

East Bronx Academy for the Future

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of East Bronx Academy for the Future by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as in need of improvement (Year 1) Under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The ESCA process utilized 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 East Bronx Academy for the Future

Located in the Bronx, East Bronx Academy for the Future (X271) is a high school with 621 students from Grade 6 through Grade 12. Given its unique grade span, the school has two entry points—Grades 6 and 9. The school population is comprised of 33 percent Black, 63 percent Hispanic, 1 percent White, and 2 percent Asian students. The student body includes 10 percent English language learners and 21 percent special education students (Special Education Service Delivery Report). Approximately 51.6 percent of students are boys, and 48.4 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year is 84 percent. Eighty-four percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 9 percent of students are eligible for reduced-price lunch (Accountability and Overview Report 2009–10).

East Bronx Academy for the Future employs an ongoing standards-based curriculum development process that is informed by the Understanding by Design (UBD) approach. The process is reflective, teacher-driven, and supported by both the administration and protocol-driven collaborative “teacher talks” conducted throughout the year. The school’s unique schedule allows all teachers to have common planning times each day, and teachers use this time to meet in both grade-level and subject-area teams. Students have access to a number of foreign language, visual arts, performing arts, “college culture,” credit recovery, and academic enrichment elective course offerings available during lunch period, team meeting period, before school, or after school. Consistent with its technology focus, East Bronx Academy for the Future provides students with access to computers and to faculty and staff through school email. The school’s student handbook also ensures that parents are aware that students’ grades are available and regularly updated on GradeBookWizard, which is an online grading system.

According to the 2009–10 New York State Accountability Report, East Bronx Academy for the Future is in School Improvement (Year 1)¹ for English language arts (ELA) and math. This report indicated that East Bronx Academy for the Future did not make adequate yearly progress in ELA or math in the categories of all students, Hispanic or Latino students, and economically disadvantaged students. During the past several years, the school has embarked upon a number of data-informed academic and social

¹<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/c0/AOR-2010-331900011502.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 2011.

intervention and support initiatives for its students. These initiatives include protocol-driven grade level “kid talk” meetings, a functional support team, CORE advisories structured by the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) model, and extended day tutoring activities, among others. East Bronx Academy for the Future counts New Visions, MGI, Lehman College, Kaplan Learning, and Co-op Tech among its collaborative partners.

Audit Process at East Bronx Academy for the Future

The ESCA approach utilized at the high school level examines six topic areas: student engagement, academic interventions and supports, support for incoming students, classroom instruction, professional development, and courses and extracurriculars. Data were collected at the school level via teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by East Bronx Academy for the Future during the month of March 2011. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school’s use.

These reports were presented to the school during a co-interpretationSM meeting on May 26, 2011. During this meeting, eight stakeholders from the East Bronx Academy for the Future 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 has 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 East Bronx Academy for the Future.

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

About 1/3 of survey respondents report using behavior strategies inconsistent with their colleagues' strategies and observations indicate an overall medium level of positive climate with behavior disrupters in most classrooms observed.

Co-interpretation participants developed Critical Key Finding 1 based on eight findings yielded from classroom observations and survey data. These data show that minor and major disruptors were noted in a majority of observed classrooms and inconsistent behavior management strategies were employed by teachers. Related findings indicate that wasted time and lost productivity was related to these disruptions, particularly at instructional transition points. Observation data also yielded an overall mid-range rating on positive climate in observed classrooms, due to intermittent evidence of warm relationships between teachers and students, such as smiling, respect, and frequent student-teacher proximity.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Based on observations, there is minimal feedback that encourages deep understanding and persistence. The most commonly reported activity according to teacher surveys is answering textbook and workbook questions. More than half of the teachers don't do project-based learning with portfolios and/or field work. In more than half of observed classrooms, there is an overreliance on key students and regular occurrences of off-task behavior and sporadic engagement.

Critical Key Finding 2 was developed based on five findings yielded from classroom observations and survey data. These data indicate that a majority of observed classrooms fell into the mid-range on student engagement and quality of feedback, and some teachers primarily interacted with a core group of engaged students and interacted minimally with other students in the classroom. Survey data also show that a majority of teacher respondents indicated that textbook and workbook questions were their most common classroom activities. Survey data also shows that more than half of teacher respondents indicated that they do not utilize more authentic learning activities such as portfolios, projects, and field experiences.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

In terms of school policy, teachers feel least influential in setting standards for behavior. Ways of assessing the effectiveness and quality of collaborative meetings are unclear.

