

# VOYAGES Preparatory High School

FINAL REPORT



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

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# Introduction

## About This Report

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

## About VOYAGES Preparatory High School

Viable Options for Young Adults to Grow, Excel, and Succeed (VOYAGES) Preparatory High School (Q744) is a high school with 200 students in Grades 9–12. The school is located in Elmhurst, New York, in the borough of Queens. The school population comprises 28 percent black, 58 percent Hispanic, 7 percent white, and 7 percent Asian students. The student body includes 7 percent English language learners and 8 percent special education students (Special Education Service Delivery Report). Of the students, 47.30 percent are boys, and 52.70 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year is 71 percent. Of the students, 67 percent are eligible for free lunch, and 9 percent are eligible for reduced-price lunch (Accountability and Overview Report 2009–2010).

VOYAGES is a transfer high school serving the borough of Queens. According to the NYCDOE website (2011a), “Transfer Schools are small, academically rigorous, full-time high schools designed to re-engage students who are behind in high school or have dropped out.” VOYAGES students are exclusively “overage and under-credited” and typically have a history of struggles engaging in high school due to academic, social-emotional, and family issues, frequently in combination rather than isolation. Students apply to VOYAGES and then undergo a rigorous intake process to ensure the school is a productive match for each student and to gather as much information as possible so that VOYAGES staff can work for the greatest positive impact on each student’s academic experience. VOYAGES partners with the Queens Community House, a social services organization serving Queens families. Together, the school and the community organization work to improve the lives of students seeking to re-engage and complete high school after struggling in a traditional high school environment.

VOYAGES staff seek to give students a chance to graduate from high school when such an accomplishment may have seemed impossible just weeks prior to admission. The biggest challenge, as noted by school staff throughout the ESCA process, is finding innovative and effective methods to meet the myriad special needs the students carry with them to school each day (or keep them from coming to school) and mitigate the issues the students face when they leave the building. VOYAGES staff also are aware of the inherent disadvantage they face competing in an accountability system that doesn’t account for their unique structure and

student body composition, but they do not let this impact their commitment to improving their practice and outcomes for all students.

## **Audit Process at VOYAGES Preparatory High School**

The ESCA approach utilized at the high school level examines six topic areas: student engagement, academic interventions and supports, support for incoming students, classroom instruction, professional development, and courses and extracurricular activities. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by VOYAGES Preparatory High School. 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-interpretation<sup>SM</sup> meeting held on May 6, 2011. During this meeting, nine stakeholders from the VOYAGES Preparatory High School 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.

The remainder of this report presents the key findings that emerged from the co-interpretation process and the actionable recommendations that Learning Point Associates developed in response. Please note that there is not necessarily a one-to-one connection between key findings and recommendations; rather, the key findings are considered as a group, and the recommended strategies are those that we believe are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student performance at VOYAGES.

## Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, co-interpretation participants determined a set of key findings. These key findings are detailed in this section. Each key finding statement was crafted by co-interpretation participants, and they are presented here in the participants' own words.

### Critical Key Findings

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:**

Half of the staff feels there is no consistent behavior plan.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by evidence from the Teacher Survey report and the Observation report. This key finding was the most highly prioritized by co-interpretation participants. According to the Teacher Survey report, staff perception is divided regarding consistent use of behavior management strategies. Half of teachers feel that the strategies they use to manage behavior are not consistently used by other staff members. Also, Teacher Survey respondents indicate inconsistent access to behavior data in the form of discipline referrals. Supporting this response is data from the Observation report, indicating that student behavior is a classroom disruptor.

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:**

VOYAGES offers a number of programs and courses to address academic deficiencies: skills-based classes, Regents examination preparation, grade-level teams (GLTs)/access to tutors for young women, and social/emotional support by community-based organization (CBO) counselors, NYCDOE guidance counselor, and dean. These programs and services face constraints due to low student attendance and lack of participation.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by evidence from the Teacher Survey report as well as interview and document review data from the High School Structures and Supports report. Data demonstrate several strategies and programs VOYAGES employs to reach students facing academic struggles. Additional data indicate that the size of the staff and time available to them somewhat limits the reach of the offerings, and low student attendance and engagement at these programs hinders efficacy. For these reasons, only one third of Teacher Survey respondents feel that students who need academic intervention services will receive services that impact performance.

#### **CRITICAL KEY FINDING 3:**

Observations indicate that although no classes fell in the low range for analysis and problem solving, only one fell in the high range.

Critical Key Finding 3, supported by data from the Observation report, indicates that the overwhelming majority of observed classrooms (93 percent) were rated in the mid-range on the CLASS-S Observation Protocol in the area of analysis and problem solving. This rating is indicative of limited opportunities for students to utilize higher-level thinking skills or perform metacognition. Higher-level thinking skills and metacognition activities that were inconsistently

observed in these classrooms include problem solving, self-evaluation and planning, and opportunities for students to analyze and explain their thought processes required for positions reached through inductive and deductive reasoning.

