

R072 Rocco Laurie

FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of an external school curriculum audit (ESCA) of R072 Rocco Laurie 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 community staff in order to identify areas for improvement and ways to generate plans for improvement. This report includes an overview of the audit process, a description of the key findings identified in collaboration with the school, and recommendations for addressing these issues. It is entirely up to the school to determine how to implement the recommendations. At the conclusion of each recommendation we have included examples from the field based on the experiences of AIR staff, which we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

About R072 Rocco Laurie

R072 Rocco Laurie is located in New York City, in Staten Island (Community School District 31). The school serves 1,619 students in Grades 6–8. Six percent of students are ELLs, and 23 percent are identified as SWDs. In 2010–11, Rocco Laurie’s accountability status was “Restructuring (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 R072 Rocco Laurie

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 26, 2011, attended by 16 staff members from R072 Rocco Laurie. Attendees included the principal and representatives from the administrative and teaching staff.

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 100 teachers, including 89 teachers of SWDs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 100 teachers, including 64 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 its 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

Less than half of the general education teachers report differentiating instruction daily or almost daily in classrooms that include SWDs and/or ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the Special Education Teacher Survey Report. This finding reflects a concern that staff has about the frequency with which general education teachers are differentiating instruction. As noted in the positive key findings, interview and observation data in the two site visit reports show that teachers are differentiating instruction. However, survey data show that only about half of general education teachers report differentiating instruction for SWDs and/or ELLs on a daily basis.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2

Based on teacher surveys, less than half of special education teachers report relying on one-on-one and classroom paraprofessionals to a great extent to effectively deliver instruction to students with disabilities, and more than one third of teachers indicate they are not sure to what extent they rely on classroom paraprofessionals to effectively deliver instruction to ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from the Special Education Teacher Survey Report and the English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, and reflects staff concern over a lack of sufficient support from paraprofessional staff regarding the education of SWDs and ELLs.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3

Based on interviews, teachers indicate a need for more professional development related to the instruction of ELLs and SWDs, specifically professional development regarding students with social-emotional and behavioral issues, provided by professionals who are currently or were recently in a classroom.

Critical Key Finding 3 is supported by data from the Special Education Site Visit Report. Although data show that many teachers have found professional development they have received to be helpful to them in educating SWDs and ELLs, teachers also report wanting more professional development. Specifically, interview data revealed that teachers want more professional development on the instruction of students with social-emotional and behavioral issues.

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. Based on interviews and teacher surveys, a majority of teachers report using informal opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.
2. Based on observations, interviews, and surveys, teachers differentiate instruction and incorporate differentiation in classrooms with ELLs and SWDs.
3. Based on interviews and teacher surveys, a majority of staff report receiving support from administrators related to teacher collaboration, instructional strategies for SWDs and students needing additional academic support, and ELLs and SWDs who will be entering their classrooms.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with R072 Rocco Laurie led AIR to make two recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process. These recommendations are supported by currently available research and evidence. Resources and references that support these recommendations are provided.

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

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

*Enhancing Your Instruction
Through Differentiation
Professional Development
Module*

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

Resources on differentiated instruction

<http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/differentiated-instruction-resources.aspx>

*Accommodations,
Techniques, and Aids for
Learning*

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

*Appropriate Behavioral,
Social, and Emotional
Supports to Meet the Needs
of All Students*

http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/appropriatebehavioralsupports.pdf

*Supports, Modifications,
and Accommodations for
Students*

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

(Continued)

Recommendation 1: Professional Development

AIR recommends that R072 Rocco Laurie review its current professional development plan and adjust it to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of SWDs and ELLs, including differentiated instruction and the instruction of students with social-emotional and behavioral needs.

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). Content areas should align with school improvement needs and goals to target improvement to those areas.

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

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 3, in which teachers indicated a need for more professional development, specifically on the instruction of students with social-emotional and behavioral needs. This recommendation also links to Critical Key Finding 1, which noted that fewer than half of general education teachers are differentiating instruction on a daily basis for SWDs and ELLs. Although data reviewed during the co-interpretation revealed that teachers are differentiating instruction, staff expressed a desire for general education teachers in particular to be differentiating instruction more often than they are now.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to adjust the professional development plan to increase the focus on using differentiated instructional strategies for all students, including SWDs and ELLs:

- 1. Offer professional development to all teachers on differentiated instruction strategies, including the following:**
 - How to use data and assessments to measure student proficiency
 - How to differentiate product, process, and content

QUICK LINKS: Continued

National Center for Students with Intensive Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs—Project REACH

<http://www.lehigh.edu/projectreach>.

