

P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as in need of improvement (year 1) under the New York State Education Department (NYSED) differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

About P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton

Located in New York City, in Brooklyn, P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton (K297) is an elementary school with 309 students from kindergarten through Grade 5. The school includes 48 percent black or African American, 49 percent Hispanic or Latino, 2 percent white, and 1 percent Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.¹ The student body includes 22 percent students with disabilities,² and 16 percent of the students are English language learners. The gender breakdown of the school is 50 percent boys and 50 percent girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 90 percent. Ninety-six percent of the students are eligible for free lunch, and 1 percent of the students are eligible for reduced-price lunch.³

In 2009–10, P.S. 297 did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts for all students, the black or African-American subgroup, the Hispanic or Latino subgroup, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. In 2010–11, P.S. 297's state accountability status was designated as "Improvement (year 1)."⁴ Because the school was designated as in need of improvement, it participated in the ESCA.

Audit Process at P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton

The ESCA approach utilized at the elementary school level examines six topic areas related to literacy: student engagement, instruction, academic interventions and supports, professional learning and collaboration, curriculum, and assessments and their use. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school's use.

¹ <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/f5/AOR-2010-331400010297.pdf>. Accessed on August 18, 2011

² http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_K297.pdf. Accessed on August 18, 2011

³ <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/f5/AOR-2010-331400010297.pdf>. Accessed on August 18, 2011

⁴ <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/f5/AOR-2010-331400010297.pdf>. Accessed on August 18, 2011

These reports were presented to the school at a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 9, 2011. During this meeting, 30 stakeholders from the P.S. 297 community read the reports. Through a facilitated and collaborative group process, they identified individual findings and 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 P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton.

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Technology is used, but there is limited use of new literacies.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from a review of school documents and classroom observations, which showed that technology is used at the school. According to documents, in addition to a computer in each classroom, there are two “floating labs,” each with 12 laptops, on each floor. Three students were observed checking out laptops when they were finished with their work and used the laptops to locate maps. Much of the time, students spent searching for sites. Also, Smart Boards were observed in two classrooms. In one of these classrooms, students were engaged in a lesson using the Smart Board.

Because the school computers provide access to the Internet, the school has the potential to address the reading comprehension skills students need to read on the Internet, which are not the same as reading comprehension skills used to read traditional texts. However, a new literacies perspective on the use of the Internet was not evident at the school.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

There is no evidence of a systematic vocabulary program.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by information from a review of school documents and classroom observations. One of the school’s goals in its comprehensive educational plan is to build the sight-word vocabulary of students in Grades K–2; however, no attention appears to be given to oral receptive vocabulary in these grades.

There were few limited examples of explicit vocabulary instruction observed in classrooms, and there was no evidence from documents or observations that the school has a systematic vocabulary program. Examples of fast mapping in which teachers give the meaning of a word during read-alouds were observed in three classrooms; teachers gave student-friendly definitions. The use of a research-based strategy (nonlinguistic representations) to teach vocabulary was observed in one classroom. One teacher directed students to use the vocabulary word in a sentence as part of their homework. In one classroom, a list of new words was taught prior to reading and placed in a pocket chart.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

There are packets for summer reading but no program for summer reading.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from school interviews. According to interview respondents, summer school is available for at-risk students from P.S. 297. There is no evidence of any school program designed to keep students reading over the summer break.

According to interview respondents, the New York City Public Library summer reading club is encouraged. In addition, the school has used vacation packets.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

The school systematically assesses, identifies, promotes, and encourages support for students through the use of modifications but does not extend through the summer months.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by information from the review of school-submitted documents and teacher survey results. According to interviewees, academic intervention services and the extended day program provide opportunities to address the academic needs of the students in small-group settings. Slightly less than two thirds of teacher survey respondents indicate that the school is moderately to very likely to systematically identify the kinds of academic supports and services struggling students need. Sixty-four percent of surveyed teachers reported that academic and other needed supports are provided soon after student needs are identified.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 5:

There is no systematic school-wide plan to increase reading stamina.

Critical Key Finding 5 is supported by information from classroom observations.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Teachers report some influence over establishing the curriculum and selecting materials.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by information from teacher survey results. Almost half of the surveyed teachers have indicated moderate to great influence over establishing the curriculum. Forty-one percent of surveyed teachers report moderate to great influence over selecting books, programs, and other instructional materials.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

Collaboration occurs between general education teachers and teachers who specialize in meeting the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities.

