Access for Under-Prepared High School Students

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Across the nation, urban, rural and suburban schools are striving to reach higher standards and to improve the academic performance of their students. The *Tools for Schools* teleconference series has been designed to support schools as new State assessments linked to higher learning standards are phased in. Six components that leading national educational experts and high performing schools have found effective in enhancing student performance are featured in this series. This *Checklist for Self Assessment* can assist school administrators, teachers and other school personnel, parents, and the greater school community in reviewing their own teaching and learning environment, and stimulate discussion towards developing strategies to raise standards for student achievement, build capacity to reach the standards and to answer for results and improve them.

### Responsive Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Do we set high expectations for achievement for all students including students with disabilities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Is our vision for success of all students communicated to all school staff, students and parents?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we have and express a commitment to using assessment results to enhance our teaching strategies in our school?</td>
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<td>♦ Do we recognize the diversity of students’ learning styles and base our instruction on these styles?</td>
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<td>♦ Do we integrate use of technology in our instruction for all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we use a collaborative team approach involving all teachers to address the needs of targeted students?</td>
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Access for Under-Prepared High School Students:

Checklist for Self-Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On-going Staff Development</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Are all teachers provided information, materials and training about instructional strategies to help all students achieve the State’s learning standards?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we provide training in positive youth development approaches for working with under-prepared high school students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we use the expertise of our school’s teachers as part of our staff development effort?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Are opportunities provided on a regular and on-going basis for all teachers to share strategies for instruction and assessment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do teachers provide input on the types of staff development they need to meet the learning needs of students in their classrooms?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Are the skills of special education teachers used to help develop instructional strategies for students with disabilities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Are staff development activities on-going and related to the needs of students?</td>
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</table>
### Access for Under-Prepared High School Students:

**Checklist for Self-Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaging Curriculum</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Do we promote the active involvement of all of our students including students with disabilities in their learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we use techniques that challenge students’ curiosity, problem-solving ability, and require that they analyze information to reach conclusions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we focus our instructional efforts on the learning styles of individual learners including students with disabilities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Are all students provided interdisciplinary learning experiences to enable them to make connections across subject areas?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Are our instructional activities and learning experiences designed to connect student learning to real-life experiences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Are all students provided challenging work that enables them to strive to reach their highest potential?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we use cooperative learning experiences to help all students strengthen both their academic and their social skills?</td>
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</table>
## Access for Under-Prepared High School Students:

*Checklist for Self-Assessment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexible Resources</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Do we seek ways to ensure that the maximum amount of time during the school day is devoted to teaching and learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do our teachers share ideas and strategies for helping all students achieve success in school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we draw upon the knowledge and expertise of our own teachers and staff for improving instruction for all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we use flexible grouping of students to adjust to different learning styles and interests of students including students with disabilities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we target discretionary grants and funds to improve instruction for all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we provide teaching and learning experiences to help all students achieve the State’s learning standards?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we seek volunteers as tutors and mentors to help all students achieve success in building their academic and social and personal skills?</td>
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</tbody>
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### Access for Under-Prepared High School Students:

**Checklist for Self-Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive Involvement of Parents and Community</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Do we provide information to all parents about the State’s learning standards and graduation requirements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we provide information to parents about the instructional strategies we use to enable all students to achieve the State’s learning standards?</td>
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<td>♦ Do we seek input from parents about their children and the types of learning activities that they enjoy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we suggest activities that parents can use at home to reinforce skills being developed in school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we assign homework projects that develop all students’ skills and promote family involvement in their learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we invite parents to serve on school district and building committees planning standards-based instruction for all students in the school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we consider parents’ work schedules and family commitments when we schedule meetings?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Access for Under-Prepared High School Students:

### Checklist for Self-Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehensive Planning</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Do we develop school building plans that include high achievement standards for all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do our plans focus on student achievement and establish specific goals for educational improvement of all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do our plans build on our successes and our strengths as models for overall school improvement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do our plans include training to ensure that teachers can implement strategies and activities focusing on positive youth development?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do our plans set clear priorities and goals for high achievement of all students and devote resources to meet the priorities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do our plans include use of technology to address the learning needs of all of our student population?</td>
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<td>♦ Are our plans aligned with the State’s learning standards?</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Do we monitor and evaluate implementation of our plans?</td>
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Engaging High School Curriculum
The Six A’s of Instructional Design

When teachers remember significant learning experiences in their own adolescence and then share their best teaching unit, project, or curricular design, they are often surprised to see that the same basic list of features almost invariably emerges: authenticity, academic rigor, adult connections, applications of knowledge, active exploration, and assessment practices that help learners to internalize high standards. In helping teachers design for community-connected learning, Jobs for the Future uses a framework, developed by Adria Steinberg, to highlight these Six A’s.

1. **Authenticity**: using a real-world context (e.g., community and workplace problems) to teach academic and professional disciplines.

2. **Academic Rigor**: involving students in using methods of inquiry central to academic and professional discipline(s) and requiring higher-order thinking skills.

