

# K269 Nostrand

## FINAL REPORT



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# Introduction

## About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of K269 Nostrand 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 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 that we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

## About K269 Nostrand

K269 Nostrand is located in New York City, in Brooklyn (Community School District 22). The school serves 581 students in Grades 3–5. Ten percent of students are ELLs, and 17 percent are identified as SWDs. In 2010–11, Nostrand’s accountability status was “Improvement (Year 1),” due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for its population of SWDs and ELLs.

## Audit Process at K269 Nostrand

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-interpretation meeting on May 27, 2011, attended by 13 staff members from K269 Nostrand. Staff members included the principal, assistant principal, ESL teacher, and several other faculty members.

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 24 teachers, including 16 teachers of SWDs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 24 teachers, including 15 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**

Teachers report that they do not receive sufficient information about incoming SWDs or ELLs.

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 Special Education Teacher Survey Report and the English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report.

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2**

The staff reports a need for additional professional development on teaching SWDs and ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from all four data reports. Although data 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 related to teaching SWDs and ELLs.

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3**

When asked if they rely on one-on-one or other paraprofessionals to effectively deliver instruction to SWDs or ELLs, about half the teachers surveyed answered “Not Sure/NA.”

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by data in the Special Education and English Language Learner Teacher Survey Reports. Overall, this finding and the supporting data reflect staff concern over lack of sufficient support from paraprofessional staff to support the education of ELLs and SWDs.

## 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. Observations, interviews, and documentation indicate that general education and special education teachers are differentiating instruction for both ELLs and SWDs.
2. Teachers of SWDs report using individualized educational programs (IEPs) to learn about students and drive instruction.
3. Teachers report that they have behavior discipline management systems in their classrooms and that they review behavior data on a regular basis.

# Recommendations

## Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with K269 Nostrand led AIR to make three 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: Supports for New SWDs and ELLs

**AIR recommends that K269 Nostrand review and adjust its procedures for welcoming new SWDs and ELLs into the school to ensure appropriate support for the new students, as well as for teachers and staff who will be responsible for teaching those students.**

### QUICK LINKS:

#### Online Sources for More Information

ALLIANCE National Parent  
Technical Assistance Center  
[http://www.  
parentcenternetwork.org/  
national/aboutus.html](http://www.parentcenternetwork.org/national/aboutus.html)

*Keeping the Committed: The  
Importance of Induction and  
Support Programs for New  
Special Educators*

[http://www.personnelcenter.  
org/pdf/keepcomm.pdf](http://www.personnelcenter.org/pdf/keepcomm.pdf)

Families and Advocates  
Partnership for Education  
(FAPE)

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

*Transitioning Students With  
Disabilities From Middle to  
High School.*

[http://journals.cec.sped.  
org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?art  
icle=1393&context=tecplus  
&sei-redir=1#search="orient  
ation+for+students+with+dis  
abilities+research"](http://journals.cec.sped.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1393&context=tecplus&sei-redir=1#search=orientation+for+students+with+disabilities+research)

*Parent Guide to the ESL  
Standards for Pre-K-12  
Students: Introduction and  
Common Questions*

[http://schools.dcsd.k12.  
nv.us/pdc/documents/  
parent\\_guide.pdf](http://schools.dcsd.k12.nv.us/pdc/documents/parent_guide.pdf)

National Early Childhood  
Transition Center

[http://www.hdi.uky.edu/SF/  
NECTC/Home.aspx](http://www.hdi.uky.edu/SF/NECTC/Home.aspx)

### LINK TO RESEARCH

Both students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) often share the experience of entering a new school, which typically requires adjustment to significantly different social and academic situations than they have previously experienced. SWDs may be entering a new school building to attend a special program. ELLs may be the children of immigrant parents, are entering a school that is not only new to them, but is also culturally very different from their previous experiences.

Research indicates that positive school adjustment is important for a number of reasons. Students who develop supportive school-based relationships with teachers and other staff, as well as peers, are more likely to engage in behaviors that are necessary to do well in school, such as attending class, completing school work, and doing homework. Researchers have demonstrated the significant impact that such behaviors have on students' grades (Suarez-Orrasco, 2006). In addition, students who develop a positive attitude with regard to a new secondary school are more likely to graduate (Watt, Roessingh, & Bossetti, 1996).