Positive Key Finding 2 is based on evidence from the teacher survey and school interviews. Seventy-one percent of surveyed teachers agree or strongly agree that special education and general education teachers collaborate informally. Eighty-four percent of surveyed teachers agree or strongly agree that this type of informal collaboration occurs between teachers of English language learners and general education teachers. Sixty-four percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that special education and general education teachers routinely use common planning or professional development time to share knowledge and strategies. Interviewees report that teachers have a common planning period every day.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

Participants at the P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton co-interpretation prioritized critical key findings that identify areas in which the school's ELA literacy program can improve as well as several positive findings highlighting school strengths. Critical Key Finding 1 refers to new literacies, an emerging area. Critical Key Finding 2 addresses vocabulary and the need for a systemic vocabulary program to be implemented in the school. Critical Key Findings 3 and 4 address summer reading loss, which contributes to achievement gaps between high-poverty and middle class students. Critical Key Finding 5 addresses reading stamina.

One of the strengths of P.S. 297 Abraham Stockton is that teachers collaborate formally and informally. These opportunities may be built upon and focused so that they address the recommendations in this report.

THE FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide systematic vocabulary program.
2. Develop and implement a plan to address summer learning loss.
3. Develop and implement with fidelity a school-wide plan to increase the reading stamina of the students.
4. Develop and implement with fidelity a multi-year plan to align the school's curriculum, instruction, assessments, and instructional materials to the Common Core State Standards.
5. Investigate ways to increase opportunities for developing the new literacies of the students.

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

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

Recommendation 1: Vocabulary Program

Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide systematic vocabulary program.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Vocabulary. One of the most persistent findings in reading research is that the size of students' vocabulary relates strongly to their reading comprehension and overall academic success (Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Becker, 1977; Davis, 1942; Whipple, 1925). Although most word learning occurs incidentally through experiences with oral language and wide reading (National Reading Panel, 2000), intentional, explicit teaching of specific words and word-learning strategies can add words to students' vocabularies (Tomeson & Aarnoutse, 1998; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990) and improve reading comprehension of texts containing those words (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Effective instruction includes opportunities for both incidental word learning and intentional word learning. Vocabulary instruction should address academic vocabulary, which is critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in school.

Research shows that background knowledge is more important to the understanding of reading than IQ. According to Marzano (2004), the most important factor in ensuring that students have the background knowledge to understand the content they will encounter in the areas of science, social studies, and so on, is the provision of direct instruction in academic vocabulary terms to students. Academic vocabulary is the vocabulary critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in school. Vocabulary instruction in specific content-area terms builds up students' background knowledge in the content areas. When students understand the academic vocabulary, it is easier for them to understand the information they will read and hear in class.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Provide opportunities to broaden students' vocabulary exposure.

Vocabulary refers to words students must know to read increasingly demanding text with comprehension. Effective vocabulary instruction includes opportunities for both incidental word learning and intentional word teaching. A comprehensive vocabulary program should include the following components:

- Frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences
- Teaching individual words through explicit vocabulary instruction
- Teaching word learning strategies
- Strategies for fostering word consciousness (Graves, 2006)

Vocabulary can be learned through reading and talking (incidental word learning). To promote incidental word learning, teachers provide opportunities to use oral language experiences at school to promote vocabulary growth. Reading children's books aloud, particularly when accompanied by teacher-student talk, can increase students' vocabularies. Once students are reading on their own, a wide range of reading materials will aid vocabulary growth.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

FreeRice (Website)
www.freerice.com

Intentional and explicit instruction of specific words and word-learning strategies also is important. In selecting specific words to teach, teachers should consider two criteria: importance (words that are important to understanding a specific reading selection or concept) and usefulness and frequency (words that are generally useful for students to know and that they are likely to encounter with some frequency in their reading).

Students should be given a student-friendly definition of the words targeted for explicit instruction. They should also be repeatedly exposed to new words in multiple oral and written contexts and provided sufficient practice opportunities for learning words. Researchers estimate that it could take as many as 17 exposures for a student to learn a new word. Repeated exposure will be most effective if exposures occur over an extended period of time. For this reason, a small number of words should be selected for each week and receive attention all week. Teachers should give students sufficient opportunities to use new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing, and independent reading.

Students require strategies that will support them in learning new vocabulary independently. Students can be taught the word learning strategies, such as learning to use context clues to determine word meanings; learning to use dictionaries and other word resources; and learning to use base words, prefixes, and suffixes to figure out meanings for words.