## **Positive Key Finding**

### **POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:**

Observation data show that, out of all of the dimensions, positive climate/emotional support has the highest average rating.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by data from the Observation report. Positive climate had the highest average rating of all CLASS-S Observation Protocol dimensions, and Learning Point Associates data collectors did not observe any instances of negative climate.

# Recommendations

## Overview of Recommendations

During the VOYAGES Preparatory High School co-interpretation, the school team identified issues concerning consistency of plans and strategies to address student behavior, keeping students engaged in services designed to provide additional academic support, and rigorous enactment of instructional activities requiring students to engage in higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and problem solving. Co-interpretation participants from VOYAGES and the auditors noted that although the school already has plans and programs in place to address these issues, it is important for the school to maintain a disposition of continuous improvement to best serve the students. In support of this goal, co-interpretation participants also identified positive key findings, almost universally recognizing the positive climate, supportive and unified staff, and catalog of services and efforts offered by the school to attempt to meet the challenging needs of the student population.

## THE THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

With these issues and strengths in mind, Learning Point Associates auditors developed the following three recommendations:

1. Ensure consistency of implementation of a schoolwide positive behavior policy and system with clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. The policy and related system should include concise social expectations and a continuum of supports, interventions, incentives/rewards, and consequences—including a clear delineation of activities and programs that students are entitled to versus those that are privileges.
2. Implement strategies that foster student engagement in academic intervention services to promote academic achievement as well as systems to monitor student participation in intervention services and programs.
3. Build on existing positive climate to improve implementation of instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

These three 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, as well as suggestions for further reading, appear in the References section at the end of this report.

Please note that the order in which these recommendations are presented does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations.

## Recommendation 1: Consistent Implementation of a Schoolwide Behavior Plan

**Ensure consistency of implementation of a schoolwide positive behavior policy and system with clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. The policy and related system should include concise social expectations and a continuum of supports, interventions, incentives/rewards, and consequences—including a clear delineation of activities and programs that students are entitled to versus those that are privileges.**

While data show that VOYAGES maintains a fairly positive classroom environment, and the school employs a number of methods to encourage and reward positive behavior (including the “VOYAGES bucks” currency system, field trips, and schoolwide recognition), staff still feel that problem behavior is addressed inconsistently, stemming from the perception that there is no consistently implemented behavior plan. The following recommendation and strategies both reinforce the steps the school has taken to support positive behavior and provide guidance toward a consistent school plan for addressing disruptive behavior that all staff enact.

### LINK TO RESEARCH

One of the greatest obstacles within urban schools is the large number of students whose behavior interferes with their achievement or the achievement of others. Often, these students have behaved in a manner that disrupts the educational climate of the classroom and the school. One key element for changing this pattern is ensuring consistent implementation of a schoolwide behavior program that is developed with the input and support of parents and staff and establishes schoolwide expectations for how students should behave and for how staff should both support positive behavior and intervene with disruptive behavior.

Effective schoolwide behavior programs have clearly established standards for safety, discipline, and respect. Students need a secure, orderly environment that promotes their personal well-being and supports learning. Rules should also be fair and stress the student’s responsibility to the school community, their parents, and themselves. All students in the school need to be aware of the rules, the reasons for the rules, and the consequences for breaking the rules. Effective discipline programs are based on praise and encouragement for positive behavior and clear, consistent consequences for misbehavior (Chicago Public Schools, Office of Specialized Services, 1998).

Effective schools build and maintain a positive “social culture.” Successful students are safe (don’t hurt themselves or others), respectful (follow adult requests and get along with their peers), and responsible (arrive to class on time and complete assignments). These foundational skills are essential for a safe and orderly school environment. In addition, members of a positive social culture use “higher-order” skills, such as (1) impulse control, (2) anger management, (3) conflict resolution, (4) empathy, and (5) drug and alcohol use resistance and prevention. Research studies consistently show that schools that establish a positive social culture also achieve the best academic gains (California Services for Technical Assistance and Training [CaSTAT], 2011).

Positive behavior interventions, used correctly by teachers, administrators, and parents, encourage or strengthen desirable behavior and reduce inappropriate behavior. Positive

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

These videos show School-Wide Positive Behavior Support in action:

*Alcott Middle School Behavior Expectations and Related Teaching Materials* (Video)

[http://www.pbis.org/swpbs\\_videos/alcott\\_mid.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/alcott_mid.aspx)

*Discovering School-Wide PBS: Moving Towards a Positive Future* (from Florida’s Positive Behavior Support Project) (Video)

[http://www.pbis.org/swpbs\\_videos/pbs\\_video-discovering\\_swpbs.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/pbs_video-discovering_swpbs.aspx)

*Washington Elementary School Example* (Video)

[http://www.pbis.org/swpbs\\_videos/wash\\_elem.aspx](http://www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/wash_elem.aspx)

interventions have a greater likelihood of enabling a student to change his or her behavior in a way that does not interrupt learning. Effective interventions encourage praise and recognition of positive behavior and demand clear and consistent responses to misbehavior. Children and youth tend to respond to positive techniques. In some cases, however, more restrictive interventions may be necessary to control and change extremely inappropriate and aggressive behavior (Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2011).

