

Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness

On-Site Needs Assessment

# Final Report



<b>BEDS Code</b>	131500010011
<b>School Name</b>	Poughkeepsie Middle School
<b>School Address</b>	55 College Avenue, Poughkeepsie, New York 12603
<b>District Name</b>	Poughkeepsie City School District
<b>Principal</b>	Principal Mr. Dwayne D'Avilar
<b>Dates of Visit</b>	April 8, 9, 10, 2019

<b>NYSED Representative</b>	N/A
<b>Outside Educational Expert (OEE)</b>	N/A
<b>District Representative</b>	Dr. Elizabeth Ten Dyke
<b>Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) Representative</b>	Ms. Jenny Schinella
<b>Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBE-RN) Representative</b>	Ms. Kathleen Lowell
<b>Additional Team Members</b> (Add rows as necessary)	Ms. Cheryl Rabinowitz

## Purpose Of The Visit

This school was identified as a Targeted Support and Improvement School needing additional support by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Because of this identification, the District conducted an on-site Needs Assessment. The visit is intended to help the school identify areas of need that are making long-term success a challenge and provide several recommendations that can be accomplished and demonstrate the school's commitment to improvement.

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:

- Subgroup 1 Black Students
- Subgroup 2 Multiracial

## Information About The Visit

- The team included two district representatives, a Special Education School Improvement Specialist (SEIS) representative, and a representative from the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN).
- Dr. Elizabeth Ten Dyke served as the lead reviewer on the district-led team.
- The team made a total of 49 classrooms observations during the visit.
- The Lead Reviewer visited 9 classrooms with the school principal.
- At PACE Academy, a team member completed observations in 4 middle school classrooms. In addition, the same team member interviewed PACE middle school students.
- Out of 49 classroom observations completed at PMS, when rated on a scale of 1 - 4 for **Rigor**, where 1 is low, and 4 is high, 37 classes were at Level One, 10 were at Level Two, and 2 were at Level Three.
- Out of 49 classroom observations at PMS, when rated on a scale of 1-4 for **Higher Order Thinking**, 37 were at Level One, 10 were at Level 2, and 2 were at Level Three.
- Out of 49 classroom observations at PMS, when rated on a scale of 1-4 for **Peer-to-Peer Academic Collaboration**, 38 were at Level One, 6 were at Level Two, and 5 classes were rated at Level Three.
- Team members conducted interviews with students, staff, parents, the principal, assistant principals, and the vice principal.
- One of the team members was bilingual, and was able to interview newcomer ELLs (English Language Learners) in Spanish.

- Team members examined documents provided by the school, including pre-review documents, faculty meeting and COP agendas, the vice principal's memoranda regarding school protocols, faculty meeting sign in sheets and agendas.
- The review team requested sign in sheets and agendas from the school safety team, however the PMS School Safety Team has not met since last October (2018) and no sign in sheets or agendas were provided.

## **Successes Within The School That The School Should Build Upon:**

1. Senior members of the staff have considerable depth of knowledge, experience, and deep loyalty to Poughkeepsie Middle School, and PMS students.
2. Teachers and Assistant Principals expressed a strong commitment to collaboratively developing school-wide systems for safety, security, culture, climate, student social-emotional well-being, and academics.
3. PTA members are ready and willing to work with the school principal to make improvements at PMS.
4. During the 2018-19 school year, PMS staffed Department Chairs in ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Special Education.
5. PMS Department Chairs are knowledgeable and skilled.
6. The school corridors have informative and welcoming hallway displays.
7. Teachers were observed in COPs (Communities of Practice) engaged in professional work including, but not limited too, scoring common assessments in social studies, and planning common assessments in music.

## Recommendations

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

### Short-Term Recommendation #1

Area: School Safety

#### Recommendation:

**The School Leader must collaborate with the administrative leadership team, Building Council, the Community Engagement Team, and the School and District Safety Teams to immediately increase student and staff safety particularly in hallways and during transitions.**

