

The Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy

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 the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being designated as 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 the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy

Located in the Bronx, the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy (X519) is a high school with 403 students in Grades 9–12. The school population is 21 percent African-American, 75 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Caucasian, and 2 percent Asian. Thirteen percent of the students are English language learners, and 19 percent are identified as students with disabilities. About 41.4 percent of students are boys, and 58.6 percent are girls; 77 percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch or reduced-price lunch.

In 2009–10, the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students, the Hispanic or Latino subgroup, and economically disadvantaged students¹.

The mission for the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy states:

The purpose of the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy is to promote growth within students and the community. The Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy creates a respectful environment where students feel safe exploring new ideas. Growth through learning gives us the power to understand what needs to change in society and the tools we need to make those changes. Our mission statement reflects the belief that all students possess leadership qualities. Across all content areas, the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy has a group of essential questions that challenge students to take a critical look at themselves and their relationship to the community vis-a-vis the law and public policy².

¹<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/13/AOR-2010-320800011519.pdf>. Accessed on July 18, 2011.

²<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/08/X519/AboutUs/Overview/Our+Mission.htm>. Accessed on July 18, 2011.

Audit Process at the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy

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 the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school's use.

These reports were presented to the school during a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 9, 2010. During this meeting, 12 stakeholders from the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy 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 the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, co-interpretation participants determined a set of key findings. These key findings are detailed in this section.

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Student engagement was largely inconsistent and student behavior, tardiness, wasted time, lost productivity, and negative climate were rated as major classroom disrupters during classroom observations.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by data collected from the classroom observations. Tardiness, behavior, wasted time, and lost productivity were rated as major classroom disrupters in multiple classroom observations conducted by the auditors. Furthermore, in one classroom, disrespect and behavioral disrupters were so pervasive that the lesson was nearly inaudible. In half of the observed classrooms students were overtly disrespectful of teachers. In one fourth of observed classrooms students and teachers did not share enthusiasm for the lesson. Student engagement was inconsistent in three fourths of observed classrooms.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

It is unclear that the current student orientation program is effective.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data collected from interviews with school leaders and document review. According to one interviewee, there is no information that student government is helpful to incoming freshmen. It also is unclear whether ninth grade orientation is mandatory. All students are given the opportunity to attend the summer bridge program, but only 20 students participated in the 2010 program. Furthermore, based on a review of submitted documents, there are no data to indicate that incoming students participate in the orientation activities offered to them.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

The school does not have tools to collect, organize, and disseminate behavioral information on all students, and a significant number of staff do not use student behavioral data to inform instruction.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by data collected from the teacher survey, interviews with school leaders, and document review. From these sources, it is unclear that the school has a robust data collection process in place or a system for using those data to identify and support at-risk students. The school uses intervention logs as its sole source for student behavior data. It is unclear whether student behavior data are used to identify at-risk students, and it is unclear whether student behavior data are used to identify at-risk incoming ninth grade students. However, 60 percent of teachers indicated that they review student behavior data; 35 percent of teachers review student behavior data once or twice a month, and 25

percent of teachers review student behavior data once or twice a week. Furthermore, 40 percent of teachers indicated that they review student behavior data at least twice a week. Only 20 percent of teachers use individualized education plans (IEPs) daily to once or twice a week.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

While teachers report collaborating across grade levels and departments, there is little evidence of structures in place that would make such collaboration sustainable and meaningful.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by data from the teacher survey, interviews with school leaders, and document review. Forty-two percent of teachers indicated that special education and general education teachers collaborate informally to share knowledge and strategies. Based on interview data, it is unclear that teachers participate in the school's four-step program designed to increase teacher collaboration. A majority of teachers (81 percent–86 percent) indicated that various types of teacher collaboration exist in the school building, and two thirds of teachers indicated that teachers collaborate across subjects and grade levels. Math, English language arts, social studies, and science departments coordinate with one another according to data from document review.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 5:

There is no evidence of tracking the implementation of the interventions. There is no documentation of how the individual student plans and interventions are developed, implemented, and monitored.

Critical Key Finding 5 is supported by data from interviews with school leaders and document review. According to a review of submitted documents, the school does not document how the individual student plans and interventions are developed, implemented, and monitored. From the document review, it is clear that teachers do not consistently document when interventions are administered and how consistently they are offered to students. Further support for this finding is derived from the interviews where respondents did not provide information that the school documents the processes used to craft interventions, how interventions are used in the school, or the results of interventions.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

In a majority of observed classrooms, and according to the teacher survey, the students build on each other's ideas, driving discussion in class and further illuminating student understanding.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by data from the teacher survey and classroom observations. Three fourths of teachers reported that students build on each other's ideas during classroom discussion. In seven classrooms, teachers used feedback loops and provided encouragement to students as they worked through the assigned materials. Teachers sometimes, but not always, took advantage of opportunities to illuminate student understanding.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

There is support for teachers to align their instruction with Common Core Standards.

Positive Key Finding 2 is supported by data from document review. The school currently receives support from the Children’s First Network in developing a curriculum aligned with the Common Core Standards. While the mathematics curriculum is not yet aligned with the Common Core Standards, the school has a professional development plan focused on alignment with Common Core Standards, teacher collaboration, and common planning.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the co-interpretation at the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy, faculty identified issues related to student engagement, behavior management, effective transition programming, effective student progress monitoring, and teacher collaboration. Another critical key finding related to the school's math curriculum not being aligned with Common Core Standards was prioritized by school stakeholders. However, because this issue was supported by only one data source (submitted documents), and because the school is in the process of aligning its math curriculum with Common Core Standards, it is not addressed in detail in this report. Additionally, one of the positive key findings related to the supports the school has in place to align its curricula with Common Core Standards.

Supported primarily by data from classroom observations, student engagement and behavior were topics that received the most attention and discussion during the co-interpretation process. Overall, the co-interpretation participants were in agreement about these critical findings. Participants acknowledged the school's strength, however, with regard to student discussions and knowledge sharing. Co-interpretation participants also were concerned about the effectiveness of their new student transition programs, use of behavior data, and implementing effective academic intervention services. At the end of the process, participants were satisfied with the findings.

THE FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Initiate a schoolwide process for increasing student engagement and creating a sustainable and supportive learning environment.
2. Implement an ongoing student orientation system that emphasizes community and academic support for the transition to high school.
3. Develop and implement a schoolwide positive behavior policy and system with clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect.
4. Create and implement structured opportunities for purposeful teacher collaboration. Time allocated to collaboration among teachers must be focused on strengthening instruction, based on student data, and connected to schoolwide goals.
5. Develop and implement clear policies, regulations, and feedback loops within the school to determine how students are identified for interventions and supports and to measure student progress.

For each recommendation, additional information is provided in the narrative on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process, as well as real-life implementation examples and research resources for further reading.