Academic vocabulary should be built throughout elementary school. To facilitate the development of students' academic vocabulary, the school can develop a list of academic vocabulary words and terms by grade level, which all teachers will teach. Marzano and Pickering in their book, *Building Academic Vocabulary: Teacher's Manual* (2005), provide a list of academic vocabulary terms that schools can use to create their own list of subject-specific vocabulary words. They recommend that teachers teach one word weekly for each academic subject (30 terms per year per subject). They also recommend that all teachers follow the same six-step process to teach the terms:

- The teacher provides a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
- Students restate the explanation of the new term in their own words.
- Students create a nonlinguistic representation of the term (e.g. draw a picture, a symbol).
- Students periodically do activities that help add to their knowledge of the vocabulary terms.
- Periodically, students are asked to discuss the terms with one another.
- Periodically, students are involved in games that allow them to play with the terms.

2. Provide professional development opportunities to support the fidelity of implementation of a vocabulary program.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Researchers have found that reading aloud to students increases their vocabularies. Some researchers contend that the real value of reading aloud activities for vocabulary growth lies not only in the reading but also in the teacher-student talk that accompanies the reading.

Text Talk, developed by Beck and McKeown (2001) is designed to increase both comprehension and vocabulary by incorporating word learning in the context of reading new books. The goals of Text Talk are to develop comprehension with open-ended questions and enhance vocabulary development. In order to increase comprehension, the teacher intersperses open-ended questions that require students to explain and describe text ideas and then asks follow-up questions that encourage elaboration of initial ideas. The pictures in the book are presented after students have responded to the text. Discussions are based on the actual text. Students are not permitted to rely heavily on their background knowledge. This aligns well with the expectations of the Common Core State Standards.

Using explicit instruction, three or four vocabulary words are taught after the story has been read. The teacher gives the word within the context it is used in the story and then provides a student-friendly definition. Students repeat the word and then interact with the word in different contexts to assure understanding. The word is then repeated. This process continues with the remaining words. Finally, students are given exercises using the word—including responding to questions, making comparisons, and choosing the correct word within the context of a scenario.

Coolidge Elementary School, part of the Wyckoff, New Jersey, Public Schools, uses Text Talk and posts Text Talk lessons on its website (<http://www.wyckoffps.org/coolidge/site/default.asp>). Text Talk lessons created by Utah educators for more than 100 books are available on the Utah State Office of Education website (<http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/readingfirst/documents/combinedtexttalkLessons.pdf>).

Recommendation 2: Summer Learning Loss

Develop and implement a plan to address summer learning loss.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Research has shown that low-income family, minority, and less skilled readers fall behind their high-income family, white, and more skilled peers during the summer months when they are not in school. This phenomenon is referred to as summer learning loss. The problem of summer vacation was first documented in 1906, and researchers have been investigating the phenomenon of summer learning loss for more than a century. Borman and D’Agostino (1996) reviewed reading achievement gains in Title I reading programs and found that achievement gains were significantly higher from fall to spring when students were enrolled in school reading classes but were lower from spring to spring when the summer months in which students were not participating in school reading programs were considered.

Summer reading loss is one of the most important factors contributing to reading achievement gaps. Test scores show that all students’ skills improve at similar rates during the year, but students from higher income families keep up the pace during the summer and students from lower income families plateau or lose ground. The problem compounds over time and plays a huge role in overall achievement gaps.

According to the “faucet theory” proposed by Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (1997), all children gain when they are in school because the resources needed for learning are available to them. When school is not in session, however, the resource faucet is turned off. This particularly affects students from low-income families, who may not have access to books and other reading materials over the summer. For these students, the faucet is turned off, which is why the summer months produce differential growth in reading.

Researchers have studied the summer effect on student achievement for most of the last century. Barbara Heyns first brought widespread attention to summer learning loss in 1978 with the publication of *Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling*, which documented that the achievement of middle-grade students from families of low socioeconomic status regressed over the summer compared with that of students from families of high socioeconomic status. In 1978, Heyns examined 3,000 students over a two-year period and found that the top quartile made rapid gains during the academic year and slower but continued growth over the summer months. The reading achievement of average students remained steady or fell slightly over the summers. The bottom quartile of students made comparatively slower gains in reading achievement during the academic year and then lost a significant portion of those gains over each summer.