School-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) is based on the research-based application of lessons learned from more than 7,000 schools currently implementing successful changes in their school environment. SWPBS evolved from valid research in the field of special education. SWPBS is not a curriculum, intervention, or practice but a decision-making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidenced-based behavioral practices for improving important academic outcomes for all students (Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2011).

Researchers have only recently begun to study the effects of schoolwide behavioral management systems and what it takes to implement these systems effectively. While it is too early to offer “recipes for success,” the work of key researchers and their school-based colleagues are providing some encouraging developments. There are different variations of schoolwide systems of behavioral support, yet most have certain features in common. The emphasis is on consistency—both throughout the building and across classrooms. The entire school staff is expected to adopt strategies that will be uniformly implemented. As a result, approaches necessitate professional development and long-term commitment by the school leadership for this innovation to take hold. The school-based models featured in the sidebar have been selected to show how different features of a schoolwide behavioral management system can apply across urban, suburban, and rural locations. These schools understand that change is incremental and are approaching implementation of their schoolwide systems slowly and over an extended time period.

### Common Features of Schoolwide Behavioral Management Systems

- Total staff commitment to managing behavior, whatever approach is taken
- Clearly defined and communicated expectations and rules
- Consequences and clearly stated procedures for correcting rule-breaking behaviors
- An instructional component for teaching students self-control and/or social skill strategies

(Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, 1997)

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

### 1. Incorporate key guiding principles of student behavior management.

The Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has established the following SWPBS guiding principles:

- Develop a continuum of scientifically based behavior and academic interventions and supports.
  - If not already established, a well-articulated schoolwide behavior policy/student code inclusive of positive expectations, minor and major infractions, etc., must first be in place. Clarity about expectations for staff's handling of in-class behaviors is important. Authentic faculty feedback and participation are important throughout the policy and system development processes.
- Use data to make decisions and solve problems.
  - Data on both minor and major behavior incidents should be collected, tracked, analyzed, and utilized in decision making by the team and faculty on a monthly basis at minimum. Data should be presented in a user-friendly format.
- Arrange the environment to prevent the development and occurrence of problem behavior.
  - This is inclusive of three to five positively stated overarching schoolwide social expectations that are visibly posted around the schools, particularly in problematic areas.
- Teach and encourage prosocial skills and behaviors.
  - Students should be introduced/taught the schoolwide expectations, rules for specific settings, reward/consequence system, and related interventions/supports. Staff should be trained on how to present expectations to students. Ongoing communication and collaboration with families and the community are very important.
- Implement evidenced-based behavioral practices with fidelity and accountability.
  - Interventions should be multitiered, increasing in levels of intensity, and inclusive of evidence-based programs or strategies. The primary level (all students) is the overall behavior management plan. The secondary level (some students) is for a targeted group or focused on individual plans for those who did not respond to the first level. The tertiary level (few students) includes highly individualized plans for students who did not respond to the first two levels.
- Screen universally and monitor student performance and progress continuously.
  - There should be a plan for collecting data to evaluate SWPBS outcomes in which data are collected as scheduled and used to evaluate their effectiveness for future adjustments.

## 2. Build a team.

Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project (2005) outlines an SWPBS process that can provide a systematic structure and formalized procedures that can be implemented during the summer months. The initial requirement is to ensure consistent adoption and philosophical alignment among school staff. The suggestion is not to develop another group but to fold SWPBS into the roles and responsibilities of an already established team. Members of the team should include administrators (i.e., principal, assistant principal, or dean), counselors, social workers, general education teachers, special education teachers, a behavior specialist and/or teacher with demonstrated behavior management skills, and a coach/district representative. It is vital for administration to support the process, take an active role along with the rest of the team, and/or attend most meetings.

## 3. Determine school capacity.

Other important implementation consideration points center around gauging and developing the school's individual and collective capacities to implement a comprehensive program. Related initial key questions include:

- What are the schoolwide social expectations, routines, etc.?
- Who at the schoolwide level has the unique disposition necessary to both firmly hold students accountable *and* support them as they attempt to adjust with fidelity?
- What are the procedural expectations of teachers for managing in-class behaviors?
- What manageable recourse do teachers have for patterns of and/or extremely disruptive and disrespectful instances of behavior "in the moment" (i.e., immediate referrals to a dean/counselor/administration, in-school "time-out room," etc.) and criteria for reentry)?
- What is a specific, realistic, and *manageable* continuum of interventions and supports?
- What is the specific, realistic, *and manageable* continuum of consequences for patterns of disruptive in-class behavior?
- How will the efficacy of chosen interventions and supports be intermittently monitored and adjusted as needed in a data-driven manner? Who is responsible for this?
- What are the mechanisms for notifying and collaborating with students' parents/guardians in the process early and often?
  - Who is responsible for this (i.e., teachers, counselors, social workers, deans, administrators)?
- What are the thresholds for more severe consequences/privilege losses for patterns or disruptive behaviors?
- What outside resources are available to support students and families struggling with issues that are affecting students' behavior but are well outside of the school's capacity to address?
- What privileges and incentives (i.e., extracurricular activities, athletics, field trips, social activities, etc.) are currently in place that can serve as points of leverage?

