

# P.S. 84 José de Diego

## FINAL REPORT



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# Introduction

## About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of P.S. 84 José de Diego conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being in corrective action (year 1) under the New York State Education Department (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. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

## About P.S. 84 José de Diego

Located in Brooklyn, P.S. 84 José de Diego (K084) is an elementary school with 414 students from prekindergarten through Grade 5. The school population is 11 percent black or African-American, 80 percent Hispanic or Latino, 6 percent white, and 3 percent Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Approximately 27 percent of the students are limited English proficient, and 21 percent are students with disabilities.

The majority of students, 84 percent, are eligible for free lunch, and 5 percent are eligible for reduced-price lunch. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school was 93 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In 2009–10, P.S. 84 José de Diego did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students, the Hispanic or Latino subgroup, and economically disadvantaged students. In 2010–11, the school's state accountability status was designated as "Corrective Action (year 1)."<sup>2</sup> Because the school was designated as being in corrective action, it participated in the ESCA.

## Audit Process at P.S. 84 José de Diego

The ESCA approach utilized at the elementary school level examines six topic areas related to literacy: student engagement, instruction, academic interventions and supports, professional learning and collaboration, curriculum, and assessments and their use. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by P.S. 84 José de Diego. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school's use.

These reports were presented to the school at a co-interpretation<sup>SM</sup> meeting on June 13, 2011. During this meeting, 10 stakeholders from the P.S. 84 José de Diego community read the reports. Through a facilitated and collaborative group process, they identified individual findings and then developed and prioritized key findings that emerged from information in the reports.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/5d/AOR-2010-331400010084.pdf>. Accessed on August 18, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/5d/AOR-2010-331400010084.pdf>. Accessed on August 18, 2011.

The remainder of this report presents the key findings that emerged from the co-interpretation process and the actionable recommendations that Learning Point Associates developed in response. Please note that there is not necessarily a one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings are considered as a group, and the recommended strategies are those that we believe are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student performance at P.S. 84 José de Diego.

## Key Findings

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

### Critical Key Findings

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:**

The school does not have a systematic vocabulary program.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the documents submitted by the school and classroom observations. The school provided no evidence in documents or observations of a systematic vocabulary program. Evidence that individual teachers implement a vocabulary program in a systematic way was present in only 5 of the 19 observed classrooms.

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

Word work is not evident in all classrooms.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by information from classroom observations. Word work, or systematic word study, refers to students' ability to recognize words, both aurally and visually. None of the visited classrooms included instructional time spent on word-study lessons, though six classrooms did have related charts posted around the room. Fifteen classrooms had word walls, but these walls did not always meet grade-level criteria.

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

Inconsistent structures are in place for independent reading.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from classroom observations. While students need to be reading at the appropriate levels for their age and grade in order for classroom instruction to be most effective, reading programs varied among classrooms, and it was not apparent whether students were reading at level. Of the observed classrooms, 12 of 19 listed independent reading as an activity.

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:**

The workshop model is not centered around the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by information from classroom observations. Only 7 of the 19 observed classrooms followed a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction. In the majority of the classrooms, teachers did not demonstrate tasks or provide explicit instructions for students.

## Positive Key Findings

### **POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:**

Opportunities are available for general education teachers to have scheduled meetings and collaborative sessions.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by information from interviews, teacher survey results, and the review of school-submitted documents. Teachers have common planning periods at least twice a week and a working lunch once a week. All of the surveyed teachers indicated that they have scheduled opportunities to meet and work with other teachers multiple times per week.

### **POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:**

Teachers believe that there is adequate support for identifying and servicing struggling students.

Positive Key Finding 2 is supported by information from school interviews, in which 90 percent of respondents indicated that struggling students received effective supports. Seventy percent of the respondents also indicated that these supports were provided in a timely manner. The interview respondents also mentioned services and supports for struggling students, such as the Extended Day and Wilson programs.

# Recommendations

## Overview of Recommendations

Participants at the P.S. 84 José de Diego co-interpretation meeting prioritized several key findings that focused on areas in which the school can improve its ELA instruction and curriculum. The findings address several instructional areas where an essential component of literacy is not implemented in a consistent way across classrooms. The key findings note that vocabulary, word work, independent reading, and use of the gradual release of responsibility method were evident in some of the observed classrooms but not in others.

The recommendations in this report address both literacy and implementation. The recommendations refer to implementing with fidelity, which refers not only to implementation of instructional strategies and models as articulated, but also implementation throughout the school.

One of the strengths of P.S. 84 José de Diego is that teachers have time and opportunities for collaboration. These opportunities may be built upon and focused so that they address the recommendations in this report.

## THE FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide word-study curriculum.
2. Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide plan to increase the effectiveness of independent reading.
3. Develop and implement a plan to ensure challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction in every classroom.
4. Develop and implement a multiyear plan to align the school's curriculum, instruction, assessments, and instructional materials to the Common Core standards.
5. Develop and implement a multiyear professional development plan that follows a job-embedded and sustained professional learning process and focuses on content related to the following topics identified during the co-interpretation: word study, independent reading, effective literacy instruction, and the Common Core.

