

**NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
Office of Accountability**

**Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)**

**SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT**

<b>BEDS Code:</b>	14-18-00-01-0005
<b>District Name:</b>	Lackawanna City School District
<b>School Name:</b>	Lackawanna Middle School
<b>School Address:</b>	550 Martin Road, Lackawanna, NY 14218
<b>Principal:</b>	Bruce Axelson
<b>Accountability Phase/Category:</b>	Improvement (year- 1) - Comprehensive
<b>Areas of Identification:</b>	English Language Arts – African American Students and Economically Disadvantaged Students Mathematics - All Students; African American Students; Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students
<b>Dates of On-site Review:</b>	January 9 -11, 2012

**PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT**

“Our vision is to educate and support all of our students in meeting the New York State Learning Standards necessary to graduate from Lackawanna City School District and to become contributing members of the community. The professional staff of the Lackawanna City School District will implement and continually refine a well-defined standards-based curriculum responsive to the needs to all students in order to develop their academic knowledge and skills, educational and career pursuits, lifelong learning and social responsibility.”

**PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS**

- The school is under new leadership. It has had three school leaders in the past three years. The current school leader is highly regarded by staff and focused on identifying areas in need of improvement in instruction as well as in student management. The school has renewed and defined a set of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program actions, routines, and procedures that are generally practiced, with varying degrees of success. In addition, routines and procedures for posting learning objectives and class agendas are evident throughout the school.
- District leaders responsible for instructional delivery are also relatively new. They have come together as a team to address program improvement for the District and their students. They are exploring all aspects of research-based responses for school improvement. They have begun work on a data analysis plan and are focusing teacher efforts on the implementation of the New York State (NYS) P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS).

- Given the new leadership and the dedication of the teaching staff, the school appears to have a renewed energy in improving outcomes for all students.

### **PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA**

##### **FINDINGS:**

- The District does not have an integrated plan to disseminate data to all teachers, analyze or review data, or use data to inform instructional decisions. The District has been working with the Data Warehouse on training for all teachers. The District does share gap analysis reports with the school, but there have not been comprehensive discussions analyzing the data or making instructional decisions related to the data. Not all teachers have received the data. The school implemented Achievement Improvement Monitoring's web (AIMS web) this year to collect benchmark data; however, teachers have not yet been trained on the how to analyze or use the data.
- There is limited evidence that teachers are using common interim assessments, primarily in the form of mid-term assessments. Teachers have not had the opportunity to formally or systematically analyze results of these assessments to inform instruction.
- There is no evidence that special education teachers or Academic Intervention Services (AIS) teachers use progress monitoring data to inform changes or make adjustments to instruction for all students. In addition, there is no early warning system infrastructure in place to look at data related to behavior, suspension rates, or academic performance to identify students who are at risk.
- Matters related to attendance in all schools are generally handled by the District Attendance Office. Attendance staff makes phone calls and conduct home visits to students with attendance issues on behalf of the District. However, there is little coordination between the District Attendance Office and the school in terms of evaluating attendance issues and formulating plans to address the core problems related to poor attendance. The District neither has an attendance committee, nor do school staff collect or analyze attendance data by subgroup.

##### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The District should develop a plan to implement data inquiry teams to provide school leaders and teachers the opportunity to collaboratively and systematically analyze data to inform instructional decisions. School leaders should work with the Network Team to ensure that this initiative is implemented with fidelity. The data and resulting discussions with all stakeholders should be used to inform the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) and to identify professional development (PD) goals.
  - In particular, teachers should be provided time to formally and systematically analyze AIMS web benchmark assessment data results.
  - Data analysis, interpretation, and recommendations of actions should be disaggregated for identified

- The data analysis plan should include interventions that address the academic needs of English language learners (ELLs).
- The District should identify and implement a system for progress monitoring of Individualized Educational Program (IEP) goals. Teachers should develop a tool for collecting data and be trained on how to analyze and use data to monitor IEP goals and inform instructional decisions. Similar tools are available for AIS teachers in AIMS web. AIS teachers should be provided training on the use of such tools.
- The District and/or school should implement an attendance committee to work in partnership with the District Attendance Office to discuss and problem-solve matters related to student attendance. Attendance plans should be conveyed to teachers. In addition, attendance data should be disaggregated to determine patterns or trends related to student performance in the identified subgroups.