Evidence from teacher survey and document review data was used to develop Critical Key Finding 3. Most teachers believe that they have little influence in setting standards for student behavior. Document review data evidenced that it is unclear how the overall quality and effectiveness of collaborative grade-level and team meetings are evaluated.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

According to interviews, documents and teacher surveys, the school has many opportunities for collaboration between teachers, support staff and administration. Teachers are very likely to share their concerns in these venues.

Positive Key Finding 1 was developed based on interview and teacher survey data. These data show that teachers believe that East Bronx Academy for the Future's unique schedule allows them to frequently collaborate formally and informally in both grade-level and subject-area teams. Survey data further indicate that teacher respondents are moderately to very likely to share concerns about struggling students and believe that academic and other needed supports are provided. Teacher respondents also indicate that they have a great deal of influence in areas related to hiring new personnel, selecting instructional materials, and establishing curriculum and instructional programs.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

All teachers agree that the principal communicates effectively regarding vision, instructional goals, and teaching standards. The principal is actively involved in monitoring student academic progress and the quality of teaching.

This finding was based on evidence from teacher surveys. The surveys indicate that all teachers agree that the school principal communicates effectively regarding school vision, instructional goals, and teaching standards. Furthermore, the principal is actively involved in monitoring student academic progress and the quality of teaching. Teacher respondents also rated the principal as a strong leader in all related categories.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 3:

According to interview and document review data, East Bronx Academy for the Future "staffulty" have access to a wide variety of data and use those data (along with anecdotal notes) to strategically place students in academic and enrichment supports.

Positive Key Finding 3 is supported by information from interview and document review data that indicate that East Bronx Academy for the Future's administration, faculty, and staff analyze student data from a number of formative and summative assessments. These findings also show that students are strategically placed in specific academic and social interventions based upon the students' identified needs.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the East Bronx Academy for the Future co-interpretation, school staff and faculty identified school climate, behavior policies and practices, quality feedback, and instructional strategies as they relate to rigor and student engagement as priority areas for improvement. School climate and behavior policies and practices were prevalent topics, as were others related to inconsistent student engagement and on-task behavior. There was much discussion around the negative effects of classroom disruptions and what seemed to be inconsistent behavioral strategies to address these disruptions within the school community. Participants also noted surprising indications of an overreliance on less rigorous and authentic instructional strategies such as answering textbook and workbook questions in some classrooms. Similarly, participants noted an overreliance on engagement with a core group of students in observed classrooms.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Continue to refine and implement a schoolwide positive behavior policy and system with clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. The policy and related system should include concise social expectations and a continuum of supports, interventions, incentives/rewards, and consequences—including a clear delineation of activities and programs that students are entitled to rather than those activities that are privileges.
2. Expand the implementation of instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.
3. Identify and implement instructional strategies that encourage high-quality instructional feedback between the teacher and students or among students.
4. Develop and implement a schoolwide initiative aimed at increasing student engagement and creating a sustainable and supportive learning environment. The aim is to improve student attendance, enhance participation, reduce boredom, end negative behaviors and the associated classroom management issues, and increase student achievement in academic and social skills.

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

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

Recommendation 1: Positive Behavior Management System

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

LINK TO RESEARCH

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

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

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

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

Schoolwide positive behavior support (SWPBS) is based on the research-based application of lessons learned from more than 7,000 schools currently implementing successful changes in their school environment. Schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) evolved from valid research in the field of special education. SWPBS is not a curriculum, intervention, or practice but a decision-making framework that guides selection, integration,

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

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

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

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

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

School-Wide PBIS Implementation in High Schools: Current Practice and Future Directions (Publication)

http://www.pbis.org/school/high_school_pbis.aspx

Tiered Interventions in High Schools: Using Primary Lessons Learned to Guide Ongoing Discussion (Publication)

http://www.pbis.org/school/high_school_pbis.aspx

and implementation of the best evidenced-based behavioral practices for improving important academic outcomes for all students (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP] Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2011).

