

Community School District 5 Students With Disabilities

FINAL REPORT



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

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INTRODUCTION

This final report summarizes findings from an external district curriculum audit of Community School District 5 (CSD 5) by Learning Point Associates (LPA), an affiliate of the American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the district being identified as in need of improvement under the NYSED differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The audit process utilized 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.

CSD 5 was identified as in need of improvement in part due to its failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English Language Arts (ELA) for its students with disabilities (SWD) and English language learner (ELL) populations. The audit process focused on strategies and practices related to the ELA instruction of SWDs and ELLs. In particular, the audit process examined practices and strategies being implemented in schools in good standing (“high-performing” schools), and compared those to practices and strategies being implemented in schools not in good standing (“low-performing” schools). The purpose of the audit was not to determine compliance, but rather to ensure that the NYCDOE and CSD 5 gain useful feedback about challenges and effective practices that can have an impact on the achievement of SWDs and ELLs.

This particular report includes findings related to SWDs and all information relates to SWDs only. A companion report includes findings related to ELLs.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Several questions guided the data collection, analysis, and reporting for the CSD 5 audit. The questions focused on differences between high- and low-performing schools on critical factors related to educating SWDs. We asked how high- and low-performing schools in CSD 5 differ with respect to the following:

- Curricular standards used to guide instruction of SWDs
- Modifications to the curricular materials and/or programs when teaching SWDs
- Implementation of differentiation instruction
- Implementation of appropriate instructional strategies for teaching SWDs
- Implementation of data-driven instruction
- Use of IEPs to inform instruction
- Availability and quality of supplemental services and interventions for SWDs
- Strategies to manage behavior in classrooms and throughout the school
- Professional development focused on topics related to the instruction of SWDs

- Collaboration among general education and special education teachers
- Availability and quality of support staff for educating SWDs
- Administrative leadership regarding the education of SWDs

Data that pertained to each of the 12 guiding questions above were examined across all data sources.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

CSD 5 is located in New York City, New York. In 2010–11, when the audit was conducted, the district had 31 schools, including 12 elementary, 7 middle, 5 high, 3 K-8, and 4 secondary (grade 6–12) schools. The district serves 12,952 students from pre-kindergarten through 12, of whom 16 percent¹ are SWDs and 11 percent are ELLs. Fifty-seven percent are African American, 38 percent are Hispanic, and 2 percent are Asian. Many of the students are economically disadvantaged, with 72 percent qualifying for free lunch and 6 percent for reduced-price lunch.

METHODS

Data collection and analysis focused on a subset of schools where SWDs have been successful, as well as on a subset of schools where success educating SWDs has been more of a challenge, to identify focused strategies and practices to improve the achievement of all students. Analysis of these data was combined with analysis of data gathered from all principals in the district, and a sample of network staff interviewees.

Data were collected from six sources. Two sources (principal survey and district administrator interviews) represented *all* schools in CSD 5, and four sources (school staff interviews, classroom observations, teacher surveys, and document review) represented a sub-sample of three high-achieving and three low-achieving schools within the district. The district-level sources give a more comprehensive picture of potential differences between high-performing and low-performing schools district-wide, while the school-level sources present a more focused and nuanced picture of these differences at the school level. Combined analysis of these data sources supported development of the key findings presented later in this report. All data are aggregated and reported at the district level.

District-Level Data Sources

Two district-level data sources were used to inform findings for this audit: (1) a principal survey and (2) network administrator interviews. The principal survey was administered to principals of all 31 schools in CSD 5. Web-based surveys were administered over the course of six weeks in May and June 2011. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on curriculum and

¹ Calculated from the 2010–11 enrollment data provided in the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) for each school in CSD 5.

instruction practices for the 2010–11 school year related to teaching students with disabilities and English language learners. Survey questions addressed issues such as access to the general education curriculum, instructional strategies, school-wide interventions, professional development, collaboration among staff, and administrative support. The overall response rate for the survey was 61 percent. Survey data were analyzed by comparing responses from principals in high-performing schools with those from principals in low-performing schools. High performing schools were those identified by the district office to be “in good standing,” meaning the school met AYP for all subgroups in all subject areas based on most recent state test data (2009-10). Low-performing schools in the sample were those whose accountability status was Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring.² The number of respondents to any given item for high performing schools ranged from 8 to 13; for low performing schools, the range was 2 to 6.

In addition to the principal survey, district-level data were gathered through a set of interviews with network leaders who work with schools in CSD 5. Two network leaders participated in telephone interviews, offering their perspective on how high- and low-performing schools differ with respect to the education of SWDs. These interviews were used to add contextual, supporting information to the overall study findings.

School-Level Data Sources

The four school-level data sources used in this audit were collected as part of site visits to three high-performing and three low-performing schools within CSD 5. The sample of site visit schools was selected in collaboration with NYCDOE. All six schools had relatively high percentages of SWDs (16 percent or more) in their school populations. High-performing schools were those whose accountability status was determined to be “in good standing” during the 2009-10 school year. The accountability status of the low-performing schools was Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring, due in part to failure to make AYP for the SWD subgroup.

