

PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer 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). 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 PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer

PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer is located in New York City, in Brooklyn (Community School District 23). The school serves approximately 578 students in Grades PK–8. Twenty percent of students are identified as SWDs. In 2010–11, Nicholas Herkimer’s accountability status was “Improvement (Year 1),” due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for its population of SWDs.

Audit Process at PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer

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 May 18, 2011, attended by 11 staff members from PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer. Staff members included the principal, representatives from the administrative staff, special education and ESL teaching staff, and parents.

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.
- Special Education Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 44 teachers, including 20 teachers of SWDs.

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. 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:

Observations reveal that technology was not being implemented.

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 Site Visit Report. Participants agreed that the problem exists because of the lack of hardware; there are not enough computers available for teachers to implement the software programs that are available.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Both special education and general education teachers would like to receive more professional development related to SWDs, including professional development on the following: specific disabilities, differentiated instruction strategies, IEP writing, and inter-school visitation for best practices.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from the Special Education Site Visit Report and the Special Education Teacher Survey Report. As noted in the positive findings below, professional development is a strong focus in the school. However, data also revealed that teachers want to receive *more* professional development—specifically related to the instruction of 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. Staff reported that the administration is supportive.
2. Special education and general education teachers collaborate formally and informally about students' needs and goals.
3. The CEP has a strong focus on training all teachers. As revealed in interviews and surveys, the majority of all teachers agreed that professional development was connected to school goals and strategies to help them address students' needs.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer 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: Technology

AIR recommends that PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer take steps to increase the availability and use of technology to support the instruction of all students, including students with disabilities.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Schools often find themselves working on a series of initial implementation efforts, trying one thing after another, and not achieving full implementation of any one program. Even high-quality training, if used in isolation, is not sufficient to lead to full-scale implementation of technology; for true technology integration, teachers need to do more than simply learn about a new technology tool. Teachers are inundated with new initiatives every year; new ideas come and go and are rarely sustainable (Zorfass, 2001). To avoid initiative fatigue, schools must focus not only on introducing new technology, but also on implementing and scaling up new technologies.

There are several factors that facilitate the implementation of technology. Research on educational interventions has shown professional development, leadership, organization and school structure, and resources and support to be instrumental in implementing effective school-wide change (Abbot, Greenwood, Buzhardt, & Tapia, 2006; Billig, Sherry, & Havelock, 2005; Blumenfeld, 2000; Ely, 1990; Elmore, 1996; Ertmer, 2005; Glazer, Hannafin, & Song, 2005; Price et al., 2002; Royer, 2002; Staples, Pugach, & Himes, 2005; Zorfass, 2001). These factors facilitate the implementation of technology, and will play a role in every stage of the intervention, from the initial planning and exploration phases to helping to sustain the intervention once fully implemented.

Schools and districts often have multiple initiatives and grant possibilities to procure and enhance technology available in any given year, but school leaders may not always connect all of the available resources. An outside TA provider can view the big picture and help identify additional sources of funding, resources available, or opportunities for partnerships. Acknowledging multiple (and sometimes competing) initiatives while highlighting natural connections among existing projects and resources is an important function of a TA provider (Center for Implementing Technology in Education, 2011.)

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 1, in which observation data revealed no use of instructional technology in classrooms. Discussion during the co-interpretation revealed that the limited use of technology in classrooms was due to a lack of sufficient computer equipment in the school.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Center for Implementing
Technology in Education
<http://www.cited.org/index.aspx>

Center for Technology
Innovation
www.nationaltechcenter.org

*Using technology with
classroom instruction
that works*
<http://technologygrantnews.com/technology-grant-news.html>

*Teaching tips: Technology
grants for educators.*
<http://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/474>

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to increase the availability and use of technology in the classroom:

- 1. Secure computers in classrooms and labs throughout the school in order to implement the software programs that are available to assist all students, especially students with disabilities. This action step can be accomplished by:**
 - Identifying funding sources to secure computers—for example, through technology-related grants.
 - Developing a system between teachers to share computers.
 - Designing lessons around technology that can be utilized in a computer lab or library.
 - Accessing innovative uses of, and resources for, technology from the National Center for Technology Innovation (www.nationaltechcenter.org), and the Center for Implementing Technology in Education (www.cited.org).
 - Seeking opportunities for the school to be considered as a pilot for educational software. These opportunities will often provide the hardware to support the program being studied.

