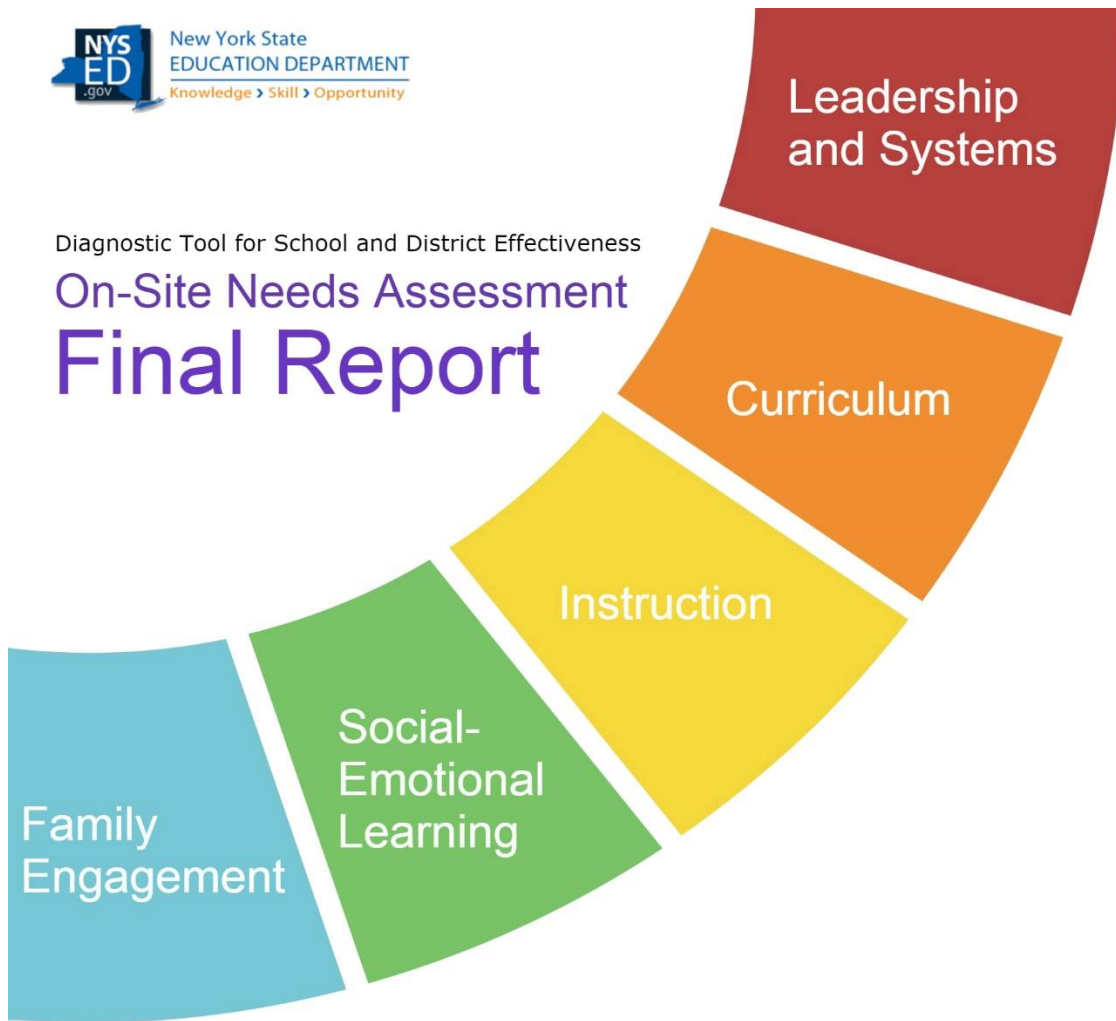


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	661500010001
School Name	Hillcrest School
School Address	4 Horton Drive, Peekskill, NY 10566
District Name	Peekskill City School District
Principal	Randy Lichtenwalner
Dates of Visit	February 27-29, 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	4

