

International Arts Business School

FINAL REPORT



Contents

- Introduction 1
 - About This Report 1
 - About International Arts Business School 1
 - Audit Process at International Arts Business School 2
- Key Findings 3
 - Critical Key Findings 3
 - Positive Key Findings 4
 - Additional Key Finding 5
- Recommendations 6
 - Overview of Recommendations 6
 - Recommendation 1: Positive Behavior Management System 7
 - Recommendation 2: Learning and Growth of All Students 13
 - Recommendation 3: Instructional Rigor 18
- References 21

Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of International Arts Business School 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 International Arts Business School

International Arts Business School (K544) is located in the George Wingate Educational Campus in Brooklyn, Community School District 17, together with three other high schools. International Arts Business School serves 477 students in Grades 9–12. The school population is approximately 86 percent black, 13 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian.¹ Four percent are English language learners (ELLs), and 18 percent receive special education services.²

According to the Quality Review Report for 2010, the school's diverse curriculum, which includes the arts, business, dance, and a culinary program, provides students with many opportunities to tap into their interests and talents. The school also provides opportunities for students to learn beyond the classroom. For example, students studying media arts went to New Orleans to film interviews with Hurricane Katrina survivors.³ Interviews revealed that the school enjoys partnerships with Young Audiences New York, Global Kids, and Safe Harbor Build On.

The mission for International Arts Business School states:

Our mission is to create independent, self-reliant learners through a theme based curriculum focusing on the business of the arts and culture. Our courses will prepare students for higher education.⁴

In 2009–10, International Arts Business School did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students, the black or African-American subgroup, and economically disadvantaged students. In 2010–11, International Arts Business School's state accountability status was designated as in need of improvement (Year 1) comprehensive.⁵ Because the school was designated as in need of improvement, the school participated in the ESCA. Data collection for the audit took place from February through May of 2011.

¹<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/e7/AOR-2010-331700011544.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 2011.

²http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_K544.pdf. Accessed on July 25, 2011.

³http://schools.nyc.gov/OA/SchoolReports/2009-10/Quality_Review_2010_K544.pdf. Accessed on July 25, 2011.

⁴<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/17/K544/AboutUs/Overview/Our+Mission.htm>. Accessed on July 25, 2011.

⁵<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/e7/AOR-2010-331700011544.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 2011

Audit Process at International Arts Business School

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 International Arts Business School. 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 two-day co-interpretationSM meeting that took place on May 11 and 12, 2011. During this meeting, 13 stakeholders from the International Arts Business School 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 International Arts Business School.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, co-interpretation participants determined a set of key findings. The wording of the following 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:

Student engagement appears to be an issue: dealing with classroom management and student behavior.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the teacher survey and classroom observations. More than half (58 percent) of the surveyed teachers reported that there is no schoolwide behavior plan in place, with 86 percent reporting that they implement their own strategies for managing classroom behavior. Observation data revealed that wasted time/lost productivity was a disruptor in approximately a third of the observed classrooms. In addition, approximately 20 percent of observation cycles were rated in the low range for positive climate indicating lack of respect among students and teachers.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

A majority of teachers reported that they receive minimal to no support from the special education lead teacher, the assistant principal(s), or the external consultant in regard to instruction of students with disabilities.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by teacher survey results. More than half (54 percent) of surveyed teachers reported that they receive minimal or no support from the special education lead teacher; 72 percent reported that they receive minimal or no support from the assistant principal focused on special education; and 61 percent of surveyed teachers reported that the external consultant provides minimal to no support concerning students with disabilities. As noted earlier, approximately 18 percent of the student population are students with disabilities.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Fewer than 50 percent of teachers surveyed reported that they differentiate instruction for ELLs and students with disabilities.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from the teacher survey. Approximately 55 percent of surveyed teachers indicated that they modify or provide different material for students with disabilities. Although about 40 percent of surveyed teachers reported differentiating instruction for their ELL students once a week, about 30 percent do so only a few times per semester, if ever.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

Professional development is perceived as ineffective and not helpful for meeting the needs of struggling students.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by teacher survey results. Approximately half (52 percent) of surveyed teachers agreed that the professional development experiences at International Arts Business School have been ineffective in helping them address the needs of students in their classrooms. In addition, 56 percent of teachers indicated that professional development they had received related to the use of individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities was minimally helpful to not helpful at all.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

There is a high degree of communication between the staff and the administration about struggling students.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the teacher survey results. Surveyed teachers indicated that there is a high level of communication regarding struggling students between the school administration and among teachers. More than 80 percent of teachers reported that they would share concerns about struggling students with the school administration and with other teachers.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

Teacher collaboration occurs frequently, both formally and informally.

