



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	610301060008
School Name	Dryden Middle School
School Address	118 Freeville Road, Dryden, NY 13053
District Name	Dryden Central School District
School Leader	Mr. David Thon
Dates of Review	March 22-23, 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 Dryden Middle School

School Configuration (2015-16 data)					
Grade Configuration	6-8	Total Enrollment	374	SIG Recipient	No
Types and Number of English Language Learner Classes (2015-16)					
# Transitional Bilingual	0	# Dual Language	0	# Self-Contained English as a Second Language	0
Types and Number of Special Education Classes (2015-16)					
# Special Classes	1	# SETSS	0	# Integrated Collaborative Teaching	30
Types and Number of Special Classes (2015-16)					
# Visual Arts	16	# Music	18	# Drama	0
# Foreign Language	9	# Dance	0	# CTE	0
School Composition (most recent data)					
% Title I Population	49	% Attendance Rate	97		
% Free Lunch	42.7	% Reduced Lunch	10.1		
% Limited English Proficient	0	% Students with Disabilities	17		
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5	% Black or African American	0.8		
% Hispanic or Latino	2.9	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.2		
% White	92.7	% Multi-Racial	2.9		
Personnel (most recent data)					
Years Principal Assigned to School	1	# of Assistant Principals	1		
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate	2	% Teaching Out of Certification	1.9		
% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience	15	Average Teacher Absences	3.4		
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2014-15)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	22%	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4	31%		
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 4)	88%	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 8)	73%		
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. Close the achievement gap for students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students. 2. Continue to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment to all content and special areas, with an emphasis on transitions and coordination. 3. Engage in collaboration and systematic data-driven practice utilizing professional learning communities to support the strategic plan. 4. Promote positive youth development in partnership with all stakeholders in the Dryden Central School District to support the success of all students through the Search Institute model of asset building. 5. Research and select additional performance measures and targets to add to the academic improvement plan. 					

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 Students	54	64

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 (SESIS) representative.
- The review team visited a total of 60 classrooms during the two-day review.
- The OEE visited seven 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, school-wide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the review, the school provided results of a student survey that 66 students (17.6 percent) completed.
- In advance of the review, the school provided results of a staff survey that 35 staff (50 percent) completed.
- In advance of the review, the school provided results of a parent survey that 12 parents (1.6 percent) completed.

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

SUCCESSSES WITHIN THE SCHOOL THAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD BUILD UPON:

1. The school leaders implemented co-teaching teams for mathematics and English language arts (ELA), and the most recent STAR assessments from December 2015 showed that students increased their scores in reading and mathematics. Both students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students made progress in reading and mathematics.
2. School leaders modified the school schedule to include 20 minutes of academic support for students in grades seven and eight during the lunch period. Data provided by the school leader indicated a 51 percent decrease in behavioral referrals.
3. After reviewing research studies that focused on the correlation between students in poverty and higher rates of chronic absenteeism, school leaders established protocols for communicating with families about student absences. The school leader reported there was a 64 percent improvement in

the attendance rate for the identified students.

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:

- Beginning March 28, 2016, school leaders should conduct three walk-throughs per week, at a different grade level each day, looking at the engagement of all students with a focus on determining whether students know what they are being taught. School leaders should provide immediate and specific feedback to teachers.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The review team’s examination of school documents, discussions with teachers and school leaders, and classroom observations showed that leaders do not regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Although school leaders conduct formal observations linked to the district’s Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) plan, the feedback is general, descriptive, and does not consistently include targeted comments and suggestions that lead to improvements in the quality of teaching. Monitoring of teaching by school leaders is too infrequent to ensure that practices throughout the school are consistent or that they result in improvements in student learning and achievement.
- In many observed classes, reviewers noted that most students were passive and not engaged in learning. Discussions with students indicated that they did not understand what they were supposed to learn or why they were learning it. The school leader reported that in formal observations he highlighted student engagement as a focus of teaching practice; however, he has not prioritized visiting classes to see whether teachers consistently implement this focus. Written feedback examined by the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) did not provide specifics about what school leaders expected or what teachers needed to do to improve their practice.
- School leaders reported that they have not made it a priority to gather information about school-wide practices or the effectiveness of their initiatives in bringing about school improvement. During interviews with the IIT, teachers and parents were not able to articulate the school leader’s vision for improvement. The review team found that many lessons they observed moved at a slow pace and reflected a lack of challenge for some students. Few students were able to express a perspective about the purpose of learning, why they should set high personal goals for achievement, or the need to improve their academic performance so they are ready for the next stage in their learning to prepare for college and future careers.

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:

- Starting April 18, 2016, school leaders should ensure that in all planning meetings teachers use feedback from the school leaders’ walk-throughs to adapt their planning so that it accounts for the

respective levels at which students are achieving and the next steps they need to take in order to learn. School leaders should also attend at least one planning meeting per week.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader reported that he has set up a series of planning meetings to ensure that the curriculum is adjusted to meet the needs of all students. However, during the IIT’s observation of a planning meeting, staff were not clearly focused on adjusting curriculum planning so that it takes into account the respective levels at which students are working. The school leader stated that leaders have not consistently monitored curriculum planning to ensure that teachers modify lesson plans to support individual and subgroups of students. Curriculum adaptation was also not a focus of a grade-level meeting observed by reviewers, and the meeting had no structure or requirements provided by the school leader. Most curriculum plans for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), but the lesson plans derived from them do not include the steps students need to take in order to learn. The review team found little evidence of data-driven instruction (DDI) in most lessons. Students reported little modification or personalization of tasks based upon their readiness or interest.
- Discussions between the IIT and teachers about their use of data to inform curricular planning indicated that teachers are at an early stage of development in this practice. Despite being a focus of the strategic plan, many teachers do not incorporate student needs, complex materials, or higher-order questions in their plans. Students stated they do not see the relevance of what they are learning or how it will help them in the future.
- The IIT found limited evidence that ELA lesson plans are specifically designed to support students with disabilities. In most classes the IIT visited, all students did the same work. Lesson plans did not include specially designed instruction for students with disabilities, plans for student grouping, individual student accommodations, or progressions of learning targets based on students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

