

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	421800010033
School Name	Corcoran High School
School Address	919 Glenwood Ave, Syracuse, NY 13207
District Name	Syracuse City School District
Principal	Tara Jennings
Dates of Visit	April 2 – 4, 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:

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	1	1	1	2	1	1	2

Corcoran High School serves 1166 students in grades nine 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 and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The team visited a total of 47 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 7 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, and teacher feedback.
- In advance of the visit, 51 out of 124 staff members (41.1 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. During the 2018-19 school year, school and teacher leaders have launched an initiative called Corcoran the Family (CTF). The purpose of this initiative is to form positive relationships that encourage the community to regard the school as an extension of each student's family. The principal told the IIT that building positive community perceptions of the school will enable the school to be more effective in helping students succeed. School and teacher leaders shared that CTF was developed by a community group that included students, teachers, and parents. Students and teachers reported that CTF meetings this school year have concentrated on getting out the message that the school cares about families and will always be there for support. Leaders noted that students are more regularly coming to school, the number of student referrals has decreased, and the rate of chronic absenteeism has decreased by 8.7 percent.
2. During the 2018-19 school year, school and teacher leaders have promoted a positive school environment and supported students' social and emotional developmental health by investing in the lives of the students outside of the academic school day. For example, teachers show support by attending student activities and events. School leaders have provided community tours to better acquaint staff with the communities in which their students live and provide a better understanding of family circumstances. According to school leaders, students now report that they feel more supported personally and academically, which may have contributed to recent growth in student academic achievement, including a measurable increase in the number of students who have raised their scores on school-based assessments.
3. This school year the principal has created time in the schedule for teacher teams to meet and plan in professional learning communities (PLCs). The purpose of this strategy is to provide content area and special area teachers with time to plan and execute the school instructional foci of personalized learning and formative assessment. Although the school is in the initial stages of using data to drive instruction, this structure enables staff to have more frequent conversations about assessment data. This initiative has changed the way in which staff approach their collaborative planning and has resulted in teachers beginning to understand how formative assessment can be used to drive instructional decision making in the classroom.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The principal should implement a comprehensive system to support student social and emotional developmental health schoolwide.** The principal shared that teachers are using a variety of intervention strategies to support the social and emotional developmental health of students. She shared that while some teachers are using restorative practices, others are using strategies more closely aligned to trauma-informed care. The IIT found that further professional development (PD) for all staff is needed around a schoolwide approach for supporting the social and emotional needs of students. The principal added that the school has partnered with external organizations to help support the social and emotional needs of students by providing access to individualized supports services to students, as required.

- **The principal needs to provide teachers with clear guidance on how to use data systems to drive instructional decisions in the classrooms.** Teachers reported that they are using their PLC time to plan personalized learning and develop formative assessments to drive instructional decisions, student grouping, and individualized student support. During interviews with the IIT, teachers expressed the need for more targeted training on how best to use the data that they are now starting to collect and analyze. The principal shared that she has created systems and structures through a planning matrix known as Plan, Do, Study, and Act (PDSA) to help teachers use data to construct purposeful student groupings in the classroom. The IIT found that teachers need clear guidance about the expectations for specific data points and techniques to use.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should explore ways to increase teacher attendance at professional learning opportunities provided by the school and the district.** During interviews with the IIT, teachers shared that the school and district offer a variety of professional development opportunities and the school has a professional development committee that analyzes teacher survey data to identify and provide focused individualized support for teachers, as appropriate. However, teachers stated that more staff should take advantage of these offered professional learning opportunities.
- **School and teacher leaders should develop interdisciplinary curriculum units across departments to enhance or deepen student learning experiences.** The principal reported that one school goal is to develop interdisciplinary curricula to link content across grades and departments. Teachers interviewed by the IIT shared that one of the functions of the Middle Year Program is to assist PLCs with the development of interdisciplinary units to synthesize ideas and characteristics across content area subjects. However, during classroom visits, explicit interdisciplinary connections during instruction were typically not observed.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers need to build their skill in implementing personalized learning and developing formative assessments.** During interviews with the IIT, teachers shared that they use PLC time to plan and develop personalized learning and formative assessment strategies for use in their classrooms. These teachers also shared that all of their colleagues should be implementing these strategies at a high level and that more PD support is needed. Teachers shared with the IIT that it would be helpful to initiate a cycle of peer observations so that staff can learn from the best practices taking place in other classrooms. The principal agreed that the school is still in the initial stages of implementing personalized learning and teacher-developed formative assessments schoolwide. The IIT examined the personalized units developed by teachers and found that effective planning within the framework they have been given needs to be strengthened.
- **Teachers need to provide English as a new language (ENL) learners enough time to consider the content, so that they can answer questions posed by the teacher.** During classroom visits, the IIT found that ENL students are not typically provided with enough time to think about the content and respond to the questions teachers ask. ENL students stated that they need to be given more time to consider and respond to questions in classrooms.
- **Teachers need to use data to drive instructional decision-making.** The principal shared with the team that teachers are beginning to develop formative assessments so that they can give regular and timely feedback to students about their academic achievement during lessons, but that more PD will be required to support

teachers in improving this practice. Teachers told the IIT that the development of formative assessments has been helpful, and that they are learning how to use the data from their formative assessments to inform instructional decisions in the classroom, including helping students target areas that need work. The IIT observed students working in some classrooms in small groups or individually, while teachers monitored instructional tasks and provided appropriate guidance to individual students.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents would like more parent participation at Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO) meetings.** Parents shared that PTSO meetings are not well attended, and they would like to increase parent and student participation. These parents believed that they could attract a larger and more diverse group of parents by involving more students in the PTSO meetings. Parents also reported that, in the future, they would like to set up information tables during planned school events to encourage parent and student interest and support.
- **Students would like more diverse course offerings.** Interviewed students believed that the school is preparing them for college but reported that they were not offered a diverse or extensive menu of non-traditional or career-oriented classes. Students reported that having a greater variety of classes to choose from could spark student curiosity or interest in other career choices. Students expressed interest in vocational courses such as culinary arts and engineering.
- **Teachers would like more mental health services available for students and families.** Teachers reported that the school does its best to respond to the personal and psychological needs of students, but it would be beneficial if the school provided increased access to mental health services for students and families dealing with difficult personal situations. The principal acknowledged that having on-site mental health services is part of her long-term vision for the school.