Positive Key Finding 2 is supported by information from staff interviews and teacher survey results. Interviews revealed that teachers have common planning times and meet by grade or department once a week. In addition, interview respondents said that the school pays close attention to what is said in staff conferences and planning meetings in order to take into account staff viewpoints and ensure staff input regarding any school issues. Surveyed teachers reported that the school administration supports collaboration among teachers; 73 percent reported that such support is moderate to strong.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 3:

There are numerous programs to help ninth graders transition into high school, including orientations, an advisory class, and meetings with a guidance counselor.

Positive Key Finding 3 is supported by documents submitted by the school and information from interviews with school faculty. Data revealed that the school offers two orientations for ninth-grade students. Students also participate in advisory groups and the Safe Horizons program. Advisory groups meet three times each week to provide support for students as they adjust to new academic and social expectations.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 4:

Academic expectations are clearly explained to students and parents.

Positive Key Finding 4 is supported by information provided during interviews and documents provided to the auditors by the school. Data revealed that parents are provided with an overview of high school diploma requirements and information about the school's college readiness tracker. The school develops attendance contracts that parents and students sign, students are encouraged to attend college or pursue vocational training, and students are provided support and encouragement after they graduate from the school.

Additional Key Finding**ADDITIONAL KEY FINDING 1:**

Only 37 percent of classrooms observed consistently provided opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking.

Additional Key Finding 1 is supported by data collected during classroom observations conducted by the auditors; however it was not prioritized by co-interpretation participants. Although this finding was not identified as critical during the co-Interpretation process, the auditors found that only 37 percent of the observations received ratings in the high range for analysis and problem solving, indicating that the other 63 percent received ratings in the mid and low ranges. This result indicates that teachers did not consistently promote students' use of higher-level thinking, provide complex tasks for students to problem solve, or provide opportunities for students to develop thinking, self-evaluation, and planning skills. In many of the observed classrooms, observers noted that learning activities were superficial, requiring little to no deep thinking, with few follow-up questions to probe deeper.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

As detailed in the Key Findings section, participants at the International Arts Business School co-interpretation meeting prioritized some key findings that highlighted the strengths of the school (Positive Key Findings 1 through 4) and other key findings that focused on areas in which the school can improve (Critical Key Findings 1–4 and Additional Key Finding 1). These priorities were supported by evidence from data collected by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research, and presented to the participants during the co-interpretation.

THE THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement a schoolwide positive behavior policy and system with clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. The policy and related system should include concise social expectations and a continuum of supports, interventions, incentives/rewards, and consequences—including a clear delineation of activities and programs that students are entitled to rather than those activities that are privileges.
2. Develop and implement professional learning opportunities that promote the learning and growth of all students. Professional learning opportunities should encourage and support effective and ongoing collaboration between general education teachers and learning specialists (e.g., bilingual teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and so forth), whereby teachers design differentiated learning experiences and improve future instruction.
3. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

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

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

Recommendation 1: Positive Behavior Management System

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

LINK TO RESEARCH

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

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

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

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

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

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

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 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

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

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

Common Features of Schoolwide Behavioral Management Systems

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

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

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Understand the guiding principles of student behavior management.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This principle includes 3–5 positively stated overarching schoolwide social expectations that are posted prominently around the schools, particularly in problematic areas.

- “Teach and encourage prosocial skills and behaviors.”

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

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

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

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

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

2. Build a team.

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

3. Determine school capacity.

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

- What are the schoolwide social expectations, routines, and so forth?
- Who at the schoolwide level has the unique disposition necessary to both firmly hold students accountable *and* support them as they attempt to adjust with fidelity?

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

Positive Behavior Support in the Classroom

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

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

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support in an Urban High School: A Case Study

A study to examine the impact of SWPBS was conducted by Chicago Public Schools during a three-year period. The implementation high school served an estimated 1,800 students during the first year of the study. The school served a diverse student body with the following racial and ethnic makeup: 36 percent African American, 36 percent Hispanic, 16 percent Asian American, 8 percent Caucasian, 2 percent Native American, and 2 percent other, with 21 percent demonstrating limited English proficiency (LEP). In addition, 89 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and 20 percent were identified as SWDs.

