

North Queens Community 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 North Queens Community High School by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research. This audit was conducted in response to the school being designated 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 North Queens Community High School

North Queens Community High School (Q792) is located in Flushing, Queens. The school serves 205 students in Grades 9–12. The school population is composed of 39 percent African-American, 40 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Caucasian, and 11 percent Asian students. There are no English language learners; 12 percent are special education students.¹ Approximately 50.79 percent of students are boys, and 49.21 percent are girls. The average attendance rate for the 2009–10 school year was 66 percent. Sixty percent of the students are eligible for free lunch, and 11 percent of students are eligible for reduced-price lunch.²

North Queens Community High School is a transfer school. It is a small, academically rigorous, full-time high school designed to reengage students who have fallen behind or dropped out. As a transfer school, it is characterized by rigorous academic standards, student-centered instruction, a personalized learning environment, numerous supports to meet each student's academic and developmental goals, and connections to college and career readiness. It also has the added support of Learning to Work, which offers additional academic and student support, college and career exploration, work preparation, skills development, and internships to 50 students who have elected to join the program. "This school has changed me as a person," said Marie Rosado, 18, who entered North Queens Community High School in 2009 with two credits and was set to graduate in June 2011. "They will push you, they will break you down, and it's because they know you can make it."³

The unique population that North Queens Community High School serves comes with numerous challenges, including meeting the NYCDOE credit and Regents requirements for graduation. This is reflected in the school's latest Accountability and Overview Report, which indicates that its state accountability status is "Improvement (Year 1) Comprehensive" because all students and economically disadvantaged students did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and graduation rate.⁴ A

¹http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/sesdr/2010-11/sesdr_Q792.pdf. Retrieved July 18, 2011.

²<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/8a/AOR-2010-342500011792.pdf>. Retrieved July 18, 2011.

³http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-02-27/local/28651548_1_high-schools-marie-rosado-graduation-rates. Retrieved July 18, 2011

⁴<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2010/8a/AOR-2010-342500011792.pdf>. Retrieved July 18, 2011.

strong partnership with School Community Organization Family Services, including embedded staff, aids the school's efforts to provide a strong, supporting learning environment and build positive, product relationships among adult staff members and students.

Audit Process at North Queens Community 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 extracurriculars. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, administrator interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of documents submitted by North Queens Community High School during the month of April, 2011. From these data, Learning Point Associates prepared a series of reports for the school's use.

These reports were presented to the school during a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 27, 2011. During this meeting, 12 stakeholders from the North Queens Community High School community read the reports. Through a facilitated and collaborative group process, they identified individual findings, 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 North Queens Community High School.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, co-interpretation participants determined a set of key findings. These findings are detailed in this section and presented in the co-interpretation participants' own words.

Critical Key Findings

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Only two classes received high ratings on content understanding and only one classroom was given a high rating on analysis and problem solving, due to a lack of emphasis on the classroom practice of engaging students in higher-order thinking questions and activities.

Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by evidence from the observation report, which indicates that only two observed classes received a high rating for content understanding and only one received a high rating in analysis and problem solving. All other observed classrooms received ratings in the low and mid range in these areas.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

The majority of classrooms were assigned ratings in the mid range for content understanding, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by evidence from the observation report, which indicates that the majority of observed classrooms received a mid or low range score for analysis and problem solving and content understanding. The rating for analysis and problem solving 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 observed inconsistently in these classrooms include problem solving, self-evaluation and planning, and opportunities for students to analyze and explain their thought processes for positions reached through inductive and deductive reasoning. The rating for content understanding is indicative of limited or inconsistent opportunities to pursue depth of knowledge and understanding and/or to make connections across pieces of information.

Positive Key Findings

POSITIVE KEY FINDING 1:

Incoming students at North Queens are given programs according to their individual needs. Focus is placed on both meeting the credit needs of students and assessing their skills, especially in English.

