

# Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School

## FINAL REPORT



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# Introduction

## About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as in Improvement (Year 1) 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 Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School

Located in the Bronx, Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School (X227) is a high school with 391 students in Grades 9–12.<sup>1</sup> The school population comprises 33 percent Black, 64 percent Hispanic, 2 percent White, and 1 percent Asian students.<sup>2</sup> The student body includes 26 percent English language learners (ELLs) and 20 percent special education students (Special Education Service Delivery Report).<sup>3</sup> Approximately 50 percent of students are boys and 50 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 78 percent. Approximately 83 percent of the students are eligible for free lunch and 5 percent are eligible for reduced-price lunch (Accountability and Overview Report 2009–2010).<sup>4</sup>

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School is a small urban high school that partners with the New York City Outward Bound Organization. The school's mission is to foster a culture of academic and individual development to prepare students for college and professional careers (Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School Comprehensive Education Plan 2010–11).<sup>5</sup> The school has implemented a number of strategies to achieve this objective and help students develop leadership and decision-making skills. These programs consist of a summer bridge program that allows students to engage in expeditions in New York City, as well as Crew, an advisory program that students participate in throughout their tenure at the school.

According to the 2009–10 New York State Accountability and Overview Report, Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all students in English language (ELA) and math, as well as for Latino and economically disadvantaged students.<sup>6</sup> The school has implemented rigorous data-driven practices to monitor student performance and improve instruction, which are primarily targeted at the ninth

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/14/AOR-2010-320900011227.pdf>. pg 3. Accessed on July 13, 2011.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/14/AOR-2010-320900011227.pdf>. pg 3. Accessed on July 13, 2011

<sup>3</sup>[http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr\\_X227.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_X227.pdf)

<sup>4</sup><https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/14/AOR-2010-320900011227.pdf>. pg 3. Accessed on July 13, 2011

<sup>5</sup>[http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep\\_X227.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep_X227.pdf)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/14/AOR-2010-320900011227.pdf>. pg 3. Accessed on July 13, 2011

grade. A diagnostic assessment is administered to each student upon entry; every 6-8 weeks, students are given follow-up interim assessments that are formatted like Regents exams. According to the Bronx Expeditionary Learning Comprehensive Educational Plan 2010–11, the school recognizes a need to improve attendance, credit accumulation, and the academic achievement of ELL and special education students.<sup>7</sup> The school noted that the ELL and special education populations have increased dramatically over the past several years, and these students have not had the same level of academic success as general education students.<sup>8</sup>

## **Audit Process at Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School**

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

These reports were presented to the school during a co-interpretation<sup>SM</sup> meeting on May 3, 2011. During this meeting, 18 stakeholders from the Bronx Expeditionary Learning 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 Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School.

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<sup>7</sup>[http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep\\_X227.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep_X227.pdf). pg. 11

<sup>8</sup>[http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep\\_X227.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2010-11/cep_X227.pdf). pg. 11

## Key Findings

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

### Critical Key Findings

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:**

Teachers have access to student data and use it to discuss students' progress and identify necessary interventions. However, there is a lack of data to demonstrate whether or not those services (tutoring block, "Kid Talk," etc.) effectively support student development, including support for incoming students.

Critical Key Finding 1 summarizes 13 findings from document review, interview, and survey data. Teacher survey data indicated that teachers have moderate to great access to student data and believe the school is likely to both identify appropriate supports for struggling students and provide those services in a timely manner. Document reviews also provided strong evidence that teachers use interim assessments to measure student progress and inform instruction. However, interview and document review data indicated that there is a dearth of data with regard to the impact of tutorial courses, "Kid Talk" meetings, departmental meetings, and orientation programs on student progress and achievement. Interviews also provided evidence that teachers are not uniformly receptive to professional development and feedback or constructive criticism related to instruction. Additionally, interview data revealed that the school does not have a systematic process for collecting and analyzing robust academic attendance and behavioral data for incoming students.