Hillcrest School serves 502 students in grades three 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 and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- 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 and student work.
- In advance of the visit, seven staff members (12.5 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. In September 2019, the school leaders introduced a What I Need (WIN) program to provide interventions for all students. This initiative enables teachers to provide more targeted instruction in areas identified as specific needs for students. The school leader shared with the team that this has led to improvements in students' reading and writing skills. The IIT noted data showing that students had made gains in their reading scores since September 2018.
2. At the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year, school leaders extended the school's music program by expanding chorus to include grade four students. At the same time, school leaders also introduced the opportunity for students in grade four to take part in instrumental music lessons. Students and parents told the team that this was a popular decision that has improved students' musical skill and their enjoyment in the subject.
3. The school introduced HAWK Squawks, tickets containing positive comments for students, in September 2018. Teachers, parents, and students reported that this initiative has been successful in improving students' self-image and their desire to work hard. Teachers said that students are more willing to participate in school activities and tasks since the introduction of this incentive. Students told the IIT that they are now working harder so they can earn tickets to gain small prizes at the end of each week. Parents shared with the team that they have seen a notable improvement in their children's attitudes toward schoolwork since the program began.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders will need to use the 2019-20 School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) to identify goals and incremental priority action steps to improve student achievement.** While the school drafted a 2018-19 SCEP with specific, measurable, ambitious, results-oriented, and timely (SMART) goals, many of these goals had long-range benchmarks without action points to incrementally measure progress throughout the school year. Further, school leaders explained that the previous Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) visit identified many areas of need, and that while the recommendations contributed to the writing of the current SCEP, since the visit took place before prior to current principal's appointment, only a few of these recommendations had been addressed. To address the recommendations, school leaders drew up a list of actions to be taken, but many of these remain areas of focus.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should regularly visit classrooms to provide staff with regular feedback to improve instructional practices.** School leaders and teachers stated that there is a need for more regular classroom visits and feedback in order to improve instruction. Staff suggested that school leaders create a calendar for walkthroughs, where one leader remains on call to handle any additional school issues, while the other school leader is free to conduct walkthroughs. Teachers stated that most of the feedback they receive is in the form of questions to consider rather than actions they can take to improve their practice. School leaders shared that there is a need to more consistently follow up on any feedback given to teachers to ensure that their

suggestions are implemented. In the future, school leaders should provide teachers with written, actionable feedback following classroom visits and return to the classrooms to monitor the implementation of feedback.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should provide students with feedback to guide their work.** Students shared that they do not regularly receive feedback, and that they are unclear what they need to do to improve their work in most subjects. Teachers shared they need more clarity on the expectations for feedback to students. While some teachers stated they provide verbal and occasionally written feedback to students, most student work reviewed did not contain any feedback, or the feedback was general such as “good job.”
- **Content and language objectives should be used to guide instruction and to check student understanding during the lesson.** Teachers routinely post content and language targets in classrooms so that students can see them; however, these objectives were not typically referred to during instruction or used as a means of assessing student understanding. Further, when asked, students typically were not clear about what they were working on or why. In some classrooms, teachers assessed student understanding of the learning objective by asking them to show “thumbs up” or “thumbs down,” but not all students responded.
- **Lesson plans should be written to meet the needs of all students.** The IIT observed a range of lessons in many classrooms. In approximately three-quarters of these lessons, the task given to all students was the same. Those students who found the task difficult were generally supported by a special education teacher or a classroom aide. However, the IIT observed that the content of the material was not matched to the learning needs of all students. In several classrooms, students were grouped according to needs, which supported student learning, but this was not typical. In the future, targeted professional development (PD) should be provided to improve teacher’s ability to design and deliver lessons that contain a range of tasks that are well matched to students’ needs and prior achievement.
- **Teachers will need to work with students to set individual academic or personal targets to guide their progress toward reaching the expected standards for their grade level.** The IIT learned that few students understand how to improve their work or make better progress in their learning. Staff stated that goal setting and conversations with students about specific targets they need to set to achieve at a higher level is an area for growth. Parents said that they would like their children to have clear improvement targets, so that they can support their children in achieving those targets at home.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents would like their children to bring home examples of the work they have been doing in school.** The principal reported that the monthly school newsletter contains information for parents about the topics each class covers, but families do not receive individual examples of student work. Teachers reported that students would like to take work home to share with their parents but need guidance in their choices. Parents said that if their children brought work home it would give them a better idea of what they were doing in school and how they were progressing.
- **Parents would like more information from the school leaders about what their children should expect when they graduate from grade three and transition to grade four.** The IIT learned that students transfer from nearby primary schools into Hillcrest School at the end of grade three. Parents of grade four students reported

that they received little information from school leaders or teachers about what their children should expect in grade four, included expectations about homework, supplies, equipment, and the curriculum.

- **Students would like a greater choice in the books they read.** Teachers said that students are expected to read for 30 minutes each night at home but have limited book choices, adding that some students are not enthusiastic about reading. Parents agreed that they would like their children to have more choice in what they read.
- **Teachers would like to observe instructional practice in other schools to enhance their PD and instructional practice.** Several teachers said they would like more input into the PD provided by the school and the district, including the opportunity to go to other schools within and outside of the district.