

JHS 259 William McKinley

FINAL REPORT



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

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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of JHS 259 William McKinley conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research (AIR.) This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being in corrective action 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.

The audit focused on access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs). It examined curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing practices through the multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. Findings in these areas served as a starting point to facilitate conversations among school community staff in order to identify areas for improvement and ways to generate plans for improvement. This report includes an overview of the audit process, a description of the key findings identified in collaboration with the school, and recommendations for addressing these issues. It is entirely up to the school to determine how to implement the recommendations. At the conclusion of each recommendation we have included examples from the field based on the experiences of AIR staff, which we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

About JHS 259 William McKinley

JHS 259 William McKinley is located in New York City, in Brooklyn (Community School District 20). The school serves approximately 1,419 students in Grades 6–8. Twenty-one percent of students are ELLs, and 11 percent are identified as SWDs. In 2010–11, William McKinley's accountability status was “Corrective Action (Year 1),” due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for its population of SWDs and ELLs.

Audit Process at JHS 259 William McKinley

The key findings were identified through an audit process. Data were collected using the following guiding themes as the focus of the audit: curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing. Following data collection, AIR staff facilitated a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 9, 2011, attended by 18 staff members from JHS 259 William McKinley. Staff members included the principal, administrative staff, special education, ESL and general education teaching staff, and network personnel.

Co-interpretation is a collaborative process that helps school teams understand and use the data gathered by the audit team to generate findings. During the meeting, the following data reports were presented and reviewed:

- Special Education Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on the special education program and SWDs.
- English Language Learner Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on instruction of ELLs.
- Special Education Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 79 teachers, including 54 teachers of SWDs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 79 teachers, including 69 teachers of ELLs.

The school team studied the individual data reports and used this information to develop key findings about the school's strengths and challenges related to educating students with disabilities and English language learners. Participants rated the findings based on the following criteria:

- Is the key finding identified as one of the most critical problems faced by the school and addressed by the audit?
- If resolved, would student achievement improve sufficiently to move the school out of corrective action?
- If resolved, will there be a measurable, positive impact?

In the remainder of this report, we describe the key findings that were identified by school staff as their top priorities, and present recommendations for the school to consider incorporating into its Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, participants at co-interpretation determined a set of final key findings. These key findings, which are based on the voting that occurred during the co-interpretation meeting, are detailed in this section.

Critical Key Findings

These key findings were identified by co-interpretation participants and were prioritized by the group for action planning.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Data indicate inconsistent collaboration among general education and ESL teachers.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the English Language Learner Site Visit Report and English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report. Although the positive findings show that teachers are collaborating informally, it was unclear from the data to what extent general education and ESL teachers are collaborating. Some ESL teachers reported frequent collaboration with general education teachers, while others reported little collaboration.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Teachers report a need for more professional development related to instructing ELLs and SWDs in a variety of topics.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from all four data reports. Although the positive findings indicate that teachers have found professional development on a number of topics helpful, data also show that teachers would like to receive additional professional development—specifically on topics related to critical aspects of teaching SWDs and ELLs.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Teachers reported that they differentiate instruction, but data showed inconsistent implementation.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by data from all four data reports. According to survey and interview data, teachers reported differentiating instruction. However, survey data show that only about half of teachers are differentiating instruction daily, and observation data reveal that teachers were differentiating instruction in only about half of the classrooms visited.

Positive Key Findings

Positive key findings are listed because it is to the school's advantage to approach its action planning from a strengths-based perspective and to leverage what has been working. AIR encourages the school to realistically acknowledge what it is doing well and effectively and to use those strengths as a springboard for approaching recommendations-based action planning.

The top three positive key findings according to the vote at co-interpretation were as follows:

1. Teachers at McKinley access and modify materials for SWDs and ELLs.
2. All teachers reported collaborating informally.
3. Teachers at McKinley teach SWDs and ELLs to the same general education curriculum and standards.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with JHS 259 William McKinley led AIR to make two recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process. These recommendations are supported by currently available research and evidence. Resources and references that support these recommendations are provided.

The order does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. Also, there is no one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings were considered as a group, and these recommendations are offered as those that would likely have the greatest positive impact on student performance.

Recommendation 1: Collaboration

AIR recommends that JHS 259 William McKinley consider options for increasing opportunities for general education and ESL teachers to meet and work together. This includes both shared professional development around strategies for working with ELLs and channels of communication to discuss particular school and classroom issues.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Collaboration among teachers and other school professionals may be defined as the manner in which, and extent to which, members of the school interact in their approach to their work, and is characterized by authentic interactions that are professional in nature (Marzano, 2003). These behaviors may include openly sharing failures and mistakes, demonstrating respect for one another, and constructively analyzing and criticizing practices and procedures in an effort to improve teaching and learning in a school (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Marzano cites the need for a number of school norms that will enable teachers and other staff to effectively work to improve their schools—norms such as deciding how staff will resolve conflicts, how staff will address and solve professional problems, how staff will communicate to third parties about other staff members, and how staff will behave during professional meetings (e.g., staff meetings and professional development). 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.

