

International High School at Prospect Heights

FINAL REPORT



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

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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of International High School at Prospect Heights (17K524) 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 need of improvement under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

About International High School at Prospect Heights

Located in Brooklyn, International High School at Prospect Heights (17K524) is a high school with 437 students in Grades 9–12. The school population comprises 32 percent Hispanic, 29 percent Asian, 28 percent black, and 11 percent white students.¹ The student body includes 93 percent English language learners (ELLs) and three percent special education students.² The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 92 percent.³ Eighty percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 7 percent of students are eligible for reduced-price lunch.⁴

International High School at Prospect Heights is a small school community located near Prospect Park in Brooklyn. The school is co-located on the campus with two other high schools, each with its own primary floor and shared common spaces like auditoriums, libraries, gymnasiums, and cafeterias.

The school works in partnership with the Internationals Network for Public Schools. The mission of the Internationals Network is to provide a quality education for recently arrived immigrants through a strong network of schools, 11 of which are located in New York City.⁵ According to the school's website, the mission of the school is as follows:

The International High School at Prospect Heights empowers recent immigrant students by teaching them fluency in reading, writing, speaking, and understanding English through a rigorous curriculum that is language rich, interdisciplinary, and project based. Students learn to think critically, navigate societal constructs and prepare for college and

¹<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/54/AOR-2010-331700011524.pdf>. Accessed on July 28, 2011.

²http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2009-10/sesdr_K524.pdf. Accessed on July 28, 2011.

³<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/54/AOR-2010-331700011524.pdf>. Accessed on July 28, 2011.

⁴<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/54/AOR-2010-331700011524.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 2011.

⁵<http://www.internationalsnps.org/index.html>. Accessed on July 28, 2011.

other educational opportunities after high school. Students, staff and families create a caring school environment that promotes collaboration, cross-cultural interaction, and appreciation of diversity.⁶

The 2009–10 New York State Report Card Accountability Report indicates that the school did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) or mathematics for three subgroups: all students, limited English proficient (LEP) students, and economically disadvantaged students. The failure to meet AYP benchmarks in ELA across three subgroups of students for two consecutive years has resulted in the identification of the school as a School in Need of Improvement (Year 1)⁷ for English language arts. The report also indicates that the school is currently in good standing for graduation rate, although the school did not make the benchmark for AYP in the area of graduation rate in the 2009–10 school year.

During the data collection phase of the ESCA, school leaders noted that all students are immigrants and the school has a significant number of students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) population. For new students, the school has the date the students entered the country. Some foreign transcripts are requested and translated. The school conducts assessments, including the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSELAT), and interviews students to gather as much information as possible. The school creates a binder of information for each student, which includes an informal index card that informs class placement, instruction, and student grouping. Interview respondents explained that students are not solely grouped with other students who speak the same language. Rather, purposeful grouping is conducted based on specific factors that include a student's spoken language skills, academic performance, ability to conceptualize in English, length of time in the United States, and leadership skills. Students are assigned subgroups within classes, and these subgroups are heterogeneous as well.

Audit Process at International High School at Prospect Heights

The ESCA approach utilized at the high school level examines six topic areas: student engagement, academic interventions and supports, support for incoming students, classroom instruction, professional development, and courses and extracurriculars. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by International High School at Prospect Heights. 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-interpretationSM meeting, which, at the request of the school, was split across May 16 and May 17, 2011. During this meeting, stakeholders from the International High School at Prospect Heights community read the reports—14 stakeholders attended on Day 1 of the co-interpretation and 16 stakeholders

⁶<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/17/K524/AboutUs/Overview/Our+Mission.htm>. Accessed on May 14, 2011.

⁷<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/54/AOR-2010-331700011524.pdf>. Accessed on August 8, 2011.

attended on Day 2. 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.

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 International High School at Prospect Heights.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, co-interpretation participants determined a set of key findings. These key findings are detailed in this section.

