

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

BEDS Code:	53060001022
School Name:	Oneida Middle School
School Address:	1629 Oneida Street Schenectady, New York 12308
Principal:	Karmen McEvoy
Restructuring Phase/Category:	Restructuring Advanced Focused
Areas of Identification:	English Language Arts- Black Students; Hispanic Students; Students with Disabilities; and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Diagnostic Review:	January 11, 13-14, 2011

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Community and School Background

Oneida Middle School (MS) serves 581 students in grades 7 and 8. The student enrollment is 41 percent White, 37 percent Black, 15 percent Hispanic and seven percent Asian students. One hundred-eight students are students with disabilities. Most of the students live close to the school; however, bus transportation is provided to 255 students.

The administrative team consists of the Principal, Assistant Principal (AP) and Dean of Students. All members of the team contribute to the management and operation of the daily school functions. Over the past 12 years the school has had four Principals. The current Principal is in her fifth year of service. There are 72 teachers, 26 of whom are new to the school due to an increase in student enrollment. Thirty-four of the teachers have been on staff fewer than three years. One hundred percent of the staff are highly qualified.

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 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 <u>All Students</u> subgroup in one or more identified subject/area(s).	✓

B. School Strengths

- A mentor program is provided for all new teachers. Teachers are permitted to observe one another for the purpose of professional growth and sharing of best practice.
- Parents indicated that they feel welcome at the school. Parents indicated that most teachers are available and committed to helping their children achieve.
- A new data system, *Performance Plus*, is being implemented and teachers are beginning to recognize how this system can be effectively used to inform their instruction. This system can also house lesson plans and support curriculum development.

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

Findings:

- Although there is a curriculum for social studies, science and mathematics, the English language arts (ELA) curriculum for grades 7 and 8 has been only partially developed at the District level and has not been finalized. Some efforts have been made to begin curriculum mapping for ELA in grades 7 and 8.

Teachers report that the grade 7 and 8 ELA curriculum is somewhat disconnected from curriculum in kindergarten through grade 6 and grades 9 through 12. In the absence of a completed curriculum, grades 7 and 8 ELA teachers are individually responsible for ensuring that lessons are aligned with the New York State (NYS) Learning Standards.

- A variety of scoring rubrics are being used by teachers across curricular areas.
- No common District format for curriculum has been adopted and thus a number of written formats for curriculum are employed by different academic departments.
- Two or more software programs have been used for developing and housing ELA curriculum that is to be shared by teachers, but there have been technical difficulties preventing successful completion.

Recommendations:

- Work with the District in developing curricula in all core areas and ensure that it is clearly aligned with the current NYS Learning Standards. Curriculum must be aligned to the new NYS P-12 Common Core Learning Standards in ELA and literacy and mathematics 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.

Provide professional development (PD) for all teachers and administrators on how to plan and implement a curriculum with rigor, as well as delivery methods that are student-centered. The curriculum should be 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 being taught.

Appoint a District curriculum team that includes representatives from all levels, elementary, middle and high school, to finalize the ELA curriculum that is aligned to the NYS Standards and includes a scope and sequence/curriculum map and pacing guide. This will ensure seamless transitions from each level (elementary-middle-high school). Appoint an ELA curriculum expert (internal or external) to facilitate the writing process. Ensure that the superintendent and/or assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction as well as all curriculum coordinators and Principals attend the orientation of the curriculum writing team to demonstrate support and to reinforce the need for an ELA focus across all curricular areas.

Develop a plan for implementation of the ELA curriculum that defines the procedures for presenting the curriculum to all teachers; designs opportunities for ongoing discussion among ELA teachers, Principals and District administrators; and provides professional development (PD) in the form of teacher-to-teacher modeling and modeling/coaching from outside experts.

- Develop and implement a Districtwide rubric for grading/assessing student writing and for providing feedback to students. Require all students to maintain a writing journal and require all teachers (in all subject areas) to make regular writing assignments. Make writing journal assignments a significant portion of grading and promotion policies.
- Establish expectations for all subject area teachers to develop ELA lessons/activities aligned with the NYS Standards. Set goals for all teachers to publish these lessons/activities on the

Performance Plus platform to be shared Districtwide. Each teacher should develop and post ten lessons annually. Five of the lessons could be the result of collaboration with a colleague, on a department-wide or interdisciplinary basis. Devote vertical and horizontal team planning time to this effort on a regular and published basis. Develop and implement a common lesson plan template that identifies NYS Standards, specific student outcomes, strategies to differentiate instruction and means to assess student understanding.

