

Community School for Social Justice

FINAL REPORT



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

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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of Community School for Social Justice (CSSJ) 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 need of improvement 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 Community School for Social Justice

Community School for Social Justice (X427), located in New York City, in the Bronx, is a high school with 345 students from Grade 9 through Grade 12. The school population comprises 38 percent Black, 61 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent White students. The student body includes 9 percent English language learners and 19 percent special education students (Special Education Service Delivery Report¹). Boys make up 44.34 percent of students; 55.66 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year is 84 percent. Eighty-six percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 8 percent of the students are eligible for reduced-price lunch (Accountability and Overview Report 2009–2010²).

Community School for Social Justice is a small, supportive, and intellectually rigorous school that aims to prepare students for both college and the work world.³ Notably, the school has decided to implement curriculum that is based on the performance-based assessment task (PBAT) rather than the New York State Regents exams. Thus, students are required to conduct in-depth research projects and deliver multimedia oral presentations that are attended and critiqued by teachers, community members, and their peers.

One of the major challenges facing the school is that the majority of incoming students enter the school at risk due to poor attendance at their previous schools. Many incoming students also tend to be over-age and under-credited. Thus, the school administers the Scantron Performance Series English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments to all incoming students early in the academic year and uses the results to plan for students' academic programming and for ninth-grade curricular and instructional planning.

The school also has a program in place to provide individualized social and academic support to students through the Family Group curriculum, which is different for every grade level. The structure of the curriculum includes check-ins, academic support and individual conferences, targeted discussions, and a mix of activities and down time, which take place on a weekly

¹http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_X427.pdf. Accessed on July 15, 2011.

²<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/c4/AOR-2010-320700011427.pdf>. Accessed on July 15, 2011.

³http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep_X427.pdf. Accessed on July 15, 2011.

basis. Community School for Social Justice's guidance counselors and social workers also take part in the Family Group curriculum as well as participate in individual meetings with students when necessary.

Audit Process at Community School for Social Justice

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 extracurriculars. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by Community School for Social Justice during April, 2011. 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-interpretationSM meeting, on May 10, 2011. During this meeting, 14 stakeholders from the Community School for Social Justice 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 most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student performance at Community School for Social Justice.

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

There is an inconsistency across classrooms in opportunities for analysis and problem solving and regard for adolescent perspective. This is characterized by a mixed level of student use of higher-level thinking and opportunities for student autonomy and leadership.

This key finding was developed based on evidence from observations, which identified inconsistent opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking and problem solving in observed classrooms. In addition, observation data noted few examples of classroom structures that promote student autonomy, encourage meaningful peer interaction, encourage students to share ideas and opinions, and present content in a way that is relevant and useful to adolescent lives.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2

Interview, document, and survey data indicate that Community School for Social Justice provides many academic interventions for students in order for them to succeed. Most teachers feel the supports are minimally to moderately effective, and it is unclear how these interventions are evaluated.

This key finding is supported by evidence from documents and interview data, as well as the teacher survey. According to document review and interview data, the school has implemented a number of interventions, such as tutoring, specialized classes, check-in/progress meetings, and curricular instructional adjustments. While the vast majority of surveyed teachers (95 percent) reported that students are systematically identified for appropriate academic supports, 65 percent of teachers responded that these supports were only “moderately likely” or “minimally likely” to be effective. In addition, the auditor’s review of documents revealed a lack of clarity regarding how support initiatives and credit recovery programs are evaluated for effectiveness and adjusted as needed.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3

Modification and differentiation is happening at Community School for Social Justice to varying degrees.

Data from the teacher survey support this key finding. The vast majority (90 percent) of teacher respondents reported that they differentiate products for English language learner (ELL) students and over 70 percent reported modifying content, materials, and/or programs. Similarly, over half (55.6 percent) of teacher respondents reported modifying standards for ELL students. However, more than 70 percent of teacher respondents also reported that they do not differentiate content on a daily basis for students with disabilities.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4

Individualized education programs (IEPs) and professional development for IEPs are not effective in driving instruction and curriculum.