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

The effectiveness of interventions is inconclusive because of a lack of evidence.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the teacher survey, interviews, and documents provided by the school. A total of 25 surveys were returned, which represents approximately 76 percent of full-time teachers in the school.⁸ Of teachers surveyed, only 68 percent state that the school will very likely systematically identify the kinds of academic support. In addition, 56 percent of surveyed teachers reported that the school would be very likely to provide support to a student after needs are identified. Furthermore, only 48 percent of teachers feel that students are very likely to receive effective services and supports. Neither interview respondents nor reviewed documents provided evidence of any measures of the effectiveness of literacy support, Regents preparation, the newly initiated sustained silent reading effort, or tutoring in addressing students' academic deficiencies or other needs.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Continue and improve upon the identification and the monitoring of students in need of academic support and intervention.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by information from the reviewed documents, interviews with school administrators conducted by the auditors, teacher survey data, and input from participants at the co-interpretation. Interviews and documents revealed that among the interventions in place at the school that support student literacy are the following: supplemental periods of literacy instruction, including small group instruction; sustained silent reading; peer tutoring; home tutoring through supplemental educational services (SES) vendors; afterschool and Saturday Regents preparation; an afterschool literacy program; and an afterschool life skills program for students with individualized educational programs (IEPs). Participants at the co-interpretation indicated that such interventions and efforts should continue and that the effectiveness of the interventions provided by the school should be determined.

School administration views all students as at risk because they are ELLs and newcomers to the United States. School administrators reported that observations, portfolios, and assessments provide benchmarks to help identify at-risk students. Interviews revealed that staff monitor students who exhibit signs of emotional distress and that International High School at Prospect Heights has a grant that enables teachers to shadow students to

⁸The number of full-time teachers is taken from the school's *School Demographics and Accountability Snapshot* at http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cep/2009-10/cep_K524.pdf. Accessed on May 2, 2011.

determine issues they need help with. School administrators reported that teachers meet two to three times a week with a guidance or curriculum focus to discuss individual students. Between 68 percent and 76 percent of teachers surveyed indicated that they had great access to information about students.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Although no classes were observed in the low ranges of student engagement, opportunities do exist for continuing improvement to move satisfactory-rated classes to high-rated classes.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from classroom observations conducted by the auditors. The observation data are based on 15 observation cycles that were completed in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies classrooms.

Eighty percent of observed classrooms at International High School at Prospect Heights were rated in the high range in the area of student engagement, meaning that most students were actively engaged throughout the observation period. No classrooms were rated in the low range of student engagement. Wasted time and lost productivity was observed as a minor disrupter in 29 percent of the observed classrooms; behavior was observed as a minor disrupter in 21 percent of the observed classrooms. Although all observed classes received ratings in the midrange or high range in student engagement, and major disrupters were not evident in any of the observed classrooms, co-interpretation participants expressed dissatisfaction with mediocrity and an expectation that there are opportunities for classes rated in the midrange to improve to a high-range rating.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the co-interpretation process at International High School at Prospect Heights, school staff and faculty identified determining the effectiveness of interventions, identifying students in need of support and intervention, and moving students to higher levels of engagement as key findings.

The school closely monitors its students, who are all immigrants, and offers several interventions for struggling students. Co-interpretation participants raised questions regarding the effectiveness of interventions as the school continues to improve upon the identification of student needs and move students to higher levels of student engagement. While the majority of co-interpretation participants acknowledged that the prioritized key findings were challenges, some participants also acknowledged the positive aspects of the prioritized key findings (e.g., the school offers several interventions).

THE TWO RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement a schoolwide system to identify at-risk students using assessment data, provide multitiered academic interventions, and employ ongoing progress monitoring to address student needs.
2. Initiate a schoolwide process for increasing student engagement and creating a sustainable and supportive learning environment. The aim is to improve student attendance, enhance participation, reduce boredom, end negative behaviors and the associated classroom management issues, and increase student achievement in academic and social skills.

These two recommendations are discussed on the following pages. Each recommendation provides a review of research, online resources for additional information, specific actions that the school may wish to take during its implementation process, and examples of real-life schools that have successfully implemented strategies. All works cited, as well as suggestions for further reading, 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: Systemic Academic Interventions

Develop and implement a schoolwide system to identify at-risk students using assessment data, provide multitiered academic interventions, and employ ongoing progress monitoring to address student needs.

