

I.S. 206 Ann Mersereau

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of I.S. 206 Ann Mersereau conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being designated as in corrective action under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

About I.S. 206

I.S. 206 Ann Mersereau (X206) is located in New York City, in the Bronx (in Community School District 10). The school serves approximately 390 students in Grades 5–8 and in special education classes. Approximately 34 percent of the students are English language learners, and 20 percent are identified as students with disabilities.

In 2009–10, I.S. 206 did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students, Hispanic or Latino subgroup, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged students. In 2010–11, I.S. 206's state accountability status was designated as Corrective Action (Year 1).¹ Because the school was designated as in corrective action, the school participated in the ESCA. Data collection for the audit took place from February through May of 2011.

The mission for I.S. 206 states:

We believe in a standards-driven environment that includes the home, the school and community, offering opportunities for all students to achieve academic excellence. We incorporate Marine Science, the Arts and Technology into the basic curriculum as we prepare children to meet the challenges of the 21st century.²

Audit Process at I.S. 206

The ESCA approach utilized at the middle school level examines five topic areas: student engagement, curriculum and instruction, academic interventions and supports, professional learning and collaboration, and support for transitioning students. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by I.S. 206. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school's use.

¹ <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/d2/AOR-2010-321000010206.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 2011.

² <http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/10/X206/AboutUs/Overview/Our+Mission.htm>. Accessed on June 22, 2011.

These reports were presented to the school at a co-interpretationSM meeting on May 26, 2011. During this meeting, nine stakeholders from the I.S. 206 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 I.S. 206.

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:

Rigorous instruction is not consistent across classrooms.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from classroom observations and teacher survey results. Observations showed that overall, students were sometimes provided with the opportunity to extend and expand learning or to engage in activities leading to deeper understanding through discussion and feedback, but the frequency of these opportunities was limited or inconsistent. Teacher survey results similarly indicated that students only sometimes build on each other's ideas during discussions. Through observations, there also was evidence of a lack of consistent use of higher-level thinking or complex tasks for students to solve. Observations also noted a lack of consistent opportunities for students to develop thinking, engage in reflection or self-evaluation, and utilize planning skills. The lack of opportunity for students to engage in higher-order thinking was echoed in teacher surveys, where teachers reported that the students in their classrooms participate in answering textbook or worksheet questions once per week or more.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Data analysis is not being used in a standardized way for planning.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by information from teacher survey results, review of the school's submitted documents, and school interviews. Interviews and documents suggested that there is a set of commonly administered assessments at the beginning of the school year and on a monthly basis throughout the school year. However, teacher survey results showed that teachers are more likely to rely on data from teacher-created assessments when planning instruction, with more than a quarter (28 percent) of teachers reporting use of data from periodic assessments a few times per semester or less. Further, coaches in some subjects create tracking sheets that show which performance indicators the students have mastered (based on monthly common tests), yet almost 40 percent of teachers reported using data provided by a specialist only a few times a semester or never.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Academic support services are in place to address students who are struggling in reading, writing, and mathematics, but there is no system for monitoring the effectiveness of implementation.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from a review of the school's submitted documents and school interviews. Interviews and documents provided evidence of many intervention programs and services that are available to students during and after school, including afterschool tutoring and Saturday programs. However, no documents were

submitted to show how intervention services are monitored to determine if they are being implemented consistently across teachers or to determine their effectiveness in improving student achievement.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

The majority of the students are passively engaged.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by information from classroom observations. In the majority of classrooms observed, there was evidence of a positive climate, where teachers and students appeared connected in some ways. However, classroom communication sometimes did not involve the majority of the students. Similarly, although there was evidence of some student engagement in all classrooms, participation was not consistent for all students and engagement was not sustained. Observations also showed inconsistent presence of opportunities for student leadership, discussion of the value of the lesson, and opportunities for peer interactions. Often, the structure of the lesson was dictated by the teacher without opportunity for student choice.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Teachers frequently meet to collaborate. Teachers collaborate to share concerns about students and to discuss new ideas and instruction.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by information from teacher survey results and school interviews. Teacher survey results showed that the majority of teachers (65 percent or more) participate in a variety of formal and informal collaboration. Teachers discuss instruction, student needs, and student work, and they seek out colleagues for questions and new ideas. In addition, formal collaboration time is scheduled regularly (some of this time is structured), and teachers generally agreed that general education teachers collaborate with special education teachers and with teachers of English language learners.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

A schoolwide system of weekly meetings and curriculum maps support teacher instruction.

