Independence High School

FINAL REPORT

New York City Department of Education External School Curriculum Audit | August 2011

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Contents

Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of Independence High School conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being in corrective action under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

About Independence High School

Independence High School (M544) is a multicampus high school that embraces teaching and learning in a small, caring environment with high academic standards. The school is dedicated to assisting young adults as they begin to make healthier and more successful choices. The school offers a multicultural, interdisciplinary curriculum infused with the arts and technology. An advisor works with each student and family to achieve academic goals and set postsecondary plans. Senior internships prepare students for postgraduation opportunities.

Located in Manhattan, Independence High School had a 2009–10 enrollment of 439 students in Grades 10–12.[1] The Independence High School student poopulation comprises 39 percent Black, 55 percent Hispanic, 2 percent White, and 4 percent Asian students. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 67 percent. Approximately 68 percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 9 percent of students are eligible for reduced-price lunch.[2]

The 2009–10 New York State Accountability Report indicates that the African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and economically disadvantaged subgroups did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in mathematics. The school also did not make AYP for graduation rate. The school did not make AYP in English language arts (ELA) for the same subgroups. The failure to make AYP in mathematics and graduation rate for two years across various student subgroups has resulted in the identification of the school as a school in need of improvement (year one) for mathematics (comprehensive) and a school in need of improvement (year one) for graduation rate (basic).[3]

[1] http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Directory/school/?sid=3251. Accessed on August 17, 2011.
[2] https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/25/AOR-2010-310200011544.pdf. Accessed on August 17, 2011.
[3] https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/25/AOR-2010-310200011544.pdf. Accessed on August 17, 2011.

Audit Process at Independence High School

The ESCA approach utilized at the high-school level examines six topic areas: student engagement, academic interventions and supports, support for incoming students, classroom instruction, professional development, and courses and extracurricular activities. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by Independence High School. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school's use.

These reports were presented to the school at a co-interpretation[SM] meeting on June 6, 2011. During this meeting, many stakeholders from the Independence High School community read the reports. Through a facilitated and collaborative group process, they identified individual findings, then developed and prioritized key findings that emerged from information in the reports.

The remainder of this report presents the key findings that emerged from the co-interpretation process and the actionable recommendations that Learning Point Associates developed in response. Please note that there is not necessarily a one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings are considered as a group, and the recommended strategies are those that we believe are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student performance at Independence High School.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, co-interpretation participants determined a set of key findings. These key findings are detailed in this section. The wording of the key findings below matches the wording developed and agreed upon by co-interpretation participants at the meeting.

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Teachers at Independence High School reported that they did not receive professional development (PD) in the following areas: technology for instruction, formative assessments, coteaching, inquiry-based learning, classroom management, students performing below grade level, students with disabilities (SWDs), teacher collaboration, individualized education programs (IEPs), teaching reading skills, teaching content-based reading skills, and working productively with teachers from other schools.

Supported by data from the teacher survey report, co-interpretation participants at Independence High School identified this key finding to be their top priority. A significant percentage of surveyed teachers reported not receiving PD opportunities in the above mentioned areas. Furthermore, teachers who reported receiving PD in these areas felt that the PD opportunities were not helpful or only minimally helpful. These areas were identified as critical leverage points for improving student achievement at the school.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Tardiness and absenteeism take away from instructional time and from teacher and student focus on instruction and learning.

Supported by evidence from the observation report, this key finding describes tardiness and absenteeism as the greatest disrupters to classroom instruction and an impediment to student success. The most frequently observed disrupter was tardiness, with observers noting students entering class late in more than half of observed classrooms. Absenteeism also was noted as a disrupter in 30 percent of classrooms.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

All four data sets indicate that there is the intention among teachers to focus on higher-level thinking skills/instructional strategies in planning and execution of lessons. However, observations indicate inconsistent evidence of instructional strategies and feedback designed to encourage deeper understanding.

Data from the observation report, interview, document review, and the teacher survey report support this key finding. Most of the classrooms observed at Independence High School demonstrated behaviors related to instructional support with moderate frequency. Furthermore, teachers use Understanding by Design as well as formative and benchmark assessments to inform classroom instruction. However, there is inconsistent implementation

of instructional strategies among teachers. Most of the teachers do not differentiate instruction; feedback given to students during instruction did not always seem to improve understanding; and teachers across different subject areas inconsistently promoted deeper understanding of concepts.

Positive Key Finding

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Independence High School offers afterschool tutoring as well as Regents prep tutoring. Independence High School also offers various options to earn additional credits, including credit recovery.

Supported by evidence from the supports and structures report, this key finding shows that various services are offered to academically at-risk students at Independence High School. These include but are not limited to the following: afterschool tutoring, Regents preparation, online programming, and tutoring during school breaks.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the Independence High School co-interpretation meeting, school staff and faculty identified several critical key findings that pointed to issues for improvement. They also identified positive key findings that capture the school's successes and can be expanded upon. Prioritizing these key findings made several themes evident. Co-interpretation participants identified structural issues (truancy and tardiness, as well as new ideas on credit recovery), collaboration issues (a need for more PD related to school goals), and instructional issues (higher-order thinking skills and analysis and problem solving) as priority areas for improvement.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

With these issues in mind, Learning Point Associates developed the following four recommendations:

1. Develop and implement a professional development (PD) plan that is aligned to school goals and focused on subject-area content.
2. Find an effective way to support attendance and reduce tardiness.
3. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.
4. Provide engaging and individualized credit recovery.

These four recommendations are discussed on the following pages. Each recommendation provides a review of research, specific actions the school may wish to take during its implementation process, examples of real-life schools that have successfully implemented strategies, and online resources for additional information. All works cited, as well as suggestions for further reading, appear in the References section at the end of this report.