Family income plays an important role in predicting the magnitude of summer loss in reading. Students from low-income families experience significant summer learning losses in reading comprehension and word recognition. On average, students from middle-income families actually experience slight gains in reading performance over the summer months. In a longitudinal study of student from high- and low-income families, Entwisle et al. (1997) found that although both groups of students made comparable gains in reading achievement during the academic year, by the end of sixth grade, achievement gaps between the two groups had

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

How Your Kids Can Avoid
Summer Learning Loss

[http://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=O1YgRNMDOKo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1YgRNMDOKo)

Book Adventure (Website)

[http://www.bookadventure.
com](http://www.bookadventure.com)

National Summer Learning
Association

[http://www.summerlearning.
org](http://www.summerlearning.org)

grown to approximately three grade-level years. Hayes and Grether (1983) have suggested that nearly 80 percent of the achievement difference between students from high-income and low-income families may be attributable to summer reading loss.

A review of 13 empirical studies representing approximately 40,000 students found that, on average, the reading proficiency levels of students from lower income families declined over the summer months and the reading proficiency levels of students from middle-income families improved modestly. In a single academic year, the decline among lower income students resulted in an estimated three-month achievement gap between more advantaged and less advantaged students. Between Grades 1 and 6, the potential cumulative impact of this achievement gap could compound to 1.5 years' of reading development lost in the summer months alone (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996).

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Of all the activities in which students engage outside school, time spent actually reading is the best predictor of reading achievement—the more students read, the better readers they become (Allington, 2006; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). Reading growth is related to volume of reading.

1. Get students to read during the summer.

The best predictor of summer loss or gain is whether students read during the summer. The number of books students need to read over the summer to fend off summer reading loss and maintain the reading gains made during the school year is based on the student's reading level. Students whose independent reading level is above second grade need to read at least six books over the summer. Students whose independent reading level is at second grade need to read 12 books. Students whose independent reading level is below second grade need to read 20 books.

2. Get books into students' hands.

The best predictor of whether students read is whether they own books. Students from low-income families usually depend heavily on school to provide books to read. Research shows that the key to stemming summer reading loss is finding ways to get books into the hands of students. A strategy the school might consider is giving students sets of books appropriate to their levels and interests to read over the summer.

Access to reading materials is not enough, especially in the early elementary school years, to maintain and build reading skills. Research suggests that providing books without guidance makes no difference for younger children and only a slight difference for older children. Students need some form of scaffolding for voluntary summer reading to improve reading skill.

3. Consider implementing a program for summer reading.

The following four-component program might be appropriate for the school: Teacher training, end-of-year lessons, book matching, and parent/family member support for summer reading.

Teacher Training/End-of-Year Lessons. The teacher training session focuses on the three end-of-the-year lessons that they will teach their students. One lesson focuses on comprehension strategies. Teachers explain to students that they will be receiving books and postcards over the summer (see example of postcard on the following page). Teachers ask students to generate a list of five strategies they have been taught during the year that good readers use to help them understand what they are reading (reread, predict, ask questions, make connections, and summarize). Teachers model the strategies by doing a think-aloud. As each strategy is modeled, the students are asked to identify it, and the teacher rephrases their responses so they exactly match the phrases they will see on the postcard. Next, the teacher demonstrates how to complete the questions on a postcard like the one the students will be receiving with their books. Then, in the last part of the lesson, students select a book, attach sticky notes where they used a comprehension strategy, share their examples of strategy use with the class, and practice answering the question on the postcard. They place a checkmark by each comprehension strategy they used.

The next day, teachers conduct a lesson that focuses on fluency practice. Teachers read a 100-word passage from a book three times, and students rate the teacher's reading. Teachers use a sample of the postcard to demonstrate how the students would answer a three-part question asking whether they read more smoothly, whether they knew more words, and whether they read with more expression. Teachers point out that the postcard asks for a family member's signature and optional comment.

Students then pair up and practice reading a 100-word passage with their partners. One student reads the passage aloud while the other gives feedback using the postcard rating categories; then, the roles are reversed for a second reading. After paired reading, the students "mail" their postcards by returning them to the teacher. The students are given a homework assignment to independently read a book for 15 minutes, read aloud a 100-word passage to a family member twice, complete the questions on the postcard, and obtain a family member's signature.

In a third lesson, teachers provide additional modeling and practice with a nonfiction book. Teachers elicit and model comprehension strategies as before, model completion of the postcard questions, and model counting out 100 words and reading aloud with improvement shown. Students then practice on their own (for silent reading and comprehension strategies) and with a partner (for oral reading and fluency practice).

Book Matching. Students are matched with books, based on reading level and interests. One book is mailed each week for eight successive weeks from June when school is out until school starts in August. A postcard for the student and letter for the parent/family member is sent along with each book. The letter asks parents to encourage their children to read and return the postcard.

