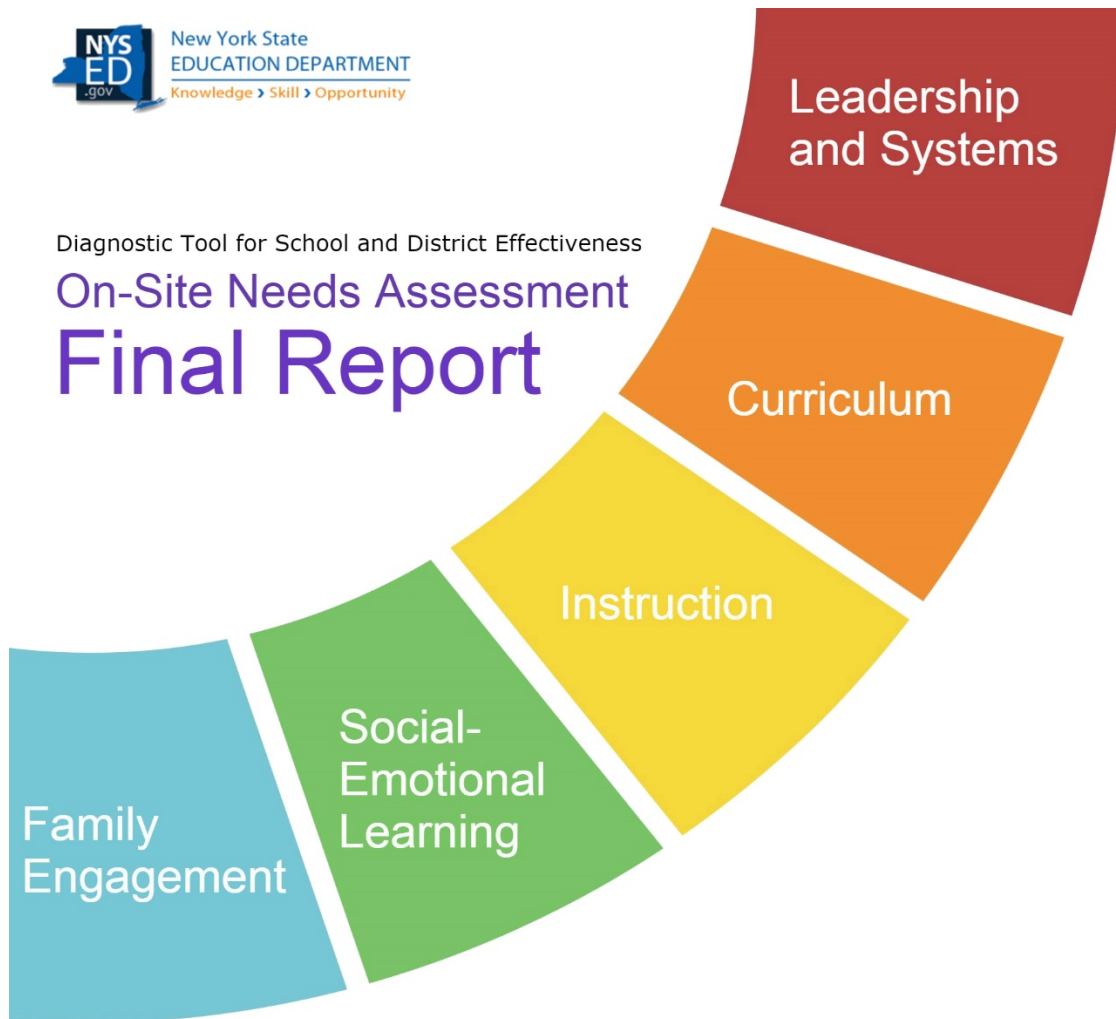


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	600101060005
School Name	Waverly Middle School
School Address	1 Frederick St, Waverly, NY 14892
District Name	Waverly Central School District
Principal	Paul Vesci
Dates of Visit	April 23-25, 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

