

P.S. 109

FINAL REPORT



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

Contents

- Introduction 1
 - About This Report 1
 - About P.S. 109 1
 - Audit Process at P.S. 109 1

- Key Findings 3
 - Critical Key Findings 3
 - Positive Key Findings 4
 - Additional Key Findings 4

- Recommendations 5
 - Overview of Recommendations 5
 - Recommendation 1: Classroom Management 7
 - Recommendation 2: Word-Study Curriculum 12
 - Recommendation 3: Independent Reading 17
 - Recommendation 4: Common Core 21
 - Recommendation 5: Professional Learning 25

- References 29

Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an External School Curriculum Audit (ESCA) of P.S. 109 conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as in corrective action (year 1) 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 (NCLB) 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. 109

Located in Brooklyn, P.S. 109 (K109) has 636 students from kindergarten through Grade 8. Sixty-three percent of the student population is eligible for free lunch, and 3 percent are eligible for reduced-price lunch (Accountability and Overview Report 2009–2010).

Seventy-eight percent of the students are black or African American, and 20 percent are Hispanic or Latino. Twenty-one percent of the students are classified as students with disabilities, and 14 percent are identified as English language learners. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 92 percent.

In 2009–10, P.S. 109 did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for all students, the black or African-American subgroup, students with limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged students. In 2010–11, P.S. 109's state accountability status was designated as "Corrective Action (year 1)."¹

Audit Process at P.S. 109

The ESCA approach utilized at P.S. 109 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. 109. 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 on June 14, 2011. During this meeting, 31 stakeholders from the P.S. 109 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.

¹ <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/37/AOR-2010-332200010109.pdf>. Accessed on March 3, 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 has 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. 109.

Key Findings

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

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Behavior management/transitions are inconsistent in the school.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from classroom observations and teacher survey results. Behavior management techniques and transition routines help teachers minimize the loss of allocated instructional time. Eight of the 19 classrooms observed demonstrated consistent behavior management and transition routines. Two classrooms that were observed had no routines in place, and nine had limited routines related to transitions. Seventeen of 49 teachers who took the teacher survey reported they had never received professional development focused on managing student behavior.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Individualized education programs (IEPs) are not being used consistently to drive instruction.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by information from teacher survey results. Twenty-five of the 34 respondents agreed that IEPs are consulted on an infrequent basis (less than one or two times per month).

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:

Most teachers are not teaching word study effectively.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by information from classroom observations. Word work, or systematic word study, refers to students' ability to recognize words, both aurally and visually. Though the school administration expects teachers at every grade level to schedule 20 to 30 minutes of word study each day, no word study lessons were observed in any of the 19 classrooms visited. Though word walls were displayed in the visited classrooms, they were neither used consistently nor in compliance with the criteria for an effective wall.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 4:

Lack of routines is negatively impacting instructional time.

Critical Key Finding 4 is supported by information from classroom observations. In addition to the lack of transition routines, teachers in eight classrooms did not have routines in place to encourage student engagement. In one classroom, a teacher would call for volunteers but then would not always give three to five seconds' wait time for students to respond.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Most teachers have scheduled meetings for collaboration.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by information from school interviews, teacher survey results, and the review of school-submitted documents. K–5 teachers have weekly collaborative planning periods by grade levels, and middle school teachers have weekly collaborative planning periods by department. In addition, teachers meet informally. More than 77 percent of teachers agreed that English as a second language (ESL) teachers and general education teachers collaborate informally to share knowledge and strategies.

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 2:

Some teachers are using differentiated instruction to modify instruction for all.

Positive Key Finding 2 is supported by information from classroom observations, teacher survey results, and the review of school-submitted documents. Differentiated instruction in the form of guided reading groups was observed in four of the 19 classrooms observed and is mandated for all teachers of literacy in grades K–8.

Additional Key Findings

Additional key findings were identified by co-interpretation participants but were not prioritized by the group for action planning. However, the auditors found these key findings worthy of consideration in developing recommendations.

ADDITIONAL KEY FINDING 1:

Some teachers are not utilizing independent reading effectively.

Additional Key Finding 1 is supported by information from classroom observations. The amount of reading students do in and out of school significantly affects the development of reading rate, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and academic achievement. However, teachers are not monitoring how well students are utilizing independent reading time.

