

X089 Williamsbridge

FINAL REPORT



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

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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of X089 Williamsbridge conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research (AIR.) This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being in corrective action under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

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

About X089 Williamsbridge

X089 Williamsbridge is located in New York City, in the Bronx (Community School District 11). The school serves approximately 1,337 students in Grades PK–8. Twenty-one percent of students are ELLs, and 19 percent are identified as SWDs. In 2010–11, Williamsbridge’s accountability status was “Restructuring (Year 1),” due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for its population of SWDs and ELLs.

Audit Process at X089 Williamsbridge

The key findings were identified through an audit process. Data were collected using the following guiding themes as the focus of the audit: curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing. Following data collection, AIR staff facilitated a co-interpretationSM meeting on May 19, 2011, attended by administrators, special education teachers, ESL teachers, and parent and network representatives from X089 Williamsbridge.

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

- Special Education Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on the special education program and SWDs.
- English Language Learner Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on instruction of ELLs.
- Special Education Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 40 teachers, including 19 teachers of SWDs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 40 teachers, including 17 teachers of ELLs.

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

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

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

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

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

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Approximately half of general education teachers reported that they differentiate instruction for ELLs and/or SWDs on a daily basis.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. One of the top positive key findings described on p. 4 also relates to Critical Key Finding 1:

- A majority of special education and ESL teachers are differentiating instruction for SWDs and ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the Special Education Teacher Survey Report and English Language Learner Survey Report, and reflects a concern that staff have about the level of frequency with which general education teachers are differentiating instruction. As noted in the related positive finding, the interview and observation data in the two site visit reports show that teachers are differentiating instruction. However, survey data show that only about half of general education teachers report differentiating instruction for SWDs and/or ELLs on a daily basis.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

School staff expressed a concern that not all teachers are using data to plan for instruction.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from the Special Education Teacher Survey Report and the English Language Learner Site Visit Report. Although a majority of teachers reported using data to plan instruction, not all teachers reported this. School staff emphasized the need for all staff to be using data regularly to inform instruction.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Most interviewed teachers expressed a need for more professional development related to instruction of SWDs and ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by interview data from the Special Education Site Visit Report. Most surveyed teachers reported professional development related to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs to be only moderately helpful to them in improving their instruction. There were also positive findings about professional development related to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs. However, Critical Key Finding 3 demonstrates a need for additional professional development in these areas.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

In interviews, no teachers reported using IEPs as a source for instructional planning.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by information from the Special Education Site Visit Report. School staff noted during the co-interpretation that both interview and survey data show that teachers are using individualized education programs (IEPs) to understand and monitor progress toward meeting goals. However, teachers are not using IEPs to inform instructional planning.

Positive Key Findings

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

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

1. A majority of special education and ESL teachers are differentiating instruction for SWDs and ELLs.
2. Teachers are using a variety of instructional strategies and accommodations to address the needs of ELLs and SWDs during instruction.
3. Teachers report that they collaborate formally.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with X089 Williamsbridge led AIR to make three recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process. These recommendations are supported by currently available research and evidence. Resources and references that support these recommendations are provided.

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

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Enhancing Your Instruction Through Differentiation Professional Development Module

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/differentiationmodule.asp

Resources on differentiated instruction

<http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/differentiated-instruction-resources.aspx>

Effective Instruction for English Language Learners Question and Answer Transcript

<http://www.ncltalks.org/content/interview/detail/3734/>

Accommodations, Techniques, and Aids for Learning

<http://www.idaamerica.org/aboutId/teachers/understanding/accommodations.asp>

Differentiated Instruction and Implications for UDL Implementation

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

Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students With Disabilities

http://www.osepideastthatwork.org/toolkit/accommodations_manual.asp

Recommendation 1: Professional Development

AIR recommends that X089 Williamsbridge review its current professional development plan and adjust to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs, including a specific focus on differentiated instruction for general education teachers.