Positive Key Finding 1 is supported by interview and document review data. It shows the individualized attention regarding their credit needs that North Queens Community High School gives incoming students. During the interview, it was stated that, "English seminar is given in the first trimester to all students, with the goal of advancing basic skills and providing an accurate picture of student readiness for subsequent courses in the curriculum," and,

“students are not able to choose their own electives; rather, they are focused on their greatest needs in terms of credit.” During co-interpretation, participants indicated a strong interest in improving credit recovery programs in terms of both the breadth of options and the flexible settings in which students can engage in these programs.

Additional Key Finding

An additional key finding was identified by co-interpretation participants but was not prioritized by the group for action planning. However, the auditors found this key finding worthy of consideration in developing recommendations.

ADDITIONAL KEY FINDING 1:

Tardiness is a major disruptor of classroom instruction. Although wasted time, behavior issues, and a negative climate were major disruptors, tardiness occurred the most frequently.

According to observation data, tardiness and absenteeism occurred frequently at North Queens Community High School. As a transfer school, North Queens enrolls students who are behind in high school or who have dropped out. Thus, the school is faced with the challenge of reengaging these students and preventing truancy. This is supported by the school's attendance rate for school year 2010-11, which shows that in any given day, 34 percent of the student population was absent.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

During the co-interpretation, school staff and faculty identified rigorous instruction, credit recovery, and truancy and tardiness as priority areas for improvement. A key finding developed by the participants acknowledged that most classrooms observed received a rating in the mid range for content understanding and analysis and problem solving, although a few classrooms received a high rating in the same dimensions. Participants in the co-interpretation also stated the need to improve upon the credit recovery programs already offered at the school. The auditors also noted that it was often difficult for the teacher to engage in effective teaching due to student truancy and tardiness issues in the classroom.

THE THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.
2. Review existing credit recovery programs, subsequently adjusting and/or expanding as needed, to ensure they flexibly meet student needs, motivate students, monitor student progress, and include a college/career-oriented community.
3. Bolster efforts to combat truancy and tardiness by strengthening school-, family-, and community-focused approaches to reduce truancy so as to increase student engagement, improve scholastic behavior, and promote academic success.

These three recommendations are discussed on the following pages. Each recommendation provides a review of research, online resources for additional information, specific actions that the school may wish to take during its implementation process, and examples of real-life schools that have successfully implemented strategies. All works cited appear in the References section at the end of this report.

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

Recommendation 1: Instructional Rigor

Implement instructional strategies that increase opportunities for higher-order thinking, analysis and problem solving, and deeper content understanding.

North Queens Community High School staff indicated during data collection and at co-interpretation that the school employs several strategies and offers professional learning on implementing higher-order thinking skills and differentiating instruction. Staff also feels that these efforts need sustained focus and continued attention. Additionally, for the 2011-2012 school year, North Queens is initiating wholesale change to grading and assessment, moving to an outcome-based system. The considerations outlined in this recommendation should be reviewed in that context as a means to support those efforts.

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 that “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, which 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). 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). Disciplined

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)

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 (2011), 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.

Description excerpted from the *Doing What Works* website at http://dww.ed.gov/media/CL/OIS/TopicLevel/case_perrysburg_52708rev.pdf

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

NYCDOE: Summer School
(Website) (Website)
[http://schools.nyc.gov/
ChoicesEnrollment/
SummerSchool/default.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/SummerSchool/default.htm)

NYCDOE: Flexible Scheduling
Options (Website)
[http://schools.nyc.gov/
NR/rdonlyres/9EF23CC9-
8520-4C55-BE46-
8BFD468F0E28/0/
FlexibleSchedulingOptions.
pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/9EF23CC9-8520-4C55-BE46-8BFD468F0E28/0/FlexibleSchedulingOptions.pdf)

Afterschool in New York
(Website)
[http://www.
afterschoolalliance.org/
policyStateFacts.cfm?state_
abbr=NY](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateFacts.cfm?state_abbr=NY)

*Research Review for School
Leaders, Vol. III (Publication)*
(See the section on
*scheduling options,
including trimesters.*)
[http://books.google.com/
books/about/Research_
Review_for_School_Leaders.
html?id=TxtzewY8aDYC](http://books.google.com/books/about/Research_Review_for_School_Leaders.html?id=TxtzewY8aDYC)