ADDITIONAL KEY FINDING 2:

Specific skills and strategies that students need to learn in each grade are not evident in curriculum maps.

Additional Key Finding 2 is supported by information from the review of school-submitted documents. Specific curriculum goals that are to be accomplished at each grade level were not evident on the curriculum maps.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the P.S. 109 co-interpretation, participants prioritized several key findings that focused on areas in which the school can improve its ELA instruction and curriculum. The recommendations address these findings in a direct way.

As noted in Critical Key Finding 1 and also in Critical Key Finding 4, many teachers are not using classroom management techniques and routines that allow full use of instructional time and that encourage student engagement. Lack of routines in numerous classrooms resulted in time off task. Active engagement among students was not facilitated through effective routines, such as randomly calling on students and waiting an adequate amount of time for them to respond to questions or requests. The recommendation on classroom management addresses these findings and, if implemented, will positively impact ELA and other subject areas.

At P.S. 109, essential components of an ELA program were not systematic. These include word study and independent reading. Two recommendations made in this report provide frameworks for these two ELA components.

All New York schools will have to modify their curriculum to meet the Common Core standards, which were adopted by New York state. A recommendation on the Common Core standards is provided because any changes to the curriculum and curricular materials must consider the Common Core standards.

Any efforts to improve the curriculum and instruction are based on professional development, particularly job-embedded professional development opportunities that allow teachers to support one another's learning. One of the recommendations provided in this report addresses professional learning, particularly job-embedded professional learning.

No recommendation is being made for the issue identified in Critical Key Finding 2 (IEPs are not being used consistently to drive instruction). This issue can be addressed by being more diligent about using IEPs to plan instruction.

THE FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Develop and implement with fidelity a plan to ensure that the components of effective classroom management are evident in every classroom.
2. Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide word-study curriculum.
3. Develop and implement with fidelity a schoolwide plan to increase the effectiveness of independent reading.

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 topics identified during co-interpretation.

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: Classroom Management

Develop and implement with fidelity a plan to ensure that the components of effective classroom management are evident in every classroom.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Studies of effective teachers, effective reading programs, and productive schools show that management at the classroom level is critical to ensuring that time is used well and that reading achievement is maximized (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Samuels, 1981). In classrooms taught by skilled teachers, more of the available learning time “is spent in activities with academic value” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

Routines. Classroom routines positively affect students’ academic performance as well as their behavior (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt, & Zigmond, 2000). Teachers in schools with high levels of student literacy “maximize every instructional minute” (Briggs & Thomas, 1997). Well-managed classrooms are the hallmark of effective teachers. Research shows that students learn more in classrooms that are well organized and that good classroom management results in more and better student engagement.

There is a substantial body of research showing “that time allocated for academic instruction in a school day can easily slip away when a teacher cannot keep the transitional time, wait time, and behavioral problems to a minimum” (Berliner, 1981). In “unsuccessful classrooms, time is wasted because routines are not established and there are often interruptions brought about by discipline problems” (Samuels, 1981). Even in many average classes, “there is a lack of attention to classroom management that results in considerable inefficiency and reduced achievement on standardized tests of reading” (Berliner, 1981).

In contrast, when teachers are effective managers, the classrooms are characterized as “being orderly because less time is wasted on discipline problems and giving instructions on routine matters, such as passing out books and transitions from one activity to another” (Samuels, 1981) and because there are routines for ensuring that learning activities run smoothly (Anderson et al., 1985; Briggs & Thomas, 1997). The great portion of class time is devoted to the lesson at hand (Rutter, 1983).

Self-regulation. Research shows that effective teachers foster self-regulation in their students. Self-regulation includes and is related to children’s capacity to focus attention upon, engage in, and persist at learning tasks; their ability to manage both positive and negative emotions in a group setting; and their capacity to plan and follow through on their plans. Warmth, organization, and predictability are factors that improve self-regulation in the home and also seem to be important in classrooms.

Preschool children with good self-regulation have higher levels of school readiness. Good self-regulation in preschool predicts children’s academic success in primary grades better than children’s IQ, their socioeconomic background, or their preschool knowledge of mathematics and literacy (Blair, 2011). Self-regulation continues to be a strong predictor of academic achievement in elementary school and middle school. Low-income students consistently demonstrate lower levels of self-regulation and higher incidences of behavior problems than their middle-income peers (Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008).

