Park Slope Collegiate
(formerly Secondary School for Research)

FINAL REPORT

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

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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of Park Slope Collegiate 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 under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

About Park Slope Collegiate

Located in Brooklyn, Park Slope Collegiate (15K464) (formerly Secondary School for Research) is a high school with 479 students in Grades 6–12. The school is colocated on the campus with two other high schools, each with its own primary floor, and shared common spaces, such as auditoriums, libraries, gymnasiums, and cafeterias. The school population comprises 51 percent Hispanic, 36 percent black, 7 percent Asian, and 6 percent white students. The student body includes 10 percent English language learners (ELLs) and 18 percent special education students.[1] Fifty-three percent of students are boys, and 47 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 84 percent. Seventy-five percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 11 percent of students are eligible for reduced-price lunch.[2]

The mission statement for Park Slope Collegiate states:

> We are a small school in Park Slope, grades 6-12, that prepares students for college and careers. We expect and encourage students to explore and research topics across all academic disciplines rather than specializing in a particular subject. We strive to be a community of creative people who are eager to question and learn. Our students work independently and in groups to investigate in English, History, Science and Mathematics. Students build on what they know by comparing different sources and opinions and then presenting their new learning to our school community.[3]

[1] http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_K464.pdf. Accessed on August 5, 2011
[2] https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/64/AOR-2010-321000010254.pdf. Accessed on March 3, 2011
[3] http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/15/K464/AboutUs/Overview/Our+Mission.htm. Accessed August 5, 2011

Audit Process at Park Slope Collegiate

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

These reports were presented to the school at co-interpretation℠ meetings on May 24 and 25, 2011. During these meetings, 14 stakeholders from the Park Slope Collegiate community read the reports. Through a facilitated and collaborative group process, they identified individual findings, then developed and prioritized key findings that emerged from information in the reports.

The remainder of this report presents the key findings that emerged from the co-interpretation process, and the actionable recommendations that Learning Point Associates developed in response. Please note that there is not necessarily a one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings are considered as a group, and the recommended strategies are those that we believe are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student performance at Park Slope Collegiate.

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:
Seventy-one percent of respondents agreed that behavior management strategies are consistent throughout the school.

Critical Key Finding 1 is based on information from the teacher survey and classroom observations. Seventy-one percent of respondents agreed that the school has a behavior plan in place and that the behavior management strategies they use are consistent with those in classrooms throughout the school. Wasted time and lost productivity were perceived as major or minor disrupters in 27 percent of the observed classrooms. Though these statistics might seem positive, co-interpretation participants voted that this was the key finding with the highest priority to improve student achievement at the school. Consequently, the Learning Point Associates auditors provided a recommendation that addresses behavior management.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:
Formal systems of discussion of academic progress are not consistent across grade teams, and there is no evidence of a system for when and how to intervene academically. Some but not all grade teams provide opportunities and structures to discuss individual students.

Critical Key Finding 2 is based on data gathered during interviews. Respondents stated that some grade team meetings provide opportunities to focus on each child. However, they also stated that not all grade teams use consistent systems to ensure that time is spent on each child.

- **Related Positive Findings:** Interview and teacher survey data indicate that teachers communicate frequently about student needs, progress, and the curriculum. Also, teacher survey and interview data indicate that teachers collaborate on planning and implementing decisions about vertically and horizontally aligned curricula.

  Positive findings related to Critical Key Finding 2 draw on information from teacher surveys and interviews. Among surveyed teachers, 100 percent report that they share their concerns about struggling students with other teachers. Ninety-eight percent of surveyed teachers report that they collaborate across subjects and grade levels, formally and informally, about student work, goals, and needs. Eighty-six percent of surveyed teachers meet weekly (or more often) to collaborate on instruction and student learning. Interview respondents confirm these facts about collaboration, stating that teachers have weekly scheduled meetings to collaborate on both the department level and the grade team level. Interviewees stated that in addition to structured and

scheduled professional development opportunities, teachers also collaborate and meet informally. Interviewees noted that because of the small size of the school and the staff's communication skills, staff members are able to understand student skills, behavior history, and academic work.