- Do more need to be identified or developed?
- How are students who actively exhibit established desirable social behaviors formally recognized?
- Perhaps most important, how are those actively attempting to make sustained social adjustments formally recognized and supported (without stigmatizing)?

### **Positive Behavior Support in the Classroom**

- Arrange classroom to minimize crowding and distraction.
- Establish explicit classroom routines and directions that are linked to schoolwide routines and directions.
- Post three to five positively stated expectations and teach and reinforce them.
- Provide frequent acknowledgement of appropriate behaviors.
- Give students multiple opportunities to respond and participate during instruction.
- Actively supervise the class during instruction.
- Ignore or provide quick, direct, explicit reprimands/redirections in response to inappropriate behavior.
- Implement multiple strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior (points, praise) linked to schoolwide strategies.
- Give specific feedback in response to social and academic errors and correct responses.

(Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, & Sugai, 2006)

## **Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support in an Urban High School: A Case Study**

**A study to examine the impact of SWPBS was conducted by Chicago Public Schools over three years, with the implementation high school serving an estimated 1,800 students during the first year of the study. The school served a diverse student body, with the following racial and ethnic makeup: 36 percent African American, 36 percent Hispanic, 16 percent Asian American, 8 percent Caucasian, 2 percent Native American, and 2 percent Other, with 21 percent demonstrating limited English proficiency (LEP). In addition, 89 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and 20 percent were identified as students with disabilities.**

The results of the study revealed that it took about two years for the school to fully implement all components of the SWPBS plan. However, by the third year, the average rate of daily discipline referrals had been reduced by 20 percent. Successful implementation strategies cited by the school included the following:

- Convening a PBS team with various stakeholders from the school (i.e., administrator, educator, parents, and students) for a day of training and to develop an action plan.
- Conducting a summer trial intervention with about 100 students during a summer activity to test teaching systems using positive behavior expectations.
- Providing teachers with key products such as sample copies of social skills lesson plans, posters reflecting schoolwide behavior expectations, and sample syllabi.
- Conducting grade-level assemblies to introduce rationales for the expected behavior and provide opportunities to practice positive and negative examples of specific behaviors (e.g., respectful walking in the hallway).
- A system of rewards, including redeemable “acknowledgement” tickets that could be awarded to individual students for exhibiting positive behavior.
- Holding schoolwide celebrations that were contingent on the overall reduction of disciplinary referrals.

(Bohanon et al., 2006)

## Recommendation 2: Student Engagement in Academic Intervention Services

**Implement strategies that foster student engagement in academic intervention services to promote academic achievement as well as systems to monitor student participation in intervention services and programs.**

When asked about academic interventions and students in need of extra academic support at VOYAGES, staff often stated that every student is at risk and in need of additional support. Although data show that VOYAGES offers a host of programs, courses, and services to provide additional support to students in need, the school struggles to sustain students' engagement in these offerings. According to VOYAGES staff, when students consistently attend and engage, they see positive change. The recommendation and following strategies can help increase engagement with students so that improved performance and success is available to a broader set of VOYAGES students.

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

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

<http://casel.org/>

Check & Connect School  
Dropout Prevention Program  
(Website)

<http://checkandconnect.org/default.html>

New York State Response  
to Intervention Technical  
Assistance Center (Website)

<http://www.nysrti.org>

National Research Center on  
Learning Disabilities: Tiered  
Service-Delivery Model  
(Website)

[http://www.nrclld.org/rti\\_practices/tiers.html](http://www.nrclld.org/rti_practices/tiers.html)

### LINKS TO RESEARCH

Ensuring that at-risk students are actively engaged in intervention programs and services can be challenging for schools, given the diversity of most student populations in terms of their racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their academic, social, and emotional needs (Greenberg et al., 2003; Lane, Wehby, & Robertson, 2007). Thus, there is a growing demand for schools to offer academic interventions that are composed of coordinated schoolwide efforts related to social, emotional, and academic learning (Greenberg et al., 2003; Kalberg, Lane, & Menzies, 2010).

Research has shown that school-based interventions are most effective when linked to students' personal and social resources and thus designed to enhance the students' learning environment (Eccles & Appleton, 2002). In the context of positive youth development, personal and social resources refer to the following assets (National Academy of Sciences, 2005):

- **Physical development:** Positive health habits and health risk management skills
- **Intellectual development:** School success, decision-making skills, cultural awareness
- **Psychological and emotional development:** Good mental health and emotional self-regulation
- **Social development:** Connectedness, prosocial abilities, civic engagement

Adolescence represents a developmental period during which students are undergoing significant social, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional shifts that can impact academic achievement (Archembault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009). For example, an estimated 20 percent of youth experience mental health issues during the course of year, with 75 to 80 percent of students failing to receive appropriate interventions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). The 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey also provides evidence that large percentages of high school students are involved in activities that could affect their academic performance, such as substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, violence, and problem behavior related to mental health issues. Research has shown that students who are at risk for dropping out of high school exhibit behavioral, affective, and cognitive

differences that can negatively influence their high school experience (Archambault et al., 2009). As a result, there is a need for more holistic school-based interventions that are flexible enough to target the needs of individual students who may be struggling academically for a variety of reasons.