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:**

Teacher surveys indicate that both special education and ELL teachers are collaborating with content-area teachers during scheduled and informal times. However, all teachers are unsure as to where to seek instructional support regarding modifications and special populations.

Critical Key Finding 2 presents evidence from six findings based on teacher survey data, which indicated that the majority of respondents (73 percent) noted that they collaborate with ELL and special education teachers during common planning, professional development, and informal times. However, teacher responses were inconsistent with regard to knowledge of direct sources of support to improve instruction of students with disabilities, as well as whether or not there is administration or staff support of ELLs.

### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:**

According to interviews and documents, the school does not offer many elective courses. This was attributed to limited resources and a philosophy which focuses on the core curriculum.

Co-interpretation participants developed Critical Key Finding 3 based on two findings from interview data, which indicated that the school did not offer many elective courses due to a heavy focus on basic academics. According to interview data, a dearth of electives may inhibit student engagement among the students who regularly attend school. Consequently, the school tends to focus more energy on challenging students at the school rather than the students who would actively participate in and benefit from offering electives.

## **Positive Key Findings**

### **POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:**

There is clear evidence that teachers collaborate on both a formal and an informal basis, and that teachers feel supported by administrators for that collaboration.

Positive Key Finding 1 was based on interview and survey data, which reflect that the majority (70 percent) of teacher respondents agreed that teachers collaborate across grade and subject levels as well as discuss instruction and student needs with other teachers. According to interview and survey data, the school administration intentionally and regularly provides time for teachers to collaborate on grade teams, as departments, and with co-teachers on a regular basis; the vast majority (95 percent) of teacher respondents agreed that the school supports teacher collaboration. Additionally, survey data reflected teacher consensus that collaboration takes place between general education teachers and co-teachers for ELLs and special education.

### **POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:**

Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School received a high average rating of 5.8 for creating a positive classroom climate with a high concentration in ELA and math. Although there were some lower ratings for this positive climate, this can be attributed to disruptive behavior on the part of some students.

Participants developed Positive Key Finding 2 from analyzing five findings from observation data and discussed that, on average, observed classrooms received ratings at the high end of the mid-range for positive climate, indicating that instances of warm and respectful relationships between teachers and students, positive expectations and communication, as well as respect were noted to varying degrees across classrooms observations. No classrooms received ratings in the low range for this dimension since elements of positive climate were observed across all observation cycles. The majority of observed classrooms contained strong evidence of warm relationships between students and teachers, such as frequent proximity in the classroom, social conversation, and teachers speaking to students in a warm, clear voice. Observed classrooms that received lower ratings for positive climate were due to disruptive behavior on the part of students. Co-interpretation participants also noted that primary classroom disruptors consisted of behavior and wasted time/lost productivity.

### **POSITIVE KEY FINDING 3:**

Observation data indicated that the majority of students were engaged in their classrooms, with ratings notably higher in math classes. While most students participated, some evidence of off-task and disruptive behavior was observed.

Positive Key Finding 3 was developed based on observation data. Co-interpretation participants discussed that observed classrooms received an average rating of 5.1 for student engagement, indicating the majority of classrooms received ratings in the high mid-range. According to observation data, uneven student engagement was noted with some students participating and others engaged in disruptive or off-task behavior. Another finding indicated that no classes received ratings in the low range.

### **Additional Key Finding**

An additional key finding was identified by co-interpretation participants but was not prioritized by the group for action planning. The auditors found the following key finding worthy of consideration in developing recommendations.

### **ADDITIONAL FINDING 1:**

According to observations and survey data, teachers encourage procedural practice more often than they promote deep understanding and critical thinking.

Co-interpretation participants developed Additional Key Finding 1 from 10 findings based on observation and teacher survey data. Observation data indicated that the majority of observed classrooms contained strong evidence of procedural practice with nominal effort on the part of teachers to encourage a deep understanding of content area. According to survey data, the majority of teacher respondents (68 percent) reported having their students write reflections in a notebook, journal, or blog 1–2 times a week or daily/almost daily. However, only a minority (36 percent) of observed classrooms received ratings in the 6–7 range that reflected frequent integration of real-world examples, use of student’s prior knowledge, and clear modeling procedures. Additionally, participants noted that, based on observation data, while students were generally provided with opportunities for analysis, instances of complex problem solving or self-evaluation were rarely noted.