Interview respondents also noted that departments are actively engaged in developing horizontal and vertical curricula. Ninety percent of surveyed teachers confirm this observation, agreeing that they have the opportunity to select instructional materials; 95 percent agree that they establish curriculum.

- **Other Related Findings:** Multiple data sources indicate that the school offers courses and supports that address academic deficiencies and that students who participate in them seem more engaged than others who do not. There is no evidence, however, that the effectiveness of these programs is measured. Seventy percent of surveyed teachers believe that students are likely to receive academic or other supports.

  The teacher survey and interviews and a review of school documents contributed to Critical Key Finding 2. Approximately 70 percent of surveyed teachers believe that students are moderately or very likely to receive academic or other supports, and that those supports can be accurately identified. However, the document review did not include evidence of any measures or evaluations of the effectiveness of programs addressing academic deficiencies. Although interview respondents noted that several courses and supports exist to address academic deficiencies, one support—Saturday school—was offered less frequently because of budget constraints.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:
More than two thirds of general education teachers consult at least once a semester with an ELL specialist and refer to student individualized education programs (IEPs). Two thirds of general education teachers also report differentiating for ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 3 is based on information from the teacher survey. Ninety-one percent of surveyed teachers report referring to IEPs at least once per semester for instructional planning. Sixty percent of teachers report using the same English Language Arts (ELA)/ mathematics standards when teaching ELLs. More than two thirds of surveyed teachers report that they differentiate process and product for ELLs at least weekly. Almost 70 percent of general education teachers collaborate informally with ELL teachers.

- **Related Positive Finding:** Teacher survey data indicate that differentiation occurs in the majority of classes.

  The related positive finding for Critical Key Finding 3 is based on information from the teacher survey. In a finding that was also mentioned in Critical Key Finding 3, 60 percent of teachers report using the same ELA/math standards when teaching ELLs. Approximately one third of surveyed teachers reported differentiating content for ELLs, but more than two thirds reported differentiating process and product for ELLs. When teaching children with disabilities, surveyed teachers report differentiating content with varying frequencies.

- **Other Related Findings:** Teacher survey data indicate that differentiation of content, process, and product based on learning needs is inconsistent.

  Other findings related to Critical Key Finding 3 are based on evidence from the teacher survey. Most respondents (56 percent) report differentiating product weekly or daily. Respondents report differentiating process more often; 71 percent indicate that they differentiate process one to two times per week, if not more. Ninety-one percent of surveyed teachers refer to IEPs at least once per semester for instructional planning.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

According to surveyed teachers, the gaps in professional development opportunities include training in content-specific topics, teaching students with disabilities, teaching ELLs, and teaching students who are several years below grade level.

Critical Key Finding 4 is based on information from the teacher survey. More than 50 percent of teachers report receiving no professional development on the following topics: teaching students with disabilities, teaching ELLs, teaching students who are several years below grade level, using IEPs for students with disabilities, and coteaching a class.

Positive Key Finding

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Because professional development is focused on instruction and curriculum planning, the vast majority of teachers (90 percent) report that they establish curriculum, select instructional materials, and develop assessments to inform instruction.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by evidence from interviews and teacher surveys. Interviewees report that professional development is centered around fostering instruction and curriculum planning. Eighty-nine percent of surveyed teachers report using classroom or teacher-created assessments on a weekly basis to inform instructional planning and delivery. Ninety percent of surveyed teachers agree that they have the opportunity to select instructional materials, and 95 percent state that they establish curriculum.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

As detailed in the Key Findings section, participants at the Park Slope Collegiate co-interpretation meeting identified several Critical Key Findings related to areas needing improvement as well as Positive Key Findings, highlighting what the school is doing well.

Focus of Recommendation 1. Recommendation 1 addresses a schoolwide behavior management system, an issue identified in Critical Key Finding 1. Though the key finding might seem positive, co-interpretation participants made this the highest priority to improve student achievement. Accordingly, the Learning Point Associates auditors included a recommendation addressing this issue.