#### Anticipated Benchmarks:

- 1) No later than Friday, April 26, 2019, the School Leader and his administrative team will review the district's Code of Conduct, as well as school-specific discipline plans and memoranda, particularly those written and disseminated by the Vice Principal. For the balance of the school year, the plans will be implemented with fidelity, unless the Administrative, School Safety, and Community Engagement Teams deem that revisions are warranted to school-specific plans. If these Teams determine that revisions are warranted, revisions will be completed no later than May 23, 2019.**
- 2) The School Leader must review the section of the PCSD Code of Conduct pertaining to progressive discipline, particularly pages 32-33 in Section 14, "Guidelines for Intervention and Disciplinary Responses." This section specifies that a student's prior behavior history is only one of ten factors to be considered in assigning disciplinary consequences in the model of progressive discipline. In addition, "where a student's conduct is dangerous or threatens the safety of others, a more severe form of disciplinary action may be warranted, even if it is the student's first offense" (32-33).**
- 3) No later than Tuesday, April 30, 2019, the School Leader and School Safety Team will meet with the Assistant Superintendent for Security. The meeting agenda will be to identify priorities for PMS that will improve safety and security at the school. These priorities may include, but are not limited to, staffing, professional development, schedules, and student movement or transition.**
- 4) A second meeting, which will occur no later May 13, 2019, will establish a timeline and identify funding to accomplish tasks identified in the first meeting.**

- 5) **The PMS Safety Team will establish a calendar for regularly scheduled meetings for the balance of the 2018-19 school year, and the 2019-20 school year.**

**Rationale that led to the Recommendation:**

- Middle school students interviewed at PACE Academy stated that they feel safe at PACE academy.
- At Poughkeepsie Middle School, Review Team members witnessed and became involved in breaking up at least three fights on the second day of the review, April 9, 2019. Each fight took place during a transition.
- Teachers, administrators, parents, and students all identified safety and security as an absolute priority for the school.
- In addition to concerns voiced during scheduled meetings, staff contacted team members spontaneously throughout the school visit (verbally, in writing, and by email) to express significant concerns concerning safety and security, and administrative responses to student discipline infractions.
- All twenty students interviewed during the team's visit at Poughkeepsie Middle School stated "no" when asked if they feel safe in school.
- When asked if PMS students are being prepared for success at Poughkeepsie High School, one student referred to chaos in the school's corridors and said PMS students are "being prepared to go to PHS and act like fools."
- Teachers, administrators, and students identified a high level of inconsistency in how discipline infractions are addressed.
- Teachers stated that school-specific safety and discipline protocols have been developed and distributed; but they are not followed consistently by administration.
- The PMS School Safety Team has not met since last October. There is no person, or team, at PMS regularly tracking or monitoring data related to improvement in safety and security at PMS.
- There is a significant inconsistency between the School Leader's interpretation of the district Code of Conduct, and the 2/27/19 memorandum distributed by the Vice Principal regarding discipline. The School Leader stated that PMS follows a model of progressive discipline, and students are assigned the lowest level consequence if it is their first infraction, regardless of the nature of the infraction. The Vice Principal's memo provides for immediate, high level consequences for low level infractions (out of school suspension for being on the wrong floor, or stairwell) that do not follow this interpretation of progressive discipline.

- Students pointed out this inconsistency, observing that students who get in physical fights in school are not necessarily suspended out of school. However, a student deemed to be “trespassing,” by being in a location in the building where he or she does not belong, would receive an immediate Out of School suspension.
- Teachers expressed grave concerns about students who get involved in physical altercations at school, who return to the school the next day, or serve only low level disciplinary consequences (detentions, or a day of in-school suspension). The School Leader denied that this occurs. The Review Team is not in a position to ascertain which statement is true, however the contradictory views clearly communicate significant gaps in expectations and practices that must be addressed.
- Students clearly stated that they want to learn in an environment that is structured, organized, and disciplined, and that is staffed by adults who interact with students with compassion and understanding.

## Short-Term Recommendation #2

### Area: Leadership

#### Recommendation:

**The School Leader will immediately initiate measures to build positive relationships in the school community by increasing communication, visibility, engagement, and positive interactions with students, staff, parents, and the community. He will set the tone for PMS, clearly communicating high expectations and a positive vision, and he will identify and communicate specific, measurable goals for improvement.**

#### Anticipated Benchmarks:

- 1) **Beginning immediately, the School Leader will communicate positive, motivating, and encouraging greetings and messages every morning and afternoon, in daily announcements, unless emergency duties or obligations preclude the administrator from doing so. In such emergency situations, announcements must still be similarly positive and encouraging, even if they delivered by a different staff member.**
- 2) **The School Leader must immediately increase his visibility in corridors and classrooms. On a daily basis, he must communicate positive and encouraging messages to students. This is in addition to the corrective or disciplinary interactions the School Leader currently has with students. Suggested behaviors include but are not limited to consistently smiling, saying good morning, learning and using student names.**
- 3) **The School Leader will support improvement in school culture and climate by conveying similar expectations to all school administrators.**
- 4) **No later than the April 25 CET meeting, the School Leader will collaborate with his leadership team and the Community to schedule student grade level assemblies that are engaging and that encourage and motivate**

students, and convey positive expectations for the balance of the school year. The assemblies will take place no later than May 23, 2019. The assemblies must be culturally and linguistically diverse, and support expanded student awareness of the school's cultural diversity.

