

NYSED/SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT JOINT INTERVENTION TEAM REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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| BEDS Code: | 421800010029 |
| School Name: | Elmwood Elementary School |
| School Address: | 1728 South Avenue Syracuse, New York 13207 |
| Principal: | Margaret Wilson |
| Restructuring Phase/Category: | Restructuring Advanced Comprehensive |
| Area(s) of Identification: | English Language Arts – All students; Black students; Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged students |
| Dates of On-site Diagnostic Review: | February 28 – March 2, 2011 |

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Community and School Background

Elmwood Elementary School serves 373 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The student enrollment is 72 percent Black; ten percent Hispanic; nine percent White and one percent other students. Twenty-one percent of the students are students with disabilities. Approximately 54 percent of the children reside in the neighborhood and walk to school. Less than half actually live in the Elmwood attendance area, but many others live nearby.

The administrative team consists of the Principal who is in her first year at the school with over ten years experience as an administrator in the District and a Vice-Principal in her third year with five years experience as an administrator. Administrative turnover is high, with five Principals over the past six years.

The teaching staff maintains a history of established ties to this community. Due to District downsizing, the school has recently lost 50 percent of teachers with fewer than five years of experience. Currently, there are 42 teachers, all highly qualified for their positions. There are five teachers with less than one year at Elmwood and three teachers with fewer than three years at Elmwood. The teacher turnover rate is 13 percent.

PART 2: ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL’S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

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

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| 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. | ✓ |

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| Positive or Negative Indicator (+/-) | School Performance Indicators | ✓ |
| - | 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 All Students subgroup in one or more identified subject/area(s). | ✓ |

B. School Strengths

- The school had been identified by the District for closure at the end of the 2010-11 school year. Despite this expectation, the staff has remained focused on improving student performance. This is commendable and a tribute to their professionalism. Note: The Board of Education recently reversed their decision and announced that the school will remain open.
- Both student and parents feel comfortable going to teachers and administration with concerns and problems. Parents describe the school as open and available for them. They also expressed support for the afterschool program that serves 220 students.
- The school has developed strong partnerships that include Excellus, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, a law firm, a local bank, the Syracuse University Literacy Corps, and Oasis (support services). Partners volunteer for a wide range of activities, including active mentoring and tutoring of students and supporting students' and teachers' projects.

C. Key Findings and Recommendations

Summary of the key issues (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

Finding:

A substantial number of teachers use the Board of Education (BOE) adopted textbook objectives and teacher editions for both the reading program, *Treasures*, and mathematics program, *Think Math*, for their planning rather than the BOE adopted curricula and benchmarks.

Recommendation:

If District adopted textbooks are used as the primary source for planning, the school should monitor the aligned Syracuse City School District (SCSD) curriculum benchmarks against the new reading program, *Treasures*. Teachers should evaluate components carefully to ensure that they match student needs. The new reading program has many more components than any single teacher could

implement, so careful selection and coordination of selections is essential. If District adopted textbooks are used as the primary source for planning, the school should align them with the District curriculum benchmarks.

II. Teaching and Learning

Findings:

- There is an inconsistent depth of understanding and implementation of effective instructional planning and strategies that support differentiated, first time, core instruction. Strategies such as student talk, higher level thinking, scaffolding, and modeling were inconsistently observed.
- Most instruction was teacher-directed, with little opportunity for students to actively participate in learning. Rubrics were missing in a number of classrooms and student ownership of rubrics was not observed. Mathematics instruction is predominantly whole group, despite the availability of information and materials for small group instruction.
- Lesson planning lacks common criteria for effective instructional planning and delivery, with various templates/criteria used. Some objectives observed in lesson plans were not objectives but were procedures, activities and events, and did not include measurable skill proficiency. Many plans that were reviewed focused on what the teacher would do, not on active student learning.
- Teacher monitoring of student skills is focused on formal assessment data from such sources as the NYS Assessments, Acuity, and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). It has not yet reached the individual classroom level and/or student level in the form of regular formative assessment monitoring.
- The teaching staff has focused more on DIBELS assessments and much less on process writing in core subjects. There seems to be little understanding of the links between reading and writing.
- Collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants does not always occur.
- Parents report that teachers do not consistently send appropriate grade level books or library books home with students.