One-day site visits were conducted in each of these schools during May and June of 2011. During the site visits, researchers conducted approximately eight staff interviews and eight classroom observations. Interviewees typically included the principal, special education coordinator, three special education teachers (representing self-contained, resource, and co-taught settings), and three general education teachers (including at least one co-teacher and teachers who have at least three SWDs in their classroom). Interview protocols included

² It is possible, although unlikely, for a school to be not in good standing, but still have made AYP for its SWD population. A school in this situation would technically not be “low-performing” with respect to its SWD population. In 2010–11, of the seven CSD 5 schools categorized as low-performing for this study, four did not make AYP in ELA for their SWD subgroup. None of the remaining three made AYP for SWDs. Two had insufficient numbers of SWDs to determine AYP status for this subgroup, and one made AYP for SWDs through the “Safe Harbor” provision. Because these three schools were deemed not in good standing overall, and because there was not enough information to determine if they could be considered “high-performing” for SWDs, these schools remained in the “low-performing” group for this study.

questions about curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing. All interviews were recorded (with the permission of the interviewee) and transcribed, and then coded using ATLAS, a qualitative data analysis software program. Researchers then reviewed all codes to identify common themes and emerging differences in interview responses between teachers in high- and low-performing schools.

Observations were conducted for an entire class period in both general education and special education settings. Classrooms were selected in collaboration with the school principal, to accommodate scheduling and to ensure that a range of settings was included. Observers used an observation protocol covering the following topics: classroom environment, behavior management, grouping strategies, student activities, instructional practices, differentiated instruction, student engagement, and student-teacher interactions. Researchers reviewed observation data and notes to identify any consistent differences between classrooms observed in high- and low-performing schools.

In addition to the site visits, all teachers in the selected sub-sample of schools were asked to complete a teacher survey. This survey focused on actions, resources, and strategies related to identifying students for academic interventions and provision of effective interventions for SWDs; classroom practices; and school capacity, particularly instructional leadership, school management, professional development, and collaborative opportunities. The survey was administered in hard copy and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Response rates ranged from 51 percent to 96 percent in the sample schools. Data were analyzed by comparing responses between teachers in high- and low-performing schools.

Finally, LPA collected and analyzed relevant documents from each of the selected schools. These data included redacted IEPs, and the school's CEP, Quality Review report, school-wide behavior plan, and professional development plans. IEPs were coded to determine the extent to which goals are reflective of the general education curriculum and based on performance data, the reasons for removing a student from the general education environment are indicated, and the range of instructional accommodations is listed. The CEPs and Quality Review reports were coded to note language and action items relevant to the needs of students with disabilities. The school-wide behavior plans were reviewed and analyzed in conjunction with interview and observation data related to behavior, to determine the extent to which consistent expectations for behavior are communicated and implemented in the school. Professional development documents were reviewed in conjunction with interview data to determine the extent to which teachers are participating in professional development related to the instruction of students with disabilities. Again, researchers looked across schools to identify any consistent patterns of difference between documents submitted by high- and low-performing schools.

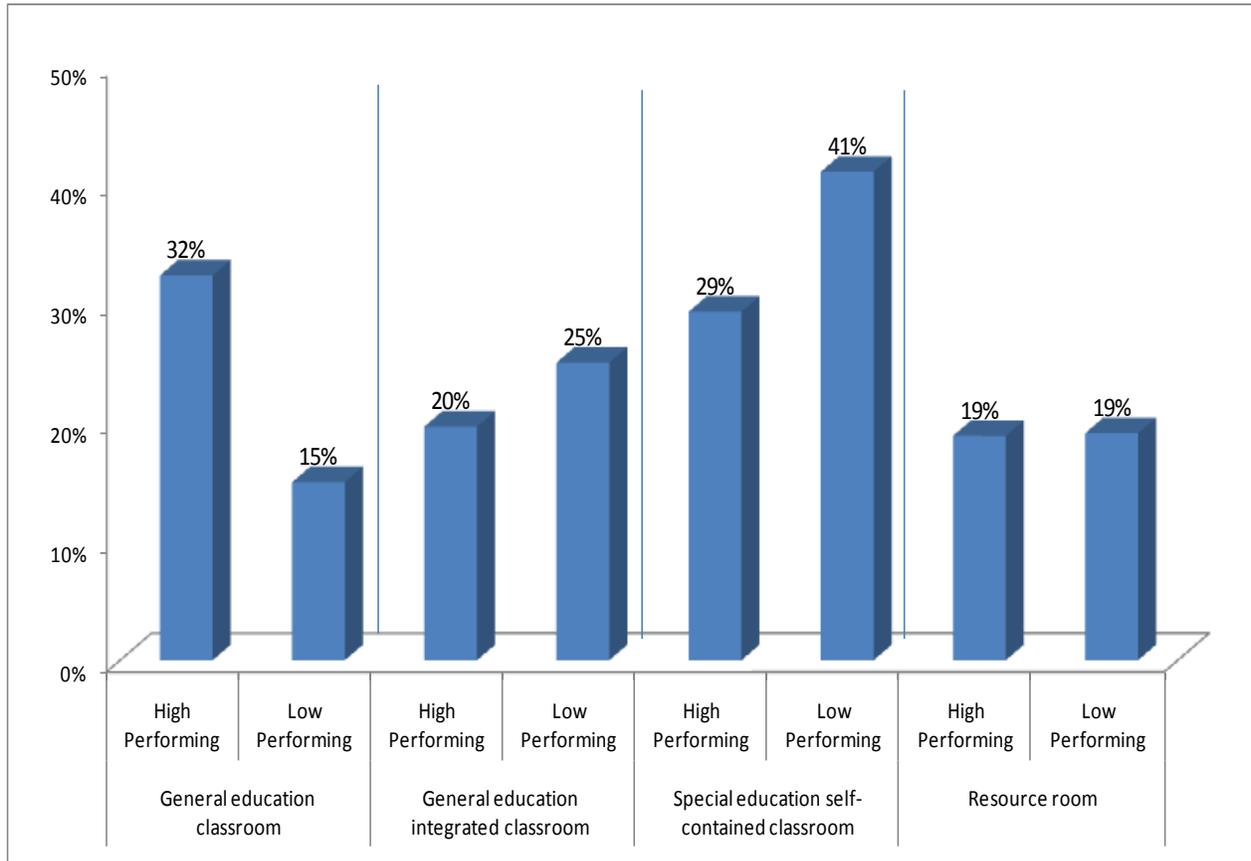
Study Limitations

This is a comparative study of high- and low-performing schools in CSD 5, with respect to the education of SWDs. However, three caveats must be noted. First, the definitions of “high-

performing” and “low-performing” used for the purposes of this study are based on schools’ 2010–11 accountability status. These definitions do not directly take into account academic performance of SWDs, nor take into account recent progress that schools may have made with respect to their SWD population.