Please note that the order in which these recommendations are presented does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Professional Development and Collaboration

Develop and implement a professional development (PD) plan that is aligned to school goals and focused on subject-area content.

Independence High School staff reported that they need additional PD in many areas. This recommendation outlines how to create a PD plan that meets the needs of faculty and staff while focusing on areas that will have the greatest impact on student achievement.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Research has found that PD for teachers is most effective and boosts student achievement when it is embedded in their daily work and sustained, as opposed to a one-time workshop model (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Steiner, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Effective PD also provides teachers with opportunities for collaboration, coaching, and peer observation, which allows them to be actively involved in their own development and to practice learned skills more frequently (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 2002). In addition, PD is most effective when it is directly connected to teacher practice and focuses on content (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Wei et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). Content areas should align with school improvement needs and goals to target improvement to those areas.

By refining the process by which PD is offered; ensuring that it is embedded, sustained, and allows for active teacher participation; and focusing the development on teacher practice and content, schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement (Wei et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007).

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Creating a PD plan that addresses both student learning and teacher learning can be a complex task. Professional learning activities should be designed with student achievement as both the impetus and outcome. School improvement goals should be directly related to a review of student achievement data. Subsequently, teacher learning activities should be directly related to the goal of improving student outcomes. At minimum, successful schoolwide PD plans include the following sequential steps:

1. **Analyze student data/conduct a needs assessment.**
   - Review student learning data such as an item analysis of state test results, interim assessment results, school quality review, or ESCA report.
   - Identify areas of low proficiency, slow learning progress, drops in proficiency between grades, and subgroup and gender differences.
2. **Select goals for student learning.**
   - Identify specific and measurable (SMART) learning goals for students.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Public Impact—Professional Development for Educators (Website)
http://www.publicimpact.com/teachers-leaders/professional-development-for-educators

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality—*High-Quality Professional Development for All Teachers: Effectively Allocating Resources* (Publication)
http://www.tqsource.org/publications/HighQualityProfessionalDevelopment.pdf

3. **Select PD goals for teacher learning.**
    - Identify specific and measurable teacher learning goals, directly related to student learning goals.
4. **Select PD activities to meet goals.**
    - Determine what activities will best meet teachers' learning needs (e.g., workshops, coaching, collaborative inquiry, intervisitation, etc.).
    - Consider available resources (time, money, materials) and a range of PD activities; match activities with the needs of adult learners.
5. **Implement PD activities.**
    - Ensure that teachers have time and resources for activities (e.g., research, articles, video clips, coaches, opportunities to observe master teachers).
    - Provide teachers with clear expectations for integration into their pedagogical practice, structures and protocols for activities, and opportunities for reflection.
6. **Evaluate impact.**
    - Develop an evaluation plan.
    - Identify what to measure, how to measure it, and when to measure it.
    - Create a frequent and ongoing schedule of evaluation.
7. **Modify PD plan.**
    - Determine the impact of the PD activity.
    - If the activity achieves or fails to achieve its desired results, modify the plan accordingly.

Sample Professional Learning Plan

- **Needs Assessment.** A significant drop in mathematics proficiency is identified between fourth and fifth grade. Further review of test-item analysis indicates that students did not demonstrate proficiency in fractions.
- **Student Learning Goals.** At the end of the third quarter of fifth grade, 75 percent of all students will pass an end-of-unit test on fractions.
- **PD Goals for Teachers.** At the end of the spring semester, all fifth-grade teachers will demonstrate an improved ability to teach fractions as measured by their implementation of new instructional strategies and improved student learning.
- **PD Activities.** In the fall, before teachers begin the fractions unit, fifth-grade mathematics teachers will meet twice a month to discuss and share new curriculum materials related to fractions and to design joint interim assessments to measure student progress. Teachers will receive the assistance of a mathematics instructional coach. In the summer, review schedules to ensure that fifth-grade teachers have common planning time to meet. Gather curriculum materials and meet with instructional coach to discuss implementation.
- **Evaluate Impact.** Measures of evaluation include (1) percentage of students meeting objectives and (2) staff pedagogy measured by regular and ongoing observations conducted by the school's instructional leaders.

Adapted from *Apply What You Know: Designing Effective Professional Development* (Steiner, 2009).

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Professional Development Plan for New Vision High School (2004–08)

The New Vision High School vignette was the culmination of four years of work. Each year, the school made incremental changes in how teachers experienced PD. They engaged in small, school-based interdisciplinary learning teams who meet three times a week for 45 minutes to develop their own learning plans for the year.

YEAR ONE

The new principal, Leslie Richardson, began the process by focusing on student learning needs and how large schools could be structured to provide a more personalized learning environment for students and teachers. The principal took the following actions:

- Made brief walk-throughs of classrooms
- Interviewed faculty members to collect perception data
- Used faculty meetings for small-group discussion about alternative structures for large schools and research-based teaching strategies
- Formed a team of 10 who visited a high school that had divided into "houses"

YEAR TWO

The school faculty divided itself into small study groups. Each group focused on a specific topic related to a restructured high school format. Topics included block scheduling, advisor-advisee programs, problem-based learning, and senior projects. Each team also was responsible for creating and implementing interactive activities about their topics for faculty meetings.

YEAR THREE

The school faculty voted to divide into interdisciplinary houses that use a modified block schedule, advisor-advisee system, and senior projects. The school offered 5- or 10-day summer workshops on how to teach in a block schedule, problem-based learning, cooperative learning, and serving as an advisor. Teachers were assigned to a multidisciplinary team and a subject-area team. These teams supported and followed up on the same topics offered during the summer institute and conducted problem-solving discussions to help support the desired change. A small team representing each content area attended a summer institute, joined a school-to school network, and attended three follow-up meetings designed to provide support and assistance to the whole school as they worked through this change.