Recommendations:

- More targeted and skill-based differentiation is needed, particularly in the intermediate grades. To further ensure quality first-time instruction, each lesson should be designed around the District “Components of an Effective Lesson,” used by the District as a guide for reminding staff of effective instructional strategies.

There should be a focus on ensuring that students understand the goal of each lesson and that teachers are making connections and scaffolding what students already know and are able to do to what they need to conceptually learn and be able to do.

- Teachers should focus their lessons to provide significant opportunities for student talk that leads to student understanding and ownership of the skills/strategies/content being studied. Student work should be rated using rubrics, and rubrics should be posted and discussed with students in every classroom so students can learn to self-evaluate.

- The School Leadership Team (SLT) should establish common lesson planning criteria using;
 - the district’s poster of “Components of Effective Instruction” for lesson planning;
 - “Bloom’s Taxonomy and Costa’s Questioning, especially higher level questions, as a component of planning; and
 - the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) template.

The administration should regularly collect lesson plans and provide feedback. Administrators should also plan daily/weekly focused walkthroughs and provide appropriate feedback.

- School staff should focus on formative assessment as a part of conceptual, first-time instruction. They should regularly analyze the progress of every child in every classroom collectively and/or individually. Formative assessments and/or checks for understanding should be done daily, i.e., Ticket out the Door, observations, analysis of writing tasks. Support in using formative assessment strategies should be a part of the school grade level meetings and their Urban Teacher Calendar (UTC) daily half hour PD, with a focus on using these formative assessments to inform first-time instruction as well as re-teaching.
- Teachers should stress the instructional connection between reading comprehension and writing. Writing to learn and learning to write should have a connection to comprehension and higher level thinking. The staff should implement their plan to focus on writing as a part of each instructional day and should include a range of genres and content areas. Writing should also be a focus of the 2011 -2012 Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP).
- Formal opportunities should be scheduled for teachers to regularly meet and plan with their teaching assistants. The School Instructional Support Teachers should ensure that the planning process is developed and effectively used.
- Teachers should regularly send home books and other instructional materials appropriate for each child’s level to assist parents in working with their children. Teachers should also plan meetings with parents where they explain what students are learning and help parents identify strategies that would support learning at home.

III. School Leadership

Findings:

- Vertical articulation occurs informally, but there is no formal requirement to ensure that opportunities for vertical articulation are regularly used for that purpose.
- School leaders are not conducting formal and informal walkthroughs on a daily or weekly basis.

Recommendations:

- Vertical articulation should be mandated and minutes of these meetings should be collected and reviewed by school leadership.

- School leadership should schedule daily walkthroughs, both formal and informal, and feedback should be provided to teachers. Formal walkthroughs should be focused on an instructional element and should change on a weekly or monthly basis.

IV. Infrastructure for Student Success

Findings:

- SLT agendas and minutes show that the SLT is being distracted from its primary role: to improve student performance. The SLT agenda template is not specifically structured to ensure that CEP implementation is monitored and drives schoolwide improvement.
- Processes and practices that can be sustained despite building leadership or coach changes are not internalized by individual teachers, grade levels, or by the SLT.
- Student behavior distracts teachers and students from the teaching/learning process. It appears that there are a few students in each classroom, particularly in the intermediate grades, that are disruptive to the teaching/learning process.
- Up-to-date technology is lacking in many classrooms. The team observed inconsistent use of the few working classroom computers that were available. Some classrooms have SMART Boards and Docu-cams (Elmos) but others do not. (Elmos have been ordered for all classrooms this year but have not yet arrived.)
- While some parents are actively involved in their children's education, many are not. Attendance at parent-teacher conferences is spotty, with some teachers seeing fewer than half of their students' parents at these conferences.