Second, it is important to note that this study is not intended, nor able, to make determinations about what kinds of practices or strategies *cause* better outcomes for SWDs. This study identifies a set of practices and strategies that appear to be more consistently present in high-performing than in low-performing schools. There are likely many other factors that contribute to differences in SWD performance between the categories of schools, and these were not controlled for in this study. For example, according to the principal survey administered in this study, the identification rate for SWDs is higher in low-performing than in high-performing schools (20 percent compared to 17 percent). Additionally, principals in high-performing schools, on average, reported a higher percentage of SWDs in general education settings (32 percent) than did principals in low-performing schools (15 percent). Principals in low-performing schools, on average reported a higher percentage of SWDs in self-contained classrooms (29 percent) than did principals in high-performing schools (41 percent) (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Average percentage of students with disabilities by reported educational setting, for high- (n=9) and low-performing (n=4) schools



Source: CSD 5 Curriculum Audit Principal Survey (LPA, 2011)

Note: Students may be reported in multiple settings; therefore the sum across the categories do not equal 100 percent for a given school type. A “general education integrated classroom” was defined in the survey as a general education teacher and a special education teacher co-teaching in the same classroom.

These data demonstrate that SWDs in high-performing schools, in general, are served in less restrictive settings than those in low-performing schools. While one could argue that this difference in service delivery models may be one of the factors contributing to the differences in SWD performance, it could also reflect differences in the populations of SWDs. For example, those SWDs enrolled in low-performing schools may have higher needs than those in high-performing schools, and this difference may be a contributing factor to differences in their performance.

Third, most of the findings from this audit are based in large part on data gathered from a sub-sample of six schools. In some cases, school-level data are combined with data from the district-level principal survey to inform a finding. In all cases, multiple data sources are used to inform findings, and no findings are based on one data source only. Nonetheless, caution should be used in generalizing findings from these data to all schools in the district. These findings should be

used to inform district and NYCDOE personnel about challenges and effective practices that could potentially have an impact on outcomes for SWDs in CSD 5 schools and elsewhere.

KEY FINDINGS

This section presents key findings from the CSD 5 audit. Key findings reflect strategies and practices that were observed more consistently in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools, and are supported by multiple data sources. Below, we present each key finding, followed by a narrative describing the supporting evidence.

KEY FINDING 1: DATA-DRIVEN INSTRUCTION

Data are used to inform instruction more consistently in high-performing than in low-performing schools.

Key Finding 1 is supported by data from the network leader interviews, teacher surveys, school staff interviews, and document review. Together these data sources demonstrate that in both high- and low-performing schools, data on student achievement are being collected. However, the *use of data to inform instruction* is more prominent in high-performing than low-performing schools.

Supporting Evidence

Network leader interviews indicated that while both low- and high-performing schools have systems in place for gathering student achievement data, the high-performing schools are more skilled at using the data to drive instruction. For example, one network leader said, “In higher-performing schools, you have much . . . deeper analysis of the data. It’s not just that the staff (at higher-performing schools) has it and can produce it, but, they’re having conversations around it—so what does this all mean for our students and their improvement of instruction.”

Responses to the teacher surveys demonstrated the differences between high- and low-performing schools regarding the use of student achievement data. When planning and delivering instruction, more teachers in high-performing schools refer to data from multiple sources at least once or twice per week than teachers in low-performing schools: 31.5 percent versus 20.3 percent for data from annual standardized exams; 40.3 percent versus 34.1 percent for formative, periodic assessment data; and 27.3 percent versus 23.8 percent for data provided by school specialists (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Number and percentage of teachers surveyed that reported using various forms of data when planning and delivering instruction by frequency of use, for high- (n=73–82) and low-performing (n=84–95) schools

	High-Performing	Low-Performing
Data from annual standardized exams		
Never / Almost Never	6 (8.2%)	11 (12.4%)
A Few Times a Semester	21 (28.8%)	31 (34.8%)
1–2 Times a Month	23 (31.5%)	29 (32.6%)
1–2 Times a Week or More	23 (31.5%)	18 (20.2%)
Formative, periodic assessment data (e.g., from AIMSWeb, Acuity)		
Never / Almost Never	8 (10.4%)	11 (12.5%)
A Few Times a Semester	11 (14.3%)	17 (19.3%)
1–2 Times a Month	27 (35.1%)	30 (34.1%)
1–2 Times a Week or More	31 (40.3%)	30 (34.1%)
Data provided by a specialist (e.g., reading specialist)		
Never / Almost Never	8 (11%)	20 (23.8%)
A Few Times a Semester	23 (31.5%)	22 (26.2%)
1–2 Times a Month	22 (30.1%)	22 (26.2%)
1–2 Times a Week or More	20 (27.3%)	20 (23.8%)

Source: CSD 5 Curriculum Audit Teacher Survey (LPA, 2011)

