



The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	121901040003
School Name	Walton Middle School
School Address	47-49 Stockton Avenue Walton, NY 13656
District Name	Walton Central School District
School Leader	Mr. Rob Knuschke
Dates of Review	March 30 – 31, 2016
School Accountability Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focus School
Type of Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SED Integrated Intervention Team (IIT)

School Information Sheet for Walton Middle School

School Configuration (2015-16 data)					
Grade Configuration	6 – 8	Total Enrollment	209	SIG Recipient	No
Types and Number of English Language Learner Classes (2015-16)					
# Transitional Bilingual	0	# Dual Language	3	# Self-Contained English as a Second Language	0
Types and Number of Special Education Classes (2015-16)					
# Special Classes	3	# SETSS	3	# Integrated Collaborative Teaching	6
Types and Number of Special Classes (2015-16)					
# Visual Arts	9	# Music	9	# Drama	0
# Foreign Language	6	# Dance	0	# CTE	0
School Composition (most recent data)					
% Title I Population	48%	% Attendance Rate		95%	
% Free Lunch	58%	% Reduced Lunch		17%	
% Limited English Proficient	.01%	% Students with Disabilities		17%	
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0	% Black or African American		.01%	
% Hispanic or Latino	.04%	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		.001%	
% White	95%	% Multi-Racial		.001%	
Personnel (most recent data)					
Years Principal Assigned to School	.7	# of Assistant Principals		1	
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate	0	% Teaching Out of Certification		0	
% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience	5	Average Teacher Absences		8.26	
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2014-15)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	21%	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4		28%	
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 4)	89%	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 8)		63%	
Student Performance for High Schools (2014-15)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4		Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4			
Global History Performance at levels 3 & 4		US History Performance at levels 3 & 4			
4-Year Graduation Rate		6 Year Graduation Rate			
Regents Diploma w/ Advanced Designation		% ELA/Math Aspirational Performance Measures			
Overall NYSED Accountability Status					
In Good Standing		Local Assistance Plan		X	
Priority School		Focus School		X	
SCHOOL PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE SCHOOL: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literacy Improvement, Close-Reading, Emotional Support 2. Increasing support for students with disabilities 3. Improving student achievement through technology access 					

School Identification Status		
The school was identified for not meeting the subgroup performance minimum cut point for the following subgroups in 2014-15:		
Subgroup	School's Performance	Minimum Cut point
Economically Disadvantaged	51.5	64
Students with Disabilities	26	29

Purpose of the visit

This school was visited by the State Education Department Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) because of its low performance.

The purpose of this review is to provide the school with feedback regarding the practices across the school and to provide a number of actionable recommendations to direct the school's work in the immediate future.

This report is being provided as a feedback tool to assist the school and to help identify areas for improvement. These areas can address the subgroups identified or they may be broader and cover additional subgroups or the entire school. NYSED recognizes that there are dedicated staff members at the school committed to the success of the students. The report below provides a critical lens to help the school best focus its efforts.

Information about the review

- The review was co-led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE) and a representative from the New York State Education Department. The team also included a district representative, and a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) representative.
- The review team made 44 visits to 25 classrooms during the two-day review.
- The OEE visited 12 classrooms with the school leader during the review.
- Reviewers conducted focus groups with students, staff, and parents.
- Reviewers examined documents provided by the school, including curriculum maps, lesson plans, schoolwide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- The school's principal was assigned to the school in August 2016, and also serves as principal of the high school. The two schools are joined by a corridor and share some facilities and staff. The building also houses the school district offices.

The Review Team concluded that the school's current systems and practices are a generally aligned with Stage One or Stage Two on the DTSDE Rubric, with the majority of Statements of Practice aligning with Stage One.

SUCSESSES WITHIN THE SCHOOL THAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD BUILD UPON:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school leader instituted a literacy period for grades seven and eight taught by all subject teachers in order to address students' low performance on the State English language arts (ELA) assessment.2. The school leader re-established the building leadership team comprised of all constituencies in the middle and high school in order to grow ownership for shared decisions regarding school life.3. The school has coupled Open Houses with other events such as awards ceremonies and report card distribution to provide additional opportunities for reciprocal communication between families and school staff.

Tenet 2 - School Leader Practices and Decisions: Visionary leaders create a school community and culture that lead to success, well-being, and high academic outcomes for all students via systems of continuous and sustainable school improvement.