YEAR FOUR

Teams took on the responsibility of forming their own learning plans based on the analysis of student data. The data included state achievement tests, district-based interim assessment data, and classroom projects. Teacher teams created their own learning goals for students as well as plans for their own learning and refinement of expository writing in their classrooms. These plans were reviewed by the administration and shared with other teams in order to promote cross-team collaboration.

Source: Ozarks Unlimited Resources Educational Service Cooperative, 200

Recommendation 2: Addressing Truancy and Tardiness

Find an effective way to support attendance and reduce tardiness. Implement school-, family-, and community-focused approaches to reduce truancy and increase student engagement, improve scholastic behavior, and promote academic success.

As a transfer school, Independence High School struggles with truancy and tardiness on a daily basis. Improving overall attendance and reducing tardiness are two of the most critical steps Independence High School can take to improve achievement. This recommendation gives suggestions on how to reverse the current trends.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Truancy has been identified as one of the 10 major problems in U.S. schools (Rohrman, 1993). In New York City's public school system, 99,635 students, approximately 10 percent of the entire population, were absent on any given day during the 2009–10 academic year.

The consequences of truancy are serious and numerous. Truancy, whether for a full school day or isolated to individual class periods during the day, is often one of the first and best indicators of academic failure, suspension, and expulsion (Trujillo, 2006). Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates, and because truants are the youth most likely to drop out of school, they have high dropout rates, as well (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). Furthermore, truant youths often are absent from school for such a long time that it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to catch up. "This leads to further disengagement from school, from teachers and ultimately can lead to serious antisocial behavior like juvenile delinquency" (Gonzales, Richards, & Harmacek, 2002). Truancy has been linked to serious delinquent activity in youth and to significant negative behavior and characteristics in adults, such as substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activities (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Garry, 1996; Rohrman, 1993; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995). These studies provide convincing evidence that educators and researchers need to take seriously the issue of student absenteeism and the need to improve attendance (Trujillo, 2006). After all, research indicates that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests (Lamdin, 1996; Myers, 2000) and that schools with better rates of student attendance tend to have higher passing rates on standardized achievement tests (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, 1991).

Improving student attendance at school requires a holistic approach that addresses school and classroom factors, as well as factors outside of school. Several school characteristics and classroom practices are predictive of student attendance rates. Student perceptions of the classroom or teacher as chaotic, uncaring, or boring are associated with student absenteeism and truancy (Duckworth & de Jung, 1989; Roderick et al., 1997). By contrast, attendance is better, even in high-poverty schools, if there are quality teachers, courses, and extracurricular offerings (Eskenazi, Eddins, & Beam, 2003). Schools and teachers, however, cannot solve attendance problems alone.

Educators have a responsibility to help families and communities become involved in reducing student absenteeism. Studies show that when schools develop programs of school, family, and community partnerships, they have higher levels of parent involvement (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2003b; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004),

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Reports and Publications From the National Center for School Engagement (Reports)
http://www.schoolengagement.org/index.cfm/Reports

Truancy Publications From the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Publications)
http://www.ojjdp.gov/search/SearchResults.asp?ti=11&si=32&kw=&p=topic&strItem=&strSingleItem=Publications&PreviousPage=searchResults

What Research Says About Family-School-Community Partnerships (Research Review)
http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancypreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/WhatResearchSaysAboutFamily-School-CommunityPartnerships.pdf

higher percentages of students pass standardized achievement tests (Sheldon, 2003a), and schools take fewer disciplinary actions with students (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). There is, then, good reason to believe that the development of partnership programs can decrease absenteeism.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Implementing initiatives to address truancy and tardiness is a daunting task, and the strategies presented in this recommendation, while shown effective through research and practice, are large in scale and aimed at long-term change to the school culture. In considering the strategies and practices to address this issue, it is important to understand that real change does not happen immediately and requires sustained focus. In light of this, Independence High School staff should seek a tiered approach to any of the research-based practices, implementation considerations, and examples from the field.

This tiered approach should start with simple, smaller scale activities that can generate "quick wins" for the school. The purpose behind this initial pursuit of quick wins is multifaceted. First, quick wins are still wins, regardless of their size. In addition, quick wins, partnered with the school's best efforts to publicize the positive changes, can build community buy-in and enthusiasm toward greater efforts and changes down the line. Furthermore, large-scale, long-term change requires significant, sustained momentum; starting that process with quick wins initiates that momentum. The school should continue to identify opportunities for quick wins to maintain and/or inject momentum throughout the course of bigger changes that require more time and sustained attention.

1. **Involve parents/guardians and family members.**

   Involving parents or guardians and family members in truancy prevention and intervention is critical. There is a large body of research demonstrating the positive outcomes associated with increased parent or guardian involvement in school activities, including improved academic achievement and reduced likelihood of dropout. Involving parents or guardians in truancy programming is more than simply inviting their attendance at a school meeting. True participation means that parents or guardians are sought after for their advice, experience, and expertise in the community, as clients of our public system of care, and in their children's lives. This means engaging parents/guardians as a natural course of events, not just when things are not going well (National Center for School Engagement [NCSE], 2007).

   According to the NCSE, to be meaningfully engaged, parents must have access to information and be empowered to act on it. Parents must be able to work with school staff to promote student achievement, close the achievement gap, and reduce the dropout rate. Therefore, parents also must be involved in the decision making at their school.

   Meaningful parent involvement should meet all of the following National Standards for Parent or Family Involvement Programs (developed by the National PTA through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, based on the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce Epstein from the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University):

- **Communicating:** Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- **Parenting:** Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- **Student learning:** Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- **Volunteering:** Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- **School decision making and advocacy:** Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- **Collaborating with the community:** Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. (Epstein, 2001)

Potential Quick Wins: Implement a system in which teachers call parents/guardians of students who have missed more than two days in a given week. Include monitoring of these logs with existing attendance data review, and allow teachers to use some of their dedicated planning, supervision, and/or professional learning time to place these calls.