## II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

### FINDINGS:

- There is evidence that school staff is working on aligning all curricula to the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning standards (CCLS), including written curricula for all grade levels. There is also evidence that teachers are developing units aligned with the CCLS. The school has pacing guides in some subject areas.
- There is limited evidence that all teachers are effectively using research-based instructional elements and strategies in the classroom. Teachers are responsive to District expectations regarding posting objectives and agendas daily; embedding literacy strategies in lesson plans, i.e., guided notes and vocabulary development; and displaying student work. Observers noted inconsistencies in objective writing and alignment, use of literacy strategies, opportunities for guided practice, and lesson closure.
- There is limited evidence that specially designed instruction is occurring for students with disabilities.
- Special education teachers are assigned to co-teaching classes based, in part, on following some of their students across the content areas and, in other cases, to fill needed assignments. Co-teachers do not have scheduled common planning time. The review team noted that the co-teaching models have met with varying degrees of success depending on the number of years that the teams have been together. In addition, the role of the special education teacher in the co-teaching classes was not always clear. There is limited evidence that students in self-contained classrooms have full access to the general education curriculum.
- The District recently restructured the delivery of AIS. In previous years, all students received 120 extra minutes of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics instruction per six day cycle. Beginning this year, the extended blocks were removed for all students, and only students who were identified based upon NYS assessment scores were assigned to the additional 120 minutes of ELA and mathematics. Both students with disabilities and general education students are receiving these AIS services. There is limited evidence that students are grouped by common need, with deliberate selection of interventions

- There is limited evidence of culturally responsive instruction occurring in the classrooms, most notably in the selection of diverse texts. There is limited evidence of articulation of culturally responsive instruction in lesson design.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The District should continue efforts to ensure that teachers are using evidence-based instruction in all classrooms. It is recommended that school leaders work with teachers on formulating appropriately aligned learning objectives; effectively using guided practice strategies, including cooperative learning opportunities; and implementing closure activities to check for student understanding of the objective. A strategic plan to embed literacy strategies across all content areas should also be explored.
- The District should review co-teaching assignments to determine if it is more beneficial to have special education teachers follow all of their students across the content areas (student driven), or be assigned by discipline areas (instruction driven). In the first scenario, special education teachers are able to better progress monitor their students across all disciplines; the latter model allows special education teachers to focus on improving instructional delivery by pairing with fewer regular education teachers and focusing on content. Both models have merit. The District should research the models, determine which model works best for the middle school, and plan future assignments accordingly. In addition, all curricula for self-contained classrooms should be more closely aligned with the general education curricula.
- The current use of a reading intervention program for AIS in ELA may not prove effective for struggling writers; therefore, writing interventions should be included in AIS services to ensure alignment with the State assessment and grade level expectations. AIS for ELA may require a two-tiered approach, using the reading intervention program for the lowest readers in conjunction with a separate and additional AIS program for students with skill deficits in both reading and writing. In addition, teachers should receive training on report generation and progress monitoring tools built into the reading intervention program in order to maximize the benefits of the software.
- The AIS mathematics program should be aligned to ensure that AIS instruction is paired with general classroom instruction and supports the remedial needs of individual students. AIS instruction should be strategic and include remediation of common weaknesses and reinforcement of concepts currently being taught in the general classroom, while also addressing individual deficits as identified in the assessment data.
- The middle school has a diverse population. The District should explore providing staff with training in culturally responsive instruction to ensure that teachers are meeting instructional and social-emotional needs of their student population so that students from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, language, and ability groups have an opportunity to fully access the curricula.
- The school should clarify its expectations regarding the display of student work to ensure that student privacy rights are also protected.