Co-interpretation participants developed this key finding based on teacher survey and interview data. Survey data indicate that 70 percent of the staff do not find professional development related to using IEPs very helpful and only refer to students' IEPs a few times a semester or less when planning instruction. Related findings evidenced that only 25 percent of the staff found professional development on co-teaching helpful, and 25 percent of respondents indicated that they did not receive professional development on co-teaching.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1

Survey, interviews, and documents indicate strong evidence of collaboration and teacher participation in decision making.

This key finding is supported by interview data, as well as the teacher survey. According to interview data, Community School for Social Justice faculty and staff are consistently provided with time and opportunities to engage in productive collaboration. Interview data also show that Community School for Social Justice faculty and staff have an active role in developing and leading internal professional development and have access to external professional development opportunities. The vast majority of teacher respondents (over 80 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that professional development is coherent, focused, and closely aligned with school goals and that the school administration strongly supports teacher collaboration.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2

According to survey, interview, and document review data, school data are used by teachers in a collaborative effort to track student success. Examples include Edline, Performance Series test, and school-designed spreadsheets.

Evidence from interviews and documents support this key finding. According to interview data, Community School for Social Justice utilizes online applications such as Edline and Google Docs to facilitate the identification of students who are at risk. Department teams are responsible for monitoring students' progress and developing interventions. In addition, the school implements internal interim assessments such as Performance Series and Read Naturally in order to inform ELA supports and interventions.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 3

Community School for Social Justice earned consistently high ratings in the following classroom observation categories: positive climate, quality of feedback, content understanding, and student engagement.

This key finding is supported by evidence from observations and the teacher survey. According to observation data, the vast majority of classrooms (over 80 percent) received high ratings for the quality of feedback, showing that teachers frequently engaged in feedback loops

and provided feedback to strategically scaffold student learning through prompting hints and assistance. In addition, 75 percent of observed classrooms received ratings in the high range for positive climate and emotional support due to strong evidence of supportive relationships, mutual respect, and enthusiasm. Auditors also noted evidence of consistent student engagement across classrooms indicating that most students regularly participated in classroom activities; there was a notable lack of off-task behavior. Similarly, the majority of teacher respondents (63 percent) reported that most students often or always participate in class discussions.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the Community School for Social Justice co-interpretation, school faculty and staff identified higher-order thinking, regard for adolescent perspectives, evaluation of academic interventions, and effective differentiation for students with disabilities as priority areas for improvement. Small- and whole-group discussions centered on the lack of consistency in opportunities for analysis and problem solving, and the lack of consistent regard for the perspective of adolescents noted in observed classrooms. Co-interpretation participants discussed issues related to the fact that although the school analyzes available data and assigns students to available academic interventions based on identified needs, there is no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of Community School for Social Justice's academic interventions. There was also discussion about the limited degree of differentiated instruction for students with disabilities, particularly when compared to the more consistent ELL differentiation reported by Community School for Social Justice faculty. Differentiation for students with disabilities was found to merit more deliberate attention moving forward.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement specific strategies for incorporating appropriate student voice, choice, and opportunities for autonomy and leadership in the classroom.
2. Evaluate the impact of interventions, processes, and partnerships through the use of valid and highly usable data.
3. Continue to develop and implement learning activities and instructional strategies that differentiate instruction for all students, with a specific focus on students with disabilities.
4. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

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: Student Voice, Choice, Autonomy and Leadership

Develop and implement specific strategies for incorporating appropriate student voice, choice, and opportunities for autonomy and leadership in the classroom.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Empirical research has demonstrated that supporting student choice, autonomy, and leadership in the classroom can train students to regulate their own learning and deepen their cognitive processes and to improve academic achievement. Efforts to foster supportive autonomy consist of establishing a link between a student's classroom behavior and the resources that motivate the student to succeed, such as personal interests, goals, and values (Reeve, 2010). This approach inherently involves students in their own learning process by creating a direct link between their personal motivations and classroom activities.