3. **Applied Learning**: engaging students in solving semi-structured problems calling for competencies expected in high-performance work organizations (e.g., teamwork, problem solving, and communication).

4. **Active Exploration**: Extending learning beyond the classroom to work internships, field-based investigations, and community explorations.

5. **Adult Connections**: Providing students with adult mentors and coaches from the wider community.

6. **Assessment**: Involving students in regular exhibitions and assessments of their work in light of personal, school, and real-world standards of performance.

Teachers find this framework especially helpful as they struggle to create a bridge between two important trends in education—the use of external standards to drive school-level changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and organization and the creation of community-based opportunities for students’ immersion in the adult world of work and learning. The Six A’s represent an interweaving of these two currents of thought and activity, and hence help to define concretely the key features of high-quality, community-connected learning.

By calling attention to key characteristics of this type of learning, these criteria are equally applicable to projects that originate inside and outside of the classroom; they serve as a reminder that when projects originate from academic subject matter, they can reach out to community and workplace concerns, and when they originate from real problems, they can be structured to connect back to academic fields of study and to provide practice in vital academic skills.

Teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators, staff developers, and others across the State have gathered together in their schools to examine and discuss student work. In doing so, the school community has gained a greater appreciation for the expertise and support of other educators and have engaged in opportunities to examine evidence of student growth and learning and of the effectiveness of teachers’ own practices.

Teachers have always spent a good deal of time individually looking at their own students’ work. Looking collaboratively at student work provides an added opportunity for discussion and allows professionals to work together to make the best possible decisions for their students. Just as physicians consult with each other, teachers also benefit from the expertise, ideas, and suggestions from colleagues.

There are many reasons to look at student work:

♦ Identify strengths and shortcomings of the work
♦ Diagnose, identify, or monitor student needs
♦ Align curriculum, instruction and assessment with student needs
♦ Ensure that all students have equal access and opportunity to succeed
♦ Guide curriculum development and refinement
♦ Improve teaching
♦ Assess the merits of programs
♦ Assess the extent to which standards are addressed
♦ Determine how students compare to outside norms

Educators that have worked together to look at student work collaboratively recommend to other educators that protocols be established. Protocols provide a structure for conversation about student work. In establishing a set pattern, or process, that is consistent over a period of time, participants feel more comfortable with a guided process. The process provides a safe, comfortable environment that is supportive for teachers to share not only their students’ work, but their own. Following a protocol also assists participants from making quick judgments without careful examination and thoughtfulness. As teachers become more comfortable with a protocol, the “artificialness” of a set pattern of activities disappears, and the protocol simply becomes a guide for how the process is conducted.

Following are two protocols from Looking Together at Student Work. Steps include:

♦ Taking stock of current ways of looking at student work
♦ Establishing goals and framing questions
♦ Choosing, adapting, or developing a process for looking collaboratively at student work
♦ Implementing the process
♦ Reflecting on and revising the process.

## Two Processes for Looking at Student Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Role of Description, Interpretation, and/or Evaluation</th>
<th>Presentation of the Context for the Student Work</th>
<th>Kinds and Amount of Student Work Typically Shared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuning Protocol</strong></td>
<td>To develop more effective exhibitions, projects, and assessment tasks. To develop common standards for students’ work. To support teachers’ instructional practice through focusing on student performances.</td>
<td>Primarily evaluation The process asks participants to provide “warm” and “cool” feedback on student work samples and exhibition or project designs.</td>
<td>Context presented initially At the beginning of the session, the presenting teachers typically provide descriptions (including documents) of the assignment, scoring criteria, as well as reflections from students and others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Assessment Conference</strong></td>
<td>To learn more about students’ goals and the problems and issues they choose to focus on in the course of an assignment. To learn more about the strengths and needs of a particular student. To reflect on and gather ideas for revising classroom practice.</td>
<td>Primarily description with some interpretation The process asks participants to describe the student work, to ask questions about it, and to speculate about the problem or issue in the work that the student was most focused on.</td>
<td>Context withheld until middle of process The presenting teacher does not describe the context for the work until after participants have looked carefully at it and formulated questions about it.</td>
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Reinventing High School: Six Journeys of Change

Reinventing High Schools features the reform journeys of six American high schools. The stories describe many promising and effective practices, yet the intent is not to create a “best practices” compendium or to put a few schools in the limelight. Underlining this study convened by Jobs for the Future and the Coalition of Essential schools are two strongly held beliefs: all schools are works-in-progress; and the work involved in school reform cannot take place only in the school building itself.

Following are some of the emerging patterns that are drawn from the case studies of these six high schools: Oakland Technical High School in Oakland, California; Brighton High School in Boston, Massachusetts; Landmark High School in Manhattan, New York; Rex Putnam High School, just outside of Portland Oregon; Sir Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo, California and Quest High School located in Humble, a suburb of Houston Texas.

Emerging Patterns

♦ A focus on preparing students for college and careers. One of the most striking similarities across all of the schools is their focus on preparing students for both college and careers. Most of these career-focused programs of study include project work inside the school as well as internships in the community. Such experiences are designed to allow students not only to apply academic knowledge but also to develop “high performance competencies” in areas important to both college and careers, such as problem-solving, teamwork, and information searching and management. These experiences also afford a significant number of young people the opportunity to work alongside adults, who push and support them to meet real-world standards.

