

Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo High School

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo High School 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 students with disabilities (SWDs) and 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 that we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

About Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo High School

Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo is located in New York City, in Queens (Community School District 29). The school serves 4,063 students in Grades 9–12. Six percent of students are ELLs, and 11 percent are identified as SWDs. In 2010–11, Benjamin N. Cardozo's accountability status was "Improvement (Year 1)," due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) for its population of SWDs and ELLs.

Audit Process at Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo High School

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 May 17, 2011, attended by 16 staff members from Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo. Staff members included the principal; representatives from the administrative staff; special education, ESL, and general education teaching staff; and parents.

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:

- Special Education Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on the special education program and SWDs.
- English Language Learner Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on instruction of ELLs.
- Special Education Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 125 teachers, including 82 teachers of SWDs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 125 teachers, including 73 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 students with disabilities and 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:

Most (33 of 43) individualized education programs (IEPs) do not list instructional accommodations.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. Other key findings related to this key finding—but receiving fewer votes—are as follows:

- The majority of general education teachers do not report using IEPs frequently for instruction.
- The majority of teachers stated that professional development related to using IEPs to guide instruction and select instructional strategies was moderately helpful.

In addition, one positive key finding relating to Critical Key Finding 1 was identified during the co-interpretation process:

- Most special education teachers report referring to IEPs when planning instruction.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the Special Education Site Visit Report and the Special Education Teacher Survey Report. This key finding refers to the usefulness of IEPs for planning and informing instruction. Documents analyzed for the Site Visit Report show that a low percentage of IEPs specify appropriate instructional accommodations. Survey and interview data reveal that special education teachers rely frequently on IEPs to plan their instruction, but that general education teachers do not. Interview data from the Site Visit Report reveal further that neither special education nor general education teachers described using IEPs to learn about instructional strategies or accommodations that could be helpful in instructing a particular student. Teachers instead looked at IEPs to gather information about students' goals and progress towards achieving those goals.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Teachers identified the following needs for professional development related to SWDs and ELLs: reading IEPs, models of CTT (co-teaching), designing instruction for ELLs/SWDs, referring students for ISS/placement of those students, more professional development (general).

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from all four data reports. Although data reveal that teachers have found professional development on a number of topics helpful, data also show that teachers would like to receive additional professional development. Specifically, teachers would like receive professional development on topics related to critical aspects of instructing SWDs and ELLs. These topics include IEPs, co-teaching, designing instruction for SWDs and ELLs, and making appropriate referrals for extra support for SWDs and ELLs.

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 the vote at co-interpretation were as follows:

1. Formal and informal opportunities for collaboration exist and are supported by administrators.
2. Teachers of students with disabilities report and were observed using a variety of teaching strategies within the classroom.
3. Most teachers report using data for student instruction and evaluation.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo 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.

Recommendation 1: Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

AIR recommends that Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo High School take steps to support both general and special education teachers in the effective use of IEPs to inform instruction for SWDs.

LINK TO RESEARCH

In order for teachers to effectively use students' IEPs to guide instruction, it is critical to include information about appropriate instructional accommodations and modifications. The terms "accommodation" and "modification" are often confused in general conversations regarding the needs of students with disabilities and should be clearly delineated in the IEP

Accommodations provide access and allow students with disabilities to learn all of the same content as peers in the general education curriculum (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). Making decisions about which accommodations will be used by students begins with making good instructional decisions that are informed by gathering and reviewing information about the student, including present level of performance and disability (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, & Hall, 2005). Accommodations should allow students with disabilities to demonstrate their skill levels without being hindered by their disability (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Capizzi, 2005; Thurlow et al., 2005). Accommodations should be available in all content areas related to a student's disability (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). For example, if a student requires the use of oral and visual instructions for assignments, he or she must have these available in all content classes as well as support classes, such as art. Accommodations may also be used for testing (i.e., state and local exams) and should be listed in a student's IEP and implemented in the classroom.