The results of the study revealed that it took about two years for the school to fully implement all components of the SWPBS plan. However, by the third year the average rate of daily discipline referrals had been reduced by 20 percent. Successful implementation strategies cited by the school included the following:

- Convening a “PBS team” with various stakeholders from the school (e.g. administrator, educator, parents and students) for a day of training and to develop an action plan.
- Conducting a summer trial intervention with about 100 students during a summer activity to test teaching systems using positive behavior expectations.
- Providing teachers with key products such as sample copies of social skills lesson plans, posters reflecting schoolwide behavior expectations, and sample syllabi.
- Conducting grade-level assemblies to introduce rationales for the expected behavior and to provide opportunities to practice positive and negative examples of specific behaviors (i.e., respectful walking in the hallway).
- A system of rewards, including redeemable “acknowledgement” tickets that could be awarded to individual students for exhibiting positive behavior.
- Holding schoolwide celebrations that were contingent on the overall reduction of disciplinary referrals.

Adapted from “School-wide Application of Positive Behavior Support in an Urban High School: A Case Study,” by Bohanon et al. (2006), *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 8(3), 131-145.

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

General information for teachers (Website)

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org>

A Look At Differentiating Instruction, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (Website)

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

A Teachers Guide To Differentiating Instruction, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (Website)

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

Resources to improve student achievement (Website)

http://centerforinstruction.org/resources_searchresults.cfm?searchterms=Differentiation

National Center for Accessing the General Curriculum (Article by Traci Hall)

<http://www.cast.org/ncac/index.cfm?i=2876>

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/udl/diffinstruction.asp

Recommendation 2: Learning and Growth of All Students

Develop and implement professional learning opportunities that promote the learning and growth of all students. Professional learning opportunities should encourage and support effective and ongoing collaboration between general education teachers and learning specialists (e.g., bilingual teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and so forth), whereby teachers design differentiated learning experiences and improve future instruction.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Teacher collaboration is a type of job-embedded professional development in which members of the school interact in their approach to their work; it is characterized by authentic interactions that are professional in nature (Marzano, 2003). Research shows that collaboration between teachers can be a powerful tool as a driver for school improvement by providing “opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement” (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 2). Lambert (2003) identifies teachers who have a high degree of skill in this area as possessing a shared vision resulting in program coherence, inquiry-based use of data to inform decisions and practice, broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions, reflective practice that leads consistently to innovation, and high or steadily improving student achievement.

Too often, content-area teachers and specialists, such as teachers of students with disabilities, bilingual teachers, and reading specialists, do not have adequate time to collaborate on the curriculum content, best practices and instructional strategies that can be used to ensure the academic success of all students. Many general education teachers have not received staff development in how to instruct students with a variety of learning styles and needs, nor are they aware of how to choose “scientifically validated curricula and academic programs that address at-risk students’ needs” (Fuchs et al., 2007, p. 58). However, special educators and other specialized instructors have more specific training on working with diverse learners and selecting valid instructional programs with integrity. Herein lies the need for collaboration.

The inclusion of students with disabilities and ELLs in the general education classroom requires that all teachers become knowledgeable in instructional strategies that address the learning needs of all students. 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; rather, 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 indicate 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, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, & d'Apollonia, 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).

Although there is no single set of strategies that constitutes differentiated instruction, the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009) has identified several guidelines 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, alternative procedures, and provides varying degrees of difficulty.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Schools that have moved to schoolwide implementation of a differentiated approach to instruction caution that 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).

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; developing and otherwise ensuring access to differentiated curriculum. Special education teachers can collaborate with their colleagues by assisting general educators in their planning for instruction (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Planning for a class collaboratively allows special educators to have input in the lesson proactively, even if they might not be there physically (Murawski, 2005). This tactic enables special educators to coach their general education counterparts on instructional strategies that can be used with a variety of students to enable them to access the general education curriculum effectively.

1. Embed professional learning opportunities related to differentiation in the school's annual professional development plan.

- Offer formal and regularly scheduled opportunities for collaboration, including shared planning time during the school day that will enable content-area teachers and special education/learning specialists to share information about content to be covered and to share ideas that will benefit all students.

