New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge › Skill › Opportunity

Leadership and Systems

Curriculum

Instruction

Social-Emotional Learning

Family Engagement

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report

BEDS Code	651201060003
School Name	Sodus Junior/Senior High School
School Address	54 Mill Street, Sodus, NY 14551
District Name	Sodus Central School District
Principal	Arkee Allen
Dates of Visit	May 21-23, 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
2	1	1		1	3

High School Performance Indicators

4 Yr Grad. Rate <67%	Composite Performance Achievement Level	Average of 4-, 5-, and 6-year Graduation Rate Levels	Combined Composite Performance Achievement and Graduation Rate Level	English Language Proficiency Level	Average ELA and Math Academic Progress Level	Chronic Absenteeism Level	College, Career, Civic, Readiness (CCCR) Level
No	2	2	2		1	1	4

Sodus Junior/Senior High School serves 444 students in grades seven to twelve.

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 42 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 11 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, 27 staff members (39 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The school leaders have been successful in developing the creative arts program within the school. At the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, the school introduced an artist in residence series to encourage students to work with an artist from the community in a studio setting within the school. The team spoke to students and teachers who reported that the program had resulted in students working in new media and techniques, including traditional film photography. The team observed students' work and noted that it covered a wide range of subjects to a high standard.

2. A program for high school students to monitor recess in the elementary school was expanded by school leaders in the 2018-19 school year to include the intermediate school. Interviewed students reported that this program has been successful in building their self-esteem and sense of responsibility, and teachers noted that students were very positive about their monitoring experiences in the other schools, adding that the program provides students with an opportunity to act as informal role models and mentors for younger students.

3. Interviewed teachers reported that they have increased the number of field trips offered during the current school year in the high school to expand student understanding of the wider world, including, for example, a trip to visit the Tinker Nature Center. Students reported that they enjoyed these trips as they have helped them understand the topics they were studying. Teachers noted that student scores on quizzes and tests related to these topics improved after these trips and that their understanding of world issues had deepened.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders should use the available data to continually monitor and assess the effectiveness of programs and initiatives in the school.** Although information from assessments, behavior reports, and attendance is reviewed by school leaders, the school does not have a robust system for analyzing schoolwide data to determine the effectiveness of school programs and initiatives. Interviewed teachers confirmed that many initiatives have been introduced recently, many of which have not yet been fully implemented or resulted in obvious school improvement. For example, school leaders provided training in personalized learning in 2018, but the impact of this initiative has not been monitored by gathering data from classroom visits. From their classroom observations, the team noted that few teachers have adopted personalized learning strategies in their classrooms. The team also learned from interviews with staff and parents that effective monitoring and communication systems have not yet been put in place to ensure that staff, students, and families understand the importance of the various initiatives in bringing about school improvement.
- **School leaders should further engage teachers, students, and parents to build ownership of the school leaders' vision for high expectations and student achievement.** School leaders have not yet engaged all staff in prioritizing leaders' vision in areas such as personalized learning strategies or planning academically challenging curricula. For example, the principal reported that one of his key priorities was for teachers to provide students with more rigorous learning opportunities during lessons. He also reported that he had communicated his expectations to all staff at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year at a faculty meeting. However, the team observed that, in many observed lessons, students were provided with low-level tasks, such as coloring in maps or doing word searches, that did not engage them in rigorous thinking activities.

Parents said that they did not know the school leaders' vision for student achievement, and they did not recall any recent communications giving them this kind of information.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should use schoolwide data to identify teaching trends and areas of need and produce an action plan to improve teacher practices and student performance.** The team found that student achievement information is not currently being used to identify classrooms and subjects in which student performance needs to be improved. There is also no plan to ensure that all teachers are implementing strategies learned during professional development, as expected by the school leaders. For example, school leaders reported that although they had asked teachers to make use of student data when planning lessons, no information had been collected about whether teachers were meeting these expectations. From classroom observations, the team learned that many teachers do not use student data to plan lessons that matched student achievement levels.

- **School leaders should use the data collected from frequent schoolwide observations to provide individualized actionable feedback to teachers that they can use to improve their teaching strategies.** The team found that classroom visits are not occurring often enough for school leaders to identify the overall quality of teaching in the school. The team noted during classroom visits that although teachers used a wide variety of teaching strategies, many of them failed to engage students in critical thinking through a range of challenging tasks. School leaders reported they had developed a walkthrough tool to monitor key teaching strategies, such as the effective use of questioning and learning targets, but only gave feedback to teachers in generalized terms. Interviewed teachers agreed that the feedback they had received was often too infrequent and generalized to help them improve their instructional practices. The team reviewed several examples of feedback the school leaders had given to teachers and noted that the feedback did not provide teachers with specific actions they could take to improve their instructional practices. Going forward, school leaders should conduct daily classroom visits and give individual teachers actionable feedback on what they have observed. School leaders should follow up on this feedback within a month to ensure the teacher has implemented the indicated actions.