Because all of the students who enter International High School at Prospect Heights are new to high school and to the country, the administration views all students as at risk. School administrators reported that students are identified and their progress is monitored closely through observations, portfolios, and assessments to ensure that their needs are addressed. However, the school does not yet have a system in place to organize or analyze student performance along the achievement continuum (utilizing progress monitoring data), nor are there any ongoing processes in place to determine the efficacy of the many academic interventions offered.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Academic intervention services is defined by the New York State Education Department (2008) as “additional instruction which supplements the instruction provided in the general curriculum” for “students who are at risk of not achieving the state learning standards in English language arts, mathematics, social studies and/or science, or who are at risk of not gaining the knowledge and skills needed to meet or exceed designated performance levels on state assessments.” Across the state of New York, school leaders are searching for ways to enhance the current academic intervention services (AIS) programs in their schools to be able to identify students earlier, provide services to all students who require them, and measure student outcomes (Killeen & Sipple, 2004). Many schools begin to implement response to intervention (RTI) after determining that their current structures and processes were not meeting their students’ academic needs.

The incorporation of an RTI model into established interventions has been found to improve student academic progress; specifically, it has been found to increase the number of children who demonstrate proficiency on state accountability tests (Heartland Area Education Agency 11, 2004).

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (Prewitt & Mellard, 2010), RTI is a model of academic supports that “integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems.” These goals are accomplished through the identification of students at risk for poor learning outcomes, provision of evidence-based interventions, regular monitoring of student progress, and regularly adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness.

In a national study conducted by the National Center on Response to Intervention (Prewitt & Mellard, 2010), middle schools across 28 states, including New York, participated in a study to identify current RTI practices, identify key factors of successful implementation, and identify RTI practices linked to positive student learning outcomes. Schools involved in the study chose RTI to (1) close the student achievement gaps, (2) meet AYP every year with every subgroup, or (3) address undesirable and disruptive student behaviors.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Doing What Works:
Research-Based Education
Practices Online (Website)
<http://dww.ed.gov/>

National Center on
Response to Intervention:
What Is RTI? (Web page)
[http://www.rti4success.org/
whatisrti/](http://www.rti4success.org/whatisrti/)

National Research Center on
Learning Disabilities: Tiered
Service-Delivery Model (Web
page)
[http://www.nrclid.org/
rti_practices/tiers.html](http://www.nrclid.org/rti_practices/tiers.html)

New York State Response
to Intervention Technical
Assistance Center (Website)
<http://www.nysrti.org>

According to Prewitt and Mellard (2010), models of a responsive academic intervention program include a data-driven decision-making model that includes:

- The use of a schoolwide (universal) screening assessment to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes
- Multitiered intervention programs and strategies that increase in levels of intensity
- Frequent and ongoing progress monitoring to determine student progress and determine program efficacy
- A team structure to organize and analyze student performance using progress monitoring data

Although research indicates minimum components for successful implementation of responsive intervention programs, no specific model of RTI, intervention program or strategy, or progress monitoring tool is endorsed by Learning Point Associates. Instead, schools are encouraged to consider these research-based recommendations to make specific decisions regarding the structure and design of intervention programs that will best meet the needs of their situation.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Schools face several challenges when selecting a strategy for implementing academic interventions. Local regulations, contracts, and resources such as time, funding, and personnel all play a major role. Schools must make the determination, based on individualized circumstances, of what will ultimately work best. The most effective programs are those that are launched with clear leadership, built from careful planning, and supported with schoolwide awareness and professional development prior to full implementation.

1. Identify a team of school staff members who will lead the rollout of the intervention.

This leadership team may vary according to the school's demographics. Some schools choose to include teachers who work with subpopulations (e.g., English language learners and students with disabilities), and other schools include teachers who teach in the content areas in which RTI is being implemented (e.g., ELA teachers from each grade, literacy coach, and reading specialist). Network resources and coaches also should be considered.

2. Conduct careful planning to ensure the success of the rollout.

School leadership defines the intervention infrastructure, scheduling, resources, funding, staffing, screening and progress monitoring assessments, intervention programs, tools, and strategies. This process includes developing explicit plans, processes, and procedures prior to implementation. Following is a checklist of topics to cover:

Data-Based Decision Making

- Establish a team structure, routines, and procedures for making decisions.
- Set explicit decision rules to decide when students will move in, out, or within interventions.

- Develop record-keeping systems that communicate student progress to stakeholders (e.g., student, parent, teachers, AIS coordinator).