2. **Collaborate with the community.**

It is important to identify and use community resources and services to strengthen schools, families, and student learning and development. Although students' school-community link is the least supported and publicized component of the school-family-community partnership model (Jordon, Orozco, & Averett, 2001), research indicates that the quality of those connections influences children's school learning (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Effective partnerships are based on understanding the cultural, socioeconomic, health, social, and recreational needs and interests of each school's families. Efforts to that end include family literacy programs, health services, English as a second language programs, and vocational training (Espinosa, 1995). In addition, according to the National Center for School Engagement (2007) there is a need for schools to form partnerships with local businesses and law enforcement in order to limit the areas where students can congregate while they are away from school during the day and to have truant youth returned to school.

Potential Quick Win: Request that local businesses and/or community spaces post signs promoting school attendance.

3. **Take a comprehensive approach.**

Effective programs simultaneously focus on prevention and intervention. As described by the National Center for School Engagement (2007), many factors contribute to truant behavior: Youth fail to attend school due to personal, academic, school climate, and family-related issues. A truancy program may be called upon to help a family obtain counseling, to advocate for a family to receive entitlement benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), to negotiate a new school schedule, to figure out transportation solutions, and to perform other more traditional social work activities such as mental health evaluation and counseling services. An effective truancy plan will address these issues; school staff will be prepared to respond to the first unexcused absence of an elementary student and will not give up on the 100th absence of the habitually truant adolescent.

Potential Quick Wins: Integrate data reviewed by the school's attendance team with data reviewed within the departments, and triangulate this data with other academic data. Allow flexible scheduling and attendance arrangements for students taking a portion of their coursework in online, asynchronous environments or through partner schools and colleges.

4. **Use incentives and sanctions.**

   Meaningful sanctions for truant behavior and meaningful incentives for school attendance are key components of promising and model truancy programs. Sanctions, traditionally used to respond to truancy, frequently mirror the punitive steps taken against other undesirable behaviors: detention, suspension, petition to juvenile court, denial of privileges, etc. Incentives tend to be recognition-based, but may include special experiences or even monetary rewards. The critical task is to design sanctions and incentives that are meaningful to youth and their families. Addressing truancy and tardiness as problem behaviors as part of a schoolwide system of positive behavior support ties directly to this practice. For more information, see http://www.pbis.org/.

   Potential Quick Win: In addition to incentives already provided to high attendance students, provide tangible incentives to students who reach tiers of improvement in tardiness and attendance.

5. **Improve afterschool programming.**

   Studies have shown that participation in afterschool programming can yield significant benefits for youth, families, and society. In many studies, the greatest benefits were realized among low-income students. These studies found that youth who were enrolled in effective afterschool programs that included academic support, mentoring, recreation, and cultural/social enrichment often fared better than their peers in a variety of areas. Improved behavior resulting from participation in afterschool programs includes better school attendance (Kane, 2004; Little & Harris, 2003).

   Potential Quick Win: Integrate student voices in developing and setting agendas for extended-day activities.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Strategies to Combat Tardiness and Truancy

TRACK AND MENTOR STUDENTS:

A "daily attendance accountability log" is a tool to help redirect truant students with a proactive approach to time management and attendance accountability. Through the use of an attendance log and mentoring, students are shown structure, responsibility, and accountability and begin to understand the importance of attendance and academic achievement. *Source: Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX*

COLLABORATE IN ATTENDANCE PLANNING:

In Virginia, students and their families come together with the school, court, and community to discuss and implement appropriate levels of intervention, including an attendance contract, monitoring, and treatment. *Source: Alexandria School District, Alexandria, VA*

REENGAGE TRUANT STUDENTS:

Project Reconnect is a court-ordered, 30-day tracking program that reengages students in school. Students use a tracking form that must be completed every hour by every teacher. The form records attendance, homework, and behavior. Students also are required to complete community service hours based on their specific needs. *Source: Warner Robbins Schools, Warner Robbins, GA*

OFFER INCENTIVES:

As a reward, a lunch-time soccer game is organized by school staff for students with good attendance. *Source: Summit School District, Frisco, CO*

PROMOTE FAMILY-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY EVENTS:

A school in California participated in International Walk to School Day in October, during which 200 students and families walked to school together. The school was able to partner with the Nutrition Network, which supplied water and fresh vegetables to the participants. *Source: Schmitt School, Westminster, CA*

EXPAND FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

In addition to attending the standard "parent night," parents and students are required to complete hours toward building community partnerships (e.g., volunteering at the local museum, city clean-up day). These types of strong, supportive partnerships lead to the development of leadership, community involvement, attendance accountability, and responsibility. *Source: Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX*

Recommendation 3: Instructional Rigor

Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

Independence discovered a lack of instructional rigor in its classrooms through the audit process. Many transfer schools struggle with this issue, as the student population is one that has historically struggled, and there is a need to achieve both credit recovery and deep content understanding. This recommendation provides some strategies to increase the cognitive demand for students.

LINK TO RESEARCH

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Doing What Works: Providing Research-Based Education Practices Online (website)
http://dww.ed.gov/

Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Learning (publication)
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/20072004.pdf

Instruction that pushes students to engage in higher-level thinking leads to deeper learning for students (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001; Pashler et al., 2007). Too often, particularly in schools where students are struggling, instruction focuses on lower-level thinking skills, basic content, and test preparation. Teachers of struggling student groups or tracks usually offer students "less exciting instruction, less emphasis on meaning and conceptualization, and more rote drill and practice activities" than do teachers of high-performing or heterogeneous groups and classes (Cotton, 1989, p. 8). Yet this focus on basic skills does not necessarily improve student achievement.