Positive Key Finding 2 is supported by information from a review of the school's submitted documents, school interviews, and teacher survey results. According to documents and interviews, I.S. 206 has a basic curriculum map, which is organized using a monthly focus for reading and writing. Interviews further indicated that the details in the curriculum come from weekly meetings. During this time, coaches and teachers meet to discuss implementation of the curriculum, including strategies and materials for that month's focus. The teacher survey also confirmed that teachers meet in collaborative groups once or twice a week.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

As detailed in the Key Findings section, participants at the I.S. 206 co-interpretation meeting prioritized some key findings that highlighted the strengths of the school (Positive Key Findings 1 and 2) and other key findings that focused on areas in which the school can improve (Critical Key Findings 1, 2, 3 and 4). Following is an explanation of each recommendation's focus, which is followed by the actual recommendations.

Focus of Recommendation 1. Recommendation 1 addresses instructional rigor, which was identified in Critical Key Finding 1

Focus of Recommendation 2. Recommendation 2 addresses standardized data use, which was identified in Critical Key Finding 2.

Focus of Recommendation 3. At the end of the co-interpretation meeting, one participant mentioned Critical Key Finding 3, stating that the school does monitor academic interventions in some ways, in spite of the lack of monitoring evidence in interviews and submitted documents.

Though the school uses assessment data to assign students to academic intervention services (AIS) tutoring and support groups, no documents were submitted that describe how student placement is continuously revisited and changed to meet the needs of students. Similarly, current monitoring efforts do not determine if the interventions are implemented consistently across teachers. Finally, the school uses several programs to provide services to students, including:

- National Reading Styles
- Collins Writing Program
- Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model

Neither submitted documents nor interview responses stated if or how the school determines whether these programs have been effective at improving student achievement. Because of this lack of evidence, the Learning Point Associates auditors agree with the participants of the co-interpretation meeting that monitoring of academic interventions should be a priority of the school as it seeks to improve student achievement.

The school principal indicated during his interview that when response to intervention (RTI) is required, the school will use the National Reading Styles program as the RTI intervention. Thus, although academic intervention services currently are in place for students, the auditors believe that the school could benefit from comparing its current system for academic interventions against what research shows a multitiered intervention system should look like, in case the school chooses to move to a multitiered system in the near future. Because of this situation, Recommendation 3 describes the implementation of a full multitiered AIS system, including but not focusing solely on the implementation of program monitoring.

(Recommendations 2 and 3, with the focus on teacher-level and school-level data use, are closely related and part of building a schoolwide data-driven culture.)

Focus of Recommendation 4. Recommendation 4 addresses student engagement, an issue identified by Critical Key Finding 4.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.
2. Provide clear expectations and support for the schoolwide use of student achievement data for planning and delivering instruction.
3. Develop and implement a schoolwide system to identify at-risk students using assessment data, provide multitiered academic interventions, and employ ongoing progress monitoring to address student needs.
4. Initiate a schoolwide process for increasing student engagement and creating a sustainable and supportive learning environment.

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

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

Recommendation 1: 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 (2011b), 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.

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>

Plainwell Middle School

Plainwell Middle School in Plainwell, Michigan, serves students in Grades 6–8. The school has had success in improving instructional rigor.

In 2005, Plainwell Community Schools implemented districtwide curriculum restructuring with professional development focused on using the research-based instructional strategies outlined in Robert Marzano's *Classroom Instruction That Works* (2003)... Some of the instructional delivery techniques that were adopted as part of this professional development include the use of nonlinguistic representations of abstract concepts and the use of higher-order questions to elicit student explanations. Teachers find Marzano's strategies to be compelling, noting the evidence of a significant correlation between increased student achievement and the use of research-proven instructional techniques. This approach lays the groundwork for a shift in staff culture, moving away from the use of personal intuition to the use of empirical, quantitative data to inform decisions around teaching and learning.