*Evaluation of Evidence-
Based Practices in Online
Learning (Publication)*
[http://www2.ed.gov/
rschstat/eval/tech/
evidence-based-practices/
finalreport.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf)

Doing What Works: Increased
Learning Time (Website)
[http://dww.ed.gov/
Increased-Learning-Time/
Maximize-Attendance/
practice/?T_ID=29&P_
ID=76](http://dww.ed.gov/Increased-Learning-Time/Maximize-Attendance/practice/?T_ID=29&P_ID=76)

Recommendation 2: Credit Recovery

Review existing credit recovery programs, subsequently adjusting and/or expanding as needed, to ensure they flexibly meet students' needs, motivate students, monitor their progress, and include a college/career-oriented community.

As a result of past academic struggles and resulting struggles to earn credits at an adequate pace, credit accumulation is perhaps the greatest area of challenge and purpose for North Queens Community High School students. School staff also are challenged to both offer sufficient opportunities for credit recovery and provide opportunities for severely undercredited older students to earn enough credits to graduate before they are too old for high school enrollment. In addition to meeting the commitment to serve its students, North Queens also faces accountability challenges in the area of graduation rate due to the varied and significant credit deficiencies of those students. Learning Point Associates auditors note that credit recovery is already a major focus for the school. To that end, the recommendations below should be considered as a means to assess, supplement, and strengthen current programs.

LINK TO RESEARCH

“Credit recovery options should be rigorous yet flexible, and should allow students to build their skills and credits at an accelerated pace toward on-time graduation” (Almeida, Steinberg, & Santos, 2010, p. 18).

The recommendation identifies four key aspects of a successful credit recovery program: flexibility, student motivation, community, and data tracking. Each of these is rooted in research and practice. Together, the four work as a system in which strength in one area strengthens the other three, just as weakness weakens them.

The Importance of Flexibility. The program should be flexible so that it meets each student’s schedule, learning pace, and needs. The population of students requiring credit recovery includes both the student who has missed one credit and the one who has missed several. The credit recovery program should be able to serve each of those students, despite their disparate needs (Watson & Gemin, 2008, p. 6). The students who also are considered “at-risk” likely have home and work concerns that affect their ability to attend and focus on school. “Effective programs take a comprehensive approach, not only addressing ... school credits, but also addressing other factors that prevent students from succeeding” (Wyckoff, Cooney, Djakovic, & McClanahan, 2008, p. 14). These factors may include having a child, being a runaway, having already dropped out, rarely attending class, and using drugs or drinking alcohol. The student’s learning style—for example if the student is a visual or tactile kinesthetic learner—also may affect the ability to succeed in traditional classes (Trautman & Lawrence, 2004, p. 9). Flexibility, the ability to adapt to fit the students, is also an important part of ensuring that students are motivated to succeed in their credit recovery programs.

Student Motivation. “Motivating students who have failed in the traditional classroom setting is a key to success for credit recovery programs” (Watson & Gemin, 2008, p. 14). Unfortunately, ensuring motivation can be a difficult task. According to motivational theory,

students require two beliefs in order to be motivated. They must believe that the goal is both worthwhile and attainable (Ames, 1992, as quoted in Roderick & Engel, 2001, p. 200). After failing once, students may not see that they can succeed. Additionally, they may not see the value of earning credits or of graduating. Unless students have a high level of self-efficacy, their inability to see the relevance of high school may result in a lack of effort (Surland, 2010).

The Need for Community. A college/career-oriented community allows students more time with their teachers and provides a clear goal for students in which their credits matter: life after high school. Learning communities positively affect “student achievement, school climate, school attendance, and graduation rates” (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30). The smaller communities provide students with more opportunities to interact with their teachers on a one-to-one basis, which is something students desire. During an evaluation of an online course, a group of students was asked how the program could be improved. Sixty percent said that they wanted “more direction and communication from the teacher” (Oliver, Osbourne, Kleiman, & Patel, 2009, p. 42). The community also needs to guide students toward college and career options. This way students may more easily visualize the relevance of a high school diploma. According to a What Works Clearinghouse panel, “a focus on learning and high expectations for student achievement” enhanced the learning community’s efforts (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30).