Another recent study found a relationship between a sense of school-belonging and mental health. The study found that a greater sense of school belonging among adolescents was associated with lower depression and higher self-efficacy (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Several researchers have also pointed out the interrelationship between children's in-school experience and out-of-school well-being (Gilligan, 2000).

Topics for orienting students who are entering a school building for the first time need to include use of a locker; school conventions such as lining up, using staircases, and using planners and other materials that promote self-regulation; the roles of school personnel and who to go to with specific problems; what to do in emergency drills; and procedures for changing into special clothes for physical education classes (Short & Boyson, 2004).

Parents also need orientation to a new school. They need to know what courses their students will be taking, who their children's teachers will be, and who to contact at the school if they believe their child might be experiencing problems of one type or another.

### LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links to Critical Key Finding 1, where teachers reported that they do not receive sufficient information about incoming SWDs and ELLs.

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to provide orientation services to ensure successful integration of new SWDs and ELLs into the school:

**1. Ensure that teachers receive the proper training and support for teaching SWDs and ELLs in their classrooms. This action step can be accomplished by:**

- Ensuring that teachers receive copies of IEPs for all SWDs in their classrooms, including new students
- Making sure teachers are aware of the English acquisition levels of all ELLs in their classrooms, including new students
- Providing opportunities for teachers to meet with parents, fellow teachers, and other service providers who have worked or are working with each new SWD and ELL, and ensuring that language support services are provided for parents, if necessary
- Offering professional development to general education teachers in inclusive classrooms on how to meet the needs of SWDs and ELLs in their classrooms

**2. Provide opportunities for parent involvement, including:**

- Offering an orientation program to parents of SWDs and ELLs when their children enter the school or change classrooms. This should include the classroom teacher(s) as well as all other service providers who will be working with the children.
- Providing channels for parents to communicate regularly with teachers about the progress of their SWDs
- Offering materials and resources to ensure parental awareness of the supports and services available to SWDs
- Ensuring that all communication and resources are provided in parents' native languages or are otherwise accessible to parents if they are not fluent in English

**3. Offer orientation activities to the students themselves, such as:**

- Ensuring that new SWDs and ELLs participate in all orientation activities available to their non-disabled and native English-speaking peers
- Allowing additional time for SWDs and ELLs to become familiar and comfortable with the classrooms, teachers, and other service providers
- Introducing a “buddy” to new SWDs and ELLs who can help orient them to the classroom and help them meet and interact with their peers

## **ELL Orientation**

Laurence Chao is entering Lincoln High School as a sophomore. This will be his second high school since the family left China 18 months ago. The previous school was not in New York. He speaks better English than he did before, but he is nervous. Will there be other students who speak Chinese? Will he be able to find his way around and ask for help if there aren't? His parents are worried, too, about what classes he will take and what he needs to do to graduate and go on to some kind of postsecondary schooling.

Laurence's parents have the necessary paperwork to enroll him and he has taken the LAB test and brought the result, which show that he still qualifies for English as a second language (ESL) services. The office makes an appointment for the next day to orient both Laurence and parents to the school and to get Laurence started as soon as possible.

The next day, Laurence meets the school counselor whose caseload includes the tenth graders. The school does have students who speak his language, and the school counselor arranges for him to meet Greg, who takes him around the school, showing him important places such as the gym, cafeteria, and library. He shows him his locker and tells him when they return to the office the counselor will supply him with the combination.

While this is occurring, Laurence's parents meet with the principal, the counselor, and the ESL lead teacher. They review his transcripts and other records and enroll him in the classes he needs. They explain he will have one ESL class in addition to his English language arts (ELA) class, where he will receive instruction that will help him with his other coursework. The ESL teacher explains her role as a resource person and encourages him to rely on her heavily in the beginning if he feels confused about what is going on in any of his classes. The counselor gives him a list of supplies he will need and gives him his locker combination, and shows him how to use it. Greg has a similar schedule, so that makes Laurence feel much more comfortable. Laurence steps out the office with his new friend, ready for his first class in his new school.