In 2005, social studies teachers at Plainwell Middle School decided to adopt a new curriculum aligned with Marzano's strategies.... Interactive slideshows are used as a way to actively engage students in new content learning, letting them participate in lectures by touching, interpreting, and acting out historical images and events projected onto a screen. The curriculum also supports vocabulary instruction with graphic organizers that connect definitions with visuals to help students understand and retain key terms. Some teachers...have modified the workbook graphic organizers to create their own "visual dictionaries:"...

Higher-order questions are also used as an instructional technique through the new curriculum. Response groups are a structure that teachers use to facilitate small group discussion on controversial topics in history. Through a series of probing questions that require critical thinking and the use of evidence, teachers elicit student explanations that require analysis and application of historical information. Finally, students match up their decisions and viewpoints with actual decisions made in history.

In addition to these strategies, social studies teachers at Plainwell Middle School intentionally build review into daily lessons and assessments. Each day begins with a warm-up activity that quizzes students on a previous lesson.... When introducing a lesson, teachers also make sure to begin with a preview activity that they can refer back to when reviewing the material....

Curriculum restructuring at the middle school is carefully implemented to ensure success.... First, a less-is-more approach is taken, allowing ample time for teachers to learn and practice a single strategy before moving on to another one. Also, teacher training is conducted by lead teachers...who model classroom techniques, lead guided discussions, and set periodic objectives for teams. Instead of a passive "sit-and-get" approach, teachers actively practice the strategies and report to their teams about their progress. Finally, administrators support the efforts by aligning observational classroom walk-through forms to match the professional development focus, keeping the strategies at the center of conversation about teaching.

Description excerpted from the from the Doing What Works website at http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_plainwell_71508.pdf. This information is in the public domain.

Recommendation 2: Systematic Use of Data to Inform Instruction

Provide clear expectations and support for the schoolwide use of student achievement data for planning and delivering instruction.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Student assessment data is an essential tool in measuring the effectiveness of instruction; teachers can use these data to ensure the success of all students.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making* (Hamilton et al., 2009) includes the following school-level recommendations regarding data use to improve instruction:

- “Establish a clear vision for schoolwide data use.”
- “Provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school.”
- “Make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement.” (p. 9)

Clear Vision for Schoolwide Data Use. Learning Point Associates and Educational Service Agency Alliance of the Midwest (2006) emphasize the need to do the following:

Make sure all staff members understand what their core responsibilities are and what their obligations are for learning to do that work better. Understanding this will make a big difference in how staff will seek, manipulate, present, and use data. (p. 21)

The principal and school leaders also should set the example of using data regularly. A study of the effects of leadership practices on student achievement by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) shows “the extent to which the principal monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student achievement” to be one of the 21 leadership responsibilities significantly associated with student achievement (p. 12). Cotton (1988) agrees, “The careful monitoring of student progress is shown in the literature to be one of the major factors differentiating effective schools and teachers from ineffective ones” (p. 1).

Supports That Foster a Data-Driven Culture Within the School. Cultivating a culture of reflection and continuous improvement will help teachers feel comfortable using data. Young’s (2008) case studies identify “four dimensions of trust” that suggest how culture may or may not support teachers using the data system. To the degree that teachers think in terms of these four dimensions, they will be more likely to utilize a data system:

- “Other teachers have high standards.”
- “Other teachers won’t think I’m incompetent.”
- “Others will participate/reciprocate in response to my engagement.”
- “Problems I raise will be seen as collective problems.” (p. 99)

Time also is an important factor in professional support. Teacher respondents cited in a U.S. Department of Education report on data use most often cited “lack of time to examine and

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Children First Intensive
(Website)

[http://schools.nyc.gov/
Accountability/resources/
childrenfirst/](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/resources/childrenfirst/)

Doing What Works: Providing
Research-Based Education
Practices Online (Website)