Autonomy-supportive instructional strategies have been shown to improve student engagement, conceptual understanding, academic achievement, and persistence in the classroom (Young, 2005). The goal of these strategies is to encourage students to engage in self-regulated learning, which involves students interpreting learning tasks, determining goals, and implementing strategies to meet goals (Young, 2005). Creating an autonomy-supportive classroom environment requires teachers to incorporate students' preferences, choices, curiosity, and challenges into lessons (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Barch, & Jeon, 2004). Additional approaches include allocating time in a way that allows students to work in their own way, scaffolding student learning, engaging in feedback loops with students, and offering praise and encouragement to students (Young, 2005).

Enhancing student autonomy through autonomy-supportive strategies and lesson content that has relevance to adolescent lives allows students to align their inner motivational resources, classroom behavior, and academic achievement (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004; Young, 2005). This strategy encourages students to understand schoolwork in the context of their own interests and goals, which has the potential to help students to develop self-regulation skills and learning strategies to facilitate their academic and professional success.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Adolescence represents a critical period during which youths struggle to take on new responsibilities and learn decision-making skills while concurrently establishing a sense of self and identity. This period also marks a stage where adolescents are learning to regulate their behavior and cognitive abilities, which can be facilitated by incorporating autonomy-supportive strategies in the classroom (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

The key to developing and implementing an autonomy-supportive classroom is to become familiar with the strategies that either encourage or inhibit student voice, choice, autonomy, and leadership. Table 1 provides an overview of the features and aspects that characterize an autonomy-supportive motivating instructional style versus a controlling motivating style.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Collaborative for Academic,
Social and Emotional
Learning (Website)
<http://casel.org/>

Self Determination Theory
(Website)
[http://www.
sustainengagement.com/](http://www.sustainengagement.com/)

*Classroom Observation:
Student Autonomy* (Online
video)
[http://www1.teachertube.
com/viewVideo.
php?title=Classroom_
Observation__Student_
Autonomy&video_
id=185325](http://www1.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?title=Classroom_Observation__Student_Autonomy&video_id=185325)

Table 1. Defining Features of Two Types of Motivating Styles: Autonomy Supportive and Controlling

Autonomy Supportive Motivating Style	Controlling Motivating Style
<p>Definition: A teaching style that involves understanding and valuing the student’s perspective during instruction</p>	<p>Definition: A teaching style that involves a teacher-centered approach to developing a class agenda and encouraging student compliance with the agenda</p>
<p><i>Key Features</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourages a student’s personal motivational resources ■ Incorporates noncontrolling instructional language ■ Promotes worth ■ Acknowledges and accepts negative expressions and attitude 	<p><i>Key Features</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dependent on external motivational sources ■ Utilizes language that is more controlling and pressuring ■ Assertive
<p><small>Adapted from <i>Anatomy Support</i> by Johnmarshall Reeve (n.d.), available online at http://www.education.com/reference/article/autonomy-support/.</small></p>	

Specifically, teachers can take the following actions to promote student autonomy in the classroom:

1. Foster relevance.

Teachers should make an overt effort to incorporate their students’ interests, values, and goals into the learning process by learning about student concerns through informal and classroom dialogue (Learning Point Associates, 2005). Examples include communicating with the students regarding their feedback about classroom tasks and trying to help students understand how a task contributes to their personal objectives (Assor et al., 2002). Research has indicated that students are more likely to be cognitively engaged and use higher-order thinking skills when they find the subject matter interesting (Young, 2005).

2. Make learning authentic.

Instructional practice should build upon students’ foundational knowledge (i.e., background, ideas, skills, and attitudes), challenge students, and also connect content to value beyond the classroom (Donovan & Bransford, 2005; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995). Teachers should give assignments that have public or personal value to students (such as oral history projects or writing editorials for the local newspaper) and also are academically rigorous (Newmann et al., 1995).

3. Provide choice.

Teacher behavior should enable students to choose classroom activities and tasks that are consistent with their interests and goals. Providing students with the opportunity to understand how schoolwork can contribute to their personal goals increases their

ability to work more autonomously (Assor et al., 2002). In addition, asking students for input on classroom activities allows teachers to become more aware of students' psychological needs and to incorporate those needs into the lesson (Reeve, 2010).