Recommendation for Tenet 2 – School Leader Practices and Decisions:

- By May 1, 2016, the school leader should establish and be a member of a middle school task force as a sub-group of the building leadership team. The task force’s initial charge should be to identify and recommend initiatives that will create a unique and separate identity for the middle school.
- By April 22, 2016, the school leader should create a plan to establish three teacher team leader positions to coordinate the work of the grade level teams. The team leaders, who will be members of the data team, should be trained in using data to plan and inform instruction. They, in turn, should train teachers to implement data-driven planning and instruction and facilitate this process. This plan should be implemented by the beginning of the 2016–17 school year.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The middle and high schools are located in one building and share school leaders, one leadership team, some staff, and core facilities. Veteran teachers spoke of a time when the middle school philosophy drove the educational program of the school with an emphasis on student-centered instruction and interdisciplinary teaming. The school leader has not developed a unique identity for the middle school, separate and apart from the high school. All stakeholders said that the school leader has not clearly and consistently communicated his vision for developing a unique middle school identity based on a shared understanding of high expectations for students’ intellectual and social-emotional growth and development.
- The school leader established grade level teams, but does not actively monitor them in order to determine their effectiveness and provide appropriate guidance and support. The school leader revised the master schedule to provide daily common planning periods for grade level teams. The grade level teams are required to meet once each week. The grade eight team voluntarily meets daily; however, it is uncertain how often the other two grade level teams meet since the school leader does not monitor these meetings.
- The school leader established a daily literacy period for grades seven and eight students and charged the grade level teams with creating an implementation plan. The school leader has not monitored the implementation of the literacy period in order to maximize its effectiveness.
- The school leader told the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) that the school culture did not value assessment data and staff did not use these data to inform curriculum planning. Consequently, the school has not implemented benchmark assessments in any subject area. The school leader stated that he is attempting to increase teachers’ ability to utilize data to plan and deliver instruction in order to address a broad range of students’ needs. Although aggregated ELA assessment results substantiated the need for a literacy period, the school is not using individual student performance data to inform literacy instruction.

Tenet 3 - Curriculum Development and Support: The school has rigorous and coherent curricula and assessments that are appropriately aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) for all students and are modified for identified subgroups in order to maximize teacher instructional practices and student-learning outcomes.

Recommendation for Tenet 3 – Curriculum Development and Support:

- Effective immediately, teachers should plan lessons that contain at minimum a student learning objective, explicit instruction, a formative assessment, and a meaningful outside assignment when appropriate. School leaders should provide feedback to teachers regarding their plans, monitor and record implementation to evaluate the impact on planning and instruction, and provide support as needed.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader has not established a systematic procedure for developing a rigorous coherent curriculum that addresses students’ needs and prepares them for future success. The school leader stated that he has not set explicit expectations for curricular planning or created a common understanding of the components of a rigorous curriculum. Additionally, he has not developed a review and evaluation cycle that results in targeted feedback to staff to modify and strengthen the curriculum.
- The lesson plans reviewed by the IIT rarely included complex texts and teachers did not demonstrate an understanding of text complexity in interviews. Learning objectives were posted in some classrooms, but these objectives were often not expressed in student-friendly language. The learning objective was not evident in most observed classes, and when asked, students were unable to articulate the purpose of the lesson. The review team requested copies of the lesson plans for the classes it observed in order to determine the relationship between the planning and implementation of the instruction; however, the school did not provide them.

Tenet 4 - Teacher Practices and Decisions: Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn, so that all students and pertinent subgroups experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking, and achievement.

Recommendation for Tenet 4 – Teacher Practices and Decisions:

- During the April and May 2016 grade team meetings, school leaders should provide training for teachers in integrating into every lesson a minimum of three checks for understanding related to the lesson’s learning target. Through these checks, teachers should be able to determine how well the students have learned what the teacher intended during the lesson, and students should be able to articulate what they have learned.
- During the April and May 2016 grade team meetings the school leaders should provide training so that going forward all teachers include a minimum of one highly engaging student activity in every lesson such as think-pair-share, rich discussion, and opportunities for students to build on other students’ responses through the use of accountable talk stems. School leaders should monitor and record the implementation of these practices in order to evaluate the impact on learning, provide feedback and support, and make modifications as needed.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- Teachers are generally not fostering a high level of student engagement through rigorous instruction. Although students stated they felt safe in their classrooms, the review team found in observed classes that there were limited opportunities for students to voice their thoughts and opinions and engage in rigorous activities that lead to increased achievement. Instruction was typically teacher-centered with teachers doing most of the talking and thinking. Teachers often posed literal comprehension questions that led to correct answers rather than a deeper understanding of underlying ideas and concepts. In many observed classes, teachers did not provide sufficient wait time for students to formulate their

thoughts and teachers often went on to answer their own questions. The review team did not observe any opportunities for students to engage in rich discussion with each other. There were few opportunities for experiential learning, and teachers often used the SMARTBoard as a chalkboard.

- There were few opportunities for intellectual discovery in observed classes. For example, a science teacher spent half the period going through the steps of an experiment rather than providing step-by-step guidance while the students conducted the experiment themselves. As a result, many students lost interest in a potentially highly engaging lesson. In most observed classes, teachers did not promote critical thinking through rich discussions where students build on each other's responses. The review team observed many missed opportunities to ask thought-provoking questions and promote discussion.
- The review team observed few checks for understanding integrated into lessons. Only a quarter of teachers used exit tickets to inform the following day's lesson, and two teachers used the results of a formative assessment to compose student groups. However, this was not typical. Teachers told the IIT that they wanted more feedback and guidance from the school leader to improve their instructional practices around using checks for understanding.

