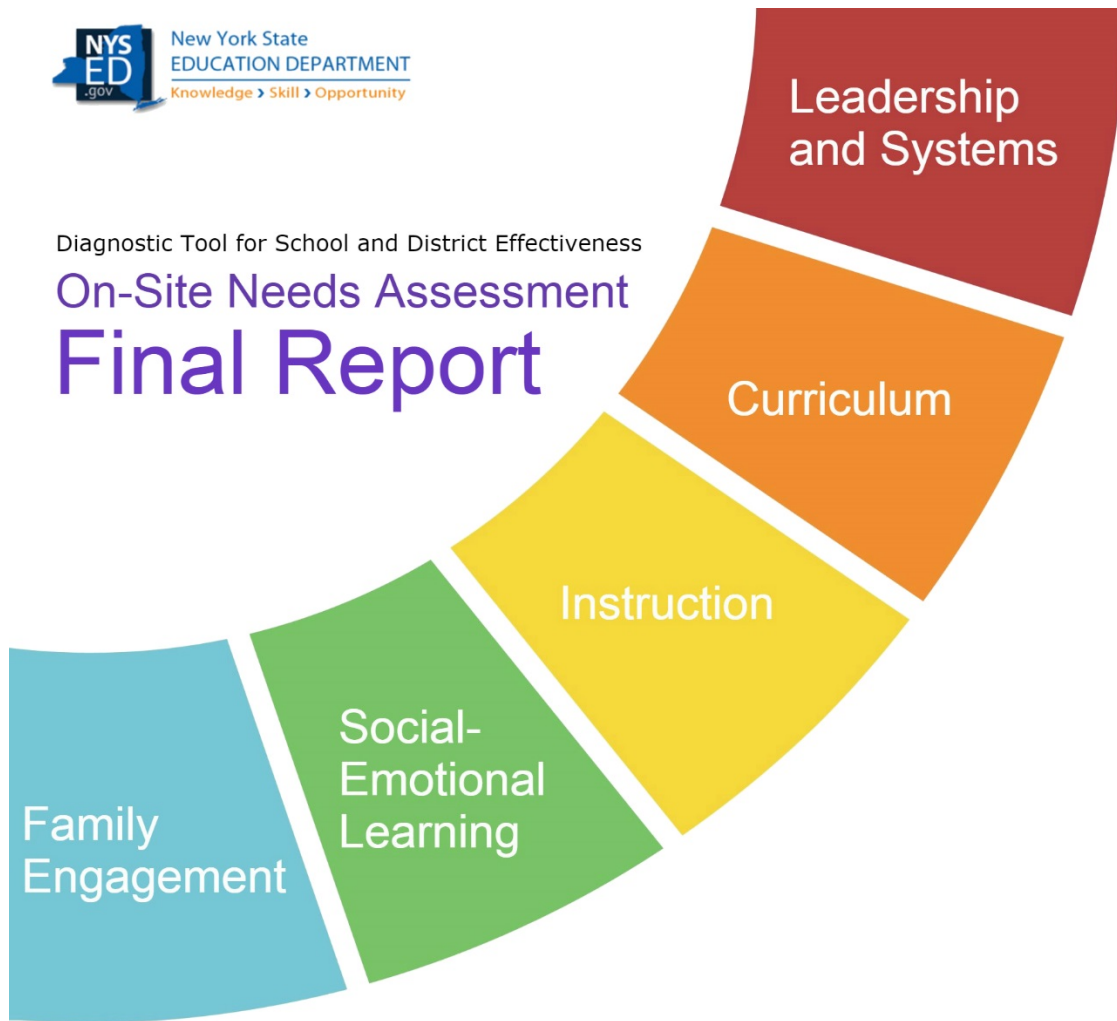


Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	472506040001
School Name	Worcester School
School Address	198 Main Street, Worcester, NY 12197
District Name	Worcester Central School District
Principals	Jessie Westfall and Kimberlea Curran
Dates of Visit	May 29-31, 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	2

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	2	3	2	-	1	2	2

Worcester School serves 377 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 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.
- The team visited a total of 38 classrooms during the visit.
- The OEE visited 23 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, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 30 staff members (77 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.
- The school is housed in a single building but has two principals, one for pre-kindergarten through grade six (the elementary school) and the other for grades seven through twelve (the secondary school).