A number of school-based interventions that are designed to address the needs of students who are at risk for academic failure have been developed in recent years, such as:

- Social and emotional learning-based prevention programming
- Three-tiered interventions (response to intervention and positive behavior support)
- The Check & Connect model: A comprehensive student engagement intervention

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

### ***Strategies for Fostering Student Engagement in Academic Intervention Services***

Strategies that encourage at-risk students to actively participate in academic interventions should represent important components of school-based interventions, such as the following:

- 1. Pair a student with a mentor.** A number of research studies have shown that students can benefit on both academic and psychological levels from working with a nonparental adult. A study by DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found evidence to support the viewpoint that at-risk students who worked with a nonfamilial adult as a mentor were more likely to complete high school and engage in health-promoting behaviors. Similarly, findings by Holt, Bry, and Johnson (2008) indicated that students who spend sufficient time with a mentor feel a deeper connection with their school environment, particularly with regard to their teachers.
- 2. Focus on positive youth development.** School-based programs include strategies that address key competencies related to the development of a student's personal and social skills. Example programs include the PATHS curriculum, which involves a three-step self-management process that utilizes red, yellow, and green stoplights to help students develop skills in monitoring and managing behavioral and emotional impulses (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002). Strategies that foster the development of students' interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, and academic behaviors have the potential to reduce school misbehavior, truancy, and other risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse (Greenberg et al., 2003).
- 3. Connect social, emotional, and academic learning (SEAL).** School-based programming should make an effort to make a connection between strategies to promote social and emotional learning and academic outcomes. According to Zins, Weissberg, Wang, and Walberg (2004), the SEAL approach provides a framework for implementing an intervention that promotes a student's social-emotional competence to promote better academic performance. Students who develop self-awareness and confidence related to their learning abilities are more likely to motivate themselves, set goals, manage their stress, and organize their approach to school work.

### **Strategies for Monitoring Student Engagement in Academic Intervention Services**

In addition, systematic screening and monitoring procedures should be in place, preferably as part of regular school practices, both to identify students in need of intervention and to monitor their engagement and progress in the intervention to ensure that their needs are being met (Kalberg, Lane, & Menzies, 2010).

- 1. Collect data regularly.** When implementing schoolwide intervention programming, schools need to collect reliable data regularly to evaluate the overall school response to the intervention as well as identify students that may need secondary or tertiary supports if the intervention has three tiers (Lane, Kalberg, Bruhn, Mahoney, & Driscoll, 2008). For example, student engagement can be monitored through attendance and program participation data.
- 2. Monitor academic outcomes.** Several curriculum-based measures can be used to measure academic progress, and many have a focus on reading. Examples include state achievement tests, district-administered and standardized writing tests, or periodic assessments such as Acuity Predictive and Instructionally Targeted assessments, Performance Series Computer Adaptive assessments, or Instructionally Targeted assessments. Students who are identified as not meeting academic benchmarks can then be placed into interventions of varying intensity, as appropriate (Kalberg, Lane, & Menzies, 2010).
- 3. Monitor behavioral outcomes.** Many schools use office disciplinary data (ODD) to monitor student behavior through systems such as the School-Wide Information Systems (SWIS). Additional behavior screeners include the Systemic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) and the Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS) (Kalberg, Lane, & Menzies, 2010).
- 4. Administer surveys.** Schools should consider administering surveys to students, parents, and teachers in order to determine students needs, preferences, and interests prior to implementing interventions, as well as to monitor student engagement during implementation (Becket et al., 2009).

#### **Components of Effective School-Based Intervention Programs That Promote Student Engagement**

- Promoting a positive interpersonal climate by fostering supportive relationships between students and teachers
- Offering coursework that is relevant to students' lives and future goals
- Providing support to address any serious personal problems
- Intervening early to address students' academic and behavior problems
- Supporting and rewarding positive social, health, and academic behavior using systematic school-family-community approaches.

(Archambault et al., 2009)

## **The Check & Connect School Dropout Prevention Program: A Case Study**

**The Check & Connect intervention model has been successfully implemented in a number of settings, including one that examined the effectiveness of this model in the context of fostering engagement for urban high school students who have emotional or behavioral disabilities. The study took place from 1996 to 2000 in an urban school district that served a diverse population. All of the students participating in the study were from the ninth grade and were enrolled in special education services for an emotional or behavioral disability with African Americans (67 percent) and males (82 percent) representing the majority of the sample.**

### **THE MODEL CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING TWO COMPONENTS:**

- **Check:** Continuous and systematic monitoring of student engagement with school using indicators such as attendance, suspensions, grades and credits.
- **Connect:** Implementing timely and individualized interventions that focus on a student's academic progress, which are guided by the check indicators. These interventions are provided by Check & Connect monitors who coordinate with school staff, family members, and community members and evaluate program implementation.

