



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

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS (DTSDE)



BEDS Code	421800010011
School Name	Meachem Elementary School
School Address	171 Spaulding Avenue, Syracuse New York 13205
District Name	Syracuse City School District
School Leader	Ms. Kathryn Moulton
Dates of Visit	November 29 – December 1, 2017
Date of Return Visit	TBD
School Accountability Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Priority School
Type of Visit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SED Integrated Intervention Team (IIT)



School Information Sheet for Meachem Elementary School

School Configuration (2017-18 data)					
Grade Configuration	PK-5	Total Enrollment	400	SIG Recipient	YES
Types and Number of English Language Learner Classes (2017-18)					
# Transitional Bilingual	0	# Dual Language	0	# Self-Contained English as a Second Language	0
Types and Number of Special Education Classes (2017-18)					
# Special Classes	2	# SETSS	6	# Integrated Collaborative Teaching	0
Types and Number of Special Classes (2017-18)					
# Visual Arts	1	# Music	3	# Drama	0
# Foreign Language	0	# Dance	0	# CTE	0
School Composition (most recent data)					
% Title I Population		57.3	% Attendance Rate		93.7
% Free Lunch		56.5	% Reduced Lunch		0.8
% Limited English Proficient		0.3	% Students with Disabilities		22.5
Racial/Ethnic Origin (most recent data)					
% American Indian or Alaska Native		2.0	% Black or African American		62.5
% Hispanic or Latino		6.8	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		2.3
% White		15.5	% Multi-Racial		11.0
Personnel (most recent data)					
Years Principal Assigned to School		2	# of Assistant Principals		1
% of Teachers with No Valid Teaching Certificate		0.0	% Teaching Out of Certification		0.0
% Teaching with Fewer Than 3 Years of Experience		2.9	Average Teacher Absences		7.9 (2016-17 data)
Student Performance for Elementary and Middle Schools (2016-17)					
ELA Performance at levels 3 & 4		8.5	Mathematics Performance at levels 3 & 4		15.2
Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (4th Grade)		70.6	Science Performance at levels 3 & 4 (8th Grade)		N/A
Overall NYSED Accountability Status					
Priority School		X	Local Assistance Plan		
Focus School (indicate subgroups identified below)			In Good Standing		
Focus School Identified Subgroups	N/A				
<p>SCHOOL PRIORITIES AS WRITTEN BY THE SCHOOL:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mastering Personalized Learning 2. Consistently Implementing EDI 3. Maximizing Resources Through Co-Teaching <p>These priorities will strengthen instructional practices, which will increase student achievement on state and local assessments.</p>					

Purpose of the visit

This school was identified as needing additional support by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). As a result of this identification, NYSED arranged for an Integrated Intervention Team (IIT) to visit the school.

The purpose of this visit is to provide the school with feedback to assist the school in its improvement efforts 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. The areas of feedback may include 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 visit

- The visit was led by an Outside Educational Expert (OEE) and a representative from NYSED. The team also included a district representative, a priority school consultant, and a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) representative.
- The team visited a total of 66 classrooms during the three-day visit.
- The OEE visited eight classrooms with the school leader during the visit.
- Team members conducted focus groups with students, staff, and parents.
- Team members examined documents provided by the school, including curriculum maps, lesson plans, schoolwide data, teacher feedback, and student work.
- In advance of the visit, 17 staff members (49 percent) completed a DTSDE pre-visit survey conducted by NYSED.

SUCCESSSES WITHIN THE SCHOOL THAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD BUILD UPON:

1. The combined actions of school leaders and staff have led to a decrease in the number of student disciplinary referrals from 500 to 200 over the past two years. School data shows that the school is on track to continue this reduction in the 2017-18 school year. Students and family members shared with the IIT that they believe the school is a safe place. The school uses the PAX Good Behavior Game model for Tier 1 behavioral interventions in conjunction with its positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) program. According to the students and staff members interviewed by the IIT, a schoolwide implementation of these approaches has led to greater consistency in teacher behaviors and a calmer learning environment for students.
2. School leaders and staff have recognized the need to add counseling services for students and family members who may need additional social and emotional support. As a result, the school has formed a partnership with The Family Center, which offers therapy services for individuals, families, and children. Although in its early stages, staff and school stakeholders spoke positively about the impact the collaboration has made. They believe that this partnership will allow the school to better meet the social and emotional needs of its students and families.
3. In past years, it has been difficult for leaders to schedule school intervention team meetings at times when teachers are available to attend. As a result, the school leader has put in place a protocol that requires a member of the intervention team to meet with the student's teacher before the meeting to

collect detailed written information to inform the team's discussion. According to the school leader, teachers, and intervention team members, this new protocol has been helpful in gathering useful information about referred students. Additionally, the school has moved intervention team meetings to Monday mornings, a meeting time during which more teachers are available to participate. Interviewed teachers believe that their participation in these meetings allows for the team to better understand the needs of these students and make decisions that better meet their academic and social and emotional 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:

By December 18, 2017, the school leader should ensure that English language arts (ELA) teachers will plan and teach at least two lessons each week in which current assessment data have been analyzed and targeted instructional interventions have been developed based on individual student needs.