Differentiated Instruction and Implications for UDL Implementation

http://aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgroundpapers/differentiated_instruction_udl

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

- How to effectively implement differentiated instructional strategies, such as compacting, tiered assignments, and contracts
- How to monitor student progress and adjust instruction based on student performance

2. Provide follow-up support to general education teachers in implementing differentiated instruction. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Encouraging special education and ESL teachers to work closely with general education teachers in planning lessons that incorporate strategies for differentiating instruction
- Using staff development meetings as a forum in which general education teachers can get feedback from special education teachers, ESL teachers, and other general education teachers on their implementation of differentiated instruction
- Placing increased emphasis on differentiated instruction during teacher evaluations

3. Offer professional development to all teachers and staff on strategies for effectively addressing the social-emotional and behavioral needs of students, including the following:

- How to implement a classroom environment that promotes positive social-emotional growth and behavior
- How to model appropriate social-emotional and behavioral skills for students, including how to make constructive behavior choices and how to work cooperatively with peers
- How to manage classroom behavior effectively
- How to respond appropriately and effectively to students with challenging or disruptive behaviors

Development of a School-Wide Professional Development Plan

Mrs. Smith, a principal at a large urban middle 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 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.

QUICK LINKS:

Online Sources for More Information

Educators' perceptions of collaborative planning processes for students with disabilities

<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/ETD/image/etd1344.pdf>

ESL Coteaching and Collaboration: Opportunities to Develop Teacher Leadership and Enhance Student Learning

http://www.tesolmedia.com/docs/TJ/firstissue/04_TJ_DoveHonigsfield.pdf

Working With Paraprofessionals

http://www.pealcenter.org/images/Giangreco-working_with.pdf

Implications of Collaboration in Education

<http://www.academicleadership.org/article/implications-of-collaboration-in-education>

ELL/General Education Collaboration Guidelines

<http://ell.spps.org/uploads/GeneralEducationCollabGdlines.pdf>

Starting Off on the Right Foot: Providing Orientation for Paraeducators

<http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/speconn/main.php?cat=collaboration§ion=main&subsection=work/orientation>

Recommendation 2: Paraprofessionals

AIR recommends that R072 Rocco Laurie explore options for ensuring adequate use of support staff by teachers in their efforts to educate SWDs and ELLs.

LINK TO RESEARCH

In the past decade, teacher roles have expanded to include active participation with principals and other staff in determining which programs will most effectively meet the needs of learners in their schools and how best to allocate resources to meet program objectives (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). This evolution in teacher roles has had a profound impact on the nature of paraeducator roles. The roles of “teacher aides,” as they once were called, have become more complex and demanding. In today’s schools, paraeducators need to work alongside and assist teachers with the delivery of instruction and other direct services for learners. Indeed, they have become technicians who are aptly described as paraeducators, just as their counterparts in law and medicine are designated as paralegals and paramedics (Pickett, 1989). While they may still perform some clerical tasks, their role has expanded in many ways. They are now asked to engage individual learners and small groups of learners in instructional activities developed by teachers, carry out management and disciplinary plans, assist teachers with functional and other assessment activities, and document objective information about learner performance that enables teachers to plan and modify curriculum and learning activities for students. Their assistance in a child’s education may be part of that child’s individualized education program (IEP) documentation regarding their use, and their schedules may be required and audited by state, local, and federal agencies that fund their employment.

The use of paraeducators in general and special education, Title I and other compensatory or remedial programs, multilingual and ESL programs, and early childhood and transitional services has greatly expanded the expectations that schools and staff have for them (French, 2001). As their use increases and becomes increasingly monitored, a new challenge is presented to principals and other professionals. This includes training, preparation, and supervision. However, the scheduling aspect of their use may be a real challenge to school administration, and to teachers as well, because they must match paraeducators’ schedules to defined roles and jobs in the school and to providing mandated services at prescribed times. Our present-day school leadership and their staffs need to develop new and creative ways to manage this process.