- 5) No later than May 17, 2019, the School Leader will meet with all school staff in small group meetings, for example during teacher Communities of Practice. He will invite staff to share positive feedback about PMS, and recommendations regarding "best practices" that should be sustained, as well as concerns and recommendations for improvement.
- 6) No later than the first faculty meeting in June, the School Leader will share a written and verbal summary of his conversations, including a vision for the school, and specific actions to be taken during the summer of 2019, and over the course of the 2019-20, in response to staff recommendations, and which support the vision. No later than the end of the school year, the School Leader will convene all other staff to similarly share his written and verbal summary, and vision.
- 7) The School Leader will meet monthly with the school PTA. No later than the end of June he will share the same summary and vision with the PTA.
- 8) The School Leader will increase his attendance, presence, and visibility at student and community events including sports, service, and cultural events or performances.

#### **Rationale that led to the Recommendation:**

- Constituent groups all stated that they do not have a connection with the School Leader.
- When interviewed by the review team, the School Leader clearly articulated a vision for the school, and he identified quantifiable goals for improvement.
- When asked, each constituent group interviewed by the team cited a different vision for the school, or said they were "not sure" what the vision is. In addition, no constituent group was able to identify measurable goals for school improvement.
- In interviews, students, staff, and parents, said the School Leader's interactions with students are often negative or disciplinary in nature.
- Parents and students asked that the school principal be more visible and accessible.

## Short-Term Recommendation #3

Area: School Leadership

### Recommendation:

Beginning immediately, the School Leader will collaborate with his administrative leadership team, and the Community Engagement Team to improve in the area of timely, coordinated planning for school events and activities.

### Anticipated Benchmarks:

- 1) At the Community Engagement Team on Thursday April 25, the School Leader will present math testing plans for review by the CET. The plans will include updated student accommodation lists, room assignments, proctor assignments, plans for the daily schedule, lunch, students who required additional testing time, and a written plan for organization, distribution, and collection of all math testing supplies. The School Leader will consult with the CET at this meeting. Based on CET recommendations, the School Leader will submit any required revisions to the testing plan to the CET by email no later than 10 AM Monday, April 29, 2019.
- 2) No later than Friday, May 3, 2019 the School Leader will collaborate with school administrators and the Community Engagement Team to develop a comprehensive, end-of-year calendar including all remaining state assessment, all local final exams, field trips, moving up ceremonies, and other anticipated events.
- 3) The School Leader will work with the Chair of the Community Engagement Team to schedule collaborative planning for all spring 2019 school events with the CET. The School Leader will make planning decisions together with the CET, and clearly communicate these decisions with school staff through the school's weekly Panther Weekly newsletter.

### Rationale that led to the Recommendation:

- Constituent groups stated that a lack of collaborative planning and clear communication is pervasive at PMS. This has hindered effective implementation of critical activities including, but not limited to, Second Step, ELA testing, professional work in Communities of Practice and Department Meetings, and the pilot of iReady math, among other activities.
- One group stated, "There are a lot of great ideas, but there is a disconnect." "There is no communication with staff." "There is no follow through—plans fizzle out." "There is no consideration given to effective roll out."
- Evidence shared with the review team demonstrates that the current division of labor at PMS with respect to planning and implementation is not effective.
- Teachers have shared school history and recommendations with the School Leader. They stated that their recommendations have not been honored.

- Teachers expressed concern about critical tasks such as the roll out of Second Step and ELA testing, which were undertaken without clear, consistent communication and collaboration with staff.
- Teachers stated that they want to help with school planning and processes, stating that they “need to share in the logistics.”
- In interviews with different constituent groups, PMS processes were described as “reactive” and “knee jerk reactionary,” often developed at the last minute, without collaboration, frequently changed, inconsistently communicated, and sometimes communicated with contradictions.

