

JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey

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 JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey conducted by Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research (AIR). This audit was conducted in response to the school being identified as being in corrective action under the New York State Education Department differentiated accountability plan, pursuant to the accountability requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act. The utilized ESCA process was developed for and carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of School Development, within the Division of Portfolio Planning.

The audit focused on access to the general education curriculum for English language learners (ELLs). It examined curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing practices through the multiple lenses of data collection and analysis. Findings in these areas served as a starting point to facilitate conversations among school staff in order to identify areas for improvement and ways to generate plans for improvement. This report includes an overview of the audit process, a description of the key findings identified in collaboration with the school, and recommendations for addressing these issues. It is entirely up to the school to determine how to implement the recommendations. At the conclusion of each recommendation, we have included examples from the field based on the experiences of AIR staff, which we believe illustrate the implementation of an aspect of the recommendation.

About JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey

JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey is located in New York City, in Queens (Community School District 28). The school serves 1,079 students in Grades 6–9. Eight percent of students are ELLs. In 2010–11, Stephen A. Halsey's accountability status was "Restructuring (Year 1)," due, in part, to the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for its population of ELLs.

Audit Process at JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey

The key findings were identified through an audit process. Data were collected using the following guiding themes as the focus of the audit: curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing. Following data collection, AIR staff facilitated a co-interpretationSM meeting on June 8, 2011, attended by 17 staff members from JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey. Staff members included the principal and representatives from administrative and teaching staff.

Co-interpretation is a collaborative process that helps school teams understand and use the data gathered by the audit team to generate findings. During the meeting, the following data reports were presented and reviewed:

- English Language Learner Site Visit Report (based on a document review, observations, and interviews), which focuses on instruction of ELLs.
- English Language Learner Teacher Survey Report, based on compiled responses from surveys completed by 45 teachers, including 28 teachers of ELLs.

The school team studied the individual data reports and used this information to develop key findings about the school's strengths and challenges related to educating English language learners. Participants rated the findings based on the following criteria:

- Is the key finding identified as one of the most critical problems faced by the school and addressed by the audit?
- If resolved, would student achievement improve sufficiently to move the school out of corrective action?
- If resolved, will there be a measurable, positive impact?

In the remainder of this report, we describe the key findings that were identified by school staff as their top priorities, and present recommendations for the school to consider incorporating into their Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Key Findings

After considerable thought and discussion, participants at co-interpretation determined a set of final key findings. These key findings, which are based on the voting that occurred during the co-interpretation meeting, are detailed in this section.

Critical Key Findings

These key findings were identified by co-interpretation participants and were prioritized by the group for action planning.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 1:

Few teachers of English language learners incorporate cultural awareness and responsiveness in their instructional practices.

Critical Key Finding 1 was identified as a top priority by the majority of the co-interpretation participants. Critical Key Finding 1 is supported by information from the English Language Learner Site Visit Report. Although observation and interview data indicated that teachers of ELLs are using a variety of instructional strategies, and incorporating language learning goals into their instruction, data also showed that very few teachers were developing cultural awareness through their instruction by valuing and building on students' diverse backgrounds.

CRITICAL KEY FINDING 2:

Teachers expressed a need for additional professional development related to the instruction of ELLs.

Critical Key Finding 2 is supported by data from the English Language Learner Site Visit Report. Although the positive findings indicate that teachers have found professional development on a number of topics helpful, data also show that teachers would like to receive additional professional development, specifically on topics related to critical aspects of teaching ELLs.

Positive Key Findings

Positive key findings are listed because it is to the school's advantage to approach its action planning from a strengths-based perspective and to leverage what has been working. AIR encourages the school to realistically acknowledge what it is doing well and effectively and to use those strengths as a springboard for approaching recommendations-based action planning.

The top three positive key findings according to a vote at the co-interpretation were as follows:

1. Teachers at JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey collaborate regularly, both formally and informally.
2. Teachers agreed that professional development was relevant and useful, and that the topics covered were helpful.
3. Teachers at JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey differentiate instruction.

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The key findings determined through the co-interpretation process with JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey led AIR to make two recommendations. For each recommendation, additional information is provided on specific actions that the school may consider during its action-planning process. These recommendations are supported by currently available research and evidence. Resources and references that support these recommendations are provided. It should be noted that JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey has already engaged in much work linked to these recommendations. However, data suggests that the school could redouble its efforts along these lines to meet the needs of their ELLs.

