

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	530515060003
School Name	Draper Middle School
School Address	2070 Curry Road, Schenectady, NY 12303
District Name	Rotterdam-Mohonasen Central School District
Principal	Rick Arket
Dates of Visit	May 29-31, 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:

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	-	1	4

Draper Middle School serves 675 students in grades six 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.
- The team visited a total of 25 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, and teacher feedback.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a student survey that 505 students (81 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 69 staff members (100 percent) completed.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a parent survey that 76 parents completed.
- In advance of the visit, 47 staff members (68 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) learned in discussions with school leaders, district leaders, and teachers that in 2018-19, the principal has recognized immediate culture and climate needs in the school and has taken steps to address these needs. For example, in response to an increase in the number of discipline referrals, the principal created a discipline committee to examine referral data and determine the root causes of poor behavior. The principal also established a climate committee to address concerns identified through a building-wide climate survey. In addition, the climate survey revealed that many staff members felt that they were not included in school decision-making, and therefore, the principal created opportunities for staff to have a voice within the committees that were formed.
2. In 2018-19, in response to the increasing needs of students and families, the principal created the Draper closet. Through the Draper closet, students and families are able to access toiletries, clothing, and other necessities in a private setting. The principal reported that the closet has helped to reduce barriers to learning so that students are able to participate more fully in school.
3. During 2018-19, the school began piloting restorative circles in some classrooms. Students stated that the circles help them to manage their emotions and react appropriately to difficult situations. Students also said that the restorative circles have helped them to build positive relationships with other students whom they otherwise may not have had the opportunity to interact with. Students added that they believe it would be beneficial if all students were able to participate in restorative circles.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should establish a specific action plan for school improvement.** The principal has identified three specific priorities for the school, the use of learning targets, increased parent communication, and the implementation of restorative practices. However, an action plan has not been developed to direct the school's work towards these priorities, and benchmarks have not been established to monitor progress and determine next steps. Teachers interviewed by the IIT were familiar with the focus on learning targets but were unclear about the specific goals and actions necessary to ensure success.
- **The school needs a system for identifying students needing behavior intervention supports and developing plans to provide those supports.** Interviewed teachers and students stated that the behavior of some students interrupts the instruction and learning process. The IIT found that the school does not currently have a system in place to identify students needing additional social-emotional supports and develop plans to ensure those supports are provided. The grade-level deans shared that there are limited options for addressing the behavior of students who are frequently disruptive other than removing those students from the school either through external suspension or alternative learning placements outside of the building.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should communicate a clear vision for school improvement.** Interviews with staff revealed that many staff did not have clear understanding of the principal's vision for school improvement. The principal

identified school priorities of learning targets, parent communication, and restorative practices. However, when asked what the school priorities are, teachers provided a variety of responses. Teachers explained that due to the changes in leadership throughout the district, they are unsure of the long-term vision for the school and what they should do to support school improvement efforts. The principal will need to provide staff with clear, consistent messaging of his vision, as well as the steps necessary to achieve the vision.

- **The principal needs to increase the number of instructional walkthroughs and provide teachers with feedback on their practice.** The principal shared that he wants the teachers to be more comfortable with him visiting their classrooms, and he wants to visit classes more frequently. Additionally, he stated that although he does conduct some walkthroughs, teachers are not provided with feedback after class visits. Teachers stated that they would welcome more feedback from the principal about their teaching practice.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers need to check for understanding more frequently.** Students told the IIT that sometimes lessons move forward without them fully understanding what was previously taught. Students also stated that assessments during the lesson and exit tickets are used infrequently. The IIT saw some checking for understanding during classroom visits, but it was not prevalent in most observed classrooms. Although the IIT saw learning targets posted in most classrooms, students reported that learning targets are not reviewed at the end of the lesson to ensure that students have met the targets.
- **Teachers need to use student data to inform instruction.** The district uses data from IXL Math for math benchmarking and to determine student growth expectancy for the school year. However, the principal stated that IXL data is not being used to inform instruction in all classes. He explained that teachers are at the beginning stages of understanding the data and using it to make necessary adjustments to instruction. The district began using Star 360 for benchmarking in English language arts (ELA) in 2017-18, and the system was fully implemented this school year. Teachers are at the beginning stages of learning the system and using the data to inform instruction. The academic administrator stated that ELA teachers in grades six through twelve have begun analyzing Star 360 data, and she shared a plan for using this information to begin making decisions for ELA instruction and curriculum moving forward.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students would like the school to develop and implement a multi-level recognition system in order to recognize more students throughout the school year.** Interviewed students stated that they would like more students to be recognized for their efforts. Students explained that while the school recognizes students for high honor roll, students who make honor roll or show improvement do not receive the same recognition. In addition, students stated that they would like the school to have a pep rally in the spring as well as the fall. They suggested that during these events, they would like students to be recognized for academics, behavior, and participation in school activities as well as athletics. In addition, students stated they would like the school to clarify the criteria for Student of the Month.
- **Parents would like more opportunities to attend events where parents, students, and teachers engage with each other.** Parents shared that the most successful events are ones where the parents, students, and teachers are able to interact together. They stated that providing more opportunities for these types of activities would help to strengthen home-school relationships.

- **Teachers would like to increase reciprocal communication with families.** Interviewed teachers stated that they would like to increase phone communication with families and stated that their current communication with families is limited and generally occurs through email. Additionally, teachers stated that most communication is focused on sharing information about assignments or discussing student misbehavior. Teachers said that increasing back and forth communication between teachers and parents would help to improve home-school relationships. They suggested that establishing monthly goals for positive communication with parents would be beneficial.
- **Some students suggested that the school develop a process to help new students transition to the school.** Two students who transferred from other districts stated that they had difficulty transitioning to the school. They stated that they did not receive a tour of the school and were not given an orientation to school policies and procedures. They said this led to them feeling confused at times and they initially received poor grades. Each student stated that it took several months for them to feel comfortable in the school.
- **Students would like teachers to provide more opportunities for students to ask questions during the lesson.** Some students shared that they are not comfortable asking questions in class when they do not understand what is being taught. One student who spoke to the IIT while in class said that he did not understand the lesson, and he would ask a friend later because he didn't feel comfortable asking questions during class. When asked why, the student explained that many students ask each other questions because there are no opportunities to ask questions during the lesson.