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

Recommendation 1: Student Engagement

Initiate a schoolwide process for increasing student engagement and creating a sustainable and supportive learning environment. The aim is to improve student attendance, enhance participation, reduce boredom, end negative behaviors and the associated classroom management issues, and increase student achievement in academic and social skills.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Student engagement provides an essential foundation for increasing achievement levels.

“Educators must work to build engagement levels if they hope to support students in meeting higher standards” (Learning Point Associates, 2005, p. 2).

In a report on the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement, which was taken by 42,754 students, Yazzie-Mintz (2010, pp. 2–3) describes a spectrum of student disengagement—from temporary boredom to dropping out—and attributes this disengagement to the following: uninteresting and irrelevant material, work being too challenging or not challenging enough, no interaction with the teacher, not liking the school or the teacher, not seeing value in the assigned work, adults at the school not caring about the student, safety and bullying concerns, schoolwork not connecting to real world or real work, feeling little connection with any adult at the school, teacher favoritism, ineffective instruction or instructional methods, feeling unheard and not responded to or respected, and feelings of frustration and disconnection.

When students feel marginalized or alienated at school, they lose interest and become disengaged. Yazzie-Mintz (2010, p. 17) concludes that there are considerable gaps not only in academic achievement but also in student engagement and suggests the integration of engagement data with academic data as a useful tool for school planning and decision making.

Factors that would increase student engagement, according to the surveyed students (Yazzie-Mintz, pp. 18–23) are as follows: supportive and nurturing schools; increased individualization; classes that are more fun as well as interactive, experiential, and relevant; a schoolwide belief in relationships, respect, and responsibility; coaching and modeling for the staff of good student engagement practices; reflection on and response to student ideas; adult understanding of student skills, strengths, and interests and having these qualities inform instruction; experiential learning and interdisciplinary studies; and opportunities for students to work together on finding solutions to real-world problems and issues.

Students need to build a sense of self-efficacy (Alvermann, 2003) in an inclusive environment in which they can achieve competence. They should be engaged in authentic and personally meaningful work, using a culturally relevant curriculum with an appropriate level of difficulty and challenge—one that requires problem solving (Voke, 2002). In addition, Gordon (2006) suggests the recognition and leveraging of individual student strengths and recalls a typical student response from the 2005 Gallup Youth Survey:

My teacher understood the way that I learned and worked. I was never criticized for my ideas or feelings, but I was met with questions and ideas that could change the way I looked at something. —Jessica, 17, Waverly, IA (p. 77)

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Center for Mental Health in Schools (Website)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (Website)

<http://www.casel.org>

Illinois Learning Standards for Social/Emotional Learning (Website)

http://isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility (Website)

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org>

A rubric, “Partnership Guide for Culturally Responsive Teaching” (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000, pp. 185–187), offers a list of engagement activities (establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence) and assessment tools. The Executive Summary of *Engaging Schools* (Committee on Increasing High School Students’ Engagement and Motivation to Learn, 2003) provides 10 recommendations for reaching “the goals of meaningful engagement and genuine improvements in achievement” for high school students (pp. 4–9). Easton (2008) discusses engaging struggling high school students by using experiential learning, essential questions, and a whole-child perspective in curriculum development, instructional strategies, professional development, and teacher evaluations. “If there is a secret to motivation in the classroom,” says Gordon (2006, p. 80), “it lies in the interaction between the teacher and the student.”

“There is a growing consensus that whatever else is done, schools must also become places where it is easier for students and teachers to know one another well and for students to connect to the school and its purposes, says Sergiovanni (2006, p. 58). “Schools in other words must be caring and learning communities.”

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: WHOLE-SCHOOL PRACTICES

Incorporating student engagement practices should be part of the annual school improvement process. Whole-school practices such as building a safe and supportive school environment are part of this process. Students can learn effectively only in environments in which they feel safe and supported and where their teachers have high expectations for their learning. Implementation of a schoolwide positive behavior plan that is based on prosocial values, social competencies, incentives, and positive peer relationships will lay the foundation for classroom-level work and must occur before the classroom work can begin.

The following guidelines were developed by the Victoria Department of Education and Early Child Development (2009) for implementation of effective student engagement strategies across whole schools at the building level:

1. Create a positive school culture.

Teachers and staff must recognize students as individuals by acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of the student population. The school must find ways to connect students to school (through clubs, sports, student council, and other activities) so they develop a sense of belonging. The school should provide transition programs and practices at different stages of schooling that will minimize anxiety, increase resilience, and ensure that students develop a readiness to enter their new environment and make successful transitions between year levels.

2. Encourage student participation.

Giving students a voice is not simply about the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it also is about having the power to influence change. Incorporating meaningful involvement of students means validating and authorizing them to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout education to improve the school.

3. Proactively engage with parents/caretakers.

Keys to successful partnerships with parents/caretakers and families include strong two-way communication, volunteer opportunities, curricula-related collaborations, shared decision making, community-based partnerships, and efficacy building.

4. Implement preventative and early interventions.

The school needs to determine how it will intervene when students exhibit disengaged behaviors—specifically poor attendance and antisocial behaviors. Prevention strategies should target the whole school and should be designed to reduce any risk factors that may contribute to attendance or behavioral issues.

5. Respond to individual students.

The school should have a process in place to identify and respond to individual students who require additional assistance and support. It is imperative to coordinate early intervention and prevention strategies that utilize internal as well as external support services in order to identify and address the barriers to learning that individual students may be facing.

Schools also can implement major changes to their structures that can make it easier to develop positive learning relationships, including small learning communities, alternative scheduling, team teaching, teaching continuity, school-based enterprises, and professional learning communities.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Keeping students focused and engaged in the classroom is quite a challenge amid complex changes—physical, intellectual, emotional, and social—that they experience during this phase of their lives.

1. Relate lessons to students' lives.

A relevant curriculum relates content to the daily lives, concerns, experiences, and pertinent social issues of the learners. Teachers can gain insight into student concerns by taking periodic interest inventories, through informal conversations, and from classroom dialogue (Learning Point Associates, 2005). These issues and topics then can be incorporated into units, lesson plans, and further classroom discussions.

2. Make the learning authentic.

Newmann et al. (1995) advocate for authentic instructional practices to engage learners and they offer three criteria for authentic instructional practices: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond the school.

The first criterion for authentic instructional practices is to facilitate the construction of knowledge by acknowledging students' existing understanding and experience. Identifying student preconceptions and initial understanding is critical to the learning process. "If students' preconceptions are not addressed directly, they often memorize content (e.g., formulas in physics), yet still use their experience-based preconceptions to act in the world" (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 5).

The second criterion for authentic instructional practices is to facilitate disciplined inquiry through structured activities; the inquiry process is critical to the construction of knowledge (Marzano, 2003; Newmann et al., 1995). This process consists of building on the learner's prior knowledge to develop a deeper understanding, integrating new information, and using the knowledge in new ways.