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

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

## Recommendation 1: Word-Study Curriculum

**Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide word-study curriculum.**

### LINK TO RESEARCH

Word recognition is basic to reading comprehension (Chall, 1983). There is a strong relationship between word recognition and higher-order comprehension processes (Brown & Felton, 1990; Kame'enui, Simmons, Baker, Chard, Dickson, et al., 1998). Weak word-identification skills “are strongly coupled with poor reading comprehension in both children and adults” (Adams & Bruck, 1993, p. 119). When decoding requires little attention, more attention can be allocated to comprehending text.

It is critical that word study include phonics and vocabulary. Although a word-study curriculum includes more than these two elements (as will be described in the Implementation Considerations section), phonics and vocabulary anchor word study and are essential for developing decoding skills and expanding one's reading comprehension. Research on phonics and vocabulary are briefly presented in this section.

**Phonics.** The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that systematic phonics instruction produces a significant impact on students' growth as readers. Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Ranking, Mistretta, Yokoi, et al. (1996) conclude that the development of letter-sound associations and explicit decoding instruction focusing on the sounds of words is definitely associated with later reading success. Programs that include systematic instruction on letter-sound correspondences lead to higher achievement in both word recognition and spelling, at least in the early grades and especially for struggling or economically disadvantaged students (Adams, 1990). There is no significant difference in effectiveness among the kinds of systematic phonics instruction.

**Vocabulary.** One of the most persistent findings in reading research is that the size of students' vocabulary relates strongly to their reading comprehension and overall academic success (Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Becker, 1977; Davis, 1942; Whipple, 1925). Although most word learning occurs incidentally through experiences with oral language and wide reading (National Reading Panel, 2000), intentional, explicit teaching of specific words and word-learning strategies can both add words to students' vocabularies (Tomeson & Aarnoutse, 1998; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990) and improve reading comprehension of texts containing those words (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Effective instruction includes opportunities for both incidental word learning and intentional word learning. Vocabulary instruction should address academic vocabulary, which is critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in school.

Research shows that background knowledge is more important to the understanding of reading than IQ. According to Marzano (2004), the most important thing a teacher can do to ensure that students have the background knowledge to understand the content they will encounter in the areas of science, social studies, and so on, is to provide students with direct instruction in academic vocabulary terms. Academic vocabulary is the vocabulary critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in school. Vocabulary instruction in specific content-area terms builds up students' background knowledge in the content areas.

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

New York City Department  
of Education: Standards/  
Curriculum

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/EnglishLanguageArts/StandardsCurriculum/default.htm>

When students understand the academic vocabulary, it is easier for them to understand the information they will read and hear in class.

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

### 1. Guide the word-study curriculum with the following goals.

- Students are able to read a large core of high-frequency words.
- Students understand simple and complex letter-sound relationships.
- Students know and use patterns within words.
- Students are continually expanding their vocabularies.
- Students use word-solving strategies.
- Students use references, resources, and proofreading.

### 2. Build a vocabulary of common words.

In English, about 120 words make up half of all written text. Students must learn to quickly and automatically recognize and spell these most common words (*of, and, the, is, etc.*). As part of word study, teachers should assess students' sight word knowledge and ensure that students know these high-frequency words. *Fry's Instant Word List* or the *Dolch List* can be used to assess students' sight word knowledge. (These lists can be found on numerous websites.) Expectations on sight word knowledge can be established for each grade level.

In the primary grades, the words on the word walls should be high-frequency words. Teachers should introduce five new words each week until mid-April. The goal is to have all students know the words with some automaticity before going to the next grade level. *Month-by-Month Phonics* by Pat Cunningham identifies appropriate word wall words.

### 3. Provide systematic phonics instruction in a balanced literacy program.

Phonics instruction works best when it is part of a balanced literacy program. Phonics should not dominate reading instruction. A program of systematic phonics instruction identifies a carefully selected and useful set of letter-sound relationships and then organizes the instruction of these relationships into a logical instructional sequence. Characteristics of effective phonics instruction include the following:

- Teachers explicitly and systematically instruct students in how to relate letters and sounds, how to break spoken words into sounds, and how to blend sounds to form words.
- Students understand why they are learning the relationships between letters and sounds.
- Students apply their knowledge of phonics as they read words, sentences, and text.
- Students apply what they learn about sounds and letters to their own writing.
- Instruction can be adapted to the needs of individual students as informed by assessment.

- Students are provided with many opportunities to practice the letter-sound relationships they are learning.

Research suggests that the most effective phonics instruction is planned and sequential, explicit, and systematic. *Month-by-Month Phonics*, one of the programs recommended by the New York City Department of Education, meets these criteria. In the program, students begin by learning phonemic awareness, letter names, and sounds. They progress to learning digraphs, blends, and vowel patterns in one- and two-syllable words and then to decoding and spelling polysyllabic words. This program also helps teachers meet the needs of the range of learners in their classrooms by being multilevel.