During the study, baseline data were collected related to student engagement via the Social Skills Rating System (SRSS). SRSS provides information related to social behavior, academic and social competence and behavioral problems. Either the student's core academic teacher or special education case manager provided the ratings. Students were randomly assigned to treatment (i.e. Check & Connect intervention) or control groups. The connect component of the intervention consisted of a basic intervention and a more frequent and individualized intensive intervention based on individual needs guided by results from student engagement indicators.

Results from the study indicated that student levels of engagement with school were higher for students that received the Check & Connect intervention compared to students who did not. Students who participated in the Check & Connect intervention were more likely to attend school with greater persistence and thus less likely to drop out of school. Additionally, these students showed evidence of more active IEP transition plans, such as an updated IEP that had clear transition goals in the areas of postsecondary education and community activities. Thus, these results indicate that the Check & Connect program has the potential to holistically address the social, emotional and academic needs of students who are at risk of academic failure.

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Description retrieved from Sinclair, M. F., Christenson, S. L., & Thurlow, M. L. (2005). Promoting school completion of urban secondary youth with emotional or behavioral disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 71(4), 465-482

## LEARNING TOOLS ON THE INTERNET

Following is a sample of some online educational resources that can be used to build or provide additional means for schools to provide enrichment and/or additional academic support to students in need. The links are provided as examples of tools available to schools and students on the Internet. Learning Point Associates recommends that schools take advantage of the myriad websites and learning tools available to them, but we neither recommend nor endorse resources included in the following list any more or less than any other similar services. In addition, this list is not intended as a comprehensive library of online tools and resources available but rather as a small sample.

+ free with paid options; \* free for individuals, paid for a group

### **Online Flashcards**

Students may create their own deck of flashcards or download a previously created deck. Also, teachers can create decks for student use. Several services also allow syncing between computers and cell phones. The decks all use some form of a spaced-repetition system (SRS). An SRS tracks students' progress with the cards, ensuring they review cards they struggle with more frequently than those they do not.

- Anki (<http://ankisrs.net/>)
- Mnemosyne (<http://www.mnemosyne-proj.org/>)
- StudyStack (<http://www.studystack.com/>)
- Headmagnet (<http://headmagnet.com/>)

### **Online Whiteboards**

Teachers can use online whiteboards much as they would the ones in their classrooms. Online whiteboards would allow teachers to share visual notes with students who are unable to be physically present and tutor students at a distance. Students may also use the whiteboards to work on projects together.

- +Dabbleboard (<http://www.dabbleboard.com/>)
- Scriblink (<http://www.scriblink.com/>)
- +Twiddla (<http://www.twiddla.com/>)
- Stixy (<http://www.stixy.com/>)

### **Wikis**

A wiki is an easy way for one or more people to collect and link notes. Students may build a wiki together, creating a potentially useful study tool. A wiki could facilitate discussion of class materials and help students organize class concepts.

- +Wikispaces (<http://www.wikispaces.com>)
- +PBworks (<http://pbworks.com/content/edu+overview>)

### ***Presentations***

The Internet offers several means of creating and sharing presentations online. Teachers could share presentations with students who are not able to be physically present and supplement classroom lectures. Students also could use the presentations to revisit class topics near test time.

- +Glogster—Create interactive, online posters (<http://www.edu.glogster.com/>)
- +Prezi—A creative alternative to PowerPoint (<http://prezi.com/>)
- +SlideShare—Host and share presentations online (<http://www.slideshare.net>)

### ***Brainstorming and Collaboration***

The Internet has many options for facilitating cooperative thinking and creation. Students may create mind maps together or edit a document together in real time.

Bubbl.us (<https://bubbl.us/>)

+MindMeister (<http://www.mindmeister.com/>)

Google Docs (<https://docs.google.com/>)

Storybird—Collaborative, visual storytelling (<http://storybird.com/teachers>)

### ***Web Conferencing***

Web conferencing allows a group of people to share materials, talk together, comment on a presentation, and more. Each service has its own strengths and weaknesses. If students are unable to attend an academic intervention service, a teacher could offer long-distance tutoring through a Web conference.

- Wiggio (<http://wiggio.com/>)
- +Skype (<http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home>)
- Mikogo (<http://www.mikogo.com/>)
- +Yugma (<https://www.yugma.com/>)

### ***Video Lectures and Demonstrations***

Many professors share lectures and lecture series online. Other websites include demonstrations on a variety of topics. Teachers may pull from these resources or use them as inspiration in creating their own.

- Wolfram Demonstrations (<http://demonstrations.wolfram.com/>)
- Vialogues—Allows real-time commenting on a video (<https://vialogues.com>)
- \*VoiceThread—Allows various forms of commenting on online media (<http://voicethread.com/>)
- Khan Academy—Videos and practice exercises on a variety of topics (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>)
- YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/education?b=400>)
- VideoLectures.NET (<http://videolectures.net/>)

### ***Blogging***

Blogs are online journals. Teachers may check for updates regularly and leave comments on students' posts. An RSS feed would allow the teacher to check one page for updates rather than visit each blog individually. Students could keep an online journal of their study progress. They also could share where they are having difficulties, allowing teachers or fellow students to provide help in the comments.