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

Common Features of Schoolwide Behavioral Management Systems

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

Reprinted from Schoolwide Behavioral Management Systems by Mary K. Fitzsimmons, at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED417515.pdf>. Published in 1998 as ERIC/OSEP Digest E563.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Understand the guiding principles of student behavior management.

The OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2011) has established the following SWPBS guiding principles:

- “Develop a continuum of scientifically based behavior and academic interventions and supports.”

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

- “Use data to make decisions and solve problems.”

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

- “Arrange the environment to prevent the development and occurrence of problem behavior.”

Post 3–5 positively stated overarching schoolwide social expectations prominently around the school, particularly in problem areas.

- “Teach and encourage prosocial skills and behaviors.”

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

- “Implement evidenced-based behavioral practices with fidelity and accountability.”

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

- “Screen universally and monitor student performance and progress continuously.”

There should be a plan for collecting data to evaluate SWPBS outcomes, wherein data are collected as scheduled and used to evaluate effectiveness for future adjustments.

2. Build a team.

Florida’s Positive Behavior Support Project (2005) outlines a SWPBS process to provide a systematic structure and formalized procedures that can be implemented during the summer months. The initial steps should be to establish the program, encourage all staff to buy in, and establish a schoolwide leadership team or behavior support team. The goal is not to develop yet another group but to fold SWPBS into the roles and responsibilities of an already established team. Members of the team should include administrators (i.e., principal, assistant principal, or dean), counselors, social workers, the regular education teacher, the special education teacher, a member with behavior expertise, and a coach/district representative. It is vital that the administration supports the process, takes as active a role as the rest of the team, and attends most meetings.

3. Determine school capacity.

Other important implementation consideration points center around gauging and developing the school’s individual and collective capacities to implement a comprehensive program. Related initial key questions include the following:

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

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

Positive Behavior Support in the Classroom

- The classroom is arranged to minimize crowding and distraction.
- The classroom has explicit routines and directions that are linked to schoolwide routines and direction.
- There are 3–5 positively stated expectations (or rules) that are posted, taught, and reinforced.
- There are frequent acknowledgments of appropriate behaviors.
- Students have multiple opportunities to respond and participate during instruction.
- The teacher actively supervises class during instruction.
- Inappropriate behavior is ignored; instead, quick, direct, explicit reprimands/redirections are provided.
- Multiple strategies are in place to acknowledge appropriate behavior (points, praise) linked to schoolwide strategies.
- Specific feedback is given in response to social and academic errors and correct responses.

Adapted from Classroom Management: Self-Assessment Revised by Brandi Simonsen, Sarah Fairbanks, Amy Briesch, and George Sugai, available at http://www.pbis.org/pbis_resource_detail_page.aspx?Type=4&PBIS_ResourceID=174.

A Case Study on the Schoolwide Application of Positive Behavior Support in an Urban High School

A rare three-year participatory case study of schoolwide PBS implementation in an urban high school yielded the following findings.

- **Degree of schoolwide implementation:** It took the school roughly three academic years to approach full implementation across five domains of the plan (expectations are defined, expectations are acknowledged, system for responding to behavior, making data-based decisions, and management); two additional domains (behavioral expectations are taught, and district-level support) were found to be more difficult to achieve.
- **Behavioral outcomes:** After three years, the school saw significant reductions in the total number of referrals per student per year, incidents of serious disobedience of authority, daily referrals, and uniform violations. The overall result of this success was less administrative time spent on discipline, and increased instructional time for students.

In addition, the action researchers identified a number of challenges to implementation that they considered unique to high schools:

- **The schoolwide acknowledgment system:** It was important for this adolescent population that rewards/acknowledgments be meaningful and “cool,” but not “babyish.” Acquiring student input through surveys, student councils, or focus groups are strategies for generating ideas. These strategies also benefit the program by fostering student engagement and buy-in.
- **Teaching behaviors in a high school setting:** There was a need to overcome staff resistance to directly teaching behaviors vs. reinforcing them. This points to the need for a system in which teaching these behaviors occurs on a regular basis and is integrated into the curriculum. Understanding the training, priorities, and needs of high school teachers is also critical.
- **Logistics of implementation:** Owing to the complexity and sheer size of many high schools, initial implementation may take longer and require more energy and effort during the initial data gathering efforts and development of partnerships than at other levels. Moreover, a perfect stepwise assumption should not be made regarding the succession of interventions.
- **Enacting consistent policies that address behavior:** Again, because of the sheer numbers of staff and students that are within a large high school, developing and agreeing on a consistent policy for a range of issues requires sustained effort.
- **Modifying office discipline referral forms to track data:** Another challenge was the modification of the discipline referral form to meaningfully assess and track behaviors. Modifications included making it easier for teachers to provide data about the location and time of referrals, and asking teachers to hypothesize about the students’ possible motivation for their behavior (e.g., gaining attention).

Source: Bohanon, H., Fenning, P., Carney, K. L., Minnis-Kim, M. J., et al. (2006).

Recommendation 2: Instructional Rigor

Expand the implementation of instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Instruction that pushes students to engage in higher-level thinking leads to deeper learning for students (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001; Pashler et al., 2007). Too often, particularly in schools where students are struggling, instruction focuses on lower-level thinking skills, basic content, and test preparation. Teachers of struggling student groups or tracks usually offer students “less exciting instruction, less emphasis on meaning and conceptualization, and more rote drill and practice activities” than do teachers of high-performing or heterogeneous groups and classes (Cotton, 1989, p. 8). Yet this focus on basic skills does not necessarily improve student achievement.

Several research studies were completed from 1990 to 2003 “which demonstrated that students who experienced higher levels of authentic instruction and assessment showed higher achievement than students who experienced lower levels of authentic instruction and assessment” (Newmann, King, & Carmichael, 2007, p. vii). These results included higher achievement on standardized tests (Newmann et al., 2001). It is also important to note that these results “were consistent for Grades 3–12, across different subject areas (mathematics, social studies, language arts, science), and for different students regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status” (Newmann et al., 2007, p. vii).

Teachers need to provide structured opportunities and time for students to take on higher-level cognitive work (Tomlinson, 2003). In discussing the gradual release of responsibility model, Fisher and Frey (2008) state that “the cognitive load should shift slowly and purposefully from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility, to independent practice and application by the learner” (p. 2). This process allows students to become what Graves and Fitzgerald (2003) call “competent, independent learners” (p. 98).

There are several steps to ensure that students are being asked to complete this type of intellectually challenging work, which increases test scores and improves performance on authentic assessment measures as well. Newmann et al. (2001) define authentically challenging intellectual work as the “construction of knowledge, through the use of disciplined inquiry, to produce discourse, products, or performances that have value beyond school” (p. 14). Daggett (2005) agrees, stating that all students should be pushed “to achieve academic excellence, which ultimately boils down to applying rigorous knowledge to unpredictable, real-world situations, such as those that drive our rapidly changing world” (p. 5). Disciplined inquiry, which occurs in the classroom, requires that students “(1) use a prior knowledge base; (2) strive for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness; and (3) express their ideas and findings with elaborated communication” (Newmann et al., 2001, p. 15).

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

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

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

Organizing Instruction and
Study to Improve Learning
(Publication)

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

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Cultivate schoolwide high expectations for students.

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

2. Provide professional development for teachers on instructional strategies that push students to engage in higher-order thinking.

- Provide for teachers ongoing professional development 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.

Electronic Portfolio Development

Dr. Helen C. Barrett (2000) believes that a student portfolio (electronic or paper) provides a “richer picture” of a student’s abilities and shows growth over time. Understanding how the multimedia development and portfolio development processes fit together, together with understanding the role of standards in electronic portfolio development, will provide teachers and students with a powerful tool for demonstrating growth over time. Dr. Barrett further notes that as more schools expand student access to technology, there are an increasing number of options available for developing electronic student portfolios, including relational databases, hypermedia programs, Web pages, PDF files, and commercial proprietary programs. Based on relevant research, the following benefits appear to result from developing electronic portfolios with teachers and students:

