

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

BEDS Code:	580211060009
District Name:	Middle Country Central School District
School Name:	Dawnwood Middle School
School Address:	10 43rd Street, Centereach, NY 11720
Principal:	Mrs. Linda M. Peyser
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year- 1) - Focused
Area of Identification:	English Language Arts –Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners,
Dates of On-site Review:	November 28 – December 1, 2011

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

“The mission of the Middle Country Central School District is to empower and inspire all students to apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be creative problem solvers, to achieve personal success, and to contribute responsibly in a diverse and dynamic world.”

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The school presents a clean, orderly, and safe learning environment. Students were well-behaved, hallways were orderly during passing time between classes, and staff was welcoming and had good rapport with students.
- A uniform grading policy across all grades/content areas, including eight formal progress reports have been implemented.
- There is an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and an active Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA).
- The school offers extended day, week, and year academic support programs. The school provides a diverse offering of clubs and extracurricular activities for students.
- All students have District-distributed agenda books for parent communication and student organization.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- Formative and interim assessments are not consistently implemented and used to inform instruction.
- Some disaggregation and interpretation of data for students in identified subgroups is available; however, on-going evaluation of student performance and attendance data for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) is not universally used to target interventions or inform decision-making for at-risk students.
- The student data management system provides for student and parent access to student progress and attendance records, but is available primarily in English. Some parents are unable to interpret progress reports and report cards as they are currently written and therefore these parents have difficulty understanding their children's performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Departmental formative and interim assessments should be developed and implemented. Student performance data should be collected and analyzed, with a focus on informing instruction for students with disabilities and ELLs.
- Data disaggregated by subgroup that includes assessment data as well as attendance data should be incorporated in departmental action planning and instructional decision-making.
- Communications with parents who are not fluent in English should be provided in their native languages, e.g., progress reports, announcements of extended day/year activities and ELL Parents as Partners activities. The parent portal should provide options for languages other than English. Communications about student progress should explain student performance data in parents' and guardians' native languages where possible.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- The school is in the process of transitioning to the New York State (NYS) P-12 Common Core Curriculum (CCLS); therefore, the current curricula are not fully aligned with the CCLS to meet the needs of identified subgroups.
- Most grade eight students are placed in Algebra I regardless of past performance in mathematics.
- Although most school staff have opportunities to participate in staff activities, special education and English as Second Language (ESL) teachers are not always available for all opportunities, including departmental meetings in ELA and mathematics.

- Instructional strategies and initiatives do not consistently reflect rigorous expectations and provide access to challenging learning opportunities for students in the identified subgroups. A mechanism to ensure consistent incorporation of rigor and relevance in instruction for all students was not evident to the review team.
- Academic Intervention Services (AIS) provided to ELLs do not integrate English language acquisition goals.
- There is a lack of evidence that all ELLs and students with disabilities “belong” to all teachers who serve them and that the needs of these students are addressed in all classrooms and content areas.
- Although differentiated instruction was seen by the review team in some classes, it was not evident that the needs of ELLs were being addressed through differentiation, e.g., scaffolding and building upon prior language. Instruction was not always in alignment with current second language acquisition research.
- Students whose native language is Spanish and who opt to take Spanish to earn Regents credit are placed in Spanish A. This course is designed as an introductory Spanish course and is not differentiated to meet the individual literacy needs or instructional level of native language Spanish speakers.
- Native language support materials, particularly bilingual dictionaries and glossaries, were lacking in general education classes. Although ELLs are allowed extended time on local tests, students were not observed using other allowable accommodations on local assessments.
- Some teachers reportedly make accommodations to assignments for ELLs so that they are appropriate for individual student proficiency levels, but other teachers do not. Likewise, some teachers recognize and reward effort when students attempt homework and assignments that are above their English language proficiency levels; other teachers do not, and some students are penalized for assignments that are incomplete due to lack of English proficiency.
- In some classes visited by the review team, the following were observed:
 - Some teachers asked higher order questions to make students synthesize and apply learned content.
 - Some teachers, particularly in grade eight mathematics and science classes, included a literacy/language focus in their lessons. This served all students, and particularly English Language Learners (ELLs), in understanding the lesson focus.
 - Many teachers asked multiple students to explain concepts and processes in their own words. This strategy assisted other students’ understanding of the lesson focus.
 - In classrooms where SMART Boards were installed, they were used effectively to enhance teaching and learning, especially in mathematics classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- As the school transitions to the CCLS, school and District leaders should ensure that specific strategies and assessments to address the needs of the identified subgroups are considered.

