy
School Address	1595 Bathgate Avenue, Bronx, NY 10457
District Name	NYCDOE CSD 9
Principal	Christopher Hibbert
Dates of Visit	April 2-4, 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	1	1	1	3	1	1	1

Validus Preparatory Academy serves 363 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 31 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited eight classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with 20 students, eight staff, and seven parents.
- Team members examined documents provided by the school including teacher schedules, professional learning community (PLC) protocols, instructional priorities, student notetaking templates, lesson plan templates, teacher lesson plans, flyers to parents, data spreadsheets of the Super Initiative, teacher instructional material, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 19 staff members (79 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal is working to create a positive school culture to promote teacher development, solid behavior norms, and student empowerment across the school. Staff reported that the principal is accessible and goes above and beyond by arriving early and staying late, and by ordering supplies to ensure the needs of the school community are met. Interviewed teachers stated that this school year, they began implementing professional learning communities (PLCs) at the principal's direction, which has given them the opportunity to share problems of practice with colleagues. Grade twelve students stated that this year they felt empowered when the principal approved their plan to allow seniors to leave campus for lunch if they earn a certain percentage for attendance and positive behavior for the week. Additionally, students interviewed by the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) stated that the school is a safe environment overall with clear behavior norms and that as a result, there are few, if any, altercations at the school.

2. In 2018-19, the school introduced the College Block Super Initiative, which affords students the opportunity to take charge of their own learning and behaviors that lead to success in school by tracking key data through a merit and demerit system for attendance, credits, grade point average (GPA), tardiness, and cell phone use. The IIT learned that the implementation of this initiative has created comradery among students and a friendly competition among the schoolwide colleges that have been developed. This point system of merits and demerits has helped to enhance student accountability and self-efficacy. Students told the IIT that the top three schoolwide colleges at the end of the school year are awarded with various field trips.

3. Student and staff member interactions are warm and caring. Students and staff interviewed by the IIT stated that they care deeply for each other. Several interviewed students shared that teachers help them during lunch and after school, which helps them improve their grades and keeps them motivated to do well in school.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **Staff should be able to articulate the key priorities outlined by the principal.** The principal reported that it is important for staff to understand the main priorities of the school to ensure that the school's work has a clear and coherent focus. The principal shared that the key priorities for the school focus on increasing the rigor of instruction, improving students' Regents exam scores, and developing teachers' work in PLCs. However, when asked by the IIT to identify key priorities, various staff members stated different priorities such as Text coding or annotation, Asking and answering higher-order thinking questions, and Peer-to-peer discussion (TAP); Regents exam preparation; student discussion; and student grouping. Interviewed staff reported that the priorities are communicated mainly through the annual staff retreat. The team found that by providing the staff with more support on what the school priorities are, instruction schoolwide can be more coherent and focused.

- **Lesson plans should demonstrate an alignment between learning targets, standards, and learning outcomes.** The IIT found that while the school has the tools and capacity, such as instructional strategies, instructional leaders, and curriculum to make strides on quality and rigor, there should be a clearer link between learning targets, standards, and learning outcomes in lesson plans. The IIT observed that the current lesson plan template needs the option of embedding language objectives that would support integrated English as a new

language (ENL) instruction. Interviewed teachers shared that the ENL teachers co-teach a few periods with core subject area teachers but need to regularly plan with the content area teachers. In the future, the school leaders should provide a revised lesson plan template that includes learning targets, standards, and learning outcomes. Additionally, the school leaders should provide exemplars of this lesson plan template as models that demonstrate coherence, alignment, and are inclusive of ENL strategies that support student needs.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal and school leaders will need to focus on instructional leadership.** Teachers interviewed by the IIT stated that master teachers and peer collaborative teachers are the instructional leaders in the school, as they provide the professional development (PD) and lead the PLCs. Teachers stated that they look to the school leaders more for culture and climate matters such as student behavior and town halls. School leaders should consider participating in the PLCs, as it would be helpful for teachers to see the school leaders as a part of the learning communities outside of their role as evaluators.

