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
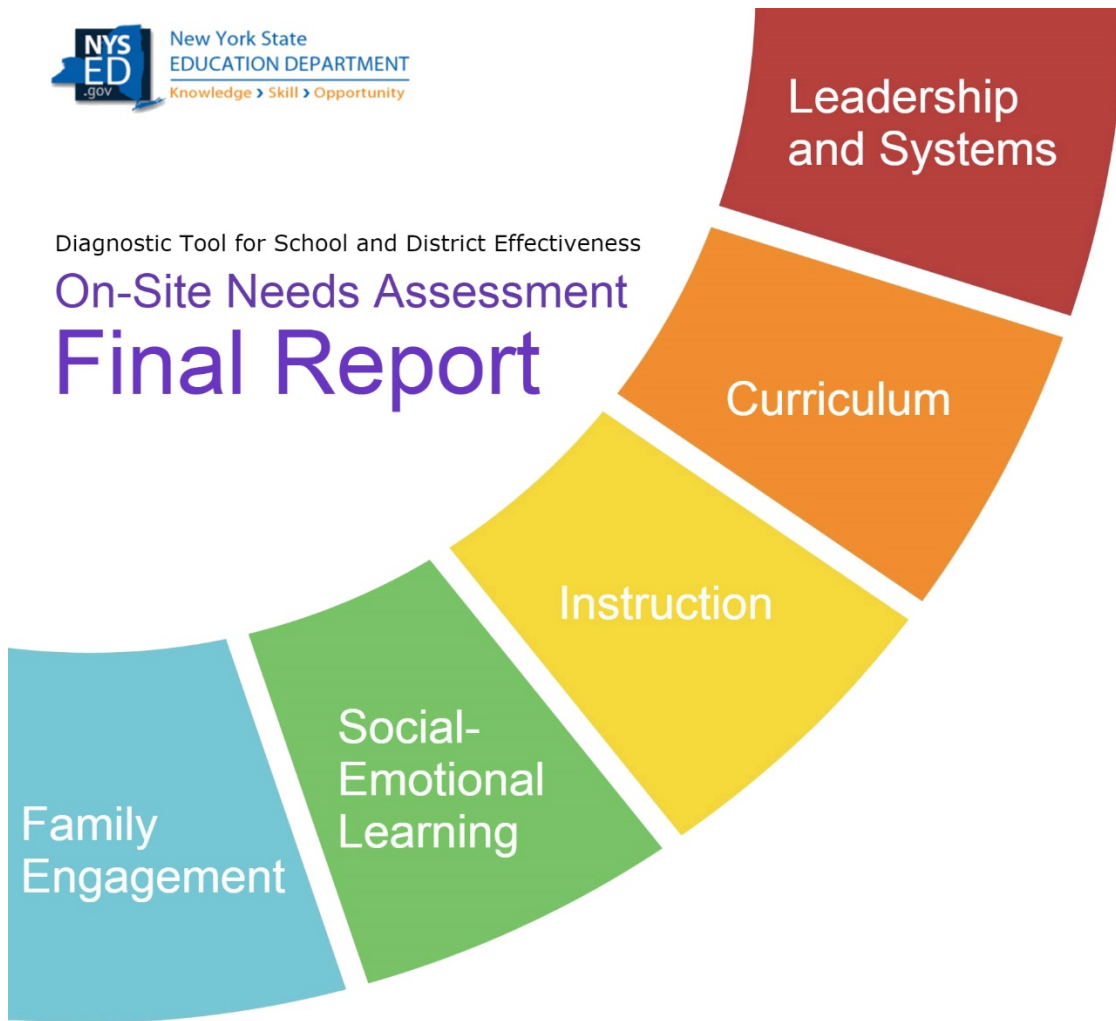
BEDS Code	41180010023
School Name	Louis V. Denti Elementary School
School Address	1001 Ruby Street, Rome, NY 13440
District Name	Rome City School District
Principal	Sherry Lubey
Dates of Visit	January 15-17, 2019

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.