LINK TO RESEARCH

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

By refining the process by which professional development is offered, ensuring that it is embedded, is sustained, and allows for active teacher participation, and focusing the development on teacher practice and content, schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement (Wei et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 3, in which teachers indicated a need for more professional development related to teaching SWDs and ELLs. It is also related to Critical Key Finding 1, which noted that about half of general education teachers are not differentiating instruction on a daily basis for SWDs and ELLs. Although data reviewed during the co-interpretation revealed that teachers are differentiating instruction, staff expressed a desire for general education teachers in particular to be differentiating instruction more often than they are now.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to adjust the professional development plan to increase the focus on strategies for teaching SWDs and ELLs:

1. Offer professional development on strategies for effective instruction of SWDs, including the following:

- Effectively implementing individualized instructional strategies for SWDs
- Monitoring student progress and adjusting instruction based on student performance

- Using instructional accommodations and modifications in the classroom
- Implementing effective instructional strategies with SWDs in the classroom

2. Offer professional development on strategies for effective instruction of ELLs, including the following:

- Understanding language development
- Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both ELA and ESL state standards that clearly articulates literacy competencies and ensures that language objectives are defined at each stage of language acquisition
- Being aware of what ELLs should understand and be able to do in terms of content and language skills at each proficiency level within the ELA curriculum
- Developing strategies and techniques for delivering the curriculum to ELLs in monolingual, bilingual, and general education classrooms

3. Offer professional development to all teachers on differentiated instruction strategies, including the following:

- Using data and assessments to measure student proficiency
- Differentiating product, process, and content based on student readiness, learning profile, and interest
- Effectively implementing differentiated instructional strategies, such as compacting, tiered assignments, and contracts
- Monitoring student progress and adjusting instruction based on student performance

4. Provide follow-up support to general education teachers in implementing differentiated instruction. This action step can be accomplished by doing the following:

- Encouraging special education and ESL teachers to work closely with general education teachers in planning lessons that incorporate strategies for differentiating instruction
- Using staff development meetings as a forum in which general education teachers can get feedback from special education teachers, ESL teachers, and other general education teachers on their implementation of differentiated instruction
- Placing increased emphasis on differentiated instruction during teacher evaluations
- Providing on-site coaching (from the administration, literacy coaches, or other teachers) to general education teachers as they implement differentiated instruction

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mrs. Smith, a principal at a large urban elementary school, designed and implemented a year-long plan for professional development designed to support diverse learners at her school who were not making adequate progress. Mrs. Smith knew that just targeting specialist teachers would not be enough for students to make gains, so she provided professional development focused on differentiated instruction and on reaching individual learners to all teachers at the school.

She began with a day of training on differentiated instruction, school-wide, presented by the school's literacy coach and assistant principal. This was followed with classroom visits and one-on-one sessions with each teacher in the school, conducted by the assistant principal, literacy coach, and herself. In the one-on-one sessions, each teacher was asked to develop a plan for differentiating instruction and meeting the individual needs of SWDs and ELLs over the next nine months. Each teacher was observed once a month for the first four months of school and received coaching from an administrator or the literacy coach, including modeling differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom. At each faculty meeting, additional professional development on differentiated instruction was provided to the entire staff, including training on specific strategies to address student needs that teachers had identified and shared during individual coaching sessions.

By January, Mrs. Smith saw an increase in the use of differentiated instruction as she visited classrooms. Coaching sessions were shifted to be every other month for the second half of the school year and teachers were each asked to commit to visiting and providing feedback to one of their fellow teachers. By the end of the year, teachers agreed that their awareness of and comfort with differentiated instruction had increased and that they reported feeling supported by administrators. Mrs. Smith convened a group of general education, special education, and ESL teachers to help write the professional development plan for the next school year. She also sent those teachers to training over the summer with the understanding that they would serve as models and peer coaches for the following year.

**QUICK LINKS:
Online Sources
for More Information**

Data Quality Campaign: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement.