Data Tracking and Analysis. A good data tracking system allows the school to identify the students who are in need of credit recovery and track them toward completion. The data system, providing it is comprehensive, also can allow for early interventions, lowering the need for intense credit recovery programs (Almeida et al., 2010, p. 12; Gewertz, 2009). For example, the school could target students with low attendance and provide academic intervention services before the habitual truancy caused them to lose a credit. Data also could inform the pacing of the credit recovery programs, enabling higher levels of flexibility and personalization.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The best credit recovery program(s) will vary by school. Each school will have its own need and capacity. The first step in optimizing or implementing a credit recovery program is to identify the school’s need, resources, and capacity. Then, based on this information, the school will need to select a model. The model has two main components, most easily summarized in the questions *when* and *what*. Finally, the school must monitor its chosen program(s), evaluate the effectiveness, and make adjustments as necessary. At each step, the school should focus on maximizing flexibility and student motivation while maintaining a college/career-oriented community and including data tracking and analysis.

1. Identify needs.

The identification process is two-fold: First, the school must examine its student data and determine which students are in need of the greatest number of credits. This will allow the school to target its efforts where the need is greatest. In addition, the school should determine what it can and cannot offer in-house. For example, if the school does not have many computers available, an on-site, computer-based credit recovery program would be ill advised. Second, the school should determine student preferences regarding credit recovery programs. One of the easier ways would be to give students and their guardians a short survey, asking when the students could and would prefer

to attend credit recovery programs, and about student interests. If most students work after school, an afterschool program would not be the best option for the school. The questions about student interests would allow the school to tailor programs and develop alternative credit-bearing courses that fit student needs and interests (Beckett et al., 2009, p. 21). For example, if several students express interest in automobiles, the school could structure a science or math class around automobile mechanics and design.

2. Select a model.

Selecting a model first requires deciding *when* the program will take place, and then determining *what* that program will be. Not all of these options will be immediately feasible for every school. For example, if a school does not have an afterschool program in place, it would require a school-based option vote in order to offer one. As school-based option discussion and voting typically take place in the spring, the afterschool program may not be possible for the 2011–12 school year. The school could, however, discuss the program in spring 2012 and ratify it for the 2012–13 school year.

Credit Recovery Programs

Options Based on When the Program Will Take Place

Afterschool, Evening/PM School, and Saturday School

This option lengthens the school day or week. Classes during these times may be particularly engaging for students when they incorporate preparation for college/careers (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Pennington, 2006). These options do not take away from and are more flexible than the regular school day. However, students may not attend due to other commitments or a lack of engagement. The school also would need access to the facilities and staff during these times. Finally, these options would require a school-based option vote to implement, as well as an extended use permit.

Summer School

Another option is lengthening the school year. Summer school may take place on campus—a matter that would require a school-based option vote—or at another school with a program. A summer program does not take time from and may be more flexible than classes during the regular school year. In addition, summer programs can make learning more continuous over the long holiday, possibly increasing knowledge retention. However, ensuring staffing and facilities can be difficult for the schools, given concerns such as budgeting and air conditioning. While students can attend off-campus programs, they may not know how to enroll or—having enrolled—they may not attend. If the school opts to use off-site programs, it should provide support during enrollment and check in with students once the summer programs begin.

Trimesters

New York allows schools to restructure their school days and year in several ways, including dividing the year into three terms rather than two. The basic trimester system is three cycles of 60 days. The other system, which the NYCDOE refers to as the 75-75-30 Plan, divides the school year into two long terms and one short term. The short term also may be divided into two 15-day terms. These systems provide time for credit recovery as well as enrichment programs, short electives, and compressed courses (NYCDOE, n.d.).

Credit Recovery Programs

Options Based on What the Program Will Offer

Credit-Bearing Alternatives

Rather than require students to recover their credits by retaking a class, the school may repackage the credit-essential elements of the class within an elective course. This is an area in which knowing student interests and goals would be helpful. The school also may offer credit for community service or internships supplemented with a project, essay, or other form of assessment. While students may find these alternatives more engaging, designing the courses and, in the case of community service and internships, finding opportunities may be difficult. This credit recovery option requires that the school make opportunities for its students, although programs such as Learning to Work and relationships with other community organizations can help.