4. Promote independent thinking and permit student criticism.

Encouraging students to engage in independent thinking and criticizing lessons that they do not find interesting can provide teachers with opportunities to foster more in-depth conversations about classroom activities. These discussions may allow the teacher to make adjustments to lessons to increase student interest or engage in a dialogue with students about the importance of the task to make them value the assignment (Young, 2005). The overall goal of this strategy would be to increase the opportunities for student voice in the classroom and promote mutual communication between teachers and students regarding lesson content.

5. Be aware of how teacher behaviors can *inhibit* student voice, choice, leadership, and autonomy. Work to eliminate the following behaviors:

- **Micromanaging student work and behavior.** Teachers should avoid unnecessary intrusions related to how students approach their work. Such intrusions inhibit student expression. Students should have the opportunity to discover their natural working patterns in the context of classroom activities (Young, 2005).
- **Assigning tasks that lack relevance and interest to adolescents.** Students are less likely to be responsive to tasks that they do not find interesting or important. Thus, teachers should make an effort to communicate the importance of tasks that they assign and incorporate elements that are relevant to adolescent lives (Reeve, 2009; Young, 2005).
- **Forbidding student criticism and stifling independent thinking.** Teacher behavior that undermines student voice has the potential to inhibit students' ability to conduct self-regulated learning and self-expression. Inhibiting students' ability to express their opinions can be frustrating and interferes with their ability to make connections between classroom activities and their personal interests and goals.

Autonomy-Inducing and Autonomy-Suppressing Teacher Behaviors

Autonomy-Inducing Teacher Behaviors:

- Listening
- Integrating independent work sessions
- Facilitating peer-to-peer conversations
- Praising and encouraging evidence of improvement or mastery
- Scaffolding
- Creating a responsive environment that supports student questions and comments
- Incorporating student perspective and experiences

Autonomy-Suppressing Teacher Behaviors:

- Dominating learning materials
- Solving problems or answering questions before students have had a chance to work on them independently
- Directive rather than reciprocal feedback
- Interrupting student comments

Young, M. R. (2005). The motivational effects of classroom environment in facilitating self-regulated learning. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 27(1), 25-40.

Seacrest High School

Seacrest High teachers and administrators decided that a critical step in understanding why students were not successful was to ask the failing students themselves. Students who had received failing grades in three or more subjects were invited to participate in a focus group, led by a senior teacher of the school. The students were encouraged to speak openly and honestly about how teachers could make schools a better place to learn. In addition to working with students, the students' teachers were asked to complete a survey about why they believed the students were failing. Following the initial focus group, Seacrest High continued to supply opportunities for students to have a voice by holding eight more focus groups during the year of the project.

OUTCOMES

The major outcome of the Seacrest High School project was the clarity it provided for teachers with regard to what was affecting student success. Students taking part in the focus groups spoke about different learning styles, the need for additional counseling and tutoring, and having a sense of mutual respect between teachers and students. Teachers talked about the students' lack of motivation (30 percent) and attendance (16.5 percent).

Students of all backgrounds and academic abilities were able to point to aspects of school structure and teaching that they believed contributed to their, or their classmates', failure, while teachers indicated that the students were to blame for their own failure. Looking at the problem from different perspectives shifted the focus from teachers and students blaming each other to teachers and students working together to improve teaching and learning. At the conclusion of the project, students reported an increased sense of engagement with their school and teachers were provided with specific issues to target in the upcoming year.

From "Student Voice: A Historical Perspective and New Directions" by John Manefield, Robyn Collins, John Moore, Sandra Mahar, & Christine Warne. (Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education), 2007. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/outreach/k12out/pdf/2010/Student_Voice_report.pdf

Recommendation 2: Program Evaluation

Evaluate the impact of interventions, processes, and partnerships through the use of valid and highly usable data.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Evaluation is a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed policy, program, or project, and its design, implementation, and results (Marriott & Goyder, 2009). In schools, program evaluation means examining initiatives the school has undertaken to answer the question, “Is what we are doing working?” (Program Evaluation, 2006). The primary goal for any evaluation system should be to foster an environment of continuous improvement by providing schools, districts, and providers with data to review the approaches used to improve student learning outcomes (Hassel & Steiner, 2004).