#### **4. Provide opportunities to broaden students' vocabulary exposure.**

*Vocabulary* refers to words students must know to read increasingly demanding text with comprehension. Effective vocabulary instruction includes opportunities for both incidental word learning and intentional word teaching. A comprehensive vocabulary program should include the following components:

- Frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences
- Teaching individual words through explicit vocabulary instruction
- Teaching word learning strategies
- Strategies for fostering word consciousness (Graves, 2006)

*Vocabulary* can be learned through reading and talking (incidental word learning). To promote incidental word learning, teachers provide opportunities to use oral language experiences at school to promote vocabulary growth. Reading children's books aloud, particularly when accompanied by teacher-student talk, can increase students' vocabularies. Once students are reading on their own, a wide range of reading materials will aid vocabulary growth.

Intentional and explicit instruction of specific words and word-learning strategies also is important. In selecting specific words to teach, teachers should consider two criteria: importance (words that are important for understanding a specific reading selection or concept) and usefulness and frequency (words that are generally useful for students to know and that they are likely to encounter with some frequency in their reading).

Students should be given a student-friendly definition of the words targeted for explicit instruction. They also should be repeatedly exposed to new words in multiple oral and written contexts and provided sufficient practice opportunities for learning words. Researchers estimate that it could take as many as 17 exposures for a student to learn a new word. Repeated exposure will be most effective if exposures appear over an extended period of time. For this reason, a small number of words should be selected for each week and receive attention all week. Teachers should give students sufficient opportunities to use new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing, and independent reading.

Students require strategies that will support them in learning new vocabulary independently. Students can be taught the word-learning strategies, such as learning to use context clues to determine word meanings, learning to use dictionaries and

other word resources, and learning to use base words, prefixes, and suffixes to figure out meanings of words.

Academic vocabulary should be built throughout elementary school. To facilitate the development of students' academic vocabulary, the school can develop a list of academic vocabulary words and terms by grade level that all teachers will teach. Marzano and Pickering in their book, *Building Academic Vocabulary Teacher's Manual* (2005), provide a list of academic vocabulary terms that schools can use to create their own list of subject-specific vocabulary words. They recommend that teachers teach one word weekly for each academic subject (30 terms per year per subject). They also recommend that all teachers follow the same six-step process to teach the terms:

- The teacher provides a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
- Students restate the explanation of the new term in their own words.
- Students create a nonlinguistic representation of the term (draw a picture, a symbol, etc.).
- Students periodically do activities that help add to their knowledge of the vocabulary terms.
- Periodically, students are asked to discuss the terms with one another.
- Periodically, students are involved in games that allow them to play with the terms.

## DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Text Talk, developed by Beck and McKeown (2001), is designed to increase both comprehension and vocabulary by incorporating word learning in the context of reading new books. The goals of Text Talk are to develop comprehension with open-ended questions and to enhance vocabulary development. In order to increase comprehension, the teacher intersperses open-ended questions that require students to explain and describe text ideas and then asks follow-up questions that encourage elaboration of initial ideas. The pictures in the book are presented after students have responded to the text. Discussions are based on the actual text. Students are not permitted to rely heavily on their background knowledge. This aligns well with the expectations of the Common Core.

Using explicit instruction, three or four vocabulary words are taught after the story has been read. The teacher gives the word within the context that appears in the story and then provides a student-friendly definition. Students repeat the word and then interact with the word in different contexts to assure understanding. The word is then repeated. This process continues with the remaining words. Finally, students are given exercises using the word—including responding to questions, making comparisons, and choosing the correct word within the context of a scenario.

District U-46 in Elgin, Illinois, implements the Text Talk instructional strategy with its diverse student population. Information including demonstration videos about Text Talk are posted on the website <http://www.u-46.org/roadmap/dyncat.cfm?catid=640>. Text Talk lessons created by Utah educators for more than 100 books are available on the Utah State Office of Education website <http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/readingfirst/documents/combinedtexttalklessons.pdf>.

## Recommendation 2: Independent Reading

**Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide plan to increase the effectiveness of independent reading.**

### LINK TO RESEARCH

The goal of reading instruction is to have students read with volume, stamina, and fluency.

**Volume.** The amount that students read in and out of school significantly affects the development of reading rate and fluency, vocabulary, general knowledge of the world, overall verbal ability, and academic achievement. The amount of reading is a strong predictor of reading comprehension, outweighing intelligence, economic background, and gender. The New York City performance standards address volume of reading by specifying that by the end of the fourth grade, elementary students should be reading 25 books a year. The standards for California schools specify that fourth-grade students should be reading 500,000 words a year.

**Stamina.** Reading stamina is the ability to read for a sustained amount of time without getting distracted or distracting others. Research shows that reading stamina will gradually increase with the amount of time spent reading. Lack of reading stamina is becoming a problem. Students are losing their ability to read for long periods of time. This is important for many reasons but especially when one considers the amount of time students have to read for the state tests.

**Fluency.** Reading fluency has three components: accuracy, speed, and expression. Fluent readers are characterized by the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (National Reading Panel, 2000). In order to build students' reading fluency, teachers model good oral reading through the daily read-aloud, teach students phrasing, offer many opportunities for students to practice with guidance and support (repeated reading, choral reading, echo reading, buddy reading, recorded reading, reader's theater, poetry readings), and assess and track students' fluency over time.