Modifications change the expectations of content, learner achievement, and outcomes (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000) and are therefore used for fewer students. An even smaller group of students may require an individualized set of content goals. Modifications that are used for testing must be listed in the student's IEP (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 1, in which document data noted that a large percentage of IEPs reviewed did not include appropriate instructional accommodations. Furthermore, teachers noted that they did not use IEPs to identify and inform decisions about instructional strategies that could be helpful with their SWDs.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Contents of the IEP

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/IEPcontents.aspx>

The IEP Team

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/team.aspx>

The Short-and-Sweet IEP Overview

<http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/IEP/Pages/overview.aspx>

Writing Quality IEPs: Indicators of Best Practice

http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/d75/iep/Writing_Quality_IEPS.pdf

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to support teachers in the effective use of IEPs to inform instruction for SWDs:

1. Provide professional development to special and general education teachers on the writing and interpretation of IEPs. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Offering workshops on IEP writing to special education teachers and other staff who are responsible for writing IEPs. These workshops should focus on designing and including appropriate instructional accommodations for students with disabilities. These instructional accommodations should be based on present levels of performance and processing strengths and weaknesses, specifically stating strategies to accommodate individual learners.
- Offering workshops on IEP interpretation to all teachers who teach SWDs. Specific attention should be given to explaining and demonstrating the use of the included instructional accommodations in lesson planning and instruction as well as the effectiveness of the accommodations.
- Using staff development meetings periodically to provide refresher trainings and hold discussions about the use of IEPs to inform instruction.

2. Provide support to teachers in the effective use of IEPs. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Ensuring all teachers have ready access to copies of IEPs for all SWDs in their classrooms, possibly to include one-page summaries of all IEPs written by the special education teacher for the general education teachers of SWDs. This summary sheet would include an evaluation summary, present levels of performance, testing accommodations, recommended instructional accommodations, and any anecdotal information in the IEP that would help guide instruction.
- Encouraging special education and general education teachers to review IEPs together during common planning time as a way to share effective strategies for teaching students with disabilities.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Ms. Johnson, the special education coordinator at an urban elementary school, became concerned as she spoke with general education teachers that they were not familiar with the IEPs for SWDs in their classrooms and were not using them to guide instruction. She also conducted a review of the school's IEPs and found that although testing accommodations and annual goals were well written, many of the school's IEPs lacked appropriate instructional accommodations for students. Ms. Johnson first met with the school's special education teachers and provided professional development on instructional accommodations, asking each teacher to examine the IEPs for their students and revise or write accommodations as appropriate. She then developed an electronic template for a one-page summary of an IEP and asked each special education teacher to use the template to give an IEP summary to each teacher at the school who worked with a student with a disability.

As the summaries were being distributed to teachers, Ms. Johnson held a training session, during a school-wide faculty meeting, on interpreting IEPs and planning for instruction. At this training, she handed out sample lesson plans that directly linked to individual student goals and accommodations. Ms. Johnson also paired each general education teacher with a special education teacher at the same grade level and asked them to meet once a week to make sure that the needs of SWDs in the general education classes were being met.

Through the use of an observation protocol and teacher interviews during a six-month period, Ms. Johnson noticed that general education teachers had significantly increased their use of IEPs to guide instruction and were coming to IEP meetings better informed and more able to discuss the impact of instructional accommodations on the SWDs in their classrooms. She also conducted a second IEP review and found that almost all IEPs included appropriate instructional accommodations.

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

*Co-Teaching Modules:
Improving Access to the
General Education Curriculum
for Students With Disabilities
Through Collaborative
Teaching*

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/Co-TeachingModule.asp

*Enhancing Your Instruction
Through Differentiation
Professional Development
Module*

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/differentiationmodule.asp

*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 2: Professional Development

AIR recommends that Q415 Benjamin N. Cardozo High School review its current professional development plan and adjust to ensure appropriate coverage of content related to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs, such as the following topics identified during co-interpretation:

- IEPs
- Co-teaching
- Strategies for effectively instructing SWDs
- Strategies for effectively instructing ELLs
- Appropriate procedures for addressing the needs of students prior to referral to special education

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 (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). Professional development content areas should align with school improvement needs and goals in order to target improvement to those areas.

Schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement 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 (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, specifically on IEPs, co-teaching, strategies for teaching SWDs and ELLs, and referral and placement procedures. This recommendation also links to Critical Key Finding 1, the need to ensure that IEPs include information that is helpful for teachers in informing their instruction. As part of Recommendation 1, which links directly to Critical Key Finding 1, we have recommended that the school provide professional development on the writing and interpretation of IEPs.

QUICK LINKS: Continued

Accommodations, Techniques, and Aids for Learning

<http://www.ldaamerica.org/aboutld/teachers/understanding/accommodations.asp>

National Center on Response to Intervention

<http://www.rti4success.org/>

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring

<http://www.studentprogress.org/default.asp>

Supports, Modifications, and Accommodations for Students

<http://www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/supports/pages/default.aspx>

Site Visits: Seeing Schools in Action

<http://fcsn.org/peer/ess/sitevisitsib.html>

Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students With Disabilities

http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/accommodations_manual.asp

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

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

- 1. Conduct an in-depth needs assessment among staff regarding professional development needs related to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs. This action step can be accomplished by:**
 - Conducting a teacher survey asking for specific feedback on previous professional development opportunities related to SWDs and ELLs, and asking teachers to prioritize needs for additional professional development.
 - Reviewing teacher evaluation data regarding the instruction of SWDs and 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 SWDs and ELLs.
- 2. Offer professional development on co-teaching, including the following:**
 - How to establish an effective working relationship with your co-teacher
 - Different models of instructional delivery in a co-taught classroom (e.g., station teaching, parallel teaching)
- 3. Offer professional development on strategies for effectively instructing SWDs, including the following:**
 - How to effectively implement differentiated instructional strategies for SWDs
 - How to monitor student progress and adjust instruction based on student performance
 - How to use instructional modifications and accommodations in the classroom
 - How to implement effective instructional strategies with SWDs in the classroom
- 4. Offer professional development on strategies for effectively instructing ELLs, including the following:**
 - Understanding language development
 - Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both English language arts (ELA) and ESL state standards that clearly articulates literacy competencies and ensures that language objectives are defined at each stage of language acquisition
 - 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
- 5. Offer professional development on procedures for referring and placing students who need extra support, including the following:**
 - Prereferral practices
 - Universal screening to accurately identify students at risk for academic difficulty
 - Implementation of targeted, multitiered interventions for students identified as at risk

Development of a School-Wide Professional Development Plan

Mrs. Smith, a principal at a large, urban elementary school, designed and implemented a year-long plan for professional development designed to support diverse learners at her school who were not making adequate progress. Mrs. Smith knew that just targeting specialist teachers would not be enough for students to make gains, so she provided professional development focused on differentiated instruction and reaching individual learners to all teachers at the school.

She began with a day of school-wide training on differentiated instruction, presented by the school's literacy coach and assistant principal. This was followed with classroom visits and one-on-one sessions with each teacher in the school conducted by the assistant principal, literacy coach, and herself. In the one-on-one sessions, each teacher was asked to develop a plan for differentiating instruction and meeting the individual needs of SWDs and ELLs over the next nine months. Each teacher was observed once a month for the first four months of school and received coaching from an administrator or the literacy coach, including modeling differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom. At each faculty meeting, additional professional development on differentiated instruction was provided to the entire staff, including training on specific strategies to address student needs that teachers had identified and shared during individual coaching sessions.

By January, Mrs. Smith saw an increase in the use of differentiated instruction as she visited classrooms. Coaching sessions were shifted to be every other month for the second half of the school year, and teachers were each asked to commit to visiting and providing feedback to one of their fellow teachers. By the end of the year, teachers agreed that their awareness of and comfort with differentiated instruction had increased, and they reported feeling supported by administrators. Mrs. Smith convened a group of general education, special education, and ESL teachers to help write the professional development plan for the next school year. She also sent those teachers to training over the summer, with the understanding that they would serve as models and peer coaches for the following year.

Implementation of Newly Acquired Instructional Skills

Mrs. Brown is a teacher 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 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, which 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 that 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 and photos, 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.

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