While school improvement plans are often driven by numerous goals and various strategies school staff will use to support increased student achievement, many plans do not include how schools will determine if the strategies used are effective in meeting school improvement goals, thus increasing student achievement. An evaluation can be an important tool in improving the quality of prevention and intervention programs if it is integrated into the fabric of a program rather than added on after the fact (Muraskin, 1993). The evaluation(s) of implemented strategies, programs, and interventions can provide useful feedback on ways to modify implementation of strategies, track initial changes in outcomes, and provide an early warning of potential problems so they can be addressed (Program Evaluation, 2006). The overarching goals of evaluation are to inform schools about what is and isn’t working and to guide decisions, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive impact.

The Center On Innovation and Improvement (Ross, Potter, & Harmon, 2006) offers the following reasons to conduct evaluations of educational programs:

- To determine the effectiveness of programs for participants;
- To document that program objectives have been met;
- To provide information about service delivery that will be useful to program staff and other audiences; and
- To enable program staff to make changes that improve program effectiveness.

Frequent evaluations and communication of the results of the evaluation are critical to ensuring that implementation and outcomes are on track.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Many evaluation techniques are easy to execute; can make use of data that are already being gathered; and can be performed on a scale that is practical for teachers, principals, and other school leaders (Program Evaluation, 2006). Evaluation systems need to be embedded in, or aligned with, school-wide accountability systems and are most meaningful when integrated early into programs and interventions. In order to design and implement an evaluation process that will reflect the unique needs and context of school improvement programs, schools should consider the following key questions (Yap, Aldersebaes, Railsback, Shaughnessy, & Speth, 2000, pp. 6–7):

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Program Evaluation for the Practitioner, Using Evaluation as a School Improvement Strategy

http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_June06.pdf

Manual for Monitoring and Evaluating Education Partnerships

http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Info_Services_Publications/pdf/2009/Mariott-Goyder_Partnership.pdf

Evaluating Whole-School Reform Efforts: A Guide for District and School Staff

http://www3.ksde.org/sfp/csr/csr_resources/14_evaluating_whole_school_reform_efforts_a_guide_for_district_and_school_staff.pdf

- *What does our school want to accomplish overall?*
- *What will our school have to do to achieve these goals and objectives?*
- *How will our school know that its program is succeeding at accomplishing its goals and objectives?*
- *How will evidence be gathered to demonstrate progress toward our school's goal?*
- *How will our school determine what the data are telling us?*
- *How will our school use evaluation results?*

A critical factor to the success of any program or intervention and its subsequent evaluation is generating support in the school community and dedicating sufficient time and resources to ensure that evaluation findings are considered throughout program implementation and used for constructive changes that will further school improvement efforts.

1. Align expectations and set goals.

- Involve all stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, internal and external service providers, consultants, etc.) in the process of designing and aligning program and service expectations. Considerations include who will receive the services, where and when services will be delivered, and the frequency and duration of services.
- Identify specific educational goals or outcomes that are to be achieved. For example, a resulting goal might be a 50 percent increase of students reading on grade level through the implementation of Reading Matters program.

2. Select key indicators to monitor goals and outcomes.

- Translate outcomes into a set of measurable performance indicators. Select program objectives and performance measures that are meaningful, measurable, and relevant or related to program objectives and goals.
- Design indicators to be SMART (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic, and Time-Bound*).
- Center accountability on actual outcomes rather than perceptions of progress. Indicators may be qualitative or quantitative.
- Measure key performance indicators regularly to determine whether outcomes are being achieved. An example of a metric might be the percentage of students scoring 70 percent or better on interim reading assessments.

