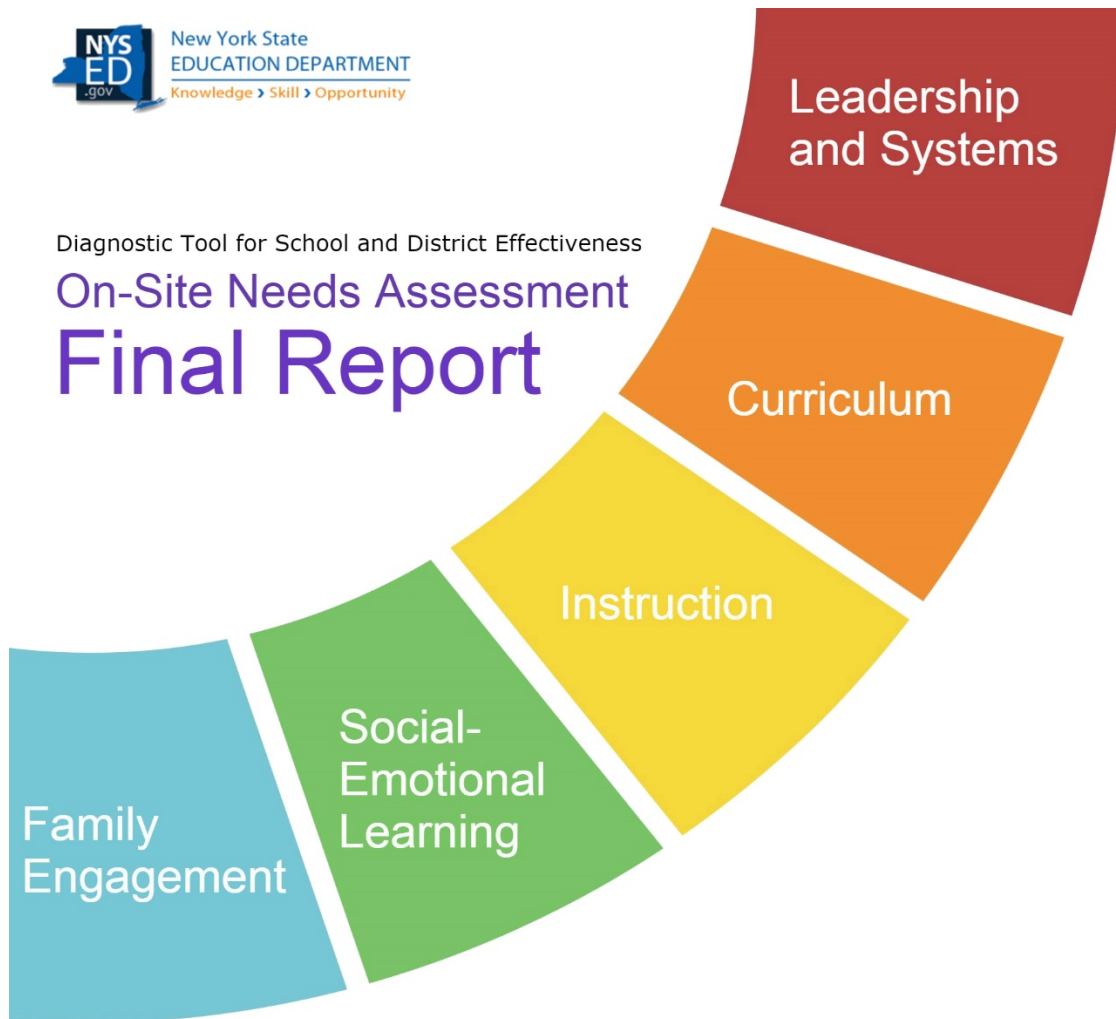


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	100501040003
School Name	Taconic Hills Junior/Senior High School
School Address	73 Co Rte. 11A, Craryville, NY 12521
District Name	Taconic Hills Central School District
Principal	James Buhrmaster
Dates of Visit	March 27-29, 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:

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	1

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	3	3	3		2	1	4

Taconic Hills Junior/Senior High School serves 638 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, a district consultant, and a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) representative.
- The team visited a total of 48 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 14 classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with students, staff, and parents.
- In advance of the visit, 52 staff members (82.4 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The IIT learned from school leaders that an annual student survey administered in fall 2018 showed that students feel connected to individual teachers and adults at the school. Several students reported to the IIT that they have at least one trusted adult to go to in the building when they need to talk to someone. Students reported to the IIT that teachers and adults at the school care about them and they can count on having an adult at the school they can confide in if they have a problem.
2. Teachers reported to the IIT that this is a positive school community where colleagues work well together and are supportive of one another. Teachers are also supported by the instructional coaches, summer professional development, and the common planning time provided for them to collaborate with colleagues. All teachers participated in trauma-based instruction professional development (PD) in summer 2018 and have had access to the presenter throughout the school year to support their efforts in meeting the social-emotional needs of the students.
3. Students reported that teachers are available after school and during their lunch periods for help with coursework. Teachers stagger their after-school schedules so that at least one or more teachers are available after school each day of the week. In addition to after-school support, the students can now collect their lunch, take it to their classroom, and receive help on assignments from teachers during their lunch time when needed.
4. Parents and students reported that there are a wide range of electives and extracurricular activities to support the social and emotional needs of students. The school offers an array of athletics and clubs, including art, drama, and yearbook, as well as coursework through Advanced Placement and online Distance Learning opportunities. Students reported that they can easily find a club or a course of interest to them.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The school needs to develop a system to ensure high attendance; and the attendance committee must meet regularly to review attendance data and develop policy.** The principal told the IIT that a team of staff members comprised of the assistant principal, dean of students, and school counselors had been assembled to work on a plan to improve chronic absenteeism for the 2019-20 school year. However, meetings have not yet produced plans that the team has used to reduce chronic absenteeism. The IIT learned that the school received a small grant to support incentives for attendance in October 2018 but, at the time of the review, there was not a plan in place to implement this grant. The IIT also learned that attendance has been an issue in the elementary school, as well as the junior/senior high school, and is therefore a matter of concern for the entire district. In the future, school and district leaders will need to collaboratively develop a process for the review of daily attendance data, develop incentives to improve attendance, and implement a process to monitor attendance at the school.
- **The school should create a system to monitor discipline practices within the school.** The IIT reviewed an analysis of school performance data showing a high number of student referrals for in-school and out-of-school suspension and confirmed the accuracy of the data with school leaders. The assistant principal agreed that the number of referrals is high and said that leaders are working on a plan to address the issue. School leaders reported that they are concerned by the high number referrals they are presented with every day and the

variations in the reasons for the referrals, which often stem from varying teacher expectations. Parents and students also reported inconsistent expectations for student behavior within the classrooms. For example, students reported that some teachers refer students for being late to class, while other teachers do not issue referrals for the same infraction. The school leaders reported there is an urgency to develop a process and protocol for student referrals, train staff on the process, and establish consistent schoolwide expectations for student behavior and staff referrals. School leaders indicated that, in summer 2019, they plan to align the referral process with the student behavior handbook, the school's Code of Conduct policy, and provide training for all staff, parents, and students in the fall of 2019.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **The principal needs to ensure that all staff understand his vision for school practices and consistently implement schoolwide improvement priorities.** The principal reported that, at the start of the 2018-19 school year, he explained his instructional vision to staff and established instructional priorities, such as the posting of learning objectives in classrooms, the greeting of students at the classroom doors, and the closure of lessons. However, few teachers could share specific information with the IIT about the principal's vision and priorities for the school, and during classroom observations, the IIT found that a limited number of teachers were consistently posting objectives or routinely implementing other instructional priorities. The team learned that walkthroughs are not regularly conducted to confirm that expectations are being followed and to reinforce the importance of implementation when they are not.
- **The principal should be visible in classrooms and around the school.** Teachers and students reported to the IIT that the principal is not seen regularly in classrooms and around the school. Several of the parents interviewed by the IIT said that they rarely see the principal in common areas of the school during the school day. The principal confirmed to the IIT that he often works in his office during the day and has not delegated routine administrative tasks to other staff. The principal also agreed that he could more strategically deploy available personnel resources such as the communications director, the director of instruction, school counselors, and the assistant principal, all of whom could assume some of the administrative duties. In the future, the principal should delegate more of the routine, administrative tasks to other staff so that he can undertake the critical role as the instructional leader of the school.
- **Student achievement data must be used to inform instruction.** The principal reported that he shared his expectations for the use of data to inform instruction with teachers at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. However, the principal added that following up on these expectations with regular monitoring of data team meetings and classroom instruction to ensure that teachers understand and use the protocols they are expected to implement in their classrooms has not been prioritized. The IIT learned that teachers are expected to meet with their data teams once each month and that each content lead was trained by Results First! to lead the data team meetings. However, the IIT found that while teams held meetings during the allotted time, work on student data analysis did not typically occur. The school leader will need to reestablish and monitor his expectations for the use of data to inform instruction and set expectations for the data teams.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should fully engage students in the learning process.** The IIT observed that most lessons were teacher-directed and included little input from students. The team also observed that on completion of assignments, students in most classrooms were not provided with any feedback or further instructions. Some