The third criterion for authentic instructional practices is value beyond school (Newmann et al., 1995). This criterion may entail connecting content to personal or public issues as well as the demonstration of understanding to an audience beyond the school. Examples of such activities include writing persuasive letters to the city council to advocate for a skate park, interviewing community elders for an oral history project, or communicating the impact of a development project using scientific concepts.

3. Give students choices.

Finally, providing choice in classrooms will engage learners. Providing opportunities for students to select a topic or text acknowledges young adolescents' need to exercise more decision-making power. Giving students ownership in their learning process increases motivation and keeps interest levels high. Students who have a strong interest in a specific subject may wish to pursue an independent project. These projects may be used as a differentiated way to explore the curriculum.

Regard for Adolescent Perspectives in the Classroom

Following are some suggestions for showing regard for adolescent perspectives. These ideas are based on the work of Smutny, Walker, and Meckstroth (1997) and Tomlinson (1999).

- Independent projects will extend learning beyond the curriculum in the textbook and develop enthusiasm, commitment, and academic skills in addition to allowing students to develop deeper relationships with subject matter.
- “Brainstorming with...children on what kinds of projects they could do may also generate ideas teachers may never have thought of on their own” (Smutny, 2000, p. 7).
- Surveying students' interests in the beginning of the school year will give teachers direction in planning activities that will “get students on board” from the start.
- Surveying again at key points during the year will inform teachers of new interests that develop as their students grow.
- Interest centers are designed to motivate students' exploration of topics in which they have a particular interest. They are usually comprised of objects that students can explore, such as shells, leaves, maps, or projects, and are centered around broad topics.
- Students can choose from the menu and note their choices accordingly.... Teachers decide how many items on the menu (minimum) that each student is required to complete. This is adjusted to meet instructional needs on an individual basis.

Examples of Student Engagement

The National Center for School Engagement (2007) compiled the following examples of student engagement best practices from school districts across the United States:

Factor in Math Fun: In Oswego, New York, a Factoring Fan Club was created for ninth grade math students to get them excited about factoring, to keep it fresh in their minds, and to be “good” at factoring. Source: Oswego School District, Oswego, NY

Celebrate Pi Day on 3/14: This event was created to help students enjoy math by offering a fun-filled day honoring pi. Events included a pie-eating contest, measuring the diameter and circumference of round objects to calculate pi, and other games related to circles. Source: Independence School District, Independence, VA

Mobilize Community: Community Now! is an asset-based community development tool of the Connection Institute. It uses asset-based language and planning to bring the community together to discover what values the community shares as a whole. It then works to mobilize community members around its assets and shares values to become proactive, rather than reactive, in its planning. Source: Kittery Children’s Leadership Council, Kittery, ME

Collaborate with Higher Education: In Mesquite, Texas, a local college delivers 3.5 hours of continuing education courses (educational opportunities) to truant students and their families. The curriculum includes the negative consequences associated with poor school attendance and the positive consequences associated with scholastic achievement. Transition from high school to college is discussed, and a tour of the college is provided. Source: Dallas Independent School District, TX

Offer Incentives: As a reward, a lunchtime soccer game is organized for students with good attendance by school staff. Source: Summit School District, Frisco, CO

Support Positive Behavior: Jacksonville School District adapted the principles of *Got Fish?* (a book to build business morale) for the classroom. Principles include: being there, playing, choosing your behavior, and making their day. Students are recognized when observed living each of the principles. Source: Jacksonville School District, Jacksonville, FL

Create Student-Generated Classroom Rules: In Eugene, Oregon, students create a list of classroom rules. Each student signs off on the rules and is held accountable by fellow students. In addition, they developed their own honor roll, in which students are recognized for doing their best, following directions, and not talking out more than three times a day. Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

Facilitate Positive Student-Teacher Connections: Some schools in Oregon encourage students to sign up for a one-on-one lunch with their teacher during school time. The teacher uses this time to get to know the student and offers encouragement and praise. Students benefit when their teachers demonstrate that they care about student well being in addition to academic success. Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

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QUICK LINKS:
Online Sources
for More Information

Student Transitions from Middle to High School: Improving Achievement and Creating a Safer Environment, by J. Allen Queen (Publication)
<http://books.google.com/books?id=FWqgM3dKKGAC&printsec=frontcover>

This book, which is partially available through Google Books, explains the importance of the transition process in clear prose and provides some ideas on how to create a successful program.

Easing the Transition to High School: Research and Best Practices Designed to Support High School Learning, from the National High School Center (Publication)
http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_TransitionsReport.pdf

Middle-to-High School Transition: Practical Strategies to Consider, by Abner Oakes and Winsome Waite of Learning Point Associates (Publication)
<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED506363.pdf>

Recommendation 2: Student Transition Programs

Implement an ongoing student orientation system that emphasizes community and academic support for the transition to high school.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Many students struggle during the transition into high school. These early struggles can and do lead to disengagement and, potentially, dropping out of school (Dynarski et al, 2008). In a report prepared by the National High School Center, a factsheet created by researchers from the American Institutes for Research noted that “students’ experiences in their first year of high school often determine their success throughout high school and beyond. However, more students fail ninth grade than any other grade” (Williams & Richman, n.d., p. 2). In other words, the first year is critical for long-term school success, but it is also one of the most difficult years students face.

In a survey of 320 ninth grade students, researchers Akos and Galassi (2004) shared that students seemed “to identify three primary categories of school transition concerns—academic, procedural, and social” (p. 218). In a later report focusing on the transition for African-American students, Holcomb-McCoy (2007) divided struggling students into three categories, those who had academic problems, those who had social problems, and those who were disconnected. Then, in 2009, Oakes and Waite drew from a 2006 research summary by the National Middle School Association and wrote that for “many students [...] social matters and peer relationships overshadow academic concerns in ninth grade.” Although the survey that Akos and Galassi used may have been limited to a small number of primarily white (76.3 percent) students in the south, the “three primary categories” they listed receive attention in other studies and analyses of different populations. However, the emphases may vary. These three areas, then, are a useful way to consider the transition process, and a successful transition system will address all three.

In a research brief from the Council of Great City Schools, Horwitz and Snipes (2008) cautioned that “structural reforms,” such as those that create ninth grade academies, “are insufficient to improve student outcomes.” The structural reforms address some of the social and procedural concerns (i.e., anything that involves “navigating around and dealing with the complexities of a larger school environment including multiple classes taught by different teachers” (Akos & Galassi, 2004, p. 218)) that students have by providing them with a home base, stable group of classmates, and teacher who can answer questions about the school, but the reforms do not necessarily address academic problems that students may be facing. In a book on high school transitions, Queen (2002) wrote that, while advisory periods are an option, often “many of the activities that occur during these periods are mechanical tasks, such as taking attendance or distributing notices” (p. 58). Herlihy (2007) noted that structural reforms may help, but that the reforms gave students a stronger chance for high school success when they were combined with “specific instructional and curricular reforms” (p. 25). Repeatedly, research shows that a single approach to the high school transition is not enough; schools must approach the transition process through multiple channels.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The school's transition process has the following four key characteristics present. The information included here should help to improve the transition process.