- Conduct a data-driven needs assessment to determine topics for collaborative sessions (e.g., progress of students, differentiated instructional approaches, team-teaching strategies).
- Create a system of easy communication among staff so that teachers can note any concerns or issues related to specific students.
- Create feedback loops whereby teachers have the opportunity to voice at regular intervals what is working and not working for them in terms of formal collaborative opportunities and also to provide feedback on the other types of professional development they are receiving that they may need as they continue to work together and learn from one another.
- Ensure that sessions are interactive and allow teachers opportunities to learn from one another.
- Train staff regarding effective communication and collaboration skills (e.g., active listening, establishing appropriate agendas, effective use of meeting time). Use reflective questions or protocols to guide collaborative discussions and ensure optimal use of collaborative meetings.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to give feedback on the sessions so that adjustments can be made to better address the needs of students.
- Have an administrator participate to show the school's support for collaboration.

2. Review content-area curricular documents and identify opportunities for differentiation of the content, process, or product.

Consider beginning with one subject area or unit of study. Consider these guiding questions, which are meant only as a starting point.

- Are pre- and posttests included in the unit?
- Are alternate assessment activities included? Are alternate activities suggested for struggling or accelerated learners?
- Do the materials suggest a variety of activities based upon student interest? Do the materials encourage student choice among a variety of activities?
- Do the materials suggest a variety of activities based upon student needs and learning styles?
- Do the materials offer various product outcomes so that students may choose how to demonstrate required unit knowledge? If not, provide examples of how this might be accomplished.
- Does the unit suggest tiered lessons and/or multiple entry and exit points for struggling and accelerated learners?

3. 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, an understanding of the current structure of the curriculum and its supports or lack of supports for differentiation, and a knowledge of student needs, teachers should work collaboratively to design and embed instructional strategies that support differentiation into the curriculum.

- Teachers should identify opportunities to infuse different parts of the curriculum with differentiated instructional strategies.

4. Provide structure.

- Structure collaboration time with clearly mapped goals, objectives, and accountability. Create a long-term plan, calendar, and schedule of topics and activities for common planning time.
- Establish guidelines related to the use of protocols. The use of a protocol can be a powerful tool in creating a formalized process for collaboration. It helps establish ground rules for participation, interactions, and potential distractions. The use of a discussion (or any other) protocol can help structure conversations by specifying how time will be allotted to achieve certain goals such as presenting context, asking clarifying questions, providing and reflecting on feedback, brainstorming, or making decisions.
- Protocols can provide structures for ways in which to examine student work, tune and align curricular documents, provide feedback on lesson plans and teaching, develop common assessments, and identify students for remediation.

5. Provide leadership and support.

- Focus the work of collaborative groups by helping them align their priorities with achievement goals.
- Provide resources need to support the work of collaborative teams.
- Allow teachers to hold the key leadership positions during collaboration time by facilitating group work. Identify subject-area chairpersons or grade team leads. Work with these teacher leaders to create goals, objectives, and structures for collaboration time.

Subject-Specific Differentiation Resources

http://www.ldonline.org/Ld_indepth/writing/reluctant_writer.html

This guide offers an overview of the different strategies and methods that are used to help motivate struggling writers.

<http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/science/instr/differstrategies.htm>

A website that lists instructional strategies and techniques teachers can use to differentiate in the science classroom.

<http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiatingstrategies.html>

The Enhancing Learning with Technology site provides explanations for various differentiation strategies.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/print.php?ID=154>

This site provides examples and strategies for differentiated instruction in reading.

<http://www.rti4success.org>

This website offers further information on monitoring fidelity of implementation.

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=615&g=2>

This website offers games and methods to encourage and motivate struggling writers.

<http://www.webmath.com/>

This mathematics website provides assistance with solving math problems.

Central Elementary School

Central Elementary School provides an example for implementing differentiation.

“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 in their school.

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. Forty-five percent of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, and 30 percent of students spoke English as a second language. 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 in the school.

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. The content was delivered through three tiers of activities. Learning was differentiated according to the needs of the students through the use of reading-leveled texts.

Once the social studies units were complete, teachers wrote specific lessons to include in the units. Teachers collaboratively planned concurrent differentiated learning experiences for students, based on a single instructional objective. For the school, the social studies units represented the first round of differentiated lesson planning and instruction. During the course of the year, each discipline in the regular curriculum was examined and revised to include differentiation. 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 weaknesses, systems to make the process of small, flexible group instruction manageable, and the development of leveled classroom libraries. 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. Each 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.

