

PS 179 Kensington

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 PS 179 Kensington conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research (AIR.) This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being in corrective action under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

The audit focused on access to the general education curriculum for English language learners (ELLs). It examined curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing practices through the multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. Findings in these areas served as a starting point to facilitate conversations among school staff in order to identify areas for improvement and ways to generate plans for improvement. This report includes an overview of the audit process, a description of the key findings identified in collaboration with the school, and recommendations for addressing these issues. It is entirely up to the school to determine how to implement the recommendations. At the conclusion of each recommendation we have included examples from the field based on the experiences of AIR staff, which we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

About PS 179 Kensington

PS 179 Kensington is located in New York City, in Brooklyn (Community School District 20). The school serves 946 students in Grades PK–5. Thirty-six percent of students are ELLs. In 2010–11, Kensington’s accountability status was “Corrective Action (Year 1),” due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for its population of ELLs.

Audit Process at PS 179 Kensington

The key findings were identified through an audit process. Data were collected using the following guiding themes as the focus of the audit: curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing. Following data collection, AIR staff facilitated a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 3, 2011, attended by 13 staff members from PS 179 Kensington. Staff members included the principal, assistant principal, 11 teachers, and a network representative.

Co-interpretation is a collaborative process that helps school teams understand and use the data gathered by the audit team to generate findings. During the meeting, the following data reports were presented and reviewed:

- English Language Learner Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on instruction of ELLs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 41 teachers, including 32 teachers of ELLs.

The school team studied the individual data reports and used this information to develop key findings about the school's strengths and challenges related to educating English language learners. Participants rated the findings based on the following criteria:

- Is the key finding identified as one of the most critical problems faced by the school and addressed by the audit?
- If resolved, would student achievement improve sufficiently to move the school out of corrective action?
- If resolved, will there be a measurable, positive impact?

In the remainder of this report, we describe the key findings that were identified by school staff as their top priorities, and present recommendations for the school to consider incorporating into their Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, participants at co-interpretation determined a set of final key findings. These key findings, which are based on the voting that occurred during the co-interpretation meeting, are detailed in this section.

Critical Key Findings

These key findings were identified by co-interpretation participants and were prioritized by the group for action planning.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1

Few teachers are developing cultural awareness in their instruction.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from interviews and observation data in the English Language Learner Site Visit Report. Specifically, no classrooms were observed in which teachers developed cultural awareness by valuing and building on students' diverse backgrounds, and fewer than half of interviewees described instructional practices that are culturally responsive.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2

Teachers reported that professional development experiences were only moderately helpful in a variety of topics related to the instruction of English language learners.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from both reports. Although one of the positive findings indicates that teachers have generally found professional development experiences to be useful, data also show that teachers would like to receive additional professional development, specifically on topics related to teaching ELLs.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3

Teachers are unclear about whether there is a school-wide behavior plan.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by data from both reports. Only about half of the teachers surveyed, and none of the teachers interviewed, stated that the school has a behavior plan in place.

Positive Key Findings

Positive key findings are listed because it is to the school's advantage to approach its action planning from a strengths-based perspective and to leverage what has been working. AIR encourages the school to realistically acknowledge what it is doing well and effectively and to use those strengths as a springboard for approaching recommendations-based action planning.

The top three positive key findings according to a vote at the co-interpretation were as follows:

1. ELLs are receiving additional academic support during and after the school day.
2. Interview and survey data indicate that teachers collaborate informally and during regular collaboration time.
3. Generally, teachers reported that professional development experiences were useful.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with PS 179 Kensington led AIR to make two recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process. These recommendations are supported by currently available research and evidence. Resources and references that support these recommendations are provided.