<http://dww.ed.gov/>

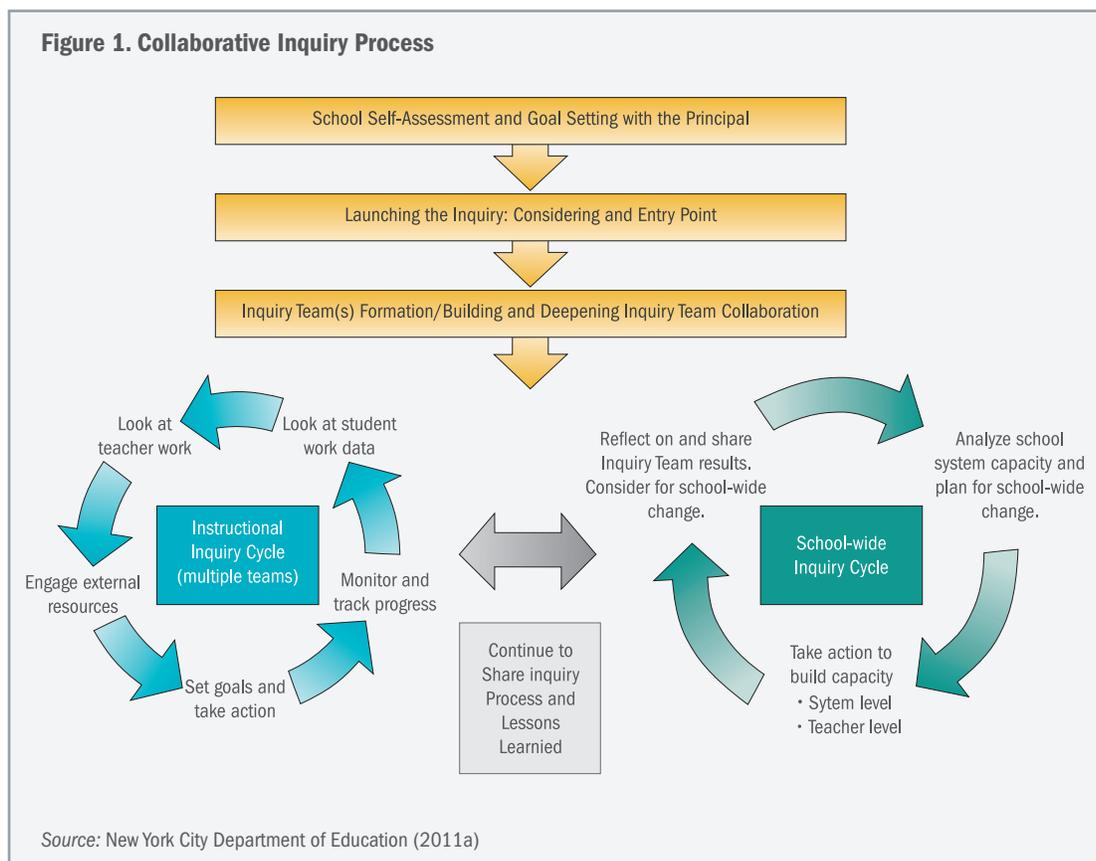
*Using Student Achievement
Data to Support
Instructional Decision
Making* (Publication)

[http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/
wwc/pdf/practiceguides/
dddm_pg_092909.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dddm_pg_092909.pdf)

reflect on data [as] the greatest barrier to data-driven decision making” (Means, Padilla, & Gallagher, 2010, p. 87).

Finally, “teachers need to learn how to obtain and manage data, ask good questions, accurately analyze data, and apply data results appropriately and ethically” (Lachat & Smith, 2005, p. 336). Through professional development and coaching, the school can support teachers in meeting these goals.

Data as Part of an Ongoing Cycle of Instructional Improvement. The NYCDOE Children First Intensive professional development plan established school-level inquiry teams at each school to support student achievement. NYCDOE uses the following graphic (see Figure 1) to illustrate the ongoing process of collaborative inquiry.



NYCDOE (2011a) defines *collaborative inquiry* as “a sustained process of investigation and action by a group of educators that empowers teachers to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Collaborative inquiry can look very different in different contexts, but there are some common threads across all teams, mainly that teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their collective work through the lens of student work and data.”