The school leader should monitor this practice weekly, through lesson plan reviews and informal classroom walkthroughs. The school leader should provide explicit formative and actionable written feedback to ensure that the teachers are performing this practice at the level of quality that she seeks.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader provides verbal and written feedback to teachers through use of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) protocol and informal classroom walkthrough visits. The IIT found that some of the feedback was helpful, such as a school leader recommendation that a teacher attend a specific training or suggestions about strategies to link the common core learning standards to the lesson content. The school leader also used feedback effectively to ask teachers to reflect on their professional practice by posing questions such as, "What would have been a better question to ask?" However, the IIT found that much of the written feedback was a log of classroom observations that did not typically draw a clear picture of what the teacher needed to do to better meet the school leader's expectations for the implementation of high quality instruction.
- The school leader stated that she may not have provided clear guidance about the instructional strategies that she expects teachers to use, which may have led to inconsistent practices in some classrooms. As a result, the school leader believes that some teachers may not understand how they should be using data to personalize student learning plans. For example, teachers interviewed by the IIT acknowledged that not all teachers have a clear understanding of when they should be using scaffolding as opposed to differentiation supports. The IIT found that while some teachers may believe that they are meeting expectations for planning and instruction, they are not actually planning and delivering lessons using the strategies that the school leader has prioritized.
- The school leader and interviewed teachers stated that the school leader regularly checks to ensure that teachers complete lesson plans. However, she does not provide feedback on reviewed plans to let staff know if they are completing them using the strategies and the degree of quality desired, particularly in the case of using student performance data to drive personalized learning. For example, the IIT found

that many teachers do not explicitly link the use of data to the grouping of students or to the planning of differentiated activities for student groups.

- An IIT analysis of feedback to teachers showed that the school leader does not always provide formative and actionable feedback related specifically to data-driven instruction, which is one of the school's main instructional initiatives. Much of the instruction observed by the IIT was not well enough matched to the learning needs of the students because few teachers used student performance data to inform lesson plans that included personalized instructional strategies for all 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 December 18, 2017, English language arts (ELA) teachers should plan two lessons per week in which current assessment data have been analyzed and targeted instructional interventions have been developed based on individual student learning needs.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The proficiency rates for the school's New York State (NYS) English language arts (ELA) Regents exam decreased from 12 percent in 2015-16 to eight percent in 2016-17. The school leader and teachers said they could not determine a definitive cause for the decrease, but the school leader believes it was mainly due to teachers' limited use of student performance data to inform the planning of lessons accurately matched to the learning needs of students. As a result, school leaders and staff are focusing their attention in the 2017-18 school year on increasing the use of student performance data to plan lessons that provide opportunities for personalized learning, particularly in ELA classes. The school leader believes that this initiative will improve student achievement and increase the number of students graded as proficient on the NYS ELA assessments.
- The school leader stated that she expects teachers to use student data as the rationale to group their students, as well as to inform decisions about what these groups will be taught based on their individual learning needs and skill deficiencies. However, an IIT analysis of teacher planning showed that while lesson plans often included references to different student groups, no specific data was used to justify the grouping decisions.
- The IIT found that teachers do not typically take the personalized learning needs of students into account when planning lessons and learning activities. For example, in many of the lesson plans analyzed by the IIT, teachers placed students in groups at a high, middle, or low level based on the results of recent classroom or standardized assessments. However, since each group then rotated through the same learning stations in each class, all students eventually completed the same tasks at every level, regardless of their level of achievement. Additionally, the school leader stated that some teachers struggle with modifying curricula to meet the needs of students. Several teachers acknowledged that many teachers do not have a clear understanding of how to differentiate instruction for all learners.

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 December 18, 2017, English language arts (ELA) teachers should teach at least two lessons in which current assessment data have been analyzed and targeted instructional interventions have been developed based on individual student needs.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The IIT found that in the classrooms visited, teachers often organized students into high, middle, and low ability groups. Although this was a regular practice, it did not typically lead to either sufficiently challenging learning experiences or to instruction that was accurately matched to the learning needs of the students based on their respective ability levels. Teachers interviewed by the IIT stated that the use of data to instruct students through personalized learning was still a work in progress. Many stated that they still need to learn how to deliver activities that meet the learning needs of different groups of students through more challenging tasks or different work based on each child’s needs.
- Despite the school’s initiative to provide personalized learning experiences for all students, the IIT found that this is not taking place with sufficient frequency in most classrooms. Students interviewed by the IIT stated that in most classes, even if grouped with other students of similar ability levels, teachers do not provide each group with unique learning experiences. These students also stated that in most classes, they are taught the same content, in the same manner, as all other student groups.

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 January 3, 2018, to more effectively support students that have the greatest social, emotional, and behavioral needs, the school leader and/or designees should teach all staff members a strategy each month that they can use to better support these students, including those suffering from trauma.

