

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	530600010014
School Name	Pleasant Valley Elementary School
School Address	1097 Forest Road, Schenectady, NY 12303
District Name	Schenectady City School District
Principal	Sean Inglee
Dates of Visit	March 6-8, 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	2	1	2

Pleasant Valley Elementary School serves 441 students in grades pre-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 40 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited seven 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, 28 staff members (72 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal has worked to increase parent communication and participation. The principal recently appointed a parent liaison, who this year introduced a number of events including monthly coffee chats with the principal and family evenings. She has also connected parents with support groups, counselling services, and healthcare. The school leaders produce a monthly parent newsletter that includes upcoming events and tips to support student learning at home, such as hints for parents to help with reading and math homework. The parent liaison set up a Facebook page and Twitter account to improve communications with parents. Parents said that they thought there had been significant improvements in two-way communications this year. The parent liaison said that there had been a big increase in attendance at family events at the school this year, which was confirmed by the sign-in records for these events.
2. At the beginning of the current school year, school leaders introduced a range of new initiatives to support student social-emotional learning, including the Positivity Project, trauma-informed education, class meetings, and behavior management strategies. Teachers also have established a sensory room for students in emotional crisis to visit. Students said that they felt that these initiatives had helped them calm down when they were stressed by giving them time and space to get their emotions under control. Teachers said that they found that the class meetings had enhanced students' social-emotional learning, as they were able to concentrate on developing students' social skills, such as how to manage their anger in social settings. The principal showed the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) that there had been a significant decrease in office referrals and suspensions this year, which he attributed to these initiatives.
3. The principal told the IIT that during the current school year, the school community has made a concerted effort to improve attendance. The school leaders set up attendance teams who make phone calls to families when students fail to appear in school. The family liaison makes home visits to families with poor attendance records and discusses with parents how to overcome barriers to attendance, such as resolving transportation difficulties. She also produced leaflets on the importance of good attendance, which were distributed to parents by mail. Teachers have introduced a number of incentives to encourage good attendance, such as inter-class competitions and individual awards for 100 percent attendance. Parents reported to the IIT that they were aware of the school leaders' drive for good attendance and were supportive of the initiative. The principal showed the IIT data that demonstrated that attendance has improved this year from around 70 percent to over 90 percent in most classes.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders need to identify the incremental steps and activities that build on one another to measure progress towards larger goals.** The School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) goals need to be Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Results-oriented, and Timely (SMART) and the benchmarks should have graduated steps towards these SCEP goals. For example, the goal for tenet two was that feedback will be shared during Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings afterschool on a monthly basis. This goal needed to be SMART and benchmarked. As a result, school leaders reported that they have made little progress towards achieving the SCEP goals they set in response to the district-led review last year. While the school leaders noted a focus on behavior, prior recommendations and goals found in the SCEP need to be more fully

addressed. The school leaders said they have received support from the district leaders in implementing the main findings from previous visits and, as a result, there has been some progress over recent months, such as implementing the Positivity Project.

- **The school should use the data it collects and analyzes from established systems to inform school improvement decisions.** The principal said he is focusing on multiple school improvement initiatives, such as implementing readers' and writers' workshops. However, the IIT found collected data needs to be used to monitor the impact of these initiatives. Further, data should be used to identify the school's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in a strategic manner. In the future, school leaders should conduct an analysis of all school data to establish focused and measurable schoolwide goals, especially in regard to student achievement.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders need to create a master schedule to make maximum use of uninterrupted instructional time.** The IIT observed that because the schedules at each grade level were not always synchronized with each other, there were several points during the day when it was difficult for staff to plan support for students. For example, support staff said that they had to take students out of classes so they could service their needs, which meant that they missed parts of other lessons that would have benefitted them. The IIT also observed that time is lost at various points during the day because teachers do not begin on time and transitions around the building take longer than is necessary. In the future, school leaders should produce a master schedule that ensures that pull-out or push-in support sessions are used effectively across the school and that transitions are timely so that instructional time is maximized for all students.
- **School leaders need to ensure that technology is used in a way that supports student learning and growth.** The IIT observed that in many classes, computers were not being used effectively to support student learning. Technology was primarily used by students who had finished their other work, or to run basic programs to reinforce their learning. Students shared that they do not regularly use computers as a primary learning tool. Parents stated that they would like students to use technology more in classrooms to make presentations or complete research for projects.
- **School leaders should effectively communicate clear expectations for the content and quality of lesson planning and the delivery of instruction.** Feedback provided to teachers on lesson plans typically did not identify clear points for improvement or how to incorporate changes to planning. Further, lesson plans did not have a common format that included the school's instructional priorities, such as higher-order questioning or opportunities for students to engage in academically productive talk. The walkthrough tool used by school leaders should include areas to provide targeted feedback about the quality and effectiveness of the planning and delivery of the lesson.
- **School leaders should effectively communicate how they will follow up on the knowledge and skills that teachers have learned through professional development (PD).** The focus of recent PD, such as accountable talk, will need to be more fully embedded in classroom practice. For example, while there were a few examples of anchor charts being used to promote accountable talk, the IIT did not observe any being used to promote higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, students need more opportunities to work collaboratively and engage in discussion. School leaders should follow up on PD as part of their walkthroughs and feedback.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should give students tasks that are matched to their prior learning or their individual levels of performance.** In many classes, the IIT observed students working on the same tasks, such as highlighting words to support their answers to questions. When students needed help completing the task, they were supported by the teacher or paraprofessionals. However, tasks were not modified to meet student needs. Teachers reported that they routinely plan the same activities for all students around the units in the curriculum. In future, school leaders should provide teachers with PD on how to plan lessons in which the tasks given to students are well matched to their prior learning and current achievement.
- **Teachers should plan lessons and deliver instruction that actively engages students.** Classroom visits demonstrated that most students are not actively engaged in instruction. During classroom visits, students said they were unsure about the purpose of the tasks they were working on and indicated that the learning was not interesting to them. Instructional tasks should be designed to challenge students to think deeply or to extend their learning.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents think that school leaders and teachers could do more to take into account the different cultures represented in the school community.** Parents reported that there had been a multicultural event last year, but that nothing had been planned so far this year.
- **Students reported that some teachers have loud voices, which they find intimidating.** The IIT observed that in some classrooms, teachers raised their voices occasionally, mainly to gain students' attention. Parents also said some of their children are uncomfortable with the tone teachers use when addressing them.
- **Teachers reported they would like to establish opportunities for vertical planning meetings so that they could learn what had been covered in the previous grade.** The principal said that at the moment, teachers had 30 minutes of planning time a day, but this was used either for grade-level meetings or personal lesson planning. Teachers reported that they did not know what was happening in the previous grade so that they could better plan work for their grade and would appreciate opportunities to discuss prior learning with their colleagues.
- **Teachers reported they would like to have paraprofessionals attend PLC meetings to establish a common system of communication.** Teachers said that at present, paraprofessionals found it difficult to communicate with teachers about the students they were supporting, and that it would be beneficial for them to attend some PLC meetings. School leaders said that this could be easily organized.