Several research studies were completed from 1990 to 2003 "which demonstrated that students who experienced higher levels of authentic instruction and assessment showed higher achievement than students who experienced lower levels of authentic instruction and assessment" (Newmann, King, & Carmichael, 2007, p. vii). These results included higher achievement on standardized tests (Newmann et al., 2001). It also is important to note that these results "were consistent for Grades 3–12, across different subject areas (mathematics, social studies, language arts, science), and for different students regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status" (Newmann et al., 2007, p. vii).

Teachers need to provide structured opportunities and time for students to take on higher-level cognitive work (Tomlinson, 2003). In discussing the *gradual release of responsibility model,* Fisher and Frey (2008) state that "the cognitive load should shift slowly and purposefully from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility, to independent practice and application by the learner" (p. 2). This process allows students to become what Graves and Fitzgerald (2003) call "competent, independent learners" (p. 98).

There are several steps to ensure that students are being asked to complete this type of intellectually challenging work, which increases test scores and improves performance on authentic assessment measures as well. Newmann et al. (2001) define *authentically challenging intellectual work* as the "construction of knowledge, through the use of disciplined inquiry, to produce discourse, products, or performances that have value beyond school" (p. 14).

Daggett (2005) agrees, stating that all students should be pushed "to achieve academic excellence, which ultimately boils down to applying rigorous knowledge to unpredictable, real-world situations, such as those that drive our rapidly changing world" (p. 5). Disciplined inquiry, which occurs in the classroom, requires that students "(1) use a prior knowledge

base; (2) strive for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness; and (3) express their ideas and findings with elaborated communication" (Newmann et al., 2001, p. 15).

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Cultivate schoolwide high expectations for students.**
   - Align instruction with the New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards. According to NYCDOE (2011), schools in New York City are set to have fully adopted the P–12 Common Core Learning Standards for students to take aligned assessments during the 2014–15 school year. These standards are internationally benchmarked and rigorous; they clearly explain what students at each grade level are expected to know and be able to do. Some schools were involved in pilot programs in 2010–11.
   - Develop a shared understanding of instructional rigor through collaborative curriculum planning, design, and/or redesign. When developing or revising curriculum maps, identify opportunities for formative assessment tasks that encourage higher-level thinking for each unit of study.
   - Through teacher collaboration, develop common student assignments that ask students to perform rigorous and authentic tasks.
   - Through teacher collaboration, develop common student assessments that include rigorous and authentic summative assessment tasks.
   - Monitor implementation of expectations through classroom observations, lesson plan review, and student achievement results on common formative assessments.

2. **Provide PD for teachers on instructional strategies that push students to engage in higher-order thinking.**
   - Provide ongoing PD for teachers that describes the importance of pushing students to do higher-level thinking and provides strategies for how to do so. This training may be provided through ongoing PD sessions and/or support of an instructional coach.
   - Create clear expectations regarding how teachers should implement this PD in the classroom (e.g., one strategy utilized each day as reflected in lesson plans, authentic assessments at the end of each unit).
   - Identify how this PD can be incorporated into scheduled teacher collaboration sessions.
   - Monitor implementation of PD through classroom observations, lesson plan review, and student achievement results on common formative assessments.

3. **Develop examples of authentic intellectual work.**

   The following example can be used to help school leaders and teachers understand what authentic intellectual work might look like.

Examples of High-Scoring and Low-Scoring Measures of Authentic Intellectual Work

The research report Improving Chicago's Schools: Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence? by Newmann, Bryk, and Nagaoka (2001) provides examples of two sixth-grade writing assignments: one that scored high and one that scored low on measures of authentic intellectual work. The authors conclude each example with a commentary of why the assignment received the score that it did.

High-Scoring Writing Assignment

Write a paper persuading someone to do something. Pick any topic that you feel strongly about, convince the reader to agree with your belief, and convince the reader to take a specific action on this belief.

Commentary

In this high-scoring assignment, demands for construction of knowledge are evident because students have to select information and organize it into convincing arguments. By asking students to convince others to believe and act in a certain way, the task entails strong demands that the students support their views with reasons or other evidence, which calls for elaborated written communication. Finally, the intellectual challenge is connected to students' lives because they are to write on something they consider to be personally important.

Low-Scoring Writing Assignment

Identify the parts of speech of each underlined word below. All eight parts of speech—nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections—are included in this exercise.

1. My room is arranged for comfort and efficiency.
2. As you enter, you will find a wooden table on the left.
3. I write and type.
4. There is a book shelf near the table.
5. On this book shelf, I keep both my pencils and paper supplies.
6. I spend many hours in this room.
7. I often read or write there during the evening.

Commentary

This assignment requires no construction of knowledge or elaborated communication, and does not pose a question or problem clearly connected to students' lives. Instead it asks students to recall one-word responses, based on memorization or definitions of parts of speech.

Further examples of authentic intellectual instruction, teachers' assignments, and student work can be found in the following source:

Newmann, F. M., King, M. B., & Carmichael, D. L. (2007). *Authentic instruction and assessment: Common standards for rigor and relevance in teaching academic subjects.* Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from http://centerforaiw.com/sites/centerforaiw.com/files/Authentic-Instruction-Assessment-BlueBook.pdf

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Perrysburg High School

Perrysburg High School in Perrysburg, Ohio (a suburb of Toledo), serves students in Grades 9–12. This school has had success in implementing instructional rigor and self-guided learning.