Postcard

1. What's the title of the book you got? _____
Book title _____ :
2. Did you finish reading this book? _____
 - Yes
 - No, I stopped on page ____
3. How many times did you read this book?
 - Didn't finish
 - 1 time
 - 2 times
 - 3 times or more
4. What did you do to better understand this book? (Check all that apply.)
 - I reread parts of the book.
 - I made predictions about this book.
 - I asked questions about this book.
 - I made connections.
 - I summarized parts of this book.
5. After you read the book, tell someone in your family what the book was about. Pick a part of the book to read aloud two times. Ask him or her how you improved the second time you read the section and ask for his or her signature. (Check all that apply.)
 - Did I read more smoothly?
 - Did I know more words?
 - Did I read with more expression?
6. Family member's signature: _____
Optional comment about this student's reading: _____

Family Member Support for Summer Reading. Educating parents and students on the importance of summer reading is critical. It is not enough to simply tell parents that it is important for students to read over the summer. Parents, particularly parents of lower socioeconomic status, need to be offered concrete, specific programs and suggestions.

An example of a specific suggestion relates to television viewing. There is a correlation in the United States between the amount of hours students spend watching television and their reading achievement. The students who spend the most time watching television typically have the lowest reading scores. This correlation is reversed in other countries of the world, where students who watch television have higher reading achievement. Researchers hypothesize that this is because students in other countries watch television shows that are captioned in their language: They are reading while watching television. One suggestion for parents is to set reasonable limits for television viewing. When children are watching television, parents should have the captioning feature enabled so children view the words they are hearing.

The home environment of students influences student achievement. Only a small part of this influence, however, is attributable to parents' income, education, or occupation. A much larger part of this influence on student achievement is attributable to parents reading to children, helping with homework, encouraging them to go to college, and taking them to the library and cultural events. These activities need to be encouraged by the school. The single strongest factor in the home environment is the extent to which parents communicate high academic expectations for their children (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

As a result of the policy forum New Vision for Summer School in New York City, held in July 2011, innovative new summer programs will be piloted in 2012. The elementary school could become involved in this initiative.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Students in 17 high-poverty elementary schools in Florida were given books to read over the summer. The 1,330 students were predominantly black or Hispanic students who began the study in the first and second grades. They were given 12 books in each of three summers. Each spring, they were brought to a book fair where they picked from a large selection of trade books. The results of this intervention showed a statistically significant improvement in the students' reading skills, particularly among students at the lowest socioeconomic level.

Recommendation 3: Reading Stamina

Develop and implement with fidelity a school-wide plan to increase the effectiveness of independent reading.

LINK TO RESEARCH

The goal of reading instruction is to have students read with volume, stamina, and fluency.

Volume. The amount that students read in and out of school significantly affects the development of reading rate and fluency, vocabulary, general knowledge of the world, overall verbal ability, and academic achievement. The amount of reading is a strong predictor of reading comprehension, outweighing intelligence, economic background, and gender. The New York City performance standards address volume of reading by specifying that by the end of the fourth grade, elementary students should be reading 25 books per year. The standards for California schools specify that fourth-grade students should be reading 500,000 words per year.

Stamina. Reading stamina is the ability to read for a sustained amount of time without getting distracted or distracting others. Research shows that reading stamina will gradually increase with the amount of time spent reading. Lack of reading stamina is becoming a problem. Students are losing their ability to read for long periods of time. This is important for many reasons but especially when one considers the amount of time students have to read for the state tests.

Fluency. Reading fluency has three components: accuracy, speed, and expression. Fluent readers are characterized by the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (National Reading Panel, 2000). In order to build students' reading fluency, teachers model good oral reading through the daily read-aloud, teach students phrasing, offer many opportunities for students to practice with guidance and support (repeated reading, choral reading, echo reading, buddy reading, recorded reading, reader's theater, poetry readings), and assess and track students' fluency over time.