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

QUICK LINKS:
Online Sources
for More Information

Report describes the challenges faced by second-language learners in developing literacy

http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/nlpreports/executive_summary.pdf

Report provides guidance regarding developing academic literacy for adolescents

<http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Academic%20Literacy.pdf>

Resources and supporting materials for implementing guided reading instruction

<http://www.heinemann.com/fountasandpinnell/default.aspx>

Resources related to the implementation of the SIOP model, which facilitates high-quality instruction for ELLs in content-area teaching

<http://www.siopinstitute.net/>

Books and resources related to the instruction of ELLs

<http://www.shop.ascd.org/ASCDProductListing.aspx?Category=BOOK&Subcategory=ELLS>

Recommendation 1: Culturally Responsive Instructional Practices for ELLs

AIR recommends that JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey take steps to ensure that teachers are implementing instructional practices that are culturally responsive, and that teachers are supported in these efforts.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Current research around the topic of teaching literacy skills to ELLs contains both good and bad news for educators. There are very real challenges that confront ELLs in developing these skills. For ELLs, lack of proficiency in the areas of English vocabulary, meaning, language structure, background knowledge, and textual knowledge all undermine the ability to comprehend information and develop a text base. Research indicates that it takes second-language learners 3 to 5 years to develop oral proficiency and 4 to 7 years to develop academic proficiency commensurate with their monolingual peers. In addition, some second-language learners arrive in the United States with limited or interrupted schooling in their first language and thus begin behind their more schooled peers. Socioeconomic status is powerful in predicting English-language acquisition, with students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) homes taking considerably longer to acquire English proficiency (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). However, with effective teaching strategies, ELLs can and do meet rigorous literacy standards in English. If educators consider the cultural and linguistic issues that their ELLs bring with them to the learning situation, the job of enabling these students to achieve at a high level may be made much easier.

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 1, the need for teachers to incorporate cultural awareness and responsiveness in their instructional practices.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to promote greater use of culturally responsive instructional practices:

- 1. Explicitly teach students the demands made by the various genres of text, with emphasis on nonfiction text, and the language and features of this text that help make it accessible for the reader. Specifically, acquaint students with the following:**
 - The five design features of factual texts (text divisions, graphics, the print itself, layouts, and organizational tools), the specific details of each, and the author's purpose in employing these features. For example, the features of print may include type size and style, such as italic, regular, and boldface, the font itself, and color.
 - Midlevel structures, more commonly called patterns of organization, which generally include comparison and contrast, cause and effect, definition and example, and analysis and classification. These structures assist comprehension in specific ways so that, if an opening sentence states, "All mountain ranges share the same characteristics," the reader would thereby be alerted to the fact that subsequent materials would analyze these characteristics. Sometimes these structures occur within individual sentences, such as, "Whereas the geologically more recent

mountains of the western United States are extremely high and jagged, the geologically older ranges of the eastern United States tend to be lower, and their peaks more rounded in appearance.” Understanding such devices creates a reader with better comprehension skills.

- Signal words, often called connectors or connection words, link and form relationships between ideas. Signal words can be additive (*in addition, furthermore*), contrastive (*however, on the other hand*), causal (*hence, as a result*), or temporal (in conclusion, finally). It is important to note that students must not only know the role of these words in the reading process but be able to use them in writing and fully understand their individual meanings.

2. Develop or purchase supplementary materials in all content areas that will enable students to create or access background knowledge that will, in turn, enable them to develop bridges to new learning.

- This action step can be accomplished by:
 - Surveying staff about their current needs in the way of instructional materials and prepare a multiyear buying plan to secure more resources, including commercially developed materials so that teachers may have more at their disposal available from the school rather than self-made.
 - Researching and seeking out reading materials, including novels, short stories, and poetry at varying difficulty levels to increase their inventory of materials that take into account students’ personal experiences, including relevant aspects of their cultural background, which aids in their reading comprehension by enabling them to activate background knowledge.
- Such materials might include but are not necessarily limited to the following:
 - Sets of pictures, photographs, and drawings that can provide visual support for a wide variety of content and vocabulary
 - Visuals that might include overhead transparencies charts, maps, graphs, and timelines
 - Multimedia materials such as DVDs, CD-ROMs, and brief video clips
 - Related literature and print materials on chosen topics
 - Hi-lo readers that may simplify selected content, especially for struggling readers

