New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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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 | 530600010008 |
|---|---|
| **School Name** | Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School |
| **School Address** | 100 Stanley Street, Schenectady, NY 12307 |
| **District Name** | Schenectady City School District |
| **Principal** | Thomas Nicholson (interim) |
| **Dates of Visit** | January 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.

## 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 34 lessons 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 lesson plans, schoolwide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, the school provided results of a staff survey that 33 staff members (81 percent) completed.
- Martin Luther King Jr Elementary School serves 540 students in grades pre-kindergarten to five.

## Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. Recognizing that student behavior was challenging to teachers and students and impacting the quality of teaching and learning, school leaders developed a plan to adopt PAX strategies so that students learn self-management skills to help make their classroom a peaceful and productive learning environment.

2. Recognizing that some students were not receiving the academic intervention services (AIS) they needed, grade-level teams developed a plan to use student data, including attendance, Fountas & Pinnell, and STAR assessment data, to create flexible grade-level groups so that students are able to receive the academic support they need to improve.

3. Recognizing that teachers needed more feedback on their instructional practices, school leaders developed a literacy walkthrough tool in order to provide teachers with more targeted feedback on how to improve their instructional practices.

## Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

### Systems for Improvement

- **School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) goals and benchmarks should be monitored and adjusted on an on-going basis.** The IIT found that the SCEP needs to be more consistently monitored and action plans need to be revised or adjusted to meet end of year goals. The principal reported that to ensure all students have rigorous literacy instruction, school leaders developed plans to create a literacy block checklist for walkthroughs so that they could provide teachers with explicit monthly feedback on their instructional practices. However, at the time of the review only a handful of walkthroughs had taken place. When asked about plans to monitor subgroup performance on the next STAR assessment, leaders shared that there was a need to review current subgroup data to set a baseline.

- **School leaders should collect and analyze data to determine if professional development (PD) is positively impacting teachers' instructional practices.** The SCEP indicated that PD on high leverage practices would take place throughout out the school year but there was a lack of clarity over the specific math or English language arts (ELA) strategies that teachers who received training were using or which staff members attended the training. Further, teachers were not clear on the high leverage practices that came from the all-staff book club. School leaders shared that they need to conduct walkthroughs on a more consistent basis and ensure that the walkthrough tool connects PD trainings to specific high leverage look-fors. The IIT found there is a need to develop a plan for the collection, analysis, and use of lesson plan and walkthrough data to improve teachers' instructional practices.

- **The school leaders need to create a system to regularly analyze and monitor behavioral data to determine the schoolwide impact of the PAWS and cool-down rooms and adjust as needed.** Staff shared that the school needs an electronic or paper tracking system to gather, analyze, and monitor how many students are sent to the cool-down room each day, who they are, the reason, the time of day, the sending teacher, how long students stay, and the outcome of the visits. While the school's crisis team meets once a week to discuss students in crisis, as do the student support staff, including guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists, and a nurse, a formal system with protocols and guidance documents needs to be created. Staff would like to provide input and receive guidance on what a system should include and how to go about launching it. While

school leaders indicated that staff know which students are struggling the most, there was no quantitative data available that outlined the specific interventions, initiatives, and other supports that are working best for students.  Teachers stated that they need more clarity on the purpose of the PAWS room, how it helps students to self-regulate their behavior, or how it supports the school's trauma-sensitive efforts.  Students stated that the cool-down room is a fun place to go because they get to play computer games for a few hours.  Staff were not clear how the PAWS room was different from the cool-down room, and a review of documents demonstrated that students go back and forth between the two rooms.  Staff should understand the specific de-escalation strategies used in the PAWS room and the criteria staff use to decide if a student is able to return to the classroom, needs to be referred to the principal, or needs a different intervention.

- **The school needs to establish a set of school-wide behavioral expectations.**  The IIT learned that there are currently no school-wide behavioral expectations and that teachers use different strategies across classrooms. During the visit, off-task or inappropriate behavior was not consistently addressed.  Students shared that they are not clear about what the rules are at school or what they need to do to earn PAWS bucks for good behavior.

## Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should set targets, define what success looks like, and gather evidence to monitor the quality of the implementation of strategies and initiatives so that staff know if their efforts are having a positive impact.**  The school's literacy committee meets monthly to plan activities intended to increase literacy proficiency, such as events including literacy reward programs, Literacy Night, and Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) days.  School leaders and staff should be clearer on how many parents attended Literacy Night, how many classrooms and grade levels participate in DEAR days each week, and whether or not these events or activities are successful in improving literacy proficiency.  The IIT learned that when intervention staff are pulled away to cover a class, perform lunchroom duty, or respond to student behavior issues, this hinders their ability to support teachers.  The school has an attendance committee that meets weekly to discuss chronically absent students but needs to develop strategies, such as home visits, phone calls, and monthly recognition for perfect attendance and school leaders need to help them monitor these efforts to understand which are leading to improved academic outcomes.