The order does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations. Also, there is no one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings were considered as a group, and these recommendations are offered as those that would likely have the greatest positive impact on student performance.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Resources related to the implementation of the SIOP model, which facilitates high-quality instruction for ELLs in content area teaching

<http://www.siopinstitute.net/>

Report describes the challenges faced by second-language learners in developing literacy

http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/nlpreports/executive_summary.pdf

Article about strategies for incorporating reading and writing instruction into the content area curriculum

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov02/vol60/num03/Reading,-Writing,-and-Understanding.aspx>

Effective Instruction for English Language Learners Question and Answer Transcript

<http://www.ncldtalks.org/content/interview/detail/3734/>

RTI for English Language Learners: Appropriate Screening, Progress Monitoring, and Instructional Planning

<http://www.rti4success.org/webinars/video/893>

(Continued)

Recommendation 1: Professional Development

AIR recommends that PS 179 Kensington review its current professional development plan and adjust to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of ELLs.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Research has found that professional development for teachers is most effective and boosts student achievement most when it is embedded in their daily work and sustained, as opposed to one-time workshops (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Steiner, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Effective professional development also provides teachers with opportunities for collaboration, coaching, and peer observation, which allows them to be actively involved in their own development and to more frequently practice learned skills (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 2002). In addition, professional development is most effective when it is directly connected to teacher practice and focuses on content (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Wei et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). Content areas should align with school improvement needs and goals to target improvement to those areas.

By refining the process by which professional development is offered; ensuring that it is embedded, is sustained, and allows for active teacher participation; and focusing the development on teacher practice and content, schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement (Wei et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 2, in which teachers indicated a need for more professional development related to the instruction of ELLs. This recommendation also links to Critical Key Finding 1; data showed that few teachers are developing cultural awareness in their instruction. Targeted professional development is recommended in order to provide appropriate support to teachers in their efforts to implement culturally responsive instruction for ELLs.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

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

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

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

2. Offer professional development on strategies for effectively instructing ELLs, focused particularly on providing culturally responsive instruction, including the following:

- Understanding language development
- Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both ELA and ESL state standards that clearly articulates literacy competencies and ensures that language objectives are defined at each stage of language acquisition
- Developing cultural awareness in students through instruction that values and builds on students' diverse backgrounds
- Being aware of what ELLs should understand and be able to do in terms of content and language skills at each proficiency level within the ELA curriculum
- Developing strategies and techniques for delivering the curriculum to ELLs in monolingual, bilingual, and general education classrooms

**QUICK LINKS:
Continued**

*Professional Learning
For Culturally Responsive
Teaching*

http://www.ideapartnership.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1412&catid=275&Itemid=111

*Principles for Culturally
Responsive Teaching*

<http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tl/tl-strategies/crt-principles.shtml>

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mrs. Brown is participating in professional development that will help her better meet the learning needs of her ELLs. From the outset, she has learned that she must follow the Common Core State Standards. The standards, as she has come to understand them, define what all students must know and be able to do, but not how teachers should teach.

The Common Core State Standards must be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum. The aim of the standards is to articulate the fundamentals, but they are not an exhaustive list of what must take place in the classroom. They set grade-level goals, but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are below or above grade-level expectations.

It is the job of the professionals who work with children to make the Common Core State Standards accessible to all learners. The curriculum represents the content, or subject matter, that students must master in the course of their education. Teachers must adapt that content by modifying the way in which they teach so that English language learners or students with disabilities can learn it.

Teachers may accomplish this by supplementing or adapting the curriculum. Supplementing the curriculum involves providing additional material that provides background knowledge and supports different learning styles. Supplementary materials could include pictures that illustrate vocabulary words and concepts. Visuals may include charts and graphs, timelines, and maps, all of which supply visual clues that help students who have difficulty processing large amounts of auditory instruction. Readers that are simplified and contain more photographs or pictures, captions, and vocabulary word definitions may also provide supplements without diminishing the information students need to learn.

Modified or adapted materials also may help the learner who has problems with complex and/or large amounts of language. They may be used before the lesson or during it to make the content more comprehensible. These may include graphic organizers, teacher-prepared outlines, or study guides. They may also include taped text or rewritten text that reorganizes the material into smaller portions or chunks. Sometimes a spare copy of the text material may be given to students in which they may mark or highlight.

Mrs. Brown understands all this and is ready, as part of her training, to redesign a science unit she has already taught to make it more accessible to her ELLs. She wants to teach them some content from geology about earthquakes and volcanoes, but she knows she will have to supplement and modify the material to make it accessible to her ELLs.

She begins by activating prior knowledge and building background. Last year, students learned about the large plates under the ocean and how they move, essential information for this new unit. However, students may not remember this material and her ELLs may have been speaking much less English when they were learning it, so she clearly is going to have to activate what prior knowledge students have and review it so she can build on what they know. She prepares a PowerPoint presentation, which goes over the concepts of tectonic plates and how the sea floor always spreads and moves, and how there are mountains on the earth and under the sea and how this movement affects them. She gives students the PowerPoint note pages with key vocabulary and diagrams, which students can keep in their science notebooks to refer to again.