3. Collect baseline data on indicators.

- Use a baseline to set the current condition against which future change can be tracked.
- Obtain baseline data related to performance indicators and directly correlating to school improvement or student performance goals.
- Use either primary or secondary data sources for indicators. For example, primary data would be diagnostic assessments administered by supplemental education service providers or diagnostics assessments that are part of an intervention program. Secondary baseline data may include data already gathered by the school from predictive assessments, teacher-created assessments, or any other

performance assessments or screening tool used by the school as part of the yearly assessment plan.

4. Select results targets.

- Set reasonable and feasible targets given the resources, time, and capacity to deliver services. A target defines what can be achieved in a specific time toward reaching an outcome.
- Review targets and measure progress through interim checkpoints. This way, schools can identify barriers to success and formulate new strategies or changes to programs along the way. Examples of targets are (a) an incremental increase in the total number of students scoring 70 percent or better on interim assessments or (b) the incremental increase of each student's score on interim assessments.

5. Collect data and interpret results.

- Decide which data collection method to use to obtain relevant information. Consider what data systems already exist and add only data collection methods that will fill any existing gaps. While it may be wise to utilize existing data, it is important to ensure that the data are directly related to goals, indicators, and target results.
- Consider delegating the task of collecting and interpreting the data to the staff responsible for implementing programs. This creates an instantaneous feedback loop to inform decisions about program operations, instructional practices, and strategies.
- Examine data to better understand the effectiveness of programs and services. Consider the following questions when discussing results with stakeholders (Holcomb, 1999; Levesque et al., 1998): What do these data reveal? What else might explain these results? *What else do we need to know to better understand the data before we draw conclusions? What good news is here for us to celebrate? What needs to be done to improve program performance and effectiveness?*

6. Document and communicate progress.

- Monitor and evaluate outcomes, indicators, baseline, and targets: This is critical to ensure that services, programs, and interventions are achieving desired goals. Establish an ongoing process to review, interpret, and communicate results. Sharing successes generates enthusiasm, involvement, and commitment to services and programs (Yap et al., 2000).
- Identify a timeline for evaluations that may include a midterm evaluation and end-of-term evaluation. Midterm evaluations allow improvements in programs, services, and partnerships to be made while implementation continues. The key purpose of end-of-term evaluations is to determine strengths and weaknesses, improve the design for the next term, or decide whether to continue programs, services, or partnerships.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate program components: This provides schools with the necessary data with which they can evaluate the effectiveness of programs to correct gaps in services, build upon effective programs, or discontinue ineffective interventions or partnerships.

Jefferson High School

Jefferson High School has an enrollment of 500 students in Grades 9–12. The student population includes 35 percent minority students and approximately 60 percent of students in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Jefferson has just adopted a comprehensive school reform model (reading through the content areas) for schoolwide implementation. A school leadership team is formed to oversee the school improvement effort.

The school's assessment plan includes a statewide assessment of students in grades 9 and 11 in reading and mathematics in April of each school year. In addition, districtwide writing assessments of grade 11 students take place in April of each year.

The school leadership team wants to know if student performance is improving with the implementation of the school reform model. The team decides to take advantage of existing data available from the state and district assessments to evaluate the impact of the comprehensive school reform model on student achievement. The school leadership team decides to look at student performance in four areas: reading, mathematics, writing, and attendance. Even though the school reform model is focused on reading, the school feels that it is important to look at other success indicators for the entire school.

Relevant data will come from the statewide assessment program, including student achievement in reading and mathematics. The school will also use data from the districtwide writing assessment. Student achievement data are obtained electronically from the statewide and districtwide assessments for the approximately 60 students in each of the assessed grades. School attendance data are collected from school attendance records for all students in grades 9 and 11.

A database is set up to store and manage all the data, including attendance data collected at the end of the school year. The database contains statewide assessment data in reading and math, as well as districtwide writing assessment data for the current and preceding school years. The data are analyzed to provide percentages of students who meet the state standards of benchmarks for the current school year and the preceding school year—prior to the implementation of the school reform model.

A difference in percentage points provides an indication of impact.

Attendance data are analyzed to provide an average number of days absent for each school year. Similar analyses will be conducted in future years to detect any consistent trends and patterns.