Virtual Schools and Online Courses

The use of computer-based learning, both off and online, is growing and spreading. New York has recognized the potential of such programming through its creation of the School of One and Innovation Zone (iZone), which piloted iLearnNYC—an online credit recovery and elective program—during the 2010-11 school year. Courses may take place within a single program, in conjunction with online elements (e.g., message boards, video chat), or blended with face-to-face classroom instruction. They also may take place on campus or wherever a computer and Internet connection are available. The most effective courses, however, are those that include student-instructor interaction and individualization, both in program adaptability and student control of content (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Oliver, Osborne, Kleiman, & Patel, 2009; Watson & Gemin, 2008; Witta & Witta, 1999). If the school already has a computer-based credit recovery program in place, then it may wish to increase the student-instructor interaction through a blended face-to-face approach or a message board or other form of online communication. The school also may seek ways to individualize the program through better pacing and differentiation, or by giving the students more control over their programming and, if possible, course content.

Wichita Falls High School

For its credit recovery system, Wichita Falls High School uses the Continuous Achievement Placement System.

The “[Continuous Achievement Placement System (CAPS)] is an intensive credit recovery program that relies on technology delivered curriculum content” (Trautman & Lawrence, 2006, p. 1).

In order to combat its dropout rate, Wichita Falls High School decided to provide credit recovery through the Continuous Achievement Placement Center. Rather than just provide students with online content, in this case the American Education Corporation’s A+dvanced Learning Systems (A+LS), the Continuous Achievement Placement Center builds a community and culture around the online programming. It operates out of two classrooms at Wichita Falls High School, maintaining a 20-1 student-to-teacher ratio. Each of these classrooms contains 18-24 computers. The program is a morning-to-afternoon (7:45-2:45) “school within a school” (Trautman & Lawrence, p. 9) in which students learn at their own pace within a collegial atmosphere and receive personal attention and guidance. While “students primarily work independently,” new students to the program are paired with successful peers. Students enter the program by counselor referral, although the school study team may suggest students to the counselors. The program is not targeted for students with behavioral problems. An in-house evaluation found that students in the program had better attendance rates than their peers outside the program, and that they earned credits at a swifter pace. Standard education students earned an average of 4.47 credits per student, while students in the program earned an average of 10 credits. As for attendance, students in the program outperformed the standard education students by almost three percentage points (Trautman & Lawrence, p. 14). The study also found that the program “appears to be exceptionally effective for limited-English-proficient and economically disadvantaged students” (Trautman & Lawrence, p. 21). The study compared pass rates on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills between limited-English-proficient students within the program and limited-English-proficient students in the whole state. For mathematics, limited-English-proficient students in the program had a 92 percent pass rate. Texas limited-English-proficient students had a 59 percent pass rate. The difference for the ELA pass rate is nearly as great. Continuous Achievement Placement Center limited-English-proficient students had a 68 percent pass rate, while Texas limited-English-proficient students had a 42 percent pass rate (Trautman & Lawrence, p. 16). Wichita Falls High School blended computer-based credit recovery with a personalized community and data tracking and analysis to create a program that fit their school and worked for their students.

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. Additionally, 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. 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. This system tracks student progress with the cards, ensuring that they review cards they struggle with more frequently than those they do not.

Anki (<http://ankisrs.net/>)

Mnemosyne (<http://www.mnemosyne-proj.org/>)

Study Stack (<http://www.studystack.com/>)

Head Magnet (<http://headmagnet.com/>)

Online Whiteboards

Teachers can use online whiteboards much as they would the ones in their classrooms. This would allow teachers to share visual notes with students who are unable to be physically present and tutor students at a distance. Students also may 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 (www.slideshare.net)

Brainstorming and Collaboration

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

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

+Mind Meister (<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 resources.

