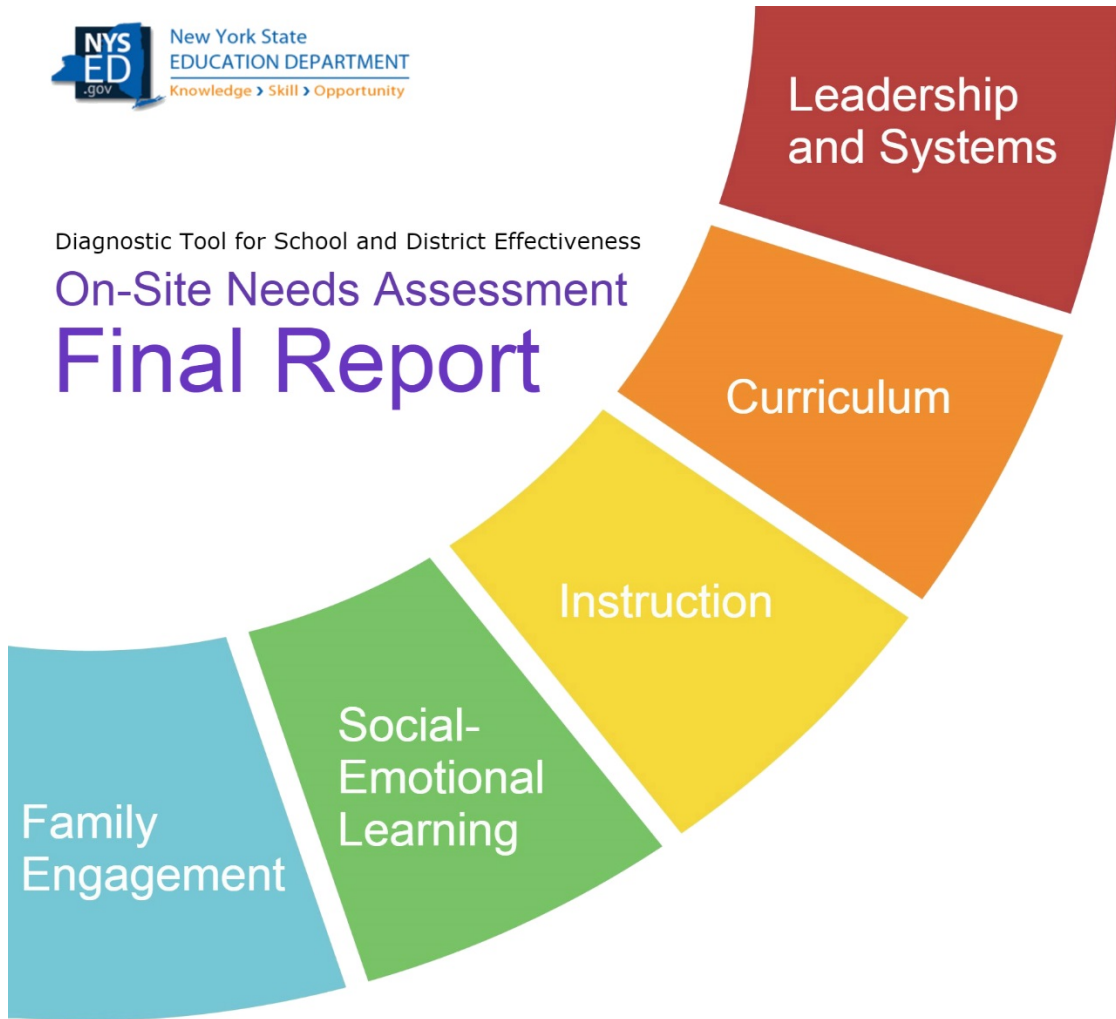


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	161401060003
School Name	Saranac Lake Middle School
School Address	141 Petrova Avenue, Saranac Lake, NY 12983
District Name	Saranac Lake Central School District
Principal	Trisha Wickwire
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	1

