

High School for Civil Rights

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

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

About High School for Civil Rights

Located in Brooklyn, High School for Civil Rights (K504) serves 447 students in Grades 9–12. The school population comprises 76 percent Black, 22 percent Hispanic, 1 percent White, and 1 percent Asian students. The student body includes 6 percent English language learners and 16 percent special education students.¹ Boys make up 55 percent of the students; 45 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 80 percent. Sixty-eight percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 4 percent of students are eligible for reduced-price lunch.²

High School for Civil Rights is a small school community located on the Thomas Jefferson Educational Campus in Brooklyn. High School for Civil Rights is colocated with three other high schools; each has its own primary floor and shares common spaces such as auditoriums, libraries, gymnasiums, and cafeterias. The school is a limited unscreened school, which means that while students may elect to attend High School for Civil Rights, priority is given to students who live in the geographical region. The curriculum at High School for Civil Rights is designed around civil rights themes. These themes are infused throughout all content areas and extended day programming. Major themes include voting rights, civil law, criminal law, tolerance, diversity and law, and government. In the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) provided to the auditors by school leaders, project-based activities and cooperative learning techniques are specifically identified as key instructional strategies employed at the school.

Also in the CEP, the school acknowledges that much of the student body struggles academically, in particular in the area of literacy skills. Identified strategies to address these challenges include teacher training in literacy programs, the use of periodic diagnostic assessment data to drive differentiated instruction, and teacher collaboration. In 2009–10, High School for Civil Rights did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students and for economically disadvantaged students. Safe Harbor was obtained for Black or African-American students. In 2010–11, High School for Civil Rights' state accountability status was designated as "In Need of Improvement (year 1)."³

¹http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_K504.pdf. Accessed on August 10, 2011.

²<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/b3/AOR-2010-331900011504.pdf>. Accessed on August 10, 2011.

³<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/b3/AOR-2010-331900011504.pdf>. Accessed on August 10, 2011.

Audit Process at High School for Civil Rights

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

These reports were presented to the school during a co-interpretationSM meeting on May 23, 2011. During this meeting, 10 stakeholders from the High School for Civil Rights 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 recommended strategies are those that we believe are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student performance at High School for Civil Rights.

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Based on classroom observations, there were limited opportunities for student autonomy. Sharing of student ideas is brief and limited because the activity was teacher-directed.

Critical Key Finding 1 is primarily supported by information from classroom observations conducted by the auditors using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, a protocol developed and validated at the University of Virginia. Eighteen observation cycles were completed in various classrooms across subject areas. Observation data indicate that active student engagement was frequently low. Often student engagement was passive; off-task behavior also was common. These data contrast with the results of the teacher survey. The survey was completed by approximately 74 percent of the instructional staff at High School for Civil Rights. More than 80 percent of teacher respondents reported that students often participate in classroom discussion, build on each other's ideas, and draw on relevant knowledge. This contrast suggests to the auditor a disconnect between teacher awareness and external observations, or differing criteria for sustained active student engagement.

Further observation data noted by the co-interpretation participants point to a lack of consistent and ongoing opportunities for students to exercise autonomy, take on leadership roles, and participate in meaningful discussions with peers. Co-interpretation participants developed additional findings that support this key finding, although they did not receive the most votes for prioritization. These additional findings were derived from the teacher survey and indicate that teachers most frequently rely on having students respond to textbook and worksheet questions for classroom learning activities.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

The observation reports show that overall there is a medium level of instructional support (i.e., content understanding, analysis and problem solving, quality of feedback); instructional support varied considerably from class to class.

Three dimensions of the classroom observation instrument focused on aspects of instructional support: content understanding, analysis and problem solving, and quality of feedback. The data indicate that nearly all of the observed classrooms had inconsistent or fleeting presence of the characteristics associated with each of these aspects. Typically teachers provided most of the information, while offering students few opportunities for guided practice and giving only brief attention to background knowledge and misconceptions. The data indicate that in the majority of observed classrooms, students were sometimes given opportunities to use content knowledge

to analyze text or solve problems. However, this was not consistent throughout the observation. Finally, observation data show the feedback given to students was generally perfunctory or nonspecific. In cases where more specific feedback loops between teacher and student were observed, the interactions were limited in depth and duration.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