School staff interviews also revealed that more teachers from high-performing schools (21 of 21) than low-performing schools (17 of 21) said they use data to guide their instruction of SWDs. Among staff interviewed from high-performing schools, 11 teachers gave detailed examples of how they might use data to adjust their instructional strategies and/or content focus in a particular lesson, as compared to 9 teachers from low-performing schools. Teachers from high-performing schools described using achievement data to drive instruction in a variety of ways. A general education teacher from a CTT classroom said, “We do running records, unit assessments, teacher observation. We do many tests and quizzes. We’re constantly evaluating the kids. We actually dissect the data and come up with a strategy that we see.” A third grade general education teacher with SWDs in the classroom shared the following:

“I take each individualized data and look at it piece by piece, really [as] often as possible, subscale by subscale, for the objective for the day. For example, character analysis—I would look at the data to see how that particular child has scored from baseline on, literally understanding a character, and then making inferences about that character’s personality, and then design an activity for that child depending on the data. If the child is struggling to even pick out a main character in a book, I’m not going to then ask them inference questions. [The data allow me to] start where we need to start.”

Documents submitted by the three high-performing schools demonstrated coverage of topics related to data use in professional development (e.g., Looking at Data and the CCSS; Conference Notes; Acuity Instructional Workshop; Looking at Assessment to Increase Student Achievement – ARIS and Acuity; ARIS Training; Looking at Student Work; Protocols for Analyzing Student Work; ECLASS-2 Training). Meanwhile, documents submitted by the three low-performing schools demonstrated no coverage of topics related to data use in their professional development offerings. Additionally, the average Quality Review score for “Gather and Analyze Data” was higher for high-performing schools (3.7) than for low performing schools (3.1).

KEY FINDING 2: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Teachers in high-performing schools implement differentiated instruction to a greater degree than teachers in low-performing schools.

Key Finding 2 is supported by data from the teacher surveys, school staff interviews, and classroom observations. Together these data sources demonstrate that in both high-and low-performing schools, there is some effort to implement differentiated instruction. However, this practice is more prevalent in high-performing schools’ general education and co-taught settings than in those in low-performing schools.

What Is Differentiated Instruction?

To differentiate instruction is to recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, and preferences in learning and interests, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process of teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is and assisting him or her in the learning process. (http://aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgroundpapers/differentiated_instruction_udl)

Supporting Evidence

According to responses on the teacher survey, the majority of all teachers in both high- performing and low-performing schools differentiate their instruction at least once a week. However, the percentage of teachers reporting this was slightly higher in high-performing than in low-performing schools, for differentiating content (73 percent versus 70 percent), process (81 percent versus 78 percent), and product (79 percent versus 77 percent). The difference in these data between the two groups of schools was more pronounced among general education teachers of SWDs. More general education teachers in high-performing schools than low-performing schools reported differentiating content (84 percent versus 67 percent), process (94 percent versus 78 percent), and product (88 percent versus 78 percent), at least once a week.

When asked to describe examples of differentiated instruction strategies used in the classroom, teachers interviewed in high-performing schools were slightly more likely to give clear examples of how they differentiated instruction than were teachers from low-performing schools. Among high-performing schools, all 21 teachers interviewed said that they differentiate their instruction,

and 12 of those 21 teachers were able to provide detailed examples of how they differentiate their instruction. For example, a general education teacher with SWDs in the classroom reported,

“The content will be the same, but ... I do what’s called tiering ... The kids are given work according to what they can possibly do, so that, you know, everyone has some success ... So what product is produced at the end should reflect that. I gave them [all] the graphic organizer today. They had to classify, but then they had to produce a sentence. You know, one group had to produce three [sentences]. The other group had to produce one sentence. And that, that’s enough for them—for that particular group.”

Another teacher described differentiating levels of responses expected from different students in this way:

“I modify it with the type of questions I ask the students and the expectation of our answers when they respond back to me. Today ... [one group] had multiple choice questions, [another group] had fill-in-the-answer questions where they had to explain their answer. Whereas, another group had all fill-in where they had to really explain themselves more in-depth.”

Nine of the 21 teachers gave examples of differentiated instruction that reflected a general understanding of what differentiated instruction is, but were vague.

Among low-performing schools, 18 of 21 teachers interviewed said that they differentiate their instruction. Nine of those 18 teachers were able to provide detailed examples of how they differentiate their instruction. The other 9 of those 18 teachers said they differentiate instruction, but did not provide a clear example.

In high-performing schools, differentiated instruction was being implemented in two of the five general education classrooms observed, in both of the two co-taught classrooms, and in five of the seven self-contained classrooms. In low-performing schools it was not observed in any general education classrooms, and in only one of six co-taught classrooms and one of four self-contained classrooms. Differentiated instruction strategies observed in high-performing schools included grouping, leveled text, and varied levels of expectations for complexity in independent seat work and homework assignments.

KEY FINDING 3: SCHOOL-WIDE BEHAVIOR PLAN

A school-wide behavior plan, reflecting principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and implemented consistently throughout the school, was more prevalent in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools.

What Is PBIS?

“PBIS is a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students.”

(from http://www.pbis.org/pbis_faq.aspx)

Key Finding 3 is supported by data from the teacher surveys, school staff interviews, classroom observations, and document review. Data sources from schools in CSD 5 demonstrate that while both low- and high-performing schools described and were observed implementing a variety of behavior management strategies in classrooms, the staff at schools in high-performing schools were more likely to be guided by a school-wide behavior plan that reflected principles of PBIS. In fact, three interviewees from low-performing schools indicated that the implementation of a school-wide behavior plan is the one change they would like to see in their schools.