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:

- Starting May 2, 2016, teachers should give verbal and written feedback in lessons to students about how well they understand the learning targets and outcomes and the next steps they need to take in their learning.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- Reviewers’ examination of student work showed that written feedback consists primarily of grades or general encouraging comments such as “Good job!” During discussions with the IIT, although some students expressed concern about getting good grades, most students were not able to articulate what they need to do to improve their academic achievement. The review team found inconsistencies in teachers’ grading systems, with some teachers giving percentage scores and others letter grades.

Although some essays reviewers examined were graded with suggestions about how students could improve grammar, syntax, or spelling, this was not typical of most classes.

- Teachers use online assessments four times a year to measure student achievement, and they also use ongoing informal assessments such as exit tickets. However, the review team found that teachers make little use of assessment data to adjust instructional practice so that it better meets the needs of individual and subgroups of students. In addition, teachers typically did not use data to provide students with feedback to help them take ownership of their learning.
- Although some classrooms display learning targets and desired outcomes, teachers do not regularly review these, and when questioned by reviewers, many students did not seem to understand the meaning of the objectives. In lessons the IIT observed, students typically did not engage in discussion, explanation, or self-assessment of the learning targets. Because many lessons lack challenge, students are not encouraged to think deeply or rigorously, which limits students' developing higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, teachers make little use of assessment information to group students according to their understanding or prior learning so they can build on what they already know.

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:

- Beginning March 28, 2016, the school leader should set up a student advisory council to increase student involvement in the school community and decision-making processes.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The review team observed that the school is generally a well-ordered environment, and students reported that they feel safe in the school. However, many students expressed the perspective that some teachers are not interested in them or their problems. This sentiment was also confirmed by a student survey conducted in October 2015. Reviewers noted that teachers sometimes did not explore reasons for students' lack of interest in learning. For example, in one lesson a teacher excused a student's lack of engagement by commenting that the student had a hard day. The review team did not find evidence in discussions with students and the student support team that students are involved in providing any input concerning school policies. The IIT's discussions with younger students showed that they would appreciate more opportunities to be involved in the school community and take some responsibility for establishing school rules and protocols. The October 2015 student survey indicated that most students disagreed that they had any say in decision-making processes.
- The school leader reported that the gathering of information on students' social and emotional developmental health needs was centered mainly on behavioral issues, although the focus on chronic absenteeism has produced some positive results. The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, although implemented inconsistently across the school, has reduced the number of suspensions. When students discussed behavior issues with the IIT, they had a number of pertinent observations about how it could be improved, but reported that they did not have a means of bringing these ideas to school leaders.
- Parents reported that the school has not organized its work with parents to support students' social

and emotional needs, and some expressed the desire for more training on how to help their children overcome academic and social-emotional problems. They noted that they receive little information on how their children are progressing.

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:

- In order to improve two-way communication with families and the community, school leaders should ensure that by May 2, 2016, the school web site contains:
 - a short, clear statement about the school vision, mission, and expectations for academic achievement and behavior;
 - a simple explanation of the data presented on quarterly report cards provided to parents;
 - a link to the school’s newly designed smartphone communications application; and
 - a link to enable parents to contact school personnel with suggestions and concerns. The school leaders should ensure that these communications are responded to within 24 hours.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- One of the key concerns voiced by parents to reviewers was the lack of consistent two-way communication with the school. They noted that the school leader is quick to respond to communications, but they stated that this is not the case with all teachers. Many parents stated that they want to know how their children are doing academically and socially but that they receive a response from some teachers only when they are persistent. The school leader reported that the school has provided little training on how to create and sustain strong home-school partnerships that allow parents and teachers to work together to support student achievement. Parents of students with disabilities stated that it sometimes takes too long to receive the support that they and their children require.
- Many parents stated that they do not understand the statistical information about State test results or the grades students receive on quarterly report cards from the school. Parents also reported they do not find the school website useful. The school leader acknowledged that two-way communication could be improved and noted that plans are in place to redesign the online systems to address this issue.
- The school leader reported that the school does not have a set of school-specific expectations about academic achievement separate from the district, but since he was appointed in July 2015, he has been working on a school mission statement that he will share with all stakeholders including staff, parents, and students.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO ADDRESS

- Senior leaders do not consistently monitor the impact of resource allocations to promote student progress and achievement. As a result, school leaders are not sufficiently well informed about school-wide practices and do not have the data they need to bring about needed improvements. In the future, school leaders should use the information gathered from walk-throughs to help determine how best to use resources to improve student achievement.

- The review team found that teachers give minimal attention to establishing interdisciplinary links between subjects in their planning, resulting in a curriculum that is not deepening students' understanding of how areas of learning connect across subjects. In the future, school leaders and teachers should improve how they plan for cross-curricular links and build them more effectively into unit and lesson plans.
- Many parents reported that they do not feel that teachers are proactive in contacting them with information about their children's academic and social-emotional needs. In future, the school leader should provide training to teachers on how to create and support home-school partnerships so both parties can work together to support student achievement.