Wolfram Demonstrations (<http://demonstrations.wolfram.com/>)

Vialogues – Allows real-time commenting on a video (<https://vialogues.com>)

*Voice Thread – 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 student posts. A Rich Site Summary (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/>)

Open Study – A place to connect with others studying 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 notice board (<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 notetaking, notebooks may be shared (<https://www.evernote.com>)

Google Art Project – Virtually visit several famous museums (<http://www.googleartproject.com/>)

+Dropbox – Online flash drive for easy file sharing (<http://www.dropbox.com/>)

+SpiderOak – Similar to Dropbox (<https://spideroak.com/>)

Recommendation 3: Truancy and Tardiness

Bolster efforts to combat truancy and tardiness by strengthening school-, family-, and community-focused approaches to reduce truancy so as to increase student engagement, improve scholastic behavior, and promote academic success.

North Queens Community High School staff of all classifications noted several times throughout the ESCA process that if they could get students to come to school, they could get them to achieve. Part of this challenge lies in the fact that school staff have limited control of factors outside the school that impact student attendance. Unfortunately, urban issues such as traffic and delays in public transportation also will create issues of tardiness and truancy that the school cannot change. The strategies suggested below can help mitigate the impact of those factors that are outside school control. That being said, this issue is complex, pervasive, and challenging. It also is important to note the unique considerations of the North Queens Community High School student population, acknowledging both their academic histories as well as social-emotional and family issues that may impact school attendance. These details heighten the importance of balancing the desire for long-term, large-scale cultural change with the need for smaller, incremental improvements that address the broader problem and generate momentum. Additionally, the transient nature of the transfer high school population accentuates the need for balance between strategies tailored to individual students and global strategies designed to serve the entire school population.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Truancy has been identified as one of the 10 major problems in U.S. schools (Rohrman, 1993). In the New York City public school system, 99,635 students (approximately 10 percent of the entire population) were absent on any given day during the 2009–10 academic year.

The consequences of truancy are serious and numerous. Truancy, whether for a full school day or isolated to individual class periods during the day, is often one of the first and best indicators of academic failure, suspension, and expulsion (Trujillo, 2006). Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates, and because truants are the youth most likely to drop out of school, they also have high dropout rates (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). Furthermore, truant youths often are absent from school for such a long time that it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to catch up. “This leads to further disengagement from school, from teachers and ultimately can lead to serious antisocial behavior like juvenile delinquency” (Gonzales, Richards, & Harmacek, 2002). Truancy has been linked to serious delinquent activity in youth and to significant negative behavior and characteristics in adults, such as substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activities (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Garry, 1996; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993). These studies provide convincing evidence that educators and researchers need to take the issue of student absenteeism and the need to improve attendance seriously (Trujillo, 2006). After all, research indicates that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests (Lamdin, 1996; Myers, 2000), and that schools with better rates of student attendance tend to have higher passing rates on standardized achievement tests (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, 1991).

Improving student attendance at school requires a holistic approach that addresses school and classroom factors, as well as factors outside of school. Several school characteristics

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Reports and Publications
From the National Center
for School Engagement
(Reports)

[http://www.
schoolengagement.org/
index.cfm/Reports](http://www.schoolengagement.org/index.cfm/Reports)

Truancy Publications From
the Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention
(Publications)

[http://www.ojjdp.gov/
search/SearchResults.asp?ti
=11&si=32&kw=&p=topic&
strItem=&strSingleItem=Pub
lications&PreviousPage=sea
rchResults](http://www.ojjdp.gov/search/SearchResults.asp?ti=11&si=32&kw=&p=topic&strItem=&strSingleItem=Publications&PreviousPage=searchResults)

*What Research Says About
Family-School-Community
Partnerships* (Publication)

[http://www.
schoolengagement.org/
TruancyPreventionRegistry/
Admin/Resources/
Resources/WhatResearch
SaysAboutFamily-School-
CommunityPartnerships.pdf](http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/WhatResearchSaysAboutFamily-School-CommunityPartnerships.pdf)

and classroom practices are predictive of student attendance rates. Student perceptions of the classroom as chaotic, or the teacher as uncaring, or boring were associated with student absenteeism and truancy (Duckworth & de Jung, 1989; Roderick et al., 1997). By contrast, attendance was better, even in high-poverty schools, if there were quality teachers, courses, and extracurricular offerings (Eskenazi, Eddins, & Beam, 2003). Schools and teachers, however, cannot solve attendance problems alone.