Supporting Evidence

According to teacher surveys, 76 percent of all teachers in high-performing schools agree or strongly agree that their school has a school-wide behavior plan in place, compared to only 38 percent of all teachers in low-performing schools. Furthermore, 37 percent of all teachers in low-performing schools, compared to only 15 percent of all teachers in high-performing schools, strongly disagree that their school has a school-wide behavior plan in place. In high-performing schools, 73 percent of all teachers agree or strongly agree that the strategies they use for managing behavior are consistent with those used in classrooms throughout the school. This compares with only 39 percent of teachers in low-performing.

Interviewees from high-performing schools were much more likely than those from low-performing schools to describe following a school-wide behavior plan grounded in PBIS. Among high-performing schools, all 15 teachers interviewed and four of the five administrators said they had a school-wide behavior plan, as compared to 4 of 11 teachers interviewed and four of five administrators interviewed from low-performing schools. The principal of one of the high-performing schools described the school-wide behavior plan in this way: “This is the first year we started [PBIS]. In September we implemented it, because we were trying to find a way where we could address behavior and just positive supports. My guidance counselor, she’s the one at the helm of the [PBIS] team.”

Two of the teachers interviewed from one of the low-performing schools said there is no school-wide behavior management plan in place, but reported that there are plans to implement a PBIS plan next year. Three of the teachers interviewed in the other low-performing schools reported that there is no school-wide behavior plan in place at their school, but said that this is the one change they would like to see. According to one of these teachers, “I would like to see a school-wide behavior plan; we seem to have a lot of kids who have emotional and behavior disorders ... There needs to be some type of a structure of what to do, when.”

Documents submitted by two of the high performing schools reflected principles of PBIS, implemented consistently throughout the school. One school submitted a PBIS plan with several supporting documents, including lessons for a different value characteristic each month (e.g., responsibility, citizenship), documentation of a school store where students can redeem points

given for good behavior “Student of the Month” certificates, and a “Super Effort” award. Evidence of a PBIS plan was observed in one of the classrooms in a high-performing school, where a poster on the classroom door stated, “This is a PBIS School,” and there were small posters describing what PBIS looks like. None of the low-performing schools submitted documents reflecting principles of PBIS being implemented consistently throughout the school. One school submitted a Student Behavior Contract, including a Code of Consideration, the NYC Code of Conduct, and a student behavior contract. Neither of the other two low-performing schools submitted any documents related to a school-wide behavior plan.

KEY FINDING 4: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While both high-and low-performing schools offer a variety of professional development (PD) opportunities related to teaching students with disabilities, these opportunities are more sustainable and useful in high-performing schools.

Key Finding 4 is supported by data from network leader interviews, teacher surveys, school staff interviews, and document review. While there was no apparent difference in the number and the focus of PD opportunities related to teaching students with disabilities between high-and low-performing schools, these sessions were reported to be more helpful by teachers in high-performing schools. The strength of PD described by staff in high-performing schools was in the availability of building-level coaches, and the effort to provide interactive, sustainable, and coherently focused PD sessions.

Supporting Evidence

According to respondents on the teacher survey, a higher percentage of teachers from high-performing schools than from low-performing schools reported professional development on a number of topics related to the instruction of SWDs to be very helpful. Topics included developing standards-based lessons, using formative assessments, differentiated instruction, teaching students reading skills, teaching students how to comprehend subject area content, collaborative learning for students, and inquiry-based learning (see Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Number and percentage of teachers surveyed that reported receiving professional development on various topics, by helpfulness, for high- (n=89) and low-performing (n=98) schools

	High-Performing	Low-Performing
Developing standards-based lessons		
Not Helpful	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.1%)
Minimally Helpful	10 (12.3%)	10 (10.9%)
Moderately Helpful	27 (33.3%)	33 (35.9%)
Very Helpful	32 (39.5%)	31 (33.7%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	10 (12.3%)	17 (18.5%)
Using formative assessments		
Not Helpful	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.2%)
Minimally Helpful	7 (8.9%)	7 (7.5%)
Moderately Helpful	30 (38%)	37 (39.8%)
Very Helpful	33 (41.8%)	30 (32.3%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	7 (8.9%)	17 (18.3%)
Differentiated instruction		
Not Helpful	3 (3.7%)	3 (3.2%)
Minimally Helpful	9 (11.1%)	13 (14%)
Moderately Helpful	24 (29.6%)	26 (28%)
Very Helpful	38 (46.9%)	36 (38.7%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	7 (8.6%)	15 (16.1%)
Collaborative learning for students		
Not Helpful	4 (4.9%)	2 (2.2%)
Minimally Helpful	12 (14.8%)	7 (7.5%)
Moderately Helpful	22 (27.2%)	32 (34.4%)
Very Helpful	30 (37%)	23 (24.7%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	13 (16%)	29 (31.2%)
Inquiry-based learning (such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, or challenge-based learning)		
Not Helpful	5 (6.2%)	4 (4.4%)
Minimally Helpful	12 (15%)	11 (12.1%)
Moderately Helpful	25 (31.2%)	36 (39.6%)
Very Helpful	29 (36.2%)	20 (22%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	9 (11.2%)	20 (22%)
Teaching Reading Skills		
Not Helpful	5 (6.2%)	2 (2.1%)
Minimally Helpful	66 (7.4%)	11 (11.7%)
Moderately Helpful	25 (30.9%)	23 (24.5%)
Very Helpful	34 (42%)	32 (34%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	11 (13.6%)	26 (27.7%)
Teaching Students How to Comprehend Subject-Area Content		
Not Helpful	4 (4.9%)	2 (2.2%)
Minimally Helpful	10 (12.3%)	8 (8.8%)
Moderately Helpful	29 (35.8%)	30 (33%)
Very Helpful	24 (29.6%)	24 (26.4%)
Did Not Receive PD on This Topic	14 (17.3%)	27 (29.7%)

Source: CSD 5 Curriculum Audit Teacher Survey (LPA, 2011)

School staff interviews also indicated that professional development related to the instruction of SWDs was more helpful in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools. More general education teachers interviewed in high-performing schools (5 of 10) than in low-performing schools (1 of 8) reported receiving professional development that focused on SWDs. Additionally, slightly more teachers interviewed from high-performing schools (17 of 21) than low-performing schools (14 of 21) reported that the professional development they received regarding SWDs was helpful.