- **School leaders need to conduct frequent classroom walkthroughs in order to support teacher's growth in providing high quality instruction.**  Over the last year, the leadership team has been comprised of an instructional supervisor and several interim principals.  The SCEP indicated that by October 2018, the school leaders would provide teachers with feedback using either a literacy-focused or general classroom walkthrough tool, but leaders shared that the tool had first been used just two weeks prior to the team's visit. Leaders shared that they do give teachers some feedback on their lesson plans, but they need to make routinely conducting observation walkthroughs a priority.  In discussions with the IIT, teachers said they need more guidance and instructional leadership.

## Learning at the School

- **Staff must have high expectations for all students.**  Teachers shared with the team that 76 percent of newly enrolled students are performing at Level 1 on State assessments.  School leaders will need to work with staff to make clear that expectations need to be high for all students regardless of their backgrounds and support teachers in providing all students with high-quality pedagogy that increases their achievement. The IIT found

that instruction in classrooms needs to be differentiated and modified in order to help individual and groups of students gain the skills necessary to advance toward grade level standards.

- **Teachers should support students in monitoring and self-regulating their behavior.** When students experienced a behavioral crisis during the visit, students were sent to hall monitors, sent to the cool-down room, or left to roam the hallways. The IIT found that teachers will need support in developing tools to help students manage their behavior. Staff shared that some students have behavioral plans, but that they are not clear where they are or how to use them. School leaders stated that the PAWS room needs to be structured to provide specific students with coping strategies, as opposed to an in-school suspension room. Staff shared that the school's Sunshine Room provides the neediest students with scheduled therapeutic support time during the school day and can accommodate approximately 20 students a month, one student at a time. Students in need of support outside of the Sunshine Room need to be provided with proactive measures to meet their needs.

- **Teachers should provide students with opportunities to engage in collaborative discussion with each other in small groups**. Team members saw that independent and whole group instruction were the primary instructional strategies that teachers used. Students typically worked independently to complete worksheets or sat passively listening to the teacher talk. When students were observed working in guided reading groups, the work did not typically involve problem-solving activities that required discussion or debate. Students should have regular opportunities to engage in thoughtful discussions beyond low-level questions that require recall or recitation. Students were unclear about when they last worked with their peers on a group project.

- **Teachers will need to provide students with feedback so that they know how they are doing in relation to specific learning goals.** The team observed that most student work posted in classrooms or displayed on hallway bulletin boards had little feedback on it including written comments, check marks, smiling faces, or percentages. In some cases, student papers were displayed with spelling and grammatical errors. Most students knew their Fountas & Pinnell reading level but were not able to explain what they needed to do to move up to the next level. Team members observed that while teachers rotated among students during lessons, they need to address the needs of all students, not just those who raise their hand for support. In one math lesson, team members noted that the teacher repeatedly called on the same two or three students who gave the correct answer and chose them to go to the board and share their work.

- **Teachers need to manage complete the math modules within the 45-minute math to ensure students have access to all of the core curriculum.** The school leaders shared that teachers are not able to get through the math modules in their entirety and that they need math intervention support in the same way as they receive it for literacy. The team observed a math lesson where students were using yarn to measure length with standard measurement. Students were appropriately and productively struggling to figure out which of the three provided strategies worked best, but the teacher had to end the lesson and go to the exit ticket before most students had time to complete the initial activity due to time constraints.

## Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents shared that procedures for arrival and dismissal on the street in front of the school are not clear, and they reported that although the street is congested and not safe, school staff could do more to help to direct traffic, help families cross the street, and/or manage congestion.** Interviewed parents stated that the street on which the school is located is a narrow two-way street and that there is no crossing guard to help pedestrians cross the street or to direct cars. Parents said that some parents dropping their children off

routinely drive up the opposite side of the street because they do not want to let their children out on the other side into oncoming traffic.  Parents also stated that some parents regularly double park and/or idle in no parking areas even though the street signs indicate no parking is allowed.  Parents added that during the winter, snowbanks and unplowed streets create a chaotic and dangerous situation.

- **Parents shared that the school is a welcoming place and that their children enjoy coming to school to be with their friends but that the school does not offer enriching learning opportunities.**  Interviewed parents expressed the view that learning at the school is not fun and activities do not spark creativity, curiosity, and wonder in their children.  Parents stated that teachers could do more to create exciting learning opportunities that are joyful and stimulating for young children.

- **Students and staff shared that sometimes they do not feel safe in the cafeteria because it is loud and unruly.**  Staff reported that the cafeteria is the area of the building where most fights occur, and that more reliable and consistent staff supervision is needed.  Students shared that in the winter when it is too cold to go outside, instead of sitting in the cafeteria waiting to return to class, they would like to go to the gym for recess.

- **Teachers reported that although there are instances when de-escalation practices and the PAWS rooms are useful, it is not clear how they reinforce behavioral expectations.**  Interviewed teachers stated that having places to send students who need to cool down is helpful in the moment, but without a common language and consistent approach, those places do not help staff promote student social-emotional learning or development.  Teachers added that because protocols, criteria, and guidance documents aligned to the principles of self-regulation, PAX, and trauma-informed care have not been created, they do not understand the decision-making process, ladder of consequences, or underlying rationale behind the PAWS rooms.