Saranac Lake Middle School serves 283 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 and a district consultant.
- The team visited a total of 28 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited six 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, 25 staff members (69 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. This school year, students have the opportunity to choose from a wider selection of quarterly special classes than they have in the past. These choices include home and careers, art, technology, and literature appreciation. Students told the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) that they appreciate the choices they now have. Home and Careers is a newly developed course this year, which many students said is of particular interest to them. In this course, students learn life skills, including sewing, financial budgeting, nutrition, and cooking. Teachers explained that these skills are especially important because many students have the responsibility of preparing their own meals and those for their younger siblings because their parents are working late shifts in the service industry in this resort town. The school has outfitted the home and careers classroom with sewing machines and portable kitchens so the students can easily learn and practice these life skills.
2. A program begun this school year, dedicates period nine to lifelong learning classes. Students who choose these classes and the teachers who teach them have the opportunity to pursue areas of particular interest to them. Course offerings include, for example, additional physical education activities or becoming part of a student tech team to learn how to repair or troubleshoot problems with Chromebooks. Having a tech team available for repairs or troubleshooting is especially important in this school, where all students are issued their own Chromebook to aid their learning. In addition, students can enroll in extra art classes, learn video production, or hone their digital skills through several projects. The teachers have also established a space in part of the library that is equipped with a variety of materials for students to use when they build robots or learn more about sewing, for example. Students shared with the IIT that they look forward to this period because they can learn and experiment with new ideas that they may not have the time or opportunity to pursue in regular classes.
3. In the 2018-19 school year, the school established a credit recovery program for students who have failed a subject for two quarters. This program is in lieu of either retaining these students in their current grade in June or having them enter high school already deficient in gaining the number of credits required for graduation. Students attend credit recovery classes each morning during which they use a computer program to make up the work they have failed. The class is overseen by the athletic director who offers instructional and social-emotional support and encouragement to students as they engage with the computer program. This program monitors student success and identifies those areas in which the student needs extra practice or further explanation. Each student has a set of goals to achieve, and when those are reached, they are no longer required to attend the class. This additional class allows students to address the gaps in their learning while continuing with instruction in their regular class. The principal noted that she and the teachers are aware that students who enter high school with fewer than the usual number of credits are more likely to drop out before graduation. Therefore, identifying these students early allows them to make up their work and enter ninth grade with the required number of credits rather than wait until high school to make up their credits and risk slipping further behind in their learning.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should work with the building leadership team to identify and communicate the school's instructional priorities for the 2019-20 school year and create a system to ensure that these priorities are implemented.** During classroom visits and in interviews with teachers, the IIT found that not all teachers knew about or were implementing the instructional priorities for the 2018-19 school year. The principal noted that she visits classrooms informally at least once a month. Although the team learned that she keeps records of which teachers she has visited, there is a need for a system for collecting data on which teachers were addressing the current year's priorities effectively or a method to provide feedback to the teachers on her findings. In the future, the principal should consider developing a system to monitor each teacher's effectiveness in implementing the instructional priorities and provide feedback and follow-up to teachers regarding the use of these priorities.
- **The principal and student support staff should collaborate on the development of a system/database for collecting social and emotional data on all students in order to allow staff to identify trends and enable them to be more proactive with regard to student support.** The IIT learned from both the principal and student support staff that currently there is no database to track student referrals for behavioral or other social emotional issues. Typically, students are referred for services on an informal basis through conversations between the teachers and the student support staff. The principal explained that while students receive services, there is usually no official documentation that can be used if and when students must be referred for more intensive interventions. Additionally, without longitudinal data, the student support staff are unable to identify trends in behaviors that would enable them to be proactive and track individual student's issues in order to better address their needs
- **The principal will need to collaborate with the dean and the attendance support staff to develop a system to proactively address the chronic absenteeism issue.** The principal and dean expressed concern about the number of students who are chronically absent and are beginning to address the problem. School leadership has taken actions, such as alerting parents when their child has met the threshold for chronic absences or is often late. However, these actions have not had a significant impact on increasing attendance as yet. There is a need for the school to implement a system to collect and analyze attendance data in a proactive way, including regularly sending letters to parents listing the number of absences their child currently has and how close that number is to the unacceptable threshold.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal should communicate her expectations to teachers for student behavior, academic rigor, and effective instructional practices so teachers are all aware of the principal's priorities and can focus on achieving them.** During interviews with the IIT, the principal shared her expectations for quality instruction. These included teachers making effective use of class time, including the use of bell ringers to begin the lesson and some type of closure activity at the end. She shared that it was important for teachers to teach bell to bell. In addition, she expected teachers to ensure that students had a good grasp of what they needed to know and why, by sharing learning outcomes with the class. The principal noted that teachers should have standards for expected behavior in their classes and reinforce them consistently. During classroom visits, the IIT observed

that in some classes teaching occurred from bell to bell, and there were effective closure activities; however, this was not observed in all classes. During these visits, when students were asked by the IIT why they were doing a particular activity, many were not sure of the reason. Learning outcomes were generally not posted in classes that were visited. In many classes it was evident that students were aware of and carried out routines; however, students indicated that class rules vary from teacher to teacher and that is confusing for them.