- Determine the software program that will be used for developing and housing ELA curriculum and resolve any technical difficulties so that it be completed successfully.

II. Teaching and Learning

Findings:

- Of the 35 classes visited:
 - 80 percent were *teacher centered with direct instruction*. Students were asked to respond to a series of whole class, teacher initiated questions/prompts followed by individual student answers directed back to the teacher. Teacher questioning was varied but focused primarily on recall and interpretation. Higher order thinking skills were less evident.
 - 49 percent of the lessons observed incorporated technology in some capacity and in most cases for the purpose of projecting questions/activities on a screen or SMART Board for students to answer.
 - 20 percent of the lessons observed required students to work in groups.
 - Six percent of the lessons observed incorporated differentiated instructional strategies designed by the teacher.
- Both the literacy and mathematics workshops, the primary vehicle for delivery of Academic Intervention Services (AIS), are not directly connected to ELA and mathematics courses. Students are assigned to both of these workshops when they score one or two on the State ELA assessment. Students are not grouped in these “workshop” classes by ability level/s or needs.
- Assignment of homework varies widely from teacher to teacher. District or school policies or guidelines regarding homework have not been developed.
- In many of the lessons, NYS Standards were evident but not specifically stated to students. Standards, exemplars and student work were posted in only a few of the classrooms.
- Although Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been implemented over the past few years with a degree of success, PBIS is not being consistently implemented. Classroom rules, school rules/expectations, i.e., PBIS, are posted in some classrooms. Despite these inconsistencies, in most of the lessons observed teachers worked hard to engage students purposefully, keep students focused, monitor student engagement and adjust their instructional practices accordingly. However, in several lessons observed teachers spent a large percentage of their time attempting to focus student attention on the task at hand throughout the instructional period. The primary focus in these cases was on

maintaining student discipline, with little focus on student learning. In these instances, the amount of time focused on the learning objective was greatly diminished and transitions throughout the lesson required teachers to spend time managing student behavior issues.

- Although weekly lesson plans are submitted to the Principal, there is no pacing document for ELA to ensure NYS Standards are being met.
- While no school grading policy is in effect, teachers were aware of a school focus/expectation on including student participation as a percentage in the computation of student grades.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the emphasis on differentiated instruction schoolwide as an expectation and monitor its application across all curricular areas. Monitoring should be a joint responsibility of the Principal, coordinators and assistant superintendent through classroom observations and ongoing teacher feedback.

Devote significant and regularly scheduled time at vertical and horizontal meetings, faculty meetings, schoolwide meetings and superintendent conference days for discussions between and among teachers and administrators at all levels throughout the District. Provide facilitation for these meetings from experts (internal and external) familiar with effective, research-based instructional strategies/practices. Monitor these meetings to ensure that teachers value and adopt these strategies/practices as a significant part of the school and District culture.

- Align literacy and mathematics workshops directly with ELA and mathematics courses and determine scheduling alternatives to ensure that students are grouped based on common needs. For students who are reading two or more years below grade level, devote the double period (ELA and literacy workshop) entirely to reading instruction provided by a certified reading teacher.
- Develop schoolwide guidelines and expectations for homework and communicate these to students and parents. Develop and implement a policy and guidelines that place restrictions/limitations on the use of classroom instructional time for students to begin their homework.
- Re-visit and reinvigorate the PBIS program in the school. Develop schoolwide rules/expectations with both student and teacher input. Ensure that these are posted in all classrooms and other areas of the school, i.e., hallways and cafeteria, and that they are consistently reinforced by all staff and teachers. Teachers should create classroom rules with student input and reinforce the rules/consequences consistently. School leadership should continue to work with those teachers who need technical assistance and/or PD in behavior management.
- Develop a pacing guide for ELA that includes the NYS Standards. Post NYS Standards in hallways, offices and classrooms. Communicate the student learning outcome/s

(instructional objective) to students at the beginning and end of each lesson as an ongoing schoolwide practice.

- Create a schoolwide grading policy.