- 2. Explore efficient strategies for using alternative technologies to improve access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities, including the following:**
 - Handheld devices (e.g., smartphones)
 - Smart Board

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mr. Jordan, the principal of an urban middle school, faced the unusual dilemma of his school having access to a variety of valuable software programs to support the learning of his students with disabilities, but not having sufficient computers to allow most students to access these valuable learning tools.

Mr. Jordan found the TechMatrix on the National Center for Technology Innovation website, which offered an online database to help educators and families find educational and assistive technology resources and help for students with special needs. This resource included search features, expert advice, professional development resources, “Hot Topic” pages, updated product listings, and implementation resources. Through this website, Mr. Jordan identified a foundation that was offering access to complete technology programs for schools, including hardware to support these programs. Mr. Jordan wrote a grant for the program that best met the needs of students identified with a learning disability in mathematics, and received not only the state-of-the-art software, but five new computers for his school to implement the program.

Building on this success, Mr. Jordan created a team of special education teachers and technology specialists in his school to further investigate additional resources for increasing the technology capacity at his school. During the following two school years, through diligent attention to available grants and pilot study participation, the school was able to build a technology lab, which included 18 new computers, and obtain software programs to meet the instructional needs of students with learning disabilities in reading, written language, and mathematics.

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

Enhancing your instruction through differentiation professional development module

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

Accommodations, techniques, and aids for learning.

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

Supports, modifications, and accommodations for students

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

The IEP Team

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/team.aspx>

The Short-and-Sweet IEP Overview

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/overview.aspx>

(Continued)

Recommendation 2: Professional Development

AIR recommends that PS-IS 155 Nicholas Herkimer review its current professional development plan and adjust it to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of SWDs, such as the following topics identified during co-interpretation:

- **Specific disabilities**
- **Differentiated instruction strategies**
- **IEP writing**
- **Inter-school visitation**

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.

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, 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 indicated a need for more professional development, specifically on disability types, differentiated instruction strategies, IEP writing, and school inter-visitiation for best practices.

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 regarding the instruction of SWDs. 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 asking teachers to prioritize needs for additional professional development.

QUICK LINKS:

Continued

Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities

<http://www.ncld.org/at-school/general-topics/accommodations/accommodations-for-students-with-learning-disabilities>

Site visits: Seeing schools in action

<http://fcsn.org/peer/ess/sitevisitsib.html>

Accommodations manual: How to select, administer, and evaluate use of accommodations for instruction and assessment of students with disabilities

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

- Reviewing teacher evaluation data regarding the instruction of SWDs 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.

2. Offer professional development on specific disabilities, including the following topics:

- Definitions of the 13 federal disability types, including descriptions of how these disability types can affect learning.
- How to identify and implement appropriate strategies for targeting the specific educational needs related to each disability type.

3. Offer professional development on differentiated instruction strategies, including the following topics:

- Using data and assessments to measure student proficiency.
- Differentiating product, process, and content.
- Effectively implementing differentiated instructional strategies, such as compacting, tiered assignments, and contracts.
- Monitoring student progress and adjusting instruction based on student performance.

4. Offer professional development on IEP writing, including the following topics:

- Creating and maintaining an IEP.
- Learning about information that should be included in an IEP, general steps to developing an IEP, IEP accommodations.
- Encouraging special education and general education teachers to review IEPs together during common planning time as a way to share effective strategies for teaching students with disabilities.
- Understanding the IEP process for parents, students, and teachers.

5. Provide opportunities for staff to visit other schools to learn about best practices in teaching students with disabilities. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Identifying neighboring schools with similar demographics that have seen successful performance for students with disabilities.
- Gathering information on strategies and practices at these schools that have contributed to increased student performance.
- Arranging for visits among small groups of teachers to one or more of these schools. Visits can include classroom observations as well as a chance to meet with staff from these schools to discuss implementation tips and challenges related to effective strategies.
- Coordinating follow-up staff meetings for teachers to reflect on what they learned during the inter-school visitation, and to identify steps to take for implementing similar strategies at PS-IS 155.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

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 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 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 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.

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