Educators have a responsibility to help families and communities become involved in reducing student absenteeism. Studies show that when schools develop school, family, and community partnership programs, they have higher levels of parent involvement (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2003b; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004), and higher percentages of students pass standardized achievement tests (Sheldon, 2003a). In addition, schools take fewer disciplinary actions with students (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). There is, then, good reason to believe that the development of partnership programs can decrease absenteeism.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Implementing initiatives to address truancy and tardiness is a daunting task, and the strategies presented in this recommendation, while shown effective through research and practice, are large in scale and aimed at long-term change to the school culture. In considering the strategies and practices to address this issue, it is important to understand that real change does not happen immediately and requires sustained focus. In light of this, North Queens Community High School staff should seek a tiered approach to any of the research-based practices, implementation considerations, and examples from the field.

This tiered approach should start with simple, smaller scale activities that can generate “quick wins” for the school. The purpose behind this initial pursuit of quick wins is multifaceted. First, quick wins are still wins, regardless of their size. In addition, quick wins, partnered with the best efforts of the school to publicize the positive changes, can build community buy-in and enthusiasm toward greater efforts and changes down the line. Furthermore, large-scale, long-term change requires significant, sustained momentum; starting that process with quick wins initiates that momentum. The school should continue to identify opportunities for quick wins to maintain and/or inject momentum throughout the course of bigger changes that require more time and sustained attention.

1. Involve parents/guardians and family members.

Involving parents or guardians and family members in truancy prevention and intervention is critical. There is a large body of research demonstrating the positive outcomes associated with increased parent or guardian involvement in school activities, including improved academic achievement and reduced likelihood of dropout. Involving parents or guardians in truancy prevention programs is more than simply inviting their attendance at a school meeting. True participation means that parents or guardians are sought after for their advice, experience, and expertise in the community; as clients of our public system of care; and because of their importance in their children’s lives. This means engaging parents/guardians as a natural course of events, not just when things are not going well (National Center for School Engagement [NCSE], 2007).

According to the National Center for School Engagement, to be meaningfully engaged, parents must have access to information and be empowered to act on it. Parents must be able to work with school staff to promote student achievement, close the achievement gap, and reduce the dropout rate. Therefore, parents also must be involved in decision making at their school.

Meaningful parent involvement should meet all of the following National Standards for Parent or Family Involvement Programs (developed by the National PTA through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, based on the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce Epstein from the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University):

- **Communicating:** Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- **Parenting:** Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- **Student learning:** Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- **Volunteering:** Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance is sought.
- **School decision making and advocacy:** Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- **Collaboration with the community:** Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. (Epstein, 2001)

Potential Quick Win: Implement a system in which teachers and advocacy counselors keep detailed logs of all contact with parents/guardians regarding attendance issues, and make these logs available electronically to all school staff. Include monitoring of these logs with existing attendance data review, triangulate this data with other school data, and allow teachers to use some of their dedicated planning, supervision, and/or professional learning time to place these calls.

2. Collaborate with the community.

It is important to identify and use community resources and services to strengthen schools, families, and student learning and development. Although the student school-community link is the least supported and publicized component of the school-family-community partnership model (Jordon, Orozco, & Averett, 2001), research indicates that the quality of those connections influences student learning (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Effective partnerships are based on understanding the cultural, socioeconomic, health, social, and recreational needs and interests of each school family. Efforts to that end include family literacy programs, health services, English as a second language programs, and vocational training (Espinosa, 1995). In addition, according to the National Center for School Engagement (2007) there is a need for schools to form partnerships with local businesses and law enforcement in order to limit the areas where students can congregate while they are away from school during the day and to have truant youth returned to school.

Potential Quick Win: Request that local businesses and/or community spaces post signs promoting school attendance.

