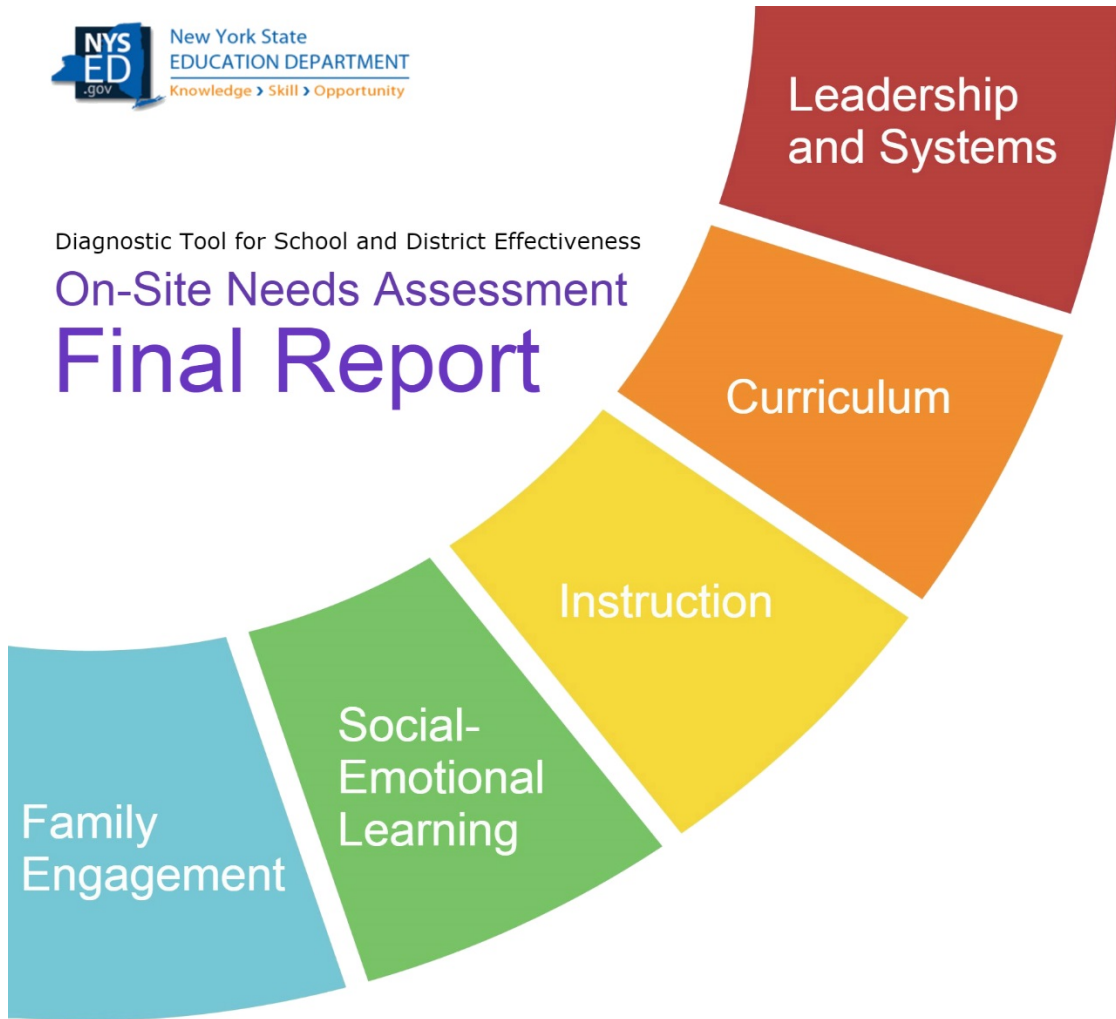


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	580205060006
School Name	Waverly Elementary School
School Address	1111 Waverly Avenue, Holtsville, NY 11742
District Name	Sachem Central School District
Principal	Kevin Tougher
Dates of Visit	May 8-10, 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
1	1	1		1	4