The school leader will then monitor these practices through classroom visits and provide feedback to the staff members to ensure that they are delivering these strategies in the most effective manner possible.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The school leader and staff have implemented the PAX Good Behavior Game model for Tier 1 behavioral interventions, in conjunction with PBIS, to encourage a consistent approach to the development of classroom behavioral norms. However, in discussion with the IIT, the members of the intervention team shared that staff in the school are struggling to meet the social and emotional needs of students who require more specific interventions. The school leader and members of the school intervention team stated that they currently have more than a dozen students with significant social, emotional, and/or

behavioral needs, and they are not sure if the interventions they are providing at the Tier 1 level are having the impact that they seek. Members of the intervention team and the school leader explained that teachers have not been trained in strategies that would specifically benefit students suffering from trauma and other higher-order social and emotional issues. As a result, these staff believe that not all students' needs are being met at the classroom level. Teachers, intervention team members, and school leaders stated that unless teachers and staff incorporate strategies to help these students have more success in their Tier 1 classroom environment, the more intensive needs of students struggling to manage their behaviors in the general education classroom will not always be met.

- Members of the intervention team, the school leader, and teachers stated that while some students suffer from trauma, staff members have not been trained in trauma-informed care, which helps staff identify students who may be suffering from trauma and provide them with interventions and supports that take their specific needs into account. As a result, teachers may not be able to identify and meet the needs of students in the general education classroom environment who are suffering from trauma or be able to arrange placements in settings where their social and emotional needs can be addressed.

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 January 10, 2018, the school leader should ensure that each week, teachers call five different families to provide information on their child's academic progress. Teachers should provide families with a support strategy based on the child's academic data and on a skill that the child needs, which the family can use at home to help their child grow academically.

The school leader should monitor these calls through a call log, which should detail who was called, when they were called, and what strategy was discussed.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- While the school leader checks that each teacher has made telephone calls to at least five families each week, she has not yet shared expectations as to what these calls should accomplish. For example, it is not clear whether all families, or just a proportion of the families, should receive a call over a specified time. As a result, some interviewed family members stated that they have yet to receive a call from their child's teacher. Some teachers stated that they make calls to family members when there is an academic or behavioral issue concerning the child, but not necessarily to share academic information or to encourage family support in a proactive manner.
- The school leader expects each teacher to send home weekly reports on the academic progress of each student. However, through interviews with family members, the IIT found that in some cases this does not occur. Family members also reported that they are often not provided with information regarding their child's academic needs, and as a result, they do not always know about strategies they could be using at home to help their child. Some family members stated that if they contact their child's teacher to ask about how they can help at home, the teacher will provide them with specific strategies. However, many families stated that they must initiate the conversation to obtain this information.

- Most family members stated that there is a lack of information available at the school to help them understand what the assessment data they receive tells them about their child’s academic progress. These parents said there is also little guidance regarding instructional strategies they can use at home to help their child. Though each child has a data folder that contains some of their recent ELA and math test scores, there is no additional information provided to help parents understand what the data means or the next steps they could take to help their child at home.

SUBGROUP SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for Students with Disabilities:

By December 18, 2017, special education teachers should implement the use of three formative assessments in their daily lessons, especially in classrooms with students with disabilities, by using overt checks for understanding (i.e., whiteboards, calling non-volunteers, pair-share, response cards) approximately every five minutes to uncover student misconceptions and allow for real-time feedback and re-teaching when necessary. This information should lead teachers to reteach the material for students who not did learn what was taught the first time.

Rationale that led to the recommendation:

- The IIT found little evidence showing that formative assessments are frequently used in classes containing students with disabilities. The IIT found that special education teachers pose questions to the class, but do not typically engage all students, including students with disabilities, by choosing non-volunteers, partaking in pair-share activities, completing exit tickets, or utilizing individual white boards to quickly assess the understanding of the entire class. These teachers typically rely instead on questioning the few students who raise their hands to demonstrate their understanding. As a result, the IIT found that special education teachers may not always know what proportion of the class understands what was just taught and may not reteach aspects of the lesson that some students need to learn to meet the classroom objective.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO ADDRESS

- The IIT found, through lesson plans examined and classrooms visited, that teachers typically ask low-level questions that do not challenge students to think at high cognitive levels. Additionally, many tasks require students to solve simple problems that have only one correct answer or complete work that they already know. Additionally, the school leader and teachers stated that some teachers do not modify curricula to make learning objectives and tasks at higher cognitive levels accessible for all students. In the future, the school leader will need to ensure that teachers plan and ask students higher level, cognitively challenging questions and plan rigorous tasks that require students to solve complex problems that have more than one right answer.
- The IIT found that typically teachers’ written feedback to students was very general in nature and did not explicitly inform students about the skills they needed to improve upon to perform at a higher level. Oftentimes, the feedback was only a grade or a comment such as a reminder to include a punctuation mark. Additionally, the school has a new initiative in which students have data folders that contain performance data. However, students interviewed by the IIT stated that teachers set the goals in their folders, and in most every case, these students were not certain of the specific skills they needed to

improve upon to meet their goals or how close they were to achieving them. In the future, the school leader will need to ensure that the feedback teachers provide to students is formative and actionable, and that teachers regularly conference with students to discuss their data folders and determine the specific skills that each child needs to improve upon to meet their goals.