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Students need to read in order to become better readers. There is a great deal of research that shows a very strong correlation between the amount of time spent reading and a student's progress as a reader. *Reading for Change*, the report issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD in 2002, states that reading proficiency is closely linked to the amount of time students spend reading in their free time and the diversity of materials they read. The report makes the claim that finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change—to equalize learning across disadvantaged and middle class youth. The report makes the following statement:

Fifteen-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds who read a lot get higher average reading scores than those whose parents are of high or medium occupational status but who have little interest in reading. (p. 6)

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

The 2 Sisters (Website)  
<http://www.the2sisters.com/>

Emma Eccles Jones  
Center for Early Childhood  
Education  
<http://www.coe.usu.edu/ecc>

Classrooms that provide more reading time yield higher reading achievement among students. The amount of independent silent reading students do in school is significantly related to gains in reading achievement. It is during successful independent reading practice that students consolidate their reading skills and strategies. Without extensive reading practice, reading proficiency lags. Research has not yet confirmed, however, whether instructional time spent on independent silent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading achievement and fluency. The research of Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008) and Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, and Smith (2008) shows promise in terms of how to structure independent reading so that it does affect reading achievement.

## **IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS**

It is extremely important that students are reading books at their independent reading level.

### **1. Help students select books.**

Teaching students how to select “just right” books using the five-finger rule or a similar technique is critical. Students cannot develop stamina using reading materials that are too hard for them. Book boxes and bins with books at an appropriate level should be easily accessible.

### **2. Hold students accountable.**

Holding students accountable for their independent reading is important. Students should keep reading logs in which they record the number of pages they have read in their book. Teachers should be aware of how long it should take a child who reads at one reading rate or another to read books of different levels. In this way, a teacher has some idea of the progress that a student can be expected to make through books. Another way to hold students accountable for their independent reading is to provide time for them to share with a partner or the whole class what they have read.

### **3. Monitor student engagement.**

Teachers can monitor student engagement during independent reading and help students who are having trouble, perhaps because they are reading a book that is too hard for them.

### **4. Communicate purpose and expected behaviors.**

Teachers need to teach focus lessons on reading stamina and help students understand what it is and why it is important. The class might use a T-chart to brainstorm what they should be doing during independent reading. Behaviors discussed should include reading the whole time, staying in one spot, reading quietly, and getting started right away. The teacher should model these behaviors for the students, and students should then be given an opportunity to practice these behaviors.

### **5. Build reading stamina.**

The teacher might start with a very short reading session on the first day and then gradually increase the time as students show they are able to read and not get distracted.

The goal would be to read at least the amount of time required for the state reading test. At the end of the reading time, students can assess how well they did. Throughout the year, students should review the behaviors using the anchor chart and constantly assess themselves on how well they are doing.

Several conditions or resources have a positive impact on reading stamina:

- **Book selection.** The more interest in the book, the better the stamina. Teachers can administer an interest inventory to the students and then be sure that there are books available in the classroom to meet the interests of the students.
- **Comfort.** Students should be comfortable and free from distractions while reading independently.
- **Teacher enthusiasm.** If the teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about books and the students are surrounded by good books they can read, the goal of increasing independent reading is more easily met.

## **6. Ensure scaffolded silent reading for students.**

Reutzel, Jones, et al. (2008) identify the problems with traditional sustained silent reading (SSR), which is that teachers fail to teach, monitor, interact with, and hold students accountable for their time spent in reading practice. Reutzel, Jones, et al. propose an alternative to traditional SSR—sustained silent reading (ScSR). Research on this approach to independent reading has shown promise.

The ScSR model includes support, guidance, structure, appropriate text difficulty, accountability, and monitoring. First, the teacher teaches explicit book selection strategies so students are able to select books appropriate to their level. Second, the ScSR period begins with the teacher explaining and modeling a strategy for five to eight minutes and then directing the students to read independently for 20 minutes. Third, the teacher conducts individual monitoring conferences with four or five students per day during the reading time. During these conferences, the teacher listens to the student read aloud from the book he or she is reading for one to two minutes. The student retells what he or she has read and then the teacher and the student have a two-minute discussion about the book. The teacher helps the student set a goal for the date to finish the book, and the student also decides how to share the book. Students use a genre wheel to ensure wide reading across different genres.

## DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Joan Moser is a K-2 multiage teacher in the state of Washington. She implemented a structure in her classroom to help her students develop daily habits of reading and writing. Her students have five literacy tasks to complete daily. As students read, the teacher meets with small groups or confers with individuals. These five tasks are (1) read to self, (2) read to someone, (3) work on writing, (4) do word works, (5) listen to reading.

During the “read to self” task, students work on increasing their stamina. Students start with three minutes of independent reading and then add one to two minutes a day until they reach the target of 30 minutes a day for primary students and 45 minutes a day for intermediate students.

Moser and her sister, Gail Boushey, who is a literacy coach, have written the book *The Daily Five* (2006), which describes this structure for having students read independently in a productive way.