- **The principal will need to ensure through classroom visits that lessons and assignments are challenging, standards-based, and meet the various needs of students.** During classroom visits, the IIT found that apart from the few classes where students were working on their projects, students were typically engaged in the same work. Most classes were teacher-centered and needed scaffolding of the material to make it accessible for all students. In one class, for example, students told the IIT member that they did not understand the work and were getting further and further behind during the lecture. There were instances of the use of higher-level questions, but one- or two-word answers were sometimes accepted without follow-up questions or engaging other students in the discussion. Some students told the IIT that they are often bored with the assignments and when they are finished with their work before other students, they sit and wait without the opportunity to become engaged with any additional, more challenging activities.
- **The school leadership should highlight the success of the credit recovery program to reinforce to teachers the effectiveness of data collection and analysis in identifying and targeting gaps in learning and skills, as well as the importance of recognizing various learning styles and setting academic goals.** The credit recovery program currently has 12 students enrolled. The software programs they are using provide data on which areas students are struggling with and how well they are progressing. The principal explained to the IIT that some students in that program learn more effectively moving at their own pace by themselves. They all have individual goals developed through conferencing with the teacher in charge of the program and pace themselves to accomplish those goals. As soon as their goals are met, they discontinue that class. When the IIT interviewed classroom teachers and students not in the credit recovery program, they found that there was a need to consistently set academic goals for the students to work towards. Teachers indicated that data is not consistently reviewed to identify and target gaps in learning and skills, note trends in student learning or the effectiveness of instruction for individual students. During classroom visits, the IIT observed that all students typically are expected to do the work in the same way, with limited consideration of how they learn best.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers will need to review the Next Generation Learning Standards and map a curriculum for each content area in grades six through eight based on those standards.** During interviews with the principal and teachers, the IIT learned that teachers do not typically rely on standards as guidelines for their lesson planning but rather follow the next unit in the textbook or replicate lessons they felt were successful in prior years, for example. Additionally, there was a need for a scope and sequence or curriculum map for content areas, which includes all relevant standards for each grade. In the future, the principal should ensure that there is a scope and sequence and a curriculum map for each content area, beginning with the core areas of math, English language arts (ELA), science, and social studies so that all students are prepared equally for movement to the next grade. Once the mapping is complete, the principal should also ensure that teachers have created vertical alignment

of the standards across content areas, and horizontal alignment across each grade to allow for the reinforcement of the standards through the interdisciplinary projects that teachers currently assign.

- **Teachers should assign students projects that are aligned to the standards, challenge students to think deeply about their work, and promote student ownership of their learning.** During classroom visits and in discussions with teachers, the IIT observed and learned about long-term projects assigned to students. These projects allowed for student choice; however, there was little evidence that they were aligned to standards. In discussions, students shared that they enjoyed working with their peers on these projects, but they were sometimes bored with the topic and did not know what they were expected to learn by doing these assignments. Some parents reported that their children said they were bored and not challenged in their work. In a few classes, the students participated in creating rubrics to measure their projects but the rubrics were similar to checklists of tasks to be accomplished during the project and did not elaborate through a scale of one to four, for example, the requirements or quality of work necessary to receive a high grade.
- **The principal, teachers, and student support staff should develop a schoolwide program to address the social and emotional learning of students, particularly in the area of discipline and positive behavior.** During classroom visits, the IIT did not see obvious behavior issues. However, during interviews with students, the IIT learned that there were some incidents of bullying and instances when student behavior in class interfered with instruction. Students and teachers reported that there were discipline issues, which needed to be referred to the office and that incidents of misbehavior were not always handled in a consistent way. In addition, the IIT learned from student support staff that when disciplinary referrals for May 2018 were compared to those in May 2019, the number had doubled from 83 to 161, respectively. Teachers and student support staff also explained to the IIT that in previous years the school had adopted Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), but that program was not currently followed and there was a need for a replacement to address students' social- emotional needs.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Teachers said it was a positive move to offer a learning lab after school where students could receive additional academic support, but it would be more beneficial if the students were separated into grade-level groups.** By separating the groups, they said, the teachers offering the extra help and support would be in a better position to target their help to the particular needs of students
- **Teachers said they appreciate the creation of the position of dean this school year.** They also reported that they would like the dean to develop a program that focuses more on restitution for chronic student misbehavior rather than a program consisting mostly of punitive discipline.
- **Students shared that they are expected to behave in class, but no one has explained to them how to behave or what is expected of them.** They suggested that teachers should discuss class rules with students and make posters for the class as reminders of the expected behavior.
- **Parents said they appreciated having teachers communicate with them, but they would like more regular communication from teachers.** The indicated they would especially like to hear positive comments about their children.
- **Some parents said their children tell them they are bored and would like more challenging work.** In addition, parents explained that they would especially appreciate more enrichment opportunities for their children when they demonstrate they have already mastered the material.