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

Teacher Data Toolkit: New York City Department of Education

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Teachers/TeacherDevelopment/TeacherDataToolkit/default.htm>

RTI Essential Components: Data-Based Decision Making

<http://www.rti4success.org/webinar/rti-essential-component-data-based-decision-making>

NYC Helpline: Collecting and Using Data to Inform Planning and Instruction

http://teachersnetwork.org/NTNY/nychelp/Professional_Development/assess.htm

Recommendation 2: Data

AIR recommends that X089 Williamsbridge take steps to ensure the consistent use of data by all teachers to inform instruction.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Data Use

Student assessment data can provide important information for measuring the effectiveness of instruction; teachers can use these data to ensure the success of all students. The IES Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making* describes several factors that are important to consider when using data to improve instruction, including establishing a clear vision for school-wide data use, providing supports that foster data-driven culture within the school, and making data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement (Hamilton et al., 2009).

The principal and school leadership are pivotal players in the school-wide effort of using data regularly. The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning's (McREL) study of the effects of leadership practices on student achievement showed "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 (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003, 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).

In addition to leading the data use initiative by example, school administration is encouraged to cultivate a culture of reflection and continuous improvement to 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, including other teachers' high standards, other teachers' perceptions of competence, the likelihood of others to participate in an activity in response to peer engagement, and individual concerns and issues being seen as collective ones. To the degree that teachers think in terms of these four dimensions, they will be more likely to utilize a data system.

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.

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 2, in which staff expressed concern that not all teachers reported using data consistently to inform instruction.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to support teachers in more consistent use of data to inform instruction.

- 1. Provide all teachers with ready and user-friendly access to multiple sources of data on student achievement. This action step can be accomplished by doing the following:**
 - Ensuring online access to data
 - Providing paper summary sheets of data, if computer access is not available
 - Providing data by subgroup and academic sub-skill so that staff can easily use the data to make decisions about instruction for all students

- 2. Provide ongoing professional development and support to all teachers on the use of data to inform instruction, including the following:**
 - Interpreting data from multiple sources, including standardized test data and periodic assessment data
 - Disaggregating data by relevant sub-group and academic sub-skill
 - Using data to inform decisions about instructional groupings and strategies

- 3. Model effective use of data for instructional purposes. This action step can be accomplished by doing the following:**
 - Using data during all administrative and staff meetings focused on student performance and instruction
 - Pairing teachers who are not using data consistently with those who are, for ongoing mentorship and support
 - Scheduling regular meetings with teachers to examine and discuss classroom data

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mr. James, an assistant principal at West Middle School, was asked by his principal to lead the school's efforts on using data to inform instruction. Mr. James visited with representatives from the district to determine the most efficient and user-friendly data tracking systems that could be put in place at the school. After selecting a system that he believed would work with the technology at his school, Mr. James conducted a school-wide training on using the system to retrieve data.

Mr. James set up meetings with grade levels to talk to teachers about how to look at the data, disaggregate it by sub-group and skill, and use it to plan instruction. Once the preliminary training was complete, Mr. James created a schedule for meeting with each teacher in the school, once in the fall and once in the spring, to review data for their classrooms and discuss next steps. Mr. James also retrieved school-wide data and presented it at each faculty meeting, showing teachers how to track progress, or lack thereof, by individual student, classroom, grade level, and school. Mr. James then led the teachers in a discussion to help develop next steps for action items based on the data. Mr. James worked with the math and literacy coaches at the school to provide them with more in-depth training on data-based instruction so that the coaches could support teachers.

At the end of the school year, a majority of teachers at the school reported that they reviewed data to plan instruction at least twice a month. Mr. James made a plan for the next school year to include having teachers talk to students about data.

**QUICK LINKS:
Online Sources
for More Information**

Contents of the IEP

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/IEPcontents.aspx>

The IEP Team

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/team.aspx>

The Short-and-Sweet IEP Overview

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/overview.aspx>

Writing Quality IEPs: Indicators of Best Practice

http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/d75/iep/Writing_Quality_IEPS.pdf

RECOMMENDATION 3: IEPs

AIR recommends that X089 Williamsbridge take steps to support both general and special education teachers in the effective use of IEPs to inform instruction for SWDs.