Information About The Visit

- The visit was led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE), a representative from NYSED, and a district representative.
- The team visited a total of 21 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited nine 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, 42 staff members (78 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- The school serves 530 students in grades Kindergarten through six.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal, with the support of teachers, reassigned some teachers to different grade levels at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. Teachers reported that the reassignments now reflect a balance of experience at each grade level. As a result, they said that they are supported, in real time, by their peers when implementing the school's instructional priorities. Teachers shared with the IIT, for example, that this year they use the Fountas and Pinnell assessment kits more frequently because they can talk informally with teachers in other grade levels about expected student performance.

2. The school has prioritized the expansion of character-building initiatives for the 2018-19 school year. Teachers, students, and parents shared that the number and range of the school's character education efforts have increased. For example, grade three classes have increased their character-building activities to include shout-outs and bucket fillers to support students who do well. Kindergarten teachers now use the word "**Kind-**er-garten" to remind the students to be kind. The principal noted that the school plans to hold a red-carpet event this spring to recognize one student per grade level for good character, kindness, and respect.

3. The principal has prioritized the implementation of shared reading across all grade levels for the 2018-19 school year. The IIT observed teachers practicing shared reading strategies such as asking students what goes into good reading and allowing students to turn-and-talk about what they read. The principal and teachers reported that as a result of the professional development (PD) and supports throughout this school year, teachers' instructional practices have improved and promoted student interest in and engagement in reading.

4. Teachers, students, and parents shared that the One School One Book program has been an effective way to get students excited about reading. A book is selected by a committee, and the decision is highly anticipated

by the students and parents. One copy of the book is provided to each family. Parents shared that the program causes "big excitement" from the staff. Specialty lessons are taught that fit with the theme of the book, and families read the book with their children at home throughout the month. For example, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was the selected book last year, so Golden Tickets were used as incentives, and the highly popular drama club performed the play. The IIT observed the palpable excitement from students and parents as they awaited the unveiling of this year's book. Students credited the One School One Book program with helping them develop a love for reading.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders should develop a plan that aligns school- based instructional activities with district goals and includes a process to measure incremental improvements.** Recommendations from the district's 2015 visit, such as Shared Reading and Guided Reading, and the district-wide improvement goals, are being implemented with varying degrees of success. The team learned in discussions with school leaders and teachers that the school does not have a plan in place that balances the recommendations from the report and the goals the district requires with the school's individual needs.   School leaders acknowledged that progress monitoring is in its early stages and that school leaders and teachers need to have a clear picture of what has been achieved and what remains to be done. Additionally, the IIT learned from school leaders that the desired progress in developing processes to support data -driven instruction has not yet been made. This issue limits the implementation of a strategic approach to linking instructional activities to goals or to developing a timeline for demonstrating incremental improvements.   For example, the school recently adopted new math and literacy benchmark assessments, and data is examined quarterly. Each grade level developed two strategies to help students with summarizing content because students often struggle with this skill. Although some new strategies have been developed, there is no timely way for school leaders to determine if these additional efforts have been successful. The team also found that strategic, measurable, ambitious, results-oriented, and timely (SMART) goals need to be developed.   In the future, school leaders should work with district leaders and staff to develop a list of improvement priorities and develop structures and systems to measure the school's progress.
- **The principal needs to develop a strategy to ensure that there is a teacher representative on the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO).** Teachers and parents shared, and the principal confirmed, that the prior teacher representative resigned from the organization last school year. The position has not yet been filled this year, and some teachers noted that this may seem like teachers are not interested in the work of this organization. Teachers and parents expressed the importance of teacher representation in the PTO, and the principal said that having teachers involved in the PTO is an important link between home and school.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should implement a system or structure to address the needs of students in grades five and six to develop their responsibility and leadership skills.** When the school was restructured in 2017 to include grades five and six, many new students were moved into the school. Since they are now grouped with younger

students, they do not have the opportunity to be in a separate setting before middle school, as they would have had in the past. The team found that initiatives specifically designed to motivate and reward grade five and six students have not been implemented effectively. For example, students in the upper grades the team interviewed did not know about the Red Paws cards, which are supposed to be given by students to students who demonstrate acts of kindness. Teachers, school leaders, and students stated that older students should be encouraged to take on leadership roles within the school, such as serving as reading buddies to younger students.