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

- 1. Create a school culture of reflection and continuous improvement.** School leaders play an important role in creating a school culture of reflection and continuous improvement.
 - Assign teachers to grade-level and/or subject-specific collaborative inquiry teams to analyze schoolwide data and grade-level/subject-specific data.
 - Identify how the work of collaborative inquiry teams will align with the schoolwide goals developed as part of the collaborative inquiry cycle, and as required for the Comprehensive Education Plan.
 - Set aside time for collaborative data analysis. This analysis can take place during existing teacher collaboration time or could be done through inquiry teams.
 - Develop a standard data analysis protocol and schedule.
 - Provide resources to support teacher collaboration on data analysis, such as tracking sheets and/or a data coach.

- 2. Set clear expectations for data use.** Establish clear expectations regarding teacher use of data.
 - Establish a yearly, schoolwide schedule for assessments and screening procedures (e.g., three times each year).
 - Identify assessment instrument(s) that will be used to track student achievement. Screening instruments should be valid, reliable, and aligned with grade-level curriculum based on learning standards (e.g., state assessments, Acuity predictive assessments, or instructionally targeted assessments) or subject-specific and researched-based assessments (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery, Qualitative Reading Inventory, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills).
 - Ensure that assessment results are shared with teachers in a timely way and that teachers have access to assessment results, if assessment results are not readily available on the Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS).
 - Describe how the school, teams, and individual teachers will be expected to use data (e.g., set goals, align resources, modify scope and sequence, identify students for tutoring, target students in lesson plans).
 - Provide professional development as needed on topics such as data analysis, item analysis, and instructional strategies.

- 3. Provide training on instructional strategies and differentiation.** “Just having student data is not sufficient if teachers do not have ideas about how to teach differently based on student performance” (Means et al., 2010, p. 87).
 - Provide professional development on instructional strategies and differentiation to give teachers a wealth of instructional options that they can call on to meet student needs.

- Adjust classroom instruction based on student progress. The IES Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making* (Hamilton et al., 2009) identifies the following changes to instruction that teachers can make to improve student achievement:
 - “Prioritizing instructional time;
 - Targeting additional individual instruction for students who are struggling with particular topics;
 - More easily identifying individual students’ strengths and instructional interventions that can help students continue to progress;
 - Gauging the instructional effectiveness of classroom lessons;
 - Refining instructional methods; and
 - Examining schoolwide data to consider whether and how to adapt the curriculum based on information about students’ strengths and weaknesses.” (p. 5)

4. Monitor progress. Track implementation of schoolwide data use policies to ensure that they are being implemented consistently and to provide teachers with continuous feedback and appropriate support.

- Establish a system of multiple methods for ensuring that teacher teams have what they need to engage in regular data analysis to inform instruction. This system could include inquiry team data logs, teacher reflection sheets on instructional strategies, and/or reports from the data coach.
- Consider implementing classroom walk-throughs by administrators, a lead teacher, or the data coach to see how data analysis and professional development are impacting classroom practice and to identify the best ways to support teachers moving forward. The intention of this process is formative teacher feedback to improve instruction—not to penalize teachers; thus, the school may wish to work collaboratively with its instructional staff to develop a related classroom walk-through protocol. By building in feedback loops, the school can ensure that effective decisions are being made, based on data. As Learning Point Associates and Educational Service Agency Alliance of the Midwest (2006) state:

Data make change visible. Data provide an empirical lens that magnifies objective detail while distancing us from personality. Data can confirm if there is change or not. The smaller, the tighter, the more frequent the feedback loops that the data system supports, the more staff can make decisions, the more frequently decisions can be made, and the more likely that the decisions made will be better ones. (p. 5)

Shotwell Middle School

Shotwell Middle School, located in Houston, Texas, serves 1,200 students in Grades 7 and 8. Approximately 78 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school has had success in using data systematically to inform instruction.

Administration and staff [at Shotwell Middle School] regularly collaborate in using data to support instructional decision making and assess program effectiveness. The administrative team provides leadership and clarifies expectations for data use, and core subject skills specialists support teachers in the process....

Data from six-week benchmark assessments are maintained in the districtwide data warehouse system, where teachers can access reports and analyze data during their departmental common planning time....