Recommendations:

- The purpose, responsibilities, and accountability for all building meetings should be clearly delineated. The SLT should increase its governance and leadership role by including the following agenda items on a regular basis: monitoring of the school improvement initiatives; reviewing evidence of student achievement; and reviewing student work, interventions and other achievement measures that inform the monitoring of the CEP.
- The SLT and administration need to build practices and procedures to the point where they are sustainable despite leadership changes. Staff, parents, students, etc. should establish an expectation that failure is not an option, and all stakeholders should commit to doing whatever they can to guarantee student success.
- The school should continue its commitment to implementing the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Although PBIS is a program for all students, it may also help to minimize the frequency of misbehavior of students who have more entrenched patterns of misbehavior.
- The school should work towards every classroom having a SMART Board, Elmo and laptop. Each classroom should also house a pod of computers in the classrooms to allow for hands-on instruction and Tier 2 intervention services beyond initial instruction.

- Parents should be surveyed to determine how the school can promote parent involvement at school events, particularly at parent-teacher conferences. Teachers should consider flexible scheduling so parents who cannot leave jobs during the day can schedule times they are available, and explore phone conferences or other technology to connect with parents. The Family-Teacher Organization should communicate with parents about the importance of getting their children to school on time, checking student planners, reading to their children, and talking to their children about school matters. The Say Yes social workers should also support this initiative.

V. Collection, Analysis, and Utilization of Data

Findings:

- Data analysis is not systematized to the point where it results in daily/weekly monitoring and adjustment of classroom and individual instruction to meet the needs of individual students.
- The literacy and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) coaches maintain most of the student achievement data and communicate it to the staff. Teachers receive the data rather than actually analyzing it themselves. Individual staff members are not directly involved in data collection and analysis, or monitoring of progress.
- Although there is evidence that some teachers are using data for such strategies as ability grouping, implementing the *Triumphs* component of the *Treasures* ELA series, and differentiating instruction, not all teachers are doing so.
- While teachers in grade 4 and 5 received strong formative assessment training, formative assessments are not being used consistently as a tool across all grade levels to inform the teaching/learning process.
- Student opportunities for self-evaluation were not observed.

Recommendations:

- The analysis of data should become systematized with accountability at all levels (administration, SLT, horizontal and vertical teams, classroom teachers, instructional coaches and support staff) rather than the current model in which the coaches analyze and facilitate discussion with horizontal and vertical teams. Data should also be analyzed with intent to solve a problem, answer a question and/or improve student learning.
- The STEM and literacy coaches should be a part of teacher discussions regarding using data to inform instruction and identifying appropriate instructional strategies for individual students and student groups.
- School leaders should discuss and communicate clear expectations to all staff regarding specific evidence collection and timelines for data analysis and monthly review.
- The coaches should maintain their plans to focus upcoming grade level meetings on the use of formative assessments. Classroom teachers should individually monitor each student's daily progress and adjust instruction accordingly, e.g., Ticket out the Door and other formative assessment strategies. The staff should include PD in formative assessment and in keeping running records tied to skills/curriculum benchmarks in their regular meetings.

- There should be a consistent use of academic and behavioral rubrics so that students become accountable for monitoring and assessing their own progress and learning.