Focus of Recommendation 2. Recommendation 2 discusses implementing systemic academic interventions, an issue identified in Critical Key Finding 2 and its related findings. Critical Key Finding 2 also included information about collaboration at the school, a fact confirmed by two clear positive key findings identified by co-interpretation participants. Because they identified collaboration as a positive practice, that aspect of Critical Key Finding 2 was incorporated in the recommendation.

Focus of Recommendation 3. Recommendation 3 focuses on differentiation, specifically for students with disabilities and ELLs. Despite positive findings that differentiation was occurring, co-interpretation participants identified this as an area of need in Critical Key Finding 3, particularly for students with disabilities and ELLs.

Focus of Recommendation 4. Recommendation 4 discusses professional development to help teachers meet the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs, identified as a need in both Critical Key Finding 3 and Critical Key Finding 4.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Review the existing Park Slope Collegiate behavior plan to ensure that it contains 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 to which students are entitled versus those that are privileges.

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

3. Develop learning activities and implement instructional strategies that differentiate instruction for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners.

4. Develop and implement a professional development plan that is aligned to school goals and focused on subject area content.

These four 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, 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: Schoolwide Behavior Management System

Review the existing Park Slope Collegiate behavior plan to ensure that it contains 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 to which students are entitled versus those that are privileges.

Even though Park Slope Collegiate has a behavior plan, evidence from reports and discussions with co-interpretation participants indicates that student behavior is an issue. As noted earlier, school staff requested that student behavior be treated as an area of improvement for the school.

While data collected as part of the ESCA and contextual evidence from the school indicate that a behavior plan exists, ESCA data also show that the strategies and practices required by the plan may not be effective. Efforts to improve student behavior in classrooms should focus on ensuring that the existing behavior plan is relevant, includes content that meets standards outlined by current research and best practice, and outlines realistic expectations for teacher implementation. The ideas, strategies, and practices below support this focus.

A focused effort by the school to effectively implement the school's behavior plan and reduce classroom disruption should include the following steps:

- A review of the current behavior plan to ensure it meets the following standards:
  - Clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect
  - Concise social expectations and a continuum of supports, interventions, incentives/rewards, and consequences
  - Clear delineation of activities and programs to which students are entitled versus those that are privileges
- Needs-sensing activities to gauge teacher awareness of the content of the existing plan and rationale behind following or failing to follow the plan as part of classroom management
- Professional learning opportunities based on the data provided by the needs-sensing activities to build staff capacity to implement the plan
- Clearly articulated and enforced administrative expectations regarding staff responsibilities for adhering to the established behavior plan and related policies

LINK TO RESEARCH

One of the greatest obstacles in urban schools is the large number of students whose behavior interferes with their achievement or the achievement of others. Often these students behave 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.

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

Washington Elementary School Example (Video)
http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/wash._elem.aspx

"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 students' 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" (Sprague, 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 lessons learned from more than 7,000 schools currently implementing successful changes in their school environment. SWPBS 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, and implementation of the best evidence-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 behavior management systems and what it takes to implement these systems effectively. While it is too early to offer "recipes for success," the work of key researchers and their school-based colleagues are providing some encouraging developments. While there are many different schoolwide systems of behavioral support, most 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, professional development and long-term commitment by the school leadership are necessary in order for this innovation to take hold. The school-based models featured in the sidebar have been selected to show how different features of a schoolwide behavior management system can be implemented in urban, suburban, and rural locations. These schools understand that change is incremental and are approaching implementation of their schoolwide systems slowly and over an extended period.

Common Features of Schoolwide Behavior 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

(The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, 1997)

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Incorporate key 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.

     A well-articulated schoolwide behavior policy/student code that includes positive expectations, minor and major infractions, etc., must first be in place. Clarity around expectations for staff's handling of in-class behaviors is important here. 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 at least on a monthly basis. Data should be presented in a user-friendly format.

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

     This includes posting three to five positively stated overarching schoolwide social expectations around the school, particularly in problematic areas.

   - Teach and encourage prosocial skills and behaviors.

     Students should be introduced to/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 evidence-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 plans for 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 is collected as scheduled and used to evaluate its effectiveness for future adjustments.