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

New York City Department
of Education: Teacher
Development Toolkit

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

*Creating Classroom
Routines and
Procedures*

http://teacher.scholastic.com/classroom_management_pictures/index.htm

Tools of the Mind program

<http://www.toolsofthemind.org>

Promoting Alternative
Thinking Skills program

<http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/paths.html>

Classroom environment. A school behavior plan has an indirect influence on student achievement and is not as important in affecting student achievement as classroom environments, which have a more direct and immediate impact on achievement. Clearly articulating and enforcing rules of behavior at the school level has a moderate influence on student achievement (Marzano, 2000). Decreasing disruptive behavior in the classroom, however, and employing effective classroom management strategies have a strong influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Because of this, the focus of this recommendation is on the classroom rather than the school. The school should assess whether schoolwide behavior problems warrant adopting schoolwide strategies.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Establish routines.

Teachers should establish routines and procedures that minimize disruptions and provide smooth transitions within and between lessons. Establishing consistent and predictable routines lets students know what to expect and what is expected of them. Routines set guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behavior. In many classrooms, a significant proportion of class time (about 25 percent on average) is spent on transitions such as collecting and putting away materials, listening to nonacademic directions, and waiting for help or for the next activity to begin. Teachers can minimize the time lost by preparing carefully for transitions and warning students about the close of one activity and the beginning of another, providing brief but clear directions, having materials immediately available, actively monitoring and reinforcing appropriate student behavior, and beginning a new activity quickly and enthusiastically.

Routines are procedures for handling both daily occurrences (e.g., taking attendance, starting a class period, turning in assignments) and minor interruptions of instruction, such as the class phone ringing. Teachers should develop routines for three types of recurring and predictable classroom events.

- **Establish administrative procedures for recurring events.** Such events include storing coats or books, using the restroom, sharpening pencils, taking attendance, making announcements, and dismissing students.
- **Establish behaviors that support instruction and learning to make teaching and learning as effective as possible.** The routines include how to get students to pay attention such as a nonverbal signal or a countdown, how students should respond to teacher questions (hand raising or random choice of which students will answer), when and how individual students can get extra help from the teacher, and what to do when students finish tasks ahead of the rest of the class.
- **Establish routines for working in groups.** Routines should be established for how to participate in discussions, how to behave in groups, and how to work with a partner.

Consistency and practice are critical to making classroom routines effective. Teachers need to consistently follow through and actively explain the routines and the reasoning behind them. They then must model routines consistently and persistently. Teachers

have to teach the classroom routines in the same way they teach academic subjects and need to be proactive in keeping students focused on successful routines. Teaching the routines is particularly important at the start of the school year.

2. Foster self-regulation.

Teachers help students' ability to self-regulate by providing an organized classroom environment and by removing elements in the environment that might trigger impulsive behavior. Students begin school with a set of self-regulation skills that are a product of their genetic inheritance and their family environment. Teachers, however, can have an effect on the students who come to school without good self-regulation by improving planning and organization, making classroom management more consistent, and facilitating students' independent and small-group work. Teachers should address three factors that create problems for self-regulation—negative emotions, lapses, and cue exposure.

- **Correct and redirect negative emotions.** Negative emotions reduce the ability to self-regulate. Many misbehaviors—fighting, teasing, breaking rules—are associated with negative emotions such as anger or frustration. When addressing negative emotions, teachers can give students who act impulsively a correction and redirection rather than a rebuke, which makes the students feel bad (negative emotion).
- **Help students to put lapses behind them.** Lapses (“falling off the wagon”) can lead to people more or less giving up their attempts to self-regulate. When a student has a lapse, the teacher should encourage the student to put the lapse behind and resolve again to behave according to expectations the student is well aware of.
- **Eliminate cues that prompt student distraction.** Cues (subtle or overt reminders of the appeal of the thing to be avoided) can make self-regulation difficult. Teachers should get rid of the cues (remove the distraction) rather than counting on students to ignore cues.