When asked to describe professional development sessions that were particularly helpful, one general education teacher at a high-performing school described participating in a three-day workshop on the Common Core State Standards, which included discussion on

“... rigor, relevance and relationships. And I think that helped a lot because it helped me modify my lessons more and be more in touch with the students overall ... The workshop was great. I felt reenergized afterwards ... I learned this; I really want to try it. You know, see if it works ... They [also] talked about questioning techniques, how you could differentiate—you know, tier questions.”

Another teacher of SWDs from a high-performing school described a helpful professional development session this way:

“I attended a workshop on curriculum mapping. So, I’ll know basically what my students [with disabilities] should be doing based on the curriculum, and how to adapt or how to differentiate instruction ... It started as a lecture, and then we worked in groups. And we started planning different activities where we could differentiate instruction. “

When asked about the quality of professional development, teachers surveyed from high-performing schools strongly agreed more often than teachers surveyed from low-performing schools with the following statements about their PD experiences during and since the 2009–10 school year: PD has been sustained and coherently focused; PD has included time to think carefully about, try, and evaluate new ideas; PD has been closely connected to the school’s goals; PD has included opportunities to work productively with colleagues in the school; and PD has addressed the needs of students in their classroom. A network leader added that on-site differentiated professional development is a strength in high-performing schools, saying, “When you have higher-performing schools, that’s because they do differentiate what a teacher needs. There is more follow-up on the part of those people who are coaches—instructional leaders go into classrooms and they see what teachers need, and then they do the PD that is required.”

In discussing professional development sessions that were not helpful, a special education teacher from a low-performing school said this:

“I find most PDs that are done in this school tend to be a little less informative and useful. I don’t think it’s very organized, it’s not planned. Sometimes it’s done in house by

teachers who are trying to maybe turnkey something that they went to, and ... because they don't own it, it's not something that they can, you know, teach you. Sometimes when you go, well when you're inside the building ... so when you're trying to learn something, you'll see like a student come and be like 'I need you...', or you know, you'll get pulled out because, oh the substitute that was supposed to cover you never showed up, so you know, you miss 45 minutes of a PD that you were supposed to be doing."

Documents submitted by the high-performing schools demonstrated, on average, *some* coverage of topics related to SWDs, including multiple sessions on differentiated instruction, the Special Education Student Information System (SEGIS), using IEPs, and alternate assessment portfolios. Documents submitted by the low-performing schools demonstrated *little to no* coverage of topics related to SWDs, including limited sessions on differentiated instruction and SEGIS, and a session on teaching reading skills.

KEY FINDING 5: COLLABORATION

Productive opportunities for collaboration among general education and special education staff are more prevalent in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools.

Key Finding 5 is supported by data from the principal survey and teacher surveys. While there is some evidence of both formal and informal collaboration in both high-and low-performing schools, staff in high-performing schools report more informal collaboration and more support for collaboration from administration, and they more often report that they are likely to this time in productive ways to improve instruction for students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

According to principal surveys, informal collaboration between special and general education teachers was more common in high-performing schools than low-performing schools. Principal survey data showed that 10 of 11 (91 percent) principals from high-performing schools agree or strongly agree that informal collaboration was typical, in contrast to four of the six (66 percent) principals of low-performing schools.

More teachers surveyed in high-performing schools reported a high degree of administrative support for teacher collaboration than teachers in low-performing schools (60 percent versus 30 percent). Additionally, more teachers in high-performing (80 percent) than low-performing schools (55 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that special education and general education teachers routinely use common planning time to share knowledge and strategies with each other (see Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Extent to which teachers agree that special education and general education teachers at their school routinely use common planning or professional development time to share knowledge and strategies with each other, for high- (n=89) and low-performing (n=98) schools

	High-Performing	Low-Performing
Strongly Disagree	4 (4.8%)	8 (8.7%)
Disagree	10 (11.9%)	23 (25%)
Agree	37 (44%)	37 (40.2%)
Strongly Agree	30 (35.7%)	14 (15.2%)
Not Sure / NA	3 (3.6%)	10 (10.9%)

Source: CSD 5 Curriculum Audit Teacher Survey (LPA, 2011)

KEY FINDING 6: AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF SUPPORT STAFF

The availability and support of both paraprofessionals and related service providers is higher in high- than in low-performing schools.

Key Finding 6 is supported by data from principal surveys, teacher surveys, school staff interviews, and classroom observations. These data sources indicate that staff at high-performing schools rely more than staff at low-performing schools on classroom paraprofessionals, one-on-one paraprofessionals, and related service providers to support the instruction of SWDs. Additionally, the amount of staff support in high-performing schools appears to be adequate more often than in low-performing schools.

Supporting Evidence

Principals from both high- and low-performing schools reported insufficient support staff at similar rates. However, principals of low-performing schools were more likely than their high-performing school counterparts to report insufficient classroom paraprofessionals. Five of the six (83 percent) principals of low-performing schools reported they had insufficient classroom paraprofessionals at their school, compared with 4 of the 10 (40 percent) principals from high-performing schools.