Assessments and Screenings

- Establish a yearly, schoolwide schedule for assessments and screening procedures (e.g., three times each year).
- Identify screening instrument(s) that will be used to identify students for interventions. Screening instruments should be valid and reliable and aligned with grade-level curriculum based on learning standards (e.g., state assessments, Acuity predictive assessments, or instructionally targeted assessments) or subject-specific and researched-based assessments (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery, Qualitative Reading Inventory, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills).
- Establish participation criteria, select benchmarks or cutpoints at which risk is determined, and identify students who fail to meet benchmarks or fall below specified cutpoints.
- Create multitiered “entry points,” and establish multiple benchmarks to “slice the pie,” allowing students to receive targeted interventions that vary in levels of intensity (e.g., students 0 percent to 40 percent and 41 percent to 65 percent, or Level 1 and Level 2 on state assessments).

Tiered Intervention Programs

- Select evidence-based intervention programs and/or strategies to use with students who fall in various ranges based on the screening tool used.
- Determine the method for delivery of service (e.g., pull-out small-group instruction, afterschool instruction, Saturday program) and duration and frequency of service.
- Ensure that services and programs are “tiered” and increase in levels of intensity, which match the increasing needs of students.

Progress Monitoring

- Determine assessments to be used. Assessments can be both formal (e.g., AIMSweb, Acuity predictive assessments, or instructionally targeted assessments) and informal (e.g., checklist, running records).
- Establish a benchmark for performance (e.g., >40 percent and >65 percent). These benchmarks determine when students will move within, through, and out of tiers of interventions.
- Establish a timeline for progress monitoring. Monitoring may occur as frequently as every two weeks.

3. Create an awareness of the intervention, and provide adequate professional development to ensure that everyone is on board.

Many schools follow a “train the trainers” model in which selected staff members attend training and turnkey that training to other staff. Depending on which teachers and staff will be providing interventions, training also may be schoolwide. A critical

component of the RTI implementation process is to ensure that stakeholders are clear about what is being implemented and why it is being implemented. School leaders must establish and communicate the goals and expected outcomes of adopting an RTI model while providing ongoing training and sufficient time for staff to fully understand the components and structures of a new intervention model. Successful implementation relies heavily on the ability of teachers and school leaders to implement RTI with fidelity.

Opportunities for AIS-related professional development should be embedded into the school's annual professional development plan. Careful planning is essential when rolling out professional learning opportunities in the area of AIS.

4. Put the intervention plan into action.

Recommendations for implementation include “start small.” (See “Starting Small.”) This approach might include starting in one grade, one content area, or one classroom; or it could begin by focusing on one or two components of RTI. This decision should be what makes the most sense for the school based on existing resources, tools, and structures. At this phase, adjustments and adaptations are an ongoing part of the process.

Starting Small

Two approaches for “starting small” with an academic intervention program are to start with one essential component or to start with one small group.

Starting With One Essential Component

Build a model with a focus on one component at a time (e.g., screening, then data-based decision making, then progress monitoring, then intervention levels). Create a timeline for the implementation of each component, and align training for school staff with each phase of implementation.

Example

A middle school in the Midwest began the implementation of its RTI program by first focusing on reading programs and strategies for students identified as at risk. A second tier of interventions and progress monitoring were rolled out later in the year.

Starting With One Small Group

Implement the intervention program with a small pilot group. With this approach, it is best to investigate which components worked well and which need to be refined before scaling up to other classes, grades, or content areas.

Example

A Pennsylvania school implemented RTI in a small number of classrooms during the first year to determine what worked and what did not work. The school's interventions team focused on creating a balance between moving too slowly (which they felt would minimize the impact of RTI and decrease staff buy-in) and moving too quickly (which might overwhelm teachers and students).

Adapted from Response to Intervention Practices in Middle Schools, a 2011 presentation by Daryl F. Mellard and Sara L. Prewett, available online at http://www.rti4success.org/ppt/WBNR_April2011.ppt. This document was produced by the National Center on Response to Intervention and is in the public domain.