Skills specialists provide extensive support to teachers in using data and planning instruction. They meet with teachers weekly to analyze data, provide expert guidance and resources for lesson planning and instruction, and help to determine appropriate instructional strategies. The school engages in a clearly articulated reteach/retest policy in which teachers gather by department for an item-by-item test analysis. Based on the number of students who are missing objectives, the teachers identify areas of concern and steps for reteaching....

Administrators and skills specialists also use data to find areas of improvement for teachers. Using a standard format, teachers enter their lesson plans into a districtwide data warehouse system. Here, administrators and specialists can review the lesson plans and assess the instructional strategies planned. The school also uses a standard format for entering comments from observations of lessons. Based on alignment among lesson plans, observations, and student data, administrators and specialists can help teachers adjust their instructional strategies....

Staff conducts universal screening for Response to Intervention (RTI) to address three areas: the district's population of English language learners and students from low-income families, the state's high rate of dropout, and student migration. Screening results for RTI are entered into a database that creates reports indicating where students score in relation to grade-level averages. These data are then examined in conjunction with results on benchmark assessments and [the Texas state test]. Students who achieve below the average ranges are provided interventions with classroom, special education, and/or RTI teachers through a pull-out program or small-group instruction in the classroom. Each week, the RTI teacher conducts progress monitoring to determine ongoing student progress and continued areas of need. When students exit the pullout program, they complete the Exit Survey and Reflection. This survey asks students about which assignments helped them master the content, why these assignments were helpful, how challenging the assignments were, and how the pull-out program could be improved. Teachers review these surveys and make appropriate changes to the program.

Description excerpted from the from the Doing What Works website at http://dww.ed.gov/media/DDI/DDDM/TopicLevel/case_shotwell_revised.pdf. This information is in the public domain.

Recommendation 3: Systemic Academic Interventions

Develop and implement a schoolwide system to identify at-risk students using assessment data, provide multitiered academic interventions, and employ ongoing progress monitoring to address student needs.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Academic intervention services is defined by New York State Education Department (2008) as “additional instruction which supplements the instruction provided in the general curriculum” for “students who are at risk of not achieving the state learning standards in English language arts, mathematics, social studies and/or science, or who are at risk of not gaining the knowledge and skills needed to meet or exceed designated performance levels on state assessments.” Across the state of New York, school leaders are searching for ways to enhance the current AIS programs in their schools to be able to identify students earlier, provide services to all students who require them, and measure student outcomes (Killeen & Sipple, 2004). Many schools begin to implement RTI after determining that their current structures and processes were not meeting their students’ academic needs.

The incorporation of an RTI model into established interventions has been found to improve student academic progress; specifically, it has been found to increase the number of children who demonstrate proficiency on state accountability tests (Heartland Area Education Agency 11, 2004).

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (Prewitt & Mellard, 2010), RTI is a model of academic supports that “integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems.” These goals are accomplished through the identification of students at risk for poor learning outcomes, provision of evidence-based interventions, regular monitoring of student progress, and regularly adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness.

In a national study conducted by the National Center on Response to Intervention (Prewitt & Mellard, 2010), middle schools across 28 states, including New York, participated in a study to identify current RTI practices, identify key factors of successful implementation, and identify RTI practices linked to positive student learning outcomes. Schools involved in the study chose RTI to (1) close the student achievement gaps, (2) meet AYP every year with every subgroup, or (3) address undesirable and disruptive student behaviors.

According to Prewitt and Mellard (2010), models of a responsive academic intervention program include a data-driven decision-making model that includes:

- The use of a schoolwide (universal) screening assessment to identify students at-risk for poor learning outcomes;
- Multitiered intervention programs and strategies that increase in levels of intensity;
- Frequent and ongoing progress monitoring to determine student progress and determine program efficacy;
- A team structure to organize and analyze student performance using progress monitoring data.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Doing What Works: Providing Research-Based Education Practices Online (Website)

<http://dww.ed.gov/>

National Center on Response to Intervention: *What Is RTI?* (Webpage)

<http://www.rti4success.org/whatisrti/>

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

http://www.nrclid.org/rti_practices/tiers.html

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

<http://www.nysrti.org>

Although research indicates minimum components for successful implementation of responsive intervention programs, no specific model of RTI, intervention program or strategy, or progress monitoring tool is endorsed by Learning Point Associates. Instead, schools are encouraged to consider these research-based recommendations to make specific decisions regarding the structure and design of intervention programs that will best meet the needs of their situation.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Schools face a number of challenges when selecting a strategy for implementing academic interventions. Local regulations, contracts, and resources such as time, funding, and personnel all play a major role. Schools must make the determination, based on individualized circumstances, of what will ultimately work best. The most effective programs are those that are launched with clear leadership, built from careful planning, and supported with schoolwide awareness and professional development prior to full implementation.