1. Creating electronic portfolios can develop teachers’ as well as students’ multimedia development skills. The multimedia development process usually covers the following stages:
 - **The Decide/Assess stage** – determine needs, goals, and the audience for the presentation.
 - **The Design/Plan stage** – determine content and sequence of the presentation.
 - **The Develop stage** – the multimedia materials to include in the presentation are gathered and organized.
 - **The Implementation stage** – students (or teachers) give their presentations.
 - **The Evaluation stage** – teachers and/or other students evaluate the presentation’s effectiveness.
2. Modeling: If teachers develop electronic teaching portfolios, their students will be more likely to have their own electronic portfolios.
3. Each stage of the portfolio development process contributes to teachers’ professional development and students’ lifelong learning:
 - **Collection:** Teachers and students learn to save artifacts that represent the successes (and “growth opportunities”) in their day-to-day teaching and learning.
 - **Selection:** Teachers and students review and evaluate the artifacts they have saved and identify those artifacts that demonstrate achievement of specific standards (this stage is where most electronic portfolios stop).
 - **Reflection:** Teachers and students become reflective practitioners, evaluating their own growth over time and their achievement of the standards, as well as the gaps in their development.
 - **Projection:** Teachers and students compare their reflections to the standards and performance indicators and set learning goals for the future. This stage is the one that turns portfolio development into professional development and supports lifelong learning.
 - **Presentation:** Teachers and students share their portfolios with their peers. This stage is the one where appropriate “public” commitments can be made to encourage collaboration and commitment to professional development and lifelong learning.

Adapted from *Electronic Portfolios = Multimedia Development + Portfolio Development: The Electronic Portfolio Development Process* by Helen C. Barrett, Ph.D., available at <http://electronicportfolios.org/portfolios/EPDevProcess.html#portdev>

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Doing What Works (Website)

http://dww.ed.gov/How-to-Organize-Your-Teaching/Higher-Order-Questions/see/?T_ID=19&P_ID=43

Doing What Works, Essential Questions (Publication)

http://dww.ed.gov/launcher.cfm?media/CL/OIS/HQ/See/584_hq_mats_essential_questions.pdf

Doing What Works, Using Higher Order Questions to Encourage Explanations (Publication)

http://dww.ed.gov/launcher.cfm?media/CL/OIS/HQ/See/585_hq_mats_student_explanation-1.pdf

Doing What Works, Socratic Seminar Planning Form (Publication)

http://dww.ed.gov/launcher.cfm?media/CL/OIS/HQ/See/583_hq_mats_seminars.pdf

Focus on Effectiveness, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Website)

<http://www.netc.org/focus/strategies/>

IES Practice Guide on Organizing instruction and study to improve student learning (Publication)

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/20072004.pdf>

Recommendation 3: High-Quality Instructional Feedback

Identify and implement instructional strategies that encourage high-quality instructional feedback between the teacher and students or among students.

LINK TO RESEARCH

A meta-analysis of research, conducted on instructional feedback, found it to be one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). In *The Power of Feedback*, the authors note that “feedback can be conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding.”

Many teachers spend a considerable proportion of their instructional time in whole-class discussions or question-and-answer sessions, but these sessions tend to rehearse existing knowledge rather than create new knowledge for students. Furthermore, teachers generally listen for the “correct” answer instead of listening for what they can learn about the students’ thinking” (Davis, 1997).

Research indicates that (a) telling students that answers are right or wrong has a negative effect on achievement; (b) providing students with correct answers has a moderate effect; (c) explaining what is correct and what is not correct has a greater effect. (Marzano et al., 2001).

According to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System—Secondary Manual, when properly implemented, instructional feedback “expands and extends learning and understanding and encourages student participation” (Pianta et al., 2007, p. 49). Feedback needs to provide information specifically relating to the task or process of learning that fills a gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood (Sadler, 1989). Feedback itself can “take on the form of new instruction, rather than informing the students solely about correctness” (Kulhavy, 1977, p. 212). Through feedback, teachers provide students with opportunities to obtain a deeper understanding of material and concepts through back-and-forth exchanges called “feedback loops” and by providing additional information; opportunities to explain their thinking and rationale for response and actions; opportunities to perform at higher levels than they would be able to perform independently through scaffolding; and increases student involvement and persistence through encouragement and affirmation (Pianta et al., 2007, p. 49).

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

There are many ways in which teachers can deliver feedback to students and for students to receive feedback from teachers, peers, and other sources. For students, it means gaining information about how and what they understand and misunderstand, finding directions and strategies that they must take to improve, and seeking assistance to understand the goals of the learning (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991).

