



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	590901060006
School Name	Liberty Middle School
School Address	145 Buckley Street, Liberty, NY 12754
District Name	Liberty Central School District
School Leader	Jack Strassman
Dates of Review	April 19-20, 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 Liberty Middle School

School Configuration (2015-16 data)					
Grade Configuration	5-8	Total Enrollment	429	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	11	# SETSS	0	# Integrated Collaborative Teaching	18.5
Types and Number of Special Classes (2015-16)					
# Visual Arts	4.5	# Music	17.5	# Drama	0
# Foreign Language	5	# Dance	0	# CTE	0
School Composition (most recent data)					
% Title I Population		No	% Attendance Rate		92
% Free Lunch		100%	% Reduced Lunch		0
% Limited English Proficient		6	% Students with Disabilities		12
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native		0	% Black or African American		7
% Hispanic or Latino		36	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		1
% White		56	% Multi-Racial		3
Personnel (most recent data)					
Years School leader Assigned to School		17	# of Assistant School leaders		1
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate		0	% Teaching Out of Certification		0
% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience		16%	Average Teacher Absences		5
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2014-15)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4		17%	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4		24%
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 4)		59%	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 8)		43%
Overall NYSED Accountability Status					
In Good Standing			Local Assistance Plan		
Priority School			Focus School		X
SCHOOL PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE SCHOOL:					
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase student cognitive engagement 2. To increase the use of data to drive instruction 3. To address the social and emotional need of our students 					

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
Students with Disabilities	13.5	29
Economically Disadvantaged	62	64
Black	55.5	61

Purpose of the visit

This school was visited by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) 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 (NYSED). The team also included a district representative, a district-selected OEE, and a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) representative.
- The review team visited a total of 64 classrooms during the two-day review.
- The OEE visited eight 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.
- Although the school is Middle and High School situated in two separate buildings, only the Middle School was reviewed on this occasion.

The Review Team concluded that the school's current systems and practices most closely align with Stage One on the DTSDE Rubric.

SUCCESSSES WITHIN THE SCHOOL THAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD BUILD UPON:

1. The school leader has identified that aspects of leadership, curriculum, instruction, and behavior are in need of improvement and has provided planning time and professional development (PD) to begin to address these areas.
2. Parents and students expressed their appreciation for being invited by the school to Honor Breakfasts and for the letters of praise from teachers they receive that celebrate student achievement and stated that these motivate students to improve their work and behavior.
3. The school leader recognized the need for school leaders to monitor teacher lesson planning and is creating a plan to better support teachers in this area.

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 16, 2016, the school leader, working with the district staff, his administrative team, and teachers from within the school identified by the leadership team as having the skills to support the planning process, should:
 - identify the school's priorities for improvement and develop specific, measurable, ambitious, results-oriented, and timely (SMART) goals;
 - document the priorities for the 2016-17 school year in a written plan;
 - identify the activities that will be undertaken, when they will take place, and who will be responsible for them; and
 - establish how progress against these goals should be monitored and measured.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school has a long-standing vision statement that is published on the school website. While the school leader has identified three school priorities that focus on increasing student cognitive engagement, increasing the use of data-driven instruction, and addressing students' social and emotional needs, teachers, students, and parents interviewed by the review team were not aware of the school's vision and were not able to articulate the school's priorities.
- The school leader acknowledged that planning and monitoring the work of the school is in need of improvement, and he attributed this to a lack of time and resources. The school leader stated that he has not established a central plan to show the steps to be taken to achieve the school's priorities. Instead, he has delegated this responsibility to teacher leaders to manage within their individual areas, and they report progress to him through meeting agendas and minutes. Because these documents are not stored in a central area to be routinely available to all staff, school leaders and teachers do not have the full picture of what is going on in the school.
- The school leader stated that he has not established SMART goals tied to the school's priorities that can be used to measure progress and inform decisions about future actions. Further, the school leader stated that he would be more confident in creating SMART goals with district support and guidance in this area. The school leader reported that although some data are collected for specific purposes, the data collected are not systematic and do not provide information about the progress of specific subgroups of students. Consequently, the school leader stated that it is not possible to monitor the major areas of the school's work.
- The school leader stated that school leaders have not provided clear guidance to staff about expectations for student achievement and social and emotional developmental health. He acknowledged that teachers subscribe to and act upon very different expectations in their dealings with students.