- **School leaders should provide teachers with additional support on assessing student understanding and customizing their learning experience based on the results.** School leaders reported little progress had been made in improving teachers' use of ongoing assessments in the classroom. The team noted that although a few teachers used a range of assessments, such as quizzes and tests, they did not often use the information gained through these assessments to adapt the curriculum so that the materials were personalized to better match the needs of individual students. The team also observed that teachers did not routinely ask questions that probed students' understanding of key concepts contained in the material and ensure that, when students do not understand the lesson, they reteach the content as needed.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should plan and deliver the curriculum in ways that provide students with opportunities to examine the content at a deep level.** The team observed that teachers did not often give students opportunities to engage in a broad range of experiences to reinforce and extend their learning, such as through discussions or practical tasks. During most observed lessons, teachers also did not provide opportunities for

students to develop and demonstrate their creativity by designing their own activities. Going forward, teachers should increase the opportunities for students to contribute to the development and delivery of the curriculum and engage with their learning.

- **Teachers should provide students with more opportunities to work in pairs and groups to discuss the content.** The team observed that teachers provided students with few opportunities to discuss issues together in pairs or groups. For example, in one classroom, the team observed students working independently on a task rather than discussing their ideas in groups. The team observed other examples of teachers giving students instruction without providing opportunities for them to discuss and explore the ideas collaboratively. Interviewed students reported they would like opportunities to discuss their work with each other, but this does not often happen.

- **Teachers should ensure that students are aware of the content and the skills they will learn in the lesson and check student understanding at the end of the lesson.** The team observed that some teachers post essential questions in their classrooms, but the questions mainly described what students would do rather than what questions they should be able to answer in the lesson. The team observed that a few teachers displayed explicit learning outcomes on the board such as, "You will be able to solve a system of equations and inequalities," to help students to understand the content of the lesson and the skills they would learn. However, few teachers gave students multiple opportunities to show that they had understood the objective of the lesson or what they had learned.

- **Teachers should consider ways to flexibly arrange their classrooms so that they are conducive to students working collaboratively.** The team noted that many teachers arranged classrooms traditionally with students seated in rows facing the board and not easily able to work collaboratively in groups. The team observed that in classrooms where teachers had arranged desks or tables in groups, students could work together and discuss work with each other. These teachers reported that they found flexible seating arrangements helped students engage more effectively in learning.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Teachers, students, and parents would like increased school leader presence in the hallways to encourage students to move quickly between classrooms.** Several interviewed teachers said that students were frequently tardy to class. Students and parents agreed that if school leaders were in hallways during transitions, this would be helpful in getting students to class on time.

- **Staff and students would like increased supervision from school leaders in the cafeteria during lunchtime.** Some interviewed students reported that they do not like lunchtimes because adults are not always available to intervene when behavior incidents occur. Teachers reported that some students do not eat their lunch in the cafeteria and sometimes leave their lunch trays in various areas around the school.

- **Students in grades seven and eight and staff would like a more organized routine for exiting the morning forum meeting.** Students said that the current procedure is chaotic and intimidating for some students as all students crowd the exit doors. They said that if students exited by grade level, then this would lead to less crowding and jostling. Teachers and staff agreed that a more orderly departure from the auditorium would create a less stressful start to the day.

- **Students would like teachers or school leaders to explain the significance of the quotations displayed around the school.** Several students pointed out specific quotations such as "Success is found under the alarm clock,"

a quote attributed to Benjamin Franklin, and asked team members what they meant. Interviewed teachers agreed that explaining the quotations would help to expand students' social-emotional learning.

- **Parents would like to receive "good news" postcards from teachers, as they have in past school years.** Parents commented that they would like school leaders to reinstate these postcards, as they appreciated the opportunity to encourage their children when they received them. Interviewed students and teachers agreed that reintroducing the postcard would be inspiring and increase communication with families.
- **Parents would like school leaders to clarify the procedures for recognizing and supporting cultural differences.** Some parents said that school leaders and teachers do not always celebrate equally the different cultures represented in the school. For example, several parents commented that although school leaders and teachers made some effort to support Black History Month, they had done little to recognize Hispanic Heritage Month. Interviewed teachers agreed with parents that school leaders and teachers should do more to recognize all cultures represented in the school.