Tenet 5 - Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health: The school community identifies, promotes, and supports social and emotional development by designing systems and experiences that lead to healthy relationships and a safe, respectful environment that is conducive to learning for all constituents.

Recommendation for Tenet 5 – Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health:

- By June 1, 2016, the school leader and student support team should analyze the results of the district-administered Panorama student survey. Analysis of these data should serve as baseline indicators for student social-emotional developmental health needs and going forward should lead to the school's developing strategies to address these identified needs.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- There is no comprehensive program to address students' social-emotional developmental health needs proactively. The school leader is beginning to develop systems to address the social-emotional needs of students so that barriers to success are removed. Although, the district recently administered a student survey, the results have not been disaggregated for the middle school so that school staff can strategically identify and address middle school students' needs.
- The school leader has not established a system to track and analyze disciplinary referrals and identify students who need additional emotional support. Under current conditions, it is not possible to make informed strategic decisions about the effectiveness of the school's student support services. Teachers and support staff told the IIT that there is a poorly implemented Response to Intervention (RtI) procedure in place, and that while teachers were given a manual without proper training on RtI, the new school leader has not corrected these issues this school year. Although all stakeholders cited that cyclical poverty results in substance abuse, depression, and adult and child suicide, the school has not instituted proactive initiatives to help students develop coping skills and resilience.

Tenet 6 - Family and Community Engagement: The school creates a culture of partnership where families, community members, and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being.

Recommendation for Tenet 6 – Family and Community Engagement:

- By May 1, 2016, the school leader should communicate to parents via School Messenger and letters home the importance of monitoring and understanding their children's progress by accessing their assessment data through their SchoolTool parent portal accounts. The data coordinator should provide

the school leader with a monthly report that includes login data so that the school leader can evaluate the time parents spent in accessing the portal, the types of information they accessed, and the number of parent logins in order to help identify trends in family engagement.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The new school leader has not broadly communicated his belief that students can achieve at high levels nor has the school leader fostered a shared appreciation of how academic rigor and high expectations promote student success. The school leader has not addressed parents’ lack of understanding of how assessments help the school educate their children. Parents stated a belief that formal assessments were unfair and that student learning was more accurately represented by teachers' grades; however, the school leader and teachers who told the IIT that the school's academic program lacked essential rigor did not corroborate this belief. The school leader has not conveyed his high expectations for student success in written communications to parents.
- Teachers told the IIT that the school leader does not collect or review their parent outreach logs, although parent outreach is an element of their annual professional performance reviews. School leaders are not monitoring parent outreach efforts in order to inform decisions about increasing parental engagement.
- The school provides parents with student performance data through report cards, progress reports, and SchoolTool, the online portal; however, the use of these tools has not changed their understanding about the meaning and use of these data. The school does not analyze the SchoolTool login data to evaluate the usage and effectiveness of the online portal and to make necessary improvements.

SUBGROUP SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for Students with Disabilities:

- All teachers should take responsibility for educating students with disabilities. Teachers should be familiar with the students’ learning objectives as stated in their Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and receive training in providing students with disabilities scaffolds and other modifications to support their learning.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- During the grade six team meeting observed by the review team, teachers missed an opportunity to ensure that all subject area teachers addressed the academic content vocabulary deficit of a student with disabilities. Instead, the special education teacher took it upon herself to preview the content vocabulary prior to the student’s learning the terms in each class. The school leader stated that general education teachers typically do not take enough responsibility for educating students with disabilities. This review found that most teachers did not use scaffolding and other modifications to meet the individual needs of students in observed classes.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO ADDRESS

- **Classroom Observations:** Teachers stated that the school leader usually provides observation feedback via email rather than through post-observation conferences. The review team found that the school leader's written feedback on observation reports was brief, non-specific, and devoid of actionable

suggestions for next steps. There is no system to identify teacher deficiencies based on classroom walk-throughs and observations to inform decisions about professional development (PD). Going forward, the school leader should conduct post-observation conferences after all observations in order to create a shared vision of high expectations and rigorous instruction and provide teachers with both individualized and group support to improve their pedagogy.

- **Assessment Data:** The school has not instituted benchmark assessments to enable teachers to evaluate the impact of their instructional practices. This is especially important since the high opt-out rate for the spring 2015 State examinations rendered these data unusable. Some teachers utilize baseline, summative student learning outcomes (SLOs), and unit examinations to track student progress, but this is not a school-wide practice. The IIT did not see evidence that data informed planning and instruction. In the future, the school needs to administer benchmark and unit examinations that provide continuous data to monitor student progress and evaluate the impact of planning and instruction on learning.
- **Student Support Team:** The student support team told the IIT that they do not meet regularly. This prevents them from coordinating their work with students and families. The student support team also stated that they would appreciate the school leader's attending their meetings. In the future, the school leader needs to meet with the student support team at regularly scheduled meetings and establish processes to proactively address students' social and emotional developmental health needs.