

NYSED/GREECE CSD JOINT INTERVENTION TEAM REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BEDS Code:	260501060022
School Name:	Apollo Middle School
School Address:	750 Maiden Lane Rochester, NY 14615
Principal:	Linda Pickering
Restructuring Phase/Category:	Restructuring (year 1) - Focused English Language Arts - Black Students and Students with
Area of Identification:	Disabilities
Dates of On-site Diagnostic Review:	December 12-16, 2011

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Community and School Background

Apollo Middle School serves 707 students in grades 6 through 8. The school enrollment is three percent Asian, ten percent Hispanic, 16 percent Black and 71 percent White students. Of these students three percent are English language learners (ELLs) and approximately 17 percent are students with disabilities.

The administrative team consists of the Principal and two Assistant Principals (APs). The Principal has served the school for five years, and the APs have served between four to five years. There are 68 teachers on staff; all teachers are highly qualified. Twelve percent of the teachers have been at the school for less than one year and 25 percent for fewer than five years. The rate of teacher turnover is 12 percent.

PART 2: ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

A. Performance on Key Indicators of Student Achievement Trends and School Progress

Positive or Negative Indicator (+/-)	School Performance Indicators	
	NYSED Quantitative Performance Measures	
-	Negative trend data for one or more identified subject/areas and subgroups for the past two consecutive years, as indicated by a decrease in the percentage of students performing at or above Level 3 and/or a decrease in the Performance Index.	✓
-	School is ten or more points away from meeting its Effective Annual Measurable Objective (EAMO) for one or more identified subgroups in subject/area(s) of identification.	✓
-	Performance data for the school on NYSED Accountability Overview Reports (AOR) for the past two consecutive years show an increase in the number of subgroups that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in identified area(s).	✓
-	Performance data for the school on NYSED Accountability Overview Reports (AOR) for the past two consecutive years indicate an increase in the achievement gap between identified subgroups and the <i>All Students</i> subgroup in one or more identified subject/area(s).	✓

B. School Strengths

Student behavior/management was orderly. Students and parents reported that they felt safe in the school.

C. Key Findings and Recommendations

Summary of the key issues (and causal factors), and other areas of concern, identified during the on-site diagnostic review that are negatively impacting student achievement in identified areas, as well as recommendations, as related to the seven JIT Indicator Categories:

I. Curriculum

Findings:

- There is no evidence of a clearly articulated and aligned English language arts (ELA) curriculum K-12. Historically, teachers have followed grade level outcomes and performance indicators, resulting in individual teachers developing curricular materials and lesson plans. Since July 1, under the leadership of a new superintendent, District Office staff have initiated an effort to create curriculum in ELA. However, teachers and administrators have reported that the curriculum continues to be inadequate.
- The ELA curriculum does not foster rigorous and engaging instruction. In the lessons observed, there was insufficient application of higher order thinking skills, problem solving and project-based learning to stimulate and engage the students.
- There was no evidence of scope and sequence in the ELA documentation provided by the school.
- ELA materials and instruction are not sufficiently differentiated to ensure high academic achievement and grade level standards for students.
- Lesson plans collected during the review did not contain objectives that were closely aligned to the curricula or standards-based. Lesson plans reflected a lack of guidance and monitoring throughout the school.
- The school does not have a wide variety of instructional resources in curriculum planning to support the different learning styles of its students. Even when some resources were available, teachers did not always use them.

Recommendations:

- The District should work with the school on the development of curriculum in all core areas and ensure that it is clearly aligned with the current New York State (NYS) Learning Standards. The curriculum must be aligned to the new P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in English language arts and literacy to prepare for implementation in school year 2012-13. All curricula should be developed by knowledgeable and trained individuals (national, State or local) who understand the key elements of curriculum development.

District leaders should take the lead and continue to work collaboratively with the school leaders and ELA teachers to develop specific goals that are differentiated for each grade level. School and District leaders should monitor curriculum planning and observe classrooms to ensure that a rigorous curriculum is implemented that meets the needs of all students. The District should create structures with frequent checks to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity.

