

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

Final Report



BEDS Code	660900010023
School Name	Benjamin Turner Middle School
School Address	624 S 3rd Avenue, Mt. Vernon, NY 10550
District Name	Mount Vernon City School District
Principal	Rodney McBride
Dates of Visit	January 8, 2020

NYSED Representative	N/A
Outside Educational Expert (OEE)	Dr. Monica George-Fields
Assistant Superintendent	Dr. Waveline Bennett-Conroy
Standards Administrator of English as a New Language and World Languages	Dr. Marguerite Circello
	Dr. Joyce Corpas



Purpose Of The Visit

This New York State Education Department (NYSED) had identified this school as a School in Good Standing. The district provided support to the school by conducting an on-site Conceptual Frame Review. The visit will help the school identify areas of need that are making long-term success a challenge and provide several recommendations that with the school's commitment to continuous improvement are achievable.

The report provides a critical lens to help the school best focus its efforts.

School Identification Status

The school has been identified as needing Targeted Support and Improvement for the following subgroups:

Information About The Visit

- The team included a district representative and a district consultant.
- **Dr. Monica George-Fields** served as the lead reviewer on the district-led team.
- The team visited a total of **18** classrooms during the visit.
- The Lead Reviewer visited **3** classrooms with the principal during the visit.
- Team members conducted interviews with the principal.
- Team members examined documents provided by the school, including teacher feedback and student work.

Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:

1. The school leaders and staff members know many, if not all, the students' names, which has led to a high level of reciprocated respect between students and staff.
2. Many of the teachers stand in the doorways during the change of periods, which assists and encourages students to arrive at their classes throughout the building quickly and promptly.
3. Teachers have created classrooms protocols and spaces where students focus on tasks and are ready to work.

Recommendations

The Recommendations below were discussed with the principal before being finalized and were left after the visit for the school to address immediately.

Short-Term Recommendation #1

Area: Schoolwide Systems and Organization

Recommendation:

By January 13, 2020, the principal must meet with teachers and inform them of the non-negotiable components that teachers must include in every lesson plan so that all teachers understand the importance of their planning towards achieving the school's academic vision and providing students with consistent school-wide protocols for approaches to teaching and learning.

Anticipated Benchmarks:

- Benchmark #1: By January 21, 2020, begin to collect and review teachers' lesson plans to ensure the components, strategies, and instructional approaches foster rigorous instruction and provide immediate feedback to teachers who need to improve their lesson plans.
- Benchmark #2: By February 10, 2020, the school leaders must begin to meet with teachers whose lesson plans do not include the required components and begin to provide professional development support around creating meaningful and robust lesson plans that address students' needs, resulting in fewer misaligned instructional protocols.
- Benchmark #3: By March 16, 2020, the school leaders must use one of the school's faculty meetings to provide all teachers with a refresher on the expectations of their daily lesson plans, which will create a learning environment where every teacher's knowledge about lesson plan requirements are widely understood and honored.

Rationale that led to the Recommendation:

- Rationale #1: During the teacher meeting and conversation with the principal, there was a concise and overlapping discussion and understanding about the required components for the school's lesson plans such as authentic experiences, reading and writing across the curriculum, differentiation, pictures and other videos. However, when the review team members visited the classrooms and reviewed various lesson plans, many of the known components were missing in the written plan.

- Rationale #2: During the classroom visits, the reviewers observed and collected lesson plans whose templates included the discussed components; however, the teachers had not responded to all the sections or they provided sparse responses.

Short-Term Recommendation #2

Area: Curriculum

Area: Instruction

Recommendation:

By January 13, 2020, school administrators must inform teachers that all curricula materials need to align to the district’s curricula expectations so that students have consistent access to appropriate standards- and grade-based aligned materials that support all students’ differentiated intervention and enrichment needs in a manner that provides access to accelerated learning.