The success of the school improvement efforts were demonstrated in improved achievement on state tests, as well as increased student engagement and positive attitudes towards school. The average percent of students at or above proficiency on state reading, writing, and math assessments increased in all segments of the student population. The achievement gap between students of differing socioeconomic backgrounds narrowed from 62 percent to 10 percent during the course of seven years. The percentage of students who scored the lowest proficiency levels on state test was reduced by 28 percent, resulting in only 4 percent of students remaining in the lowest proficiency level.

Recommendation 3: Instructional Rigor

Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

LINK TO RESEARCH

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

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

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

There are several steps to ensure that students are being asked to complete this type of intellectually challenging work, which increases test scores and improves performance on authentic assessment measures as well. Newmann et al. (2001) define *authentically challenging intellectual work* as the “construction of knowledge, through the use of disciplined inquiry, to produce discourse, products, or performances that have value beyond school” (p. 14).

Daggett (2005) agrees, stating that all students should be pushed “to achieve academic excellence, which ultimately boils down to applying rigorous knowledge to unpredictable, real-world situations, such as those that drive our rapidly changing world” (p. 5). Disciplined inquiry, which occurs in the classroom, requires that students “(1) use a prior knowledge base; (2) strive for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness; and (3) express their ideas and findings with elaborated communication” (Newmann et al., 2001, p. 15).

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

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

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

*Organizing Instruction and
Study to Improve Learning*
(Publication)

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

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Cultivate schoolwide high expectations for students.

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

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

- Provide for teachers ongoing professional development that describes the importance of pushing students to do higher-level thinking and provides strategies for how to do so. This training may be provided through ongoing professional development sessions and/or support of an instructional coach.
- Create clear expectations regarding how teachers should implement this professional development in the classroom (e.g., one strategy utilized each day as reflected in lesson plans, authentic assessments at the end of each unit).
- Identify how this professional development can be incorporated into scheduled teacher collaboration sessions.
- Monitor implementation of professional development through classroom observations, lesson plan review, and student achievement results on common formative assessments.

3. Implement an inquiry approach.

The following example from the field can be used to help school leaders and teachers understand what an inquiry approach might look like.

Perrysburg High School

Perrysburg High School in Perrysburg, Ohio serves students in Grades 9–12. Perrysburg is a suburb of Toledo, OH.

Perrysburg is the sole high school in the Perrysburg Exempted Village District in Wood County. Nate Ash teaches physics to eleventh and twelfth graders. Ash has taught professional development programs at the Northwest Ohio Center of Excellence in Science and Mathematics Education, and at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He acts as a mentor to new science teachers.

Ash teaches physics using an inquiry approach. Students do lab activities and solve problems together to understand key concepts in physics. In each lesson he poses higher-order questions to help his students build explanations: How do you know that? What would happen if we changed this variable? How is this similar or different? Ash uses whiteboards in a number of ways: for group problem solving, representing a phenomenon with pictures, and student presentations.

Each new unit/topic is introduced with a hands-on activity. Ash presents a physical situation to students, has them manipulate the variables, and then narrows down their list of variables to design an experiment. Every experiment is introduced with an open-ended question (What would happen if...? What happens when...?). Students work in small groups to describe what happens with graphs, pictures, mathematical equations, and written expression. When they are finished, students present their work to the class in “whiteboard sessions.”

Ash explains how the whiteboard sessions give important insights into student thinking: ‘We can really see if the students understand on every different level how that problem works or how that situation works. And if there is a disjoint between any of those representations, that gives us someplace to go, that gives us something to talk about, something to work through.’

Students appreciate being in charge of their own learning, having the opportunity to challenge their peers, and develop critical thinking skills as they explain their ideas in front of a group. As Ash says, “Students really like this approach because, instead of just giving them the answer, it gives them a chance to explain to each other what’s going on. And I like it because all the times that I have done physics problems on the board and gone through the answers, I got pretty good at doing physics problems but my students never got any better at all.”

Ash has found that with this approach his students are no longer trying to find equations that fit the problems, but working to develop a deep understanding of the underlying concepts.

(Description from Doing What Works website: http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_perrysburg_52708rev.pdf)

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