Perrysburg is the sole high school in the Perrysburg Exempted Village District in Wood County. Nate Ash teaches physics to eleventh and twelfth graders. Ash has taught PD programs at the Northwest Ohio Center of Excellence in Science and Mathematics Education, and at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He acts as a mentor to new science teachers.

Ash teaches physics using an inquiry approach. Students do lab activities and solve problems together to understand key concepts in physics. In each lesson he poses higher- order questions to help his students build explanations: How do you know that? What would happen if we changed this variable? How is this similar or different? Ash uses whiteboards in a number of ways: for group problem solving, representing a phenomenon with pictures, and student presentations.

Each new unit/topic is introduced with a hands-on activity. Ash presents a physical situation to students, has them manipulate the variables, and then narrows down their list of variables to design an experiment. Every experiment is introduced with an open-ended question (What would happen if…? What happens when…?). Students work in small groups to describe what happens with graphs, pictures, mathematical equations, and written expression. When they are finished, students present their work to the class in "whiteboard sessions."

Ash explains how the whiteboard sessions give important insights into student thinking: "We can really see if the students understand on every different level how that problem works or how that situation works. And if there is a disjoint between any of those representations, that gives us someplace to go, that gives us something to talk about, something to work through."

Students appreciate being in charge of their own learning, having the opportunity to challenge their peers, and develop critical thinking skills as they explain their ideas in front of a group. As Ash says, "Students really like this approach because, instead of just giving them the answer, it gives them a chance to explain to each other what's going on. And I like it because all the times that I have done physics problems on the board and gone through the answers, I got pretty good at doing physics problems but my students never got any better at all."

Ash has found that with this approach his students are no longer trying to find equations that fit the problems, but working to develop a deep understanding of the underlying concepts.

Description excerpted from the *Doing What Works* website at http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_perrysburg_52708rev.pdf.
This information is in the public domain.

Recommendation 4: Credit Recovery

Provide engaging and individualized credit recovery. Implement one or more credit recovery programs that flexibly meet students' needs, motivate students, monitor their progress, and include a college/career-oriented community.

A positive finding emerged from the co-interpretation process: Independence High School has strong programs in place for credit recovery. That said, the school failed to make AYP for graduation rate. School administrators know that credit recovery is one area that could increase the school's overall graduation rate. At the request of the school team, we are providing additional information on this topic in order to help the school improve in this area.

LINK TO RESEARCH

"Credit recovery options should be rigorous yet flexible, and should allow students to build their skills and credits at an accelerated pace toward on-time graduation" (Almeida, Steinberg, Santos, & Le, 2010, p. 18).

This recommendation identifies four key aspects of a successful credit recovery program: flexibility, student motivation, community, and data tracking. Each of these is rooted in research and practice. Together, the four work as a system in which strength in one area strengthens the other three, just as weakness in one area weakens all.

The Importance of Flexibility

The program should be flexible so that it meets the each student's schedule, learning pace, and needs. The population of students requiring credit recovery includes students who have missed one credit and those who have missed several. The credit recovery program should be able to serve each of these students, despite their disparate needs (Watson & Gemin, 2008). In addition, students who also are considered "at-risk" likely have home and work-like concerns that affect their ability to attend and focus on school. "Effective programs take a comprehensive approach, not only addressing [...] school credits, but also addressing other factors that prevent students from succeeding" (Watson & Gemin, 2008, p. 15). These factors may include having a child, being a runaway, having already dropped out, rarely attending class, and using drugs or drinking alcohol. Students' learning styles—for example, if they are visual or tactile kinesthetic learners—also may affect their ability to succeed in traditional classes (Trautman & Lawrence, 2004). Flexibility, the ability to adapt to fit the students, also is an important part of ensuring that students are motivated to succeed in their credit recovery programs.

Student Motivation

"Motivating students who have failed in the traditional classroom setting is a key to success for credit recovery programs" (Watson & Gemin, 2008, p. 14). Unfortunately, ensuring motivation can be a difficult task. According to motivational theory, students require two beliefs in order to be motivated: that the goal is both worthwhile and attainable (Ames, 1992 as quoted in Roderick & Engel, 2001, p. 200). After failing once, the student may not see that he or she can succeed. In addition, the student may not see the value of earning credits or of graduation. Unless the student has a high level of self-efficacy, this inability to see high school's relevance may result in a lack of effort (Surland, 2010).

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

NYCDOE: Summer School and Flexible Scheduling Options (Websites)
http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/SummerSchool/default.htm
http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/9EF23CC9-8520-4C55-BE46-8BFD468F0E28/0/FlexibleSchedulingOptions.pdf

Afterschool in New York (Website)
http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateFacts.cfm?state_abbr=NY

Research Review for School Leaders, Vol. III (Publication)
http://books.google.com/books/about/Research_Review_for_School_Leaders.html?id=TxtzewY8aDYC

Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies (Publication)
http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf

Doing What Works: Increased Learning Time (Website)
http://dww.ed.gov/Increased-Learning-Time/Maximize-Attendance/practice/?T_ID=29&P_ID=76

The Need for Community

A college/career-oriented community allows students more time with their teachers and provides a clear goal for students in which their credits matter: life after high school. Learning communities positively affect "student achievement, school climate, school attendance, and graduation rates" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30). Smaller communities provide students with more opportunities to interact with their teachers on a one-to-one basis, which is something students desire. During an evaluation of an online course, students were asked how the program could be improved. Sixty percent said that they wanted "more direction and communication from the teacher" (Oliver, Osborne, Kleiman, & Patel, 2009, p. 42). The community also needs to guide students toward college and career options. This way students may more easily visualize the relevance of a high school diploma. According to a What Works Clearinghouse panel, "a focus on learning and high expectations for student achievement" enhanced the learning community's efforts (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30).