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links to Critical Key Finding 1, in which data show a need to provide more established communication between general education and ESL teachers.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to increase collaboration among teachers in working with ELLs:

- 1. Provide multiple avenues for structured teacher communication, such as the following:**
 - Shared planning time during the school day that will enable content-area teachers to share information with ESL teachers about content to be covered and to share ideas that will benefit all students.
 - A listserv or other electronic method for teachers to quickly relay information to one another.
 - A system for teachers to note any concerns or issues related to specific students that can be easily communicated among staff.
 - Creation of a joint general education/ESL team that plans together regularly to ensure coverage across content areas and pacing that benefits all students.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Information and resources related to educational leadership

<http://www.ascd.org/Default.aspx>

Resources for school administrators, including information on strategies for effective leadership

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

Resources related to collaborative leadership in schools

<http://www.nassp.org/knowledge-center/topics-of-interest/collaborative-leadership>

2. Offer formal and regularly scheduled opportunities for collaboration around specific areas of need related to ELLs. This action step can be accomplished through the following:

- Conducting a needs assessment to determine topics for sessions.
- Training staff regarding effective communication and collaboration skills (e.g., active listening, establishing appropriate agendas, effective use of meeting time).
- Offering the sessions during times when general education and ESL teachers are available to participate after school.
- Ensuring that sessions are interactive and allow teachers opportunities to learn from one another.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to give feedback on the sessions so that adjustments can be made to better address the needs of students.
- Having an administrator participate to show the school's support for collaboration.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

It is 12:15 on a Wednesday at Highland Park Elementary School. The fourth grade team has assembled, just as they do every week at this time, to collaboratively create ELA plans for the upcoming week. Their students are currently in art, music, or physical education class, which gives the teachers uninterrupted time to do this. They are joined, for at least a part of their planning time, by the ESL and special education teachers who work with their grade. The school's reading specialist chairs the meeting. Each grade participates in a planning session such as this every week. The school's administrators sometimes join them, as time permits. Everyone knows they need to bring their curriculum guides, appropriate student materials, plan books, and any other materials they will need. They will complete a planning template for the week, which is on the school's intranet, where they will also post their plans. Each week, one person each week will act as "scribe" and type in the minutes in each section of the template.

The first two categories on the template address essential learnings and mastery objectives. These are from the curriculum guide and are non-negotiable, so they are typed in first. This week they will continue to develop reading comprehension skills through exposure to a variety of texts and determine important ideas and messages in literary texts. After this, the planning becomes more discretionary as to how they will do this. In addition to reading, they will also determine their lesson plans for writing, word work, fluency, and vocabulary.

The focus of instruction for this week will be historical fiction. Teachers will begin with whole group instruction in the form of read-alouds in this genre and will have whole classes complete graphic organizers that contrast fictional versus historical characters. At this point, the ESL teacher becomes concerned. Her intermediate-level students were not speaking English very well when they covered this material last year, and they worked with simplified materials. They have not been exposed to this material in as comprehensive a manner as the other students. She says that she will need to work with her students and preview this material with them so they can participate successfully with the other students. Time to do this is negotiated, and they move on to discuss their small group guided reading instruction and the strategies they will teach this week. One teacher is worried, as she is new and has not taught this material as yet and is not certain how to do it. The reading specialist volunteers to come into her classroom this week and model a strategy that will help her.

They plan their fluency focus, word work goals, and vocabulary in a similar fashion and record the information into the template. Although the wording is brief, it is complete enough for anyone to understand what they are doing. They discuss this week's writing, which is focused on researching famous people to write biographies. It is time for students to begin drafting. The special educator knows which of the students' IEP accommodations call for assistive technology (for drafting) during this part of the writing process. She will work with these students during this time and use Co-Writer software to help them with this task.

Teachers then divide up responsibilities. One teacher will visit the library and find appropriate texts to use as read-alouds. Another will make the posters for the graphic organizers they will use to help students distinguish between historical and fictional characters. Another will create a formative assessment for the grade to use at the end of the week to determine student mastery levels. One of the other teachers will make copies of the rubrics the grade uses for drafting, which students can staple into their Writing Notebooks. It is almost 1:15. They are finished for today. The notes are posted on the intranet for anyone in the school to read to see what is going on in fourth grade. It is time for teachers to pick up their students and return to their classrooms.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

*Co-Teaching Modules:
Improving Access to
the General Education
Curriculum for Students
With Disabilities Through
Collaborative Teaching*

