

PS 145 The Bloomingdale School

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of PS 145 The Bloomingdale School conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research (AIR.) 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.

The audit focused on access to the general education curriculum for English language learners (ELLs). It examined curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing practices through the multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. Findings in these areas served as a starting point to facilitate conversations among school community staff in order to identify areas for improvement and ways to generate plans for improvement. This report includes an overview of the audit process, a description of the key findings identified in collaboration with the school, and recommendations for addressing these issues. It is entirely up to the school to determine how to implement the recommendations. At the conclusion of each recommendation we have included examples from the field based on the experiences of AIR staff, which we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

About PS 145 The Bloomingdale School

PS 145 The Bloomingdale School is located in New York City, in Manhattan (Community School District 3). The school serves approximately 484 students in Grades PK–5. Nineteen percent of students are ELLs. In 2010–11, PS 145 The Bloomingdale School's accountability status was "Corrective Action (Year 1)," due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for its population of ELLs.

Audit Process at PS 145 The Bloomingdale School

The key findings were identified through an audit process. Data were collected using the following guiding themes as the focus of the audit: curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing. Following data collection, AIR staff facilitated a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 15, 2011, attended by 11 staff members from PS 145 The Bloomingdale School. Staff members included representatives from the administration and teaching staff.

Co-interpretation is a collaborative process that helps school teams understand and use the data gathered by the audit team to generate findings. During the meeting, the following data reports were presented and reviewed:

- English Language Learner Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on instruction of ELLs.

- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 22 teachers, including 16 teachers of ELLs.

The school team studied the individual data reports and used this information to develop key findings about the school's strengths and challenges related to educating English language learners. Participants rated the findings based on the following criteria:

- Is the key finding identified as one of the most critical problems faced by the school and addressed by the audit?
- If resolved, would student achievement improve sufficiently to move the school out of corrective action?
- If resolved, would there be a measurable, positive impact?

In the remainder of this report, we describe the key findings that were identified by school staff as their top priorities, and present recommendations for the school to consider incorporating into its Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, participants at co-interpretation determined a set of final key findings. These key findings, which are based on the voting that occurred during the co-interpretation meeting, are detailed in this section.

Critical Key Findings

These key findings were identified by co-interpretation participants and were prioritized by the group for action planning.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Fewer than half of the teachers are satisfied with professional development formats and experiences, and fewer than half find a variety of topics on teaching ELLs to be helpful. Most expressed a need for more professional development related to ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from both reports. Although the finding indicates that teachers have found professional development on a number of topics helpful, data also show that teachers would like to receive additional professional development, specifically on topics related to teaching ELLs.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

There is conflicting information regarding teaching the same standards and curriculum to English language learners and non-ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from both data reports. According to the interview data, teachers reported that the standards and curriculum they use when teaching ELLs are the same ones they use for general education students. However, according to the teacher survey, only 40 percent of teachers reported using the same standards. Furthermore, interview data also showed that most teachers reported that they modify the curriculum to some degree when teaching ELLs. Staff expressed concern over this disconnect, and wondered if teachers are indeed modifying standards and curriculum, or if this inconsistency reflects a misunderstanding of terms.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Some general education teachers report that they rarely or never consult with ESL teachers.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by data from the English Language Learner Teacher Survey, in which over a third of general education teachers reported that they rarely or never consult with ESL teachers to get support in designing instruction for one or more ELLs.

Positive Key Findings

Positive key findings are listed because it is to the school's advantage to approach its action planning from a strengths-based perspective and to leverage what has been working. AIR encourages the school to realistically acknowledge what it is doing well and effectively and to use those strengths as a springboard for approaching recommendations-based action planning.

The top two positive key findings according to the vote at co-interpretation were as follows:

1. Teachers were observed using effective behavior management in the classrooms.
2. Large numbers of teachers reported they collaborate formally and informally.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with PS 145 The Bloomingdale School led AIR to make two recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process. These recommendations are supported by currently available research and evidence. Resources and references that support these recommendations are provided.