- WordPress (<http://wordpress.com/>)
- Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/>)
- Google Reader (RSS) (<http://www.google.com/reader/>)

### ***Study Groups and Social Networks***

Students may connect with others who are studying similar material. The groups are especially useful for foreign language study. A social network is an easy way to connect students with similar needs together to facilitate additional learning.

- Edmodo—Social networking site created for teachers and students (<http://www.edmodo.com/>)
- OpenStudy—A place to connect with others studying on similar topics (<http://openstudy.com/>)
- Livemocha—A place to study foreign languages with native speakers (<http://www.livemocha.com/>)
- +Yammer—Private social networks (<https://www.yammer.com/>)

### ***Miscellaneous***

- Moodle—Open source course management system (<http://moodle.org/>)
- Wallwisher—Online noticeboard (<http://www.wallwisher.com/>)
- Connexions—Course management system (<http://www.cnx.org>)
- LiveBinders—Online three-ring binders (<http://livebinders.com/welcome/home>)
- +Evernote—Facilitates online note taking; notebooks may be shared (<https://www.evernote.com>)
- Google Art Project—Virtually visit several famous museums (<http://www.googleartproject.com/>)
- +Dropbox—An online flash drive for easy file sharing (<http://www.dropbox.com/>)
- +SpiderOak—Similar to Dropbox (<https://spideroak.com/>)

## Recommendation 3: Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Instruction

**Build on existing positive climate to improve implementation of instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.**

Data collected by the Learning Point Associates audit team shows that classrooms at VOYAGES Preparatory High School are strengthened by a pervasively positive climate. Leveraging this strength, as evidenced by Positive Key Finding 1 developed during co-interpretation, is essential for VOYAGES staff as they seek to address this recommendation and apply the research and strategies outlined below to increase opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking skills during instructional time.

### LINK TO RESEARCH

Instruction that pushes students to engage in higher-level thinking leads to deeper learning for students (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001; Pashler, et al., 2007).

Too often, particularly in schools where students are struggling, instruction focuses on lower-level thinking skills, basic content, and test preparation. Teachers of struggling student groups or tracks usually offer students “less exciting instruction, less emphasis on meaning and conceptualization, and more rote drill and practice activities” than do teachers of high performing or heterogeneous groups and classes (Cotton, 1989, p. 8). Yet this focus on basic skills does not necessarily improve student achievement.

Several research studies were completed from 1990 to 2003 “which demonstrated that students who experienced higher levels of authentic instruction and assessment showed higher achievement than students who experienced lower levels of authentic instruction and assessment” (Newmann, King, & Carmichael, 2007, p. vii). This included higher achievement on standardized tests (Newmann et al., 2001). It is also important to note that these results “were consistent for grades 3-12, across different subject areas (mathematics, social studies, language arts, science), and for different students regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status” (Newmann et al., 2007, p. vii).

Teachers need to provide structured opportunities and time for students to take on higher-level cognitive work (Tomlinson, 2003). In discussing the *gradual release of responsibility model*, Fisher and Frey (2008) state “the cognitive load should shift slowly and purposefully from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility, to independent practice and application by the learner” (p. 2). This allows students to become what Graves and Fitzgerald (2003) call “competent, independent learners” (p. 98).

There are several steps to ensure that students are being asked to complete this type of intellectually challenging work that increases test scores and improves performance on authentic assessment measures as well. Newmann et al. (2001) define *authentically challenging intellectual work* as the “construction of knowledge, through the use of disciplined inquiry, to produce discourse, products, or performances that have value beyond school” (p. 14).

### QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Doing What Works:  
Research-Based Education  
Practices Online (Website)

<http://dww.ed.gov/>

*Organizing Instruction and  
Study to Improve Student  
Learning* (Publication)

[http://ies.ed.gov/  
ncee/wwc/pdf/  
practiceguides/20072004.  
pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/20072004.pdf)

Daggett (2005) agrees, stating all students should be pushed “to achieve academic excellence, which ultimately boils down to applying rigorous knowledge to unpredictable, real-world situations, such as those that drive our rapidly changing world” (p. 5). The disciplined inquiry, which occurs in the classroom, requires that students “(1) use a prior knowledge base; (2) strive for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness; and (3) express their ideas and findings with elaborated communication” (Newmann et al., 2001, p. 15).

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

### 1. Cultivate schoolwide high expectations for students.

- Align instruction with the New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards. According to NYCDOE (2011b), schools in New York City are set to have fully adopted the P–12 Common Core Learning Standards for students to take aligned assessments during the 2014–15 school year. These standards are internationally benchmarked and rigorous; they clearly explain what students at each grade level are expected to know and be able to do. Some schools were involved in pilot programs in 2010–11.
- Develop a shared understanding of instructional rigor through collaborative curriculum planning, design, and/or redesign. When developing or revising curriculum maps, identify opportunities for formative assessment tasks that encourage higher-level thinking for each unit of study.
- Through teacher collaboration, develop common student assignments that ask students to perform rigorous and authentic tasks.
- Through teacher collaboration, develop common assessments that include rigorous and authentic summative assessment tasks.
- Monitor implementation of expectations through classroom observations, lesson plan review, and student achievement results on common formative assessments.