Long Beach Unified School District

An Example Drawn From *Meeting the Needs of Significantly Struggling Learners in High School: A Look at Approaches to Tiered Intervention*

In California, schools are not permitted to use IQ-Achievement testing as a criterion for determining eligibility for special education services. The Long Beach Unified School District in California employs regular assessments and tiered interventions as part of both the prereferral process and as best practice for serving the needs of all students. The district has responded to their high school students' literacy needs using a multi-tiered approach that incorporates a battery of eighth-grade assessments that are used to determine the needs of incoming ninth graders. In the spring, all eighth-grade students participate in a screening series, which is an examination of multiple measures of student achievement that includes the CA standards test, course grades and an assessment that is part of the *Language!* curriculum the district has adopted. All incoming ninth-grade students receive core literacy instruction. Based on a review of assessment data, students entering high school half a year to two years behind receive the core literacy instructional program as well as an additional literacy workshop course that provides them with support materials that scaffold the core literacy program. Entering high school students who are more than two years below grade level are enrolled in a double block of language arts that consists of an intensive English language arts program or an after-school reading program.

For their language arts curriculum, Long Beach has adopted the *Language!* and Lindamood-Bell curricula for intensive instructional programs in literacy. Lindamood-Bell focuses on developing phonemic skills for students having serious difficulties with text. Typically, students spend a semester in that intensive intervention and then transition into *Language!* Student progress is monitored throughout the school year using "cluster tests" taken primarily from the Lindamood-Bell and *Language!* curricula. In addition to the systematic supports for students, the Long Beach model includes monthly support meetings for teachers, summer institutes, and coaches that provide professional learning opportunities for teachers.

While the Long Beach approach to instruction and tiered intervention shares its key characteristics with RTI, they do not call this practice RTI, but simply call it "best practice for all students." They ask, "What do the data say about how students are performing and what instructional programs are necessary to support student growth?" Another important aspect of the Long Beach system, according to Office of Special Education Assistant Superintendent Judy Elliott, is that they do not base their decisions on a single data point. Multiple sources of data are examined to determine student needs. Long Beach views its practice as a systems approach to good instruction for all students rather than just a process to diagnose students with learning disabilities. They had such success with the practice at the high school level that they have recently applied it to their middle schools. Roughly 7 percent of students in Long Beach have IEPs as opposed to an average of 12–14 percent nationally (Elliott, 2006).

From Duffy, H. (2007). *Meeting the needs of significantly struggling learners in high school: A look at approaches to tiered intervention*. Washington, DC: National High School Center. Available online at http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_RTIBrief_08-02-07.pdf.

Recommendation 2: Student Engagement

Initiate a schoolwide process for increasing student engagement and creating a sustainable and supportive learning environment. The aim is to improve student attendance, enhance participation, reduce boredom, end negative behaviors and the associated classroom management issues, and increase student achievement in academic and social skills.

One of the greatest obstacles within urban schools is the large number of students whose behavior interferes with their achievement or the achievement of others. Lack of student engagement and student behavior that leads to lost productivity disrupts the educational climate of the classroom and the school. One key element for changing this pattern is the incorporation of best practices related to increasing student engagement.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Student engagement provides an essential foundation for increasing achievement levels. “Educators must work to build engagement levels if they hope to support students in meeting higher standards” (Learning Point Associates, 2005, p. 2).

Student motivation, a meaningful curriculum, and student choice also are important factors for engaging middle-level learners (Caskey & Anfara, 2007; Learning Point Associates, 2005; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995).

In a report on the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), which was taken by 42,754 students, Yazzie-Mintz (2010, pp. 2–3) describes a spectrum of student disengagement—from temporary boredom to dropping out—and attributes this disengagement to the following: uninteresting and irrelevant material, work being too challenging or not challenging enough, no interaction with the teacher, not liking the school or the teacher, not seeing value in the assigned work, adults at the school not caring about the student, safety and bullying concerns, schoolwork not connecting to real world or real work, feeling little connection with any adult at the school, teacher favoritism, ineffective instruction or instructional methods, feeling unheard and not responded to or respected, and feelings of frustration and disconnection.

When students feel marginalized or alienated at school, they lose interest and become disengaged. Yazzie-Mintz (2010, p. 17) concludes that there are considerable gaps not only in academic achievement but also in student engagement and suggests the integration of engagement data with academic data as a useful tool for school planning and decision making.

