

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	580224030009
<b>School Name</b>	Eagle Elementary School
<b>School Address</b>	1000 Wave Ave, Medford, NY 11763
<b>District Name</b>	Patchogue-Medford Union Free School District
<b>Principal</b>	Erin Skahill
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	March 12 – 14, 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	3

Eagle Elementary School serves 588 students in grades pre-kindergarten to five.

## 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, the Eastern Suffolk BOCES superintendent, and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team made 42 visits to 36 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited eight 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, 46 staff members (98 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

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

1. The principal and staff are working to build upon their successful development of a positive and nurturing school environment. The principal, staff, and parents shared with the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) that there has been a marked shift in the school's culture over the past two years that has turned the focus on students first. Students and parents shared that they consider the school staff to be their second family and that a feeling of support and caring is pervasive throughout the school. Parents shared numerous stories of the school staff helping their families through crises and that they considered the school to be a safe haven for their children. During the visit, the team observed caring and respectful interactions between students and between students and adults.
2. During the 2017-18 school year, the principal established structures and developed a process to address the needs of students who exhibit particular learning and behavioral challenges. This process was fully implemented in the 2018-19 school year. As part of the process, the school's data team discusses students who have been referred for academic and/or social-emotional support. A case manager is then assigned to each student, who monitors their progress and the effectiveness of the interventions prescribed by the data team. The data team next identifies strategies for a four to six-week period. After students have been discussed by the data team three times without making sufficient progress, they are referred to the student intervention team. This team then determines what next steps should be taken with the student, including possible referral for special education services.
3. The school continued to build upon its dual language program this year to address the learning needs of its Spanish-speaking students, as well as to teach Spanish to native English language speakers. The program comprises one class in each of grades kindergarten through three, where students receive instruction in English and Spanish on alternating days from two different teachers whose classrooms are side-by-side. The principal shared that an analysis of student progress in these classes thus far this year revealed that students made the same progress as students in monolingual classes. Students and parents shared that they liked the new class and that students made friends with classmates of different backgrounds that they otherwise would not have made.
4. During the past two school years, the school has expanded its enrichment activities to foster student creativity and provide students with unique educational opportunities. To achieve this goal, the school leaders and teachers have established a unique set of environments. Students in grades kindergarten through two visit the Imagination Station once a week, where they build structures with large blocks. Students in grades three through five visit the Wonder Room once a week, where they build structures with LEGO pieces. Students in all grades visit the Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) room upon appointment, where they participate in hands-on science activities like the dissection of owl pellets. Students in grades kindergarten through two also visit Tiny Town by appointment, where they take part in theatrical productions. The school also provides students with monthly yoga and mindfulness sessions taught by outside specialists. Students have opportunities to take part in numerous after-school clubs such as Math Olympiad, Girls on the Run, Boys on the Run, the Stock Market Club, and the Random Acts of Kindness Club. Kindergarten students also participate in the Let Grow program. In lieu of one homework assignment per week, students participate in an activity outside of school that is new to them and describe it graphically and in writing for their classmates. Students may, for instance, feed a pet, help make their lunch for school, fold the laundry, or send a letter to a soldier. Students in grade five can serve in Safe, a student service group that provides service to teachers and

the school. They may, for example, escort students to the bus, help students get ready to go home, and help teachers organize the materials in their rooms.

5. During the 2018-19 school year, the principal established a Principal Advisory Council with whom she meets on a weekly basis. The council comprises teacher liaisons from every grade level as well as teacher specialists. Teachers shared that they felt empowered by being part of the council and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the school's priorities and instructional initiatives. The principal shared that as a result of the advisory council, the school has better vertical communication across grade levels and better coordination of its instructional services for its neediest students.

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

### Systems for Improvement

- **The school should incorporate the strategic elements of its approach to interventions and referrals when analyzing the quality of teaching and learning.** Although the school's referral and intervention processes are characterized by some aspects of an organized system, the school has not developed a full systems approach to school improvement. The school's referral and intervention process has some elements of a comprehensive school improvement system. For example, students who are typically referred for behavioral reasons are discussed by the data team where strategies are developed. If needed, students are then referred to the student intervention team, who determine what next steps should be taken with the student, including possible referral for special education services. The principal shared that she would like to develop a comprehensive system to evaluate and analyze the quality of teaching and learning. Going forward, the school should identify areas related to instructional initiatives that would benefit from a systems approach that includes goal setting, developing action plans with interim benchmarks, analyzing progress against those benchmarks, and making adjustments based on their analysis of the progress made.
- **The school should find ways to expand the length of Professional Development (PD) sessions so that a more in-depth understanding of the content can be offered.** The school has 25 minutes of PD on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 8:30 – 8:55 a.m. However, the IIT found that this current configuration of PD does not allow teachers to adequately receive a full and complete understanding of the training being provided in this abbreviated time frame. For example, the IIT observed a PD session led by the literacy coach on guided reading that was attended by 14 teachers. As there were a large number of staff present, teachers did not have an opportunity to fully develop their skills in this area in the twenty-five minutes allotted and could have benefitted from a more robust allotment of continuous PD time.

### Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should leverage the strong relationships she has developed with her staff to build a shared understanding of effective school practices.** The school staff spoke positively about the principal and shared that she is respected as an instructional leader. The staff shared that they find the principal to be an articulate communicator with an open and inclusive leadership style; however, more could be done to communicate expectations for teaching and learning and then follow this up with rigorous monitoring, detailed but

constructive feedback, and differentiated support and accountability measures. Additionally, teaching practices observed typically did not focus on the level of student learning being achieved, but concentrated rather, on the delivery of curriculum content. Thus, observed teacher instructional practices did not reflect the principal's stated expectations for reflective teacher practice in both planning and instruction.

## Learning at the School

- **Teachers should design their lessons around specific concepts and skills that take into consideration the varying ability levels of their students.** IIT members found that the specific learning objective or purpose for the lesson was unclear in a number of classrooms visited. These lessons were not organized around a specific skill or concept that was referenced throughout the lesson. IIT members also noted that many lesson plans reviewed lacked specific references to the learning objective, strategy, or skill being taught. In addition, in most observed classrooms, the team noted all students typically experienced the same level of learning tasks using the same materials and lessons lacked scaffolds or other supports to understand content.
- **Teachers should find more ways to learn if students understand what teachers are teaching.** During classroom visits, the team observed new material being presented without confirming that students had a clear understanding of what was previously taught. Typically, students were asked, "Any questions?" or "Do you understand?" to which students either responded "Yes," or did not respond. In addition, the lessons observed frequently ended without teachers taking the opportunity to learn which students obtained the lesson objectives and understood the material and which students needed additional assistance.
- **Teachers should find additional ways to ensure that students have opportunities to discuss their thinking and reflect on their learning.** In the classrooms visited by the IIT, most teacher questions were fact-based, detail questions and teachers often accepted one-word answers. The IIT observed few open-ended questions or prompts that led to student discussions. For example, in one class, students read a text about slavery in a small group with the teacher. The students shared that they found the topic to be interesting; however, rather than ask students thoughtful, open-ended questions, the teacher asked recall questions such as, "Did they pay the slaves any money?" and "What is sugar called?" Additionally, while students shared that they feel connected to their teachers and the school, little student work was displayed in classrooms and students shared that teacher feedback usually comprises a comment such as, "Good Work," or "Very Good," but nothing else. Going forward, teachers should provide students with better and more frequent opportunities to engage in thoughtful discussions in pairs, groups, or with the entire class, as well as clear feedback on their learning.
- **Lessons need to provide more opportunities for students to think deeply and be engaged at high cognitive levels.** Students shared that in one class they sit on the carpet, listen to a song, and then repeat it for the entire period. In addition, some students who finished their work sat idly waiting for their classmates to finish. Students shared that the work is often too easy for them and indicated a desire for teachers to assign more long-term projects that would allow students to delve more deeply into a topic of their choosing. The IIT observed some notable exceptions where students were excited by what they were learning, such as a grade five science class in which students dissected owl pellets in the STEAM room.

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

- **Teachers shared with the team that curriculum maps would be helpful in planning and pacing instruction and integrating different subject areas.** Teachers shared that the 80-minute literacy block and 60-minute

math block make it difficult to provide social studies and science instruction. They stated that curriculum maps would be helpful in properly pacing units over the course of the year. The maps would also facilitate finding natural connections between the four core subject areas, so they could more easily integrate literacy and math skills into other content areas.

- **Teachers shared that they would like more PD activities that focus on specific teaching practices.** Teachers specifically asked for PD on developing questions and prompts that lead to student discussion.
- **Family members shared that they would like to be more knowledgeable about what their children are learning so they are better prepared to help them.** Parents shared with the team that they do not know if their children are on track to complete their grade curricula. They suggested that in September, the school should send parents a curriculum guide by grade for the topics or units their children will study during the year. Parents also shared that they would like to participate in more class events, so they can gain a better understanding of what their children are learning and suggested that the school provide a parent workshop on math instruction. Parents stated they felt more secure about helping their children become better readers and did not feel as equipped to help them with math.
- **Parents made numerous suggestions to improve communication between themselves and the school.** Parents shared that some teachers have online web pages, and some do not. They suggested that the school establish communication guidelines, so all teachers provide information about assignments and classroom activities online. Parents shared that some teachers called them in August to introduce themselves, which they greatly appreciated, and suggested that all teachers make these calls. Parents told the team that they were pleased that some teachers send home “Friday Folders” to communicate with parents and to share student work and provide assignments to complete at home. Other parents wished their children’s teacher did the same. Parents also suggested that the school organize a parent workshop to explain the pros and cons of opting out of the State assessments and inform parents of the nature and purpose of the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) needs assessment visit.
- **Students told the team that they would like classes to be more interesting.** They shared that sometimes when they finish their work, they have nothing to do while they wait for their classmates to catch up. Students also suggested teachers assign more long-term projects, like the Indian longhouse project, where they can study topics more deeply. Students added that they would like to take more field trips and enjoyed the mobile museum Iroquois exhibit that came to the school.
- **Students shared that they would like the school to improve their lunchtime experience.** Some students suggested that the cafeteria post menu prices and ingredients and offer students more gluten-free food choices. They also shared that they finish eating in 15-20 minutes and then do nothing for the remainder of the 40-minute lunch period. However, when team members visited the cafeteria, they noted that students were watching a video after they finished eating.