III. School Leadership

Findings:

- The Principal conducts regular walkthrough teacher observations; however no written documentation assessing the quality of instructional practices is maintained. Formal, written observations (at least one annually) are conducted for all non-tenured teachers in conjunction with District coordinators who conduct two or more formal, written observations for all non-tenured teachers.
- The Principal, AP and Dean of Students are actively involved in school management issues that occupy the majority of their time. This has been an obstacle in establishing an effective Building Leadership Team (BLT) to provide direction and oversight for implementation of the CEP. The BLT has historically been involved in the development of the school CEP but has not met this year. There have been difficulties in recruiting a parent representative to serve on the BLT.
- The Principal has some degree of autonomy regarding PD for teachers through schoolwide meeting time scheduled periodically throughout the school year. District sponsored PD is determined by a District Curriculum Coordination Council (CCC) and in many instances is not linked to the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP).
- Although the CEP identifies actions to improve student performance, it does not clearly reference the analysis of student achievement (or other data sources) nor does it provide any causal analysis which led to the identification of the actions contained within the CEP.

Recommendations:

- Increase the amount of time the Principal and AP spend on the following responsibilities:
 - observation of teachers followed by feedback that reinforces effective instructional practices and remediates ineffective instructional practices;
 - monitoring implementation of actions identified in the CEP;
 - monitoring the impact of actions identified in the CEP;
 - meeting with horizontal/vertical teams (in concert with curriculum coordinators, Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) staff, literacy coaches and special education staff) and child study teams to review relevant performance data; discuss individual, subgroup and schoolwide achievement data; and identify strategies to close identified achievement gaps;
 - meeting with curriculum coordinators and assistant superintendents to develop progress updates for faculty, students, parents, District administrators and the Board of Education regarding above items; and
 - reflecting on their leadership practice individually and collectively as members of a Districtwide professional learning community for leaders.

- Re-engage the BLT as a primary force for school improvement. Charge the BLT with the responsibility to:
 - Incorporate the recommendations from the Joint Intervention Team Final Report into a new Restructuring Plan for Oneida.
 - Develop a comprehensive implementation plan for each recommendation, including timelines and responsibilities.
 - Monitor the implementation plan and identify the data/evidence that will be collected to ensure that all actions identified in the plan have been taken.
 - Assess the impact of actions identified in the implementation plan and identify data/evidence that will be collected to demonstrate its impact/effectiveness.
 - Provide regular progress updates (reports and/or presentations) regarding the above items to faculty, students, parents, District administrators and the Board of Education.
 - Add a District-level administrator to the BLT to serve as a liaison and to provide support for the work.
 - Recruit at least two parents to serve on the BLT and schedule meetings to ensure their active involvement.

- Devote faculty meetings and schoolwide meetings to discussions and/or presentations on research-based practices that impact student achievement.

- Analyze student achievement data and other data sources to determine the causes of the school not making AYP. This will then lead to the identification of the actions that should be included in the Restructuring Plan.

IV. Infrastructure for Student Success

Findings:

- Not all teachers have high expectations for students.

- Students interviewed by the JIT team provided conflicting reports (very positive to less than positive) regarding guidance services. In some instances, students were provided a great deal of assistance and counseling from guidance and, in other instances, the help they received was perceived to be less than adequate.

- Lack of coordination of efforts/responsibilities between and among administrators and PPS staff sometimes creates the perception of inconsistency regarding student discipline.

- A variety of clubs, afterschool programs and sports are available to students, some of which provide transportation services. A number of students and parents were not aware of the club and after school programs.

- Teachers expressed some concern over the promotion/retention process and the criteria used in reaching decisions.

- There is no clearly defined schoolwide grading policy.

- Although Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) follow the prescribed State format, some include specific objectives while others do not.
- A library is available for student use before, during and after school. The library collection includes 13,000 print and 500 non-print materials and 23 periodicals. Twenty-nine computer terminals are housed within the library. A fully automated library system is used to manage the collection. Teachers can sign up for library time and work with the library media specialist to design lessons and/or units of study. However, access to the library is limited by request and availability. Some students report active use of the library, while others feel there is not time enough to take advantage of the library, as they only have access to the library before or after school or when their teacher signs up library time or allows them to go to the library.
- While efforts have been made to encourage parental involvement, it remains a challenge to engage parents. Parent nights held in the community have been successful in this regard. Other venues for parental involvement include concerts, a school play and PTO activities. Despite these efforts, some teachers believe greater parental support is needed. A Parent Compact is in place outlining expectations and commitments but does not seem to be having a meaningful impact.
- The District conducts needs assessment surveys for parents and an effective schools survey has been conducted in the past but not referenced in the CEP.