Elements of a Successful Transition Program

First, the transition should be *ongoing*. This means that the transition should not end with an orientation at the start of the year, but should continue during the full first year. This way the school can assure that students are fully adjusted and that their needs are met.

Second, the transition should be a *system*. This means that the transition should not rest on a single program, but rather should be a series of programs that work together. This is an "ecological perspective," in which change in one area of the transition will cause change in another (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p. 1). The problem is not confined to a single source, so the solution should not be confined to a single program. Just as important, however, the multiple programs should work together synergistically.

The third important part of the recommendation is the emphasis on *community*. Community, which can be cultivated in myriad ways, ensures that students do not feel alone and adrift within the high school. Students need relationships with their teachers. In a review of studies on the ninth grade transition, Neild (2009) noted that one in which researchers had "found that ninth graders averaged 0.78 fewer course failures at schools with high levels of trust between teachers and students than at schools with low levels of teacher-student trust" (p. 63). A community also can ease social anxieties by easing the process of making friends.

Fourth, the transition system should also provide *academic support*. In their research brief, Horwitz and Snipes (2008) noted that in "one large city district" a study had "suggested" that the majority of ninth grade students entered high school below grade level on reading and mathematics, as determined by test scores (p. 2). If students get behind in ninth grade, they may remain behind for all four years of high school. Additionally, students may not know how to study for high school classes or how to organize their time well. In such cases, courses on study skills such as the classes and curricula several schools in Maryland offer may be helpful (Letgers & Kerr, 2001, p. 6).

1. Designate a transition team.

The first step to creating a successful transition system is designating a transition team (Queen, 2002, p. 46). The transition team should include administrators, teachers, counselors, and possibly even students. Students are informed experts on the matter of transition (pg. 53). They know what did and did not work for them when they first entered the school. Their involvement also could create student leaders to whom incoming students could look for aid and answers. If the school did not wish to involve students in the transition team, it could opt to offer a student survey instead.

2. Have the team evaluate the current transition program(s).

The transition team would ask questions such as, but not limited to, the following:

- Is the current transition/orientation program continuous?
 - Does the current transition/orientation program address academic, social, and procedural concerns?
 - Do students receive multiple opportunities to learn their way around the school?

- Do students receive guidance on who to ask various questions?
- Do students and parents receive rich and high-quality information about the school, its policies, safety precautions, and other topics important to the school?
- Do students receive a chance to meet and interact with their peers and upperclassmen? Do they receive multiple chances?
- If the school does have multiple programs for dealing with the transition in place, do these programs work in concert or isolation? And, if the former, how smoothly and well do they work together?
- Do students have an adult with whom they can identify and to whom they can turn for help?
- Do parents have a school contact with whom they can meet and ask questions?

The team would use this self-evaluation or improve the program(s) already in place and select additional or new programs for the school.

3. Have the transition team evaluate the probable needs of the incoming class.

The team could base this evaluation on information about the incoming class gathered from computer data systems and students' previous schools, as well as from data about past freshman classes and their needs. This way, the school knows which academic supports to develop and implement.

4. Redesign, create, and augment the school's present transition program(s).

Depending on the school's needs, which would have been determined by the transition team, the options vary widely. The school may choose among structural or programmatic reforms, or some combination thereof. Structural reforms, which would be difficult to implement for the 2011/12 school year, would include the development of ninth grade academies, advisory classes, interdisciplinary teams, and student cohorts. In other words, a structural reform is any change that alters how the school works in order to better accommodate incoming students. Programmatic reforms would include options such as a summer walk-through of the school, student mentors, peer mediation, smaller orientations and re-orientations throughout the school year, year- or cohort-level events, teacher mentors, and facilitating contact among incoming students (Ashton, 2008, p. 9). The school should focus on ensuring that students have all the information they need (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Oakes & Waite, 2009), involving parents, and enhancing the student-teacher/counselor relationship (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Oakes & Waite, 2009; Queen, 2002). The best system would be one that combined structural and programmatic reforms, which work best when reinforcing one another (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008; Letgers & Kerr, 2001).

After the programs have been chosen, all persons involved with the school should be given an explicit description of their role within the system. Staff members should know their responsibilities, what they entail, and how they will be held accountable (Queen, 2002, p. 56).

5. Monitor the transition system to ensure that it is working smoothly and optimally.

The school may draw on student scores and attendance data, student and parent surveys, or staff observations for this evaluation process. The school also should use these data to ensure that all teachers are fulfilling their roles and that each student is treated fairly. Data can reveal underlying prejudices and stereotypes that may cause some students to feel isolated from the school. Professional development to address these issues and outreach to regain the students should be implemented in such cases. Cultural sensitivity on the part of the staff can greatly affect a student's transition into a new school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The process should be ongoing, recurring each year, so that the school is able to improve and refine its transition system constantly.

Talent Development High School

The Talent Development High School model, developed by the Center for Research on Students Placed at Risk, focuses on, among other areas of reform, providing students with a smoother and better supported transition into high school. The type of the transition system model is both structural and programmatic. Talent Development High School provides a valuable, research-supported example of how a transition system may be designed and implemented. Schools may borrow ideas and strategies from the system, without needing to implement the entire approach. The Talent Development High School model separates new students into a separate academy, which may even be physically separated from other students (Herlihy, 2007, p. 21). Within the academy, interdisciplinary teams team-teach students using a special curricula to help students “catch up” academically (Herlihy, 2007; Neild, 2009, p. 65-69). The school also created a special Twilight Academy that operated in the afternoon for students with persistent behavioral problems, as well as another special academy for students who were unable to continue on to tenth grade. The school encouraged attendance and academic achievement through various incentives and supports (Herlihy, 2007, p. 21). The teachers received common planning times within their teams, as well as ongoing coaching and professional development (p. 21).

The academy limited the number of teachers with whom students frequently interacted, allowing them to build relationships. The limitation also decreased the amount of physical spaces the students occupied during the day, shrinking the school. Additionally, this containment likely facilitated the creation of friendships. The catch-up curriculum and double-dosing of reading and math (Neild, 2009) helped ease academic-based anxieties and helped keep students from falling behind. One study of the Talent Development High School model found that students within the model outperformed their peers in “attendance, total credits earned, credits earned in algebra, and on time promotion” (Neild, 2009, p. 67). These gains persisted into the third year. However, Neild warns that ongoing academic success requires more than a smoother transition for ninth grade students.

Recommendation 3: Positive Behavior Management System

Develop and implement a schoolwide positive behavior policy and system with clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. The policy and related system should include concise social expectations and a continuum of supports, interventions, incentives/rewards, and consequences—including a clear delineation of activities and programs that students are entitled to versus those that are privileges.