The order does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. Also, there is no one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings were considered as a group, and these recommendations are offered as those that would likely have the greatest positive impact on student performance.

Recommendation 1: Professional Development

AIR recommends that PS 145 The Bloomingdale School review its current professional development plan and adjust it to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of ELLs, including explicit instruction regarding appropriate modification of curriculum.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Research has found that professional development for teachers is most effective and boosts student achievement most when it is embedded in their daily work and sustained, as opposed to one-time workshops (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Steiner, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Effective professional development also provides teachers with opportunities for collaboration, coaching, and peer observation, which allows them to be actively involved in their own development and to more frequently practice learned skills (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Additionally, professional development 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 professional development is offered, ensuring that it is embedded, is 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).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 1, in which teachers indicated a need for more professional development—specifically strategies for teaching ELLs. This recommendation also links to Critical Key Finding 2 regarding the potential misunderstanding of staff regarding the terms “standards,” “curriculum,” and “modification.”

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to adjust the professional development plan to increase the focus on instruction of ELLs, with a specific emphasis on curriculum modification:

- 1. Offer professional development on strategies for effectively instructing ELLs, including the following:**
 - Understanding language development.
 - Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both ELA and ESL state standards that clearly articulates literacy competencies and ensures that language objectives are defined at each stage of language acquisition.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Curriculum Modification

http://aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgroundpapers/curriculum_modification

- Being aware of what ELLs should understand and be able to do in terms of content and language skills at each proficiency level within the ELA curriculum.
- Developing strategies and techniques for delivering the curriculum to ELLs in monolingual, bilingual, and general education classrooms.

2. Offer professional development regarding language around standards, curriculum, and modification, as it relates to the instruction of ELLs. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Using staff development meetings to develop a shared language among all school staff around the terms “standards,” “curriculum,” and “modification.” All staff, including administrative leaders, general education teachers, ESL teachers, special education teachers, and support staff, should have a common understanding of what these terms mean and how they are operationalized during instruction.
- Developing and communicating clear guidelines to staff regarding when and how it is appropriate to modify the curriculum for ELLs and other students.
- Ensure clarity and consistency in language during all staff development and staff meetings around curriculum modification and differentiated instruction.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mrs. Brown is participating in professional development that will help her better meet the learning needs of her ELLs. From the outset, she has learned that she must follow the Common Core State Standards. The Standards, as she has come to understand them, define what all students must know and be able to do, but not how teachers should teach. The Standards must be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, but they are not an exhaustive list of what must take place in the classroom. They set grade-level goals, but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are below or above grade-level expectations. It is the job of the professionals who work with children to make the Standards accessible to all learners.

The curriculum represents the content, or subject matter, that students must master in the course of their education. Teachers must adapt, or modify that content by the way in which they teach so that English language learners or students with disabilities can learn it.

Teachers may accomplish this by supplementing or adapting the curriculum. Supplementing the curriculum involves providing additional material, which provides background knowledge and supports different learning styles. Supplementary materials could include pictures that illustrate vocabulary words and concepts. Visuals may include charts and graphs, timelines, and maps that supply visual clues that help students who have difficulty processing large amounts of auditory instruction. Readers that are simplified and contain more photographs or illustrations, captions, and vocabulary word definitions may also provide supplements without diminishing the information students need to learn.

Modified or adapted materials also may help the learner who has problems with complex language and/or large amounts of language. They may be used before the lesson or during it to make the content more comprehensible. These may include graphic organizers, teacher-prepared outlines, or study guides. They may also include recorded text, or rewritten text that reorganizes the material into smaller portions or chunks. Sometimes a spare copy of the text material may be given to students that they may mark or highlight.

Mrs. Brown understands all of this and is ready, as part of her training, to redesign a science unit she has already taught to make it more accessible to her ELLs. She wants to teach them some content from geology about earthquakes and volcanoes, but she knows she will have to supplement and modify the material to make it accessible to her ELLs.