She also shows a video that contains pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and the damage that can occur as a result of these phenomena. Many of her students will never have been exposed to this information and need this necessary background knowledge to acquire new content successfully. She then provides a simplified version of the material and has students read it in pairs. They mark what they already know and what is new and different to them. This gives her an idea of who in the class may need more support and who already understands the material. Given what she knows from this, she is ready to teach.

She goes online and finds pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and related concepts so that students can see a visual definition of each term: plateau, earth's mantle, fault lines, lava, magma, and diagrams of the layers of rock that cannot be seen from the earth's surface. She creates a science word wall using these pictures and their labels. Students now have a visual to reference that explains key vocabulary as they read. She makes a note to ask the ESL teacher to preview the concepts using some of the Rigby and Newbridge materials that are more highly illustrated and present this content with simplified vocabulary. All students are keeping personal dictionaries where they write definitions and make diagrams. She makes a study guide in the form of an outline so that as she teaches, the students look at her overheads and fill in information as she presents it.

Then she puts students in small groups. Together they read the information in the text. Her ELLs have a copy of the text in which they can mark and highlight. They are also given graphic organizers with flow charts, which students fill in to create the sequence of events leading to a volcanic eruption or an earthquake. Students complete the graphic organizers and write the sequence of events in sentences in their groups, all the while discussing what they have learned. ELLs are included with monolingual students who have a greater facility for self-expression in English. They put the sentences into paragraphs, which the students post and read orally to the whole group.

Finally, Mrs. Brown gives them a concept definition map about volcanoes and later she will give them one on earthquakes. Students must define a volcano in one box. In a series of connected boxes, they write what they do and what they are like, one fact per box. When Mrs. Brown has seen the students' completed maps, she will know about her next necessary steps in instruction. Do some of her students need more instruction or reteaching while other students move on? Can the ESL teacher step in and fill the gaps for her with her ELLs?

In such a way, Mrs. Brown has both supplemented and adapted her unit materials to make them more comprehensible for all students, and especially for her ELLs. She has found additional or different ways to use materials to teach all the key vocabulary and concepts, but has not left any material out or diminished it in any way.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Association for Positive
Behavior Support

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

*Positive Behavioral
Supports: Information for
Educators*

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/pbs_fs.aspx

*Ten Principles of Positive
Behavior Support*

<http://www.emstac.org/registered/topics/posbehavior/tenprin.htm>

*Prevention Research
and the IDEA Discipline
Provisions: A Guide for
School Administrators*

<http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/Products/adminbeh.web.pdf>

Technical Assistance Center
on Positive Behavioral
Interventions and Supports

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

Technical Assistance
Center on Social Emotional
Intervention for Young
Children

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

Recommendation 2: Behavior

AIR recommends that PS 179 Kensington take steps to develop and implement a school-wide behavior plan that guides the consistent implementation of strategies for managing student behavior across all classrooms and areas of the school. These strategies should include consequences for negative behavior as well as procedures for rewarding positive behavior.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Research on the development of problem behaviors in youth has shown that serious behavior problems at school are associated with current or future problems in other areas, including school failure, delinquent behavior, problem drinking, and drug use (Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Donovan & Jessor, 1985; Donovan, Jessor, & Costa, 1988; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Thus, the effectiveness of schools' methods for handling students' behaviors may impact future behavior patterns (Bullis & Walker, 1993; Walker, Homer, Sugai, & Bullis, 1996).

Schools often attempt to manage inappropriate behaviors within individual classrooms, leaving decisions regarding expectations and consequences up to the classroom teacher. The inconsistencies present throughout a school without the underpinning of a school-wide system of behavior management, such as punitive school and classroom environments, unclear rules and expectations, and inconsistent application of consequences, have been shown to contribute to increased levels of student antisocial behavior, truancy, and acts of vandalism against the school (Mayer, 1995; Mayer, Butterworth, Nafpaktitis, & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1983; Mayer, Mitchell, Clementi, & Clement-Robertson, 1993; Olweus, 1992).