Good Feedback

- Clear and unambiguous
- Specific
- Supportive, formative and developmental
- Timely
- Understood

1. Provide teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities so that teachers can learn to respond effectively during whole-class discussions and when providing feedback to individual students and small groups.

2. Identify the workshops so that teachers can learn the value of feedback.

Identify workshops and other professional learning opportunities for teachers to learn the value of feedback. Focus professional development on building opportunities for student explanations in the classroom.

3. Support teacher collaboration with peer observations.

Support teacher collaboration by giving them tools designed to help them reflect on a peer's practice. Observations should focus on the use of questioning and feedback in classroom discussions and giving each other feedback on the questions they ask and the kinds of student responses generated.

4. Discuss classroom examples.

Provide examples for teachers to discuss how teachers help students to make their thinking visible and get feedback on their explanations. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of instructional approaches used to encourage explanations.

5. Provide opportunities for teachers to incorporate instructional strategies that facilitate high-quality feedback into curriculum documents and lesson plans.

The Teaching Center (2009) provides the following strategies:

- **Include notes of when they will pause to ask and answer questions.** Asking questions throughout the class will not only make the class more interactive but also help teachers measure and improve student learning.
- **Ask a mix of different types of questions.** Use “closed” questions, or questions that have a limited number of correct answers, to test students’ comprehension and retention of important information. Also ask managerial questions to ensure, for example, that your students understand an assignment or have access to necessary materials. “Open” questions, which prompt multiple and sometimes conflicting answers, are often the most effective in encouraging discussion and active learning in the classroom.

- **Wait for students to think and formulate responses.** Waiting 5–10 seconds will increase the number of students who volunteer to answer and will lead to longer, more complex answers. Teachers should refrain from answering their own questions, which will only communicate to students that if they do not answer, teachers will do their thinking for them. If the students are unable to answer after sufficient time for thinking has passed, rephrase the question.
- **Do not interrupt students' answers.** Often, teachers find themselves wanting to interrupt because they think they know what students are going to say or because teachers are passionate about the material. Teachers should resist this temptation. Hearing the students' full responses will allow teachers to give them credit for their ideas and to determine when they have not yet understood the material.
- **Show interest in students' answers, whether right or wrong.** Teachers should encourage students when they are offering answers by nodding, looking at them, and using facial expressions that show they are listening and engaged.
- **Develop responses that keep students thinking.** For example, ask the rest of the class to respond to an idea that one student has just presented, or ask the student who answered to explain the thinking that led to his or her answer.
- **If a student gives an incorrect or weak answer, point out what is incorrect or weak about the answer, but ask the student a follow-up question that will lead that student, and the class, to the correct or stronger answer.** For example, note that the student's answer overlooks the most important conclusion of the topic being discussed. Teachers should then ask that same student to try to recall what that conclusion is. If he or she does not recall the conclusion, open this question up to the class.
- **Follow a "yes-or-no" question with an additional question.** For example, follow up by asking students to explain why they answered the way they did, to provide evidence or an example, or to respond to a yes-or-no answer given by another student. It's insufficient and shortsighted to rely on quick, right answers as indications of students' knowledge of subject matter. Probe children's thinking when they respond. Ask: Why do you think that? Why does that make sense? Convince us. Prove it. Does anyone have a different way to think about the problem? Does anyone have another explanation?

High-Quality Instruction That Promotes Learning

In February 2010, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation issued a report titled *Small High School at Work: A Case Study of Six Gates-Funded Schools in New York City*, which was a case study of six public high schools. Guided by the research literature on effective school (and instructional) practices, the report documents evidence and examples of high-quality instruction that promotes student learning and engages students in a deep understanding of material such as metacognitive skill-building, frequent assessment and feedback, and quality questioning techniques. Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching identifies the quality of teacher questions as one component of rigorous instruction. Students must be encouraged to both ask and answer challenging questions. These questions should require students to justify their arguments and responses, pressing for clarification and explanations when needed (Fancsali et al., 2010).

