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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
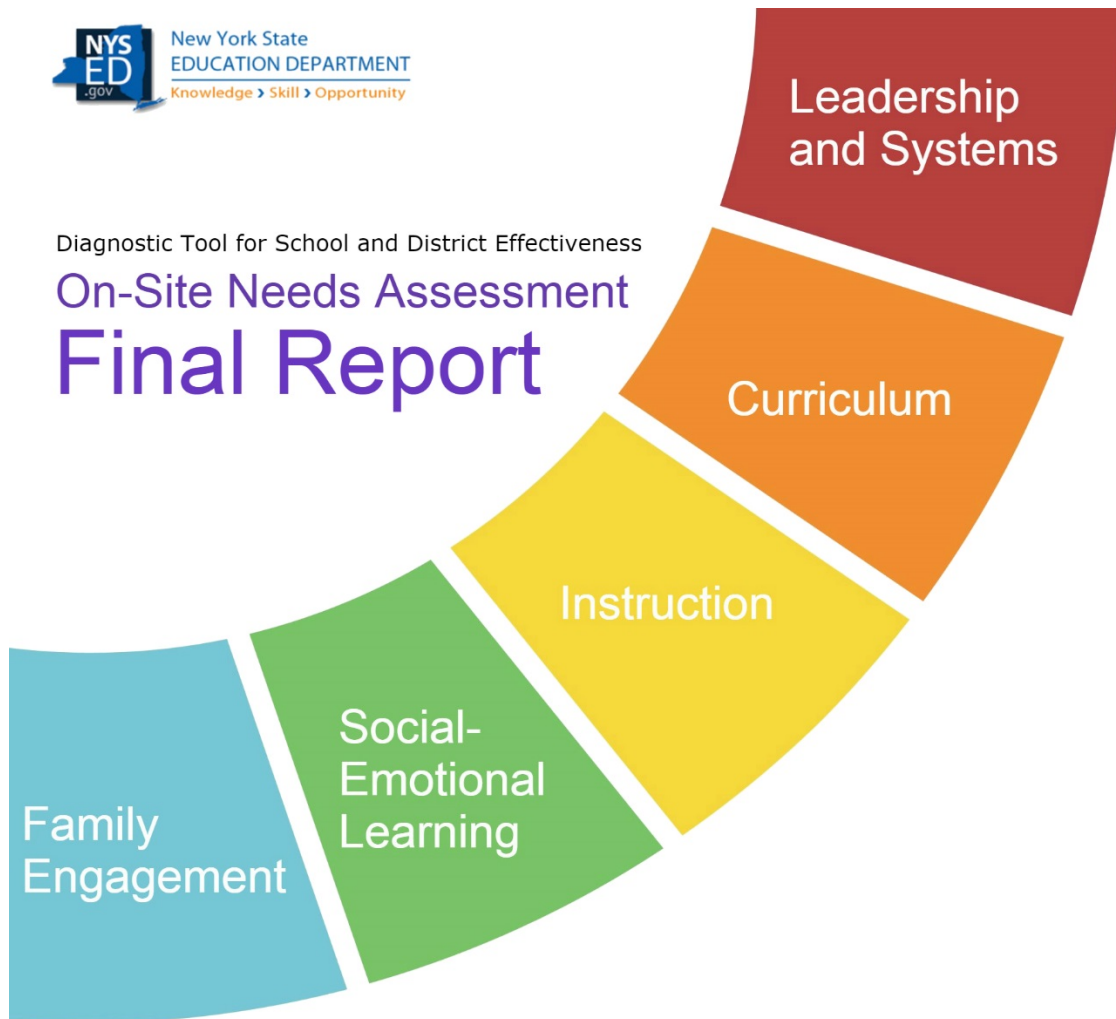
BEDS Code	421800010010
School Name	Roberts K-8 School
School Address	715 Glenwood Avenue Syracuse, NY 13207
District Name	Syracuse City School District
Principal	Mr. John Devendorf
Dates of Visit	December 4-6, 2018

Purpose Of The Visit

A team organized by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) visited the school to help the school identify areas of need that are making long-term success a challenge and provide actionable recommendations to direct the school's work in the immediate future.

The report provides a critical lens to help the school best focus its efforts.

Information About The Visit

- Roberts K-8 School serves 694 students in pre-kindergarten to grade eight.
- The visit was led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE) and a representative from NYSED. The team also included a district representative and a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SESIS) representative.
- The team visited a total of 39 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 district assessment data, student work, and teacher lesson plans.
- In advance of the visit, 45 staff members (80 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal added an additional academic intervention services (AIS) staff member to the intervention team for the 2018-19 school term. This staffing decision has enabled the school to better address the needs of struggling students by decreasing caseloads so AIS staff can devote more time to fewer students. In addition, the new AIS staff member has been trained as a turn-key trainer for district initiatives and is providing district-level professional development on site.