LINK TO RESEARCH

One of the greatest obstacles within urban schools is the large number of students whose behavior interferes with their achievement or the achievement of others. Often these students have behaved in a manner that disrupts the educational climate of the classroom and the school. One key element for changing this pattern is the implementation of a schoolwide behavior program that is developed with the input and support of parents and staff.

“Effective schoolwide behavior programs have clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. Students need a secure, orderly environment that promotes their personal well-being and supports learning. Rules should also be fair and stress the students’ responsibility to the school community, their parents, and themselves. All students in the school need to be aware of the rules, the reasons for the rules, and the consequences for breaking the rules. Effective discipline programs are based on praise and encouragement for positive behavior and clear, consistent consequences for misbehavior” (Chicago Public Schools, Office of Specialized Services, 1998).

“Effective schools build and maintain a positive ‘social culture.’ Successful students are safe (don’t hurt themselves or others), respectful (follow adult requests and get along with their peers), and responsible (arrive to class on time and complete assignments). These foundational skills are essential for a safe and orderly school environment. In addition, members of a positive social culture use ‘higher order’ skills, such as (a) impulse control, (b) anger management, (c) conflict resolution, (d) empathy, and (e) drug and alcohol use resistance and prevention. Research studies consistently show that schools that establish a positive social culture also achieve the best academic gains” (Sprague, 2011).

“Positive behavior interventions, used correctly by teachers, administrators, and parents, encourage or strengthen desirable behavior and reduce inappropriate behavior. Positive interventions have a greater likelihood of enabling a student to change his/her behavior in a way that does not interrupt learning. Effective interventions encourage praise and recognition of positive behavior, and demand clear and consistent responses to misbehavior. Children and youth tend to respond to positive techniques. In some cases, however, more restrictive interventions may be necessary to control and change extremely inappropriate and aggressive behavior” (Chicago Public Schools, Office of Specialized Services, 1998, p. 1).

School-wide positive behavioral supports (SWBPS) is based on the research-based application of lessons learned from more than 7,000 schools currently implementing successful changes in the school environment. SWBPS evolved from valid research in the field of special education. It is not a curriculum, intervention, or practice but a decision-making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidenced-based behavioral

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Alcott Middle School
Behavior Expectations and
Related Teaching Materials
(Video)

http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/alcott_mid.aspx

Discovering School-Wide
PBS: Moving Towards
a Positive Future” from
Florida’s Positive Behavior
Support Project (Video)

http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/pbs_video-discovering_swpbs.aspx

practices for improving important academic outcomes for all students (Office of Special Education Programs, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2011).

Researchers have only recently begun to study the effects of schoolwide behavioral management systems and what it takes to implement these systems effectively. While it is too early to offer recipes for success, the work of key researchers and their school-based colleagues is providing some encouraging developments. While there are different variations of schoolwide systems of behavioral support, most have certain features in common. The emphasis is on consistency, both throughout the building and across classrooms. The entire school staff is expected to adopt strategies that will be implemented uniformly. As a result, approaches necessitate professional development and long-term commitment by the school leadership for this innovation to take hold. The school-based models featured in the Quick Links on the previous page have been selected to show how different features of a schoolwide behavioral management system can apply across urban, suburban, and rural locations. These schools understand that change is incremental, and are approaching implementation of their school-wide systems slowly and over an extended time period.

Common Features of Schoolwide Behavioral Management Systems

- Total staff commitment to managing behavior, whatever approach is taken.
- Clearly defined and communicated expectations and rules.
- Consequences and clearly stated procedures for correcting rule-breaking behaviors.
- An instructional component for teaching students self-control and/or social skill strategies.

(The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice. *Effective Behavioral Supports*. American Institutes for Research. Retrieved June 2011 from <http://cecp.air.org/center.asp>)

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Guiding Principles

The Office of Special Education Program's Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2011) has established the following schoolwide positive behavioral support guiding principles:

1. Develop a continuum of scientifically based behavior and academic interventions and supports.

If not already established, a well-articulated schoolwide behavior policy/student code inclusive of positive expectations, minor and major infractions, etc., must first be in place. Clarity around expectations for staff handling of in-class behaviors is important here. Authentic faculty feedback and participation are important throughout the policy and system development processes.

2. Use data to make decisions and solve problems.

Data on both minor and major behavior incidents should be collected, tracked, analyzed, and utilized in decision making by the team and faculty on at least a monthly basis. Data should be presented in a user-friendly format.

3. Arrange the environment to prevent the development and occurrence of problem behavior.

This is inclusive of three to five positively stated overarching schoolwide social expectations that are posted in visible locations around the school, particularly in problematic areas.

4. Teach and encourage prosocial skills and behaviors.

Students should be introduced/taught the schoolwide expectations, rules for specific settings, reward/consequence system, and related interventions/supports. Staff should be trained on how to present expectations to students. Ongoing communication and collaboration with families and the community are very important.

5. Implement evidenced-based behavioral practices with fidelity and accountability.

Interventions should be multitiered, increasing in levels of intensity and inclusive of evidence-based programs or strategies. The Primary Level (all students) is the overall behavior management plan. The Secondary Level (some students) is for a targeted group or focused on individual plans for those who did not respond to the first level. The Tertiary Level (few students) includes highly individualized strategies for students who did not respond to the first two levels.

6. Screen universally and monitor student performance and progress continuously.

There should be a plan for collecting data to evaluate positive behavioral support outcomes wherein data are collected as scheduled and used to evaluate their effectiveness for future adjustments.

Building a Team

Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project (2005) outlines a schoolwide positive behavioral support process that can provide a systematic structure and formalized procedures that can be implemented over the summer months. The initial steps should be to establish and get total staff buy-in. Establish a schoolwide leadership team or behavior support team. The suggestion is not to develop yet another group, but to fold schoolwide positive behavioral support into the roles and responsibilities of an already established team. Members of the team should include: administrators, (i.e., principal, assistant principal, or dean), counselors, social workers, regular education teacher, special education teacher, staff member with behavior expertise, and a coach/district representative. It is essential that administration supports the process, take an active role with the rest of the team, and/or attend most meetings.

Determining School Capacity

Other important implementation consideration points center on gauging and developing the staff's individual and collective capacities to implement a comprehensive program. Related initial key questions include:

- What are the schoolwide social expectations and routines?
- Who at the schoolwide level has the unique disposition necessary to both hold students firmly accountable and support them as they attempt to adjust with fidelity?
- What are the procedural expectations of teachers for managing in-class behaviors?