According to interviews and survey data, the school provides timely and effective academic interventions that successfully allow students to graduate, even though the majority of students enter below grade level. However, documented evidence regarding the interventions' efficacy was not present.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from the teacher survey, document review, and interviews. A majority of survey respondents indicated that the school is very likely to identify the kinds of supports needed by students and then provide those supports in a timely manner for as long as they are needed. The school's CEP notes that a majority of students are not meeting city and state standards, indicating that struggling students are identified. It also was clear from documents and interviews that the school offers a number of supports for struggling students. Interview data show that building leaders believe that progress is made by struggling students, as they cited trends in credit accumulation of students who academically perform in the "bottom third." Nonetheless, documented evidence of the effectiveness and successful implementation of the academic interventions was lacking.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

The teacher survey and documents show that teachers have influence over developing the curriculum, some of which (i.e., the ELA curriculum) is a work in progress.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by information from interviews, documents, and the teacher survey. The school's 2010–11 CEP describes various civil rights themes that are infused into the course offerings, including voting rights, civil and criminal law, tolerance, and diversity. Language arts curriculum documents state that High School for Civil Rights has adopted the Bill and Melinda Gates Common Core Curriculum maps. The document goes on to say that teachers collaborate in groups for the ongoing development, revision, and implementation of the curriculum to ensure vertical alignment of content. Interviewees described analyses of annual assessments and monthly reflections of student work conducted by teachers to identify learning needs and revise the curriculum based on those needs. Survey respondents indicated that they have a great deal or moderate level of influence over the curriculum and instructional program, as well as over the selection of books, programs, and materials.

A review of curricular documents revealed that the ELA documents specify essential questions, focus standards, skills, objectives, activities, formative and summative assessments, required vocabulary, and additional resources. The guiding curricular documents provided by the school did not include specific benchmarks, pacing, instructional strategies, or detailed modifications for struggling or special education students. However, discussion at the co-interpretation meeting suggested that these elements may be present in other documents not provided to the auditor.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

The teacher survey shows that there is overall support for collaboration and feedback on instruction from the administration.

Positive Key Finding 2 is supported by information from the teacher survey. Nearly all respondents reported that the administration supports teacher collaboration to a moderate or great extent. Similarly, 85 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the principal makes clear to the staff his expectations for meeting instructional goals and carefully tracks student academic progress. Most survey respondents also agreed that the principal actively monitors the quality of teaching in the school. Finally, all of the survey respondents indicated that they receive feedback from an administrator at least two to three times during the school year, with nearly half reporting that they receive feedback more than five times during the school year.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the co-interpretation meeting, school staff and faculty prioritized aspects of classroom practice and the need to document the effectiveness of interventions more effectively and systemically as areas to target for improvement. Efforts to nurture classroom practices that promote higher-order thinking and problem solving were discussed, and plans were made to incorporate discoveries from the co-interpretation process into an upcoming staff retreat. This underscores key positive findings highlighting the administration's support for collaboration and teacher influence on the curriculum and materials. These qualities will support the implementation of the recommendations by fostering ongoing reflective discussions, modeling, and sharing of practices.

The issue of measuring program effectiveness garnered a robust discussion at the co-interpretation meeting. The school has a sound data infrastructure in place. In recent years, the school has implemented several programs and practices (e.g., Read 180 and afterschool tutoring) aimed at improving student achievement. Still, participants acknowledged that students continue to struggle. It was suggested by the auditor that carefully tracking students' participation in programs, academic progress, and program implementation can inform decision-making about adding or refining student supports and interventions.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement specific strategies for incorporating appropriate student voice, choice, and opportunities for autonomy and leadership in the classroom.
2. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.
3. Implement instructional strategies that encourage high-quality instructional feedback between the teacher and students or among students.
4. Evaluate the impact of interventions, processes, and partnerships through the use of valid and highly usable data.

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

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

Recommendation 1: Student Voice, Choice, Autonomy, and Leadership

Develop and implement specific strategies for incorporating appropriate student voice, choice, and opportunities for autonomy and leadership in the classroom.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Empirical research has demonstrated that supporting student choice, autonomy, and leadership in the classroom can train students to regulate their own learning and deepen their cognitive process to improve academic achievement. Efforts to foster supportive autonomy consist of establishing a link between students' classroom behavior and the resources that motivate them to succeed, such as personal interests, goals, and values (Reeve, 2010). This approach inherently involves students in their own learning process by creating a direct link between their personal motivations and classroom activities.