♦ Building on community resources, pressures, and supports. A second pattern can be seen in the ways that all of the comprehensive high schools have gained traction for their change efforts by taking advantage of resources, pressures, and support from outside the school. In a number of districts, the local business community served as a catalyst to reform by offering to partner with schools in new ways. Leadership inside the school – coming in every case from principal and teachers – enabled the schools to leverage business and community support into school reform.

♦ Addressing the (sometimes) uneasy alliance of the district and an entrepreneurial school. Each of the schools profiled has found that policies and actions in the district office both enhance and, at times, slow down, its efforts at redesign. While district leaders must encourage and applaud the entrepreneurial activities of these schools, they also worry about consistency and equity among all the schools in the community. This can make for a complex and challenging dynamic for each of the schools in the study, regardless of size.

In illustrating both the possibilities and challenges of high school change, the case studies map out the terrain that must be crossed in order for entrepreneurial schools, their communities, and their districts to truly become partners in change. Ultimately, the reinvention of high school depends on just such partnerships.

Excerpted from Reinventing High School: Six Journeys of Change, which may be downloaded from the following Web sites: Jobs for the Future (www.jff.org), Coalition of Essential Schools (www.essentialschools.org) and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (www.lab.brown.edu).

Go through all or selected benchmarks and rate your small learning community’s progress at achieving each one, according to the four-point scale provided. Place the number of your rating in the circle beside each benchmark. Then indicate which of these benchmarks are high priorities to accomplish in the upcoming year by placing an x in the appropriate box. Remember, you want to identify a reasonable number of priority benchmarks given the time, people, and material resources available.

**Scale:** 1 Not Yet Considered  2 Planning  3 Early Implementation  4 Operational

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>1. Students and teachers are clustered into small learning communities in which teams of teachers have primary responsibility for a common group of students.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>a. Small learning community includes several core academic as well as career theme-related courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>b. Students enrolled in the SLC spend at least 50 percent of their time in courses designated as part of the SLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>c. Teachers who belong to the SLC spend at least half their time teaching courses identified as part of their SLC.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td><strong>2. The small learning community design has a clear instructional and curricular focus and clearly defined criteria for successful completion.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>a. Teachers can articulate how their SLC provides a unique and different learning experience and what the specific benefits are for students who belong to it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>b. The SLC consists of a coherent and logical sequence of courses that build on each other and increasingly challenge students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>c. Teachers of academic and career or theme-related classes have identified how they use themes and interdisciplinary projects and assignments to bring coherence to the curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>d. Teachers have discussed and agreed upon the role of work-based and community-based learning experiences in the curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>e. Teachers, in consultation with community partners, have determined the requirements for successful completion of the SLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>f. Teachers, with community partners, have designed and implemented a process for assessing and certifying student attainment of SLC requirements.</td>
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(Continued)
3. Students and teachers build a strong sense of identity and shared understanding of performance expectations within their small learning communities.

   a. Students are able to identify the teachers and courses that belong to their SLC.
   b. Students are able to describe the unique features and benefits provided by their SLC.
   c. Students are able to identify the performance expectations and completion requirements for their SLC.
   d. Students and teachers engage in orientation, celebrations, and other identity-building activities designed specifically for their SLC.
   e. Students complete one or two culminating projects each year that demonstrate proficiency in identified academic and SCANS-related standards. The products created by the students illustrate the expectations for student work within the SLC.
Ideas for Differentiating Instruction

**Station Teaching**
Using centers or stations involves setting up different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously. These stations invite flexible groupings because not all students need to go to all stations all the time. This format is appropriate for any class and any age and is ideal for co-teaching (one teacher can support groups, one can assess, work with individual students, etc.).

**Compacting**
This strategy encourages teachers to assess students before beginning a unit of study or development of a skill. Students who do well on the pre-assessment do not continue working on the material they already know. Instead, they may pursue independent projects or additional research related to the unit while other students address the typical curriculum.

**Agendas**
These are lists of tasks that a student must complete in a specified time, usually during 2 or 3 weeks. The agendas can be personalized (e.g., include IEP tasks, more challenging work) for individual students, if needed. Students work individually (or in small groups) to complete the agenda tasks.

**Complex Instruction**
This strategy uses challenging materials, open-ended tasks, and small instructional groups. Teachers float among groups/pairs/individuals, asking questions, giving mini-lectures, probing student thinking.

**Entry Points**
A strategy from Howard Gardner proposes student exploration of a given topic through as many as 5 avenues: Narrational (presenting a story), logical-quantitative (using #s or deduction), foundational (examining philosophy and vocabulary), aesthetic (focusing on sensory features), and experiential (hands-on).

**Peer Tutors/Cross-Age Tutors**
Engineering student tutoring groups or pairs can provide opportunities for different learners/groups to work at different paces and/or on different material while offering students another perspective from which to learn.