- What manageable recourse do teachers have for patterns of disruptive and disrespectful instances of behavior *in the moment* (i.e., immediate referrals to a dean/counselor/administration in-school timeout room and criteria for reentry)?
- What is the specific, realistic *and manageable* continuum of interventions and supports?
- What is the specific, realistic *and manageable* continuum of consequences for patterns of disruptive in-class behavior?
- How will the efficacy of chosen interventions and supports be monitored and adjusted intermittently as needed in a data-driven manner? Who is responsible for this?
- What are the mechanisms for notifying and collaborating with students' parents/guardians early and often in the process?
 - Who is responsible for this (i.e., teachers, counselors, social workers, deans, administrators)?
- What are the thresholds for more severe consequences/privilege losses for patterns of disruptive behaviors?
- What outside resources are available to support students and families struggling with issues that are affecting students' behavior, but well outside of the school's capacity to address?
- What privileges and incentives (i.e., extracurriculars, athletics, field trips, social activities) are currently in place that can serve as points of leverage?
 - Do more need to be identified or developed?
- How are students who actively exhibit established desirable social behaviors formally recognized?
 - Perhaps most important, how are those actively attempting to make sustained social adjustments formally recognized and supported (without stigmatizing)?

Positive Behavior Support in the Classroom:

- Arrange classroom to minimize crowding and distraction.
- Establish explicit classroom routines and directions that are linked to schoolwide routines and directions.
- Post three-five positively stated expectations and teach and reinforce them.
- Provide frequent acknowledgment of appropriate behaviors.
- Provide students with multiple opportunities to respond and participate during instruction.
- Actively supervise class during instruction.
- Ignore or provide quick, direct, explicit reprimands/redirections in response to inappropriate behavior.
- Develop multiple strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior (points, praise) linked to schoolwide strategies.
- Provide specific feedback in response to social and academic errors and correct responses.

Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Support in an Urban High School: A Case Study

A three-year study to examine impact of schoolwide positive behavioral support was conducted by Chicago Public Schools, with the implementation high school serving an estimated 1,800 students during the first year of the study. The school served a diverse student body with the following racial and ethnic makeup: 36 percent African-American, 36 percent Hispanic, 16 percent Asian American, 8 percent Caucasian, 2 percent Native American, and 2 percent other, with 21 percent demonstrating limited English proficiency. In addition, 89 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and 20 percent were identified as students with disabilities.

The results of the study revealed that it took about two years for the school to fully implement all components of the schoolwide positive behavioral support plan. However, by the third year the average rate of daily discipline referrals had been reduced by 20 percent. Successful implementation strategies cited by the school included the following:

- Convening a positive behavioral support team with various stakeholders from the school (e.g., administrator, educator, parents, and students) for a day of training and to develop an action plan.
- Conducting a summer trial intervention with about 100 students during a summer activity to test teaching systems using positive behavior expectations.
- Providing teachers with key products such as sample copies of social skills lesson plans, posters reflecting schoolwide behavior expectations, and sample syllabi.
- Conducting grade-level assemblies to introduce rationales for the expected behaviors and providing opportunities to practice positive and negative examples of specific behaviors (i.e., respectful walking in the hallway).
- Establishing a system of rewards, including redeemable acknowledgement tickets that could be awarded to individual students for exhibiting positive behavior.
- Holding schoolwide celebrations that are contingent on the overall reduction of disciplinary referrals.

(Description retrieved from http://www.redorbit.com/news/education/596879/schoolwide_application_of_positive_behavior_support_in_an_urban_high/)

Recommendation 4: Professional Learning and Collaboration

Create and implement structured opportunities for purposeful teacher collaboration. Time allocated to collaboration among teachers must be focused on strengthening instruction, based on student data, and connected to schoolwide goals.

LINK TO RESEARCH

One trademark of high-performing schools is what is known as a professional learning community. A professional learning community is characterized as a group of educators who “work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice...engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning” (DuFour, 2004). Research shows that collaboration between teachers can be a powerful tool as a driver for school improvement by providing “opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement” (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p.2). Schools building professional learning communities have created opportunities for teachers and other professionals to collaborate through team meetings, critical friends groups, and/or lesson study in which teachers collaboratively plan, observe, and analyze classroom lessons.

DuFour (2007) and Fullan (2007) concede that some school systems may succumb to the temptation to rename existing teacher work groups as professional learning communities or potentially to become distracted or confused by terminology (e.g., Patterson et al., 2006) rather than the intended focus on revising and strengthening instruction for the benefit of students. These researchers and authors emphasize that a key to successful professional learning communities is developing and maintaining a schoolwide culture that does not merely accept the purpose of professional learning communities, but embraces their strict attention to examining practice to improve student learning. Among other challenges, educators need to use professional learning community time for its intended purpose and to consciously avoid using it as a forum for unrelated topics or business. Creating such a culture is a challenge. Research consistently shows, however, that when faculty, staff, administrators, and the larger education community come together to work on strengthening teaching and learning, improvement follows (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2008).

Several studies have concluded that professional learning communities can have a positive impact on school culture, professional development, and student achievement. For instance, Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) found that teachers interacting with colleagues in professional learning communities were more willing to take risks in trying new things, were able to thoughtfully reflect on their teaching, were more forthcoming in sharing ideas and concerns with one another, and were focused on improving instructional practices to improve student learning. They felt empowered to make changes based on their professional learning community work and demonstrated increased commitment to continuous professional learning for themselves and fellow teachers. Dunne, Nave, and Lewis (2000) discovered that the teachers in their study gradually shifted from teacher-directed to student-centered practices as a result of their sustained dialogues and collaborations. Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, and Towner (2004) noted that as a result of interactions and work in professional learning communities, teachers redirected their time and effort from complaining about the challenges of teaching nonproficient students to developing instructional procedures and tools to improve the learning of these students.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Effective Teacher
Collaboration Time (Website)

<http://www.mass2020.org/files/file/Increased%20Learning%20Time%20Partnership/Session%20/S2%20Presentation%20-%20Effective%20Use%20of%20Teacher%20Time.pdf>

*Professional Learning
Communities: Professional
Development Strategies
That Improve Instruction*
(Publication)

<http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/ProfLearning.pdf>

*Maximizing the Impact
of Teacher Collaboration*
(Publication)

http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Mar07.pdf

*Professional Development:
Learning From the Best.
A Toolkit for Schools and
Districts Based on the
National Awards Program
for Model Professional
Development* (Publication)

<http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/pd/lftb.pdf>

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The key to developing and implementing effective collaborative time, which can have a positive impact on student achievement, is ensuring that the time is used productively and impacts the daily practice of teachers. When developing a professional learning community and collaboration plan, think about the following:

- Resources available to support collaboration (e.g., network specialist, financial incentives)
- Ways to leverage teacher leadership—identify teachers and staff members who can serve as department chairs or team leads
- Creative ways to find collaboration time in the school schedule
- Ways to support teachers in development of collaboration skills (e.g., team-building opportunities, buddy or mentor teachers)
- Ways to address current norms of collaboration (e.g., shifting focus from behavior management to instructional focus)
- Proactive strategies to engage staff who may be more resistant to collaboration
- Constraint of teacher contracts
- Effective and inclusive integration of specialists into collaboration plan (e.g., outside consultants, network instructional specialist, mentor teachers)

Effective professional learning communities are developed and implemented using the following structures and steps:

1. Provide sufficient time for collaboration.

- Provide sufficient time for teachers to discuss student learning needs and share, review, and provide feedback on instructional practices that address student learning needs. Embed these opportunities into the school's instructional calendar.
- Create daily common planning periods. Designate one day each week for each team to engage in collaborative, rather than individual, planning.
- Identify opportunities throughout the school year for extended time to dedicate to collaboration time (e.g., inservice days, grade level assemblies, back-to-back periods of “specials”).
- *For example, a school may build the schedule so that classroom or subject-area teachers are freed up by “specials” (e.g., music, art, physical education).*

2. Align teacher work with school goals and priorities.

- Teamwork should mirror and seek to enhance schoolwide student achievement goals and objectives. Agendas, activities, and outcomes are reflective of schoolwide priorities.
- Once collaboration time is identified and embedded into the school's instructional calendar, create a plan to address school improvement topics during collaboration time. Consider in which order school improvement needs and topics will be addressed.