Autonomy-supportive instructional strategies have been shown to improve student engagement, conceptual understanding, academic achievement, and persistence in the classroom (Young, 2005). The goal of these strategies is to encourage students to engage in self-regulated learning, which involves students interpreting learning tasks, determining goals, and implementing strategies to meet goals (Young, 2005). Creating an autonomy-supportive classroom environment requires teachers to incorporate students' preferences, choices, curiosity, and challenges into lessons (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Barch, & Jeon, 2004). Additional approaches include allocating time in a way that allows students to work in their own ways, scaffolding student learning, engaging in feedback loops with students, and offering praise and encouragement to students (Young, 2005).

Enhancing student autonomy through autonomy-supportive strategies and lesson content that has relevance to adolescent lives allows students to align their inner motivational resources, classroom behavior, and academic achievement (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004; Young, 2005). This strategy encourages students to understand schoolwork in the context of their own interests and goals, which has the potential to help students to develop self-regulation skills and learning strategies to facilitate their academic and professional success.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Adolescence represents a critical period, during which youth struggle to take on new responsibilities and learn decision-making skills while establishing a sense of self. During this period, adolescents also are learning to regulate their behavior and cognitive abilities, which can be facilitated by incorporating autonomy-supportive strategies in the classroom (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

The key to developing and implementing an autonomy-supportive classroom is to become familiar with the strategies that both encourage and inhibit student voice, choice, autonomy, and leadership. Table 1 provides an overview of the features and aspects that characterize an autonomy-supportive motivating instructional style versus a controlling motivating style.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Collaborative for Academic,
Social and Emotional
Learning (Website)
<http://casel.org/>

Self Determination Theory
(Website)
[http://www.
sustainengagement.com/](http://www.sustainengagement.com/)

Classroom Observation:
Student Autonomy (Video)
[http://www1.teachertube.
com/viewVideo.
php?title=Classroom_
Observation__Student_
Autonomy&video_
id=185325](http://www1.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?title=Classroom_Observation__Student_Autonomy&video_id=185325)

Table 1. Defining Features of Two Types of Motivating Styles: Autonomy Supportive and Controlling

Autonomy Supportive Motivating Style	Controlling Motivating Style
<p>Definition: A teaching style that involves understanding and valuing the student’s perspective during instruction</p>	<p>Definition: A teaching style that involves a teacher-centered approach to developing a class agenda and encouraging student compliance with the agenda</p>
<p><i>Key Features</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourages a student’s personal motivational resources ■ Incorporates noncontrolling instructional language ■ Promotes worth ■ Acknowledges and accepts negative expressions and attitude <p><small>Adapted from <i>Autonomy Support</i> by Johnmarshall Reeve (n.d.), available online at http://www.education.com/reference/article/autonomy-support/.</small></p>	<p><i>Key Features</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dependent on external motivational sources ■ Utilizes language that is more controlling and pressuring ■ Assertive

1. Incorporate autonomy-inducing teacher behaviors.

These consist of the following elements:

- **Fostering relevance:** Teachers should make an overt effort to incorporate their students’ interests, values, and goals into the learning process by learning about student concerns through informal and classroom dialogue (Learning Point Associates, 2005). Examples include asking students for feedback about classroom tasks and trying to help students understand how tasks contribute to their personal objectives (Assor et al., 2002). Research has indicated that students are more likely to be cognitively engaged and use higher-order thinking skills when they find the subject matter interesting (Young, 2005).
- **Making learning authentic:** Instructional practice should build on students’ foundational knowledge (i.e., background, ideas, skills, and attitudes), challenge students, and connect content to value beyond the classroom (Donovan & Bransford, 2005; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995). Example activities include tasks that are academically rigorous and have public or personal value, such as oral history projects or writing editorials for the local newspaper (Newmann et al., 1995).
- **Providing choice:** Teacher behavior should enable students to choose classroom activities and tasks that are consistent with their interests and goals. Providing students with the opportunity to understand how schoolwork can contribute to their personal goals increases their ability to work autonomously (Assor et al., 2002). In addition, asking students for input on classroom activities allows teachers to become more aware of students’ psychological needs and incorporate them into the lesson (Reeve, 2010).