Once data are collected and analyzed, the results of the analysis are provided in reader-friendly data displays (e.g., bar charts and line graphs) and easy-to-understand narratives. They are shared and discussed among the school leadership team and other stakeholder groups, including school staff, parents, and district support personnel. The team will use the data to determine whether the program has met annual goals set forth by the school when the model was adopted. An in-depth review of the data will be conducted to explore plausible reasons for the findings and to develop recommendations and an action plan for continuous improvement.

Description adapted from pages 51–53 of *Evaluating Whole-School Reform Efforts: A Guide for District and School Staff*, by Kim Yap, Inge Aldersebaes, Jennifer Railsback, Joan Shaughnessy, and Timothy Speth, available online at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED445403.pdf>. This guidebook was published in 2000 by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Recommendation 3: Differentiation for Students With Disabilities

Continue to develop and implement learning activities and instructional strategies that differentiate instruction for all students, with a specific focus on students with disabilities.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Differentiation of instruction means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs of students. It is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that values the individual. Differentiating does not mean providing separate, unrelated activities for each student, but does mean providing interrelated activities that are based on student needs for the purpose of ensuring that all students come to a similar grasp of a skill or idea (Good, 2006). Teachers can differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment according to the readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of their students (Tomlinson, 2003).

Qualitative and meta-analysis research indicate that students in differentiated classrooms achieve better outcomes than students in classrooms without differentiation (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Tomlinson et al., 2003). When instructional materials are differentiated to meet student needs, interests, and readiness, academic gains increase (Lou et al., 1996). Students in classrooms that are effectively differentiated have been found to have achievement gains on state tests in reading and math (Brimijoin, 2001; Tieso, 2005).

While there is no single set of strategies that constitutes differentiated instruction, the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (Hall, 2002) has identified several guidelines to help educators form an understanding and develop ideas around differentiation.

- Instruction moves beyond minute details and facts and is concept-focused and principle-driven.
- Several elements and materials are used to support instructional content.
- Flexible grouping is consistently used.
- Initial and ongoing assessment of student readiness and growth are essential.
- Learning tasks are interesting, engaging, and challenging.
- Student assignments allow for varied means of expression, permit alternative procedures, and provide varying degrees of difficulty.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

School leaders can support the effective implementation of differentiation within and across classrooms by providing time for teacher planning for differentiation and execution of plans, providing ample and suitable materials for academically diverse classrooms, and developing and otherwise ensuring access to differentiated curriculum.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

A Look at Differentiating Instruction (Publication)

http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Feb09.pdf

A Teacher's Guide to Differentiating Instruction (Publication)

http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Jan07.pdf

Differentiation Instruction Resources (Website)

http://centerforinstruction.org/resources_search_results.cfm?searchterms=Differentiation

Differentiated Instruction and Implications for UDL Implementation (Website)

<http://www.cast.org/ncac/index.cfm?i=2876>

Briefs and Training Modules for Differentiated Instruction (Website)

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/differentiated-instruction/>

1. Focus on foundation.

Embed professional learning opportunities around differentiation within the school's annual professional development plan. Schools that have moved to schoolwide implementation of a differentiated approach to instruction caution that the process is complex and requires ample time for implementation. The success of efforts to differentiate instruction will ultimately lie with teachers. However, some teachers will lack either the necessary knowledge or skills (Gregory, 2003). To help teachers prepare to make the change, schools should provide resources on differentiated instruction and time for teachers to discuss them. Teachers may need training in strategies—such as curriculum compacting and learning centers—that can be used to support differentiation (Protheroe, 2007).

2. Analyze student needs.

Identify which assessments will be given and how assessment data will be used for purposeful student grouping. Gaining an awareness of student knowledge and understanding is a key component of successful differentiation. Assessments can be formal or informal. These can be schoolwide, universal screening tools, content-area diagnostics, or assessments to gauge students' knowledge and familiarity with a topic prior to the start of a unit of study. Decide which assessments teachers will use to accurately measure their students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests and provide guidance for next steps in instruction. Results should be tracked and used to design instructional strategies tailored to student needs.