2. **Build a team.**

   Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project (2005) outlines a SWPBS process that provides a systematic structure and formalized procedures that can be implemented during the summer. The initial steps are to establish and get all staff to buy in. Establishing a schoolwide leadership team or behavior support team supports this goal. If possible, fold SWPBS into the roles and responsibilities of an established team, rather than developing yet another group. Members of the team should include administrators (i.e., principal, assistant principal, or dean), counselors, social workers, regular education teachers, special education teachers, members with behavior expertise, and a coach/district representative. It is vital that administration supports the process, takes an active role, and attends most meetings.

3. **Determine school capacity.**

   It is important to assess and develop the school's capacity to implement a comprehensive program. Key questions include:

   - What are the schoolwide social expectations, routines, etc.?
   - Who at the school 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 extremely disruptive or disrespectful instances of behavior "in the moment" (e.g., immediate referrals to a dean/counselor/administration, in-school "timeout room," criteria for reentry)?
   - What is the 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 monitored and adjusted as needed in a data-driven manner? Who is responsible for this?
   - What are the mechanisms for notifying and collaborating with students' parents/guardians in the process early and often? Who is responsible for this (i.e., teachers, counselors, social workers, deans, administrators)?
   - What are the thresholds for more severe consequences/privilege losses for patterns or disruptive behaviors?

- What outside resources are available to support students and families struggling with issues that are affecting students' behavior but well outside of the school's capacity to address?
- What privileges and incentives (e.g., extracurriculars, athletics, field trips, social activities) are currently in place that can serve as leverage? Do more need to be identified or developed?
- How are students who actively exhibit established desirable social behaviors formally recognized? Perhaps most important, how are students who are actively attempting to make sustained social adjustments formally recognized and supported (without stigmatizing)?

Positive Behavior Support in the Classroom

- Arrange classroom to minimize crowding and distraction.
- Provide explicit classroom routines and directions that are linked to schoolwide routines and directions.
- Post three to five positively stated expectations. Teach and reinforce them.
- Provide frequent acknowledgement of appropriate behaviors.
- Give students multiple opportunities to respond and participate during instruction.
- Actively supervise classes during instruction.
- Ignore or provide quick, direct, explicit reprimands/redirections in response to inappropriate behavior.
- Incorporate multiple strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior (points, praise) linked to schoolwide strategies.
- Provide specific feedback in response to social and academic errors, and give correct responses.

Source: Simonsen, B., Fairbanks, S., Briesch, A., & Sugai, G. (2006). Available online at http://www.pbis.org/common/pbisresources/tools/gsclassman0907.doc

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

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:

- The school required three years to implement the plan. The school required three academic years to approach full implementation across five domains of the plan: defining expectations, acknowledging expectations, setting up a system for responding to behavior, making data-based decisions, and managing the plan. Two other domains—teaching behavioral expectations and gaining district support—were more difficult to achieve.
- Behavioral outcomes were positive. After three years, the school saw significant reductions in the number of referrals per student per year, incidents of serious disobedience of authority, daily referrals, and school uniform violations. As a result, less administrative time was spent on discipline, and instructional time in the classroom increased.

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

- It was important for this adolescent population that rewards/acknowledgments be meaningful and "cool," not "babyish."
- There was a need to overcome staff resistance to directly teaching behaviors rather than reinforcing them. This points to the need for a system in which teaching of 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.
- 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, staff should not assume a perfect stepwise approach regarding the progression of interventions.
- Because of the sheer numbers of staff and students in a large high school, developing and agreeing on a consistent policy for a range of issues requires sustained effort.
- 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 the behavior (e.g., gaining attention).

