New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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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	461300010000
School Name	Oswego Middle School
School Address	100 Mark Fitzgibbons Drive, Oswego, NY 13126
District Name	Oswego City School District
Principal	Mary Beth Fierro
Dates of Visit	March 5-7, 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:

Elementary/Middle School Performance Indicators

Composite Performance Achievement Level	Student Growth Level	Combined Composite and Student Growth Level	English Language Proficiency Level	Average ELA and Math Academic Progress Level	Chronic Absenteeism Level
2	1	1	-	2	1

Oswego Middle School serves 555 students in grades seven through eight.

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 district OEE.
- The team visited a total of 50 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited ten 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 schoolwide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 58 staff members (89 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. In the 2018-19 school year, the school was awarded one of 37 Riding for Focus grants by the Specialized Foundation, which promotes the use of cycling as a tool for students to achieve academic and social success and to promote good health and fitness. The grant provided the school with 20 bicycles for student use. The physical education teachers reported that they ensure a continuous rotation of students' use of the bicycles in physical education classes and afterschool activities when the weather permits. The school has several cross-country trails that are used for student cycling. During discussions with the IIT, students expressed enthusiasm about this initiative and spoke confidently about the benefits of learning how to ride a bicycle and keep fit.

2. The IIT learned in discussions with students and staff that students' transition from elementary school to Oswego Middle School proceeds smoothly. Students reported that they settled in quickly because they were well supported throughout the transition. They told the IIT that they were impressed when the principal and some students visited their elementary schools when they were in grade six to introduce them to the school. Students also noted that the summer orientation they attended prior to entering the school in grade seven was helpful. Students shared that they like it when the bell rings at the end of every period and they move from one class to another because it made them feel grown-up.

3. Students in grades seven and eight spoke about the Home and Careers course and stated that they like the tasks that are assigned to them that relate to developing life skills. Students reported that teachers assigned real-life homework assignments such as cleaning out the refrigerator and the microwave, which they said they enjoyed taking part in. Students shared that they learned how to read directions and follow instructions as they completed other homework assignments such as washing a load of laundry. Students stated that the course is preparing them for when they live away from home.

4. In discussions with parents, the IIT found that parental support for the school is generally positive. The principal reported that attendance is high when students and their families are invited to school events. The IIT confirmed this information in a review of attendance data for the recent Grade Seven Orientation, the Fall Open House, and The Scooter Basket Ball hosted by the National Junior Honors Society.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leadership needs to develop school priorities in their improvement plan into goals that are consistently specific, measurable, ambitious, results-oriented, and timely (SMART) to better enable them to measure progress.** The IIT found that although the school improvement plan includes a list of activities, they are not sufficiently specific to determine if goals are achieved. Incremental actions and benchmarks also need to be identified to provide school leaders with clear evidence to show improvement.
- **The principal should share the priorities for improvement with stakeholders.** During discussions, the IIT found that the priorities for improvement have yet to be shared with teachers, parents, and students. Consequently, stakeholders are unsure about what the school is working towards improving.
- **The principal should establish a system that accurately records attendance for all students, including students in the Intensive Learning Center, those serving out-of-school suspension, and those who are homebound tutored.** During discussions with the principal, the IIT learned that attendance could be more

accurately recorded for students in school and at times for those out of school, such as those who are homebound tutored. The IIT also found, for example, that when a student does not arrive to school on time, he or she may already have been marked as absent. The principal noted that not all teachers alter the mark to *present* after the student has arrived. During discussions with the principal, the team learned that this issue could result in safety concerns if students are marked as absent when they are actually in school. In the future, when the system is developed, the school leaders should communicate to all staff how the system works and how it is monitored for accuracy. School leaders should then analyze the school attendance data for trends and patterns, and they should track the attendance of students, especially those who are chronic absentees, with precision.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal and the assistant principal should organize a schedule of focused walkthroughs every week to ensure that initiatives for which all teachers have had training, such as explicit direct instruction, are improving the quality of instruction.** In class visits, the IIT found that although teachers posted "I can …" statements in their classrooms, they were not always written in child-friendly language. There was not a consistent focus on checking for student understanding or on enabling students to demonstrate what they had previously learned. Questioning was often directed to students who volunteered answers as opposed to those who did not raise their hand. In the future, school leaders will need to ensure that teachers are meeting school leaders' expectations for explicit direct instruction in their planning and delivery of instruction.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers s need to use the English language arts (ELA) and math achievement data that are collected for each student to adjust their planning and delivery of instruction to address the wide range of students' academic needs.** The IIT found when visiting classrooms, that teachers generally planned one lesson for all students and did not consider students' different achievement levels. Consequently, some students were appropriately involved in the lesson while others struggled silently with their work. In the future, the principal and assistant principal will need to ensure that teachers gain confidence in understanding the achievement data that are collected for all students so that they may plan activities not only for students achieving at grade level but also for those students who are achieving below and above grade level.
- **Teachers should consider students' reading levels when they plan and deliver instruction.** The team learned that the achievement data for the school's students show that many students are reading below or well below grade level. When visiting classrooms, the IIT found that students' reading levels were not always considered in the activities students complete. During discussions with the team, some teachers stated that they were not sure which students have difficulty reading the assignments. The IIT observed that often all the students read the same text. Some students appeared to find the texts easy to read while others quietly struggled with the tasks they were given. Because the understanding of students who were not contributing to the lesson was not being checked, those who worked quietly but found the work difficult, made minimal progress.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students and teachers reported that lessons are sometimes disrupted when the behavior of a small number of students interferes with the learning of others.** Some students told the IIT that they like learning and are not happy when their learning is disrupted by the behavior of students who do not want to learn. Teachers confirmed that this happens at times and that usually only a small group of students misbehave.