*Kluth (2000)- adapted from ASCD: Curriculum Update (Winter 2000); Tomlinson (1999)*
# Differentiated Instruction Is/Is Not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What differentiated instruction is not:</th>
<th>What differentiated instruction is:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An approach designed primarily to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>An approach that benefits all learners including those who are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, and those with a range of skills, gifts, strengths, needs, abilities and disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptations that are “tacked on” to pre-developed lessons</td>
<td>Curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is carefully designed to incorporate the needs of all learners up-front.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another disconnected model/approach for teachers to implement and fit into the school day</td>
<td>A reform that intersects with and ideologically fits with dozens of other current reforms and approaches including cooperative learning, authentic assessment, co-teaching, constructivist teaching, project-based instruction, active learning, culturally relevant teaching, community-based instruction, multicultural education, and inclusive schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing pieces of the lesson for one or two students</td>
<td>Creating diversity in instruction and continuously “mixing up” lesson formats, materials, instructional arrangements, teaching strategies, and personal support for all learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a new and unfamiliar approach to teaching and learning</td>
<td>Something that most teachers are doing already, perhaps without realizing it. Teachers who offer a range of assessment choices, assign diverse roles to students in cooperative groups, or offer enhancement to learners who need extra challenge are using differentiated instruction. For most teachers using DI will simply involve expanding the strategies used in the classroom and differentiating across students and lessons consistently!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Kluth, Paula (2000)*
Flow of Instruction in a Differentiated Classroom

1. Teacher and whole class begin exploration of a topic or concept.

2. Students engage in further study using varied materials based on readiness and learning style.

3. Students and teacher come together to share information and pose questions.

4. Students work on varied assigned tasks designed to help them make sense of key ideas at varied levels of complexity and varied pacing.

5. The whole class reviews key ideas and extends their study through sharing.

6. In small groups selected by students, they apply key principles to solve teacher-generated problems related to their study.

7. The whole class is introduced to a skill needed later to make a presentation.

8. Students self-select interest areas through which they will apply and extend their understandings.

9. The whole class listens to individual study plans and establishes baseline criteria for success.

A differentiated classroom is marked by a repeated rhythm of whole-class preparation, review, and sharing, followed by opportunity for individual or small-group exploration, sense-making, extension and production.

E-learning Potential

Online staff development has great possibilities – and pitfalls

By Joan Richardson

Results, September 2001.

Is this your image of online staff development? A teacher sits alone at a computer in the family room at home quietly clicking from one screen to the next as colorful lessons flash before her eyes. She types in responses to questions but talks to no one about what she’s learning. When she’s finished her online course, she fills out the required inservice sheet, gets her inservice points, and moves on.

Or, is this your image of online staff development? Using conferencing software, a teacher is connected online to others who teach the same subject. They develop lesson plans keyed to newly introduced state standards in mathematics. They edit each others’ lessons and, after they use the lessons with students, they return to an online discussion group to share their experiences with each other.

In today’s rapidly expanding world of e-learning, both images are possible. Online staff development offers enormous opportunities to customize learning around individual teacher needs and to make learning convenient for teachers. Learning can be "just in time" when teachers need it most. E-learning provides a confidential setting in which teachers can learn basic skills or it can open doors to allow teachers to network with colleagues across their districts or across the country.

But e-learning also has the potential to accentuate the worst parts of traditional staff development – the fragmentation and the isolation – without any monitoring of the rigor of the work that teachers are doing, said Joellen Killion, director of special projects for the National Staff Development Council and co-author of a newly released set of technology standards, E-Learning for Educators: Implementing the Standards for Staff Development (www.nsdc.org/standards_tech.html).

"I fear that people will be looking only at what the individual wants and not at schoolwide needs. We could have a high school of 125 teachers each doing their own thing and not working together to move the whole school in the same direction," she said.

Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council, fears electronic learning may "provide a centrifugal force that moves teachers away from daily collaboration with colleagues in professional learning communities within their schools.

"It’s essential, from my point of view, that a significant portion of teachers’ professional learning occur in school each day as teachers together plan lessons, critique student work, and examine various forms of data from their school. To the extent that electronic learning aids these core team-based functions, it may well serve schools and students. To the extent that it adds to incoherence and fragmentation of effort, it contributes to the squandering of a precious resource – teachers’ professional knowledge and skill,” Sparks said.
Larger districts develop their own

Offering any kind of professional development is a challenge in Clark County, Nevada. The 8,000-square-mile school district that includes the city of Las Vegas employs 23,000 teachers. They work in schools as small as a two-room, two-teacher building and as large as a 4,000-student suburban high school.

As director of technology development services in the Clark County, Karlene Lee manages seven teachers on special assignment and nine tech specialists, all of whom are devoted to professional development. Hers is only one of eight different groups in the district that offer staff development.

The district has been offering 15-hour courses on a variety of topics that included face-to-face meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of the course and eight class meetings online. For such courses, teachers earned one professional development credit.