Data Tracking and Analysis

A good data tracking system allows the school to identify the students in need of credit recovery and track them toward completion. The data system, providing it is comprehensive, also can allow for early interventions, lowering the need for intense credit recovery programs (Almeida et al., 2010; Gewertz, 2009). For example, the school could target students with low attendance and provide academic intervention services before the students' habitual truancy caused them to lose credits. Data also could inform the pacing of credit recovery programs, enabling higher levels of flexibility and personalization.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The best credit recovery program(s) will vary by school. Each school will have its own needs and capacity. The first step in optimizing or implementing a credit recovery program is to identify the school's needs, resources, and capacity. Then, based on this information, the school will need to select a model. The model has two main components, most easily summarized in the following questions: When? and What? Finally, the school must monitor its chosen program(s), evaluate the effectiveness, and make adjustments as necessary. At each step, the school should focus on maximizing flexibility and student motivation, while maintaining a college/career-oriented community and including data tracking and analysis.

1. **Identify the school's needs, resources, and capacity.**

   The identification process is twofold. First, the school must examine its student data to find which students are in need of the greatest number of credits. This will allow the school to target its efforts where the need is greatest. In addition, the school should determine what it can and cannot offer in-house. For example, if the school does not have many computers available, an on-site, computer-based credit recovery program would be ill-advised.

   Second, the school should determine students' preferences regarding credit recovery programs. One of the easier ways would be to give students and their guardians a short survey asking when the students could and would prefer to attend credit recovery programs and what the students' interests are. If most students have work after school, an afterschool program would not be the best option for the school.

2. Select a model.

Selecting a model first requires deciding when the program will take place, and then determining what that program will be. Not all of the following options will be immediately feasible for every school. For example, if a school does not already have an afterschool program in place, it would require a school based option (SBO) vote in order to offer one. As SBO discussion and voting typically take place in the spring, the afterschool program may not be possible for the 2011–12 school year. The school could, however, discuss the program in spring 2012 and ratify it for the 2012–13 school year.

Credit Recovery Programs

Options Based on When the Program Will Take Place

Afterschool, Evening/PM School, and Saturday School

This option lengthens the school day or week. Classes during these times may be particularly engaging for students when they incorporate preparation for college/careers (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Pennington, 2006). These options do not take away from and are more flexible than the regular school day. However, students may not attend due to other commitments or a lack of engagement. The school also would need access to the facilities and staff during these times. Finally, these options would require a school-based option vote to implement, as well as an extended use permit.

Summer School

Another option is lengthening the school year. Summer school may take place on campus—a matter that would require a school-based option vote—or at another school with a program. A summer program does not take time from and may be more flexible than classes during the regular school year. In addition, summer programs can make learning more continuous over the long holiday, possibly increasing knowledge retention. However, ensuring staffing and facilities can be difficult for the schools, given concerns such as budgeting and air conditioning. While students can attend off-campus programs, they may not know how to enroll or—having enrolled—they may not attend. If the school opts to use off-site programs, it should provide support during enrollment and check in with students once the summer programs begin.

Trimesters

New York allows schools to restructure their school days and year in several ways, including dividing the year into three terms rather than two. The basic trimester system is three cycles of 60 days. The other system, which the NYCDOE refers to as the 75-75-30 Plan, divides the school year into two long terms and one short term. The short term also may be divided into two 15-day terms. These systems provide time for credit recovery as well as enrichment programs, short electives, and compressed courses (NYCDOE, n.d.).

Credit Recovery Programs

Options Based on What the Program Will Offer

Credit-Bearing Alternatives

Rather than require students to recover their credits by retaking a class, the school may repackage the credit-essential elements of the class within an elective course. This is an area in which knowing student interests and goals would be helpful. The school also may offer credit for community service or internships supplemented with a project, essay, or other form of assessment. While students may find these alternatives more engaging, designing the courses and, in the case of community service and internships, finding opportunities may be difficult. This credit recovery option requires that the school make opportunities for its students, although programs such as Learning to Work and relationships with other community organizations can help.

Virtual Schools and Online Courses

The use of computer-based learning, both off and online, is growing and spreading. New York has recognized the potential of such programming through its creation of the School of One and Innovation Zone (iZone), which piloted iLearnNYC—an online credit recovery and elective program—during the 2010-11 school year. Courses may take place within a single program, in conjunction with online elements (e.g., message boards, video chat), or blended with face-to-face classroom instruction. They also may take place on campus or wherever a computer and Internet connection are available. The most effective courses, however, are those that include student-instructor interaction and individualization, both in program adaptability and student control of content (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Oliver, Osborne, Kleiman, & Patel, 2009; Watson & Gemin, 2008; Witta & Witta, 1999). If the school already has a computer-based credit recovery program in place, then it may wish to increase the student-instructor interaction through a blended face-to-face approach or a message board or other form of online communication. The school also may seek ways to individualize the program through better pacing and differentiation, or by giving the students more control over their programming and, if possible, course content.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Wichita Falls High School

For its credit recovery system, Wichita Falls High School uses the Continuous Achievement Placement System.

The "[Continuous Achievement Placement System (CAPS)] is an intensive credit recovery program that relies on technology delivered curriculum content" (Trautman & Lawrence, 2004, p. 1).

In order to combat its dropout rate, Wichita Falls High School (WFHS) decided to provide credit recovery through CAPS. Rather than just provide students with online content, in this case the American Education Corporation's A+nyWhere Learning System (A+LS), CAPS builds a community and culture around the online programming. CAPS operates out of two classrooms in WFHS, maintaining a 20:1 student-teacher ratio. Each of these classrooms contains 18–24 computers. The program is a morning to afternoon (7:45 a.m.–2:45 p.m.) "school within a school" (p. 9), in which students learn at their own pace within a collegial atmosphere and receive personal attention and guidance. While "students primarily work independently," students who are new to the program are paired with successful peers. Students enter the program by counselor referral, though the school study team may suggest students to the counselors. The program is not targeted for students with behavioral problems.