- School leaders and teachers should participate in on-going professional development (PD) to be competent in planning and implementing a curriculum with rigor, as well as using teaching methods that are student-centered. The curriculum should be relied upon as the basis for assessing individual student mastery and progress. Walkthroughs and formal evaluations should include how well the teacher knows and implements the curriculum for the subjects taught.
- The school should select curricular materials that reflect NYS Standards and should be differentiated by grade and skill levels. Classroom ELA resources should be organized by reading level and genre to allow students to independently select appropriate and culturally responsive texts. The District should develop and provide scope and sequence curriculum materials that are aligned with the curriculum maps to ensure a timeframe for instructional delivery. The District should provide the necessary resources to support the school in the completion and implementation of the curriculum maps. School leaders should monitor and evaluate planning documents and carry out regular classroom observations to ensure that curriculum is effectively used.
- Teachers should be trained to write high quality lesson plans. These lesson plans should contain clear and concise learning objectives that are shared with students before, during and at the end of each lesson. In order to provide more cohesive student learning, the objectives should be standards-based and make close reference to the precise content area being studied. School leaders and teachers should work together to develop a lesson planning template that emphasizes the importance of planning and instruction aligned with current NYS Standards. The lesson planning template should be consistently applied in all classrooms. School leaders should closely monitor lesson planning and conduct walkthroughs and observations to ensure that planning translates into practice. District leaders should facilitate professional development (PD) that would better equip teachers with the skills and expertise to plan and deliver a series of lessons. These lessons should contain a range of tasks to stimulate and engage students in developing higher order thinking skills.
- The curriculum should be updated to increase the rigor of intended outcomes so that instruction to support student mastery of the learning goals includes specific strategies for using a wide range of instructional resources to benefit all students in all content areas. The use of these resources should be monitored during lesson observations.

II. Teaching and Learning

Findings:

- Much of the instruction for students is teacher-directed, with little variety of instructional strategies to accommodate the differing and diverse learning needs of students. Students have few opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about topics by working in pairs or talking with different groups of students. This was especially evident in the ELA classrooms.

- Few examples of differentiated instruction were observed in Core Extension classrooms. Core Extension is a program within the school to give students additional time on task with teachers to work on academic skills. There was little evidence that data was used to group students or to match tasks to the differing ability levels of the students within the observed classrooms. Student growth is neither evaluated regularly nor is systematic, explicit instruction provided to address student needs and close identified gaps in learning.
- The co-teaching model is neither effective nor skillfully implemented. One teacher is primarily responsible for the delivery of instruction, and the other teacher plays a much less significant role as a teacher assistant. Students are not fully benefiting from having two certified teachers in the classroom. The teachers are not effectively distributing their time or attention to provide additional support to students or to work with small skill-based groups. Co-teachers are not consistently planning together, which negatively impacts the effectiveness of the co-teaching model.
- There is a lack of rigor in questioning strategies; higher order thinking and problem solving was not consistently observed, especially in ELA classrooms. Students were generally asked to recall facts and details. Students are not challenged to analyze, evaluate or synthesize information.
- Instructional time was not maximized in most classes. Too much time was spent on the 'Do Now' activities, correction of homework and lesson preparation discussion work. This did not allow the teachers to complete the objectives for their entire lessons.
- Clear, well-articulated, meaningful learning objectives were not routinely referred to at the start, during, or at the end of lessons. This was especially evident in ELA classes.
- Student engagement in meaningful instructional activities was limited. There were many lessons where instructional activities lacked challenge and did little to attract the interest of students. These same lessons did not provide students with opportunities to interact or work collaboratively. In some lessons, students were not provided opportunities to deeply engage in learning experiences.
- The master schedule as it is currently constructed does not meet the needs for improved student achievement. Students are scheduled into Core Extension classes that are not matched to student identified needs.

Recommendations:

- School leaders should provide PD to introduce teachers to a wider range of instructional strategies that can be used in the classroom to promote greater student participation in the learning process. Teachers should be expected to implement these strategies, and school leaders should monitor the effectiveness and provide additional PD for teachers when necessary.
- With the support of District leaders, school leaders should provide PD opportunities for teachers on a variety of instructional strategies to promote differentiation of instruction. The focus of the PD should be on the use of data to drive lesson planning and instruction. Strategies should focus on ensuring that tasks match the academic needs of identified subgroups. School leaders should regularly monitor teacher planning and instructional practice in the classroom to check that differentiated activities are in place throughout the school. Ongoing PD should be provided for

teachers who continue to struggle with using data to match work that meets the individual needs of students.