- **Promoting independent thinking and permitting student criticism:** Encouraging students to engage in independent thinking and criticize lessons that they do not find interesting can provide teachers with opportunities to foster more in-depth conversations about classroom activities. These discussions may allow the teacher to make adjustments to lessons to increase student interest or engage in a dialogue with students about the importance of the task to make them value the work more highly (Young, 2005). The overall goal of this strategy would be to increase the opportunities for student voice in the classroom and promote mutual communication between teachers and students regarding lesson content.

2. Be aware of how the following teacher behaviors can *inhibit* student voice, choice, leadership, and autonomy:

- **Micromanaging student work and behavior:** Teachers should avoid unnecessary intrusions related to how students approach their work. Students should have the opportunity to discover their natural working patterns in the context of classroom activities (Young, 2005).
- **Assigning tasks that lack relevance and interest to adolescents:** Students are less likely to be responsive to tasks that they do not find interesting or important. Thus, teachers should make an effort to communicate the importance of tasks that they assign and incorporate elements that are relevant to adolescent lives, when appropriate (Reeve, 2009; Young, 2005).
- **Forbidding student criticism and stifling independent thinking:** Teacher behavior that undermines student voice has the potential to inhibit students' ability to self-regulate their learning and self-expression. Inhibiting students' ability to express their opinions can be frustrating and interferes with their ability to make connections between classroom activities and their personal interests and goals.

Autonomy-Inducing and Autonomy-Suppressing Teacher Behaviors

Young (2005) describes the following teacher behaviors, which can either induce or suppress student autonomy.

Autonomy-Inducing Teacher Behaviors:

- Listening
- Integrating independent work sessions
- Facilitating peer-to-peer conversations
- Praising and encouraging evidence of improvement or mastery
- Scaffolding
- Creating a responsive environment that supports student questions and comments
- Incorporating student perspectives and experiences

Autonomy-Suppressing Teacher Behaviors:

- Dominating learning materials
- Solving problems or answering questions before students have had a chance to work on them independently
- Providing directive rather than reciprocal feedback
- Interrupting student comments

Source: Young, M. R. (2005). The motivational effects of classroom environment in facilitating self-regulated learning. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 27(1), 25-40

Student-Generated Classroom Rules

One strategy for promoting student voice, choice, autonomy, and leadership in the classroom is to enable students to generate the rules of the classroom. Following are examples of two school districts that use student-generated classroom rules.

LINN BENTON LINCOLN EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICT, EUGENE, OREGON

In 2007, the National Center for School Engagement held a contest titled “21 Ways to Engage Students in School,” which included a sampling of best practices designed to foster student leadership in schools, community-based groups, and public agencies. Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District in Eugene, Oregon, had a winning strategy for creating student-generated classroom rules:

In Eugene, Oregon, students create a list of classroom rules to be followed. Each student signs off on the rules and is held accountable by fellow students. In addition, they developed their own “honor role,” in which students are recognized for doing their best, following directions, and not talking out more than 3 times a day. (National Center for School Engagement, 2007, p. 4)

MT. PLEASANT PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MT. PLEASANT, MICHIGAN

A teacher at Mt. Pleasant High School (see Ling, n.d.) developed a unit on creating student-generated classroom rules. The unit involves multiple examples of real-world relevance, including problem solving, democratic self-government, common good, collective rights, and public discourse.

Classroom Activities:

- Identifying students’ rights that have been recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- Articulating the concept of jurisdiction in the context of classroom rules in a public school setting.
- Writing and prioritizing the most critical student rights and student behaviors that may threaten those rights
- Developing strategies for protecting these student rights.
- Voting on a single set of rules that are appropriate for a variety of classroom settings.
- Monitoring the implementation of the rules with regard to protecting student rights and making adjustment based on majority decisions.

Proposed Unit Assessments:

- **Classroom discussion:** The ability of students to articulate key concepts orally.
- **Group work:** Determining how well students are working in groups to develop a list of rights, identify problem behaviors and create classroom conduct rules.
- **Essay:** Topics could include the relationship between rights and rules in a society, identify the most (or least) important rules that protect individual rights, propose changes to the process for developing class rules.