Factors that would increase student engagement, according to the surveyed students (Yazzie-Mintz, pp. 18–23) are as follows: supportive and nurturing schools; increased individualization; classes that are more fun as well as interactive, experiential, and relevant; a schoolwide belief in relationships, respect, and responsibility; coaching and modeling for the staff of good student engagement practices; reflection on and response to student ideas; adult understanding of student skills, strengths, and interests and having these qualities inform instruction; experiential learning and interdisciplinary studies; and opportunities for students to work together on finding solutions to real-world problems and issues.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Center for Mental Health in Schools (Website)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (Website)

<http://www.casel.org>

Illinois Learning Standards for Social/Emotional Learning (Website)

http://isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility (Website)

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org>

Students need to build a sense of self-efficacy (Alvermann, 2003) in an inclusive environment in which they can achieve competence. They should be engaged in authentic and personally meaningful work, using a culturally relevant curriculum with an appropriate level of difficulty and challenge—one that requires problem solving (Voke, 2002). In addition, Gordon (2006) suggests the recognition and leveraging of individual student strengths and recalls a typical student response from the 2005 Gallup Youth Survey (pp. 77–80):

“My teacher understood the way that I learned and worked. I was never criticized for my ideas or feelings, but I was met with questions and ideas that could change the way I looked at something.” —Jessica, 17, Waverly, IA (p. 77)

A rubric titled the “Partnership Guide for Culturally Responsive Teaching” (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000, pp. 185–187) offers a list of engagement activities (establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning and engendering competence) and assessment tools. The Executive Summary of *Engaging Schools* (Committee on Increasing High School Students’ Engagement and Motivation to Learn, 2003) provides 10 recommendations for reaching “the goals of meaningful engagement and genuine improvements in achievement” for high school students (pp. 4–9). Easton (2008) discusses engaging struggling high school students by using experiential learning, essential questions and a whole-child perspective in curriculum development, instructional strategies, professional development, and teacher evaluations. “If there is a secret to motivation in the classroom,” says Gordon (2006, p. 80), “it lies in the interaction between the teacher and the student.”

“There is a growing consensus that whatever else is done, schools must also become places where it is easier for students and teachers to know one another well and for students to connect to the school and its purposes, says Sergiovanni (2006, p. 58). “Schools in other words must be caring and learning communities.”

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: WHOLE-SCHOOL PRACTICES

Incorporating student engagement practices should be part of the annual school improvement process. Whole-school practices such as building a safe and supportive school environment are part of this process. Students can learn effectively only in environments in which they feel safe and supported and where their teachers have high expectations for their learning. Implementation of a schoolwide positive behavior plan that is based on pro-social values, social competencies, incentives, and positive peer relationships will lay the foundation for classroom-level work and must occur before the classroom work can begin.

The Victoria Department of Education and Early Child Development (2009) developed the following guidelines for implementation of effective student engagement strategies across whole schools at the building level:

1. Create a positive school culture.

Teachers and staff must recognize students as individuals by acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of the student population. The school must find ways to connect students to school (through clubs, sports, student council, and other activities) so they develop a sense of belonging. The school should provide transition programs and practices at different stages of schooling that will minimize anxiety, increase

resilience, and ensure that students develop a readiness to enter their new environment and make successful transitions between year levels.

2. Encourage student participation.

Giving students a voice is not simply about the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it also is about having the power to influence change. Incorporating meaningful involvement of the students means validating and authorizing them to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout education to improve the school.

3. Proactively engage with parents/caretakers.

Keys to successful partnerships with parents/caretakers and families include strong two-way communication, volunteer opportunities, curricula-related collaborations, shared decision making, community-based partnerships, and efficacy building.

4. Implement preventative and early interventions.

The school needs to determine how it will intervene when students exhibit disengaged behaviors—specifically poor attendance and antisocial behaviors. Prevention strategies should target the whole school and should be designed to reduce any risk factors that may contribute to attendance or behavioral issues.

5. Respond to individual students.

The school should have a process in place to identify and respond to individual students who require additional assistance and support. It is imperative to coordinate early intervention and prevention strategies that utilize internal as well as external support services in order to identify and address the barriers to learning that individual students may be facing.

