

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	530600010017
School Name	Yates Elementary School
School Address	725 Salina Street, Schenectady, NY 12308
District Name	Schenectady City School District
Principal	Dr. Robert Flanders
Dates of Visit	February 13-15, 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

Yates Elementary School serves 432 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 and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 29 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited five 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, 20 staff members (65 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The school is continuing its implementation of mindfulness routines and has some programs in place to provide support for students that address their social and emotional needs. Some examples include the sensory room with an established system for referral and monitoring of students who use this space, a separate calming room, and calm corners in many classrooms where students can visit if they need some time out. Teachers have established a routine where they welcome students from another classroom if those students would benefit from some time away from their assigned class. The school also participates in the district's respite program, which allows students to spend some time in another designated building where they can receive additional services. Students interviewed by the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) shared that they feel more comfortable at school knowing they can visit these different areas when needed. The principal shared discipline data with the team, which showed that behavioral referrals this school year have declined from last school year.
2. As part of the school's commitment to increase its cultural awareness to honor all students, the principal explained how he and the staff reviewed photos of students who were receiving awards at the monthly assemblies and found that the array of awardees did not reflect the composition of the student body. To remedy this situation, teachers and staff have become more mindful of the criteria used to identify students to be honored, which has resulted in a more diverse and representative sample of the student population receiving the awards.
3. Teachers, students, and parents shared that they appreciate the family-like atmosphere at the school. Parents said the principal and teachers are responsive to any questions and concerns. The parent liaison is working with the school community to support families by making home visits and initiating clothing and household goods drives. The school has a weekend backpack program to provide food for students over weekends and school breaks. Several students approached IIT members in the hallways to offer help in finding particular classes or to give directions to help navigate the school.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal needs to establish a system for teachers to submit their plans and receive feedback on them.** The principal stated that teachers are expected to include their plans for higher-order questions and academically productive talk as related to the literacy block in their lesson plans. However, there is no system for teachers to submit their lesson plans in English language arts (ELA) or any other content area, or for the principal to review the plans and provide targeted feedback to teachers about their planned instruction. In the future, the principal should develop a system, such as reviewing plans on a rotating basis by grade level, so that all teachers have their plans reviewed and evaluated and are given feedback on a regular basis.
- **In addition to the current focus on literacy; math, social studies, and science should also be focus areas for instruction.** The principal explained to the IIT that a main area of the school's focus is on literacy and that as a result, math instruction has been neglected and math scores on State assessments have continued to decline. The school leaders and teachers stated that school priorities include greater use of higher-order questioning and academically productive talk. However, during classroom visits, the IIT did not see these

strategies taking place across the school during literacy instruction and even less so during math instruction. In addition, during class visits the IIT did not observe any science or social studies instruction taking place.

- **The principal should reflect on and share with staff how school and district initiatives align and can support one another.** Discussions with school leaders and teachers demonstrate that they do not always see the relationship between the district’s academically productive talk initiative and the school’s priorities for using higher-order questioning and providing students with challenging work opportunities. Thus, by addressing each of these initiatives separately, opportunities are missed for connecting and using these initiatives to reinforce each other and support student growth.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **Teacher-leaders should provide teachers with targeted feedback from informal walkthroughs to help them improve their instructional practices.** The principal explained that the results from teacher-leader walkthroughs are compiled, shared generally with teachers during staff meetings, and are the basis for continued professional development (PD). However, teachers stated that they do not receive targeted feedback that would help them specifically address deficits in their teaching practices. Feedback documents reviewed by the IIT showed general observations included as part of the walkthrough tool. Lead-teachers had the tool on a phone application or an iPad where the questions required only a “yes” or “no” answer. Some questions in the tool required a number such as “how many students know their learning goal?” These data were then used to create a graph to show results across the approximately 50 walkthroughs done each quarter. The principal stated that during leadership team meetings, school leaders review these findings and revise the tool on a quarterly basis. However, the IIT saw no evidence of a system in place to provide feedback to individual teachers other than a casual conversation between the teacher and the principal about a particular finding.
- **Walkthrough tools should help measure the fidelity of the implementation of the school’s initiatives.** The school leaders and teachers stated that the school focuses on critical areas for student achievement, such as literacy. However, school leaders told the IIT that they use limited strategies to continually monitor the fidelity of implementation of critical areas. The main method for monitoring teaching in literacy, math, and academically productive talk across content areas are the informal walkthroughs conducted by teacher-leaders. The IIT found that the walkthrough tools are general in nature, similar to a checklist, and do not provide opportunities to target the main areas of initiatives.
- **School leaders should consider establishing a schoolwide social-emotional learning (SEL) program.** Although school leaders stated that the school is focused on becoming more culturally responsive and trauma sensitive, they acknowledged that there is not an SEL curriculum in place to address students’ social and emotional needs.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should use data and additional resources to supplement math modules in order to create plans and implement lessons that meet student needs.** In class visits, the IIT observed that teachers were relying on the math problems presented in workbooks as their math instruction. The team noted no instances of higher-order questioning, for example, or differentiating instruction to meet the diverse needs of students.

In the future, the principal should provide teachers with PD and coaching on how to use the resources and data to create plans and implement lessons that engage and meet student needs.

- **Students, teachers, and parents should work together to develop individual student goals.** The IIT saw little evidence of student goals except in one or two classrooms. Interviewed students said that sometimes they decide their goals with their teachers and bring them home to share with their parents or make some goals at home with their parents. However, interviewed parents shared that they are not part of goal-setting activities.
- **Instruction needs to focus on meeting the diverse needs of students.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed that most instruction was directed towards the whole class. The team saw little evidence of grouping based on students' needs or goals. Some reading groups were taking place in classrooms; however, the rest of the students continued to work on their packets or in their workbooks on the same assignments. Students told the IIT that they all receive their packets at the beginning of the week and are expected to have them completed by Friday.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Some teachers stated that informal walkthroughs by teacher-leaders was not a useful experience.** Although some teachers said that being able to discuss instructional strategies with peers is helpful, they shared that they accomplish this more often in grade-level meetings or informally, as opposed to the teacher-leader process. Some teacher-leaders who conduct the walkthroughs said that they feel the practice intrudes on instruction in their own classrooms by interrupting the flow of their lessons even though they conduct a walkthrough in less than ten minutes.
- **Parents reported that they do not always know how well their children are progressing.** Parents told the IIT that they sometimes receive progress reports during the marking period and then receive the report card at the end of the school year. However, they stated that they do not routinely receive information in-between these notices to let them know how well their children are doing in class and some ways in which they can help at home. They said that while teachers are available to answer questions, the parents most often initiate calls to the school. Some students explained to the IIT that they receive grades on their writing on a scale of one to four but do not know what those grades signify.
- **Students and teachers stated that mindfulness routines contribute to increased calmness in the school.** However, several students also said that there are many behavioral problems in their classes that distract them from their lessons and interrupt their learning.