- *For example, if a school goal is to increase literacy across the curriculum, collaboration time may be spent examining curricular documents and lesson plans and identifying areas for literacy skills across various subject areas and grade levels.*

3. Focus collaboration on improving student learning.

- Effective collaboration focuses on improving practice in order to improve student learning. The work process of collaborative teams should be designed to do the following:
 - Clarify what students must learn.
 - Gather evidence of student learning.
 - Analyze that evidence.
 - Identify most powerful teaching strategies.

4. Ensure collaboration is data driven.

- Use student performance data in collaborative groups. This will be the focus with which to improve teaching and learning. Data can help identify areas of concern and aid the development of strategies and solutions.
- Create a schedule in which data analysis is embedded in collaborative time. The use of protocols can provide structure for the collection, review, and analysis.

5. Provide structured collaboration time.

- Structure collaboration time with clearly mapped goals, objectives, and accountability. Create a long-term plan, calendar, and/or schedule of topics and activities for common planning time.
- Establish guidelines related to the use of protocols. The use of a protocol can be a powerful tool in creating a formalized process for collaboration. It helps establish ground rules for participation, interaction, and potential distractions. The use of a discussion (or any other) protocol can help structure conversations by specifying how time will be allotted to achieve certain goals such as presenting context, asking clarifying questions, providing and reflecting on feedback, brainstorming, or decision making.
- *For example, protocols can provide structures for ways in which to examine student work, tune and align curricular documents, provide feedback on lesson plans and teaching, develop common assessments, and identify students for remediation.*

6. Offer leadership and support.

- Focus the work of collaborative groups by helping them align their priorities with achievement goals.
- Provide resources needed to support the work of collaborative teams.
- Allow teachers to hold key leadership positions during collaboration time by facilitating group work. Identify subject area chairpersons or grade team leads. Work with these teacher leaders to create goals, objectives, and structures for collaboration time.

Jacob Hiatt Magnet School

Jacob Hiatt Magnet School provides an example of teacher collaboration.

Jacob Hiatt Magnet School, located in Worcester, Massachusetts, serves 456 students in Grades PK–6, with 71 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Students with disabilities make up 15 percent of the student population and 30 percent of the students are limited English proficient. The school has developed a model of teacher collaboration that includes a comprehensive set of meetings woven into teachers' schedules. Collaboration time is driven by student achievement data and is deeply focused on improving instruction.

Collaboration time is structured to support identified instructional focuses with opportunities for teachers to meet in vertical teams to review student work and examine student data. Collaboration time includes regular and ongoing weekly and monthly grade-level team meetings and full staff meetings two to three times per month, after school. Teams receive guidance from the instructional leadership team and use protocols and other strategies to ensure optimal use of time. Coverage is provided by the principal, assistant principal, and specialist teachers to allow teacher teams to have at least 60–90 minutes of uninterrupted collaboration time.

Schoolwide Instructional Focus

Teacher collaboration at Jacob Hiatt Magnet School is intentional in its support of the instructional focus on helping students read critically, interpret text, and answer questions completely and intelligently based on text.

Three Schoolwide Best Practices

The instructional focus led to the identification and adoption of three best practices to be used by all teachers in support of student learning: *time dedicated to open response daily in every classroom*, *modeling*, and *use of T-charts*. Teacher collaboration is focused on supporting the refinement of these best practices.

Use of Data

Data are used routinely to understand how student achievement is impacted by changes to instructional practice. This information is then used to inform the school's continuous instructional improvement efforts.

Rounds

The collaboration model at Jacob Hiatt Magnet School also includes a process referred to as *Rounds*. This process consists of small groups of teachers who collaborate to better understand the teaching-learning process within individual classrooms via pre-arranged Rounds visits. Teachers participate as either observers or host teachers, and the professional learning process is facilitated by well-defined roles for each participant, preround orientation meetings, and postround opportunities for reflection and discussion.

The Effective Use of Teacher Collaboration Time to Advance Student Achievement. A living case study. (October, 2010). Retrieved July 18, 2011, from <http://www.mass2020.org/files/file/Increased%20Learning%20Time%20Partnership/Session%202/S2%20Presentation%20-%20Effective%20Use%20of%20Teacher%20Time.pdf>

Recommendation 5: Progress Monitoring

Develop and implement clear policies, regulations, and feedback loops within the school to determine how students are identified for interventions and supports and to measure student progress.

LINKS TO RESEARCH

Progress monitoring has become a critical element in New York Schools, since schools have been required to implement academic intervention services (AIS) designed to provide appropriate supports to underperforming students (See Section 100.1(g), 100.2(ee) of New York State Education Department Regulations). Schools are facing constant pressure to identify, assess, and address the needs of students who are not meeting academic standards in order to meet stringent accountability standards (Deno et al., 2009; Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). As a result of this policy, there has been an increased effort around standards-based reform in schools (Deno et al., 2009). This effort consists of developing and implementing policies and systems to identify students who are in need of academic interventions and supports as well as to monitor their progress using benchmark assessments once they have been placed in the appropriate academic intervention service (Stecker et al., 2008).

Research has shown that implementing student progress monitoring can result in improved student learning and achievement and also can inform instructional decisions (Cotton, 1988). A number of studies have shown that progress-monitoring tools can be used to predict outcomes related to student performance and to make data-driven decisions related to student engagement in curriculum and instruction (Mellard, McKnight, & Woods, 2009; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005). Progress monitoring is commonly used in the context of a Response to Intervention model (RTI), a model of academic supports that utilizes assessments and interventions in the context of a multilevel prevention system to promote student achievement. However, progress monitoring can be used even if a school has not fully implemented an RTI framework (Mellard et al., 2009).

The primary goal of progress monitoring is to determine whether the academic intervention is having the expected result, or whether adjustment needs to be made. This concept is often referred to as using assessment to drive instruction, and it should be implemented continuously to improve instruction (Hamilton et al., 2009; Mellard et al., 2009). Thus, practitioners need to have an understanding of key assessment tools that allow them to identify students in need of intervention, monitor students' progress, and diagnose the specific academic issues facing students.