1. Identify a team of school staff members who will lead the “rollout” of the intervention.

This leadership team may vary according to the school’s demographics. Some schools choose to include teachers who work with subpopulations (e.g., English language learners and students with disabilities), and other schools include teachers who teach in the content areas in which RTI is being implemented (e.g., ELA teachers from each grade, literacy coach, and reading specialist). Network resources and coaches also should be considered.

2. Conduct careful planning to ensure the success of the rollout.

School leadership defines the intervention infrastructure, scheduling, resources, funding, staffing, screening and progress monitoring assessments, intervention programs, tools, and strategies. This process includes developing explicit plans, processes, and procedures prior to implementation. Following is a checklist of topics to cover:

Data-Based Decision Making

- Establish a team structure, routines, and procedures for making decisions.
- Set explicit decision rules to decide when students will move in, out, or within interventions.
- Develop record-keeping systems that communicate student progress to stakeholders (e.g., student, parent, teachers, AIS coordinator).

Assessments and Screenings

- Establish a yearly, schoolwide schedule for assessments and screening procedures (e.g., three times each year).
- Identify screening instrument(s) that will be used to identify students for interventions. Screening instruments should be valid and reliable and aligned with grade-level curriculum based on learning standards (e.g., state assessments, Acuity predictive assessments, or instructionally targeted assessments) or subject-specific and researched-based assessments (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery, Qualitative Reading Inventory, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills).

- Establish participation criteria, select benchmarks or cutpoints at which risk is determined, and identify students who fail to meet benchmarks or fall below specified cutpoints.
- Create multitiered “entry points,” and establish multiple benchmarks to “slice the pie,” allowing students to receive targeted interventions that vary in levels of intensity (e.g., students 0 percent to 40 percent and 41 percent to 65 percent, or Level 1 and Level 2 on state assessments).

Tiered Intervention Programs

- Select evidence-based intervention programs and/or strategies to use with students who fall in various ranges based on the screening tool used.
- Determine the method for delivery of service (e.g., pull-out small-group instruction, afterschool instruction, Saturday program) and duration and frequency of service.
- Ensure that services and programs are “tiered” and increase in levels of intensity, which match the increasing needs of students.

Progress Monitoring

- Determine assessments to be used. Assessments can be both formal (e.g., AIMSweb, Acuity predictive assessments, or instructionally targeted assessments) and informal (e.g., checklist, running records).
- Establish a benchmark for performance (e.g., >40 percent and >65 percent). These benchmarks determine when students will move within, through, and out of tiers of interventions.
- Establish a timeline for progress monitoring. Monitoring may occur as frequently as every two weeks.

3. Create an awareness of the intervention, and provide adequate professional development to ensure that everyone is on board.

Many schools follow a “train the trainers” model in which selected staff members attend training and turnkey that training to other staff. Depending on which teachers and staff will be providing interventions, training also may be schoolwide. A critical component of the RTI implementation process is to ensure that stakeholders are clear about what is being implemented and why it is being implemented. School leaders must establish and communicate the goals and expected outcomes of adopting an RTI model while providing ongoing training and sufficient time for staff to fully understand the components and structures of a new intervention model. Successful implementation relies heavily on the ability of teachers and school leaders to implement RTI with fidelity.

Opportunities for AIS-related professional development should be embedded into the school’s annual professional development plan. Careful planning is essential when rolling out professional learning opportunities in the area of AIS.