students confirmed that they are not typically provided with additional instructions or activities when they finish their work early. In some classrooms, the team observed that students were not required to provide evidence to support their ideas and thinking, and students said they are not usually asked to contribute during lessons. Some students and parents agreed that the students are not typically challenged in their daily coursework. The IIT observed an overreliance on assignment packets and Google Classroom to provide the instruction, which resulted in minimal interaction between students and the classroom teacher. Students reported to the IIT that instead of discussing what they have learned to develop a deeper understanding, they are often told to find the answers to questions in the packets.

- **Teachers need to explain the purpose of the learning activity.** The IIT observed in many classrooms that lesson objectives were not posted or explained at the beginning of each lesson, even though this is one of the principal's instructional priorities. When questioned by members of the team, students said that many times they do not understand the relevance of the content or the purpose of their learning. Several students also stated that they did not always feel comfortable asking the teacher for clarification.
- **Teachers should routinely question students to gauge their level of understanding and to promote mastery of the content.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed that teacher questioning was often directed to one or two students and that the level of questions was often very low, demanding little more than recall. In several of the visited classrooms, students were provided with the answer almost immediately after the question was asked and time was not allowed for students to consider various options before formulating an answer. In some of the lessons, follow-up questions to promote further consideration and discussion or to check for understanding were not posed.
- **Teachers should regularly use formative assessments.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed that ongoing formative assessment was not often used as a tool to modify teaching and learning activities to meet student needs. For example, the IIT saw minimal use of closing activities, such as exit tickets, that required students to think about and demonstrate what they had learned in the lesson. The principal stated that he has not monitored classroom instruction to see if his expectation for teacher use of formative assessments is regularly implemented.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Teachers and students would like incentives for positive behavior and attendance.** Some students interviewed by the IIT said they would like to have behavior incentives at the school so that more students would follow the rules. Several teachers agreed with this idea and added that there should be incentives for both positive behavior and school attendance.
- **Teachers, parents, and students would like the principal to have a more visible presence in the school.** Students shared that although the assistant principal was visible throughout the day, they have few opportunities to interact with the principal because they rarely see him. Teachers told the IIT that the principal rarely visits their classroom and is seldom seen in the hallway. Parents reported wanting the principal to be more visible when they come to the school for before- and after-school activities.
- **Parents and students want consistent and timely communication from the school.** Some parents reported that it can take up to two weeks to receive a response from the main office or school leaders to a phone call or email. Most of the interviewed parents reported that they sometimes have to contact a teacher multiple times before they get a response. Students confirmed that some teachers are more responsive than others with e-mails and phone calls. Students and parents also reported that communication about coursework and

school expectations was not always clear and specific. Some parents and students added that the information regarding coursework planning for college admission was inconsistently provided to students and families, and they would appreciate receiving the information in time to review and prepare for college planning. Most students and parents reported that there is a heavy reliance on the school website to get information to families, and they would appreciate receiving coursework and college planning information in multiple formats, in a timely manner.