## Recommendation 3: Instruction

**Develop and implement a plan to ensure challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction in every classroom.**

### LINK TO RESEARCH

After reviewing hundreds of studies on teaching effects, John Hattie concluded that “it is teachers *using particular teaching methods*, teachers *with high expectations for all students*, and teachers *who have created positive student-teacher relationships* that are more likely to have the above average effects on student achievement” (Hattie, 2009, p. 126). Decades of research suggest that three behaviors distinguish highly effective teachers: challenging students, creating a positive classroom environment, and being intentional about their teaching.

**Challenging Students.** Highly effective teachers set high expectations for all students and challenge their students by providing instruction that develops high-order thinking skills. Rosenthal and Jacobson in their 1965 study coined the term “Pygmalion effect” to describe how teachers’ expectations of students affects the performance of the students. (See Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992.) More than 600 studies conducted since have confirmed that teacher expectations can have a powerful effect on student achievement. Conveying expectations by praising students has minimal effects, however. Carol Dweck (2006) has determined that praising students by telling them they are smart may actually have a detrimental effect on their achievement.

**Positive Environment.** Setting high expectations for students is not enough. Teachers must create positive classroom environments and build strong relationships with students. Kleinfeld (1972) identified four types of teachers—traditionalists (teachers who set high expectations for students but offered little academic or emotional support to help students meet those expectations), sophisticates (teachers who were aloof and undemanding), sentimentalists (teachers who were warm but undemanding), and supportive gadflies (teachers who combined high personal warmth with high expectations for students). Researchers since 1972 have used the term “warm demander” to describe effective teachers who set high expectations while nurturing student growth.

**Intentionality.** Highly effective teachers are intentional about their teaching. Good teachers are clear about what they are teaching and have a broad repertoire of instructional strategies to help students accomplish their learning goals. They are intentional in selecting the most appropriate instructional strategy for each situation.

Research suggests that effective literacy instruction needs to be sequenced, systematic, intentional, teacher-directed, and explicit, involving explanations, modeling, and scaffolding. These characteristics are evident in the “gradual release of responsibility” instructional model, introduced by Pearson and Gallagher in 1983 after they reviewed studies on reading comprehension instruction. These researchers found that learning occurred when it happened over time within a repeated instructional cycle that included explanation, guided practice, feedback, independent practice, and application. The gradual-release-of-responsibility model of instruction requires that the teacher shift from assuming “all the responsibility for performing a task...to a situation in which the students assume all of the responsibility” (Duke &

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

New York City Department of  
Education (NYCDOE)

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Teachers/TeacherDevelopment/TeacherDevelopmentToolkit/PTS/Engagingstudents>

Pearson, 2002, p. 211). This gradual release may occur over a day, a week, a month, or a year. Pearson and Gallagher envisioned instruction that moved from explicit modeling and instruction to guided practice and then to activities that incrementally positioned students for becoming independent learners.

The gradual-release-of-responsibility model of instruction has been documented as an effective approach for improving literacy achievement (Fisher & Frey, 2007), reading comprehension (Lloyd, 2004), and literacy outcomes for English language learners (Kong & Pearson, 2003).

Related to the gradual-release-of-responsibility model is consistent and active engagement of students in their learning. Student engagement has long been recognized as the core of effective schooling (Marzano & Pickering, 2010). In her framework for enhancing student achievement, Charlotte Danielson (2007) describes exemplary instruction:

All students are highly engaged in learning and make material contributions to the success of the class by asking questions and participating in discussions, getting actively involved in learning activities, and using feedback in their learning. The teacher ensures the success of every student by creating a high-level learning environment; providing timely, high-quality feedback; and continuously searching for approaches that meet student needs. (p. 113)

## **IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS**

In order to ensure challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction in every classroom, teachers should take the following actions:

### **1. Teach according to the principles of effective instruction.**

The gradual-release-of-responsibility model of instruction enhances effective literacy instruction. Teacher-directed, explicit instruction of literacy skills and strategies involves explanation, modeling, guided practice, feedback, independent practice, and application.

### **2. Guide students in setting personal goals and in monitoring their progress.**

Marzano and Pickering (2010) suggests that self-efficacy is possibly the most important factor affecting student engagement. Self-efficacy is commonly defined as the belief in one's capabilities to achieve a goal. Students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated. One approach for developing student self-efficacy is to have students chart their progress on a specific learning goal. Using percentage scores works well when the assessments address a very specific skill area, such as spelling or using a specific type of punctuation. In most situations, however, a rubric or scale is a better way to help students track their progress. Having students set personal goals for their individual progress and think about what they will do to accomplish their goals influences student engagement.

**3. Provide feedback to students that emphasizes the link between effort and improvement.**

Because it is important for students to attribute their success or failure to their effort and not luck or ability, teachers may have students use a scale to track their effort and preparation along with their academic progress. The oral feedback teachers give students should focus on the effort students make.