- The grade eight mathematics program should be evaluated to ensure that students receive appropriate mathematics placement and support to meet individual student needs. Student performance data in mathematics should be analyzed with a focus on appropriately placing and supporting students with disabilities, ELLs, and all at-risk students.
- School leaders should include special education and ESL teachers in core departmental meetings and school improvement initiatives, especially in mathematics and ELA.
- Consistent incorporation of rigor and relevance in instruction across all instructional programs should be ensured and monitored, i.e., during formal and informal observations and walkthroughs. Teachers and school leaders should visit and emulate classroom instruction observed in exemplary classrooms.
- The provision of AIS for ELLs should be reviewed to ensure students are receiving supplemental AIS tailored to meet their language acquisition needs.
- The school should identify and implement effective programs that celebrate and demonstrate respect for diversity and that meet the learning needs of students with disabilities and ELLs.
- Schoolwide evidence-based PD should be provided to support classroom instruction that promotes academic success for all students, with a focus on accommodations and instructional strategies, i.e., scaffolding and building upon prior language, to meet the needs of the students in identified subgroups.
- Differentiated instruction strategies should be incorporated into languages other than English (LOTE) courses to meet individual student literacy and language needs. The District should consider the implementation of a 'Spanish for Native Speakers' course.
- Native language support materials, including bilingual dictionaries and glossaries, as well as study guides and other materials should be used in all general education classes to support organizational and study skills. ELLs should be allowed to use accommodations on local assessments so that they have equal opportunity to achieve success and develop a familiarity with the procedures and skills needed for taking State assessments.
- The school should provide appropriate accommodations as needed across the educational program for homework and other assignments for ELL students. Guidance and PD for teachers should be provided to all staff.
- School leaders should support classroom visitations and use strong teachers as models to build a culture of excellence.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- Interdepartmental communications efforts among ELA, ESL, mathematics, and special education do not consistently focus upon student performance.