Research points to several important features of an effective school-wide behavior management approach. These include (1) increasing positive reinforcement for appropriate social behavior (Embry, 1997; Embry, Flannery, Vazsonyi, Powell, & Atha, 1996; Mayer, 1995; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997), (2) actively teaching appropriate social behavior (Colvin, Sugai, & Patching, 1993; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997), (3) clearly communicating a small number of rules (Mayer, 1995), (4) consistently providing corrective consequences for rule violation (Taylor-Greene et al., 1997; Walker et al., 1995), and (5) ongoing monitoring of data about student behavior (e.g., office referrals for misbehavior) to provide feedback on progress and to pinpoint situations that need revision of expectations (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 3, in which surveys and interview data indicate lack of clarity around the existence and implementation of a school-wide behavior plan.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

This recommendation can be carried out through the following action steps:

1. Establish a school-level action team to develop and maintain responsibility for implementing the plan.

This team should include the principal, lead teachers, and all ELL and SE specialists, and should also include representation from parents as well.

This action step can be accomplished by:

- Developing a statement of purpose to guide the plan, such as: “We at Kensington are dedicated to creating and maintaining a safe and supportive academic environment that promotes learning for all students.”
- Writing out a set of guidelines for behavior in the school. Maintain a positive focus on the guidelines so that they can promote feelings of empathy and respect among all students. In addition to regulations for student behavior, the document should include students’ rights and teachers’ responsibilities as well. Many examples of school-wide behavior plans are located online.
- Ensuring that the regulations are clearly communicated to all students, that they are fairly and consistently enforced, and that buy-in among school faculty is established.
- Providing ongoing professional development on behavior management strategies to ensure that everyone understands how to implement a consistent behavior plan appropriately. Identifying staff to monitor fidelity of implementation and offering coaching to staff to support the effective application of behavior management principles.
- Sharing the behavior plan with parents and the community to ensure that everyone understands expectations for behavior throughout the school.

2. Implement strategies to promote and reward positive student behaviors, such as:

- Explicitly stating behaviors that are desirable in the classroom, both verbally and, as appropriate, by posting expectations to the walls in all areas of the school.
- Openly recognizing positive behaviors when they occur in the classroom.
- Providing opportunities for leadership for students consistently displaying positive behaviors, such as serving as hall monitors, leading other students in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, or reading the morning or afternoon announcements over the intercom.
- Pairing students who consistently display positive behaviors with peers who do not do so as consistently in group classroom activities to allow for positive modeling.
- Rewarding students demonstrating positive behaviors with extra freedom or privileges in the classroom.
- Ensuring that expectations, rewards, and guidelines for giving rewards are consistently applied in all classrooms and non-classrooms (e.g., cafeteria, hallways, school grounds).
- Maintaining regular communication with parents regarding their children’s positive behaviors.

3. Develop a system of consequences for negative behaviors. This action step can be carried out by:

- As appropriate, allowing students to have a voice in determining the appropriate consequences for guidelines violations.
- Whenever possible, tying the penalty directly to the guidelines infraction to assist with behavioral change. For instance, if a student pushes another student down on the playground, his or her recess privileges are revoked for a set period of time.
- Providing opportunities for students who have committed guidelines infractions to demonstrate positive behavior changes. For instance, the aforementioned student would be allowed to reenter recess for a short period and to demonstrate how to
- play constructively with his or her peers.
- Ensuring that consequences are consistently applied in all classrooms and non-classroom areas (e.g., cafeteria, hallways, school grounds).
- Communicating regularly with parents regarding their children's negative behaviors and providing them opportunities to support efforts to help the children demonstrate positive behavior changes at home.
- Including a series of more serious consequences for students who commit repeated guidelines infractions, with severe violations resulting in prescribed consequences after the first offense. If it appears to staff that a cascade of consequences is probably not the answer to a certain child's issues, a referral might be made to the IEP Team to discuss the inappropriate and/or disruptive behaviors and begin to receive and apply professional advice regarding interventions. A classroom observation by a professional special educator or counselor may be in order. Recommendations might be forthcoming for a Functional Behavior Assessment or other measures to try to help the child manage his or her behavior in school.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

The staff at Highland Park Elementary School is upset about the lack of a school-wide discipline plan at the school. Teachers rely on their own individual classroom behavior plans, some of which are more successful than others. Teachers of subjects such as art, music, and physical education are concerned because every class that comes to them seems to have a different set of behavior standards, which makes it difficult to be consistent. Behavior in the cafeteria and playground is seemingly out of control on some days. Students return to classrooms after lunch and recess too upset or out of control for afternoon instruction. Lack of safe practices on the playground often results in student injuries. It should be noted that many of these students have had disrupted educational experiences because of mobility and have never had a chance to really learn what appropriate school behavior should be.