3. Modify the learning environment.

There are several ways teachers can modify the learning environment and decrease problem behavior. Three effective strategies:

- **Assign attainable academic tasks.** When there is a mismatch between a student's ability level and the difficulty and/or length of an academic task, inappropriate behavior is more frequent (Umbreit, Lane, & Dejud, 2004). Teachers should increase opportunities for academic success—for example, by providing opportunities for students to answer questions correctly. Teachers should pay careful attention to the difficulty of reading assignments and support students as they are learning to read. Every student has an independent, instructional, and frustration reading level, and teachers should ensure that students are not being asked to read materials at their frustration level. Literacy activities should be challenging but attainable with effort. Teachers can boost students' confidence, which increases students' intrinsic motivation to read, by working with students to set goals, monitoring their progress toward those goals, and providing frequent positive feedback on their performance.

- **Use engaging instruction.** Engaging instruction is a prevention tool for problem behavior. Adapting or varying instruction to promote high rates of student engagement and on-task behavior decreases problem behavior. Instruction delivered at a brisk pace contributes to higher levels of student engagement. Instruction that includes modeling, guided practice, and independent practice also increases student engagement.
- **Form positive relationships.** Forming positive relationships with students is another prevention tool against problem behavior. Students need to know the teacher cares about them and their learning.

As part of the NYC Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011–12 for strengthening teacher practice, many schools will be using Charlotte Danielson’s *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (2007). Danielson divides the complex activity of teaching into 22 components clustered into four domains of teaching responsibility. One of these domains is instruction, which includes engaging students in learning. Danielson identifies and provides guidance on many instructional variables that influence student engagement: the way content is represented, activities, assignments, grouping of students, instructional materials and resources, and structure and pacing, among others.

The *Teacher Development Toolkit*, provided online by the NYC Department of Education, addresses the Professional Teaching Standard of Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning. The toolkit offers guidance in five areas that support learning and engagement:

- Connecting students’ prior knowledge, life experiences, and interests with learning goals
- Using a variety of instructional strategies and resources to respond to students’ diverse needs
- Promoting self-directed, reflective learning for all students
- Facilitating learning experiences that promote autonomy, interaction, and choice
- Engaging students in problem solving, critical thinking, and other activities that make subject matter meaningful

Improving Self-Regulation in Children

An example of a curriculum designed to improve self-regulation in children once they enter school is *Tools of the Mind*, an early childhood program composed of 40 activities intended to improve self-regulation, working memory, and cognitive flexibility. The *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies* (PATHS) program for preschool and elementary students is another program designed to help develop self-regulation while focusing on social and emotional learning. These two programs have some evidence of effectiveness but more research is needed.

Scholastic, the educational publisher, has launched a Keep Cool in School campaign against violence and verbal abuse. The program is founded on the work of Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D., an expert on brain development and children in crisis. Perry has identified six core strengths that children need to be more resourceful, more successful in social situations, and more resilient. Self-regulation is one of the core strengths. The six core strengths include attachment (being a friend), self-regulation (thinking before you act), affiliation (joining in), awareness (thinking of others), tolerance (accepting differences), and respect (respecting yourself and others). A child who can form and maintain healthy emotional relationships, self-regulate, join and contribute to a group, and be aware, tolerant, and respectful of himself and others will rarely become violent and will recover more quickly when exposed to violence.

Developing Self-Regulation Strategies

Explicit instruction to develop self-regulation strategies is necessary for some students. These self-regulation strategies are included as part of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). SRSD has been used in spelling, reading, writing, and mathematics.

For example, fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in the Montgomery County Schools in Maryland used SRSD during writers' workshop to teach their students a five-step writing strategy for writing a story and to teach the self-regulation procedures of goal setting and self-monitoring through a series of extended minilessons. They found that this had positive effects on the writing of their students with and without a learning disability.

SRSD, developed by Harris and Graham (2008), is an approach to teaching writing that includes the development of self-regulation strategies. With the SRSD approach, students are explicitly taught strategies for specific writing genres as well as general writing strategies. In addition, they learn how to use self-regulation strategies, including goal setting, self-monitoring, self-reinforcement, and self-instructions, to help them manage the writing strategies and tasks and to obtain concrete and visible evidence of their progress. Students learn to use these writing and self-regulation strategies during the writing process.

Recommendation 2: 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 3: 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—scaffolded 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 they are 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 4: Common Core

Develop 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. 109 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 that 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 topics identified during co-interpretation.

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.

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.

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

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

- **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. 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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