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 2, in which staff expressed concern over the lack of sufficient support from paraprofessionals for educating SWDs and ELLs.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be followed to increase the support for teachers in educating ELLs and SWDs:

1. Refine and improve the process of providing paraprofessional support in classrooms.

This action step can be accomplished by:

- Allocating funds to hire and train paraprofessionals to support teachers serving SWDs and ELLs
- Ensuring that all paraprofessionals in the school are properly trained and receive the necessary resources to serve the school's SWDs and ELLs
- Providing professional development sessions for teachers and paraprofessionals on implementing research-based strategies for working successfully together
- Offering opportunities for paraprofessionals and teachers to collaborate and plan together outside of regular instructional time

2. Consider options for leveraging existing staff and other resources to support teachers in serving SWDs and ELLs. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Trying to assign students whose first language is not English into classes with teachers who are fluent in their native languages
- Providing professional development on differentiated instruction to all teachers to help them meet the diverse needs of all students in their classrooms
- Utilizing a “buddy” system for SWDs and ELLs, where a peer in the classroom provides peer mentoring and social-emotional support

3. Provide opportunities and support for teachers and other school faculty to collaborate around specific areas of need related to SWDs and ELLs. This action step can be accomplished by:

- Implementing shared planning time during the school day that will enable content-area teachers to share information with special education and ESL teachers about content to be covered and to share ideas that will benefit all students
- Creating a listserv or other electronic method for teachers and other service providers to efficiently relay information to one another
- Establishing a joint general education/special education team and general education/ESL team that plan together regularly to ensure coverage across content areas and pacing that benefits all students
- Providing support for collaboration among school staff through professional development
- Including administration staff in collaboration efforts along with teaching staff

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mr. James is a principal increasingly concerned about the use of paraprofessionals as an instructional resource in his middle school. Too often he finds them assigned to classrooms where the need for them is not as critical as it might be in others. Often he finds them marking papers or preparing materials when they ought to be helping students. Sometimes he finds them just sitting in a chair while the classroom teacher instructs students in a whole-group setting. He decides that the fault is largely his own and resolves to do a better job of scheduling the paraprofessionals in the building and to work with them and his staff on best practices for their involvement in the school's instructional program.

Mr. James meets with his assistant principals and department chairs for ELA, mathematics, special education, and ESL. They review schedules and class lists. Students with similar needs are usually placed in small groups so that they are available for services provided by professionals and paraprofessionals. They review these schedules and look for changes that may have taken place in students' needs since the beginning of the school year. They note that some students are far more independent than they were and may not need paraprofessional services any longer, especially in the case of ELLs. They note IEP changes that may affect the placement of paraprofessionals and make all necessary changes.

Mr. James asks all ELA and mathematics teachers to complete a rough draft of the schedule they will follow for each of their classes. The schedule must include times for whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, and, in the case of ELA teachers, word work and writing. They find that paraprofessionals are not always scheduled to be in classrooms when they are most needed. A paraprofessional may not be needed during whole-group instructional times. They discuss these schedules, along with specific students and their needs. A "game plan" is established that identifies which groups and individual students need assistance by paraprofessionals and what form this assistance should take.

The assistant principals and department heads review these schedules with the teachers and paraprofessionals themselves. They also discuss some of the best practices for using paraprofessionals in the classroom. One paraprofessional may take over a below-grade-level reading or mathematics group for additional instruction when the teacher has finished working with them and needs to move on to another group, while another may work with one particular student who has difficulties working independently. Realizing that paraprofessionals may enter a classroom to begin working at a time when the teacher may be busy, a mailbox, desk drawer, or some kind of vehicle for communication of last-minute instructions is made available. Such instructions may include any special problem with a child that may have come up or notification that a child is absent and therefore new plans are in order.

In addition, Mr. James works with representatives for the special education and ESL teams, along with the literacy coach to plan and schedule training sessions for paraprofessionals. This might include how best to teach certain algorithms, how to use mathematics manipulatives, techniques for teaching guided reading, how to effectively help a child who is drafting a piece of writing, or information about specific software applications in use in the school. Paraprofessionals also are asked to complete a survey specifying training they would like to help them be more effective in their jobs. This training is integrated into the school's professional development plan for the year.

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