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. At the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, school leaders launched a campaign utilizing the school newsletter, individual conversations, and the school web site to explain to students and their families the importance of students taking the New York State (NYS) assessments as preparation for their future education and career prospects. The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) noted that school leaders have successfully communicated this message to many students, and interviewed students reported that they understand the importance of participating in NYS assessments. As a result of these efforts, the percentage of students opting out of the NYS assessments declined from 55 percent in 2018 to 17 percent in 2019.
2. During the 2018-19 school year, the elementary principal has worked with teachers to improve reading in the elementary grades by the introducing the Fountas & Pinnell program. Interviewed teachers reported that the introduction of the new program has been very helpful in developing student reading skills. The IIT examined data from both the Fountas & Pinnell and STAR Reading assessments which showed significant improvements in reading scores for students in kindergarten, grade one, and grade two since September 2018.
3. At the end of the 2017-18 school year, school leaders identified a small group of students who were chronically absent. In 2018-19, the school implemented a variety of supports aimed at improving the attendance of these students, including home visits, letters, and phone calls. The IIT examined school data that showed a significant improvement in the attendance of students who were targeted for supports, and 60 percent of this group no longer meet the criteria for chronically absent.

Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

Systems for Improvement

- **School leaders should work with district leaders to revise the vision for school improvement and communicate the vision to stakeholders.** Interviewed teachers told the team that they had lost confidence in the school leaders' vision for the school and they had become discouraged due to the lack of progress over the last three years. Parents reported that they do not know the school leaders' vision for improvement and that they feel that some systems in the school, such as behavior management at the secondary level and supports

for student social-emotional learning, could be strengthened. Interviewed students could not recall any mission or vision statement.

- **The school should consider redefining the roles and responsibilities of school leaders to support school improvement efforts.** In interviews with the team, school leaders reported that they have several duties in addition to their roles as principals. For example, they are both co-chairs of the district Committee on Special Education (CSE). The secondary principal reported that the majority of her time is spent addressing student behavior issues and as a result, walkthroughs are not conducted regularly, and teachers do not receive instructional support on a consistent basis. Interviewed teachers in grades seven through twelve reported that they have received few class visits over the last three years and have not received any recent feedback or suggestions to improve their instruction.
- **School leaders should work with district leaders to conduct a thorough review of all policies and procedures, revise them where necessary, and then communicate them to teachers, students, parents, and the local school community.** In interviews with the IIT, school and district leaders acknowledged that many systems in the school need to be revised. For example, school leaders shared that the current Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) expectations are not age-appropriate for secondary students, and as a result, PBIS is not being implemented consistently at the secondary level. Interviewed students expressed concerns about the school's discipline policies explaining that sometimes serious infractions are not addressed while minor offenses result in significant consequences. In addition, interviewed parents reported that the school cellphone policy is not being enforced equally in all settings.

Leadership and Organization at the School

- **School leaders and teachers should work with students and parents to re-establish clear age-appropriate expectations for student behavior based on a consistent understanding of PBIS protocols.** In discussions with teachers and students, the team learned that PBIS expectations for student behavior are not age-appropriate for older students and as a result, these expectations are not explicitly taught and reinforced in the upper grades. Several interviewed students reported that there are behavior issues in the upper grades, including bullying and vaping, and that these behaviors are not addressed quickly or effectively. Students also reported that they are not actively encouraged to take responsibility for their behavior in all classes. Students and teachers told the team that some students would benefit from learning self-regulating strategies, such as skills for anger management.
- **School leaders should revise the walkthrough feedback tool to reduce the number of items being observed.** Interviewed teachers in the elementary grades reported that some of the feedback they receive is useful and has helped them to improve their instructional practices. However, they also reported that there are a large number of instructional items on the walkthrough tool, and it is difficult to concentrate on them all. The IIT reviewed the walkthrough tool and noted that it covered eight instructional strategies. The team also noted that much of the feedback provided to teachers included a description of what took place during the lesson rather than actions the teacher could take to improve instruction. Going forward, the walkthrough tool should be revised to focus on the school's instructional priorities of clearly stated learning targets, tasks that are well matched to student needs, and ongoing assessment during the lesson. In addition, the walkthrough tool should be modified to provide teachers with actionable feedback to improve their practice.
- **School leaders should monitor teacher plans to ensure that lessons include clear learning targets that are aligned to the learning standards.** School leaders reported that teacher plans are not reviewed to provide

teachers with feedback on the content and quality of their plans. Teachers shared that lesson plans are not monitored to ensure that they meet schoolwide expectations for planning and instruction. In class visits, the team noted that many lessons were not planned around clear learning targets that were aligned to the learning standards. Going forward, school leaders should monitor teacher planning on a biweekly basis and provide teachers with actionable feedback to improve the quality of their lesson plans.

- **School leaders should regularly review and analyze schoolwide student performance and teacher practice data to identify instructional trends and areas of need.** School leaders shared that due to a focus on student behavior and other responsibilities, school data has not been reviewed and analyzed during the last three years to identify instructional trends. As a result, school leaders do not have the necessary data to identify instructional strengths and areas for improvement to inform school improvement efforts.