Source: Bohanon, Fenning, Carney, Minnis-Kim, et al. (2006)

Recommendation 2: Systemic Academic Interventions

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

Link to Research

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

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

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

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

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

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

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Doing What Works: Providing Research-Based Education Practices Online (Website)
http://dww.ed.gov/

National Center on Response to Intervention: *What Is RTI?* (Webpage)
http://www.rti4success.org/whatisrti/

National Research Center on Learning Disabilities: Tiered Service-Delivery Model (Webpage)
http://www.nrcld.org/rti_practices/tiers.html

New York State Response To Intervention Technical Assistance Center (Website)
http://www.nysrti.org

Although research indicates minimum components for successful implementation of responsive intervention programs, Learning Point Associates does not endorse any specific model of RTI, intervention program or strategy, or progress monitoring tool. Instead, schools are encouraged to consider these research-based recommendations to make specific decisions regarding the structure and design of the intervention programs that will best meet the needs of their situation.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

   Data-Based Decision Making

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

   Assessments and Screenings

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

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

Tiered Intervention Programs

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

Progress Monitoring

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

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

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

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

4. **Put the intervention plan into action.**

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

Starting Small

Two approaches for "starting small" with an academic intervention program are to begin with one essential component or with one small group.

Starting With One Essential Component

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

Example

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

Starting With One Small Group

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

Example

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

Adapted from Mellard, D..F., & Prewett, S. L. (2011), retrieved August 5, 2011, from http://www.rti4success.org/ppt/WBNR_April2011.ppt. This document was produced by the National Center on Response to Intervention and is in the public domain.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Long Beach Unified School District

Long Beach Unified School District in California provides an example of tiered intervention.

In California, schools are not permitted to use IQ-Achievement testing as a criterion for determining eligibility for special education services. The Long Beach Unified School District in California employs regular assessments and tiered interventions as part of both the prereferral process and as best practice for serving the needs of all students. The district has responded to their high school students' literacy needs using a multitiered approach that incorporates a battery of eighth-grade assessments that are used to determine the needs of incoming ninth graders. In the spring, all eighth-grade students participate in a screening series, which is an examination of multiple measures of student achievement that includes the CA standards test, course grades, and an assessment that is part of the *Language!* curriculum the district has adopted.

All incoming ninth-grade students receive core literacy instruction. Based on a review of assessment data, students entering high school half a year to two years behind receive the core literacy instructional program as well as an additional literacy workshop course that provides them with support materials that scaffold the core literacy program. Entering high school students who are more than two years below grade level are enrolled in a double block of language arts that consists of an intensive English language arts program or an afterschool reading program. For their language arts curriculum, Long Beach has adopted the *Language!* and Lindamood-Bell curricula for intensive instructional programs in literacy. Lindamood-Bell focuses on developing phonemic skills for students having serious difficulties with text. Typically, students spend a semester in that intensive intervention and then transition into *Language!* Student progress is monitored throughout the school year using "cluster tests" taken primarily from the Lindamood-Bell and Language! curricula.

In addition to the systematic supports for students, the Long Beach model provides professional learning opportunities for teachers through monthly support meetings, summer institutes, and coaches. While the Long Beach approach to instruction and tiered intervention shares its key characteristics with RTI, they do not call this practice RTI but simply "best practice for all students." They ask, "What do the data say about how students are performing and what instructional programs are necessary to support student growth?" Another important aspect of the Long Beach system, according to Office of Special Education Assistant Superintendent Judy Elliott, is that they do not base their decisions on a single data point. Multiple sources of data are examined to determine student needs. Long Beach views its practice as a systems approach to good instruction for all students rather than just a process to diagnose students with learning disabilities. They had such success with the practice at the high school level that they have recently applied it to their middle schools. Roughly 7 percent of students in Long Beach have IEPs as opposed to an average of 12–14 percent nationally (Elliott, 2006).

From Duffy, H. (2007). Meeting the Needs of Significantly Struggling Learners in High School: A Look at Approaches to Tiered Intervention. Available online at http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_RTIBrief_08-02-07.pdf

Recommendation 3: Differentiated Instruction

Develop learning activities and implement instructional strategies that differentiate instruction for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Differentiation of instruction means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs of students. It is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that values the individual. Differentiating does not mean providing separate, unrelated activities for each student, but does mean providing interrelated activities that are based on student needs for the purpose of ensuring that all students come to a similar grasp of a skill or idea (Good, 2006). Teachers can differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment according to the readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of their students (Tomlinson, 2003).

