

School for Democracy and Leadership

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 School for Democracy and Leadership conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being 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 School for Democracy and Leadership

Located in Brooklyn, School for Democracy and Leadership (17K533) serves middle school and high school students, with 452 students in Grades 6–12. The student body comprises 91 percent black, 7 percent Hispanic, 1 percent white, and 1 percent American Indian students. One percent of the school's students are English language learners,¹ and according to the 2010 Special Education Service Delivery Report, 14 percent of students are students with disabilities.² In 2009–10, School for Democracy and Leadership did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students at the middle school and high school levels and for the subgroups black or African American and economically disadvantaged at the middle school level. In 2010–11, the state accountability status for School for Democracy and Leadership was designated as In Need of Improvement, Year 1 (Comprehensive), and, as a result, the school partnered with Learning Point Associates to conduct the ESCA. Data collection for the audit took place from February through May of 2011.

Certain resources are available to School for Democracy and Leadership, which have resulted in new programs and opportunities. As described in a school document titled *Defining Elements*, School for Democracy and Leadership has partnered with the organization CAMBA. CAMBA, which places a full-time liaison at School for Democracy and Leadership, has secured grant funding for programs and staff and has directed community and academic resources to School for Democracy and Leadership students. These resources include a Leading to College program (partnering with Brooklyn College); the Access to Careers program, which targets at-risk ninth graders; an adolescent literacy program for the middle school (with the Department of Youth and Community Development); and a full-time social worker.

¹<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/f3/AOR-2010-331700011533.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 2011.

²http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_K533.pdf. Accessed on July 14, 2011.

Audit Process at School for Democracy and Leadership

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

These reports were presented to the school at a co-interpretationSM meeting on April 29, 2011. During this meeting, 12 stakeholders from the School for Democracy and Leadership 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 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 School for Democracy and Leadership.

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Most teachers do not consider professional development helpful to their instruction.

Supported by evidence from the Teacher Survey report, Critical Key Finding 1 indicates that teachers at School for Democracy and Leadership do not perceive the professional development opportunities they participate in to be helpful. Only 39 percent of surveyed teachers reported that professional development sessions were sustained and focused. Another 39 percent of surveyed teachers reported that professional development sessions focused on inquiry-based learning were moderately to very helpful. Eleven (nearly one third) of surveyed teachers reported that they did not receive professional development related to the teaching of reading. Of those teachers who did receive such professional development, the majority perceived it to be minimally helpful or not helpful.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Practices with respect to class climate, behavior plans, and regard for adolescent perspective are inconsistent, which may result in inconsistent student behavior.

Supported by evidence from the Observation report and the Teacher Survey report, Critical Key Finding 2 indicates that, in numerous classrooms, behavior patterns are frequently problematic. According to the Observation report, among the 21 classrooms observed at School for Democracy and Leadership, student behavior was noted as a major disruptor (in four classrooms) or a minor disruptor (in 17 classrooms). Positive climate, which is indicated by mutually warm and respectful interactions between teachers and students, was rated high in only half of the observed classrooms. The teacher survey respondents reported that behavior management strategies are not consistent throughout the school and that most teachers (72 percent) have developed their own classroom behavior management strategies even though there is a school behavioral plan in place.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

The majority of teachers do not feel supported in developing strategies for teaching students with disabilities.

Supported by evidence from the Teacher Survey report, Critical Key Finding 3 states that teachers at School for Democracy and Leadership perceive they need more support in teaching students with disabilities. Eleven of 28 teacher survey respondents reported receiving no professional development on using individualized education programs (IEPs) for

students with disabilities. Of the 17 teachers who did receive such training, 14 teachers found the training minimally helpful or not helpful; only three teachers reported that the training was moderately helpful or very helpful. Only 26 percent of teachers reported that they received moderately to very helpful training on the use of differentiated instruction, which would help teachers address the needs of the diverse students in their classrooms. (Conversations at the co-interpretation meeting indicated that the school may not provide needed supports to struggling students in a timely manner). Teachers reported little direct support to help them instruct students with disabilities. Fifty percent or more of the respondents reported they had no or minimal support from the principal, an assistant principal, a special education department chair, or the district office. Between 38 and 45 percent of the respondents reported that they had minimal or no support from other teachers, a coach, or a mentor.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Teachers are provided with internal and external support in implementing mastery work and curriculum.

Supported by evidence from the administrator interviews, Positive Key Finding 1 states that, through professional development and coaching from external partners, teachers are provided with the assistance they need to implement mastery work and curriculum. Through a partnership with EduChange, coaching is provided to teachers in literacy, mathematics, and science. In addition, teachers receive internal support through intervisitation of each others' classrooms to learn from each other and share best practices.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

The school has a very collaborative environment.