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Students need to read in order to become better readers. There is a great deal of research that shows a very strong correlation between the amount of time spent reading and a student's progress as a reader. *Reading for Change*, a report issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, states that reading proficiency is closely linked to the amount of time students spend reading in their free time and the diversity of materials they read (Kirsch et al., 2002). The report makes the claim that finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change—to equalize learning across disadvantaged and middle class youth. The report makes the following statement:

Fifteen-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds who read a lot get higher average reading scores than those whose parents are of high or medium occupational status but who have little interest in reading. (p. 6)

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

The 2 Sisters (Website)
<http://www.the2sisters.com/>

Emma Eccles Jones
Center for Early Childhood
Education
www.coe.usu.edu/ecc

Classrooms that provide more reading time yield higher reading achievement among students. The amount of independent silent reading students do in school is significantly related to gains in reading achievement. It is during successful independent reading practice that students consolidate their reading skills and strategies. Without extensive reading practice, reading proficiency lags. Research has not yet confirmed, however, whether instructional time spent on independent silent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading achievement and fluency. The research of Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008) and Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, and Smith (2008) shows promise in terms of how to structure independent reading so that it does affect reading achievement.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

It is extremely important that students are reading books at their independent reading level.

1. Help students select books.

Teaching students how to select “just right” books using the five-finger rule or a similar technique is critical. Students cannot develop stamina using reading materials that are too difficult for them to read. Book boxes and bins with books at an appropriate level should be easily accessible.

2. Hold students accountable.

Holding students accountable for their independent reading is important. Students should keep reading logs in which they record the number of pages they have read in their book. Teachers should be aware of how long it should take a child who reads at one reading rate or another to read books of different levels. In this way, a teacher has some idea of the progress that a student can be expected to make through books. Another way to hold students accountable for their independent reading is to provide time for them to share with a partner or the whole class what they have read.

3. Monitor student engagement.

Teachers can monitor student engagement during independent reading and help students who are having trouble, perhaps because they are reading a book that is too challenging for them.

4. Communicate purpose and expected behaviors.

Teachers need to teach focus lessons on reading stamina and help students understand what it is and why it is important. The class might use a T-chart to brainstorm what they should be doing during independent reading. Behaviors discussed should include reading the whole time, staying in one spot, reading quietly, and getting started right away. The teacher should model these behaviors for the students, and students should then be given an opportunity to practice these behaviors.

5. Build reading stamina.

The teacher might start with a very short reading session on the first day and then gradually increase the time as students show they are able to read and not get distracted. The goal would be to read at least the amount of time required for the state reading test. At the end of the reading time, students can assess how well they did. Throughout the year, students should review the behaviors using the anchor chart and constantly assess themselves on how well they are doing.

Several conditions or resources have a positive impact on reading stamina:

- *Book selection.* The more interest in the book, the better the stamina. Teachers can administer an interest inventory to the students and then be sure that there are books available in the classroom to meet the interests of the students.
- *Comfort.* Students should be comfortable and free from distractions while reading independently.
- *Teacher enthusiasm.* If the teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about books and the students are surrounded by good books they can read, the goal of increasing independent reading is more easily met.

6. Scaffolded silent reading for students.

Reutzel, Jones, et al. (2008) identify the problems with traditional Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), which is that teachers fail to teach, monitor, interact with, and hold students accountable for their time spent in reading practice. Reutzel, Jones, et al. propose an alternative to traditional SSR—Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR). Research on this approach to independent reading has shown promise.

The ScSR model includes support, guidance, structure, appropriate text difficulty, accountability, and monitoring. First, the teacher teaches explicit book selection strategies so that students are able to select books appropriate to their level. Second, the ScSR period begins with the teacher explaining and modeling a strategy for five to eight minutes and then directing the students to read independently for 20 minutes. Third, the teacher conducts individual monitoring conferences with four or five students per day during the reading time. During these conferences, the teacher listens to the student read aloud from the book he or she is reading for one to two minutes. The student retells what he or she has read and then the teacher and the student have a two-minute discussion about the book. The teacher helps the student set a goal for the date to finish the book, and the student also decides how to share the book. Students use a genre wheel to ensure wide reading across different genres.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Joan Moser is a K-2 multiage teacher in the state of Washington. She implemented a structure in her classroom to help her students develop daily habits of reading and writing. Her students have five literacy tasks to complete daily. As students read, the teacher meets with small groups or confers with individuals. These five tasks are (1) read to self, (2) read to someone, (3) work on writing, (4) do word works, and (5) listen to reading.

During the “read-to-self” task, students work on increasing their stamina. Students start with three minutes of independent reading and then add one to two minutes per day until they reach the target of 30 minutes per day for primary students and 45 minutes per day for intermediate students.

Moser and her sister, Gail Boushey, who is a literacy coach, have written the book *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades* (2006), which describes this structure for having students read independently in a productive way.

Recommendation 4: Common Core

Develop and implement with fidelity a multiyear plan to align the school's curriculum, instruction, assessments, and instructional materials to the Common Core State Standards.