**4. Use active learning strategies.**

Teachers can use techniques such as *turn and talk* or *think-pair-share* to engage students. Cooperative learning structures described by Spencer Kagan (2010) also are effective in engaging students. Other approaches are *peer partners*, where on-task partners check to see whether their partner is following the direction of the teacher; *response partners*, who are taught to “look, lean, whisper” when discussing with their partner; *response cards* that provide students with prepared response cards labeled true and false or a, b, c, and so on, which allows all students respond to teacher questions; and *writing answers*, according to which each student writes answers on a individual whiteboard or slate.

**5. Vary instructional strategies.**

It is important to use a variety of instructional strategies.

**6. Use interactive reading techniques.**

Interactive reading techniques are helpful for engaging students. Examples are Say Something; Read, Cover, Remember, Retell; Partner Jigsaw; Two-Word; and Reverse Think-Aloud.

**7. Use questioning strategies that make all students think and answer.**

Teachers should ensure that students’ opportunity to respond is high. The opportunity to respond is positively related to achievement because the more opportunities students have to respond or practice a skill, the better their understanding. Ways to increase opportunities to respond include making sure all students are called on, not calling on volunteers to respond, using choral response techniques, and calling on students randomly to respond. Teachers can facilitate active involvement by providing cues and prompts that lead students to correct answers, sequencing instruction so that high rates of accuracy are achieved, and asking frequent questions.

**8. Provide students with choices whenever possible.**

Managed choice is an effective way to engage students. Students should be given opportunities to choose books that interest them, and whenever possible, students should have some choice about assignments.

**9. Use processing activities.**

Instructional strategies such as think-pair-share and quick writes are ways to engage students in the lesson and have them process the content of the lesson.

**10. Select materials and tasks that are at a correct level of difficulty.**

Recognizing the difficulty of doing this in a classroom of students with diverse learning needs, it still is important to do so as much as possible. Matching the reading levels of the materials students are asked to read and the reading levels of the students is critical. This is not possible all the time, particularly with the new demands of the text complexity of the Common Core, but it is critical that students are reading at their independent and instructional levels at least part of the day.

**11. Foster a culture of achievement.**

A culture of achievement is fostered in classrooms where instruction is challenging, students feel comfortable asking questions, and students are expected to do their best. High-quality instruction—instruction that is rigorous, aligned with standards, and uses instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students—helps promote a culture of achievement in the classroom. Clear, high, yet attainable expectations for all students ensure that students feel challenged and not bored or discouraged. Students need both high expectations and support for learning.

**12. Build relationships with students.**

One of the strongest correlates of effective teaching is the strength of relationships teachers develop with students. When students feel valued, honored, and respected, they tend to be more engaged. Teachers should create positive classroom environments.

## DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Catalina Ventura in Phoenix, Arizona, is a K-8 school with more than 1,300 students. The school is an inner-city school with a 75 percent poverty rate. During the past five years, teachers at Catalina have been trained in using Kagan cooperative learning structures in their classrooms. Dr. Spencer Kagan devised several generic, content-free cooperative learning techniques that can be used to increase student engagement. Numbered Heads Together, Corners, Think-Pair-Share, and Line-up are examples of these structures. At Catalina Ventura School, a new Kagan structure was taught monthly to the entire staff at staff meetings. The principal attributes the dramatic improvement in test scores at the school to teachers using these structures in their classrooms and having students more engaged as a result. (More information about the Kagan structures is available at [www.KaganOnline.com](http://www.KaganOnline.com). The video *Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures for Success* is available on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).)

TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) is a professional development program designed to help teachers interact equitably with all students. TESA raises the awareness of teachers about how their expectations affect student performance. Teachers reflect on their interactions with their students in their questioning and feedback and the effects on student self-esteem. Teachers observe each other to provide feedback on whether they treat some students differently from others. Results of the program include improvement in student academic performance, increases in attendance, decreases in discipline problems, and improvement in classroom climate. Information about the professional development program is available from the Los Angeles County Office of Education at <http://www.lacoe.edu/orgs/165/index.cfm>.

## Recommendation 4: Common Core

**Develop and implement a multiyear plan to align the school’s curriculum, instruction, assessments, and instructional materials to the Common Core standards.**

### LINK TO RESEARCH

The Common Core State Standards Initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers with the involvement of 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands identified what American students need to know and do to be successful in college and careers. These standards are based on best practices in national and international education as well as research and input from numerous sources including scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, and educators representing all grade levels from kindergarten through postsecondary. These standards are comparable with other countries’ expectations and are grounded in available evidence and research.

The state of New York adopted the Common Core State Standards on July 19, 2010.

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

#### 1. **Align curriculum to the NYS P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy.**

The adoption of the Common Core provides an opportunity for teachers at P.S. José de Diego to work in collaborative teams to identify what they are currently teaching through a curriculum mapping process. It will be essential for teams to identify redundancies and gaps between what they should be teaching according to the Common Core and what they are teaching.

Teachers in teams should look closely at current student work to determine the discrepancy between that work and the level of performance that the Common Core demands, and then plan the steps needed to close any discrepancies.

The Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011–12 require teachers to work together to engage all students in rigorous tasks, embedded in well-crafted instructional units and with appropriate supports. For ELA, these tasks include:

- PK–2 teachers are expected to engage their students in at least one literacy task aligned to the Common Core Reading Informational Text Standards 1 and 10 and Writing Standard 2 (written response to informational texts through group activities and with prompting and support).
- Teachers of grades 3–8 are expected to engage their students in at least one literacy task aligned to Common Core Reading Informational Text Standards 1 and 10 (written analysis of informational texts) or Common Core Reading Informational Text Standards 1 and 10 and Writing Standard 1 (written opinion or argument based on an analysis of informational texts).

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Common Core State Standards

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

Information about the state learning standards for ELA and literacy and the Common Core standards

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov>

Common Core resources

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/CommonCoreLibrary/default.htm>

Resources for strengthening teacher practice

<http://www.arisnyc.org>

Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project

<http://commoncore.org>

Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC)

<http://www.parcconline.org>

These tasks are to be embedded in Common Core-aligned curricula and include multiple entry points for all learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Through the work of implementing these performance tasks, teachers will use the inquiry cycle to adjust their curriculum and instruction to help all students meet the expectations of the Common Core. Since standards are not curriculum, teachers will need a curriculum to assist them in helping students meet the Common Core standards. The New York State Education Department is developing curriculum modules to help teachers develop curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core. These curriculum modules will be available to schools during the 2012–13 school year.

## **2. Align instructional materials to the Common Core.**

Another task related to the Common Core standards is for schools to ensure that the texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the Common Core. Schools need to select complex texts that are grade-level appropriate and meet the text complexity requirements of the Common Core. These levels of text complexity are significantly higher than the level of texts currently being used in most schools. The expectation of the Common Core is that students have extensive classroom practice with texts at or above grade level. It is the expectation of the Common Core that students who are not reading at grade level should be given the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity rather than be given less complex texts. Many students will need careful scaffolding to enable them to read at the level of text complexity required by the Common Core.

The Common Core places a great emphasis on informational text and expects students to read informational text 50 percent of the time and literary text 50 percent of the time. Schools need to ascertain whether enough informational text is available at all grade levels and is being used instructionally.

## **3. Align instruction to the expectations of the Common Core.**

As part of the work outlined in the Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011–12, teachers need to begin to adjust their instruction to help all students meet the higher expectations of the Common Core. In order to help students meet the standards outlined in the Common Core, several changes in literacy instruction will be necessary.

**Literacy Instruction.** One of these changes is the focus of literacy instruction. The focus of literacy instruction reflected in the Common Core is careful examination of the text itself, which requires close and careful reading. Schools must provide all students, including those who are behind, with extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex texts, as required by the standards. Students can access complex texts through read-alouds or as a group reading activity. Schools should consider carefully their read-aloud selections. Students whose decoding ability is developing at a slower rate also need opportunities to read text successfully without extensive extra assistance. All students are expected to have daily opportunities for independent reading. Reading materials should include newspaper and magazine articles and websites.

**Type of Questions.** Another change is the type of questions teachers ask of students. Eighty to ninety percent of the standards require text-dependent analysis.

To help students meet the standards outlined in the Common Core, teachers should ask high-quality text-dependent questions. Text-dependent questions are those that can be answered only by careful scrutiny of the text, with students specifically referring to evidence from the text itself to support the answer and not referring to information or evidence from outside the text. The questions are grounded in the text, and students must think carefully about what they heard or read and draw evidence from the text in support of their ideas about the reading.

**Strategy Instruction.** Another change in literacy instruction is the role of strategy instruction. The Common Core standards necessitate a reconsideration of the role of reading strategies. Strategies should be embedded in the activity of reading a text rather than being taught separately from texts.

**Writing Instruction.** Changes in writing instruction may be necessary to help students meet the Common Core standards. Thirty percent of writing instruction should be devoted to opinion pieces, 35 percent to informative/explanatory texts, and 35 percent to narratives. Students should be given extensive practice with short focused research projects.

#### **4. Redesign assessment to reflect the expectations in the Common Core.**

During the 2012–13 school year, interim assessments based on the Common Core standards will be administered. In addition, items developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), of which the state of New York is a member, will be field tested. The PARCC assessments will be operational during the 2014–15 school year. Presently, the PARCC assessments include two summative assessments, which will measure the full range of the Common Core State Standards at each grade level. One required component that counts toward the summative score includes performance-based assessments in grades 3–8 administered as close to the end of the year as possible.

Priorities in ELA/literacy will include focusing on writing effectively when analyzing text. Another component that is required and counts toward the summative score includes end-of-year assessments comprised of computer-based machine-scorable items focusing on reading and comprehending complex texts in ELA/literacy. A third required assessment of listening/speaking can be administered at any time of the year. With this in mind, schools need to examine assessments they currently use to determine if they are aligned with the Common Core.