Recommendations:

- Engage the Principal, AP, teachers, students, and parents in discussions (perhaps through the Building Leadership Team) on how to increase motivation for students and parental involvement. Establish an atmosphere of high expectations for all students.
- Review roles, expectations and responsibilities of guidance personnel to ensure consistency in how counseling, discipline, and extra help is provided to students.
- Have administrators and PPS staff meet regularly to coordinate their roles and responsibilities in regard to student discipline. A combined effort should be made in deciding who will discipline students or how students will be disciplined.
- Provide information to parents several times throughout the year regarding before, during and after school programs.
- Develop, publish and implement promotion/retention guidelines that identify student achievement and other relevant data to be used by the school and describe how teachers will provide input into the process. Ensure that each decision identifies the appropriate supports/interventions to be provided by the school and clearly defines the responsibilities for the student and parent/guardian (to be signed by the student and parent/guardian).
- Develop and implement a consistent policy and guidelines for grading that emphasizes student participation and writing across all curricular areas.

- Ensure that all IEPs contain annual learning goals and short-term instructional objectives and/or benchmarks, are linked to the NYS Standards, and contain all other required sections.
- Increase student access to the library during the school day and encourage teachers to work with the library media specialist to design more lessons and/or more units of study.
- Continue to explore additional efforts to involve parents through such strategies as changing the time and format of open house and/or parent/teacher conferences.
- Include information in the Restructuring Plan that is collected from the parent needs assessment surveys. Ensure that there is parent representation on the BLT and that the BLT is engaged in the process of developing the Plan. Inform parents about the school progress in meeting AYP.

V. Collection, Analysis and Utilization of Data

Findings:

- The District collects, prepares, and provides comprehensive student achievement data to the school. There is also District office staff available to present and interpret data to school faculty. However, there is no systematic plan in place for ensuring that all school staff are trained in interpreting the data and using it to inform instruction.
- The school identifies school improvement initiatives without specific reference to student achievement data or causal analysis of such data.
- Training on the new web-based, *Performance Plus* data warehouse system has been initiated to ensure its effective use and is beginning to be used by faculty to inform instruction; however there is no comprehensive schedule for this training.
- The use of formative assessments is not a schoolwide expectation, nor was it included in curriculum documents that were reviewed.

Recommendations:

- Present student achievement and other relevant data to teachers and provide regularly scheduled opportunities to discuss curriculum and/or teaching modifications based on interpretation of data.
- Assemble a school improvement/data analysis support team including the Assistant Superintendent for curriculum and instruction, Principal, all curriculum coordinators, literacy coaches, teacher leaders (including special education staff) and District testing office representative/s to assist the Principal and the Oneida BLT in the development and implementation of a plan that includes the recommendations included in this report.

- Provide training on the new data management system for teachers, Principals, APs and all District-level administrators, i.e., superintendent, assistant superintendents, and curriculum coordinators.
- Increase the use of formative assessments, i.e., use the data collected from these assessments to aid in instruction and to improve student achievement. Administrators should ensure that teachers are held accountable for using formative assessment data to plan and adjust lessons, content and curriculum accordingly to meet student needs.

VI. Professional Development

Findings:

- The District offers a wide range of PD opportunities to targeted audiences on a "first come first served" basis; thus enrollment restrictions limit participation by some teachers within the targeted audience as well as most teachers outside the target audience. PD offered by the District is determined by a central committee with representatives from schools throughout the District and may or may not address school improvement needs.
- Although vertical and horizontal team meeting structures provide daily time for teachers to share/discuss best practice, the time is only partly used for this purpose. Observations of vertical team meetings revealed that teams were using this time for routine management functions and discussions about student behaviors.
- Teachers who attend District funded conferences are required to make a report to the faculty at their school but no templates/protocols for such presentations were discovered.
- PD for paraprofessionals was not referenced in the documentation provided by the District.

Recommendations:

- Based on school needs, the following PD should be provided:
 - intensive and embedded PD and coaching on Writing Workshop for all teachers across all curricular areas.
 - coaching on differentiated instructional techniques and strategies for all teachers across all curricular areas.
 - training for all teachers and administrators on the effective use of *Performance Plus* as a vehicle to collect, interpret, and analyze student achievement data; track implementation of curriculum; and share lessons/activities constructed around NY State Learning Standards.
 - training on team effectiveness for teachers who meet on vertical and horizontal teams. Monitor the implementation of the skills acquired through the above referenced PD.
- Develop protocols and templates for reporting to faculty about attendance at District-sponsored professional conferences.