Waverly Avenue Elementary School serves 512 students in grades 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 team visited a total of 33 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited three 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 curriculum maps, schoolwide data, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 34 staff members (47 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- The principal is new to the school and the role since September 2018 but was out on leave from December 2018 to April 2019.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. Since his arrival in September 2018, the new principal worked to identify clear improvement priorities and a strategic direction for the school. During discussions, he articulated his vision for the school and the work that he and the staff need to do to improve the school and raise student achievement. He explained that he had spent the first few months as principal getting to know staff and how the school worked and that he was planning to share a clear vision and direction for the school with all stakeholders at the start of the next school year. During interviews, staff and parents talked positively and confidently about the new principal being calm, approachable, and supportive. Teachers told the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) that morale was good this year because of the new principal and said he was wonderful and “a breath of fresh air.” Several staff and parents talked about how they appreciated his elementary school experience and expertise, and said they felt the new principal cared about the students and had a clear focus on improving student academic achievement.
2. At the start of this school year, the principal introduced a system that allows students to book an appointment with him to share their ideas. Students said they liked being able to make appointments with the principal to talk to him about their ideas. As a result, students have a voice and feel their ideas are valued. Students talked enthusiastically about how the principal listened to their fundraising ideas. They said he helped them arrange events and activities to raise funds for causes such as breast cancer and autism.
3. The new principal works with staff and parents to make sure that the school provides a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive learning environment for all students. The IIT noted that interactions between teachers and students and between students were typically positive and supportive. Students the IIT spoke to were welcoming, polite, respectful, and talked confidently about their school. Students said they felt that all staff cared for and supported them and that they knew who they could talk to if they needed help with their learning or personal issues. The team found that student behavior in classrooms and hallways was exemplary.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should establish plans, with clear action steps and checkpoints, to guide and support work toward addressing identified school improvement priorities.** During discussions and in documents reviewed, the IIT learned that the principal identified school improvement priorities, such as improving school safety, establishing schoolwide guided reading, and supporting teachers to implement the new district math curriculum. However, in discussions with the principal, the team found there were no plans in place that clearly outlined action steps toward achieving improvement goals and no formal benchmarks to check progress toward those goals. For example, the principal explained that he felt teachers were generally on track with implementing the new district math curriculum but acknowledged a need to put in place a means to monitor progress in detail and adjust actions, if necessary.
- **The principal should work with staff to establish schoolwide social and emotional support systems, as well as identify potential programs and other opportunities to support student social and emotional needs.** Students and parents stated that students were well cared for and received help with their individual social and emotional needs when necessary. However, during discussions with the principal and staff, the team learned that there were no schoolwide systems to identify the social and emotional needs of all students. In

addition, staff told the team there were no schoolwide curricula or programs, such as character-building programs or other support strategies, which would provide positive and preventive support for all students' social and emotional needs. In addition, the team learned from the principal and teachers that there was little planning to make sure that teachers identified and used opportunities for social and emotional learning during classroom instruction.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should establish a schedule for frequent and regular classroom walkthrough visits that focus on teachers' use of specific instructional strategies, such as guided reading, and result in detailed, actionable feedback for teachers.** The IIT learned in discussions with the principal and teachers that there was no schedule for the principal to conduct regular and frequent classroom walkthrough visits. In interviews, teachers stated that the principal did not frequently and regularly visit classrooms or provide detailed feedback to help them improve their teaching. Some teachers told team members they often had to ask for feedback about their teaching and they wanted the principal to provide them with more feedback that is actionable. They added that instructional improvement priorities, such as teachers' use of guided reading, would develop more effectively with increased leadership presence and feedback. The principal acknowledged that he could do more to check teachers' implementation of guided reading strategies learned through professional development (PD). Additionally, the principal agreed there was a need to conduct more regular and frequent classroom visits and agreed that a focus on one or two specific instructional improvement priorities would be helpful.
- **The principal should delegate responsibilities to staff in order to distribute leadership responsibilities and develop individual and schoolwide leadership capacity.** During discussions, the principal explained that he had been getting to know the school since his arrival in September 2018 and felt the need to become familiar and knowledgeable about all areas of school practices. In discussions, the principal said that he did not feel capable of delegating responsibilities until he had a better sense of these schoolwide practices and staff strengths and capabilities. During interviews, some staff members said they were not clear about who had been delegated leadership roles and responsibilities throughout the building. For example, staff said they would appreciate more clarity and guidance about the roles and responsibilities of teams and individual staff members, especially for special events or activities.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should ask questions during lessons that help develop student's thinking skills.** During classroom visits, the IIT did not typically observe teachers asking students questions that gave them opportunities to explain and share their ideas or develop their thinking skills. The team observed that teachers' questions typically provided little challenge for students because they often only required students to provide brief, one-word answers or recall facts. The IIT found some instances during lessons where teachers asked questions of individual students. However, teachers typically asked whole-group questions to which only some students responded. In several classrooms, the team found that some students did not respond to any of the teacher's questions. As a result, some students' engagement in the lessons was limited and students typically had few opportunities to ask and answer questions of each other.