Teaching Tips:

Teachers should expect to play a role in developing rules with students and may need to generate additional “Teacher rules” to maintain a supportive and productive working environment. However, note that any teacher-generated rules should be kept at a minimum to maintain student ownership over the lesson content.

Additional details about the specific lessons at Mt. Pleasant Public Schools are available through the Learning to Give website at <http://learningtogive.org/lessons/unit18/>.

Recommendation 2: 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 also is 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 ongoing professional development for teachers that describes the importance of pushing students to do higher-level thinking and provides strategies for how to do so. This training may be provided through ongoing professional development sessions and/or support of an instructional coach.
- Create clear expectations regarding how teachers should implement this professional development in the classroom (e.g., one strategy utilized each day as reflected in lesson plans, authentic assessments at the end of each unit).
- Identify how this professional development can be incorporated into scheduled teacher collaboration sessions.
- Monitor implementation of professional development through classroom observations, lesson plan review, and student achievement results on common formative assessments.

3. Develop examples of authentic intellectual work.

The following example can be used to help school leaders and teachers understand what authentic intellectual work might look like.

Examples of High-Scoring and Low-Scoring Measures of Authentic Intellectual Work

The research report *Improving Chicago's Schools: Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence?* by Newmann, Bryk, and Nagaoka (2001) provides examples of two sixth-grade writing assignments: one that scored high and one that scored low on measures of authentic intellectual work. The authors conclude each example with a commentary of why the assignment received the score that it did.

High Scoring Writing Assignment

Write a paper persuading someone to do something. Pick any topic that you feel strongly about, convince the reader to agree with your belief, and convince the reader to take a specific action on this belief.

Commentary

In this high scoring assignment, demands for construction of knowledge are evident because students have to select information and organize it into convincing arguments. By asking students to convince others to believe and act in a certain way, the task entails strong demands that the students support their views with reasons or other evidence, which calls for elaborated written communication. Finally, the intellectual challenge is connected to students' lives because they are to write on something they consider to be personally important.

Low Scoring Writing Assignment

Identify the parts of speech of each underlined word below. All eight parts of speech—nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections—are included in this exercise.

1. My room is arranged for comfort and efficiency.
2. As you enter, you will find a wooden table on the left.
3. I write and type.
4. There is a book shelf near the table.
5. On this book shelf, I keep both my pencils and paper supplies.
6. I spend many hours in this room.
7. I often read or write there during the evening...

Commentary

This assignment requires no construction of knowledge or elaborated communication, and does not pose a question or problem clearly connected to students' lives. Instead it asks students to recall one-word responses, based on memorization or definitions of parts of speech.

Reprinted from page 24 of *Improving Chicago's Schools: Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence?* by Fred M. Newmann, Anthony S. Bryk, and Jenny K. Nagaoka, available online at <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/p0a02.pdf>. Copyright © 2001 Consortium on Chicago School Research. Reprinted with permission.

Further examples of authentic intellectual instruction, teachers' assignments, and student work can be found in the following source:

Newmann, F. M., King, M. B., & Carmichael, D. L. (2007). *Authentic instruction and assessment: Common standards for rigor and relevance in teaching academic subjects*. Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education. Retrieved August 8, 2011, from <http://centerforaiw.com/sites/centerforaiw.com/files/Authentic-Instruction-Assessment-BlueBook.pdf>

Perrysburg High School

Perrysburg High School in Perrysburg, Ohio (a suburb of Toledo), serves students in Grades 9–12. This school has had success in implementing instructional rigor and self-guided learning.

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 excerpted from the *Doing What Works* website at: http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_perrysburg_52708rev.pdf. This information is in the public domain.

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

Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning: A Practice Guide (Publication)

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

Focus on Effectiveness (Website)

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

Higher-Order Questions (Doing What Works, Website)

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

Sample Essential Questions by Grade Level (Doing What Works, Publication)

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

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

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

Socratic Seminar Planning Form (Doing What Works, Publication)

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

Recommendation 3: Instructional Feedback

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

LINK TO RESEARCH

A meta-analysis of research conducted on instructional feedback found feedback to be one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In “The Power of Feedback,” the authors note, “feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (p. 81).