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/Co-TeachingModule.asp

*Enhancing Your Instruction
Through Differentiation
Professional Development
Module*

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/differentiationmodule.asp

*Effective Instruction for
English Language Learners
Question and Answer
Transcript*

<http://www.ncltalks.org/content/interview/detail/3734/>

*RTI for English Language
Learners: Appropriate
Screening, Progress
Monitoring, and
Instructional Planning*

<http://www.rti4success.org/webinars/video/893>

*Accommodations, Techniques,
and Aids for Learning*

<http://www.idaamerica.org/aboutld/teachers/understanding/accommodations.asp>

(Continued)

Recommendation 2: Professional Development

AIR recommends that JHS 259 William McKinley review its current professional development plan and adjust it to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs, with a specific focus on differentiated instruction.

LINK TO RESEARCH

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

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

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 2, in which teachers indicated a need for more professional development—specifically related to teaching SWDs and ELLs. This recommendation also links to Critical Key Finding 3, in which the implementation of differentiated instruction was noted as inconsistent.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to adjust the professional development plan to increase the focus on instruction for SWDs and ELLs, with a specific emphasis on differentiated instruction:

- 1. Conduct an in-depth needs assessment among staff regarding professional development needs regarding the instruction of SWDs and ELLs. This action step can be accomplished by doing the following:**
 - Conducting a teacher survey asking for specific feedback on previous professional development opportunities related to SWDs and ELLs, and asking teachers to prioritize needs for additional professional development.
 - Reviewing teacher evaluation data regarding the instruction of SWDs and ELLs to determine areas in which professional development needs are greatest.
 - Using staff development meetings to get detailed feedback and suggestions from

staff about needed professional development related to SWDs and ELLs.

2. Refine offerings of professional development on instructing SWDs, including the following areas of focus:

- How to identify diverse student needs in inclusive classrooms.
- How to utilize differentiation strategies, such as flexible grouping or co-teaching, to meet students' individual instructional needs.
- How to monitor student progress and adjust instruction based on student performance, using strategies such as Response to Intervention (RtI).
- How to use instructional modifications and accommodations in the classroom.

3. Offer professional development on strategies for effectively instructing ELLs, including the following strategies:

- Understanding language development.
- Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both ELA and ESL state standards that clearly articulates literacy competencies and ensures that language objectives are defined at each stage of language acquisition.
- Being aware of what ELLs should understand and be able to do in terms of content and language skills at each proficiency level within the ELA curriculum.
- Developing strategies and techniques for delivering the curriculum to ELLs in monolingual, bilingual, and general education classrooms.

4. Offer professional development to all teachers on differentiated instruction strategies, including the following strategies:

- How to use data and assessments to measure student proficiency.
- How to differentiate product, process, and content.
- How to effectively implement differentiated instructional strategies, such as compacting, tiered assignments, and contracts.
- How to monitor student progress and adjust instruction based on student performance.

5. Provide follow-up support to general education teachers in implementing differentiated instruction. This action step can be accomplished through the following:

- Encouraging special education and ESL teachers to work closely with general education teachers in planning lessons that incorporate strategies for differentiating instruction.
- Using staff development meetings as a forum in which general education teachers can get feedback from special education teachers, ESL teachers, and other general education teachers on their implementation of differentiated instruction.
- Placing increased emphasis on differentiated instruction during teacher evaluations.

QUICK LINKS:

Continued

National Center on Response to Intervention

<http://www.rti4success.org/>

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring

<http://www.studentprogress.org/default.asp>

Supports, Modifications, and Accommodations for Students

<http://www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/supports/pages/default.aspx>

Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students With Disabilities

http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/accommodations_manual.asp

Development of a School-Wide Professional Development Related to Differentiated Instruction

Mrs. Smith, a principal at a large urban elementary school, designed and implemented a year-long plan for professional development to support diverse learners at her school who were not making adequate progress. Mrs. Smith knew that just targeting specialist teachers would not be enough for students to make gains, so she provided professional development focused on differentiated instruction and reaching individual learners to all teachers at the school.

She began with a day of training on differentiated instruction, school-wide, presented by the school's literacy coach and assistant principal. This was followed with classroom visits and one-on-one sessions with each teacher in the school, conducted by the assistant principal, literacy coach, and herself. In the one-on-one sessions, each teacher was asked to develop a plan for differentiating instruction and meeting the individual needs of SWDs and ELLs over the next nine months. Each teacher was observed once a month for the first four months of school, and each received once-a-month coaching from an administrator or the literacy coach, including modeling differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom. At each faculty meeting, additional professional development on differentiated instruction was provided to the entire staff, including training on specific strategies to address student needs that teachers had identified and shared during individual coaching sessions.