### III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

#### FINDINGS:

- There is evidence that the school leader observes all teachers based on non-tenured and tenured status, and conducts regular classroom walkthroughs. In both the formal and informal observations, teachers are provided with formative feedback. The school leader also regularly collects and reviews all plan books.
- All teachers are assigned a period of PD in their daily schedules. These periods are not aligned by grade level or department. As such, teacher collaboration is not organized. Individual teachers take the initiative to schedule meetings with other professionals who are assigned PD during the same period. In addition, PD meetings scheduled by school or District administration are based upon teacher availability.
- The school has a Planning Team comprised of the school leader and teacher leaders. The goal of this team is to review school issues related to curriculum, instruction, and student management. However, due to scheduling issues, the team does not have a common meeting time and has only met a few times this year.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The District should develop a uniform, consistent plan for supervising teachers that provides for training of all school leaders and teachers to ensure a unified approach to lesson evaluation. The focus of the process should be on formative feedback for teachers, using commonly understood instructional language. The plan should also include a unified format for lesson plans so that expectations regarding the necessary elements of instruction are also clear.
- The master schedule should be redesigned to facilitate essential communication. Teachers should have common planning time and organized PD meetings. These meetings should be monitored by school leaders to ensure that agendas are structured with a focus on the improvement of instruction. In addition, a yearly schedule of faculty meetings (school based) and cabinet meetings (district wide) should be developed to ensure professional dialogue is occurring strategically on all levels.
- The master schedule should also be designed to allow common time for the Building Planning Team to regularly meet to discuss and evaluate curriculum, instruction, student management, and other necessary issues related to school improvement.

### IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

#### FINDINGS:

- This year, the middle school resurrected the PBIS framework. The use of "Stealer Cash" has been implemented to provide tangible incentives for good behavior. One goal is to revise current practices to include a research-based behavior intervention and support plan to decrease the number of in-school or out-of-school suspensions.

- The master schedule is the product of a plan to use cross-over teachers between the middle school and high school. The two schools are not on the same bell schedule, which makes teacher scheduling less effective. The schedule was not built to provide common planning time for teachers on any organized basis, either by team or department. Lack of time for meaningful collaboration has impacted all aspects of instructional planning. In addition, the master schedule was not designed to ensure that all students have access to needed courses, particularly AIS. There are students in need of AIS who are not receiving AIS services because it does not fit in their schedules.
- There is limited evidence that the school has or uses a guidance plan to support students' academic, social, and emotional growth. The Instructional Support Team (IST) had only met once at the time of the school visit, and the meeting was for the purpose of referring a student to the Committee on Special Education (CSE). In addition, it is not clear what the roles and responsibilities of the counselor, social worker, and attendance clerk are. There does not appear to be an integrated plan formulating how support team members should work together to respond to student needs.
- The review team noted that for the most part parents who were interviewed are satisfied with communication from the school. Teachers, on the other hand, expressed frustration with the decreased level of parent involvement. Parents indicated that they believe their children are safe in school. Several parents and students voiced concern regarding the lack of extracurricular opportunities for middle school students, including modified sports. Many of these activities were cut in the budget due to fiscal constraints.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The master schedule should be redesigned to ensure course access for students and collaboration time for teachers and school leaders. Given the need to share teachers between the middle school and high school, the District should consider aligning the bell schedules. In addition, the schedule should also provide for units of instruction for ELLs based on proficiency levels per the NYS English as a second language achievement test (NYSESLAT) data.
- The middle school should develop a comprehensive student support services plan to address the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. The IST, which at a minimum should include the school leader, teachers, social worker, attendance clerk, and counselor, should be tasked with regularly meeting to identify barriers to student success; develop action plans that address these barriers; and implement procedures to communicate these plans to all necessary parties, with appropriate follow up. Given the large population of students who are economically disadvantaged, the social worker should also have communication with the food services staff to ensure that students eligible for free or reduced lunch have the opportunity to receive proper nutrition regularly.
- Staff should revise current practices to include a research-based behavioral intervention and support program designed to decrease the number of in-school and out of school suspensions. This goal should be explored via the secondary and tertiary levels of interventions of the PBIS framework. In addition, the Inspiring Minds program should continue to mentor and monitor at-risk students.
- The District should review allocations provided for extracurricular activities and the impact of recent budget cuts on after school offerings. Exploration of grant opportunities, e.g., 21st Century Grants and partnerships with community organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club or the Lackawanna Youth Bureau, might be options for enhancing after school activities in a cost effective manner.

