



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	661500010001
School Name	Hillcrest School
School Address	4 Horton Drive, Peekskill, NY 10566
District Name	Peekskill City School District
School Leader	Jacqueline Liburd
Dates of Review	April 26 – 27, 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 Hillcrest School

School Configuration (2015-16 data)					
Grade Configuration	4-5	Total Enrollment	492	SIG Recipient	No
Types and Number of English Language Learner Classes (2015-16)					
# Transitional Bilingual	0	# Dual Language	6	# Self-Contained English as a Second Language	0
Types and Number of Special Education Classes (2015-16)					
# Special Classes	2	# SETSS	0	# Integrated Collaborative Teaching	5
Types and Number of Special Classes (2015-16)					
# Visual Arts	1	# Music	1	# Drama	0
# Foreign Language	0	# Dance	0	# CTE	0
School Composition (most recent data)					
% Title I Population	100	% Attendance Rate	97.44		
% Free Lunch	82	% Reduced Lunch	7		
% Limited English Proficient	24.19	% Students with Disabilities	14.63		
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0	% Black or African American	21		
% Hispanic or Latino	67	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0		
% White	9	% Multi-Racial	3		
Personnel (most recent data)					
Years Principal Assigned to School	3	# of Assistant Principals	0		
% 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	64		
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2014-15)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4	12	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4	19		
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 4)	66	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (Grade 8)	N/A		
Overall NYSED Accountability Status					
In Good Standing		Local Assistance Plan			
Priority School		Focus School	X		

SCHOOL PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE SCHOOL:

1. Ensure that all students are reading and comprehending grade-level texts by increased use of data-driven instruction and assessments to track student progress in a timelier manner, through use of an assessment framework to monitor and adjust instructional practices and interventions. Teachers will utilize the data from these assessments and progress monitoring to inform their instruction, select appropriate instructional strategies, and differentiate tasks and resources. At the same time, staff will increase student participation in the goal setting process.
2. Ensure continuous improvement for all staff in the practice of Balanced Literacy through professional development offerings.
3. Continue to improve school culture and climate (academic, attendance, and behavior).
4. Increase parent involvement for the Tier 2 and 3 level 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	21	29
Hispanic	58	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 NYSED. The team also included a district representative, a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SESIS) representative, and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- The review team visited 68 classrooms during the two-day review.
- The OEE visited 11 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 Review Team concluded that the school's current systems and practices are generally aligned with Stage One 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:

1. Teachers' high expectations ensured that students were well behaved and respectful in classes, and attendance is actively monitored and high at 97 percent.
2. Consistent with the school's focus on improving reading proficiency and creating a love of reading, school staff have created and stocked levelled classroom libraries consisting of many books in various genres. Reviewers observed students selecting a variety of books from these libraries.
3. The Sanctuary Model community meetings held daily in all classrooms provide students with opportunities to develop relationships with their peers and teachers and allow school staff to monitor students' social and emotional developmental needs.

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 May 2, 2016, the school leader should join district leaders on walkthroughs to ensure that teachers are implementing the reading workshop model faithfully. This model consists of:
 - a mini lesson where the learning objective is clearly displayed and explained to students;
 - a workshop time where students complete activities that are accurately matched to their academic levels ; and
 - an end-of-session activity that revisits the learning objective and assesses how well students have learned, including those from all subgroups.
- The school leader should give written, actionable feedback to teachers on how well they are progressing and re-visit their classes to ensure improvement.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school self-reflection document stated the need for leaders to conduct weekly walkthroughs focused on the priorities identified by school and district leaders, such as faithful implementation of the reading workshop model. The Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) learned in interviews with the school leader and teachers that school and district leaders conduct informal walkthroughs, as well as formal observations. The school leader told the IIT that walkthroughs have not focused on how well and completely teachers are implementing the reading workshop model, and the IIT and school leaders found that teachers were not consistently implementing the components of this model in observed classes.
- The IIT found through interviews and a review of documents that school leaders’ feedback to teachers was not specific about what they needed to do to improve their instructional practices. When asked, teachers were unable to provide specific examples of feedback from school leaders that had improved their instructional practices. The school leader acknowledged that her feedback was often not actionable and told the IIT that she did not systematically re-visit classes to ensure that teachers were attempting to improve their instructional practices.
- The IIT found that teachers’ lesson plans typically did not address the needs of student subgroups, especially students with disabilities and Hispanic 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:

- Beginning May 9, 2016, the school leader should ensure that with the support of the reading and literacy teachers, classroom teachers analyze the school’s English language arts (ELA) data to plan reading activities accurately matched to the needs of individual students and subgroups.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school’s self-reflection document stated that increasing teacher use of data-driven instruction (DDI) practices when planning units and lessons was the next step the school needed to take to improve student performance. The school leader told the IIT that most teachers do not use assessment data to plan lessons to meet their students’ needs or use periodic formative assessments during lessons to check for student understanding. Classroom observations and a review of lesson plans confirmed the validity of these school concerns.
- The IIT learned that at the beginning of the school year district and school leaders provide teachers with data sheets that identify students’ reading proficiency levels on benchmark assessments. The IIT found through classroom observations and a review of documents that teachers grouped students according to their reading levels during reading sessions, but did not use benchmark assessment data to plan differentiated instruction.
- The IIT found through interviews and classroom observations that teachers did not always modify the taught curriculum based on the results of formative and summative assessments. For example, in some observed classes, students were using texts that were too difficult for them to read and understand independently; reviewers observed that this clearly impeded their learning.
- The school leader stated that she monitors teachers’ implementation and modification of the curriculum informally during walkthroughs and there is no formal monitoring procedure.