- **School leaders need to consistently provide teachers with detailed, actionable feedback on the use of student performance data to inform planning and delivery of lessons.** Teachers told the team that the principal provides meaningful feedback and offers suggestions on how to extend student learning during guided reading and shared reading. One teacher reported that the principal provided her with helpful feedback about highlighting content vocabulary while another teacher spoke of the principal making suggestions about the use of higher-order thinking questions. However, during discussions with teachers, the team learned that the approach to providing feedback on the use of student performance data to group students and to match work to students' learning needs   is not fully understood by all staff. Several teachers noted that that they do not receive helpful feedback on how to use data to inform their instructional practices.

Learning at the School

- **All teachers will need to implement the guided and shared reading programs.** The IIT observed, and school leaders and teachers reported, that implementing some components of guided and shared reading is proving a challenge for some teachers. While all teachers have been trained and are provided with ongoing support from the district, teachers and the principal stated that some teachers need opportunities to observe professional practices in other classrooms.

- **Teachers should provide students with frequent and well-structured opportunities to discuss their thinking and deepen their understanding of content with their peers.** The IIT observed that although teachers provided students with some opportunities to interact with each other, teachers did most of the talking and interacting with students. The team observed few opportunities for students to develop a deep understanding of the content and to gain mastery of their learning and engage with their peers. Providing more opportunities for student voice and less emphasis on teacher-centered instruction is a current focus of the district and the school, and school leaders noted that this has been a slow change for the school. The team found that while some teachers are beginning to make better use of strategies that allow students to communicate with each other for brief, structured periods of time, including the use of turn and talk, these efforts are not extending learning to the desired level of the district. During student interviews, some students expressed an interest in more activities that involved working together in teams. In the future, school leaders should seek out and share strategies that would help teachers encourage student discussions as a way to increase student voice.

- **Teachers need to provide lessons that incorporate more hands-on practical activities that promote student engagement.** Teachers indicated that much of the commercial curricular materials available in the school required major modifications before it was engaging for the students. The team found that teachers used the materials as is, in order to keep up with the district pacing guides but noted that the materials limited the spontaneity of learning. In many of the lessons observed by the IIT, teachers were following modules and curricula scripts, and instruction tended to follow a step-by-step format, without incorporating additional materials and resources to support teaching and learning. For example, the IIT observed teachers using

Fountas and Pinnell cards and question stems as a script for reading lessons. The IIT also observed a science lesson in which a PowerPoint presentation was read aloud to the class. Students were not provided with any materials and were only expected to passively participate by listening. The team found that this approach did not typically engage a large proportion of students. In the future, the principal should encourage teachers to modify their lesson materials by scheduling more opportunities for teachers to plan together and to share their most effective instructional strategies.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents reported that they do not always feel welcomed at events organized by the school during the day to celebrate student achievement, perfect attendance, and positive social-emotional behavior.** Once a month, there is an opportunity for parents to attend an assembly, where staff celebrate the achievements of students, and students recognize the academic and personal accomplishments of other students. Parents interviewed by the IIT said that although they appreciate the opportunity to see their children's accomplishments acknowledged, they are not allowed to sit next to them during the event or remain at the school to have lunch with them. They shared that they would feel more welcomed if the school allowed parents to interact with their child during these times and that it could increase parental participation at other school events.

- **Parents and teachers reported that there are few recent events at the school that involve parents and families with academics and the curriculum and that they would appreciate the school offering additional programs.** For example, they shared that the school has sponsored math and literacy nights in the past, which were successful and well attended. Teachers noted that they sometimes discuss future events at staff meetings. Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) members shared that there is strong support for such events; however, they noted that it is the principal's role to provide direction to these efforts because it involves academics and teachers. Both groups shared that blended events that were both academic and social have had the greatest turnout and impact. For example, an event in a prior year advertised as a "game night" was focused on math skills emphasized in the curriculum. Teachers also shared that developing a more formalized system for gathering thoughts and ideas would be beneficial over the long term.

- **Parents reported that they felt that the school moving primarily to a digital system of communication minimizes the effectiveness of the communication.** They noted that all communication from the school appears to have the same level of importance or urgency because it is all received through the same digital system. Some parents shared that they want to be able to receive paper copies of only the information that has the highest level of importance, such as a mid-year personnel changes within the school. Parents also stated that they would like to receive communication from the school about what is happening in classrooms, not just events taking place after school.