## **Special Education Orientation**

Sam is entering Columbus Elementary School as a fifth grader. He is identified as a student with mild autism, and academically Sam is relatively high functioning. Sam's disability often affects his ability to interact appropriately with his peers, and Sam is beginning to view himself as a misfit, which has begun to affect his self-confidence. To his mother, Sam appears comfortable about entering his new school, but she worries about Sam's transition into such a large school, without the support he was receiving in his previous, much-smaller school. Will he be able to find his way around and ask for help if he can't? How will other students react to Sam's inappropriate verbalizations and behaviors? His parents are concerned, too, about what academic supports will be in place for Sam since at his last IEP meeting it was agreed that he will no longer have his one-on-one paraprofessional.

Sam's parents receive an e-mail from the school indicating that one week before the opening of school there will be an orientation for all students with disabilities entering Columbus Elementary School for the first time, and their parents. Sam and his parents are encouraged to attend, and are assured that, along with refreshments provided by the PTA, there will be an opportunity to meet the people who will be responsible for Sam's day-to-day success.

When Sam and his parents arrive at the school for orientation, they are met at the front door by Jacob, a member of a student service organization at the school, Students for Students, whose mission is to provide academic and social support for students with disabilities at their school. The members of Students for Students are academic and social leaders in the fifth grade,

and are respected by both peers and staff. Jacob very comfortably encourages Sam to join him on a scavenger hunt through the school while Sam's parents, along with other parents of students with disabilities, meet the school counselor, the special education coordinator, and the fifth-grade special education and general education staff.

The school counselor provides a short introduction to policies and procedures at Columbus Elementary School, and also offers a description of Students for Students. Sam's parents learn that Jacob is assigned to be Sam's buddy throughout the school year, including partnering with Sam for academic support in the co-teaching classroom to which Sam had been assigned, as well as providing a presence and support for Sam in the cafeteria and other out-of-classroom experiences as needed. Then, Sam's parents have an opportunity to meet with the special education teacher and general education teacher on Sam's co-teaching team. The teachers supply Sam's parents with information regarding academic expectations for Sam, as well as a written description of the behavior management plan that Sam's parents had discussed with the IEP team at the end of last school year. It is very comforting to Sam's parents to realize that there has been ample communication between Sam's elementary school IEP team and his new teachers.

While this is occurring, Sam and Jacob participate together in a scavenger hunt throughout the school, enabling Sam to become familiar with the location of his classroom, the cafeteria, the restrooms, and the crisis management specialist's suite, or the "Code Blue" room as it was known, in case Sam needs a quiet place to "decompress." Throughout the scavenger hunt, Jacob assures Sam that during fifth grade he will be with Sam during the entire school day, not "in his face," but available if Sam just needs a buddy to help him get used to his new school.

After this orientation, both Sam and his parents are much more confident about a successful start to Sam's school experience. It is especially comforting to Sam's parents when, as they drop Sam off on the first day of school, Jacob is waiting for him outside the front door of the school.

## Recommendation 2: Professional Development

**AIR recommends that K269 Nostrand review its current professional development plan and professional supports, and adjust to ensure appropriate coverage of content and support relevant to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs.**

### 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 (The 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, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). Content areas should align with school improvement needs and goals to target improvement to those areas.

Schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement by refining the process by which professional development is offered; ensuring that it is embedded, is sustained, and allows for active teacher participation; and focusing the development on teacher practice and content (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

### LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 2, in which teachers indicate a need for more professional development related to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs.

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to adjust the professional development plan to increase the focus on instruction for SWDs:

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

#### 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](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](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>

(Continued)

## QUICK LINKS: Continued

*Accommodations, Techniques, and Aids for Learning*

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

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](http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/accommodations_manual.asp)

- Using staff development meetings to get detailed feedback and suggestions from staff about needed professional development related to SWDs.

### **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:**

- Understanding language development
- Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both English language arts (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

## **Implementation of Newly Acquired Instructional Skills**

Mrs. Brown is a teacher 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 that content by modifying 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 pictures and photos, 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 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 taped 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 in which they may mark or highlight.

Mrs. Brown understands all 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 presentation, which goes over the concepts of tectonic plates and how the sea floor always spreads and moves, and how there are mountains on the earth and under the sea and how this movement affects them. 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 will never have been exposed to this information and 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 and different 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 highly illustrated and present 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 orally to the whole group.