- Progress monitoring meetings are scheduled throughout the school year, but do not maintain a focus on the performance of at-risk students or development of action plans to address gaps in the educational program.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should share departmental action plans and curriculum documents at schoolwide staff meetings and across departments to maintain an increased schoolwide focus on interdepartmental activities that are centered on student performance.
- The analysis of data from departmental formative and interim assessments and progress monitoring should be evaluated at departmental and building meetings, with a focus on performance of at-risk students, and plans should be developed and incorporated into the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) to address any identified gaps.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- The master schedule does not support articulation between ESL and core teachers and does not allow special education and ESL teachers to regularly participate in departmental meetings in ELA and mathematics. The transition program from grades eight to nine does not include special education teachers in vertical articulation meetings with classroom teachers.
- Teacher assignments do not always align teacher skill sets with student needs.
- Teacher pairings and content area and grade level assignments for special education teachers in the Integrated Co-Teaching (ITC) Program have changed from year to year based on demographics and budget considerations. Successful co-teaching pairings and teaching assignments have not been uniformly maintained due to staffing reductions and personal leaves.
- The school does not seem to celebrate diversity and high expectations for all.
- There is a need to explore and review appropriate, current resources and PD to support the educational programs and services provided to students with disabilities and ELLs.
- Some ELL students expressed anxiety that some of them would have to attend a different high school than their peers because there is no single “magnet” high school for ELLs, as there is at the middle school level.
- Notices, school signs, etc. in languages other than English were not observed during the walkthrough conducted by the review team.
- It was difficult to hear teachers in some classrooms because of their diction and ambient noise. This was particularly true in some special education self-contained classrooms and resource rooms where there were many distractions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The District should ensure that special education and ESL staff are available and scheduled to participate in planning, data-sharing, articulation and core departmental meetings. Master scheduling should be reviewed to ensure opportunities for ESL teachers to participate in PD with content/team-specific teachers. Articulation meetings of grades eight and nine special education teachers should be scheduled to ensure a smooth transition and appropriate placement of grade nine special education students.
- Teacher assignments should be aligned as closely as possible to their skill sets and content knowledge and student needs. If feasible, the school should capitalize on the current practice of “teaming” teachers and students together. By grouping ELLs and students with disabilities in limited teams, teachers can better target instruction to special populations and specialized PD can be delivered to each team to increase their capacity to address the needs of specific groups of students.
- The District should place an emphasis on the development and maintenance of successful co-teaching pairings where possible. Where appropriate, the school should maintain ICT teacher pairings and teaching assignments for special education teachers and monitor the effectiveness of the ICT Program.
- Programs such as peer-to-peer programs that celebrate and promote respect for diversity and support students through their middle school and high school years should be implemented to promote a school and community focus on academic success, graduation, and college and career preparation for all students.
- The school should ensure that sufficient resources are acquired for all staff to support improvement performance of students with disabilities and ELLs. School and District leaders should ensure that the distribution of technological resources is prioritized, i.e., SMART Boards, to ensure that students with disabilities and ELLs have equitable access.
- The District and school leadership should explore having one magnet high school for ELLs in order to maximize access to instructional resources, provide vertical articulation of the curriculum, and maintain the sense of community that ELLs experience during middle school.
- Opportunities to communicate with parents in their native language should be expanded to include the interpretation of student progress reports and report cards, access to extended day/year activities, ELL Parents as Partners, and a Parent Portal option for communication in languages other than English.
- School information should be provided in the most commonly spoken languages other than English to facilitate student and parent involvement and also be visible within the school environment.
- The school should take measures to address concerns regarding ambient noise, distractions, and clarity of communications.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- While embedded instructional and technical support is provided by teacher coordinators and content chairs, PD is not targeted to address the school's accountability status and the findings of ongoing analysis of formative and interim assessments of students in the identified subgroups. Although there is some evidence of quality collaborative PD practices across the District, there is a need for increased communication and coordination centered upon student performance and the school's accountability status and subgroups identified.
- Although appropriately certified, not all special education teachers possess content certification that is needed to show that they have the content knowledge/skills to address the content-specific needs of students. Some teachers in self-contained classes noted that little support is given in content knowledge and skills.
- Some general studies staff reported that they would like to improve their knowledge and skills, as they would like to use effective instructional strategies to meet the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs.
- Staff are being introduced to the CCLS and instructional strategies to meet the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- PD should focus on District and school efforts to address the school's accountability status. PD should be included in school and District improvement plans and address the interpretation of formative and interim assessments, with a focus on students in the identified subgroups. School and District leadership should create departmental formative and interim assessments and analyze student performance data to inform targeted PD, focusing on at-risk students. A data-driven action planning process should be established during staff and departmental meetings. Assessment data, as well as attendance data, should be shared at departmental and staff meetings and used to inform instructional decision-making.
- PD for all special education teachers should focus on supporting the development of the skills, content knowledge and best practices to meet content-specific needs of students. Leadership should continue implementing the District plan to hire dually-certified teachers as openings arise. Subject-specific teacher coordinators should provide support to self-contained teachers through multiple means, i.e., informal visitations, walkthroughs, and departmental meetings. Support of special education teachers and the ESL teacher should include push-ins by departmental teacher coordinators and chairs to ensure the sharing of curricula and departmental action plans. PD should be provided to support the ESL and special education programs and all at-risk students.
- PD should be provided for all teachers and support personnel in understanding and addressing the academic needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

- The District should implement a plan to provide all teachers with ongoing PD in the CCLS. School and District leadership should evaluate and adjust the use of current programs and provide PD that focuses on the incorporation of CCLS across the curriculum.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- Resources were not consistently available to provide accommodations to address specific skills, abilities, and educational needs of students in the identified subgroups.
- The library/multi-media center is not available for student use after the school day.
- Classrooms and hallways lack a consistent display of student work that reflects the diversity of the community and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school should acquire the resources necessary to improve the instructional program in accordance with school and District improvement plans and the CCLS. Special education and ESL staff should be included in purchasing decisions to better address the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs.
- The possibility of after school supervision of the library should be explored to accommodate the needs of all students.
- Student work that reflects and celebrates the diversity of the school community should be prominently displayed throughout the school.

PART 4: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in the 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 Common Core Learning Standards, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.