- **The school leaders should establish a schoolwide framework for instruction.** In classrooms observed by the IIT, instruction needed more opportunities for students to engage in discussion, modeling, or sharing of learning with others. The IIT noted that while teachers had an agenda of activities listed on the board, instruction was mainly a step by step explanation, with a need for a gradual release of responsibility to the students so that they could develop independence and gain mastery of the subject matter. In the future, the principal should consider adopting a gradual release, or "I do, we do, you do," model to help support the flow of instruction and to promote student ownership of learning.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers will need to support students in taking ownership of their learning.** When asked by the team during class visits and focus groups, students were able to state that they were learning in math, history, or English, but they had difficulty with identifying or articulating the specific skill or standard they were learning, although it was posted on the board in many of the visited classrooms.

- **Teachers should use formative assessment and checks for understanding during instruction.** In most classrooms observed by the IIT, formative assessments, such as targeted questions regarding the content, or lesson closure activities like exit tickets, were not typically used throughout the lesson. In some classrooms, the IIT observed feedback rubrics on the bulletin boards, but in discussions with the team, students had difficulty articulating how the rubrics were used to inform instruction.

- **Students should be provided with opportunities to engage actively in discussions and to process new information in all classrooms.** In the general education classes observed by the IIT, students needed a more active role in learning, although the opposite was observed in the Advanced Placement (AP) classes where students were actively engaged in rigorous discussion, debate, and analysis of the subject matter presented. While the team observed students sitting in groups in most classrooms, the students worked independently and asked other students for assistance only when needed. Students shared that they would like more engaging learning activities that allow them to collaborate during the lesson.

- **Teachers need to ask questions at different levels beyond solely recall.** The IIT observed that the types of questions being asked of students were either to corroborate what the teacher was saying or to respond with one-word answers. The team noted that incomplete answers were accepted, and the correct or missing parts

of the answer was provided to the students. In the future, the school leaders should focus on helping teachers build more complex discussion questions for students to think beyond factual recall, yes/no, and one-word answers.

- **Teachers should be working with students to use academic language in classrooms.** In classrooms visited by the IIT, exchanges between students and between students and the teacher needed to include more academic language related to the lesson. The team observed that when students responded to questions, basic vocabulary in lieu of academic vocabulary and incomplete answers rather than full academic explanations were accepted. When observing students assisting each other with the lesson, the IIT noted that students should use the key vocabulary of the lesson that was introduced by the teacher.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents, teachers, and students shared that there should be a clear cell phone policy to ensure that students do not have phones visible during classes or in the school area.** Interviewed students shared that there should be a stricter policy on cell phones and that the school should institute a system of checking phones in and out before and after school, similar to what is done during testing times. Interviewed teachers stated that cell phone use is becoming problematic, and they said that the school needs to develop a clear plan of action to address the issue. Interviewed parents shared that their children should not be able to use their phones during the school day, adding that their use of social media on their phones could cause additional problems.

- **Students shared that they would like to reinstate the Student Government Association in order to ensure voices from all grade levels are heard**. Students interviewed by the IIT stated that if a group of students has an idea they would like to see implemented, they gather their ideas, present them to the principal, and then the principal determines if the ideas can be implemented. Students shared that this process does not capture the voices of all students and that a Student Government Association, comprised of students from all grades, would help generate additional ideas and increase student involvement.

- **Teachers expressed the opinion that changing the start and end times of the school day would help improve student attendance.** Teachers shared that shifting the school's time to a few minutes later, so that the school day ran from 8:45 a.m. to 3:05 p.m., would help alleviate student tardiness. Teachers stated that they have students who need to drop off siblings at the elementary schools, and if the start and end times were changed, the students would be able to drop off their siblings and still make it to school on time. Teachers indicated that students who have attendance and lateness issues need additional social-emotional supports, which they said is particularly important for the grade nine students transitioning from middle to high school.

- **Students reported that while the school equips them for college and/or career, they feel that the preparation should begin earlier.** Interviewed students shared that while college advisement is available in grades eleven and twelve, they would like the school to provide students in grades nine and ten with college prep courses, college information, college visits, and other resources that would help inform them of what they need to do to attend college. Students also said they want the school to provide more rigorous courses, especially if they had passed one or two Regents exams prior to entering high school. Students shared that they would like to be able to take additional courses that are not offered in their school but are offered at the other high school in the building such as art, music, and AP calculus.

- **Parents stated that students crossing the street against the light at arrival and dismissal creates a dangerous situation.** Parents interviewed by the IIT stated that students often ignore the traffic signal located at the corner of the school and walk into traffic without looking because they are on their phones or they are talking

with friends. Parents stated that a school safety officer or a school staff member is needed to help monitor the corner of the school during arrival and dismissal.