One of the most common tools for both screening and progress monitoring is curriculum-based measurement, which can be used for both general and special education (Deno et al., 2009; Stecker et al., 2005). This method consists of a straightforward procedure for regularly evaluating student progress in basic academic areas. Curriculum-based measurement has been proven to provide reliable and valid measures in key academic areas such as reading, mathematics, written expression, and spelling (Deno et al., 2009). This method also is aligned with curriculum content and annual performance goals, and consists of procedures that are implemented regularly (e.g., every three weeks). Curriculum-based management also

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring (Website)

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

Student Progress Monitoring Resources From the Center for Instruction (Website)

http://centerforinstruction.org/resources_searchresults.cfm?searchterms=progress+monitoring

New York State Response To Intervention Technical Assistance Center (Website)

www.nysrti.org

"Tiered Service-Delivery Model," National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (Website)

www.nrclid.org

National Center on Response to Intervention (Website)

<http://www.rti4success.org>

is a measure that is sensitive to student growth in the sense that teachers can determine a student's rate of progress (Stecker et al., 2008). Additionally, curriculum-based management data can be aggregated at the classroom and school level to facilitate data analysis around meeting state accountability targets (Deno, 2003).

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Progress monitoring should be implemented (along with screening and diagnostic strategies) with either a small group of students or individual students (receiving targeted instruction) in order to monitor changes in academic skills for students placed into academic intervention services. Table 1 shows key guidelines to consider when implementing progress monitoring in conjunction with additional assessments:

Table 1. Strategies for Implementing a Schoolwide Monitoring System			
Monitoring Strategy			
	<i>Screening</i>	<i>Progress Monitoring</i>	<i>Diagnostic Tests</i>
<i>Target Population</i>	School level	Class or small-group level	Individual student level
<i>Uses</i>	Establish broad benchmarks	Identify specific academic or behavioral target	Identify specific academic areas related to knowledge, skills, or abilities
<i>Frequency</i>	Annually	Every three weeks/weekly	Annually
<i>Purpose</i>	Anticipate students who are at-risk	Adjust classroom assignments or student groups	Identify individual student challenges
<i>Focus</i>	School	Student class/ small group	Student
<i>Instruction</i>	Decisions related to class/school instruction and curriculum	Evaluate curriculum/ instruction intervention	Select appropriate curriculum and instructional methods
<i>Implications</i>	First step in intervention planning process	Maintain or adjust placement	Intervention preparation or specification
Adapted from Mellard, D. F., McKnight, M., & Woods, K. (2009). Response to intervention screening and progress-monitoring practices in 41 local schools. <i>Learning Disabilities Research & Practice (Blackwell Publishing Limited)</i> , 24(4), 186-195.			

A Road Map for Progress Monitoring

This section provides an overview of strategies to guide the implementation of progress monitoring.

1. Foster a data-driven culture within the school.

Data-driven practices should be promoted in the school to make sure that teachers are engaged and supported in using data to monitor the progress of their students. Schools should implement professional development around student progress monitoring that is either curriculum based or teacher developed, such as individual or group coaching for teachers (Hamilton et al., 2009).

2. Implement standard measurement tasks.

Assessments that are standardized and validated short-duration tests represent a key component of student progress monitoring. Standardization enables teachers to establish baseline data from which progress can be measured across time. Examples of standard tasks that can be measured include reading aloud from a text and selecting words deleted from the text, writing word sequences from a story starter or picture in writing, writing letter sequences from dictation in spelling, and solving problems in arithmetic (Deno, 2003). Additionally, the exams should be fast and easy to administer to avoid impacting instructional time (Stecker et al., 2008).

3. Benchmark.

Assessments for student progress monitoring should allow teachers to compare student performance to pre-established cut scores, which serve as benchmarks to identify students as either not at-risk or at-risk (Stecker et al., 2008). Teachers should administer tests either to groups of students or to individual students at regular intervals and then compare student scores to these benchmarks as a way of determining relative risk to inform instructional decisions (Stecker et al., 2008).

4. Graph progress.

Teachers can measure student progress by collecting baseline data using standardized assessments and then plotting the results of subsequent (at least once a month) assessments on a graph (McLane, 2006). Assessment as frequent as once or twice weekly may be required for students who are low achieving or who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities (Stecker et al., 2008). A goal line can be connected from the baseline collected (representing the current level of performance) to the annual goal line to show the optimal rate of progress required to meet long-term academic achievement goals (Stecker, et al., 2008). As teachers continue to monitor the students' progress and plot scores, these data points can be compared to the goal line to evaluate the students' rate of progress (Stecker et al., 2008). For example, if the student line is steeper than the projected goal line, a student's rate of progress is likely to exceed established goals. By contrast, a line that is less steep indicates that the student may not be achieving the optimal rate of progress, and an instructional change should be considered.

Student Progress Monitoring Summarized in Five Steps

1. Select measurement materials.
2. Evaluate validity and reliability of assessments.
3. Administer and score measures.
4. Integrate results into goal setting.
5. Evaluate instructional efficacy.

Stecker, P. M., Lembke, E. S., & Foegen, A. (2008). Using progress-monitoring data to improve instructional decision making. *Preventing School Failure, 52*(2), 48-58.

MacArthur Ninth Grade School

MacArthur Ninth Grade School serves students in Grades 9–12. Located in suburban Houston, Texas, 79 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

The school regularly administers three-week and six-week assessments to check students' mastery of the objectives. Teachers analyze these data for trends and provide tutorial sessions to individual students to ensure that they can demonstrate mastery. Students also monitor their own data and set learning goals after each six-week benchmark assessment.

For the three-week assessments, teachers develop a test that typically includes 12–15 multiple-choice questions based on district benchmark assessments. The results help teachers plan instruction and provide interim feedback to students.

The six-week assessments are the districtwide benchmark tests that contain 15 questions.

Teachers typically add additional items to ensure a minimum of four questions about each objective. After assessments are scanned and scored, teachers return the results to the students.

The students count their errors per objective, determine and record their percentages, and set personal goals for the next assessment.

To analyze these results, teachers enter them in a spreadsheet that was created by the testing coordinator. To determine whether the results of an individual teacher align with the average in the department, teachers meet by department and compare the passing percent of each class with the average in the department. Then teachers reflect on the results to determine (a) areas of instruction that need to be strengthened, and (b) specific objectives that should be retaught for a whole class period or revisited through daily warm-up activities.

The district has established a 70 percent mastery goal for the six-week benchmark assessments.

Students who do not meet this goal participate in after-school tutorial sessions. Each core subject has one day set aside for these sessions. Students receiving this additional support are retested until they achieve the benchmark goal.

(Description from the Doing What Works website: http://dww.ed.gov/media/DDI/DDDM/TopicLevel/case_macarthur_revised.pdf)

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Suggestions for Further Reading

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