# Recommendations

## Overview of Recommendations

During the Bronx Expeditionary Learning co-interpretation, school staff and faculty identified three priority areas for improvement: systematically using data to more formally monitor student progress and program effectiveness for academic interventions, implementing instructional strategies that encourage a deeper content understanding, and increasing student engagement. Participants indicated that professional development and collaboration is very strong at Bronx Expeditionary Learning and is supported by the school administration.

The school invests a lot of effort into monitoring the progress of incoming ninth graders as well as targeting attendance issues and academically underperforming subgroups, such as ELL and special education students. Co-interpretation discussions primarily centered around the lack of a formalized system to evaluate program effectiveness even though the school collects academic data via regular interim assessments, identifies students in need of academic intervention, and provides a number of support programs. Additionally, participants noted that classroom instruction needs to address the needs of students at both ends of the academic achievement spectrum. Consequently, participants discussed the need for more rigorous instruction to make sure that all students from all grades were encouraged to gain a deeper understanding of classroom content, as well as provided with opportunities for higher-order thinking. Finally, participants recognized that student engagement can be uneven at Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School and that could be addressed. The auditors believe that incorporating strategies to specifically address behavior as well as continually working to provide appropriate academic challenges to students would represent an optimal approach to improvement.

## THE THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

With these issues in mind, Learning Point Associates has developed three recommendations:

1. Develop and implement clear policies, regulations, and feedback loops within the school to determine how students are identified for interventions and supports; measure student progress; and evaluate program effectiveness.
2. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.
3. 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.

These three recommendations are discussed on the following pages. Each recommendation provides a review of research, online resources for additional information, specific actions the school may wish to take during its implementation process, and examples of real-life schools that have successfully implemented strategies. All works cited 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: Progress Monitoring

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

### LINK 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) and Section 100.2(ee) of the Part 100 Regulations of the Commissioner of Education (New York State Education Department, n.d.). 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). These efforts consist of developing and implementing policies and systems to identify students who are in need of academic interventions and supports as well as monitoring 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 can also 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 used for 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 (RTI) model, a model of academic supports that utilizes assessments and interventions in the context of a multi-level 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 should be implemented continuously to improve instruction (Hamilton et al., 2009; Mellard, 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 issue facing students.

A common approach that integrates both screening and progress monitoring is curriculum-based measurement (CBM), which can be used for both general and special education (Deno et al., 2009; Stecker et al., 2005). This method consists of straightforward procedure for regularly evaluating student progress in basic academic areas. CBM 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 is also aligned with curriculum content and annual performance goals and consists of procedures that are

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

National Center on  
Response to Intervention  
(Website)

<http://www.rti4success.org>

National Center on Student  
Progress Monitoring  
(Website)

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

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

<http://www.nysrti.org>

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

[http://centerforinstruction.org/resources\\_searchresults.cfm?searchterms=progress+monitoring](http://centerforinstruction.org/resources_searchresults.cfm?searchterms=progress+monitoring)

National Research Center on  
Learning Disabilities:  
*Tiered Service-Delivery  
Model* (Web page)

[http://www.nrclid.org/rti\\_practices/tiers.html](http://www.nrclid.org/rti_practices/tiers.html)

regularly implemented (e.g. every three weeks). CBM is also 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, CBM data can be aggregated at the classroom and school levels to facilitate data analysis around meeting state accountability targets (Deno, 2003).