Supported by evidence from the Teacher Survey report, interviews with school administrators, and documents provided to auditors by the school, Positive Key Finding 2 indicates that teachers frequently collaborate with each other. The school's *Defining Elements* document states that teacher collaboration is an important practice in the school. Ninety percent of surveyed teachers reported that they meet weekly or more frequently to collaborate on instruction and student learning. Among this group, 17 percent of respondents reported that they collaborate on a daily basis. Interviews, the survey, and documents show that teacher/staff collaboration is supported by the administration. Such collaboration occurs through grade teams, departmental meetings, collaborative team teaching, and meetings between special education and general education teachers.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

Among the positive findings identified by school staff and faculty at the co-interpretation for School for Democracy and Leadership were that teachers are provided internal and external support in implementing mastery work and curriculum and that the school has a very collaborative environment. In addition, during the meeting, co-interpretation participants identified as priority areas for improvement lack of useful professional development, inconsistent practices in classroom behavior management, and lack of support for addressing and teaching students with disabilities.

THE THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

With the school's strengths and these issues in mind, Learning Point Associates developed the following three recommendations:

1. Increase the consistency of implementation by classroom teachers of the existing School for Democracy and Leadership behavior plan.
2. Develop and implement a professional development plan that is aligned to school goals and focused on subject-area content. Professional learning opportunities should be aligned to the teaching of reading and the use of IEPs for students with disabilities.
3. Develop learning activities and implement instructional strategies that differentiate instruction for all students, including students with disabilities.

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

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

Recommendation 1: Positive Behavior Management System

Increase the consistency of implementation by classroom teachers of the existing School for Democracy and Leadership behavior plan.

Even though the school has a behavior plan, Critical Key Finding 1 and evidence from reports indicate the behavior plan is not consistently implemented. As noted earlier, student behavior created major or minor disruptions in approximately half of the observed classrooms.

Although 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 are not consistently implemented by classroom teachers. Efforts to improve student behavior in classrooms should be focused 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 following ideas, strategies, and practices share this focus.

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

- A review of the current behavior plan to ensure that 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 that students are entitled to 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 existing 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 within 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. Yet research studies consistently show that schools that establish a positive social culture also achieve the best academic gains. Thus, one key element for changing this pattern is the consistent implementation of an existing schoolwide behavior program that has been developed with the input and support of parents and the school community. The emphasis is on consistency—both throughout the building and across classrooms. The entire school staff is expected to adopt strategies that will be uniformly implemented. As a result, approaches require professional development and long-term commitment by the school leadership for this innovation to take hold.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/pbs_video-discovering_swpbs.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 also should be fair and stress 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, 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 (1) impulse control, (2) anger management, (3) conflict resolution, (4) empathy, and (5) drug and alcohol use resistance and prevention (California Services for Technical Assistance and Training [CalSTAT], 2011).

Positive behavior interventions, used correctly by teachers, administrators, and parents, encourage or strengthen desirable behavior and reduce inappropriate behavior. Positive interventions have a greater likelihood of enabling a student to change his or 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, 1998).

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) is based on the research-based application of lessons learned from more than 7,000 schools currently implementing successful changes in their school environment. 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 evidenced-based behavioral practices for improving important academic outcomes for all students (Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2011).

Researchers have only recently begun to study the effects of schoolwide behavioral management systems and what it takes to implement these systems effectively. 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. There are different variations of schoolwide systems of behavioral support, but most have certain features in common. The school-based models featured in the Quick Links on the previous page have been selected to show how different features of a schoolwide behavioral management system can apply across urban, suburban, and rural locations. Apart from sharing these common features, the featured schools recognize that change is incremental, and have approached implementation of their school-wide systems slowly and over an extended time period.

Common Features of School-Wide Behavioral Management Systems

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

(Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, 1997)

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2011) has established the following SWPBS guiding principles:

1. Develop a continuum of scientifically based behavior and academic interventions and supports.

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

2. Use data to make decisions and solve problems.

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

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

- This is inclusive of three to five positively stated overarching schoolwide social expectations that are visibly posted around the school, particularly in problematic areas.

4. Teach and encourage prosocial skills and behaviors.

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

5. Implement evidenced-based behavioral practices with fidelity and accountability.

- Interventions should be multitiered, include evidence-based programs or strategies, and increase in levels of intensity. The primary-level plan, targeting all students, is the overall behavior management plan for the school. The secondary-level plan is for a targeted student group or individual students who did not respond to the first level. The tertiary-level plan is highly individualized for the few students who did not respond to the first two levels.