But the district is shifting to another model because of the cost and difficulty of bringing together teachers from such a large district. Although this is in its early phases, this is how the new Clark County model is intended to work:

A group of 4th-grade teachers from various parts of the massive district collaborate online to write model lesson plans for a new social studies unit. The teachers initially meet face-to-face in order to check software and ensure that everyone is clear on the goal of their work and the structure of how they will work. Teachers do not meet again face-to-face during this project.

For several months, the teachers meet online weekly at a designated time. Initially, they spend time learning about the state’s new social studies standards. Via videoconferencing, a local university professor is their content resource as they prepare to write lessons.

Using an online conferencing product, the teachers collaborate to write lesson plans. The software allows one user to open a document with a lesson plan while other teachers edit the document, refining and improving each piece. They discuss their proposed changes via an audio link. The software also links to a whiteboard so teachers can sketch out images to help others better understand their ideas.

"Everyone can edit. If one teacher develops an activity, everyone can see it. One person might make it, but many can edit it and improve it," Lee said.

If the group encounters a question while online, one of the teachers can move easily onto a web site that will help her locate the answer they need.

When their work is done, the lesson plan is saved in a file that is accessible to participants.

"Offering this mode of collaboration to very low level technology users would be very frustrating. But for those who have intermediate to advanced skills, it’s very good. They like the face-to-face piece of the first model but they love not having to travel in order to meet with other teachers,” Lee said.

(Continued)
Standards for online learning

Killion urges districts to hold electronic learning to the same standards they set for face-to-face learning.

The standards document developed by a group that included vendors, union representatives, and K-12 educators lists dozens of questions that administrators should consider as they either purchase or develop online courses.

Killion worries that school districts will add online staff development to their repertoire without carefully thinking through how online fits into a comprehensive program of professional learning. "I worry that it will be an add-on and that there won't be any value added because of it," she said.

"The questions I think are most important are: How do we know we need it, how do we know it’s something of value for us, and how do we know it’s going to increase student learning?" she said.

Killion said none of the products she’s aware of have data about the impact on student learning. "They can give you data on the number of users and the completion rates. But they’re a long way from having student data," she said.

NSDC Executive Director Dennis Sparks repeats that concern. "The ultimate test is whether the achievement of all students is increased because the electronic learning deepens teachers’ content knowledge, broadens the range of research-based instructional strategies available to them, and helps them use classroom assessment more effectively," he said.

Copyright, National Staff Development Council, 2001. All rights reserved. Visit the National Staff Development Council website (www.nsdc.org) for more information. Site is referenced on the New York State Education Department website.
Data-Driven Decision Making and Student Achievement

National Education Association, NEA Teaching and Learning Team July 2000

Schools routinely gather a great deal of data; in fact, they generally gather more than they can use (Wallace 1996). But they also often fail to use all this information—from test scores to attendance figures—to monitor what they are doing against the results they are getting. In short, schools tend not to be "data-driven organizations." Yet the need to be data-driven has never been greater. "After years of exhorting and cajoling schools to improve, policymakers have decided to get tough" (Education Week 1/11/99, p. 5). Accountability--linking rewards and sanctions to student performance—is the order of the day. What separates schools that successfully manage accountability demands, especially as they relate to student achievement, from those that do not is their effective use of data—an often neglected but essential tool.

What Is Data-Driven Decision Making?

Data-driven decision making is using data that are gathered on a regular basis (and additional information, as needed) to inform planning, decision making, and reporting activities. Data-driven decision making activities fall into four categories (NSSE 1998):

1. Mining the data: Collecting and managing pertinent data and information;
2. Analyzing the data: Analyzing and synthesizing the data to create knowledge;
3. Communicating the data: Reporting data, information, and knowledge to support organizational learning;
4. Using the data: Maximizing the role of data in school improvement planning.

Why Do Some Schools Engage in Data-Driven Decision Making?

Schools that engage in data-driven decision making reap a number of benefits. Overall, they have the information they need to-

1. assess the current and future needs of students, parents, staff, and the community;
2. decide what to change and how to institutionalize changes;
3. determine if goals are being met;
4. engage in continuous school improvement;
5. ensure that students "don't fall through the cracks;"
6. evaluate how well current programs and activities meet clients' needs;
7. guide curriculum development and revision;
8. identify the root causes of problems;
9. improve instruction;

(Continued)
10. judge the effectiveness of their reform efforts;
11. know which programs are producing the results the school wants;
12. meet state and federal requirements;
13. measure program;
14. monitor students' progress in meeting standards;
15. promote accountability;
16. select education programs and expertise that will solve problems and position the school for the future;
17. understand ways in which the school and community is changing.

**Why Don't All Schools Engage in Data-Driven Decision Making?**

As one observer notes, "data have the capacity to reveal strength and weakness, failure and success" (Shmoker 1996, p.33). They can challenge current practice and upset established routines, and they almost always point to some kind of action that should be taken.