Qualitative and meta-analysis research indicates that students in differentiated classrooms achieve better outcomes than students in classrooms without differentiation (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Tomlinson et al., 2003). When instructional materials are differentiated to meet student needs, interests, and readiness, academic gains increase (Lou et al., 1996). Students in classrooms that are effectively differentiated have been found to have achievement gains on state tests in reading and math (Brimijoin, 2001; Tieso, 2005).

While there is no single set of strategies that constitutes differentiated instruction, Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2011) have identified several guidelines that are noted to help educators form an understanding and develop ideas around differentiation.

- Instruction moves beyond minute details and facts and is concept-focused and principle-driven.
- Several elements and materials are used to support instructional content.
- "Flexible grouping is consistently used."
- "Initial and on-going assessment of student readiness and growth are essential."
- Learning tasks are interesting, engaging, and challenging.
- Student products allow for "varied means of expression" and "alternative procedures" and provide "varying degrees of difficulty."

School leaders can support the effective implementation of differentiation within and across classrooms by providing time for teacher planning for differentiation and execution of plans; providing ample and suitable materials for academically diverse classrooms; and developing and otherwise ensuring access to differentiated curriculum.

1. **Focus on foundation.**

   Embed professional learning opportunities around differentiation within the school's annual professional development plan. Schools that have moved to schoolwide implementation of a differentiated approach to instruction caution that the process is both complex and unlikely to be implemented quickly. The success of efforts to differentiate instruction will ultimately lie with teachers. However, some teachers will

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

A Look At Differentiating Instruction (Publication)
http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Feb09.pdf

A Teachers Guide To Differentiating Instruction (Publication)
http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Jan07.pdf

lack the necessary knowledge or skills (Gregory, 2003). To help teachers prepare to make the change, schools should provide resources on differentiated instruction and time for teachers to discuss them. Teachers may need training in strategies—such as curriculum compacting and learning centers—that can be used to support differentiation (Protheroe, 2007).

2. **Analyze student needs.**

   Identify which assessments will be given and how assessment data will be used for purposeful student grouping. Gaining an awareness of student knowledge and understanding is a key component of successful differentiation. Assessments can be formal or informal. These can be schoolwide, universal screening tools, content-area diagnostics, or assessments to gauge students' knowledge and familiarity with a topic prior to the start of a unit of study. Decide which assessments teachers will use to accurately measure their students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests and provide guidance for next steps in instruction. Results should be tracked and used to design instructional strategies tailored to student needs.

3. **Design instruction.**

   Design lesson plans, including instructional strategies, learning activities, and assessments that incorporate differentiation. Once all stakeholders have a deep understanding of what differentiated instruction is and what it is not, the current structure of the curriculum and its supports or lack of supports for differentiation, and student needs, teachers should work collaboratively to design and embed instructional strategies into the curriculum that support differentiation. They should also identify opportunities to infuse different parts of the curriculum with differentiated instructional strategies.

Differentiated Instruction

One choice for differentiated instruction is tiered assignments. "Tiered assignments are designed to instruct students on essential skills that are provided at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness. The curricular content and objective(s) are the same, but the process and/or product are varied according to the student's level of readiness" (The Access Center, 2005, p. 2). An example of this practice in an English language arts class might be when "students with moderate comprehension skills are asked to create a story-web. Students with advanced comprehension skills are asked to re-tell a story from the point of view of the main character" (The Access Center, 2005, p. 2). Both sets of students are working toward the objective of reading and comprehending literature at grade level.

Another structure for differentiated instruction is flexible grouping. "Students work as part of many different groups depending on the task and/or content. Sometimes students are placed in groups based on readiness, other times they are placed based on interest and/or learning profile. Groups can either be assigned by the teacher or chosen by the students. Students can be assigned purposefully to a group or assigned randomly. This strategy allows students to work with a wide variety of peers and keeps them from being labeled as advanced or struggling" (The Access Center, 2005, p. 3). In practice, "the teacher may assign groups based on readiness for phonics instruction, while allowing other students to choose their own groups for book reports, based on the book topic" (The Access Center, 2005, p. 3).