VI. Professional Development

Findings:

- Staff PD needs are not being met with current structures and time allotments. Staff and administration specifically identified a need for more time to co-plan, share, analyze data, and collaborate vertically and horizontally.
- PD options are based on a one-size-fits-all model, with limited opportunities for staff to develop individual options. There is also limited follow-up that is necessary to ensure effective implementation.
- There appears to be little expectation for PD follow-up, for holding teachers accountable for implementation, coaching and/or for giving direct feedback to teachers in the classroom after PD.
- The school is only in the beginning stages of exploring and implementing the following District-identified PD initiatives:
 - Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) is in early stages of implementation, occurring on a monthly basis when District In Need of Improvement (DINI) substitutes are available;
 - Reviewers observed limited implementation of differentiated instruction and use of formative assessment strategies;
 - The school has not yet begun exploring SIOP, a District initiative that would support their lesson planning process and implementation of effective instructional strategies;
 - While the school is working regularly to learn and implement the new reading series, *Treasures*, there is a need to continue that work and to explore links between that series and instructional strategies that were successful when they used *Reading First*; and
 - Staff has not yet begun exploring the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- Teaching assistants, volunteers, and support staff are not always included in the PD and in purposeful training that would optimize their effectiveness with students.

Recommendations:

- Staff and administration should find creative ways to meet for PD, including the designation of at least two planning periods each week to work with their colleagues. If the SLT approves this, it would not violate any contract language, or teachers can decide to do this on their own.
- Staff should develop a year-long PD plan based on student achievement data and Individual Professional Growth Plans (IPG) to provide differentiated PD, systematic feedback, and coaching.

- PD should include targeted and differentiated coaching support for instructional staff and expectations for self-evaluation and reflection on the implementation of PD and data at the classroom, administrative and coaching levels. PD implementation should be monitored and supported at the school and individual teacher levels and should include structured follow-up by appropriate staff to ensure implementation in the classroom.
- The school should ensure that District initiatives are a focus of PD, including:
 - Revisiting the instructional components of Reading First to identify strategies that could improve teaching and learning. In addition, teachers should explore the sections of the new reading series, *Treasures*, which include effective word recognition strategies that are appropriate for intermediate level students reading at or close to grade level.
 - Continuing work in the CCL model and in differentiated instruction. Both areas were identified in the CEP Action Plan but are in the beginning stages of implementation.
 - Ensuring that instructional staff is SIOP-trained and SIOP implemented schoolwide.
 - Focusing on effective instruction, including differentiation and formative instruction.
 - Focusing on aligning and implementing the new NYS Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA and mathematics.
- All school staff involved in instruction should participate in appropriate PD. Teaching assistants should be able to stay in the building and participate with their teachers on District-wide PD days.

VII. District Support

Findings:

- The document for evaluating teaching assistants is inadequate for measuring instructional competence.
- Fifth grade classes are too large (one of the fifth grade classes has 34 students) to provide meaningful and effective instruction.
- Even though 220 students (59 percent) participate in the afterschool programs, there is some concern that the program may be negatively impacted next year by financial issues facing the District.

Recommendations:

- The District should redesign the teaching assistant evaluation instrument so that it includes items that rate instructional effectiveness.
- Every effort should be made, within budget constraints, to balance class sizes within grade levels and maintain reasonable class sizes in grade five.
- The District should make every effort to continue current afterschool program levels.

PART 3: JOINT INTERVENTION TEAM OVERALL FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Overall Findings

| Reference | JIT Finding for Restructuring Advanced Schools | ✓ |
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| (b) | The school has made some progress in identified areas, and may make AYP with further modification to the Restructuring Plan. | ✓ |

B. Overall Recommendation

| Reference | Recommendation by the JIT for Restructuring Advanced Schools | ✓ |
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| (b) | Continue implementation of the current Restructuring Plan with <u>modifications</u> recommended as a result of the review. | ✓ |

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

The three major areas of focus for Elmwood Elementary School should be:

- The District should provide support in implementing the recommendations of the Joint Intervention Team (JIT).
- PD and on-going support should create consistency and in depth understanding and implementation of effective instructional planning and strategies that support differentiated first-time core instruction, especially for ELA.
- Data analysis should be systematized so that it reaches the expected daily/weekly monitoring and adjustment of classroom and individual instruction to meet the needs of all students.