LINK TO RESEARCH

PS. 297 Abraham Stockton is in the process of adapting its curriculum to the Common Core Standards. Teachers have received a curriculum map aligned to the New York State learning standards. The curriculum maps are being revised to reflect the new core reading program.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers with the involvement of 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands identified what American students need to know and do to be successful in college and careers. These standards are based on best practices in national and international education as well as research and input from numerous sources including scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, and educators representing all grade levels from kindergarten through postsecondary. These standards are comparable with other countries' expectations and are grounded in available evidence and research.

The state of New York adopted the Common Core State Standards on July 19, 2010.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Align curriculum to the NYS P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy.**

The adoption of the Common Core provides an opportunity for teachers at PS. 297 Abraham Stockton to work in collaborative teams to identify what they are currently teaching through a curriculum mapping process. It will be essential for teams to identify redundancies and gaps between what they should be teaching according to the Common Core and what they are teaching.

Teachers in teams should look closely at current student work to determine the discrepancy between that work and the level of performance that the Common Core demands, and then plan the steps needed to close any discrepancies.

Instructional Expectations for 2011-12 require teachers to work together to engage all students in rigorous tasks, embedded in well-crafted instructional units and with appropriate supports. For ELA, these tasks include:

- Pre-K–2 teachers are expected to engage their students in at least one literacy task aligned to the Common Core Reading Informational Text Standards 1 and 10 and Writing Standard 2 (written response to informational texts through group activities and with prompting and support).
- Teachers of grades 3–8 are expected to engage their students in at least one literacy task aligned to Common Core Reading Informational Text Standards 1 and 10 (written analysis of informational texts) or Common Core Reading Informational Text Standards 1 and 10 and Writing Standard 1 (written opinion or argument based on an analysis of informational texts).

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Common Core State Standards

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

Provides pertinent information about the state learning standards for ELA and literacy and the Common Core standards

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov>

Common Core resources

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/CommonCoreLibrary/default.htm>

Resources for strengthening teacher practice

www.arisnyc.org

Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project

<http://commoncore.org>

Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC)

www.parcconline.org

These tasks are to be embedded in Common Core-aligned curricula and include multiple entry points for all learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Through the work of implementing these performance tasks, teachers will use the inquiry cycle to adjust their curriculum and instruction to help all students meet the expectations of the Common Core. Because standards are not curriculum, teachers will need a curriculum to assist them in helping students meet the Common Core Standards. NYSED is developing curriculum modules to help teachers develop curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core. These curriculum modules will be available to schools during the 2012–13 school year.

2. Align instructional materials to the Common Core.

Another task related to the Common Core Standards is for schools to ensure that the texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the Common Core. Schools need to select complex texts that are grade-level appropriate and meet the text complexity requirements of the Common Core. These levels of text complexity are significantly higher than the level of texts currently being used in most schools. The expectation of the Common Core is that students have extensive classroom practice with texts at or above grade level. It is the expectation of the Common Core that students who are not reading on grade level should be given the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity rather than be given less complex texts. Many students will need careful scaffolding to enable them to read at the level of text complexity required by the Common Core.

The Common Core places a great emphasis on informational text and expects students to read informational text 50 percent of the time and literary text 50 percent of the time. Schools need to ascertain whether enough informational text is available at all grade levels and is being used instructionally.

3. Align instruction to the expectations of the Common Core.

As part of the work outlined in the Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011–12, teachers need to begin to adjust their instruction to help all students meet the higher expectations of the Common Core. In order to help students meet the standards outlined in the Common Core, several changes in literacy instruction will be necessary.

Literacy Instruction. One of these changes is the focus of literacy instruction. The focus of literacy instruction reflected in the Common Core is careful examination of the text itself, which requires close and careful reading. Schools must provide all students, including those who are behind, with extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex texts, as required by the standards. Students can access complex texts through read-alouds or as a group reading activity. Schools should consider carefully their read-aloud selections. Students whose decoding ability is developing at a slower rate also need opportunities to read text they can read successfully without extensive extra assistance. All students are expected to have daily opportunities for independent reading. Reading materials should include newspaper and magazine articles and websites.

Type of Questions. Another change is the type of questions teachers ask of students. Eighty to ninety percent of the standards require text-dependent analysis.