She begins by activating prior knowledge and building background. Last year, students learned about the large plates under the ocean and how they move—essential information for this new unit. However, students may not remember this material, and her ELLs may have been speaking much less English when they were learning it, so she clearly is going to have to activate what prior knowledge students have and review it so she can build on what they know. She prepares a PowerPoint that goes over the concepts of tectonic plates. She gives students the PowerPoint note pages with key vocabulary and diagrams, which students can keep in their science notebooks to refer to again. She also shows a video that contains pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and the damage that can occur as a result of these phenomena. Many of her students have never been exposed to this information, and they need this necessary background knowledge to acquire new content successfully. She then provides a simplified version of the material and has students read it in pairs. They mark what they already know and what is new to them. This gives her an idea of who in the class may need more support and who already understands the material. Given what she knows from this, she is ready to teach. She goes online and finds pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and related concepts so that students can see a visual definition of each term: plateau, earth's mantle, fault lines, lava, magma, and diagrams of the layers of rock that cannot be seen from the earth's surface.

She creates a science word wall using these pictures and their labels. Students now have a visual to reference that explains key vocabulary as they read. She makes a note to ask the ESL teacher to preview the concepts using some of the Rigby and Newbridge materials that are more heavily illustrated and to go over this content with simplified vocabulary. All students are keeping personal dictionaries where they write definitions and make diagrams. She makes a study guide in the form of an outline so that as she teaches, the students look at her overheads and fill in information as she presents it. Then she puts students in small groups. Together they read the information in the text. Her ELLs have a copy of the text in which they can mark and highlight. They are also given graphic organizers with flow charts, which students fill in to create the sequence of events leading to a volcanic eruption or an earthquake. Students complete the graphic organizers and write the sequence of events in sentences in their groups, all the while discussing what they have learned. ELLs are included with monolingual students who have a greater facility for self-expression in English. They put the sentences into paragraphs, which the students post and read aloud to the whole group.

Finally, Mrs. Brown gives them a concept definition map about volcanoes (later she will give them one on earthquakes). Students must define a volcano in one box. In a series of connected boxes, they write what they do and what they are like— one fact per box. When Mrs. Brown has seen the students' completed maps, she will know about her next necessary steps in instruction. Do some of her students need more instruction or reteaching while other students move on? Can the ESL teacher step in and fill gaps for her with her ELLs?

In this way, Mrs. Brown has both supplemented and adapted her unit materials to make them more comprehensible for all students, and especially for her ELLs. She has found additional or different ways to use materials to teach all of the key vocabulary and concepts, but has not left any material out or diminished it in any way.

Recommendation 2: Collaboration

AIR recommends that PS 145 The Bloomingdale School consider options for increasing opportunities for general education and ESL teachers to meet and work together. This includes both shared professional development around strategies for working with ELLs and channels of communication to discuss particular school and classroom issues.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Collaboration

Collaboration among teachers and other school professionals may be defined as the manner in which, and extent to which, members of the school interact in their approach to their work, and is characterized by authentic interactions that are professional in nature (Marzano, 2003). These behaviors may include openly sharing failures and mistakes, demonstrating respect for one another, and constructively analyzing and criticizing practices and procedures in an effort to improve teaching and learning in a school (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Marzano cites the need for a number of school norms that will enable teachers and other staff to effectively work to improve their schools—norms such as deciding how staff will resolve conflicts, how staff will address and solve professional problems, how staff will communicate to third parties about other staff members, and how staff will behave during professional meetings (e.g., staff meetings and professional development). Lambert (2003) identifies teachers who have a high degree of skill in this area as possessing a shared vision, resulting in program coherence, inquiry-based use of data to inform decisions and practice; broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions; reflective practice that leads consistently to innovation; and high or steadily improving student achievement.