Other data sources indicated a higher reliance on paraprofessionals among staff at high-performing, compared to low-performing schools. Of teachers who responded to the teacher survey, a higher percentage of teachers in high-performing schools reported relying on classroom paraprofessionals to a great extent to effectively deliver instruction to SWDs (27 percent) compared with teachers in low-performing schools (19 percent). In observed classrooms, classroom paraprofessionals were available in 5 of 10 classrooms in high-performing schools, compared with 2 of 8 classrooms in low-performing schools. In one special education self-contained classroom in a high-performing school, for example, a classroom paraprofessional was observed working with a small group of three students during a lesson on making inferences and drawing conclusions. In another special education self-contained classroom in a high-performing

school, a classroom paraprofessional was observed assisting a student with clarification of directions. Other roles of classroom paraprofessionals in high-performing schools included supporting student engagement and circulating around the classroom during independent seat work time, assisting students as needed.

The teacher survey also showed differences in the degree to which teachers rely on one-on-one paraprofessionals and related service providers when teaching SWDs. Specifically, 44 percent of special education teachers in high-performing schools reported relying on these support staff “to a great extent,” compared with 15 percent in low-performing schools. In classrooms, one-on-one paraprofessionals were observed in 1 of 10 classrooms, while there were no one-on-one paraprofessionals observed in low-performing classrooms. Seventy percent of special education teachers in high-performing schools reported relying on a related service provider to a great extent while only 30 percent of special education teachers in low-performing schools reported the same.

Among staff interviewed, in high-performing schools, all 12 interviewees described support staff that have been helpful in educating students with disabilities in their school. The roles of support staff mentioned include SETSS teachers, guidance counselors, speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, literacy and math coaches, and assistant principals in charge of special education. In contrast to this, among low-performing schools, only 8 of 14 interviewees identified support staff that have been helpful in educating students with disabilities in their school. Support staff mentioned included SETSS teachers, counselors, a math coach, a special education lead teacher, and a special education supervisor/coordinator. Two teachers from a low-performing school indicated that there is a need for more support staff, including a behavior interventionist and more paraprofessionals. One special education teacher in a low-performing school reported, “[We need] one-on-ones, we need one-on-one paras. [The students with emotional and behavioral disabilities] need some serious help. I don’t need an extra teacher necessarily because we have two and it’s fine. It’s perfect. We need more paras.”

KEY FINDING 7: ADMINISTRATOR SUPPORT

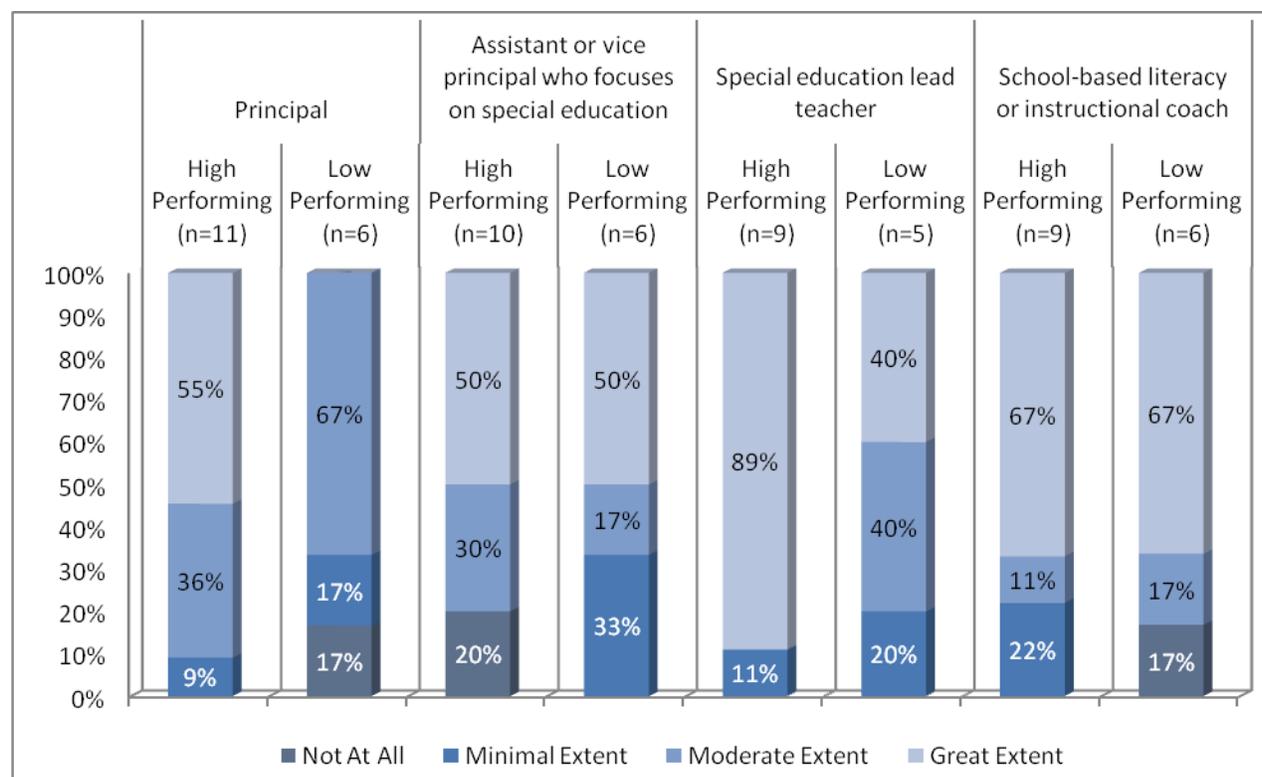
Administrative leadership to support the effective instruction of SWDs is stronger in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools.