3. Adapt or modify content in texts or other source materials by scaffolding them as prereading activities, as aids during reading, and as postreading strategies for organizing newly learned information. Modifications can include:

- Graphic organizers that provide visual clues to organize new material, such as timelines, comparison circles, webs, cause and effect diagrams, and other devices that present information for better comprehension and to enhance memory,
- Teacher-prepared scaffolded outlines for students as a format that they can use to organize new information,
- Teacher-prepared study guides for students with selected vocabulary, guiding questions, and similar materials
- Reserved texts that may be highlighted, underlined, and used to make marginal notes.

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mrs. Ishiwara teaches sixth grade English language arts in a middle school that is beginning to receive an influx of English language learners (ELLs), predominantly Hispanic students, many of whom are not yet proficient in English, and who have been tested as beginner- and intermediate-level English language learners. She has a group of eight intermediate-level ELLs, all Hispanic, in her second period class, which she co-teaches with the ESL teacher, Mr. Settles, three times a week. She sees these students in other places in the school and they are generally high-spirited, seem to enjoy sports, and she often hears them laughing and speaking Spanish with their friends. In her class, however, they are quiet and unresponsive. Never behavior problems, they just simply do not participate and sometimes put their heads down on their desks when reading selections are being discussed. Mrs. Ishiwara wonders if their academic English is not sufficiently strong enough for them to participate without feeling embarrassment, or if they cannot relate to the material they read in class because it is so focused on mainstream culture.

Mrs. Ishiwara decides she may need to refine her choice of texts to some extent to engage these students and help them gain the skills in reading and English they need so they can participate more fully. One of the texts available to her is *Taking Sides* by Gary Soto. In this short novel, the main character, Lincoln Mendoza, has moved from an inner city Los Angeles school, Franklin Junior High, to a suburban area school, Columbus Junior High, which is somewhat less diverse than his previous school. Lincoln used to play basketball for Franklin, now he plays on the Columbus team. When the two teams are slated to play each other, Lincoln starts to feel divided loyalties, and does not understand his feelings at first, which provides the main element of conflict in the narrative. Lincoln's family's dialogue is frequently in Spanish, which is translated in the book, and their lifestyle reflects a combination of Anglo and Mexican customs.

Mrs. Ishiwara chooses her *content objectives* for the upcoming reading of *Taking Sides*. First, she wants these students to think "within the text" as they read, and she determines that first of all, her students should be able to remember and share important portions of the story's plot, remembering key information and carrying it forward as they work with higher-order skills. Next, she wants them to think "beyond the text" and thinks it important that all her students are able to make predictions, based on what they know of story events, and to make inferences; in this case she wants them to think what the author means but has not directly stated. Finally, she wants her students to think "about the text" and critique the author's writing. She also chooses *language learning goals*. She wants her students to consolidate their knowledge of the text by summarizing or paraphrasing at least a portion of the plot using signal words to connect the sentences. She also wants them to use complete sentences, not fragments. She wants them to use richer and more complex signal words as they summarize a sequence of events, and rather than words such as "first" or "then," she wants them to use words and phrases such as "earlier," "in the first place," "for one thing," "meanwhile," and "not long after."

She works with Mr. Settles to plan the instructional sequence. The ESL teacher begins by reading the text with the students, pausing frequently to make certain his ELLs are demonstrating literal comprehension of the story by highlighting and clarifying key events and difficult vocabulary, as he asks questions to monitor accuracy and make certain students are self-correcting when what they have read is not making sense. The two teachers then bring the whole group back together to participate in literature circle discussion groups. They do not isolate their ELLs, but put two of them in each group. They introduce "talking sticks" to ensure full participation. Each student has one popsicle stick. When they share an observation or answer a question, they put their stick into a can in the center of their table. They may not speak again until all the sticks are back in the can. Then the sticks are redistributed the student assigned this role for the literature circle. The procedure then begins anew. The two teachers will circulate to monitor on-task behavior, assist as necessary, and keep notes on student participation, which students understand will be part of their ELA grade.