To help students meet the standards outlined in the Common Core, teachers should ask high-quality text-dependent questions. Text-dependent questions are those that can be answered only by careful scrutiny of the text, with students specifically referring to evidence from the text itself to support the answer and not referring to information or evidence from outside the text. The questions are grounded in the text, and students must think carefully about what they heard or read and draw evidence from the text in support of their ideas about the reading.

Strategy Instruction. Another change in literacy instruction is the role of strategy instruction. The Common Core Standards necessitate a reconsideration of the role of reading strategies. Strategies should be embedded in the activity of reading a text rather than being taught separately from texts.

Writing Instruction. Changes in writing instruction may be necessary to help students meet the Common Core Standards. Thirty percent of writing instruction should be devoted to opinion pieces, 35 percent to informative/explanatory texts, and 35 percent to narratives. Students should be given extensive practice with short focused research projects.

4. Redesign assessment to reflect the expectations in the Common Core.

During the 2012–13 school year interim assessments based on the Common Core Standards will be administered along. In addition, items developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), of which the state of New York is a member, will be field tested. The PARCC assessments will be operational during the 2014–15 school year. Presently, the PARCC assessments include two summative assessments, which will measure the full range of the Common Core State Standards at each grade level. One required component that counts toward the summative score includes performance-based assessments in grades 3–8 administered as close to the end of the year as possible.

Priorities in ELA/literacy will include focusing on writing effectively when analyzing text. Another component that is required and counts toward the summative score is end-of-year assessments comprised of computer-based machine-scorable items focusing on reading and comprehending complex texts in ELA/literacy. A third required assessment of listening/speaking can be administered at any time of the year. With this in mind, schools need to examine assessments they currently use to determine whether they are aligned with the Common Core.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

The Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project provides teachers with a roadmap for translating the Common Core into instruction and resources for developing more detailed curriculum and lesson plans. For most grades, there are six English Language Arts Curriculum Maps, each of which contains a list of focus standards taken from the Common Core, specific student objectives, an overview of skills and content the unit will cover, and sample student activities and assessments. Each also includes an essential question that frames the unit, suggested texts (including Common Core exemplar texts), a list of key terminology, and links to additional instructional resources. Future iterations of the maps will include sample student work and scoring rubrics to help teachers who would like to use the sample activities as formative assessment tools.

Recommendation 5: New Literacies

Investigate ways to increase opportunities for developing the new literacies of the students.

LINK TO RESEARCH

The nature of literacy has changed and been redefined. The Internet and other forms of information and communication technology (ICT), such as word processors, Web editors, presentation software, and e-mail, are regularly redefining the nature of literacy.

New literacies are the knowledge, skills, strategies, and dispositions needed to use and adapt to constantly changing information and communication technologies. In order to be considered literate in today's world, students need to be proficient in information and communication technology (International Reading Association, 2002). To prepare students for their future, teachers need to integrate these technologies into the literacy curriculum.

The position statement of the International Reading Association (2002), *Integrating Literacy and Technology in the Curriculum*, reflects the belief that students have the right to:

- Teachers who are skilled in the effective use of ICT for teaching and learning.
- A literacy curriculum that integrates the new literacies of ICT into instructional programs.
- Instruction that develops the critical literacies essential to effective information use.
- Assessment practices in literacy that include reading on the Internet and writing using word-processing software.
- Opportunities to learn safe and responsible use of information and communication technologies.
- Equal access to ICT.

A new literacies perspective considers the Internet as this generation's defining technology for information, communication, and especially for learning. The five components defined by the new literacies of the Internet (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004) are as follows:

- Identifying important questions
- Locating information
- Critically evaluating information
- Synthesizing information collected from different resources
- Communicating ideas to others in a variety of formats

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The focus of this recommendation is increasing the awareness of the staff about new literacies and finding ways to provide more opportunities for students to increase their new literacies skills. Student access to technology at P.S. 297 constrains what the school can do in this area.

Sharing the position statement of the International Reading Association (2002), *Integrating Literacy and Technology in the Curriculum*, is one way to raise staff awareness of this area.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

New Literacies Research
Team at the University of
Connecticut

<http://www.newliteracies.uconn.edu>

Teachers could examine the Common Core to determine how new literacies are integrated into the standards.

Using the Internet Reciprocal Teaching (IRT) Checklist and Taxonomy of Skills (Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004) can help teachers understand the skills involved in new literacies. It can also be used as an assessment tool.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

As part of the Striving Readers project, teachers in the Chicago Public Schools used the instructional strategy of Internet Reciprocal Teaching to increase students' reading comprehension both online and offline, academic engagement, and achievement among at-risk students.

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