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

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

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

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

There are many ways for teachers to deliver feedback to students and for students to receive feedback from teachers, peers, and other sources. For students, feedback is a way to gain information about how and what they understand and misunderstand, find directions and strategies that they must take to improve, and seek assistance to understand the learning goals (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991).

Good Feedback

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

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

- **Workshops:** Identify workshops and other opportunities for teachers to learn the value of feedback. Focus professional development on building opportunities for student explanations in the classroom.
- **Peer observations:** Support teacher collaboration by giving them tools designed to help them reflect on a peer's practice. Observations should focus on the use of questioning and feedback in classroom discussions; teachers should give each other feedback on the questions they ask and the kinds of student responses generated.
- **Classroom examples:** Provide examples for teachers to review and discuss. Explore how teachers help students make their thinking visible and get feedback on their explanations. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different instructional approaches used to encourage explanations.

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

The Teaching Center (2009) provides the following recommendations:

- **Include notes in lesson plans for when they will pause to ask and answer questions.** Asking questions throughout the class will not only make the class more interactive but also help teachers measure and improve student learning.
- **Ask a mix of different types of questions.** Use “closed” questions, or questions that have a limited number of correct answers, to test students’ comprehension and retention of important information. Also ask *managerial questions* to ensure, for example, that students understand the assignment or have access to necessary materials. “Open” questions, which prompt multiple and sometimes conflicting answers, are often the most effective in encouraging discussion and active learning in the classroom.
- **Wait for students to think and formulate responses.** Waiting 5–10 seconds will increase the number of students who volunteer to answer and will lead to longer, more complex answers. If students do not volunteer before five seconds have passed, teachers should refrain from answering their own questions, which will only communicate to students that if they do not answer, teachers will do their thinking

for them. If the students are unable to answer after sufficient time for thinking has passed, rephrase the question.

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

Using Instructional Feedback to Promote Learning

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

QUALITY QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

An 11th-grade social studies class at School 6 was studying the Progressive Era. Following an introduction to relevant vocabulary, students analyzed a political cartoon in which a lion tamer represented President Theodore Roosevelt. The teacher posed several questions about the cartoon to the whole class. In the example below, the teacher frequently probed students and asked students to elaborate on their answers by providing specific examples. The responses elicited debate as to whether the President would be able to control the trusts or not.

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

"He looks serious."

"He looks powerful."

"He looks strict."

"He looks fearless."

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

"He has a whip. I think so..."

"Why do you think this?"

"I don't know because the big business have the money and the power."

"Yeah, but they have a monopoly and the businesses use their power over people who have no rights."

"The President will free the people from big business and create rights to protect the people."

MODELING COMPLEX THINKING AND PROCESSING

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

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

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools (cont)

ENCOURAGING METACOGNITION

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

In an 11th–12th-grade mathematics class at School 3, the teacher encouraged students to make internal thought processes overt: “How did you solve this equation?” “Does anyone else have another way to solve the equation?”

At School 5, in an 11th-grade English class, the teacher modeled and encourage metacognitive behavior: “Check your notes. Do you think you took good notes on this topic?... I see that some of us take notes during the video and some of us take notes later as we discuss with group-mates. It would be helpful to take notes as you go to help you remember.”

The 9th-grade English teacher at School 2 asked one group of students to listen to another group have a discussion about the merits of wearing school uniforms. The listeners were asked to write down comments or questions about the other group's discussion. After 10 minutes, the listener group asked questions and made comments about the discussion. The teacher encouraged the listeners to attend to the justifications and evidence students presented to support their opinion. She also commented on and asked students about the quality of the arguments.

Adapted from pages 50–57 of *Small High Schools at Work: A Case Study of Six Gates-Funded Schools in New York City*, available online at <http://www.aed.org/Publications/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&pageid=35987>. This report was published in 2010 by The Academy for Educational Development (AED).

Recommendation 4: Program Evaluation

Evaluate the impact of interventions, processes, and partnerships through the use of valid and highly usable data.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Evaluation is a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed policy, program, or project, its design, implementation, and results (Marriott & Goyder, 2009). In schools, program evaluation means examining initiatives the school has undertaken to answer the question, “Is what we are doing working?” (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006). The primary goal for any evaluation system should be to foster an environment of continuous improvement by providing schools, districts, and providers with data to review the approaches used to improve student learning outcomes (Hassel & Steiner, 2004).