### 2. Provide professional development for teachers on instructional strategies that push students to engage in higher-order thinking.

- Provide ongoing professional development for teachers that describes the importance of pushing students to do higher-level thinking and provides strategies for how to do so. This training may be provided through ongoing professional development and/or support of an instructional coach.
- Create clear expectations regarding how teachers should implement this professional development in the classroom (e.g., one strategy utilized each day as reflected in lesson plans, authentic assessments at the end of each unit).
- Identify how this professional development can be incorporated into scheduled teacher collaboration sessions.
- Monitor implementation of professional development through classroom observations, lesson plan review, and student achievement results on common formative assessments.

### 3. Develop examples of authentic intellectual work.

The following example can be used to help school leaders and teachers understand what authentic intellectual work might look like.

## Examples of High-Scoring and Low-Scoring Measures of Authentic Intellectual Work

The research report *Improving Chicago's Schools: Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence?* by Newmann, Bryk, and Nagaoka (2001) provides examples of two sixth-grade writing assignments: one that scored high and one that scored low on measures of authentic intellectual work. The authors conclude each example with a commentary of why the assignment received the score that it did.

### High-Scoring Writing Assignment

Write a paper persuading someone to do something. Pick any topic that you feel strongly about, convince the reader to agree with your belief, and convince the reader to take a specific action on this belief.

### Commentary

*In this high-scoring assignment, demands for construction of knowledge are evident because students have to select information and organize it into convincing arguments. By asking students to convince others to believe and act in a certain way, the task entails strong demands that the students support their views with reasons or other evidence, which calls for elaborated written communication. Finally, the intellectual challenge is connected to students' lives because they are to write on something they consider to be personally important.*

### Low-Scoring Writing Assignment

Identify the parts of speech of each underlined word below. All eight parts of speech—nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections—are included in this exercise.

1. My room is arranged for comfort and efficiency.
2. As you enter, you will find a wooden table on the left.
3. I write and type.
4. There is a book shelf near the table.
5. On this book shelf, I keep both my pencils and paper supplies.
6. I spend many hours in this room.
7. I often read or write there during the evening...

### Commentary

*This assignment requires no construction of knowledge or elaborated communication, and does not pose a question or problem clearly connected to students' lives. Instead it asks students to recall one-word responses, based on memorization or definitions of parts of speech.*

Reprinted from page 24 of *Improving Chicago's Schools: Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence?* by Fred M. Newmann, Anthony S. Bryk, and Jenny K. Nagaoka, available online at <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/p0a02.pdf>. Copyright © 2001 Consortium on Chicago School Research. Reprinted with permission.

Further examples of authentic intellectual instruction, teachers' assignments, and student work can be found in the following source:

Newmann, F. M., King, M. B., & Carmichael, D. L. (2007). *Authentic instruction and assessment: Common standards for rigor and relevance in teaching academic subjects*. Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education. Retrieved July 29, 2011, from <http://centerforaiw.com/sites/centerforaiw.com/files/Authentic-Instruction-Assessment-BlueBook.pdf>

## **Perrysburg High School**

**Perrysburg High School in Perrysburg, Ohio, serves students in Grades 9–12. Perrysburg is a suburb of Toledo, Ohio.**

Perrysburg is the sole high school in the Perrysburg Exempted Village District in Wood County. Nate Ash teaches physics to eleventh and twelfth graders. Ash has taught professional development programs at the Northwest Ohio Center of Excellence in Science and Mathematics Education, and at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He acts as a mentor to new science teachers.

Ash teaches physics using an inquiry approach. Students do lab activities and solve problems together to understand key concepts in physics. In each lesson he poses higher-order questions to help his students build explanations: How do you know that? What would happen if we changed this variable? How is this similar or different? Ash uses whiteboards in a number of ways: for group problem solving, representing a phenomenon with pictures, and student presentations.

Each new unit/topic is introduced with a hands-on activity. Ash presents a physical situation to students, has them manipulate the variables, and then narrows down their list of variables to design an experiment. Every experiment is introduced with an open-ended question (What would happen if...? What happens when...?). Students work in small groups to describe what happens with graphs, pictures, mathematical equations, and written expression. When they are finished, students present their work to the class in “whiteboard sessions.”

Ash explains how the whiteboard sessions give important insights into student thinking: “We can really see if the students understand on every different level how that problem works or how that situation works. And if there is a disjoint between any of those representations, that gives us someplace to go, that gives us something to talk about, something to work through.”

Students appreciate being in charge of their own learning, having the opportunity to challenge their peers, and develop critical thinking skills as they explain their ideas in front of a group. As Ash says, “Students really like this approach because, instead of just giving them the answer, it gives them a chance to explain to each other what’s going on. And I like it because all the times that I have done physics problems on the board and gone through the answers, I got pretty good at doing physics problems but my students never got any better at all.”

Ash has found that with this approach his students are no longer trying to find equations that fit the problems, but working to develop a deep understanding of the underlying concepts.

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Description excerpted from the *Doing What Works* website at [http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case\\_perrysburg\\_52708rev.pdf](http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_perrysburg_52708rev.pdf)

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