Some of the reasons many schools do not use data regularly in their planning and decision making include the following (Bernhardt 1998):

1. The school's culture does not focus on data collection, analysis, or use.
2. Few people at the school are trained to gather and analyze data.
3. The staff do not think analyzing data is part of their jobs.
4. Helping schools gather, analyze, communicate, and use data is not a priority of district personnel.
5. Computer systems are outdated or inadequate, and/or appropriate user-friendly software is not available.
6. Teachers are trained to be subject oriented, not data oriented.
7. School personnel have had negative experiences with data or with how data have been used.
8. There is a perception that data are collected for someone else's purposes.
9. From the state level to the local level, data are not used systematically or well.
10. There are few good examples of schools benefiting from data-driven decision making.

**What Can the Association Do to Encourage/Support Data-Driven Decision Making in Schools?**

At a minimum, building school personnel's capacity to use data in decision making involves the following (NSSE 1998; Bernhardt 1998; Keeney 1998):

1. helping schools see the benefit of basing decisions on objective data rather than on hunches, anecdotal evidence, fads, or tradition;
2. sharing examples of schools that have used data-driven decision making to drive improvement and meet requirements;
3. providing information on user-friendly, computer-based tools that can use to manage, analyze, and report data;
4. assisting schools in taking "first steps" (e.g., establishing baseline measures of student performance; using data to meet immediate reporting requirements; developing a school profile based on data that are routinely gathered);
5. encouraging schools to ask "getting started questions" such as:
   - What data are currently collected?
   - How are currently collected data used?
   - How should the data be used to measure whether or not a school is meeting key goals?
   - What are the roadblocks to collecting, analyzing, communicating, and using data at the school?
6. helping schools create a "data portfolios"--a comprehensive set of data and information that enables them to determine the school's strengths, limitations, and emerging areas of interest;
7. counseling schools to look beyond test data and examine other information related to student performance: school characteristics, programs, activities, and services; student and community characteristics and needs; and students', teachers', administrators', parents' and the community's perspectives on education;
8. encouraging schools to focus on questions that are essential to the staff and the school's clients when analyzing and communicating data;
9. helping schools "mine" data they routinely collect and collect additional data only when it is needed to answer a key question or measure whether a key goal is being achieved;
10. sharing information with schools on how they can take "next steps" to use data as a tool for organizational learning (e.g., for problem solving and problem finding; gaining new knowledge and developing new insights to guide improvement);
11. providing training on the purposeful (versus random) collection of useful and meaningful data that are aligned with the school's mission and goals;
12. helping schools conduct mindful analyses of data so that "raw data" are transformed into information that can be used to improve professional practices, services to students, and student achievement;
13. supporting schools so they complete the cycle; that is, they make decisions or take action to improve student learning based on their data collection and analysis;
14. helping schools begin the cycle anew; that is, analyze the effects of decisions and actions to guide continuous improvement;
15. encouraging schools to consider feedback from the users of the data in refining the process of collecting, analyzing, and communicating the data.
**Resources/Web**

*From the National Education Association (NEA)*

**KEYS to Excellence (KEYS)**
http://www.nea.org/schools/keys.html
A framework that provides benchmark data on conditions that are essential to school quality. The framework guides schools' self-assessment and continuous improvement. The KEYS frameworks, and accompanying diagnostic school survey, enables schools. Who access KEYS through NEA state and local affiliates, to base decisions on objective data.

**NEA's Coalition for District Excellence (CDE)**
http://www.nea.org/nci/index.html
A network of NEA state and local affiliates that work with and support school districts that are dedicated to generating high performance in all their schools and classrooms. Progress is measured by: 1) continuously improved student learning results, 2) continuously improved stakeholder satisfaction, and 3) improved working relationships within school districts and between districts and teacher associations.

*From the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE)*

**School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance**
http://www.nsse.org/si1.html
A planning guide that provides a data-driven and research-based framework for improving student learning and strengthening the instructional and organizational effectiveness of schools. The guide includes a planning resources, rubrics, templates and sample reports to help schools develop and tailor improvement plans to meet the specific learning needs of their students.

**School Improvement Planning Software Tools**
http://www.nsse.org/sip.html
A comprehensive set of integrated tools to help schools and districts develop, implement, and monitor their school improvement plans. The software is organized around the six-part school improvement planning framework developed by the NSSE and outlined in School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance.

**Resources/Print**


Reprinted from National Education Association, NEA Teaching and Learning Team, July 2000. Visit the NEA website at www.nea.org for other articles on Data Driven Decision-Making and the resources suggested at the conclusion of this article.
Creating a Culture for Data Driven Decision Making

A professional learning community is one in which data can be used effectively to inform the teaching and learning process. The dimensions of a professional learning community (defined by Melanie Morrissey in the text, Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration) comprise one definition of a positive school culture. According to Shirley Hord, a professional learning community exists when each of five dimensions is in place and working together. Those dimensions are:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Shared values and vision
- Collective learning and application of learning
- Supportive conditions
- Shared personal practice.

The strength of the relationships between administrators and staff and among staff members is the underpinning of all five dimensions. Progress is made when administrators and teachers find ways to go beyond the traditional structures of schools by learning together, applying research-based teaching practices, and working toward the common goal of increasing student learning.