While school improvement plans often are driven by numerous goals, and school staff will use various strategies to support increased student achievement, many plans do not include how schools will determine whether the strategies used are effective in meeting those goals. An evaluation can be an important tool in improving the quality of prevention and intervention programs, if it is integrated into the fabric of a program rather than added after the fact (Muraskin, 1993). The evaluation of strategies, programs, and interventions can provide useful feedback on ways to modify implementation, track changes in outcomes, and address potential problems (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006). The overarching goals of evaluation are to inform schools about what is and isn’t working and to guide decisions about program adjustments and improvements, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive results.

The Center on Innovation and Improvement (Ross, Potter, & Harmon, 2006) offers the following reasons to conduct evaluations of educational programs:

- To determine the effectiveness of programs for participants
- To document that program objectives have been met
- To provide information about service delivery that will be useful to program staff and other audiences
- To enable program staff to make changes that improve program effectiveness

Frequent evaluations and communication of the results are critical to ensure that implementation and outcomes are on track.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Many evaluation techniques are easy to execute; can make use of data that are already being gathered; and can be performed on a scale that is practical for teachers, principals, and other school leaders (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement). Evaluation systems need to be embedded in, or aligned with, schoolwide accountability systems; they are most meaningful when integrated early into programs and interventions. In order to design and implement an evaluation process that will reflect the unique needs and context of school improvement programs, schools should consider the following key questions (Yap, Aldersebaes, Railsback, Shaughnessy, & Speth, 2000):

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Program Evaluation for the Practitioner: Using Evaluation as a School Improvement Strategy (Publication)

http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_June06.pdf

Manual for Monitoring and Evaluating Education Partnerships (Publication)

http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Info_Services_Publications/pdf/2009/Mariott-Goyder_Partnership.pdf

Evaluating Whole-School Reform Efforts: A Guide for District and School Staff (Publication)

http://www3.ksde.org/sfp/csr/csr_resources/14_evaluating_whole_school_reform_efforts_a_guide_for_district_and_school_staff.pdf

- What does our school want to accomplish overall?
- What will our school have to do to achieve these goals and objectives?
- How will our school know that it is succeeding at accomplishing its goals and objectives?
- How will evidence be gathered to demonstrate progress toward our school's goal?
- How will our school determine what the data are telling us?
- How will our school use evaluation results?

Two critical factors in the success of any program or intervention and its evaluation are (1) generating support in the school community, and (2) dedicating sufficient time and resources to ensure that evaluation findings are considered throughout program implementation and used for constructive changes that will further school improvement efforts.

1. Align expectations and set goals.

- All stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, internal and external service providers, consultants, etc.) should be involved in the process of designing and aligning program and service expectations. This includes who will receive the services, where and when services will be delivered, and the frequency and duration of services.
- Identify specific educational goals or outcomes that are to be achieved.
- *Example goal: "Achieve a 50 percent increase in students reading at grade level through the implementation of the Reading Matters program."*

2. Select key indicators to monitor goals and outcomes.

- Translate outcomes into a set of measurable performance indicators. Select program objectives and performance measures that are meaningful, measurable, and relevant to program objectives and goals.
- Indicators should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic, and Time-bound).
- While indicators may be qualitative or quantitative, accountability should be centered around actual outcomes rather than *perceptions* of progress.
- Through the regular measurement of key performance indicators, stakeholders can determine whether outcomes are being achieved.
- *Example indicator: "Percentage of students scoring 70 percent or better on interim reading assessments."*

3. Collect baseline data on indicators.

- A baseline sets the current condition against which future change can be tracked.
- Obtain baseline data related to performance indicators and directly correlating to school improvement or student performance goals.
- Data sources for indicators can be primary or secondary. For example, primary data could be diagnostic assessments administered by supplemental educational services providers, or diagnostic assessments that are part of an intervention program. Secondary baseline data may include data already gathered by the

school from predictive assessments, teacher-created assessments, or any other performance assessment or screening tool used by the school as part of the yearly assessment plan.