Waverly Middle School serves 453 students in grades five to 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, and a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS).
- The team visited a total of 20 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 5 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 curriculum documents, attendance data, student referral data, and student work packets.
- In advance of the visit, 18 staff members (51 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The principal initiated an assessment pep rally initiative to build interest, excitement, and a competitive spirit amongst students regarding the 2018-19 State assessments. The principal used the forum to excite students about taking the test, to challenge them to prepare for success, and to encourage participation. As a result, the principal stated that nearly 100 percent of students took the English language arts (ELA) State assessment this school year.
2. Recognizing a high behavioral incident referral rate in the 2017-18 school year, the principal started 2018-19 with a school-wide initiative to reset behavioral expectations and teacher referral protocols, resulting in a decrease in referrals submitted by nearly 55 percent in the first quarter.
3. This year, the principal reorganized the grade six master schedule to improve the delivery of special education support services in ELA and math, allowing special education teachers to better meet the needs of special education students as identified in the students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). As a result of the new master schedule, special education teachers have more opportunities to push into classrooms to provide students with support as needed.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **The school must craft and implement interim benchmark plans to meet its yearly goals.** School leaders stated that the school had set goals for this year, and a review of the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) and discussions with school leaders demonstrated that there was some movement toward the achievement of some of these goals. However, the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) found that there was no clear indication that the school was on track to meet all of its goals. For example, the school set a goal to implement a new school-wide writing model. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction trained both school leaders and teachers on the writing model, and school leaders and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction met to create a walkthrough tool to be used to measure the writing model's success and provide meaningful feedback to teachers. However, the principal stated that while they had developed the walkthrough tool, he had not been able to implement the tool with fidelity. As a result, school leaders were not able to determine to what degree the school has been successful implementing the school-wide writing model, and there was no data available to determine both its implementation and its impact on learning.
- **School leaders should ensure that all staff consistently use the SchoolTool Parent Portal.** School leaders stated that while the school uses the SchoolTool Parent Portal, teachers are not currently required to update grades on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Further, teachers shared that many teachers utilize different gradebook tools, and while some put grades in the system every week, others do not. Parents told the IIT that they are often unaware of their children's academic standing over the course of a given marking period because the Parent Portal is not regularly updated to show current grades. Teachers shared that grades are posted at the end of grading periods; however, parents and students stated that this leaves little if any time for students to make up work or address their deficiencies.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders need to prioritize their time effectively to regularly support and monitor the quality of instruction in classrooms.** Through classroom observations and principal interviews, the IIT learned that school leaders often handle operational or behavioral issues rather than using their time to strategically support instruction. At various points during the site visit, the principal was noted having to go to lock or unlock the upstairs bathrooms during the lunch break, to monitor the lunchroom, to monitor the hallways, or to handle minor student issues in his office. Teachers shared with the team that they do not see the principal in classrooms as often as they would like and that they do not regularly receive direction from school leaders regarding their teaching practices. Teachers told the IIT that at the start of the year, the principal was much more visible in the classrooms and was available to support and deliver feedback on the new writing model Restate, Answer, Cite, Expand, Sum up (RACES). The principal told the IIT that school leaders had constructed a walkthrough tool to assess implementation of this model and to drive teacher feedback, but that they had not applied the tool with fidelity over the course of the year. While the IIT saw anchor charts and artifacts in most classrooms, they observed limited implementation or use of these strategies.
- **School leaders need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the principal, assistant principal (AP), and the school support team.** During principal interviews, the IIT learned that the new superintendent had changed the leadership structure at the school for 2018-19, removing the co-principal model from last year and replacing it with a principal and AP model. In the co-principal model, the current principal managed grades seven and eight, while the current AP had equal oversight over grades five and six. With this year's shift to a principal and AP model, some teachers stated that the roles of leadership had become more confusing, leaving many to guess who to go to for instructional and behavioral support. Further, the principal noted that there is confusion as to the roles and responsibilities of the members of the school support team. The principal felt that without an understanding of who to go to for what, operational and behavioral concerns were going directly to school leaders, making it difficult for them to support instruction with fidelity.

Learning at the School

- **All teachers in co-teaching classrooms should work together to impact and improve student academic achievement.** During classroom visits, the IIT observed integrated ELA and math classes where consultant special education teachers pushed in to co-teach alongside general education classroom teachers in order to support instruction in select classes. The principal shared that these consultant teachers were expected to work in tandem with the classroom teachers to modify and scaffold lessons and activities to best serve the needs of students and that he expected to see the teachers managing instruction with equally impactful responsibilities while interacting and displaying strong parity. However, the IIT found that in most classes with consultant teachers, the lead teacher typically delivered instruction while the consultant teacher managed behavior or relayed information to a small group of students. Teachers stated that while they do discuss upcoming lessons with their consultant teachers, there are few opportunities for them to co-plan lessons and to determine the responsibilities for each teacher in advance in order to best support instruction and meet the needs of all students in the classroom.
- **Teachers should ask students academically rigorous questions that encourage them to think critically or grapple with material to promote deep learning and understanding.** During classroom visits, the IIT typically

observed teachers delivering instruction through the lecture model. Teachers would pose questions, allow some time for students to think independently or search for answers in their texts, and then call on students who raised their hands. Typically, these checks for understanding were driven by low-level questions and only a small group of students would participate and attempt to answer. Correct answers would be restated by the teacher so others could hear the information and copy it down in a graphic organizer or worksheet packet. Incorrect answers would be clarified or corrected by the teacher, so students could add accurate information to their worksheets. The IIT observed some classes using think-pair-share or front-to-back strategies with students; however, even in these instances, the questions given to student pairs or small groups were low-level. The principal stated that there was some training on Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questioning and that he expected to see fewer DOK level 1 questions this late in the school year.