- Teachers should be provided with support, guidance, and, where appropriate, PD to implement a more effective co-teaching model. Teachers should be given opportunities to visit successful co-teaching classrooms. The co-teachers should be given scheduled collaborative planning time to ensure best practices in co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities. School leaders should closely monitor co-teaching classroom practices and provide constructive feedback to teachers.
- Teachers should be provided PD to move from teacher-posed questions that require one-word answers or are recall and comprehension-based to questions that require students to support answers by citing text, elaborating on the answers of other students, and summarizing and rephrasing new information. Teacher lesson plans should include pre-created questions that require critical thinking and discussion. Teachers should use wait time and not allow students to opt-out of class discussions. Teachers should use random selection and/or avoid calling exclusively on willing student volunteers. Teachers should require students to answer in complete sentences.
- With the assistance of the District, the school should provide PD on effective pacing of classroom lessons. School leaders should make the pacing of lessons a regular focus for walkthroughs and observations.
- Teachers should ensure that lesson objectives are shared with students so that they have a good understanding of what it is they are learning and why. Lessons should include explicit teaching points and provide practice sessions for independent work to assess student learning before teachers proceed to the next teaching point. Teachers should make sure that teaching points are related within the same lesson and should be standards-based. School leaders should ensure through the observation process that this practice is uniform.
- Through collaboration during common planning time and PD opportunities provided by the District, teachers should ensure that all student work is appropriately challenging and demanding. Teachers should provide regular opportunities for students to work cooperatively and to discuss issues so that they become more proactive learners. School leadership should carry out regular observations of lessons to monitor that this is consistently occurring.
- The school should consider revising the master schedule to build a more explicit support system to ensure that student's needs are met to achieve high expectations for all students. The Core Extension model should be evaluated for effectiveness and redesigned to better meet student academic needs.

III. School Leadership

Findings:

- The School leadership does not set high enough expectations for the performance of all students and staff. The Principal does not effectively communicate to staff the mission and vision for school development and improvement. Strategies are not adequately defined to achieve the school's goals. The Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) is not used as a tool to achieve the necessary academic outcomes. A culture of high achievement is not fully embraced by all staff and school

leaders. The school leadership has not communicated to the staff that schoolwide standards are to be upheld.

- The school leadership's management of the organization, operations and resources of the school does not translate into an effective and efficient learning environment. This is evidenced by inequitable material resources, underutilized technology, lack of an effective schoolwide PD plan and appropriate systems for the monitoring and evaluation to determine effectiveness.
- Expectations for the use of common planning time are unclear and require further development. The school leadership has not developed a program that provides consistent opportunities for organized common planning and articulation between teachers and pupil support personnel. Common planning time is not used to effectively bring about improvement in teaching, learning and student achievement.
- Despite the need for PD for teachers of ELA and students with disabilities, the school leadership has not developed an effective PD plan that ensures all teachers will receive the necessary training to bring about improvement in student achievement.
- The expectations for ensuring that teachers implement strategies learned in PD are low, and there is no formal follow-up to monitor implementation in the classroom. This contributes to the slow improvement rate in the quality of teaching and learning.
- The school leadership has not ensured that all required services are provided to students who are eligible for Academic Intervention Services (AIS)/ Response to Intervention (RtI).
- Informal walkthroughs began in September 2011. It was reported that prior to this there were no explicit expectations for informal walkthroughs to monitor student achievement.

Recommendations:

- School leadership should establish schoolwide high academic expectations for all students and provide PD and support as necessary to ensure each teacher has the skills and tools to support high expectations and achievement for all students. The school leadership and the District should modify the CEP to create an effective schoolwide plan to improve achievement. The school leaders and staff should articulate a clear vision, mission and strategic plan that is aligned with the District strategic plan, drives the school towards high student achievement and clearly outlines the responsibilities of staff and leaders. The plan should include goals, action plans, PD, and should use all resources available through the District. The implementation of the plan should be carefully monitored and its impact on student achievement measured.
- The school leadership's management of the school's organization, operations and resources should be urgently addressed to resolve weaknesses in creating an effective learning environment. There should be increased accountability by all staff towards continuous improvement.
- School leaders should create a flexible common planning schedule in which teachers can meet across grade levels and content levels. The school leader should ensure that the expectation for common planning meetings is fully recorded through written minutes. School leaders should attend the meetings to ensure that the focus of the meetings is central to improving instruction and student outcomes. The school leader should also ensure that strategies agreed upon are implemented in the classroom and monitored through observations and walkthroughs.