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:

- By May 10, 2016, lesson plans should incorporate:
 - a learning target that clearly explains what the students are expected to learn;
 - learning activities that are modified to meet students' needs; and
 - checks for student learning during the lesson through strategies such as "Fist to Five."

- By May 10, 2016:
 - teacher leaders should use common planning time to help teachers plan daily lessons;
 - the assistant principal should check the quality of lesson plans on a weekly basis and spend at least one hour per day checking that plans are implemented in the classroom; and
 - the assistant principal should provide actionable feedback to teachers on the use of learning targets and the checking of student learning during the lesson.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader stated that his ability to provide a coherent curriculum was limited by district leader decisions, such as budget reductions leading to reduced staffing levels. He also spoke of the difficulties and time constraints caused by working in the two separate buildings that comprise the middle school and high school. During visits to classrooms, the review team found that the curriculum offered was not coherent and rigorous. Most of the lesson plans reviewed by the Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) were not modified to meet the varied needs of students.
- Although teachers incorporated learning targets into lesson plans, reviewers and the school leader noted that the learning targets focused on the activities that students were going to do rather than the knowledge, skills, and understandings that students needed to develop. Further, some lesson plans examined by reviewers contained long lists of learning targets that were not attained in the lesson because they were unrealistic.
- The school leader and reviewers noted during their lesson observations that teachers planned the same task for all students with little regard for the wide range of academic levels within the classes. As a result, the work was too difficult for some students and too easy for others. During classroom visits, the school leader and reviewers observed that in most lessons teachers did not check on student understanding as the lesson progressed. As a result, teachers rarely identified students who were struggling or needed more challenge, and teachers therefore were not well positioned to plan the next lesson. In the school self-reflection document, school leaders indicated that less than 50 percent of teachers planned effective lessons based on formative and summative assessment data.
- School leaders reported that they are not currently providing support to teachers during the lesson planning process by regularly checking that planning is matched to the lesson’s purpose and is implemented in the classroom. They also stated that they are not currently providing actionable feedback to teachers each week on the use of learning targets and the checking of student learning during the lesson in order to help teachers improve their planning. However, the school leader did state that he is working on a plan for the assistant principal to help support teachers in these areas.

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:

- By April 28, 2016, all teachers should implement the instructional expectations of:
 - providing learning targets that all students can understand;
 - asking questions that are adapted for students’ different ability levels;
 - co-teaching lessons with teaching support staff so that students can work in differentiated groups; and

- checking on learning as lessons progress, using “Fist to Five” for example, to help plan the next lesson.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- In most lessons observed by reviewers, teacher practices and decisions did not connect with what students knew and what they needed to know. Students revealed in discussions with reviewers and the school leader that teachers did not frame learning targets in language that students understood, and students were unable to explain the meaning of the learning targets.
- School leaders noted in the self-reflection document that much of the lesson content was above students’ comprehension level. The IIT observed that teachers’ instructional methods rarely accounted for the range of student needs within the class. Reviewers saw very few examples of teachers using higher-order questioning to extend student learning or questions that enabled students struggling with learning to clarify their thinking. Teachers’ questioning was typically low-level and required students to answer with one or two words. This did not encourage students to think more deeply. As a result, during instruction, reviewers observed disengagement, passive listening, and misbehavior that hindered learning.
- In most observed lessons, the teacher taught the whole class the same material and then asked students to complete a task on their own. Reviewers and the school leader noted that when support staff were present, they did not provide any input into most of the lessons and rather stood or sat quietly in the room. In one lesson observed by the IIT, the teacher and support teacher worked together skillfully questioning students on how they could improve their writing; however, this practice was not found in other classrooms.
- The review team noted in observed lessons that teachers rarely checked student learning so that teachers could plan for the following lesson. Those teachers who did check on student learning used “Fist to Five,” a quick and useful method for checking on 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 April 27, 2016, the school leaders should identify and communicate to staff and students the positive relationships and behaviors expected from all members of the school community by:
 - tasking the senior leader, such as the dean of students, to overhaul and integrate the two programs the school uses to promote the teaching of student social and emotional developmental health. This should include publishing a statement based on promoting mutual respect about the behaviors expected from students, parents, staff, and other members of the school community.
 - deploying the appropriate school leader to check three days per week that these expectations are consistently followed by staff and students by visiting classrooms and public areas and by developing a protocol for when these expectations are not met;
 - requiring teachers to greet students at the door prior to entering the classroom; and
 - changing the lunch program to allow grade eight students to eat first, followed by grades five