## **DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools**

The Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project provides teachers with a roadmap for translating the Common Core into instruction and resources for developing more detailed curriculum and lesson plans. For most grades, there are six English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum Maps, each of which contains a list of focus standards taken from the Common Core, specific student objectives, an overview of skills and content the unit will cover, and sample student activities and assessments. Each also includes an essential question that frames the unit, suggested texts (including Common Core exemplar texts), a list of key terminology, and links to additional instructional resources. Future iterations of the maps will include sample student work and scoring rubrics to help teachers who would like to use the sample activities as formative assessment tools.

## Recommendation 5: Professional Learning

**Develop and implement a multiyear professional development plan that follows a job-embedded and sustained professional learning process and focuses on content related to the following topics identified during the co-interpretation: word study, independent reading, effective literacy instruction, and the Common Core.**

### LINK TO RESEARCH

Learning Forward (formerly National Staff Development Council), the professional association committed to enhancing educators' professional learning, defines professional development as a comprehensive, sustained, intensive, and collaborative approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement (Slabine, 2011).

Stand-alone workshops and courses have been shown to have little effect on teacher practice (Guskey, 1999). Job-embedded approaches that incorporate professional learning activities into the daily work of teachers are more effective. Research has found that professional learning for teachers is most effective and boosts student achievement when it is embedded in their daily work and sustained (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Steiner, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

Effective professional learning provides teachers with opportunities for collaboration, coaching, and peer observations—opportunities that allow teachers to be actively involved in their own development and practice learned skills (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement by refining the process by which professional learning opportunities are offered, ensuring that these opportunities are embedded and sustained, and allowing for active teacher participation by focusing the opportunities on teacher practice and content.

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to implement job-embedded, sustained professional learning opportunities focused on school needs:

- 1. Provide opportunities for regular teacher collaboration and job-embedded professional learning.**

When planning professional development, consider the numerous formats that might be used to focus teacher collaboration and learning. These include action research/inquiry cycle, case discussions, coaching, Critical Friends Group, data teams/assessment development, examining student work, lesson study, mentoring, portfolio reviews, and study groups.

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

Learning Forward (Website)  
<http://www.learningforward.org>

Other approaches for job-embedded professional learning include the following:

- **Providing initial training, using outside or local experts.** Either outside experts or administrators, specialists, or teachers at the school could provide initial training.
- **Coaching at the school.** Teacher leaders may be trained to provide instructional support to all teachers. Another option is for all teachers to be trained to coach each other as members of professional learning communities.
- **Peer observation.** A feedback form can be created, and a schedule for peer observation can be developed. Expectations for peer observation can be set and clearly communicated.

Resources are available to schools through the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). Citywide Instructional Expectations provide the opportunity for job-embedded professional learning. The NYCDOE has provided resources to help educators unwrap the Common Core State Standards and begin to make the changes in curriculum and instruction necessary to help students achieve and meet the high standards. Resources include video, interactive modules, tools, articles, and podcasts to support professional development at the school.

## **2. Identify books for study groups.**

An effective way to share learning and apply new knowledge and skills is to engage in book study, with study groups meeting at regular intervals in organized sessions. Topics should be relevant to school and teacher needs. A starting point might be topics addressed in this set of recommendations.

A book possibility for a study group that we recommend as a way to focus professional learning is *Teach Like A Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College* (2010) by Doug Lemov. The book is a collection of instructional techniques the author gleaned from years of observing outstanding teachers in some of the highest performing urban classrooms in the country. The book is accompanied by a DVD of 25 video clips of teachers demonstrating these techniques in the classroom. Other videos of the techniques are available on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). The book discusses the following:

- Setting high academic expectations
- Planning that ensures academic achievement
- Structuring and delivering your lessons
- Engaging students in lessons
- Creating a strong classroom culture
- Setting and maintaining high behavioral expectations
- Building character and trust
- Improving your pacing

- Challenging students to think critically

An example of an effective teaching practice described in the book is *Technique #1—No Opt Out*. When a student does not respond, the teacher moves on to another student. When a student gives the correct response, the teacher returns to the first student who did not respond and insists that the student repeat what the student just heard. Another technique is *Technique #22—Cold Call*. In order to make engaged participation the expectation, the teacher calls on students regardless of whether they have raised their hands.

Other books that might be the focus for study groups are as follows:

- *Teach Like a Champion Field Guide: The Complete Handbook to Master the Art of Teaching* by Doug Lemov is another resource. It has 30 additional video clips of teachers using the techniques in their classes. These techniques could be part of an ongoing cycle of observation, feedback, and debriefing.
- *Bringing Words to Life and Creating Robust Vocabulary* by Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan.
- *The Highly Engaged Classroom* by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering.
- *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement* by Robert Marzano.
- *Better Learning through Structured Teaching: A Framework for the Gradual Release of Responsibility* by Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey.

Free study guides for the last two books are available from ASCD at <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/study-guides.aspx>

## **DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools**

Memphis City Schools serves a student population that is 92 percent minority and among the poorest in the nation. Despite this, student achievement is improving. District administrators attribute the improvement in part to effective professional development. The district developed a five-year comprehensive professional development plan that has incorporated characteristics and formats that research has shown to be effective. District administrators consider quality professional development to be an important factor contributing to the increase in student achievement. They are now compiling data to track its impact (Slabine, 2011).

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