Finally, Mrs. Brown gives them a concept definition map about volcanoes and 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 the gaps for her with her ELLs?

In such a 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 the key vocabulary and concepts, but has not left any material out or diminished it in any way.

## **Development of a School-Wide Professional Development Plan**

Mrs. Smith, a principal at a large urban elementary school, designed and implemented a year-long plan for professional development designed 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 school-wide training on differentiated instruction, 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 received 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 be 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.

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

*Educators' Perceptions of Collaborative Planning Processes for Students With Disabilities*

<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/ETD/image/etd1344.pdf>

*ESL Coteaching and Collaboration: Opportunities to Develop Teacher Leadership and Enhance Student Learning*

[http://www.tesolmedia.com/docs/TJ/firstissue/04\\_TJ\\_DoveHonigsfield.pdf](http://www.tesolmedia.com/docs/TJ/firstissue/04_TJ_DoveHonigsfield.pdf)

*Working with Paraprofessionals*

[http://www.pealcenter.org/images/Giangreco-working\\_with.pdf](http://www.pealcenter.org/images/Giangreco-working_with.pdf)

*Implications of Collaboration in Education*

<http://www.academicleadership.org/article/implications-of-collaboration-in-education>

*ELL/General Education Collaboration Guidelines*

<http://ell.spps.org/uploads/GeneralEducationCollabGdlines.pdf>

*Starting Off on the Right Foot: Providing Orientation for Paraeducators*

<http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/speconn/main.php?cat=collaboration&section=main&subsection=work/orientation>

## Recommendation 3: Paraprofessionals and Other Classroom Supports

**AIR recommends that K269 Nostrand explore options for ensuring adequate use of support staff for teachers in their efforts to educate SWDs and ELLs.**

### LINK TO RESEARCH

In the past decade, teacher roles have expanded to include active participation with principals and other staff in determining which programs will most effectively meet the needs of learners in their schools and how best to allocate resources to meet program objectives (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). This evolution in teacher roles has had a profound impact on the nature of paraeducator roles. The roles of “teacher aides,” as they once were called, have become more complex and demanding. In today’s schools, paraeducators need to work alongside and assist teachers with the delivery of instruction and other direct services for learners. Indeed, they have become technicians who are aptly described as paraeducators just as their counterparts in law and medicine are designated as paralegals and paramedics (Pickett, 1989).

While paraeducators may still perform some clerical tasks, their role has expanded in many ways. They are now asked to engage individual learners and small groups of learners in instructional activities developed by teachers, carry out management and disciplinary plans, assist teachers with functional and other assessment activities, and document objective information about learner performance that enables teachers to plan and modify curriculum and learning activities for students. Their assistance in a child’s education may be part of that student’s IEP. Documentation regarding their use and their schedules may be required and audited by state, local, and federal agencies that fund their employment.

Paraeducators’ use in general and special education, Title I and other compensatory or remedial programs, multilingual and ESL programs, and early childhood and transitional services has greatly expanded the expectations that schools and staff have for them (French, 2001). As their use increases and becomes increasingly monitored, a new challenge is presented to principals and other professionals. These include training, preparation, and supervision. However, the scheduling aspect of their use may be a real challenge to school administration, and to teachers as well, as they must match paraeducators’ schedules to defined roles and jobs in the school and to providing mandated services at prescribed times. Our present-day school leadership and their staffs need to develop new and creative ways to manage this process.

### LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 3, in which staff expressed concern over the lack of sufficient support for educating ELLs and SWDs.