- **The principal should support teachers to improve their ability to check for student understanding during lessons in order to provide timely feedback to students and modify instruction, if necessary.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed that teachers often moved around the room and talked to students. However, the team noted that discussions between students and teachers were usually about making sure students knew how to complete the task rather than determining the level of student understanding of what they were learning. The IIT observed some teachers asking students to give thumbs-up signals but teachers typically used these strategies so that students could indicate completion of tasks rather than to check their understanding. In one lesson, a team member observed a teacher making notes about each student following a guided reading group session. However, typically the team did not observe teachers making any notes or records of conversations with students. As a result, it was not evident how teachers gathered data that would enable them to provide students with timely feedback and adjust instruction, if necessary. Teachers typically asked the whole class at once if they understood and after the class replied chorally, they moved onto the next part of their lesson. As a result, it was not clear whether the teacher knew if all students understood the lesson or if some students just joined the choral response out of habit.
- **The principal should support teachers to improve their use of data to plan instruction that matches the learning needs of all student groups.** During classroom visits, the IIT noted instances where students received small group, guided reading instruction using books that matched their reading levels. However, apart from some guided reading groups, the team found few instances where teachers provided students with data-driven learning tasks that matched their needs. For example, in most observed classrooms, the team noted that all students typically experienced the same level of learning tasks using the same materials. The IIT observed few instances where higher achieving students received challenging work to match their abilities. When asked, some students stated that their learning tasks were often easy and that they would read or sit idly and wait if they finished their work before the others.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **During discussions, some parents said they would like more enrichment activities for their children to broaden their learning experiences.** Some parents said they appreciated that the school staff provided different learning experiences for their children such as a robot club and Goldilocks Trial. However, they told the team they felt children did not have enough opportunities to use the school science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) room for practical activities. They expressed the view that there should be more variety in learning activities for their children, including a wider range of school clubs.
- **Some parents said they would like more curriculum information and more guidance and assistance to help them support their children's learning at home.** Parents who met the IIT said they had received little information about what their children learned in school and would appreciate more. They added that they received advice from some teachers about how to support their children's learning at home, but the amount of guidance varied between teachers.
- **Students told the IIT that they would like more varied, interesting reading books in their classrooms.** Some students said they felt the choice of reading books in their classrooms was limited, and that books were often not very interesting and were old. They said they would like to have newer, varied, and more interesting books to choose, especially when reading independently while teachers worked with guided reading groups.
- **Special education teachers said that dismissal time for their students that rode busses was a difficult time of the day.** Teachers stated that as all students exited from the same area, students who needed to board

particular minibuses were forced to wait, which created safety concerns for both the students and staff. Staff suggested that special education students that needed to board specific minibuses be provided with a different exit in order to minimize disruptions and allow for a smoother and safer dismissal.