Schools also can implement major changes to their structures that can make it easier to develop positive learning relationships, including small learning communities, alternative scheduling, team teaching, teaching continuity, school-based enterprises, and professional learning communities.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS: CLASSROOM PRACTICES

1. Relate lessons to students' lives.

A relevant curriculum relates content to the daily lives, concerns, experiences, and pertinent social issues of the learners. Teachers can gain insight into student concerns by taking periodic interest inventories, through informal conversations, and from classroom dialogue (Learning Point Associates, 2005). These issues and topics then can be incorporated into units, lesson plans, and further classroom discussions.

2. Make the learning authentic.

Newmann et al. (1995) advocate for authentic instructional practices to engage learners and offer three criteria for authentic instructional practices: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond the school.

The first criterion for authentic instructional practices is to facilitate the construction of knowledge by acknowledging students' existing understanding and experience. Identifying students' preconceptions and initial understanding is critical to the learning process. "If students' preconceptions are not addressed directly, they often memorize content (e.g., formulas in physics), yet still use their experience-based preconceptions to act in the world" (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 5).

The second criterion for authentic instructional practices is to facilitate disciplined inquiry through structured activities; the inquiry process is critical to the construction of knowledge (Marzano, 2003; Newmann et al., 1995). This process consists of building on the learner's prior knowledge to develop a deeper understanding, integrating new information, and using the knowledge in new ways.

The third criterion for authentic instructional practices is value beyond school (Newmann et al., 1995). This criterion may entail connecting content to personal or public issues as well as the demonstration of understanding to an audience beyond the school. Examples of such activities include writing persuasive letters to the city council to advocate for a skate park, interviewing community elders for an oral history project, or communicating the impact of a development project using scientific concepts.

3. Give students choices.

Finally, providing choice in high school classrooms will engage learners. Providing opportunities for students to select a topic or text acknowledges adolescents' need to exercise more decision-making power. Giving students ownership in their learning process increases motivation and keeps interest levels high. Students who have a strong interest in a specific subject may wish to pursue an independent project. These projects may be used as a differentiated way to explore the curriculum.

Examples of Student Engagement

The National Center for School Engagement (2007) compiled the following examples of student engagement best practices from school districts across the United States:

Factor in Math Fun: *In Oswego, New York, a Factoring Fan Club was created for ninth-grade math students to get them excited about factoring, to keep it fresh in their minds, and to be “good” at factoring.* Source: Oswego School District, Oswego, NY

Celebrate Pi Day on 3/14: *This event was created to help students enjoy math by offering a fun-filled day honoring pi. Events included a pie-eating contest, measuring the diameter and circumference of round objects to calculate pi, and other games related to circles.* Source: Independence School District, Independence, VA

Mobilize Community: *Community Now! is an asset-based community development tool of the Connection Institute. It uses asset-based language and planning to bring the community together to discover what values the community shares as a whole. It then works to mobilize community members around its assets and shares values to become proactive in its planning rather than reactive.* Source: Kittery Children’s Leadership Council, Kittery, ME

Collaborate with Higher Education: *In Mesquite, Texas, a local college delivers 3.5 hours of continuing education courses (“Educational Opportunities”) to truant students and their families. The curriculum includes the negative consequences associated with poor school attendance and the positive consequences associated with scholastic achievement. Discussion of transition from high school to college is discussed and a tour of the college is provided.* Source: Dallas Independent School District, TX

Offer Incentives: *As a reward, a lunchtime soccer game is organized for students with good attendance by school staff.* Source: Summit School District, Frisco, CO

Support Positive Behavior: *Jacksonville School District adapted the principles of Got Fish? (a book to build business morale) for the classroom. Principles include being there, play, choosing your behavior, and make their day. Students are recognized when observed “living” each of the principles.* Source: Jacksonville School District, Jacksonville, FL

Create Student-Generated Classroom Rules: *In Eugene, Oregon, students create a list of classroom rules to be followed. Each student signs off on the rules and is held accountable by fellow students. In addition, students developed their own “honor roll,” in which students are recognized for doing their best, following directions, and not talking out more than three times a day.* Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

Facilitate Positive Student-Teacher Connections: *Some schools in Oregon encourage students to sign up for a one-on-one lunch with their teachers during school time. The teacher uses this time to get to know the students and offers them encouragement and praise. Children and youth benefit when their teachers demonstrate that they care about their well-being in addition to academic success.* Source: Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene, OR

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Suggestions for Further Reading

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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