## Short-Term Recommendation #4

Area: Culture and Climate

### Recommendation:

**PMS must fulfill the commitment made in its Receivership Improvement Plan to fully implement PBIS and Second Step during the 2018-19 school year. PBIS and Second Step must be implemented with fidelity before they can be evaluated for relevance to the middle school population, and success.**

### Anticipated Benchmarks:

- 1) **The School Leader must clarify and reinforce the expectation that Second Step instruction is delivered consistently on “B days” during the “WIN” period.**
- 2) **The School Leader will collaborate with his administrative team and the Community Engagement Team to identify and plan any additional training or other resources required for successful implementation of Second Step. If training is required, training will be added to the school end-of-year calendar being developed by the School Leader and the Community Engagement Team, as per Short Term Recommendation #3.**
- 3) **No later than Friday, June 14, 2019, PMS will consult with the RSE-TASC regarding the availability of training and support for a fully implemented PBIS program at PMS.**
- 4) **The PMS PBIS team will communicate and collaborate with leadership at PACE academy, to ensure that students at both schools are exposed to similar expectations for culture, climate, and behavior. In addition, students at both schools should have access to similar incentives and rewards.**

### Rationale that led to the Recommendation:

- Student, staff and administrative comments regarding Second Step were mixed. Some spoke clearly in support of the program, and some described it as being better suited to an elementary student population.
- The roll out of Second Step was, according to some constituents, was delayed due to difficulties with access and training, as well as inconsistent and changing expectations regarding implementation.
- During WIN on a school B day, on one grade level, one team member observed one Second Step lesson, however at the same grade level, during WIN, when Second Step should have been implemented, other teachers were observed teaching math.
- The suitability of Second Step for PMS students, and its success, cannot be evaluated if the program has not been fully implemented.

## Areas Of Need To Be Addressed For Long-Term Success

### Tenets 1 and 2 Systems, Organization, and Leadership

During the 2019-20 school year, the School Leader will maintain visibility, relationship building, positive communication, and collaborative planning as described in the short term recommendations above.

PMS is advised to assign an administrator to oversight of the ENL program, including NYSESLAT testing.

### Tenets 3 and 4: Curriculum and Instruction at the School

During the 2019-20 school year, PMS should proceed to develop a workshop model for core instruction in grade 6 ELA, and utilize Read 180 as a Tier II RTI Intervention.

Poughkeepsie Middle School is advised to provide staff with professional development in:

- hands-on learning and peer-to-peer collaboration;
- language supports and scaffolding for English language learners;
- instructional accommodations including scaffolding for students with disabilities;
- the use of formative assessment data to drive the development of differentiated student groups, and differentiated instruction.

Poughkeepsie Middle School must evaluate the effectiveness of professional development provided during the 2018-19 school year in science, social studies, and math, and make informed decisions regarding the extension of that PD during the 2019-20 school year.

The department work in common or benchmark assessment initiated during the 2018-19 school year must be extended and expanded during the 2019-20 school year, in consultation with Department Chairs, the Community Engagement Team, and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

PMS leadership must stabilize school culture and climate, so that administrators are able to be present in classrooms during instruction, to observe and support both teachers and students.

### **Tenet 5: Social-Emotional Learning at the School**

The PMS leadership team must schedule sustained, ongoing professional learning for staff regarding the social, emotional, and developmental needs of the young adolescent learner.

The PMS security staff must receive training in de-escalation strategies, TCI (Therapeutic Crisis Intervention), and the roles and responsibilities at PMS.

### **Tenet 6: Family and Community Engagement**

PMS administrators must meet regularly with the PTA. These meetings must result in collaboratively developed plans to improve family and community engagement activities.

The School Leader is advised to provide training for Pupil Personnel Staff (school counselors, psychologist, social worker) among others, to expand their knowledge of family and community resources, particularly those that provide services in Spanish, and regular communication regarding these resources to families who would benefit from their services.

PMS administrators, teachers, and staff are advised to improve contact and communication with families who speak languages other than English.

### **Areas of Need Shared by Stakeholders**

- PMS leadership (both teachers and administrators) must include their colleagues at PACE Academy in all areas such as professional development, common assessment, PBIS, and so forth.
- Stakeholders recommended a reconfiguration of the administrative positions at PMS. Specifically, the recommendation is for one Assistant Principal and one Dean of Discipline at each grade level.
- One student independently approached the Review Team with a handwritten, three page document summarizing problems with school cleanliness and facilities including, but not limited to, unsanitary bathrooms, broken ceiling tiles and light fixtures, rodents, and vermin.

- Students asked for more hands-on learning activities, more opportunities for visual learning, and fewer worksheets and packets.
- Students asked for a wider variety of lunch choices, and better quality food.
- At PACE Academy, students asked for a nurse on staff; improvements to bathroom facilities including latches on bathroom stall doors;