4. Put the intervention plan into action.

Recommendations for implementation include “start small.” (See “Starting Small” below.) This approach might include starting in one grade, one content area, or one classroom; or it could begin by focusing on one or two components of RTI. This decision should be what makes the most sense for the school based on existing resources, tools, and structures. At this phase, adjustments and adaptations are an ongoing part of the process.

Starting Small

Two approaches for “starting small” with an academic intervention program are to start with one essential component or to start with one small group.

Starting With One Essential Component

Build a model with a focus on one component at a time (e.g., screening, then data-based decision making, then progress monitoring, then intervention levels). Create a timeline for the implementation of each component, and align training for school staff with each phase of implementation.

Example

A middle school in the Midwest began the implementation of its RTI program by first focusing on reading programs and strategies for students identified as at risk. A second tier of interventions and progress monitoring were “rolled out” later in the year.

Starting With One Small Group

Implement intervention program with a small pilot group. With this approach, it is best to investigate which components worked well and which need to be refined before scaling up to other classes, grades, or content areas.

Example

A Pennsylvania school implemented RTI in a small number of classrooms during the first year to determine what worked and what did not work. The school's interventions team focused on creating a balance between moving too slowly (which they felt would minimize the impact of RTI and decrease staff buy-in) and moving too quickly (which might overwhelm teachers and students).

Adapted from *Response to Intervention Practices in Middle Schools*, a 2011 presentation by Daryl F. Mellard and Sarah L. Prewett, available online at http://www.rti4success.org/ppt/WBnr_April2011.ppt. This document was produced by the National Center on Response to Intervention and is in the public domain.

School A's Intervention Program

School A is a middle school serving a total of 870 students in Grades 6–8. Approximately 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 22 percent are English language learners, and 11 percent are students with disabilities. In the 2005–06 school year, only 50 percent of the students at each grade level were proficient on state examinations and approximately 16 percent of the students at each grade level were “far below” grade level.

In response to comprehensive school improvement efforts, the school implemented a three-tiered RTI model in reading. At the end of the 2006–07 school year, more than 80 percent of students in all grades passed the state ELA test. Following is an outline of the intervention program developed by School A in response to student performance and learning initiatives.

TIER I

Intervention Program or Strategy

- Holt Rinehart and daily fluency instruction; general education classroom

Length of Instruction/Intensity

- 5 days per week for 72 minutes per day

Screening Tools

- Grade-level fluency passages, district writing prompts, Scholastic Reading Inventory, curriculum-based assessments administered three times each year

Data-Based Decision-Making Process

- RTI team (principal, related service provider, grade-level teachers) reviews scores in monthly grade-level meetings.
- Students who are two grade levels behind are placed into the next tier of interventions; students who are three grade levels behind are placed into the third tier of interventions.

TIER II

Intervention Program or Strategy

- *REWARDS, Read Naturally, Soar to Success*

Length of Instruction/Intensity

- 3 days per week for 72 minutes each day

Screening Tools

- Curriculum-based assessments administered three times each year

Data-Based Decision-Making Process

- Students are assigned to the programs based on identified skill deficit (comprehension, decoding, fluency).
- Students move between tiers based on progress monitoring scores.

TIER III

Intervention Program or Strategy

- *Language!, Read 180, High Point*

Length of Instruction/Intensity

- Daily for 144 minutes

Screening Tools

- Same as Tier II

Data-Based Decision-Making Process

- Students exit this tier after progressing within two grade levels of expectations (into Tier II).

Adapted from pages 58–59 of *Implementing Response to Intervention: Practices and Perspectives From Five Schools—Frequently Asked Questions*, by Kathryn Klinger Tackett, Greg Roberts, Scott Baker, and Nancy Scammacca, available online at <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Implementing%20RTI%20Practices%20%26%20Perspectives%20of%205%20Schools.pdf>. This report was published in 2009 by the Center on Instruction and is in the public domain.

Recommendation 4: 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).

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) 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)

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>

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)

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* (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 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 suggested 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. In addition, schools can promote positive regard for adolescent viewpoints and perspectives. (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.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Keeping middle school 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. Youth ages 11 to 13 years (a period sometimes called the “tween” years) are characterized by a growing desire to think and act independently while at the same time caring deeply about being accepted by peers and being part of a group (Caskey & Anfara, 2007).

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.

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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