It is important to determine school and staff readiness, to take note of the barriers that limit current or previous improvement efforts as well as the strength or “boosters” that can nurture the development of a professional learning community. Both administrators and teachers alike need to reexamine their roles as learners learning together to support students. Within a professional learning community centered around meeting the needs of students, the ongoing process of inquiry and improvement nurtures the growth and change necessary for improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning staff. Data collection can be an important means for a team to “learn together.” Process used by professional learning communities include:

- Creating a culture where there is safety in using data
- Conducting action research
- Forming study groups to study data
- Examining student work
- Organizing and analyzing data

Creating a forum for dialogue about student learning may be a way to enhance the dimensions of a professional learning community in your school.

# Data Collection—Possible Sources of Data

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATIONAL AREA</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SOURCES OF DATA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Academic Achievement</strong></td>
<td>School Report Card, IGAP/ISAT results, local assessments, Illinois Learning Standards, Illinois Student Information System (ISIS), student grades, student grade point averages, commercial standardized test data, student classroom performance (e.g., portfolios), teacher observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Non-Academic Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Attendance, truancy, expulsions, suspensions, dropouts, discipline referrals, school violence, enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School/Program Resources and Support</strong></td>
<td>District strategic plan, teacher reports, literature/studies on effective schools, professional development records, principal’s goals as determined by the principal’s and superintendent’s contracts, professional development needs assessment, previous school budgets and plans, self-evaluations (e.g., NCREL Profile Tool, Lincoln Foundation criteria, Blue Ribbon Schools Program criteria, North Central Evaluation), district technology plan and learning report card, curriculum, instructional support services, facilities reports and plans</td>
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<td>♦ Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
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<td><strong>Family and Community</strong></td>
<td>District strategic plan, teacher reports, literature/studies on effective schools, professional development records, principal’s goals as determined by the principal’s and superintendent’s contracts, professional development needs assessment, previous school budgets and plans, self-evaluations (e.g., NCREL Profile Tool, Lincoln Foundation criteria, Blue Ribbon Schools Program criteria, North Central Evaluation), district technology plan and learning report card, curriculum, instructional support services, facilities reports and plans</td>
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60
What do we know about teacher learning that might improve professional development? Five premises are especially pertinent to improving teacher’s learning opportunities.

- **Teacher’s prior beliefs and experiences affect what they learn.** Teachers’ personal and professional histories have been found to play an important role in what they learn from professional development experiences.

- **Learning to teach to the new standards takes time and is not easy.** Teachers’ practices do not change merely because they decide to teach differently. There is as much to unlearn as there is to learn and what there is to learn is complex. Teachers must face their deeply-held notions about learning and knowledge, must reconsider their assumptions about students, and must develop new ways of teaching and assessing their work.

- **Content knowledge is key to learning how to teach subject matter so that students understand it.** All the techniques in the world will not, by themselves, help a teacher choose the most productive examples for a classroom presentation. Similarly, Listening skills alone are insufficient to help a teacher interpret children’s work. In both cases, a teacher’s effectiveness depends on what he or she understands about the material at hand, about the discipline, and about children’s learning.

- **Knowledge of children, their ideas, and their ways of thinking is crucial to teaching for understanding.** Understanding students is essential for making connections. Learning how to hear what students say requires more than acuity: it requires seeing the world through another’s eyes and perspective, not an easy task especially when the teacher’s and student’s worlds are different, sometimes disparate. Knowing how to link students’ learning and the curricular goals for which schools are responsible depends on insight into learners – what interests them, what they bring to learning a particular idea or skill, and how they learn.

- **Opportunities for analysis and reflection are central to learning to teach.** Teachers need time, space, and encouragement to reflect in ways that facilitate their learning by talking with others, by keeping a journal, or by engaging in action research.

Professional Development for Teachers in Culturally Diverse Schools. ERIC Digest.

The changing face of the U.S. student population is well documented. Over the last 10 years, the population of English language learners has increased by 1 million students. English language learners now comprise 5.5% of the total school-age population, with a disproportionate number of these students in California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois (Fleishman & Hopstock, 1993). And if demographic trends persist, the numbers of English language learners will continue to grow. These students are not a homogenous group. They enter U.S. schools at different ages and at different times during the school year. They come to school representing a diversity of languages, cultures, experiences with school, and economic and social power.

At the same time, school reform efforts demand that schools become places of excellence for all students. Educators committed to these reforms face enormous challenges, not the least of which is the education of teachers. Although the responsibility for improved schooling must be shared among administrators, teachers, parents, and students, school reform efforts place a tremendous weight on teachers (Clair, Adger, Short, & Millen, 1998), especially those who have received no preparation for teaching English language learners (Clair, 1995, 1998; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Clearly, professional development plays a role in equipping schools to meet the challenges facing them.

This digest focuses on professional development for teachers in culturally diverse schools. It summarizes what is known about effective professional development and the conditions that allow it to succeed. It provides three examples of professional development that are grounded in the academic achievement of English language learners as a fundamental ingredient to overall school success.