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links to Critical Key Finding 1, in which data show a need to provide more established communication between general education and ESL teachers.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to increase collaboration among teachers in working with ELLs:

1. Provide multiple avenues for structured teacher communication, such as the following:

- Shared planning time during the school day that will enable content-area teachers to share information with ESL teachers about content to be covered and to share ideas that will benefit all students.
- A listserv or other electronic method for teachers to quickly relay information to one another.
- A system for teachers to note any concerns or issues related to specific students that can be easily communicated among staff.
- Creation of a joint general education/ESL team that plans together regularly to ensure coverage across content areas and pacing that benefits all students.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Information and resources related to educational leadership

<http://www.ascd.org/Default.aspx>

Resources for school administrators, including information on strategies for effective leadership

<http://www.aasa.org/>

Resources related to collaborative leadership in schools

<http://www.nassp.org/knowledge-center/topics-of-interest/collaborative-leadership>

2. Offer formal and regularly scheduled opportunities for collaboration around specific areas of need related to ELLs. This action step can be accomplished through the following:

- Conducting a needs assessment to determine topics for sessions.
- Training staff regarding effective communication and collaboration skills (e.g., active listening, establishing appropriate agendas, effective use of meeting time).
- Offering the sessions during times when general education and ESL teachers are available to participate after school.
- Ensuring that sessions are interactive and allowing teachers opportunities to learn from one another.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to give feedback on the sessions so that adjustments can be made to better address the needs of students.
- Having an administrator participate to show the school's support for collaboration.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

It is 12:15 on a Wednesday at Highland Park Elementary School. The fourth grade team has assembled, just as they do every week at this time, to collaboratively create ELA plans for the upcoming week. Their students are currently in art, music, or physical education class, which gives the teachers uninterrupted time to do this. They are joined, for at least a part of their planning time, by the ESL and special education teachers who work with their grade. The school's reading specialist chairs the meeting. Each grade participates in a planning session such as this every week. The school's administrators sometimes join them, as time permits. Everyone knows they need to bring their curriculum guides, appropriate student materials, plan books, and any other materials they will need. They will complete a planning template for the week, which is on the school's intranet, where they will also post their plans. Each week, one person each week will act as "scribe" and type in the minutes in each section of the template.

The first two categories on the template address essential learnings and mastery objectives. These are from the curriculum guide and are non-negotiable, so they are typed in first. This week they will continue to develop reading comprehension skills through exposure to a variety of texts and determine important ideas and messages in literary texts. After this, the planning becomes more discretionary as to how they will do this. In addition to reading, they will also determine their lesson plans for writing, word work, fluency, and vocabulary.

The focus of instruction for this week will be historical fiction. Teachers will begin with whole group instruction in the form of read-alouds in this genre and will have whole classes complete graphic organizers that contrast fictional versus historical characters. At this point, the ESL teacher becomes concerned. Her intermediate-level students were not speaking English very well when they covered this material last year, and they worked with simplified materials. They have not been exposed to this material in as high-powered a manner as the other students. She says that she will need to work with her students and preview this material with them so they can participate successfully with the other students. Time to do this is negotiated, and they move on to discuss their small group guided reading instruction and the strategies they will teach this week. One teacher is worried, as she is new and has not taught this material as yet and is not certain how to do it. The reading specialist volunteers to come into her classroom this week and model a strategy that will help her.

They plan their fluency focus, word work goals, and vocabulary in a similar fashion and record the information into the template. Although the wording is brief, it is complete enough for anyone to understand what they are doing. They discuss this week's writing, which is focused on researching famous people to write biographies. It is time for students to begin drafting. The special educator knows which of the students' IEP accommodations call for assistive technology (for drafting) during this part of the writing process. She will work with these students during this time and use Co-Writer software to help them with this task.

Teachers then divide up responsibilities. One teacher will visit the library and find appropriate texts to use as read-alouds. Another will make the posters for the graphic organizers they will use to help students distinguish between historical and fictional characters. Another will create a formative assessment for the grade to use at the end of the week to determine student mastery levels. One of the other teachers will make copies of the rubrics the grade uses for drafting, which students can staple into their Writing Notebooks. It is almost 1:15. They are finished for today. The notes are posted on the intranet for anyone in the school to read to see what is going on in fourth grade. It is time for teachers to pick up their students and return to their classrooms.

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An Affiliate of American Institutes for Research®

22 Cortlandt Street, Floor 16
New York, NY 10007-3139
800.356.2735 | 212.419.0415
www.air.org

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