6. Screen universally and monitor student performance and progress continuously.

- The behavior management plan should include scheduled data collection and analysis to evaluate SWPBS outcomes and plan future adjustments.

7. Determine school capacity.

Other important implementation considerations focus on school capacity—gauging, reviewing, and developing the school’s individual and collective capacities to implement a comprehensive program. Capacity may be assessed by posing the following initial questions:

- What are the schoolwide social expectations, routines, etc.?
- Who at the schoolwide level has the ability to both firmly hold students accountable *and* support them as they attempt to adjust to the program?
- What are the procedural expectations of teachers for managing in-class behaviors?
- What manageable recourse do teachers have to address a pattern of disruptive behavior and/or extremely disruptive and disrespectful instances of behavior “in the moment” (i.e., immediate referrals to a dean/counselor/administration, in-school “time-out room,” etc.) and criteria for reentry?
- What is a specific, realistic, and *manageable* continuum of interventions and supports?
- What is a specific, realistic, and *manageable* continuum of consequences for patterns of disruptive in-class behavior?
- How will the selected interventions and supports be intermittently monitored and adjusted as needed? What data will be used? Who is responsible for collecting and analyzing the data? What are the mechanisms for notifying and collaborating with students’ parents or guardians in the process? How early and how often? Who is responsible for notifying and collaborating with parents?
- What are the thresholds for more severe consequences and losses of privilege for students who exhibit persistent patterns of disruptive behavior and/or extremely disruptive or disrespectful behaviors?
- What outside resources are available to support students and families struggling with issues that are affecting students’ behavior but are well outside of the school’s capacity to address?
- What privileges and incentives (i.e., extracurriculars, athletics, field trips, social activities, etc.) are currently in place that can serve as points of leverage? Do more need to be identified or developed?
- How are students who actively exhibit established desirable social behaviors formally recognized?

The aforementioned questions can fuel the school’s needs-sensing and aid in identifying gaps in awareness and understanding that might be addressed through professional development.

Positive Behavior Support in the Classroom

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

(Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, & Sugai, 2006)

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

A rare three-year participatory case study of SWPBS 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 total number of referrals per student per year, incidents of serious disobedience of authority, the number of 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 several challenges to implementation that they considered unique to high schools:
 - It was important for this adolescent population that rewards/acknowledgments be meaningful and “cool” but 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 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, a perfect stepwise assumption should not be made regarding the succession of interventions.
 - Because of the sheer numbers of staff and students that are within a large high school, developing and agreeing on a consistent policy for a range of issues requires sustained effort.
 - Another challenge was the modification of the discipline referral form to meaningfully assess and track behaviors. Modifications included making it easier for teachers to provide data about the location and time of referrals and asking teachers to hypothesize about the students’ possible motivation for their behavior (e.g., gaining attention).

(Bohanon et al., 2006)

Recommendation 2: Professional Learning and Collaboration

Develop and implement a professional development plan that is aligned to school goals and focused on subject-area content. Professional learning opportunities should be aligned to the teaching of reading and the use of IEPs for students with disabilities.

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 (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.

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, schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement (Wei et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007).

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Creating a professional development (PD) 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/conduct a needs assessment.

- Review student learning data such as 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 and measurable (SMART) learning goals for students.

3. Select PD goals for teacher learning.

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

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Public Impact—Professional Development for Educators (Website)

<http://www.publicimpact.com/teachers-leaders/professional-development-for-educators>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality—High-Quality Professional Development for All Teachers: Effectively Allocating Resources (Publication)

<http://www.tqsource.org/publications/HighQualityProfessionalDevelopment.pdf>

4. Select PD activities to meet goals.

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

5. Implement PD activities.

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

6. Evaluate impact.

- 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 PD plan.

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

Sample Professional Learning Plan

- **Needs Assessment.** A significant drop in mathematics proficiency between fourth and fifth grade. Further review of test item analysis indicates that students did not demonstrate proficiency in fractions.
- **Student Learning Goals.** At the end of the third quarter of fifth grade, 75 percent of all students will pass an end-of-unit test on fractions.
- **PD Goals 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.
- **PD Activities.** In the fall, before teachers begin the fractions unit, fifth-grade mathematics teachers 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 receive the assistance of a mathematics instructional coach. In the summer, review schedules to ensure that fifth-grade teachers have common planning time to meet. Gather curriculum materials and meet with instructional coach to discuss implementation.
- **Evaluate Impact.** Measures of evaluation include (1) percentage of students meeting objectives and (2) staff pedagogy measured by regular and ongoing observations conducted by the school's instructional leaders.