- Observe paraprofessionals and survey paraprofessionals and teachers to determine PD that is needed for paraprofessionals. Develop PD for these staff members and ensure that they are able to attend.

VII. District Support

Findings:

- The District receives substantial funding to support school improvement initiatives but this funding is not always focused on the goals contained in the school Restructuring Plan.
- There does not appear to be a formal means by which the District monitors implementation of the school improvement plan.
- The school's physical plant is showing extreme signs of wear as evidenced by the following:
 - peeling paint in stairwells, classrooms, bathrooms, and offices;
 - rusted and chipped stairs;
 - mildew odors;
 - extreme differences in heat (very cold to very hot);
 - ceiling leaks and missing ceiling tiles;
 - exposed cable wires;
 - noise intrusions from cafeteria and gymnasium to instructional classrooms;
 - poor classroom acoustics; and
 - general lack of neatness/organization in some classrooms.
- There appears to be a difference of opinion between District administration and Principals regarding how the formal annual written observation/evaluation of tenured teachers is to be conducted.
- Curriculum coordinators report to District Office administrators and appear somewhat disconnected from Principals, except for a significant role in observation of non-tenured teachers.
- Two assistant superintendents interact with school Principals on both a scheduled and an informal basis but without coordination of effort/purpose.
- A District strategic plan exists but is not seen as a compelling force for school improvement.
- The role of curriculum coordinators regarding support to Principals and the BLT is not clearly defined.
- The *Performance Plus* data system is currently being implemented and has shown great promise for assisting the school in their improvement initiatives; however, a comprehensive plan for training staff has not been developed.

Recommendations:

- Dedicate local, State and federal school improvement/PD funding to implement actions/goals included in the Restructuring Plan.

- Establish a timeline for conducting periodic progress reports/updates on the school improvement plan to the Board of Education and community.
- Direct human and material resources to improve the deteriorating physical conditions noted in this report at Oneida MS.
- Clarify the expectations for Principals and APs to conduct written observations of tenured teachers on an annual basis.
- Coordinate the curriculum writing projects as recommended under the “Curriculum” section of this report.
- Appoint an assistant superintendent to serve as District liaison on the Oneida BLT.
- Incorporate the goals and improvement initiatives from the Restructuring Plan into the District strategic plan. Analyze the District’s current organizational chart and make changes in titles, job functions, responsibilities and lines of reporting necessary to implement the recommendations from this report and to ensure District support to Principals and their BLT’s in this regard.
- Provide ongoing PD and develop a professional learning community for District and school-level leaders built upon a knowledge, understanding and application of research-based, effective leadership practices.
- The District should provide support in implementing the recommendations of the Joint Intervention Team (JIT).

PART 3: JOINT INTERVENTION TEAM OVERALL FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Overall Finding

Reference	JIT Finding for Restructuring Advanced Schools	✓
(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	✓
(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.

Two major factors that need to be addressed as a priority at all levels (District, school and classroom) and throughout the District as follows:

- Many efforts are being made and much work is being done at the District-level, within each academic department, and in each school and classroom, but it appears that such effort and work is not consciously coordinated or connected in any systemic manner. School improvement initiatives should be clearly defined, embraced and articulated as the highest priority by all employees and by the Board of Education. Keeping school improvement as the top priority should be the pervasive driving force at all levels of the organization and must direct the actions taken by all members of the District.
- Effort, time, talent and resources should be consciously devoted to the school improvement initiatives as clearly defined in the school Restructuring Plan. This is a shared responsibility requiring coordinated contributions and commitment from all within the District.

Below are a number of foundational elements that should be addressed as priorities in order to ensure effective implementation of the recommendations:

- Recommendations from the JIT Report should be incorporated into the new Restructuring Plan and include action plans (including timelines, responsibilities, completion dates, and methods for monitoring and assessing implementation and impact) for the implementation of each recommendation. Development and implementation of the new action plans should be accomplished as a joint effort by the BLT with complete support from District administrators.
- A School Improvement/Data Analysis Support Team should be formed as described in this report under “Part V: Collection, Analysis and Utilization of Data.”