4. Select results targets.

- A target defines what can be achieved in a specific time toward reaching an outcome. Targets should be reasonable and feasible given the resources, time, and capacity to deliver services.
- Targets should be reviewed and progress measured through interim checkpoints. This way, schools can identify barriers to success and formulate new strategies or changes to programs along the way.
- *Example targets: Incremental increases in the total number of students scoring 70 percent or better on interim assessments, or incremental increases in each student's score on interim assessments.*

5. Collect data and interpret results.

- Decide which data collection method to use to obtain relevant information. Consider what data systems already exist, only adding data collection methods if necessary to fill gaps. While it may be wise to use existing data, it is important to ensure that the data are directly related to goals, indicators, and targets.
- Consider having the staff responsible for implementing programs collect and interpret the data. This creates an instantaneous feedback loop to inform decisions about program operations, instructional practices, and strategies.
- Examine data to better understand the effectiveness of programs and services. Consider the following questions when discussing results with stakeholders (Holcomb, 1999; Levesque, Bradby, Rossi, & Teitelbaum, 1998): *What do these data reveal? What else might explain these results? What else do we need to know to better understand the data before we draw conclusions? What good news is here for us to celebrate? What needs to be done to improve program performance and effectiveness?*

6. Document and communicate progress.

- Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, indicators, baselines, and targets are critical to ensuring that services, programs, and interventions are achieving desired goals. Establish an ongoing process to review, interpret, and communicate results. Sharing successes generates enthusiasm, involvement, and commitment to services and programs (Yap et al., 2000).
- Identify a timeline for evaluations; this might include a mid-term evaluation and end-of-term evaluation. Mid-term evaluations allow improvements in programs, services, and partnerships to be made while implementation continues. The key purposes of end-of-term evaluations are to determine strengths and weaknesses; improve the design for the next term; and decide whether to continue programs, services, or partnerships.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of program components provides schools with the data they need to evaluate the effectiveness of programs in order to correct gaps in services, build upon effective programs, or discontinue ineffective interventions or partnerships.

Jefferson High School

Jefferson High School serves 500 students in Grades 9–12. The student population includes 35 percent minority students; approximately 60 percent of students qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Jefferson has just adopted a comprehensive school reform model (reading through the content areas) for schoolwide implementation. A school leadership team has been formed to oversee the school improvement effort.

The school's assessment plan includes a statewide assessment of students in Grades 9 and 11 in reading and mathematics, in April of each year. There also are districtwide writing assessments of 11th-grade students in April of each year.

The school leadership team wants to know if student performance is improving with the implementation of the school reform model. The team decides to take advantage of existing data available from the state and district assessments to evaluate the impact of the comprehensive school reform model on student achievement. The school leadership team decides to look at student performance in four areas: reading, mathematics, writing, and attendance. Even though the school reform model is focused on reading, the school feels that it is important to look at other success indicators for the entire school.

Relevant data will come from the statewide assessment program, including student achievement in reading and mathematics. The school also will use data from the districtwide writing assessment. Student achievement data are obtained electronically from the statewide and districtwide assessments for the approximately 60 students in each of the assessed grades. School attendance data are collected from school attendance records for all students in Grades 9 and 11.

A database is set up to store and manage all of the data, including attendance data collected at the end of the school year. The database contains statewide assessment data in reading and math, as well as districtwide writing assessment data for the current and preceding school years. The data are analyzed to provide percentages of students who meet the state standards for the current school year and the preceding school year—prior to the implementation of the school reform model. A difference in percentage points provides an indication of impact. Attendance data are analyzed to provide an average number of days absent for each school year. Similar analyses will be conducted in future years to detect any trends and patterns.

Once data are collected and analyzed, the results are provided in reader-friendly data displays (e.g., bar charts and line graphs) and easy-to-understand narratives. They are shared and discussed among the school leadership team and other stakeholder groups, including school staff, parents, and district support personnel. The team will use the data to determine whether the program has met annual goals set by the school when the model was adopted. An in-depth review of the data will be conducted to explore plausible reasons for the findings and to develop recommendations and an action plan for continuous improvement.

Description adapted from pages 51–53 of *Evaluating Whole-School Reform Efforts: A Guide for District and School Staff*, by Kim Yap, Inge Aldersebaes, Jennifer Railsback, Joan Shaughnessy, and Timothy Speth, available online at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED445403.pdf>. This guidebook was published in 2000 by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

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Suggestions for Further Reading

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