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Central Elementary School

"Closing the Achievement Gap With Curriculum Enrichment and Differentiation: One School's Story" (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008) documents how an elementary school approached the tasks of implementing differentiated instruction.

According to Beecher and Sweeny, Central Elementary School was considered a "failing school. Students were performing in the 30th percentile in reading, writing, and mathematics on state and district assessments.... 45 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch.... [and] 30 percent of students spoke English as [a] second language" (p. 506).

After conducting a needs assessment and developing a school improvement plan, school leaders and teachers identified differentiation as a schoolwide instructional focus and embarked on a process to implement differentiation.

Central Elementary School decided to develop a social studies unit through the use of tiered activities. The team used essential questions to "provide guidance for inclusion of higher level thinking skills in the curricular objectives that covered content, learning process, and assessment" (p. 512). The content was delivered through three tiers of activities. "Learning was differentiated according to the needs of the students through the use of texts of different reading levels" (p. 515).

Once the social studies "units were complete, teachers wrote specific lessons to include in the units" (p. 515). Teachers collaboratively planned "concurrent differentiated learning experiences for students based on a single instructional objective" (p. 517). For the school, the social studies "units represented the first round of differentiated lesson planning and instruction. Over the course of 8 years, each discipline in the regular curriculum was examined and revised to include... differentiation" (p. 517). Differentiation became a focus of all instruction.

"Teachers spent approximately four hours each month learning more about differentiation and making plans to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms. The professional development focused on identifying students' strengths and weakness; systems to make the process of small, flexible group instruction manageable; and the development of leveled classroom libraries" (p. 522). "This comprehensive staff development program was closely monitored and adjusted as needed. Teachers were given the tools and the support to be able to successfully implement the concepts presented.... [e] ach new concept was introduced and training, modeling, and coaching were provided. Staff development occurred during biweekly grade-level seminars, monthly staff meetings, and weekly school or district staff development sessions" (pp. 523–524).

These interventions had positive effects. "The success of the school improvement efforts was demonstrated in students' positive attitudes about school, increased engagement in learning, and improved achievement on district and state assessments. Analyses of student achievement on state tests from 1997 to 2004 showed improvement in all subject areas and in all levels of proficiency" (p. 526).

Recommendation 4: Professional Development

Develop and implement a professional development plan that is aligned to school goals and focused on subject area content.

LINK TO RESEARCH

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

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

QUICK LINKS:
Online Sources for More Information

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality: High Quality Professional Development for All Teachers (Publication)
http://www.tqsource.org/publications/HighQualityProfessionalDevelopment.pdf

Public Impact—Professional Development for Educators (Website)
http://www.publicimpact.com/teachers-leaders/professional-development-for-educators

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Creating a professional development plan that addresses both student learning and teacher learning can be a complex task. Professional learning activities should be designed with student achievement as both the impetus and outcome. School improvement goals should be directly related to a review of student achievement data. Subsequently, teacher learning activities should be directly related to the goal of improving student outcomes. At minimum, successful schoolwide professional development plans include the following sequential steps:

1. **Analyze student data and/or conduct a needs assessment.**

   Review student learning data by using an item analysis of state test results, interim assessment results, school quality review, or ESCA report. Identify areas of low proficiency, slow learning progress, drops in proficiency between grades, and subgroup and gender differences.

2. **Select goals for student learning.**

   Identify specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-sensitive (SMART) learning goals for students.

3. **Select professional development goals for teacher learning.**

   Identify specific and measurable teacher learning goals, directly related to student learning goals.

4. Select professional development activities to meet goals.

Determine what activities will best meet teachers' learning needs (e.g., workshops, coaching, collaborative inquiry, or intervisitation). Consider available resources (time, money, and materials) and a range of professional development activities, and match with the needs of adult learners.

5. Implement the professional development activities.

Ensure that teachers have the time and resources (e.g., research, articles, video clips, coaches, opportunities to observe master teachers) for professional development. Provide teachers with clear expectations for integration into their pedagogical practice, structures and protocols for activities, and opportunities for reflection.

6. Evaluate the impact of professional development.

Develop an evaluation plan. Identify what to measure, how to measure it, and when to measure it. Create a frequent and ongoing schedule of evaluation.