2. The school has embraced the district initiative focused on early literacy. For example, teachers are supported with training to ensure whole group instruction and intervention resources are implemented with fidelity, and the instructional coach uses team meeting times to provide consistent follow-up training to teachers in kindergarten to grade two. These efforts have positively impacted teachers' acquisition of the instructional skills needed to implement the literacy whole group, small group, and intervention programs.

3. The school leaders have provided technology resources for each classroom to ensure students have access to digital content that adapts to the individual needs of each student in the areas of reading and mathematics. In addition, school leaders secured an additional 100 laptop computers this school year, which has allowed students to prepare for computer-based New York State (NYS) assessments.

4. The school staff use strategies to address character education and teach positive behavior. Leaders and teacher spoke highly of the Positivity Project, an initiative that teaches students about positive character traits and how to apply these traits in real life. Staff incorporate examples of positive character traits into student activities and class discussions, and these lessons are reinforced through school announcements. The principal reported that the 2018-19 student suspension rate, thus far, has decreased from the 2017-18 school term.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders need to use strategic planning to incrementally address the school's improvement needs.** The school used the school-led review process to identify goals and benchmarks for the 2018-19 School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP). However, the team found that each benchmark was set as a year-long goal rather than an incremental step toward meeting the school's overall goal. The school has attempted to accomplish a broad range of goals; however, at the time of the visit, each of the benchmarks outlined in the SCEP were in the initial stages of implementation. The team found that improvement efforts would benefit from streamlining into smaller, more achievable goals with clear benchmarks that can be used for progress monitoring purposes.
- **School leaders should have regularly scheduled meeting time for school improvement planning, progress monitoring, and coordinating school initiatives.** While school leaders regularly communicate, the team found little evidence showing that ongoing meetings occur that are focused on monitoring the school improvement plan and conducting action planning in response to progress monitoring data.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should ensure that teachers receive additional support in the areas of standards-based instruction and interventions.** Teachers reported that they need additional time for collaboration and training focused on intervention initiatives and instructional practice. During interviews with the AIS staff and the instructional coach, the IIT learned that the AIS staff have been trained in the intervention and instructional programs that teachers are required to implement. School leaders agreed that AIS staff have the capacity to assist teachers with strategies to support struggling learners and align instruction to the learning standards.
- **The school should perform ongoing school-level monitoring of student data as it relates to the NYS standards.** The school administers district assessments, and the vice principal for data and teachers analyze the district assessment data. While the teachers administer the assessments that accompany district-provided unit assessments, the IIT found limited evidence showing that the resulting assessment data is analyzed as a means to monitor student mastery of NYS standards between administrations of district assessments.

Learning at the School

- **Lessons should provide students with additional opportunities to extend their learning and engage in challenging academic activities.** During interviews with the IIT, students communicated that most assignments are not challenging and they are often able to quickly finish assigned tasks. In addition, students shared that they are not typically provided with extension activities once they finish their assignments during the work period.
- **Instruction should provide an increased emphasis on teacher modeling.** During classroom visits, the IIT noted that some teachers explicitly modeled content aligned to the instructional standards, while instruction in other classrooms was activity-based rather than standards-based. During interviews with the AIS staff and the instructional coach, the team learned that more time needs to be spent working with teachers on understanding learning standards and what students should know and be able to do.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Staff and parents would like regular communication about school improvement strategies and progress toward meeting goals.** Teachers stated that the school-led review process was thorough and that they were involved in the process of developing goals to meet the specific needs of the school. Teachers also shared that regular updates on school progress are warranted to ensure they are kept abreast of the school's progress toward meeting these goals. Interviewed parents stated that they are interested in supporting the school and receiving information related to the school's efforts resulting from the DTSDE process.
- **Parents would like the school to provide them with additional opportunities and strategies to support their children's learning and to offer students school activities that support real-world application of content.** The team learned that the school hosts various events such as a curriculum night. However, parents reported that they desire to be engaged in hands-on activities specific to the instructional standards and to receive information such as high school selection criteria. Parents also communicated a need for student opportunities to apply their learning in real-life settings.
- **Parents would like frequent school-home communication related to student learning targets and progress at all grade levels.** Parents stated that they receive information on what their children are learning in the lower grades, but the frequency of communication diminishes as students progress through the grade levels. Interviewed parents communicated a desire for regular updates on their children's performance through technology and take-home notices, in addition to online resources or pamphlets specific to grade-level content. Parents of students receiving special services also expressed a need for routine updates on student progress.