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

### 1. Consider additional assessments in conjunction with progress monitoring.

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		
	Screening	Progress Monitoring	Diagnostic Tests
Target Population	School level	Class or small group level	Individual student level
Uses	Establish broad benchmarks	Identify specific academic or behavioral target	Identify specific academic areas related to knowledge, skills, or abilities
Frequency	Annually	Every three weeks/weekly	Annually
Purpose	Anticipate students who are at-risk	Adjust classroom assignments or student groups	Identify individual student challenges
Focus	School	Student class/ small group	Student
Instruction	Decisions related to class/school instruction and curriculum	Evaluate curriculum/ instruction intervention	Select appropriate curriculum and instructional methods
Implications	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. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 24*(4), 186-195.

### 2. 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).

### **3. 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).

### **4. Use benchmarks.**

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).

### **5. 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 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, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). For example, if the students' 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 9–12 grade students. Located in suburban Houston, Texas, 79 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.**

The school administers three-week and six-week assessments to regularly check students' mastery of the objectives. Teachers analyze these data for trends and provide tutorial sessions to individual students to ensure 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 assessments.

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 re-taught 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 after school set aside for these sessions. Students receiving this additional support are retested until they achieve the benchmark goal.

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Description excerpted from the *Doing What Works* website at [http://dww.ed.gov/media/DDI/DDDM/TopicLevel/case\\_macarthur\\_revised.pdf](http://dww.ed.gov/media/DDI/DDDM/TopicLevel/case_macarthur_revised.pdf).

## Recommendation 2: 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 that “the cognitive load should shift slowly and purposefully from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility, to independent practice and application by the learner” (p. 2). This process allows students to become what Graves and Fitzgerald (2003) call “competent, independent learners” (p. 98).

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

Daggett (2005) agrees, stating that all students should be pushed “to achieve academic excellence, which ultimately boils down to applying rigorous knowledge to unpredictable, real-world situations, such as those that drive our rapidly changing world” (p. 5). Disciplined inquiry, which occurs in the classroom, requires that students “(1) use a prior knowledge base; (2) strive for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness; and (3) express their ideas and findings with elaborated communication” (Newmann et al., 2001, p. 15).

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

### 2. Provide 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?* by Newmann, Bryk, and Nagaoka (2001) provides examples of two sixth-grade writing assignments: one that scored high and one that scored low on measures of authentic intellectual work. The authors conclude each example with a commentary of why the assignment received the score that it did.

### High Scoring Writing Assignment

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

### Commentary

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

### Low Scoring Writing Assignment

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

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

### Commentary

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

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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, and 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 the following source:

Newmann, F. M., King, M. B., & Carmichael, D. L. (2007). *Authentic instruction and assessment: Common standards for rigor and relevance in teaching academic subjects*. Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education. Retrieved June 24, 2011, from <http://centerforaiw.com/sites/centerforaiw.com/files/Authentic-Instruction-Assessment-BlueBook.pdf>

## **Perrysburg High School**

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

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.

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Excerpted from the *Doing What Works* website at [http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case\\_perrysburg\\_52708rev.pdf](http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_perrysburg_52708rev.pdf)

## Recommendation 3: Student Engagement

Develop and implement a schoolwide initiative aimed at 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).

Literature about middle school reform acknowledges the importance of an academically challenging and supportive environment to engage young adolescent learners. Student motivation, a meaningful curriculum, and student choice also are important factors for engaging middle-level learners (Caskey & Anfara, 2007; Learning Point Associates, 2005; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995).

In a report on the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), 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 (Learning Point Associates, 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).

### 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](http://isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm)

Morningside Center  
for Teaching Social  
Responsibility (Website)

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org>

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 (pp. 77–80):

“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)

A rubric titled the “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* (National Academy of Sciences, 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 (2000, 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 pro-social 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 anti-social 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 the entire complex changes—physical, intellectual, emotional, and social—that they experience during this phase of their lives. Adolescence represents a critical period during which youth 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, which can present a challenge to keeping them on task in the classroom. (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

### **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 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 students' 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 middle-level 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. (See "Regard for Adolescent Perspectives in the Classroom" on the following page.)

## 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 9th 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 in its planning rather than reactive.* 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. Discussion of 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 lunch-time 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, play, choosing your behavior, and make 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 to be followed. 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 3 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 them encouragement and praise. Children and youth 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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