QUALITY QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

An 11th-grade social studies class at School 6 was studying the progressive era. Following an introduction to relevant vocabulary, students analyzed a political cartoon in which the "lion tamer" represented President Theodore Roosevelt. The teacher posed several questions about the cartoon to the whole class. In the example that follows, the teacher frequently probed students and asked students to elaborate on their answers by providing specific examples. The responses elicited debate the conclusion that the president would be able to control the trusts.

"What might President Roosevelt's personality be like based on what you see in the cartoon?"

"Does the cartoonist seem to believe that President Roosevelt will be able to control the trusts?"

"Why do you think this?"

MODELING COMPLEX THINKING AND PROCESSING

Teachers model complex thinking by demonstrating the process and steps they use to analyze and synthesize information and to solve problems.

A 10th-grade English teacher at School 3 verbalized her thought process on a reading-response assignment she had given: Ask a question of your text and explain your thought process. The question the teacher asked about *Catcher in the Rye* was, "Will Holden ever be happy?" She explained, "I am wondering this because he seems totally depressed and has no goals or hope." Later in the period, the teacher modeled inference making. As she read aloud from the text, she stopped to point out when she was making an inference: "I'm going to model what inference is because we are working on finding quotes to support our statements. I'm going to infer that Holden is sweaty because he is nervous.... I'm going to infer that Holden is good at heart; he gives the benefit of the doubt. You can point to these lines [in the book] as evidence."

ENCOURAGING METACOGNITION

Metacognitive skills include noticing when one doesn't understand something and taking steps to remedy the situation, and formulating questions.

In a 11th-12th-grade mathematics class at School 3, the teacher encouraged students to make internal thought processes overt:

"How did you solve this equation?"

"Does anyone else have another way to solve the equation?"

Adapted from pages 50-57 of *Small High Schools at Work: A Case Study of Six Gates-Funded Schools in New York City* - Cheri Fancsali, Reva Jaffe-Walter, Vernay Mitchell-McKnight, Nancy Nevarez, Eliana Orellana, and Lea Williams Rose, available online at <http://www.aed.org/Publications/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&pageid=35987>. This report was published in 2010 by The Academy for Educational Development.

Recommendation 4: Student Engagement

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

LINK TO RESEARCH

Student engagement provides an essential foundation for increasing achievement levels. “Educators must work to build engagement levels if they hope to support students in meeting higher standards” (Learning Point Associates, 2005, p. 2).

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

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

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

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

Students need to build a sense of self-efficacy (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

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>

and challenge—one that requires problem solving (Voke, 2002). In addition, Gordon (2006) suggests the recognition and leveraging of individual student strengths and recalls a typical student response from the 2005 Gallup Youth Survey (pp. 77–80):

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

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

“There is a growing consensus that whatever else is done, schools must also become places where it is easier for students and teachers to know one another well and for students to connect to the school and its purposes, says Sergiovanni (2000, p. 58). “Schools in other words must be caring and learning communities.”

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: WHOLE-SCHOOL PRACTICES

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

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

1. Continue to create a positive school culture.

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

2. Encourage student participation.

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

3. Proactively engage with parents/caretakers.

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

4. Implement preventative and early interventions.

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

5. Respond to individual students.

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

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

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Keeping students focused and engaged in the classroom is quite a challenge amid the entire complex changes—physical, intellectual, emotional, and social—that they experience during this phase of their lives. Adolescence represents a critical period during which youth struggle to take on new responsibilities and learn decision-making skills while concurrently establishing a sense of self and identity. This period also marks a stage where adolescents are learning to regulate their behavior, which can present a challenge to keeping them on-task in the classroom. (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

1. Relate lessons to students' lives.

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

2. Make the learning authentic.

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

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

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

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

3. Give students choices.

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

Regard for Adolescent Perspectives in the Classroom

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

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

Examples of Student Engagement

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

Factor in Math Fun: In Oswego, New York, a Factoring Fan Club was created for 9th grade math students to get them excited about factoring, to keep it fresh in their minds, and to be “good” at factoring. Source: Oswego School District, Oswego, NY

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

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

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

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

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

Create Student-Generated Classroom Rules: In Eugene, Oregon, students create a list of classroom rules to be followed. Each student signs off on the rules and is held accountable by fellow students. In addition, they developed their own “honor roll”, in which students are recognized for doing their best, following directions, and not talking out more than 3 times a day. Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

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

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