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

- Beginning May 16, 2016, the school leader should ensure that all teachers understand what a higher-order question is and that teachers use common planning time to develop higher-order questions that allow all students, including subgroups, to articulate their thinking, thereby deepening their understanding of what they are learning.
- The school leader should also ensure that teachers are giving students specific and timely feedback as lessons progress to develop and reinforce their learning.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school self-reflection document identified limited teacher use of higher-order questioning as an area of instructional weakness. When asked about this, the school leader explained that teachers had not received any recent professional development (PD) training on planning and posing higher-order questions.
- The IIT determined through interviews and observations that very few teachers ask higher-order questions that promote reasoning and reflection and deepen students’ understanding of curriculum topics. In observed classes, teachers typically asked only closed-ended questions that students often answered either “yes” or “no” or with short unelaborated responses. Many students did not volunteer answers to teachers’ questions, but rather than seeking broader involvement, most teachers called upon only the few students who raised their hands.
- In observed classes, teachers did not use formative assessments as lessons progressed to confirm

students' understanding of the lesson content or correct any misunderstandings. Most teachers did not allocate time at the conclusion of the lesson for students to evaluate their own progress toward the accomplishment of the learning objective, and lessons often ended abruptly without a summary of the learning. Consequently, these teachers failed to reinforce the lesson objective by reminding students of the purpose of the learning and lacked data on the degree of student mastery to inform future planning.

- In a sample of student work products, the IIT found that teachers' written feedback to students was vague and global. Teachers did not typically provide specific feedback to students on the next steps to take to improve their work. Although the teacher feedback to students was supportive and encouraging, it was usually not informative and constructive.

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 May 9, 2016, the school leaders and the student support team should:
 - create a data team to focus on analyzing the data that is collected to support student social and emotional developmental health needs and student academic performance; and
 - identify trends and patterns to determine how effectively supports for student social and emotional developmental health needs are removing barriers to learning for all students, including subgroups.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The self-reflection document stated that school staff need to analyze the behavioral and academic data collected to inform decision making about the school's social-emotional developmental health programs and services. In interviews, school leaders stated that although data are collected, the school lacks procedures and protocols for using these data to direct and monitor the student support team.
- The school leader stated that she conducts a weekly clinical meeting during which staff and teachers use achievement, attendance, and behavioral data to identify struggling students and design supportive services for them. However, reviewers found no formal procedures to assess the effectiveness of these services and make necessary modifications to ensure that they are removing barriers to student success.
- In interviews, student support team members described the Sanctuary Model of community meetings during which students discuss their feelings and goals and learn who they can go to for assistance. During an observation of one of these sessions, students behaved sensibly and maturely because the teacher had high expectations regarding all students taking part and being respectful to others. Both student support team members and the school leader stated that the school does not have a data team, so lacks the capacity to complete a formal analysis to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the Sanctuary Model, which includes an anti-bullying component.
- There is no evidence that PD on students' social-emotional development health needs is appropriately

focused and effective in removing barriers to learning and increasing student success. This is because school leaders and staff do not analyze student performance data to identify trends and patterns.

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 June 3, 2016, the school leader should direct the Community School Initiative project director, in consultation with the Clinical Team, to organize focused monthly parent workshops that inform parents about:
 - the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the readiness of every student, including all subgroups, for college and career; and
 - supports available for students’ social and emotional developmental health needs that remove barriers to learning.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader stated the need to build stronger family-school relationships. However, according to documentation, PD for teachers has focused on reading and writing training, and there is no evidence of training for staff and parents on creating and sustaining a productive home-school partnership.
- In interviews, parents described evening presentations on curriculum domains such as science. However, the school leader and parents said there were few workshops to help parents learn about the CCLS and ways to help their children at home. Some parents expressed the view that they were not prepared to help their children at home because they were unfamiliar with certain aspects of the curriculum, especially mathematics. Additionally, parents expressed limited understanding of the importance of their children being college and career ready.
- Some parents said that support staff and teachers informed them about social-emotional developmental health support services during discussions about their children. However, reviewers found little evidence to show that school leaders and staff routinely inform all parents of available programs and services or empower families to take action by being supportive and involved in their children’s learning.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO ADDRESS

- There is too little specific provision for the needs of subgroups in teachers’ instructional plans; and the school environment does not fully represent the culture of the diverse subgroups within the school community, especially the students enrolled in the dual-language program. For example, reviewers found little evidence of signs and information in Spanish on classroom walls. In the future, the school leader should focus more explicitly on the needs of the different subgroups within the school.
- School goals are not Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Results-oriented, and Timely (SMART). In the future, the school leader will need to express school priorities as SMART goals that staff can readily measure to show school improvement.