- School leaders, with support from the District, should design a comprehensive PD plan to address the needs of teachers to improve their delivery of instruction. School leaders should closely monitor the delivery of instruction by reviewing lesson plans regularly, providing feedback on lesson plans and conducting informal and formal observations with written feedback that includes recommendations for improvement. The school leadership should set expectations that strategies learned in the PD sessions are implemented in the classroom.
- School leaders should use the observational process to ensure teachers are held accountable for incorporating all the skills developed within PD activities into their instructional delivery.
- All students entitled to AIS should be identified and provided with these services by qualified staff. The school should plan to implement RtI.
- The school leadership, with District support, should implement regular, frequent informal walkthroughs that result in data and feedback to drive instructional practices. Initially, walkthroughs should focus on ELA instruction.

IV. Infrastructure for Student Success

Findings:

- Some classroom environments are not conducive to learning. Some teachers do not organize their classrooms in the best possible way to promote effective, collaborative learning or student participation.
- Although the school is committed to the use of SMART Boards and laptops as instructional aids, in the classroom they are used for note taking or as communication devices.
- School staff expresses low expectations for the academic achievement of students and cites external factors, i.e., student apathy, disinterest and lack of parental involvement as the root causes of the school's accountability status.
- The school does not provide sufficient Academic Intervention Services (AIS) support staff, supplies and materials to meet the varied needs of the student population, including students with disabilities who are identified for AIS.
- The school has a system to identify at-risk students, but not all teachers have been adequately trained.

Recommendations:

- The school leader should monitor the management and design of classroom environments to ensure that classrooms are conducive to the use of a variety of instructional strategies, including students working in groups, in pairs or as a whole class work when appropriate.
- The school leader should seek the assistance of the District in order to provide teachers with on-going PD in incorporating SMART Board/technology use into their lesson plans to support

interactive and hands-on learning. School leaders should monitor technology usage through observations and walkthroughs.

- The school leader should seek the support of the District to identify high performing schools that serve similar student populations to conduct visits for staff to observe students in effectively structured and supported classrooms. Staff should cease citing external factors as excuses for underperformance and focus on improving the school's effectiveness for all students.
- The District and school leaders should review the District budget so that additional funds are allocated for AIS and other service needs to provide better support for at-risk students. School leaders should evaluate the quality of these services as a matter of routine. The District should consider allocating Title I funds to the school to address at-risk student needs.
- Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that staff has the knowledge and skills necessary to implement an intervention program.

V. Collection, Analysis and Utilization of Data

Findings:

- Data analysis is not consistently used as a tool for driving forward school improvement.
- The data that the school collects is not being analyzed in a rigorous manner to identify precisely what aspects of ELA need to be the specific focus for improvement. The analysis of data is not focused sharply enough to identify the key changes required in programs and delivery to bring about urgent improvement in student performance.
- The school has not effectively implemented the CEP to address the causes of underperformance. The School Leadership Team (SLT) has not written a clearly articulated CEP that establishes regular monitoring expectations and performance benchmarks that will address student performance needs and closing achievement gaps.
- There was little evidence that teachers used the collected assessment data to inform instruction.
- Few teachers analyze formative data to plan instruction, address the specific needs of individuals or groups of students in their classes or to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendations:

- The school should revisit the current system for data disaggregation and analysis to focus more closely on student-by-student, class-by-class and subgroup-by-subgroup deficiencies in addition to the whole school and grade monitoring. The CEP should be modified to ensure that all teachers incorporate item skills analysis and predictive results to inform their instruction in all testing grades. Particular attention should be given to monitoring the development of student skills as they move from grade to grade to check for vertical alignment in curriculum programs in each content area.
- Data analysis should be the responsibility of school leaders and instructional staff. Tests and assessment data should be used as a focal point for driving school improvement. Discussion about

data should be used as the basis for meetings at every level and should be at the core of all school improvement efforts.

- The District should provide additional training to school leaders and the SLT concerning CEP development, implementation and monitoring. A schedule for follow-up sessions and ongoing consultations should be developed to carefully evaluate plan effectiveness and progress towards achieving AYP goals. Feedback from teachers, students and parents should be obtained using informal surveys and student data.
- School leadership, with support from the District, should provide PD in developing the essential teacher skills needed to implement a more rigorous and systematic analysis of data. The school should hone these skills to identify precisely the aspects of ELA that are causing greatest concern. Plans should then be put in place to address these issues on either a school, grade or class level and to ensure that these areas are a focus for teaching and learning. The school administration should monitor the analysis and hold staff accountable to ensure that improvements are made.
- School leaders should investigate and identify resources on how to effectively use information provided by assessments to inform teachers on how to tailor their teaching to meet the specific needs of groups of students or the whole class. PD should be provided schoolwide to help teachers to implement this practice in their effort to improve student performance.