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be followed to increase the support for teachers in educating ELLs and SWDs:

**1. Refine and improve the process of providing paraprofessional support in classrooms.**

**This action step can be accomplished by:**

- Allocating funds to hire and train paraprofessionals to support teachers serving SWDs and ELLs
- Ensuring that all paraprofessionals in the school are properly trained and receive the necessary resources to serve the school's SWDs and ELLs
- Providing a professional development session for teachers and paraprofessionals on implementing research-based strategies for working successfully together
- Offering opportunities for paraprofessionals and teachers to collaborate and plan together outside of regular instructional time

**2. Consider options for leveraging existing staff and other resources to support teachers in serving SWDs and ELLs. Steps to accomplish this action step could include:**

- Trying to assign students whose first language is not English into classes with teachers who are fluent in their native languages
- Providing professional development on differentiated instruction to all teachers to help them meet the diverse needs of all students in their classrooms
- Utilizing a “buddy” system for SWDs and ELLs, where a peer in the classroom provides peer mentoring and social-emotional support

**3. Provide opportunities and support for teachers and other school faculty to collaborate around specific areas of need related to SWDs and ELLs. This action step can be accomplished by:**

- Implementing shared planning time during the school day that will enable content area teachers to share information with special education and ESL teachers about content to be covered and to share ideas that will benefit all students
- Creating a listserv or other electronic method for teachers and other service providers to quickly relay information to one another
- Establishing a joint general education/special education team and a general education/ESL team that plans together regularly to ensure coverage across content areas and pacing that benefits all students
- Providing support for collaboration among school faculty through professional development
- Including administration in collaboration efforts along with other school faculty

## DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mr. James is increasingly concerned about the use of paraprofessionals as an instructional resource in his elementary school building. Too often he finds them assigned to classrooms where the need for them is not as critical as it might be in others. Often he finds them marking papers or preparing materials when they ought to be helping students. Sometimes he finds them just sitting in a chair while the classroom teacher instructs students in a whole-group setting. He decides that the fault is largely his own, and resolves to do a better job of scheduling the paraprofessionals in the building, and to work with them and his staff on best practices for their involvement in the school's instructional program.

Mr. James has noted that teachers are setting the times when they will teach their instructional blocks in reading and math independently. This results in great demands for instructional services at the beginning of the day, with a decreasing need as the day goes on. He decides to meet with his leadership team in May to discuss this problem. He discusses the need for a master schedule whereby grade-level teams are teaching their academic subjects at different times. He asks for input as to the times teachers at various grade levels would prefer to teach these, but makes it clear that there will have to be some give and take around this issue from all concerned.

He constructs a schedule for every team's reading and math instructional times and places their "special" blocks (art, music, physical education, and library). Having done that, he meets with his ESL and special education teams and receives their advice on classroom placements for children who require these services for the coming year. Students with similar needs are placed in small groups so that they are available for services by professionals and paraprofessionals. Finally, he asks these teachers to create schedules for themselves, identifying times when they will work with teachers in a co-teaching model or pull groups as needed. They then work together to assign the building's paraprofessional to cover students with identified IEP and ESL needs who will work under the supervision of one of the professionals. It is now June. All of this work has been done before the next school year begins, and is ready to go for Day One of the following school year.

Now, it is the pre-service week of the new school year. Students will begin school the following week. Mr. James asks each teacher to complete a rough draft of the schedule they will follow for their ELA block. This must include times for whole-group instruction, small-group reading instruction, word work, and writing. One complete day of this week is devoted to team meetings, which the appropriate ESL and special education teachers and paraprofessionals attend. Specific students and their needs are discussed, along with a "game plan" for which groups and individual students will be seen by the paraprofessionals and what are the best practices for each. One paraprofessional may take over a below-grade-level reading group for additional instruction when the teacher has finished with them and needs to move on to another group; another may work with one particular student who has difficulties working independently. Realizing that paraprofessionals may enter a classroom to begin working at a time when the teacher may be busy, each teacher is asked to set up a mailbox, desk drawer, or some kind of vehicle for communication of last minute instructions. A special problem with a child may have come up, or a child is absent and new plans are in order. They are ready to begin the school year.

Each grade-level team meets weekly to plan instruction for the following week and produces notes that are placed on the school's intranet. It is understood that the paraprofessionals will read these. This helps to keep them informed what students will be learning and what activities are planned for them before the paraprofessionals enter a classroom. In addition, Mr. James works with representatives of the special education and ESL teams, along with the Literacy Coach to plan and schedule training sessions for paraprofessionals. This might include how to best teach certain algorithms in math or the use of math manipulatives, techniques for teaching guided reading, how to effectively help a child who is drafting a piece of writing, or specific software applications in use in the school. Paraprofessionals are also asked to complete a survey specifying training they might like to help them be more effective in their jobs.

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