Mrs. Ishiwara knows her ELLs, and some of her monolingual students as well, will need assistance in discussing the text using complete sentences. Therefore, she types up and laminates “sentence stem” cards so that students have a scaffold to help them produce good oral English. She includes these stems:

- I think Lincoln shows how he feels about playing against the Franklin team when he _____ .
(What does he do?)
- Coach Yesuitis demonstrates that he is not very sympathetic to Lincoln when he _____ .
(What does he do?)
- If I had been Lincoln, on the day of the game, I would have _____ .
(What are some things he could have done?)
- On page 127, the author writes, “Lincoln looked at the floor, holding back a smile, feeling giddy because he was now understanding that he was a Franklin boy beneath a Columbus uniform.” I think the author is trying to say that Lincoln _____ .
(Explain what you think he has discovered about himself.)
- I think the next time the two schools play each other, Lincoln will _____ .
(How do you think he might handle his problems next time?)
- I think this story could really have happened because _____ .
- I think this story could not really happen because _____ .

This material will cover more than one class period. Meanwhile, Mrs. Ishiwara has posted a list of richer and more complex quality sequence signal words, which she brings to students’ attention. In ESL, the ELLs preview and practice the use of these words and phrases, most of which are not familiar to them. After the discussion phase of the text reading is complete, the students are directed to make a list of eight things that happened that led to Lincoln’s decision to play in the Franklin game. Each discussion group receives a piece of chart paper to record these. As in the literature circles, each child has a role in this process. They then must take this list and turn it into a paragraph as a group. The charts are posted and the class reads each, making edits and suggesting improvements, as well as praising parts that seem noteworthy. Every student will then copy their own group paragraph into their reading journals, as an example for a future paragraph that they will have to write with a greater degree of independence.

Recommendation 2: Professional Development

AIR recommends that JHS 157 Stephen A. Halsey review its current professional development plan and adjust to ensure appropriate coverage of content relevant to the instruction of ELLs, including a focus on instructional strategies that are culturally responsive.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Research has found that professional development for teachers is most effective and boosts student achievement most when it is embedded in their daily work and sustained, as opposed to one-time workshops (The National Staff Development Council, 2001; Steiner, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Effective professional development also provides teachers with opportunities for collaboration, coaching, and peer observation, which allows them to be actively involved in their own development and to more frequently practice learned skills (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Additionally, professional development is most effective when it is directly connected to teacher practice and focuses on content (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). Content areas should align with school improvement needs and goals to target improvement to those areas.

By refining the process by which professional development is offered, ensuring that it is embedded, is sustained, and allows for active teacher participation, and focusing the development on teacher practice and content, schools can improve teacher practice and student achievement (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

LINK TO FINDINGS

This recommendation links directly to Critical Key Finding 2, in which teachers indicated a need for more professional development, specifically on strategies for teaching ELLs. This recommendation also links to Critical Key Finding 1, the need for teachers to incorporate cultural awareness and responsiveness in their instructional practices.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following steps can be used to adjust the professional development plan to increase the focus on instruction ELLs, with a focus on instructional strategies that are culturally responsive:

- 1. Offer professional development on strategies for effectively instructing ELLs, including the following:**
 - Understanding language development
 - Assisting in the development of curriculum aligned to both ELA and ESL state standards that clearly articulates literacy competencies and ensures that language objectives are defined at each stage of language acquisition

QUICK LINKS: Online Sources for More Information

Resources related to the implementation of the SIOP model, which facilitates high-quality instruction for ELLs in content area teaching

<http://www.siopinstitute.net/>

Report describes the challenges faced by second-language learners in developing literacy

http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/nlpreports/executive_summary.pdf

Article about strategies for incorporating reading and writing instruction into the content area curriculum

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov02/vol60/num03/Reading,-Writing,-and-Understanding.aspx>

- Being aware of what ELLs should understand and be able to do in terms of content and language skills at each proficiency level within the ELA curriculum
- Developing strategies and techniques for delivering the curriculum to ELLs in monolingual, bilingual, and general education classrooms

2. Consider training in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), a resource that provides a unified and consistent approach for delivering instruction for ELLs, including materials and teaching practices. While some teachers have been trained in the SIOP model, it would be beneficial if this model were implemented school-wide.