3. Design instruction.

Design lesson plans, including instructional strategies, learning activities, and assessments that incorporate differentiation. Once all stakeholders have a deep understanding of what differentiated instruction is and what it is not, the current structure of the curriculum and its supports or lack of supports for differentiation, and student needs, teachers should work collaboratively to design and embed instructional strategies into the curriculum that support differentiation. Identify opportunities to infuse different parts of the curriculum with differentiated instructional strategies.

Subject–Specific Differentiation Resources

- Strategies and Methods to Help Motivate Struggling Writers: http://www.idonline.org/ld_indepth/writing/reluctant_writer.html
- Enhancing Learning with Technology: <http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiatingstrategies.html>
- Differentiated Instruction in Reading: <http://www.readingrockets.org/print.php?ID=154>
- Games and Methods to Encourage and Motivate Struggling Writers: <http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=615&g=2>
- Assistance with Solving Math Problems: <http://www.webmath.com/>

Central Elementary School

Central Elementary School provides an example of differentiated instruction for students with disabilities:

Central Elementary School was considered a “failing school.” Students were performing in the 30th percentile in reading, writing, and mathematics on state and district assessments. Forty-five percent of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch and 30 percent of students spoke English as a second language. After conducting a needs assessment and developing a school improvement plan, school leaders and teachers identified differentiation as a schoolwide instructional focus and embarked on a process to implement differentiation in the school.

Central Elementary School decided to develop a social studies unit through the use of tiered activities. The team used essential questions to provide guidance for inclusion of higher-level thinking skills in the curricular objectives, that covered content, learning process, and assessment. The content was delivered through three tiers of activities. Learning was differentiated according to the needs of the students through the use of texts of different reading levels.

Once the social studies units were complete, teachers wrote specific lessons to include in the units. Teachers collaboratively planned concurrent differentiated learning experiences for students based on a single instructional objective. For the school, the social studies units represented the first round of differentiated lesson planning and instruction. Over the course of the year, each discipline in the regular curriculum was examined and revised to include differentiation. Differentiation became a focus of all instruction.

Teachers spent approximately four hours each month learning more about differentiation and making plans to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms. The professional development focused on identifying students’ strengths and weakness; systems to make the process of small, flexible group instruction manageable; and the development of leveled classroom libraries. This comprehensive staff development program was closely monitored and adjusted as needed. Teachers were given the tools and the support to be able to successfully implement the concepts presented. Each new concept was introduced and training, modeling, and coaching were provided. Staff development occurred during biweekly grade-level seminars, monthly staff meetings, and weekly school or district staff development sessions.

Reprinted from *Closing the Achievement Gap with Curriculum Enrichment and Differentiation: One School's Story* (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008), available online at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ810785>.

Recommendation 4: Instructional Rigor

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

LINK TO RESEARCH

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 is also 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, “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).

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](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/20072004.pdf)

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Cultivate schoolwide high expectations for students.

- Align instruction with the New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards. According to New York City Department of Education (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 professional development for teachers on instructional strategies that push students to engage in higher-order thinking.

- Provide ongoing professional development 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 professional development sessions and/or support of an instructional coach.
- Create clear expectations regarding how teachers should implement this professional development 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 professional development can be incorporated into scheduled teacher collaboration sessions.
- Monitor implementation of professional development 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?* 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.

Reprinted from page 24 of *Improving Chicago's Schools: Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence?* by Fred M. Newmann, Anthony S. Bryk, & Jenny K. Nagaoka. Available online at <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/p0a02.pdf>. Copyright © 2001 Consortium on Chicago School Research. Reprinted with permission.

Further examples of authentic intellectual instruction, teachers' assignments, and student work can be found in Newmann et al., 2007

Perrysburg High School

Perrysburg High School in Perrysburg, Ohio, serves students in Grades 9–12. Perrysburg is a suburb of Toledo.

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 professional development 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.

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Suggestions for Further Reading

INSTRUCTIONAL RIGOR

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