By January, Mrs. Smith saw an increase in the use of differentiated instruction as she visited classrooms. Coaching sessions were shifted to every other month for the second half of the school year and teachers were each asked to commit to visiting and providing feedback to one of their fellow teachers. By the end of the year, teachers agreed that their awareness of and comfort with differentiated instruction had increased, and they reported feeling supported by administrators. Mrs. Smith convened a group of general education, special education, and ESL teachers to help write the professional development plan for the next school year. She also sent those teachers to training over the summer with the understanding that they would serve as models and peer coaches for the following year.

Effective Implementation of New Instructional Skills

Mrs. Brown is participating in professional development that will help her better meet the learning needs of her ELLs. From the outset, she has learned that she must follow the Common Core State Standards. The Standards, as she has come to understand them, define what all students must know and be able to do, but not how teachers should teach. The Standards must be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, but they are not an exhaustive list of what must take place in the classroom. They set grade-level goals, but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are below or above grade-level expectations. It is the job of the professionals who work with children to make the Standards accessible to all learners.

The curriculum represents the content, or subject matter, that students must master in the course of their education. Teachers must adapt, or modify that content by the way in which they teach so that English language learners or students with disabilities can learn it.

Teachers may accomplish this by supplementing or adapting the curriculum. Supplementing the curriculum involves providing additional material, which provides background knowledge and supports different learning styles. Supplementary materials could include pictures that illustrate vocabulary words and concepts. Visuals may include charts and graphs, timelines, and

maps that supply visual clues that help students who have difficulty processing large amounts of auditory instruction. Readers that are simplified and contain more photographs or illustrations, captions, and vocabulary word definitions may also provide supplements without diminishing the information students need to learn.

Modified or adapted materials also may help the learner who has problems with complex language and/or large amounts of language. They may be used before the lesson or during it to make the content more comprehensible. These may include graphic organizers, teacher-prepared outlines, or study guides. They may also include recorded text, or rewritten text that reorganizes the material into smaller portions or chunks. Sometimes a spare copy of the text material may be given to students that they may mark or highlight.

Mrs. Brown understands all of this and is ready, as part of her training, to redesign a science unit she has already taught to make it more accessible to her ELLs. She wants to teach them some content from geology about earthquakes and volcanoes, but she knows she will have to supplement and modify the material to make it accessible to her ELLs.

She begins by activating prior knowledge and building background. Last year, students learned about the large plates under the ocean and how they move—essential information for this new unit. However, students may not remember this material, and her ELLs may have been speaking much less English when they were learning it, so she clearly is going to have to activate what prior knowledge students have and review it so she can build on what they know. She prepares a PowerPoint that goes over the concepts of tectonic plates. She gives students the PowerPoint note pages with key vocabulary and diagrams, which students can keep in their science notebooks to refer to again. She also shows a video that contains pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and the damage that can occur as a result of these phenomena. Many of her students have never been exposed to this information, and they need this necessary background knowledge to acquire new content successfully. She then provides a simplified version of the material and has students read it in pairs. They mark what they already know and what is new to them. This gives her an idea of who in the class may need more support and who already understands the material. Given what she knows from this, she is ready to teach. She goes online and finds pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and related concepts so that students can see a visual definition of each term: plateau, earth's mantle, fault lines, lava, magma, and diagrams of the layers of rock that cannot be seen from the earth's surface. She creates a science word wall using these pictures and their labels. Students now have a visual to reference that explains key vocabulary as they read. She makes a note to ask the ESL teacher to preview the concepts using some of the Rigby and Newbridge materials that are more heavily illustrated and to go over this content with simplified vocabulary. All students are keeping personal dictionaries where they write definitions and make diagrams. She makes a study guide in the form of an outline so that as she teaches, the students look at her overheads and fill in information as she presents it. Then she puts students in small groups. Together they read the information in the text. Her ELLs have a copy of the text in which they can mark and highlight. They are also given graphic organizers with flow charts, which students fill in to create the sequence of events leading to a volcanic eruption or an earthquake. Students complete the graphic organizers and write the sequence of events in sentences in their groups, all the while discussing what they have learned. ELLs are included with monolingual students who have a greater facility for self-expression in English. They put the sentences into paragraphs, which the students post and read aloud to the whole group.

Finally, Mrs. Brown gives them a concept definition map about volcanoes (later she will give them one on earthquakes). Students must define a volcano in one box. In a series of connected boxes, they write what they do and what they are like—one fact per box. When Mrs. Brown has seen the students' completed maps, she will know about her next necessary steps in instruction. Do some of her students need more instruction or reteaching while other students move on? Can the ESL teacher step in and fill gaps for her with her ELLs?

In this way, Mrs. Brown has both supplemented and adapted her unit materials to make them more comprehensible for all students, and especially for her ELLs. She has found additional or different ways to use materials to teach all of the key vocabulary and concepts, but has not left any material out or diminished it in any way.

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