An in-house evaluation of CAPS found that students in the program had better attendance rates than their peers outside the program, and that they earned credits at a swifter pace. Standard education students earned an average of 4.47 credits per semester, while CAPS students earned an average of ten. As for attendance, CAPS students outperformed the standard education students by almost three percentage points (p. 14). The study also found that CAPS "appears to be exceptionally effective for Limited English Proficient [LEP] and Economically Disadvantaged students" (p. 21). The study compared pass rates on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills between LEP students within CAPS and LEP students in the whole state. For mathematics, CAPS-LEP students had a 92 percent pass rate, compared to 59 percent for Texas-LEP students. The difference for the ELA pass rate is nearly as great. CAPS-LEP had a 68 percent pass rate, while Texas-LEP's rate was 42 percent (p. 16). WFHS blended computer-based credit recovery with a personalized community and data tracking and analysis to create a program that fit the school and worked for the students.

Learning Tools on the Internet

Below is a list of some online educational resources that may help schools provide enrichment or additional academic support to students in need. The links are provided as examples of tools available to schools and students on the Internet. Learning Point Associates recommends that schools take advantage of the myriad websites and learning tools available to them, but we neither recommend nor endorse resources included in the following list any more or less than any other similar services. This list represents a small sample of the online tools and resources available; it is not intended to be a comprehensive library.

+ free with paid options; * free for individuals, paid for a group

Online Flashcards

Students may create their own deck of flashcards or download a pre-created deck. Teachers also can create decks for student use. Several services also allow syncing between computers and cell phones. The decks all use some form of a spaced-repetition system (SRS). An SRS tracks students' progress with the cards, ensuring they review cards they struggle with more frequently than those they do not.

Anki (http://ankisrs.net/)

Mnemosyne (http://www.mnemosyne-proj.org/)

Study Stack (http://www.studystack.com/)

Head Magnet (http://headmagnet.com/)

Online Whiteboards

Teachers can use online whiteboards much as they would the ones in their classrooms. This allows teachers to share visual notes with students who are unable to be physically present and to tutor students at a distance. Students also may use the whiteboards to work on projects together.

+Dabbleboard (http://www.dabbleboard.com/)

ScribLink (http://www.scriblink.com/)

+Twiddla (http://www.twiddla.com/)

Stixy (http://www.stixy.com/)

Wikis

A wiki is an easy way for one or more people to collect and link notes. Students may build a wiki together, creating a potentially useful study tool. A wiki could facilitate discussion of class materials and help students organize class concepts.

+Wikispaces (http://www.wikispaces.com)

+PBWorks (http://pbworks.com/content/edu+overview)

Presentations

The Internet offers several means of creating and sharing presentations online. Teachers could share presentations with students who are not able to be physically present and supplement classroom lectures. Students also could use the presentations to revisit class topics near test time.

+Glogster (http://www.edu.glogster.com/)

+Prezi (http://prezi.com/)

+Slideshare (www.slideshare.net)

Brainstorming and Collaboration

The Internet has many options for facilitating cooperative thinking and creation. Students may create mind-maps together or edit a document together in real-time.

Bubbl.us (https://bubbl.us/)

+Mind Meister (http://www.mindmeister.com/)

Google Docs (https://docs.google.com/)

Storybird (http://storybird.com/teachers)

Web Conferencing

Web conferencing allows a group of people to share materials, talk, comment on a presentation, and more. Each service has its own strengths and weaknesses. If students are unable to attend an academic intervention service, a teacher could offer long-distance tutoring through a web conference.

Wiggio (http://wiggio.com/)

+Skype (http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home)

Mikogo (http://www.mikogo.com/)

+Yugma (https://www.yugma.com/)

Video Lectures and Demonstrations

Many professors share lectures and lecture series online. Other websites include demonstrations on a variety of topics. Teachers may pull from these resources or use them as inspiration in creating their own.

Wolfram Demonstrations (http://demonstrations.wolfram.com/)

Vialogues (https://vialogues.com)

*Voice Thread (http://voicethread.com/)

Khan Academy (http://www.khanacademy.org/)

YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/education?b=400)

Videolectures.net (http://videolectures.net/)

Blogging

Blogs are online journals. Teachers may check for updates regularly and leave comments on students' posts. An RSS feed would allow the teacher to check one page for updates, rather than visiting each blog individually. Students could keep an online journal of their study progress. They also could share where they are having difficulties, allowing teachers or fellow students to provide help in the comments.

Wordpress (http://wordpress.com/)

Blogger (http://www.blogger.com/)

Google Reader (RSS) (http://www.google.com/reader/)

Study Groups and Social Networks

Students may connect with others who are studying similar material. The groups are especially useful for foreign language study. A social network is an easy way to connect students with similar needs to facilitate additional learning.

Edmodo (http://www.edmodo.com/)

Open Study (http://openstudy.com/)

Livemocha (http://www.livemocha.com/)

+Yammer (https://www.yammer.com/)

Miscellaneous

Moodle—Open source course management system (http://moodle.org/)

Wallwisher—Online noticeboard (http://www.wallwisher.com/)

Connexions—Course management system (http://www.cnx.org)

Livebinders—Online three-ring binders (http://livebinders.com/welcome/home)

+Evernote—Facilitates online note-taking; notebooks may be shared (https://www.evernote.com)

Google Art Project—Virtually visit several famous museums (http://www.googleartproject.com/)

+Dropbox—An online flash drive for easy file sharing (http://www.dropbox.com/)

+SpiderOak—Similar to Dropbox (https://spideroak.com/)

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Additional Resources for Review

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