- The District should continue to explore the expansion of the Parent Portal via Electronic School (eSchool) and the implementation of a Global Connect system to improve and increase communication with parents. This exploration should include consideration of parents who do not have internet or phone access. In addition, the school should consider translating the student handbook into the major languages of its student population ,i.e., Arabic and Spanish. The District should look to establish partnerships with community-based organizations to cultivate multicultural relationships, e.g., the Arab American Community Center for Economic and Social Services of Western New York (ACCESS of WNY), to improve communication with Arab American families.

## **V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **FINDING:**

- There is evidence of a well-defined CEP that identifies realistic goals for improving teaching and learning. The plan includes PD to address awareness of the CCLS and the capacity to develop instructional plans aligned to the CCLS. All teachers have been exposed to the CCLS document and its framework for implementation and to the NYS Teaching Standards through a variety of PD opportunities with the Erie 1 Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) Race to the Top Network Team Coordinators. The plan also addresses the need to establish and train data teams.
- There is limited evidence that PD is provided to support staff, i.e., clerical, custodial and food service workers.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Based on the long and short term goals established in the District CEP, it is recommended that the District review all planned PD activities to ensure alignment. Every professional learning opportunity provided to staff should clearly identify specific objectives and expectations for teachers in order to effect positive change and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Recommendations include, but are not limited to having the school/District:
  1. ensure District and school-level leaders are equally and actively engaged in developing the curricular programming based on specific needs of staff and students;
  2. identify professional learning priorities and activities based on a variety of data sources, i.e., student achievement data and teacher-effectiveness data;
  3. develop District-wide and schoolwide objectives and goals that will be communicated to all stakeholders; and
  4. identify accountability systems that will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning throughout the school year.
- Areas Identified by the SQR Team for PD include:
  - data collection, analysis and usage;

- culturally responsive instruction;
  - progress monitoring of IEP goals;
  - training on use of AIMSweb;
  - effective use of common planning time and co-teacher assignments;
  - specially designed instruction; and
  - language acquisition for ELLs.
- The District should consider PD for support staff, as appropriate, to support District initiatives.

## **VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

### **FINDINGS:**

- Although teachers and students appear to have sufficient text books and other resource materials, the availability of technology appears to be inconsistent across the school. There was limited evidence of student use of technology to enhance learning during classroom visits.
- The school is in need of upgrades and repairs. Hallways and classrooms are in need of painting; there is evidence of stained ceiling tiles (water damage), loose tiles in the corridors, and exposed plaster. In general, the facilities are fair, but are not "welcoming." Some areas of the school do not appear to be as clean or as well-maintained as should be.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The allocation of technology resources to teachers should be reviewed and adjusted to ensure equity and updated resources.
- The District should investigate the possibility of upgrading and renovating outdated areas in the school. At a minimum, District facilities staff should ensure that all loose corridor tiles are stabilized; stained ceiling tiles are replaced or painted; plastered areas are maintained; and hallways, classrooms, and restrooms are regularly cleaned and painted.

## **PART 3: CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

The findings and recommendations noted in this report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning and the development of the CEP for school year 2012–13. The school should also continue its efforts in the implementation of the following Regents Reform Agenda Initiatives: P-12 CCLS, Data Driven Instruction and the annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.