LINK TO RESEARCH

In order for teachers to effectively use students' IEPs to guide instruction, it is critical to include information about appropriate instructional accommodations and modifications. These terms are often confused in general conversations regarding the needs of students with disabilities, and should be clearly delineated in the IEP. Accommodations provide access and allow students with disabilities to learn all of the same content as peers in the general education curriculum (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).

Making decisions about which accommodations will be used by students begins with making good instructional decisions that are informed by gathering and reviewing information about the student, including present level of performance and disability (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, & Hall, 2005). Accommodations should allow students with disabilities to demonstrate their skill levels without being hindered by their disability (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Capizzi, 2005; Thurlow et al., 2005). Accommodations should be available in all content areas related to a student's disability (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). For example, if a student requires the use of oral and visual instructions for assignments, he or she must have these available in all content classes as well as support classes, such as art. Accommodations may also be used for testing (i.e., state and local exams) and should be listed in a student's IEP and implemented in the classroom.

Modifications change the expectations of content, learner achievement, and outcomes (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000) and are therefore used for fewer students. An even smaller group of students may require an individualized set of content goals. Modifications that are used for testing must be listed in the student's IEP (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 4, in which interview data reveal that teachers are using IEPs to check on goals, but not to inform instructional planning.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to support teachers in the effective use of IEPs to inform instruction for SWDs:

- 1. Provide professional development to special and general education teachers on the writing and interpretation of IEPs. This action step can be accomplished by doing the following:**
 - Offering workshops on IEP writing to special education teachers and other staff who are responsible for writing IEPs. These workshops should focus on designing and including appropriate instructional accommodations for students with disabilities.

These instructional accommodations should be based on present levels of performance, and processing strengths and weaknesses, specifically stating strategies to accommodate individual learners.

- Offering workshops on IEP interpretation to all teachers who teach SWDs. Specific attention should be given to explaining and demonstrating the use of the included instructional accommodations in lesson planning and instruction as well as the effectiveness of the accommodations.
- Using staff development meetings periodically to provide refresher trainings and hold discussions about the use of IEPs to inform instruction.

2. Provide support to teachers in the effective use of IEPs. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Ensuring all teachers have ready access to copies of IEPs for all SWDs in their classrooms, possibly to include a one-page summary sheet of each IEP written by the special education teacher for a particular student's general education teachers. This summary sheet would include an evaluation summary, present levels of performance, testing accommodations, recommended instructional accommodations, and any anecdotal information in the IEP that would help guide instruction.
- Encouraging special education and general education teachers to review IEPs together during common planning time as a way to share effective strategies for teaching students with disabilities.
- Providing concrete examples of lesson plans that incorporate instructional accommodations from IEPs.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Ms. Johnson, the special education coordinator at an urban elementary school, became concerned as she spoke with general education teachers that they were not familiar with the IEPs for SWDs in their classrooms and were not using them to guide instruction. She also conducted a review of the school's IEPs, and found that although testing accommodations and annual goals were well written, many of the school's IEPs lacked appropriate instructional accommodations for students. Ms. Johnson first met with the school's special education teachers and provided professional development on instructional accommodations, asking each teacher to examine the IEPs for their students and revise or write accommodations as appropriate. She then developed an electronic template for a one-page summary of an IEP and asked each special education teacher to use the template to give an IEP summary to each teacher at the school who worked with a student with a disability.

As the summaries were being distributed to teachers, Ms. Johnson held a training session, during a school-wide faculty meeting, on interpreting IEPs and planning for instruction. At this training she handed out sample lesson plans that directly linked to individual student goals and accommodations. Ms. Johnson also paired each general education teacher with a special education teacher at the same grade level and asked them to meet once a week to make sure that the needs of SWDs in the general education classes were being met.

Through the use of an observation protocol and teacher interviews over a six-month period, Ms. Johnson noticed that general education teachers had significantly increased their use of IEPs to guide instruction, and were coming to IEP meetings better informed and more able to discuss the impact of instructional accommodations on the SWDs in their classrooms. She also conducted a second IEP review and found that almost all IEPs included appropriate instructional accommodations.

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An Affiliate of American Institutes for Research®

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

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