Key Finding 7 is supported by data from the principal survey, teacher surveys, and school staff interviews. Communication, expectations, and monitoring of the implementation of PD and the quality of teaching are among the factors reported more prevalently by staff in high- than in low-performing schools.

Supporting Evidence

Teachers in high-performing schools appeared more likely than those in low-performing schools to receive greater levels of direct support from administrative staff to improve their instruction of SWDs, according to principal reports (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. Principal respondents’ perceptions of the extent of direct support provided by staff to improve teachers’ instruction of students with disabilities, by staff category, for high- and low-performing schools



Source: CSD 5 Curriculum Audit Principal Survey (LPA, 2011)

For example, while 6 of the 11 (55 percent) principals in high-performing schools described the extent of direct support they provided to teachers as “great,” none of the 6 principals in low-performing schools did so. In addition, eight of the nine (89 percent) principals in high-performing schools reported a “great extent” of direct support from their school’s special education lead teacher, in comparison to two of five (40 percent) principals in low-performing schools. Seven of the eight (88 percent) principals in high-performing schools described the support from special education personnel at the district office as “moderate” or “great,” whereas three of the five (60 percent) principals in low-performing schools reported that the school received no direct support at all.

In addition to being more likely to report that they provide a great extent of direct support to staff to improve instruction of SWDs, principals in high-performing schools reported a greater degree

of knowledge about issues related to SWDs than principals in low-performing schools. Seven of the 12 high-performing-school principal survey respondents (58 percent) reported that their knowledge of issues related to SWDs was “high,” compared with 2 of the 6 principal survey respondents (33 percent) in low-performing schools.

According to responses on the teacher survey, there are a higher percentage of teachers in high-performing than in low-performing schools who strongly agreed that their principal demonstrated strong leadership skills. For example, more teachers in high-performing than low-performing schools strongly agreed with the following statements:

- Principal makes clear to the staff expectation for meeting instructional goals (54 percent versus 16 percent).
- Principal communicates a clear vision for the school (49 percent versus 16 percent).
- Principal sets high standards for teaching (54 percent versus 19 percent).
- Principal presses teachers to implement what they have learned in PD (54 percent versus 18 percent).
- Principal carefully tracks student academic progress (59 percent versus 17 percent).
- Principal actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school (52 percent versus 13 percent).

Teachers interviewed from high-performing schools supported the perspective of teachers who responded to the survey, indicating that their school administration is visible and supportive to a higher degree than reported by teachers in low-performing schools. Among high-performing schools, 19 of 21 teachers described the administration as supportive, and only 1 of the teachers described the administration as *not* supportive. Sixteen of the 21 described a visible administrative presence, and no interviewees described an absence of a visible administrative presence. In describing the presence of administrators in the classroom, one general education teacher with SWDs in the classroom said, “[The administrators] come in and I feel like it’s a friendly [climate]. I don’t feel like I’m in trouble or anything like that. But they come in all the time, and especially the principal. Like some schools, you wouldn’t see the principal, but, no, I see her often.” A special education teacher in a self-contained setting agreed, saying that the administrators “are in the classrooms; they’re in the hallways; they will walk around. They come in the room; they say ‘Good Morning.’ They talk to the children. They talk to the teachers. They’re always present.” One special education in a co-taught setting described the support available from the administration: “We had an issue with data—like, what should we teach? Should this be a priority over this? And we spoke to the principal about it and spoke to our immediate supervisor, just to see what they would think about it. [Together] we made a decision on which strategy or skill ... we were going to teach first. So they are very, very active.”

In contrast, among low-performing schools, only 10 of 21 teachers described the administration as supportive, and 7 of the 21 described the administration as *not* supportive. Ten of the 21 interviewees described a visible administrative presence, while 8 interviewees described an

administrative presence that was not visible. A general education teacher from a co-taught classroom summed this up by saying, “I don’t really feel like there is any support at all. A lot of times it’s just out of sight, out of mind. They don’t really do anything to support us.” Similarly, when a general education teacher was asked what one thing he or she would like to see change at the school, the response was, “I think one thing is a new principal. It’s what the school needs. There is no organization; there is no structure; there is no behavior plan; there is nothing expected for students to achieve. There are no expectations for the students to achieve a certain level of behavior. It just seems to be to do well on the test, and that’s all that matters.”

CONCLUSION

This report presents data demonstrating differences between high-and low-performing schools in CSD 5 related to strategies and practices for educating SWDs. The following key findings were presented:

1. ***Data are used to inform instruction*** more consistently in high-performing than in low-performing schools.
2. Teachers in high-performing schools implement ***differentiated instruction*** to a greater degree than teachers in low-performing schools.
3. ***A school-wide behavior plan, reflecting principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)***, and implemented consistently throughout the school, was more prevalent in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools.
4. While both high-and low-performing schools offer a variety of ***professional development (PD)*** opportunities related to teaching students with disabilities, these opportunities are more sustainable and useful in high-performing schools.
5. Productive opportunities supported by administration ***for collaboration among general education and special education staff*** are more prevalent in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools.
6. ***The availability and support of both paraprofessionals and related service providers*** is higher in high- than in low-performing schools.
7. ***Administrative leadership*** to support the effective instruction of SWDs is stronger in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools.

These findings reveal areas in which high-performing schools are demonstrating success, and low-performing schools are experiencing challenges. The data presented in this report can be used to inform recommendations and action planning for improvement in CSD 5 schools and elsewhere.

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