Adapted from *Apply What You Know: Designing Effective Professional Development* (Steiner, 2009).

Professional Development Plan for New Vision High School (2004–08)

The New Vision High School vignette was the culmination of four years of work. Each year, the school made incremental changes in how teachers experienced professional development. They engaged in small, school-based interdisciplinary learning teams (who meet three times a week for 45 minutes) developing their own learning plans for the year.

YEAR ONE

The new principal, Leslie Richardson, began the process by focusing on student learning needs and how large schools could be structured to provide a more personalized learning environment for students and teachers. The principal took the following actions:

- Made brief walk-throughs of classrooms
- Interviewed faculty members to collect perception data
- Used faculty meetings for small-group discussion about alternative structures for large schools and research-based teaching strategies
- Formed a team of 10 who visited a high school that had divided into “houses”

YEAR TWO

The school faculty divided itself into small study groups. Each group focused on a specific topic related to a restructured high school format. Topics included block scheduling, advisor-advisee programs, problem-based learning, and senior projects. Each team also was responsible for creating and implementing interactive activities about their topics for faculty meetings.

YEAR THREE

The school faculty voted to divide into interdisciplinary houses that use a modified block schedule advisor-advisee system and senior projects. The school offered five- or 10-day summer workshops on how to teach in a block schedule, problem based learning, cooperative learning, and serving as an advisor. Teachers were assigned to a multidisciplinary team and a subject-area team. These teams supported and followed up on the same topics offered during the summer institute and conducted problem-solving discussions to help support the desired change. A small team representing each content area attended a summer institute, joined a school-to school network, and attended three follow-up meetings designed to provide support and assistance to the whole school as they worked through this change.

YEAR FOUR

Teams took on the responsibility of forming their own learning plans based on the analysis of student data. The data included state achievement tests, district-based interim assessment data, and classroom projects. Teacher teams created their own learning goals for students as well as plans for their own learning and refinement of expository writing in their classrooms. These plans were reviewed by administration and shared with other teams in order to promote cross-team collaboration.

(Ozarks Unlimited Resources Educational Service Cooperative, 2008)

School leaders may find the following resource useful when implementing an embedded, sustained professional development process:

Annenberg Institute for School Reform. (2004). *Instructional coaching: Professional development strategies that improve instruction*. Providence, RI: Author. Retrieved August 5, 2011, from <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/InstructionalCoaching.pdf>

Recommendation 3: Differentiation of Instruction

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

LINK TO RESEARCH

Differentiation of instruction means tailoring instruction to meet the 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 it 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 mathematics (Brimijoin, 2001; Tieso, 2005).

Although there is no single set of strategies that constitutes differentiated instruction, Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2011) have identified several guidelines to help educators form an understanding of and develop ideas about 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 ongoing assessment of student readiness and growth are essential.”
- Learning tasks are interesting, engaging, and challenging.
- Student products allow for “varied means of expression, alternative procedures,” and provide “varying degrees of difficulty.”

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

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 related to differentiation within the school’s annual professional development plan. Schools that have moved to schoolwide implementation of a differentiated approach to instruction caution that

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

The Center for
Comprehensive School
Reform and Improvement—
*A Look At Differentiating
Instruction: Tips for Teachers*
(Publication)

http://www.centerforsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Feb09.pdf

The Center for
Comprehensive School
Reform and Improvement—
*A Teacher’s Guide To
Differentiating Instruction*
(Publication)

http://www.centerforsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Jan07.pdf

the process is both complex and not something that can be implemented quickly. The success of efforts to differentiate instruction will ultimately lie with teachers. However, some teachers will lack either 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. They 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. After 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 into the curriculum instructional strategies that support differentiation. They also should identify opportunities to infuse different parts of the curriculum with differentiated instructional strategies.

Structures for 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 in practice in an English language arts class could occur 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).

IEP Resources for More Information

The following resources can be reviewed and referred to regarding the use of IEPs to improve instruction:

Assessment, Individual Education Plans (IEP), Rights and more... (Website)
http://stevens_mom.tripod.com/id15.html

A Guide to the Individualized Education Program (Website)
<http://ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html#closer>

Creating a Quality IEP: Individualized Education Program Manual for NYCDOE (Publication)
<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/916F2D1C-8D46-4635-A988-45D9CC13F561/0/CreatingaQualityIEP.pdf>

Implementation Plan for the Reform of Special Education: A Two-Year Phase-in Process Focusing on the Advancement of Student Learning and Achievement for NYCDOE (Publication)
http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/C2D033F2-14F1-4D6B-9950-70ACAD7E2768/77537/SpecialEd2YearPlan_Winter2010.pdf

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