7. Modify the professional development plan.

Determine the impact of the professional development activity. If the activity achieves or fails to achieve its desired results, modify the plan accordingly.

For practical applications, refer to the "Sample Professional Development Plan."

Sample Professional Development Plan

Following is a sample professional development plan adapted from Steiner (2009). It indicates the specific actions taken by the district, which show alignment to school goals and a focus on subject-area content.

Analysis of Data. Data analysis revealed a "significant drop in math proficiency between 4th and 5th grade." Further review of test item analysis indicated that students did not demonstrate proficiency in fractions.

Student Learning Goals. The district determined the following goal for students: "At the end of the third quarter of fifth grade, 75% of all students will pass an end-of-unit test on fractions."

Professional Development Goals for Teachers. The district determined the following goal for teachers: "At the end of the spring semester, all fifth grade teachers will demonstrate an improved ability to teach fractions as measured by their implementation of new instructional strategies and improved student learning."

Professional Development Activities. The district determined the following professional development activities to meet its goals: "In the fall, before teachers begin the fractions unit, 5th grade math teachers at each school will meet twice a month to discuss and share new curriculum materials related to fractions and design joint interim assessments to measure student progress. Teachers will have ongoing assistance of a math instructional coach. In the summer, [the district will] review schedules to make sure fifth grade teachers have common planning time to meet. [The district will] provide lead teachers and/or principals with curriculum materials and the assistance of an instructional coach to guide implementation."

Evaluating Impact: Measures of evaluation included "(1) percentage of students meeting objectives" as measured by "student test scores on end of unit assessment" and "(2) staff knowledge" and pedagogy, measured by regular and ongoing observations conducted by the school's instructional leaders.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Designing a Long-Term Professional Development Plan

When designing and implementing long-term professional development plans, professional learning activities and goals should be rolled out throughout the school year. Following is a sample professional development plan for Paradise Valley Middle School. Based on a needs assessment conducted by the school, the percentage of black students who met or exceeded proficiency in math was as much as 20 percent lower than the percentage of white students who met or exceeded proficiency in math. In reading, that percentage was as much as 30 percent lower.

PARADISE VALLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Goal 1: Close the achievement gap between black and white students in reading and mathematics.

Objectives: Sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students' achievement gap in reading and mathematics will be reduced by 5% as measured by district formative assessments.

Teacher Objective: All teachers will be able to plan and implement research-based instruction in their content area as measured by principal and school improvement team classroom walk-throughs conducted in the spring.

Objective 1: All teachers will plan research-based instruction in their content areas.

Strategies/Actions	Person Responsible	Measurement of Accomplishment	Resources Needed	Due Date
Daily interdisciplinary team meetings devote at least two days a week to jointly planning research-based instruction lesson plans or units.	Team leader creates agendas to include significant time for this work.	Each team generates and submits at least four lessons or one unit each grading period.	Leveled reading materials, project-based materials, access to computer lab	Dec and June
Content-area teachers meet twice a week to study TIMSS, analyze test data to determine which mathematics objectives had not been met by a majority of students.	Team leader creates agendas and requests materials from district staff development or curriculum department.	Presentation about TIMSS and research-based instruction to other teachers during professional development time. Analysis of student learning results and lists of difficult objectives.	Disaggregated mathematics scores by objective TIMSS book and study TIMSS videotapes	January: Analysis of tests April for presentation

Objective 2: All teachers will implement research-based lessons in their classrooms.

Strategies/Actions	Person Responsible	Measurement of Accomplishment	Resources Needed	Due Date
Each team sets an implementation timeline.	Team Individual Teacher	Team members submit written debriefing of lessons. Classroom walk-through data and analysis	Debriefing protocols	

Excerpted from Ozarks Unlimited Resources Educational Services Cooperative. (2008). Effective professional development. In *A toolkit for quality professional development in Arkansas* (pp. 103–185). Harrison, AR: Author. Retrieved June 24, 2011, from http://www.oursc.k12.ar.us/default_images/index/pd_toolkit/pdtoolkitchapter3.pdf

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