VI. Professional Development

Findings:

- The PD offered was inconsistent with the stated goals of the CEP. The PD offered was not based on student needs identified through assessment data, teacher needs, or the lesson observation process.
- The school PD plan has had little impact on improving student performance. Although there is a great deal of data in the school, there was little evidence indicating that it was used to inform the plan. PD activities generally take the form of episodic, initiative-driven training rather than comprehensive efforts aligned with school goals to improve teacher capacity based on data that reflect student needs. The intensity, duration, and frequency of PD have not been consistent.
- Teachers are not held accountable for incorporating PD practices into their instructional practice. There is no mention of the PD found in the observation reports.
- PD offerings focusing upon the identified subgroups are not part of the CEP.

Recommendations:

- The school leader should revise the PD plan so it is based on student and teacher needs and closely aligned with the goals identified in the CEP. The plan should have as its primary focus improving student achievement.
- School leaders should seek support for PD from the District to help them develop a detailed plan that focuses on improving teaching and learning to better meet the needs of students and teachers.

- School leaders should conduct formal and informal observations after PD sessions to ensure that teachers incorporate the strategies learned into the classroom instructional program. The administration should develop detailed recommendations based on the PD provided and specific next steps in their observation reports to focus their next observation.
- The revised PD plan should give teachers the tools to meet the needs of all students individually and by subgroup.

VII. District Support

Findings:

- The long-term pattern of failure to make AYP indicates that the school has not been provided with adequate oversight by the District.
- School leadership currently acts as chairs of the CSE (Committee of Special Education) despite the District having four coordinators of special education. The frequent and intensive nature of the CSE meetings reduces the school leadership's effectiveness in monitoring and supporting improved teaching and student achievement.
- The District has not provided sufficient resources for efficient school functioning and maximization of student academic achievement.
- The District has provided only minimal training in data collection and analysis, and this training has not significantly impacted instruction in the classroom.
- Sixty percent of students entering the Apollo Middle School are not demonstrating proficiency on the NYS ELA assessments.

Recommendations:

- The District should closely monitor school progress and implement appropriate strategies for school leaders, as needed.
- The District should ensure that school leaders focus on instructional leadership, curriculum implementation and monitoring. District resources should be reallocated to prioritize academic improvement in the most at-risk schools K-12.
- The District should work in tandem with school leaders in observing instruction, developing strategies and identifying PD opportunities to bring about sustained improvements in teaching and learning. The District should consider reallocating resources to the building, such as Title I funds to drive student achievement.
- The District should plan with the school leaders to provide comprehensive, ongoing training for the school staff on the collection, analysis and implementation of data to inform and adjust instructional classroom practices. Follow-up on the implementation of the training should include monitoring and providing feedback by school leaders to staff. The school should use all expertise and support available through the District to disaggregate and analyze data to inform school goal setting and teacher planning.

- The District should conduct a program evaluation of all ELA practices K-8. Successful programs should be duplicated and ineffective practices eliminated. The District should develop an ongoing evaluation cycle to ensure regular review and analysis.

PART 3: JOINT INTERVENTION TEAM OVERALL FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Overall Finding

Reference	Review Team Finding	
(c)	The school has not made sufficient progress in identified areas, and is unlikely to make AYP under the current structure and organization.	✓

B. Overall Recommendation

Reference	Review Team Recommendation	
(c)	Develop and implement a School Restructuring Plan that includes significant <u>changes in staff, organizational structure, leadership and/or configuration</u> to address issues that continue to negatively impact student academic performance in identified areas. The school Restructuring Plan must also include one of the restructuring options required under NCLB.	✓

C. In the space below, include specific information to support the District in determining how the above JIT recommendation should be implemented.

- Reconfigure school leadership as necessary.
- Provide PD that is aligned to ELA priorities, differentiation of classroom instruction, data analysis, and improved co-teaching.
- Examine/change school feeder patterns.
- Develop a comprehensive ELA curriculum.
- Change/extend or restructure the master schedule of the school day to add instructional time.
- Review and change school organization/structure in the areas of grade configuration, team configuration and time on task.
- Develop a data analysis system that is effective, especially in the area of ELA.
- Review funding allocations for at-risk students ensuring equity for all students, such as Title I. We recommend, with the Superintendent's approval, that the building receive Title I funding.

Note: Greece Superintendent of Schools recommended to the Greece Board of Education at the January 2012 meeting that Apollo Middle School be closed due to decline in enrollment and academic performance issues.