to seven students, and having the appropriate leader supervise the lunch program.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader shared that the school does not provide a safe and respectful environment conducive to learning for all students. Teachers, students, support staff, and parents expressed concerns about aggressive behavior among students, such as fights between students, especially in unsupervised hallways and lunch rooms. These incidents were particularly numerous during lunch time when grade seven and eight students have lunch together. School leaders state they cannot require staff to supervise hallways, but they can require teachers to be at classroom doors to greet students when lessons begin, and that this provides some oversight of corridors as students enter classrooms with a polite and orderly start to lessons.
- Students spoke of bad behavior during lessons that regularly disrupt learning. During classroom visits, reviewers and the school leader noted that teachers did not always follow procedures to restore order in the classroom when disruptions occurred. Some teachers stated that when serious behavioral incidents arose they were not supported by senior staff. In discussions with reviewers, some students stated that they do not feel intellectually safe, as other students laugh at them when they answer questions incorrectly.
- Staff and school leaders stated that some teachers shout at students or refuse suggestions from support staff to welcome students into their classrooms with a smile and a greeting. The school leader and some teachers reported that disagreements exist between staff who consider it their duty to support children with social and emotional needs and staff who feel it is not their responsibility to do so.
- The school leader reported that the school uses the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program to promote students' social and emotional developmental health. He stated that the two approaches overlap, that teachers who use one of each of these approaches are not clear on what the other program does, and that neither approach is currently having much impact. Reviewers found little evidence that the programs have had any impact on student relationships and behavior. School leaders and teachers reported that teachers have varying levels of commitment to the anti-bullying program and that class discussions of issues such as bullying varied in effectiveness depending on the teacher's commitment.
- The school leader acknowledged that school staff and students do not have a common set of expectations about required positive behaviors that all school community members are expected to follow. In discussions with reviewers, students and parents revealed that not all students feel safe and valued.

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 6, 2016, a group of teachers identified by school leaders should plan workshops for small groups of parents on how to support students' guided reading at home. These should be held on June 9, 2016 in an informal and friendly environment. At the end of each workshop, teachers should receive written feedback from parents to evaluate the workshop's effectiveness.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- Parents interviewed by reviewers stated that they find it difficult to support their children’s learning at home. Parents also said that the school has not provided training for them to give guidance on supporting their children’s learning at home, and this was confirmed by the school leader and teachers.
- The school leader and teachers stated that it is difficult to get many parents to attend meetings at school. The school leader noted that attendance at parent-teacher meetings was sometimes as low as 30 percent. However, parents stated that the organization of these meetings that take place in a gym where parents wait in line for their turn within earshot of other parents having meetings are not conducive to having confidential conversations with teachers.
- Parents and students spoke enthusiastically of informal meetings conducted by individual teachers who invited parents into their classrooms to see their children’s work. Students said their parents felt warmly welcomed into the school and that their parents gained a better view of their work from this type of experience. Students said that the approachability of the teachers, a convivial atmosphere, and refreshments added to parents’ enjoyment of these events.
- The school leader stated that there is a need for a program to inform parents on how to support their children’s reading at home. The school leader shared that the school plans to survey the parents to find out how to help them better support students in this area.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO ADDRESS

- The review team found that procedures to check who comes in and out of the school do not provide sufficient security. Parents expressed concerns about this. In the future, school leaders will need to develop and implement clear procedures to address this issue.
- Not all students know who to go to if they have a problem or a concern. In the future, the school leader should work with guidance counselors to develop a system to make sure that all students have regular contacts with a counselor.
- School leaders and teachers record data for some areas, for example for students who need extra support. However, data are not systematically collected and centrally stored, and there are no protocols about how the data are to be used. Data analysis is not systematic, does not identify trends and patterns, and is not used to make informed decisions about the work of the school. In the future, the school leader should establish systems to manage and use data more effectively.
- Teachers rarely provide feedback during instruction to help students improve their work. In the future, school leaders should provide guidance to teachers on how to do this, and they should monitor lessons to ensure that teachers effectively implement this practice.
- School leaders have not established and clearly communicated to parents and students high expectations for student success. In the future, the school leader should work with a group that includes parent and student representatives to set the school’s expectations and communicate them to the whole school community.