- **Teachers should plan lessons and activities that are engaging to students.** While the IIT observed many classes where students were on task and participating to some degree in a lesson, most of the learning activities planned for students required little, if any, critical thinking or student interaction. While there were some classes where students were allowed to interact and move about the room while discussing the topics of the lesson, most classes were teacher-led and elicited participation from only a few students. During interviews, students shared that they are typically bored and have grown tired of the repeated worksheet packets and graphic organizers. Further, students said they would like to work on more projects and have more opportunities to choose how they show their learning. Teachers stated that they have allowed for some student choice, but only gave examples like students being able to choose their writing topic for an essay or what group members they would work with.
- **All activities and assessments should be purposeful and used to provide students with clear, actionable feedback to improve their learning.** The IIT observed the use of bell ringer assignments at the start of many classes, designed to get students settled in the classroom and transition them into that day's lesson. Many teachers employed a standardized bell ringer log, either as a standalone worksheet or as part of pre-bound worksheet packets. The team noted that bell ringers were often based on low-level questions eliciting simple information recall answers. In reviewing the worksheet packets available in some classes, team members observed exit ticket logs like those for bell ringers. In interviews, students stated that, while they do complete bell ringers in many classes, they do not feel that they help them to transition into class, as the questions are typically simple and easy to complete. Students also stated that they rarely receive feedback on their exit tickets and therefore often do not complete them.
- **Teachers will need to use data to drive instruction.** Teachers shared that they are not typically using data to inform their lessons and have not received much recent support on data driven instruction (DDI). The IIT noted that classes that group students into pairs and small groups typically developed those groups by having students work with those around them or with friends they seemed comfortable with, rather than grouping them based on student data. Teachers stated they want more support in using student performance data in their planning, and said they are excited about using data from the new Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) test.
- **Teachers stated that there are few, if any, opportunities for teachers to vertically plan together or assess curriculum to identify instructional gaps and work out how best to close them to better position students for success in local and State assessments.** The principal told the team that, while teachers do have dedicated planning time, school leaders are not able to direct how that time is used, making it difficult to have oversight on lesson planning, curriculum pacing, and vertical alignment.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Students and parents shared that the school's Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system does not offer many opportunities for student rewards and celebrations.** School leaders noted that this is the second year of the PBIS system at the school, but students stated that while PBIS tickets were handed out and drawings were held at the start of the school year, it had been some time since they received any recognition or prizes. Students also stated that they would like to be able to save up their PBIS tickets and use them to purchase items at a school store or for entry into special PBIS events rather than having to enter them into a large drawing. Parents shared that PBIS could help address behavior issues by rewarding good behavior rather than punishing bad. Students reported that in the past, the PBIS program had been used to motivate poor performing students by giving them tickets for meeting the lowest of expectations, while those students behaving well did not receive tickets.
- **Students stated that while there is a student council, only a select group or a particular type of student gets voted in, making it seem less representative.** Students stated that the student council is supposed to have regular meetings, although none of the students interviewed, including several student council members, were able to verbalize when or how often meetings were held. Students also shared that while the council has planned some field trips and fundraising events, the groups does not play a significant role in promoting student voice or developing greater choice and that only certain students get elected.
- **Students stated that disruptive behavior is often caused by their boredom and lack of engagement in class.** Although the IIT saw little evidence of disruptive behavior, teachers stated that behavior is an issue in many classes. In interviews, students shared with the team that some of their behavior is disruptive and disrespectful, but that most students generally comply with teacher directions and demands. Students shared that compliance becomes difficult after long periods of time because they are typically only required to copy down notes and complete worksheets, rather than working on interesting activities that engage them.
- **Parents reported a need for the dissemination of accurate and timely academic information from the school.** Parents stated that they are unable to monitor their children's grades with any accuracy and that they are unfamiliar with the SchoolTool Parent Portal and how to best use it. Parents also stated that when they do receive student grades, they and their children are unsure how the grades are determined and do not always understand the weight of homework, class assignments, and assessments, or how each might affect the student's overall grade.
- **Parents reported there is a discrepancy between the grades awarded to students in school and State assessment scores, making it difficult to determine how prepared their children are for high school or post-secondary education.** Parents shared that while some of their children are doing well in class and receiving high grades, most students are scoring very low on the State assessment. Parents shared the concern that the school curriculum is not properly aligned, and that classroom standards and grading policies do not match the rigor of State expectations.
- **Teachers and students stated that it is difficult to manage time and maximize instructional minutes without bells.** Teachers noted that the school does not use bells, so teachers were told to release students and begin classes based on the computer clock time. The IIT noted that the school wall clocks were not accurate across the school and teachers shared that, even with all teachers using the computer clocks, classes were not regularly released. Further, they stated that it was impossible to hold students accountable for being late when it's unclear when students have been dismissed from their previous class.