3. Continue to offer and improve professional development offerings on strategies for teaching all learners, including the following:

- Common Core Standards: ELA, Grades 6 through 12
- Developing academic English
- Teaching reading for comprehending and fluency
- Teaching reading and writing in the content areas

DOING WHAT WORKS: Examples From Real Schools

Mrs. Brown is participating in professional development that will help her better meet the learning needs of her ELLs. From the outset, she has learned that she must follow the Common Core State Standards. The Standards, as she has come to understand them, define what all students must know and be able to do, but not how teachers should teach. The Standards must be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, but they are not an exhaustive list of what must take place in the classroom. They set grade-level goals, but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are below or above grade level expectations. It is the job of the professionals who work with children to make the Standards accessible to all learners.

The curriculum represents the content, or subject matter, that students must master in the course of their education. Teachers must adapt, or modify that content by the way in which they teach so that English language learners or students with disabilities can learn it.

Teachers may accomplish this by supplementing or adapting the curriculum. Supplementing the curriculum involves providing additional material, which provides background knowledge and supports different learning styles. Supplementary materials could include pictures that illustrate vocabulary words and concepts. Visuals may include charts and graphs, timelines, maps that supply visual clues that help students who have difficulty processing large amounts of auditory instruction. Readers that are simplified and contain more photographs or illustrations, captions, and vocabulary word definitions may also provide supplements without diminishing the information students need to learn.

Modified or adapted materials also may help the learner who has problems with complex language and/or large amounts of language. They may be used before the lesson or during it to make the content more comprehensible. These may include graphic organizers, teacher-prepared outlines, or study guides. They may also include recorded text, or rewritten text that reorganizes the material into smaller portions or chunks. Sometimes a spare copy of the text material may be given to students that they may mark or highlight.

Mrs. Brown understands all of this and is ready, as part of her training, to redesign a science unit she has already taught to make it more accessible to her ELLs. She wants to teach them some content from geology about earthquakes and volcanoes, but she knows she will have to supplement and modify the material to make it accessible to her ELLs.

She begins by activating prior knowledge and building background. Last year, students learned about the large plates under the ocean and how they move—essential information for this new unit. However, students may not remember this material, and her ELLs may have been speaking much less English when they were learning it, so she clearly is going to have to activate what prior knowledge students have and review it so she can build on what they know. She prepares a PowerPoint presentation that goes over the concepts of tectonic plates. She gives students the PowerPoint note pages with key vocabulary and diagrams, which students can keep in their science notebooks to refer to again. She also shows a video that contains pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and the damage that can occur as a result of these phenomena. Many of her students have never been exposed to this information, and need this necessary background knowledge to acquire new content successfully. She then provides a simplified version of the material and has students read it in pairs. They mark what they already know and what is new to them. This gives her an idea of who in the class may need more support and who already understands the material. Given what she knows from this, she is ready to teach. She goes online and finds pictures of volcanoes and earthquakes and related concepts so that students can see a visual definition of each term: plateau, earth's mantle, fault lines, lava, magma, and diagrams of the layers of rock that cannot be seen from the earth's surface. She creates a science word wall using these pictures and their labels. Students now have a visual to reference that explains key vocabulary as they read. She makes a note to ask the ESL teacher to preview the concepts using some of the Rigby and Newbridge materials that are more heavily illustrated and to

present this content with simplified vocabulary. All students are keeping personal dictionaries where they write definitions and make diagrams. She makes a study guide in the form of an outline so that as she teaches, the students look at her overheads and fill in information as she presents it. Then she puts students in small groups. Together they read the information in the text. Her ELLs have a copy of the text in which they can mark and highlight. They are also given graphic organizers with flow charts, which students fill in to create the sequence of events leading to a volcanic eruption or an earthquake. Students complete the graphic organizers and write the sequence of events in sentences in their groups, all the while discussing what they have learned. ELLs are included with monolingual students who have a greater facility for self-expression in English. They put the sentences into paragraphs, which the students post and read aloud to the whole group.

Finally, Mrs. Brown gives them a concept definition map about volcanoes (later she will give them one on earthquakes). Students must define a volcano in one box. In a series of connected boxes, they write what they do and what they are like— one fact per box. When Mrs. Brown has seen the students' completed maps, she will know about her next necessary steps in instruction. Do some of her students need more instruction or reteaching while other students move on? Can the ESL teacher step in and fill gaps for her with her ELLs?

In this way, Mrs. Brown has both supplemented and adapted her unit materials to make them more comprehensible for all students, and especially for her ELLs. She has found additional or different ways to use materials to teach all of the key vocabulary and concepts, but has not left any material out or diminished it in any way.

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