Anticipated Benchmarks:

- Benchmark #1: By January 21, 2020, conduct walkthroughs to ensure that teachers are utilizing materials that result in students learning and understanding grade-level content.
- Benchmark #2: By March 16, 2020, the school leaders must continue to monitor the curricula material teachers use during instruction and provide professional development supports to those who continually struggle to identify and use the appropriate material.
- Benchmark #3: By May 18, 2020, the school leaders will identify teachers who use misaligned curricular material because they struggle with creating appropriate scaffolds for students to access the content.

Rationale that led to the Recommendation:

- Rationale #1: While the review team visited classes, they observed that teachers retrieved and distributed many of the materials students were responding to from online resources that did not always align with the grade-level standards.
- Rationale #2: During a conversation with the school leader about the materials teachers were using for instruction, the school leader stated that teachers do not always use the district-level curricula because a large number of students with disabilities have difficulty accessing the material, indicating that necessity of professional development around methods of scaffolding.
- Rationale #3: While visiting a class, the reviewers observed that students in some classes had access to Cornell Notes as their primary source of notetaking and discussion prompts, whereas other students completed handouts that did not require the same level of focus or thinking when compared to Cornell Notes.

Short-Term Recommendation #3

Area: Curriculum

Area: Instruction

Recommendation:

By January 21, 2020, the principal must identify the teachers whose lessons do not embed meaningful strategies of reading, writing, and vocabulary development and begin to provide targeted supports via professional development and feedback aligned to the teacher's Managing for Results action plan so that students have the opportunity to develop their literacy skills across all subjects and lessons.

Anticipated Benchmarks:

- Benchmark #1: By March 16, 2019, the school leaders must assess teachers' lessons and continue to provide professional development and targeted assistance.
- Benchmark #2: By May 18, 2019, the school leaders must provide professional development to the entire staff to elevate their knowledge of methods for providing literacy opportunities across the content areas.

Rationale that led to the Recommendation:

- Rationale #1: The students' reading proficiency is currently at 18%, which represents a 12%-point decrease of students reading at or above grade level. Furthermore, of the students with disabilities, which accounts for 41.2% of the school's student population, only 1% read at or above grade level.
- Rationale #2: According to the school leader and teachers in the response of the school's reading data, teachers are focusing on incorporating reading, writing, and vocabulary across the content area as a method of addressing students' academic proficiency.
- Rationale #3: Although embedding literacy skills in all students' learning experiences is a well-known and understood goal, the presence of all three components in core content lessons other than English and social studies were inconsistent.

Areas of Need to Be Addressed for Long-Term Success

Tenets 3 and 4: Curriculum and Instruction at the School

- Area #1: Since the school has a large number of students with disabilities, which is not likely to decrease, the focus is on developing special education teachers' understanding and skills around Specially Designed Instruction. The school leader should extend the training and expectations to all teachers in the building. This approach will foster a higher level of instructional intentionality and supports to students in every class they encounter and immediately increase students' opportunities to excel.
- Area #2: Due to the lagging proficiency rates in reading and the school's focus on building vocabulary, the school leader should arrange for the district coaches to provide teachers professional development in one focused method for increasing vocabulary study that all teachers will be required to incorporate in their lessons.
- Area #3: Across many of the 18 classes the reviewers visited, the students complied with teachers' seating assignments and groupings and could explain to the reviewer the purpose of the groupings. However, students often sat with their peers, but student-to-student initiated inquiry and discussions did not take place. Conversations between students often were teacher-prompted. The school leaders and teachers must provide

supports to teachers to incorporate strategies to have students lead discussions and freely ask peers for clarification and assistance.

- Area #4: Throughout the school, the reviewers noted that students appear to benefit from a friendly and physically safe environment. Additionally, the teacher team and guidance staff member expressed the methods the staff used to help students develop self-regulatory techniques to ensure classes were safe. However, the skillset students are acquiring are not transferring to the same levels of intellectual safety where students take more ownership of their learning, and teachers begin to release their control of the class by becoming more of a facilitator.

Areas of Need Shared by Stakeholders

- Area #1: Currently, 41.2% of the student population are students with disabilities. This excessive number of students clustered in one school makes that task of maintaining the school's Good Standing status without additional supports, such as a dean and coaches, appear insurmountable.