The entire staff believes that the school needs a system for dealing with disruptive students as well as students who act appropriately. Therefore, the school administration has enrolled the school and its team of volunteer committee members who have agreed to work on this issue in a summer training on Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) sponsored by the State Department of Education. During the training, they learn there that a clear set of expectations for all students is needed in every school, along with a set of positive procedures for teaching and reviewing behavior and for encouraging appropriate behavior rather than focusing on, and paying attention to, students who misbehave. They decide they will teach social skills and appropriate behavior strategies explicitly with the same school-wide expectations and set up a system to reward students who adhere to them.

In order to successfully implement any school-wide behavior management plan successfully, there must be buy-in and support from all stakeholder groups, and everyone must be “on board” with the plan as it is devised. Therefore, the school set aside a full day during the week before students returned from the summer vacation to review the plan with staff and elicit any input they might have. Much of the presentation was provided by faculty members so that it did not appear top-down.

First, the faculty reviewed the data, which indicated hundreds of office referrals of individual students and groups of students from virtually every setting in the school. There was a review of what had been tried. The faculty then learned about the primary, secondary, and tertiary groups of students and their behavior profiles. Then the research behind and principles of positive behavior management were outlined. The faculty moved into small groups where they outlined the consequences and rewards that might be applied consistently. Their feedback was elicited as to the management of the program and their ideas incorporated. Future faculty meeting dates were scheduled to explore student behavior data, evaluate the program, decide what was working and what was not working, and modify the program as necessary. The district facilitator was present for most of the meeting to offer future training as needed by the staff.

The school district requires a report to parents on disciplinary procedures. A brochure was prepared to replace that. It explained the program in simplified language and use of diagrams so that it could be understood by a population that lacked literacy skills in both their primary and secondary languages. It was also explained at Back to School Night with time set aside to respond to questions.

In August, when students returned to school, they found that new expectations were in place for behavior in all classroom settings, in the cafeteria, on the playground, in the hallways and bathrooms, and during arrival and dismissal times. Students were placed in groups and rotated to stations around the building where behaviors were explicitly taught. For example, the principal was on the playground and he demonstrated safe procedures for using playground equipment, how students were to line up and travel from the building to the playground and back. They noted that the playground had been divided up into activity areas. For example, one area was for jump-rope only, another for a soccer game, another for basketball, and so on. Each area around the building was introduced in a similar manner, with behavior expectations outlined at each.

The school mascot is the Hawk, so a positive behavior incentive called the Hawk Bill is invented and used by all staff to reward students for appropriate behavior. Students may redeem these rewards at a school store for prizes. Prizes have been donated by local business, and some are purchased from a fund the school has set up. The prizes are small, but students still like them. Especially popular are small pencil sharpeners in the form of NFL football helmets.

Special events are also used to reward positive behavior. The Gobble 'Til You Wobble Party is held the day before Thanksgiving vacation, with movies and popcorn, arts and crafts, and games for students who make it through November without disciplinary infractions. Similarly, as the school year winds down in June, a time when student behavior often begins to deteriorate, the "Party Like a Hawk Star" campaign begins. Students who make it through the last four weeks of school without behavioral issues are invited to the Last Day Lollapalooza, a large event with a teacher DJ and dancing, refreshments donated by a local restaurant, face-painting, and games. Special events that reinforce positive behavior are offered all year long.

As a result, the number of behavior problems diminished dramatically. The school kept track of behavior infractions: where they occur, at what time, and what kind. They keep track of the reduction in office referrals, once in the hundreds, to almost none. Academic engagement time increased and academic performance improved. Administrators had increased time for instructional support, and suspensions have decreased from more than 50 to less than 10 in one year. Parents were relieved that their students were happier and felt better about coming to school each day, and attendance improved.

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