3. Take a comprehensive approach.

Effective programs focus on prevention and intervention simultaneously. As described by the National Center for School Engagement (2007), many factors contribute to truant behavior: Youth fail to attend school due to personal, academic, school climate, and family-related issues. A truancy program may be called upon to help a family obtain counseling, to advocate for a family to receive entitlement benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families to negotiate a new school schedule, to figure out transportation solutions, and to provide other more traditional social work activities such as mental health evaluations and counseling services. An effective truancy plan will address these issues; school staff will be prepared to respond to the first unexcused absence of an elementary student and not give up on the 100th absence of the habitually truant adolescent.

Potential Quick Wins: Integrate data reviewed by the school attendance team with data reviewed within existing school teams and across the staff as a whole, and triangulate this data with other academic data. Allow flexible scheduling and attendance arrangements (part day in-school attendance, part day “virtual attendance”) for students taking a portion of their coursework in online, asynchronous environments or at partner schools and colleges.

4. Use incentives and sanctions.

Meaningful sanctions for truant behavior and meaningful incentives for school attendance are key components of promising and model truancy programs. Sanctions, traditionally used to respond to truancy, frequently mirror the punitive steps taken against other undesirable behaviors: detention, suspension, petition to juvenile court, and denial of privileges. Incentives tend to be recognition-based, but may include special experiences or even monetary rewards. The critical task is to design sanctions and incentives that are meaningful to youth and their families. Addressing truancy and tardiness as problem behaviors as part of a schoolwide system of positive behavior support ties directly to this practice. For more information, see <http://www.pbis.org/>

Potential Quick Win: In addition to incentives already provided to high-attendance students, provide tangible incentives to students who reach tiers of improvement in tardiness and attendance.

5. Improve afterschool programming.

Studies have shown that participation in afterschool programming can yield significant benefits for youth, families, and society. In many studies, the greatest benefits were realized among low-income students. These studies found that youth who were enrolled in effective afterschool programs that included academic support, mentoring, recreation, and cultural/social enrichment often fared better than their peers in a variety of areas. Improved behavior resulting from participation in afterschool programs includes better school attendance (Little & Harris, 2003; Kane, 2004).

Potential Quick Wins: Shift some high-popularity, high-value afterschool program activities to before school and/or during the school day to draw students to the building. Integrate student voices in developing and setting agendas for extended-day activities.

Strategies to Combat Tardiness and Truancy

The National Center for School Engagement (2007) compiled the following examples of strategies to combat tardiness and truancy.

Track and mentor students: A daily attendance accountability log is a tool to help redirect truant students with a proactive approach to time management and attendance accountability. Through the use of an attendance log and mentoring, students are shown structure, responsibility, and accountability and begin to understand the importance of attendance and academic achievement. Source: Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX

Collaborate in attendance planning: In Virginia, students and their families come together with the school, court, and community to discuss and implement appropriate levels of intervention, including an attendance contract, monitoring, and treatment. Source: Alexandria School District, Alexandria, VA

Reengage truant students: Project Reconnect is a court-ordered, 30-day tracking program that reengages students in school. Students use a tracking form that must be completed every hour by every teacher. The form records attendance, homework, and behavior. Students also are required to complete community service hours based on their specific needs. Source: Warner Robbins Schools, Warner Robbins, GA

Offer incentives: As a reward, a lunchtime soccer game is organized by school staff for students with good attendance. Source: Summit School District, Frisco, CO

Promote family-school-community events: A school in California participated in International Walk to School Day in October, during which 200 students and families walked to school together. The school was able to partner with the Nutrition Network, which supplied water and fresh vegetables to the participants. Source: Schmitt School, Westminster, CA

Expand family and community involvement: In addition to attending the standard parent night, parents and students are required to complete hours toward building community partnerships (e.g., volunteering at the local museum, city clean-up day). These types of strong, supportive partnerships lead to the development of leadership, community involvement, attendance accountability, and responsibility. Source: Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX

Reprinted from *21 Ways to Engage Students in School*, available online at <http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/21WaystoEngageStudentsinSchool.pdf>
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