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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	222000010013
School Name	Case Middle School
School Address	1237 Washington Street, Watertown, NY 13601
District Name	Watertown City School District
Principal	Thomas Nabinger
Dates of Visit	March 12-14, 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	1

Case Middle School serves 589 students in grades seven and eight.

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 38 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited eight 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, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 37 staff members (71 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. In November 2018, a grade eight team completed a project related to designing, budgeting, and planning a playground focusing on the use of natural landscaping. Students reached out to community members who provided information about budgeting and what natural landscaping looks like. The principal, students, and teachers spoke positively about participating in the project, and the attendance of some students who participated improved compared to 2017-18. The school is planning similar projects for the future.

2. In 2018-19, school leaders provided teachers with professional development (PD) on using technology to enhance their instruction. During class visits, the IIT observed students using an on-line learning system to support their learning. Interviewed teachers stated that the system has given students more independence by allowing them to access their assignments on-line. The team also observed students using a computer application to take quizzes in subjects such as history, health, and Spanish. Students enjoyed using the application as they collaborated with their peers to determine the correct answers.

3. For 2018-19, to address concerns about student achievement in math, teachers provided grades seven and eight students with computer-based math lessons focused on their individual skill gaps. According to iReady assessment data, the number of students who performed at or above grade level in math increased from 159 students in December 2018 to 190 students in December 2019. Additionally, the number of students who performed two or more levels below grade level decreased from 179 to 132 students over the same period.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders need to establish school improvement goals that are specific, measurable, ambitious, results-oriented, and timely (SMART) with clear incremental actions and benchmarks to enable them to achieve those goals.** Through discussions with school leaders, the IIT learned that the school is in the early stages of developing a system for school improvement. While school leaders have identified broad school priorities, such as reducing discipline referrals and improving student behavior, SMART goals based on these priorities, specific incremental actions to achieve these goals, and benchmarks to monitor the school's progress have not been developed.

- **School leaders should develop a system to involve teachers, parents, and students in school improvement efforts.** The principal acknowledged that teachers, parents, and students have not been systematically included in the development and implementation of school improvement initiatives. The team's discussions with teachers, parents, and students revealed that they did not have a clear understanding of current school improvement efforts. However, when asked, all of these groups offered suggestions that could be incorporated into a plan for school improvement.

- **The school will need to develop a system to analyze attendance data and develop strategies to improve student attendance.** The IIT learned that in the two weeks prior to the team's visit, school leaders began implementing a process to review daily attendance data to identify students who are chronically absent. However, students who are frequently tardy have not yet been identified and a system to analyze attendance data has not been developed. In the future, school leaders will need to develop procedures to identify students who are often tardy. They should also begin to analyze attendance data to identify trends and patterns for

students who are chronically absent and frequently tardy and use this information to develop strategies to improve their attendance.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders should visit classrooms regularly to monitor the quality of instruction.** The principal acknowledged that regular walkthroughs are not conducted to monitor instruction. As a result, school leaders do not have a clear understanding of the quality of instruction being provided and are not able to determine teacher strengths or identify areas where additional support is needed.
- **School leaders will need to provide teachers with actionable feedback to improve their instructional practices.** Interviewed teachers reported that they do not receive regular feedback about their planning and delivery of instruction. A few teachers stated that they sometimes receive verbal feedback but said this does not happen often. As a result, teachers do not have a clear understanding of their strengths or areas where improvement is needed. In the future, school leaders will need to provide all teachers with written feedback that identifies successes and areas for improvement. School leaders should provide teachers with actionable next steps and follow up to ensure that improvements have been made.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should use assessment data to plan activities that meet the learning needs of all students.** In reviewing student achievement data, the IIT noted considerable variation in student achievement levels. However, when visiting classrooms, the IIT found that most lessons were not differentiated based on the learning needs of individual students. In addition, the IIT observed few lessons in which formative assessment data was used to adjust or modify instruction. Consequently, the IIT found that most lesson activities did not meet the learning needs of all students. In many classes visited, some students struggled to complete the assigned task while others completed their work early and waited for others to finish.
- **The school should develop a plan for consistent implementation of the advisory period and for monitoring its effectiveness.** The school schedule includes one advisory period each week. During this time, teachers are expected to provide instruction on aspects of social-emotional learning, such as respecting differences, developing relationships, building a positive classroom environment, and recognizing and changing behaviors to reduce bullying. However, the principal acknowledged that teacher implementation of the advisory period is not monitored and varies from class to class. In addition, there is no system in place to determine the impact of the advisory period on student social-emotional learning.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents of students with disabilities reported that teachers do not always meet the needs of their children.** Interviewed parents of students with disabilities stated that although their children's individual needs have been identified, their needs are not always considered by their teachers. Some parents stated that their children's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are not always followed. Parents reported that sometimes their children struggle academically and socially because their needs are not being met.
- **Parents reported that the noise level in study halls prevents their children from completing their work.** Interviewed parents stated that their children complain of not being able to work during study halls because

of the behavior of other students. Interviewed teachers and students confirmed that some study halls can be noisy.