Learning at the School

- **Teachers should design lessons that allow students to investigate ideas and topics at a deeper level to extend their knowledge, understanding, and skills.** During class visits, the IIT noted that students, especially in the secondary school, were provided with few opportunities to be active learners. Most instruction was teacher-led and did not allow students to actively participate in the lesson. The IIT saw few lessons at the secondary level that required students to investigate their ideas at a deep level or carry out research in topics that interest them. In most observed lessons, students worked independently on tasks from textbooks or packets.
- **Teachers should use questioning strategies to probe student understanding and develop their ability to think deeply about the concepts contained in the lesson.** The team observed some elementary teachers asking students probing questions about what they were learning and circulating around the class asking students to explain their work. However, in the majority of classes, especially in the secondary school, students were asked questions that required a single-word answer. In many classes, students were not provided with wait time to think about their answers before responding to questions. For example, in several secondary lessons, the team observed teachers answering their own questions when students did not respond.
- **Teachers should extend student thinking skills by providing more opportunities to discuss ideas with each other and work on tasks collaboratively.** In some elementary classrooms, the IIT observed centers that enabled students to work together on tasks and provided students with opportunities to discuss work collaboratively. However, in many secondary school lessons, students worked independently on the same task. The IIT did observe a few instances in which students were asked to explain their work, but students were not encouraged to discuss their ideas with each other.
- **Teachers need to conduct regular checks for understanding and use this information to adapt instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.** In the majority of classes visited, student learning was not assessed during the lesson. In several lessons, the team observed all students completing the same activity in the same way. Some students with disabilities told the IIT that they did not understand the task they had been given, and they relied on support staff to help them. Interviewed support staff reported that this is common, and in most classes, student learning is not assessed during the lesson to ensure students understand the lesson content.
- **Teachers should provide students with more opportunities to work on tasks they have designed themselves to increase the level of student engagement.** Most lessons in the secondary school were teacher-led and the IIT observed low levels of student engagement. Interviewed students reported that they enjoy lessons more when they have opportunities to design their own tasks and engage in hands-on activities. In a few elementary

classes, students were allowed to self-select the tasks, and the team noted that levels of student engagement in these lessons were high.

- **Teachers should consider arranging their classrooms in ways that are more conducive to interactive and collaborative learning.** The IIT found that many secondary classrooms were not designed to promote student interaction. Students sat at individual desks in rows facing the whiteboard, so that when the teacher asked them to turn and talk, the seating arrangement inhibited their interaction. The IIT noted that in the elementary school, several teachers had arranged tables or desks in groups making it was easy for students to engage in discussions when the teacher asked them to do so.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Areas of Need and Ideas for Improvement

- **Parents would like school leaders to clarify the school cellphone policy.** In discussions with the team, parents said that teachers allow their children to use their phones in some classrooms but not in others. Interviewed students said that different teachers have different policies regarding the use of cell phones.
- **Parents and teachers would like school leaders to publicize the school mission statement more widely.** Interviewed parents said they had looked for the school mission statement on the school website but were unable to find one. Teachers confirmed that this was the case and suggested that school leaders should ensure the mission statement is posted as soon as possible.
- **Students, parents, and teachers would like students to receive more Positive Attitude, Academic Excellence, Wise Choices, Show Respect (PAWS) postcards.** Parents told the team that they enjoy receiving PAWS postcards for their children, but they have received very few in recent months. Students said they would like to receive more PAWS postcards, as this would encourage them to follow the PAWS character traits. Teachers stated that they would like school leaders to provide them with more time to complete PAWS postcards for students.
- **Teachers would like more opportunities to discuss concerns and ideas for school improvement with school and district leaders.** Teachers said that school leaders have used staff meetings this year for professional development and as a result, they have not had opportunities to discuss schoolwide issues or make suggestions for how things could be improved.
- **Students would like more information about opportunities for enrichment.** Interviewed students reported that although they know about some enrichment events and opportunities, such as athletics, field trips, and online courses, they do not know the criteria for participation in these offerings. Teachers said they realize that although some of these events are announced over the school speaker system, not all students hear them, so they need to make the opportunities more widely known.
- **Students and teachers reported that school discipline policies are not being implemented consistently in the secondary school.** A significant number of secondary students reported that different teachers give different consequences for the same behavior. They reported that for the same offense, some students receive harsh consequences while others do not receive any. Interviewed teachers acknowledged that discipline policies are not being implemented consistently, and they understood why students find this frustrating.