PROMISING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There is a growing consensus in the literature regarding the elements of effective professional development for teachers. It incorporates principles of adult learning: Adult learners need to be self-directed; they display readiness to learn when they have a perceived need; and they desire immediate application of new skills and knowledge (Knowles, 1980). Effective professional development is embedded in the reality of schools and teachers’ work. It is designed with teacher input. It fosters critical reflection and meaningful collaboration. It is internally coherent and rigorous, and it is sustained over the long term (Little, 1993; Renyi, 1996; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Promising professional development is aligned with effective teaching and learning: "Principles that describe effective teaching for students in classrooms should not differ for adults in general and teachers in particular" (Rueda, 1998).

These elements underlie various professional development structures such as university-school partnerships (Darling-Hammond, 1997), teacher networks and collaboratives (Little, 1993; Renyi, 1996) and teacher study groups (Clair, 1995; 1998), to name a few. What these structures have in common is opportunities for teachers to take ownership of the professional development process to be knowledge creators as opposed to mere receivers of information.

(Continued)
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The above elements and structures are crucial for designing professional development, but they are insufficient for educating teachers in culturally diverse schools. Any professional development in culturally diverse schools must address specific knowledge and attitudes that are relevant to teaching English language learners. Teachers need to understand basic constructs of bilingualism and second language development, the nature of language proficiency, the role of the first language and culture in learning, and the demands that mainstream education places on culturally diverse students (Clair, 1993). Teachers need to continually reassess what schooling means in the context of a pluralist society; the relationships between teachers and learners; and attitudes and beliefs about language, culture, and race (Clair, Adger, Short, & Millen, 1998; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Moreover, teachers need a "vision of students as capable individuals for whom limited English proficiency does not signify deficiency and for whom limited academic skills do not represent an incurable situation" (Walqui, 1999). Finally, promising professional development in culturally diverse schools assumes that combining content, ESL, and bilingual teachers would make complementary knowledge and perspectives available to everyone (Adger & Clair, 1999; Clair, 1998; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

CONDITIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development to improve schooling for all students requires a minimal set of conditions (Adger & Peyton, 1999; Clair, Adger, Short, & Millen, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Nadelstern, Price, & Listhaus, 1999).

♦ District and school policies must support coherent and integrated professional development. Many districts and schools have competing initiatives that drain their resources and dilute their efforts. It is not uncommon to see lists of district- and school-sponsored workshops tacked on school bulletin boards on topics as diverse as cooperative learning techniques, meeting the needs of at-risk students, and internet training for teachers. Unless there is a coherent and integrated professional development plan that grows out of a district and school vision for student success to which teachers and administrators are committed, workshops will lack meaning.

♦ District and school leadership must make student, teacher, and organizational learning a priority. District leaders and building principals must have current substantive knowledge about effective teaching and learning for students and adults. They must have knowledge about trends in effective professional development and the education of English language learners. In order to make teaching and learning a priority, principals must safeguard teacher and student time, engage the entire staff in taking responsibility for the education of English language learners, model collegial relationships with teachers and students, and participate actively in the learning community of the school.

(Continued)
There must be sufficient time and resources for promising professional development to take hold. Promising professional development is about improvement and change. The more complex the change process, the more unpredictable it is (Fullan, 1999). Introducing professional development calls for teachers to work together in new ways in order to improve schooling for all students. Learning new ways of working together and tackling the complexities of teaching in culturally diverse schools takes sustained time, focus, and resources.

### EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

Although different in form and focus, the following examples highlight ongoing professional development that promotes school-based inquiry and continual improvement. Each example brings together ESL, bilingual, and content teachers or interdisciplinary teams of teachers to support the academic success of all students.

"The International High School at LaGuardia Community College" (Nadelstern, Price, & Listhaus, 1999)

This alternative high school serves students who are recent U.S. arrivals and who have varying levels of English language proficiency. Professional development is built into the governance and instructional organization of the school. The overarching goal is to guarantee that all staff have the tools to support students in meeting rigorous graduation requirements. All staff must continually improve their ability to manage a student-centered classroom, accommodate heterogeneous arrangements, and integrate first and second language into the content areas. Interdisciplinary teacher teams work collaboratively to develop and revise curriculum, plan schedules, discuss student learning, and share successful practices. Staff members hold each other accountable through peer coaching, peer evaluation, and teacher portfolio presentations.

"California Tomorrow and Alisal High School" (Jaramillo, 1998)

Alisal High School is an urban school with 1,800 students, 94% of whom are Latino. More than half of the student population is classified as limited English proficient. Constituting themselves as the Working Group on Race, Language, and Culture, a group of teachers set out to explore language and language development issues that helped to explain their students’ performance. Professional development involved looking at research and school-based professional development models, examining student achievement data and school progress, creating a plan to improve students’ literacy, peer coaching, and reporting findings to the greater school faculty.

"The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory and The Lowell (MA) Public Schools" (Clair & Adger, in press)

The Lowell school district is highly culturally diverse with approximately 60% of the student population speaking languages other than English. Partnering with researchers from the Regional Laboratory at Brown University, ESL, bilingual, and content teachers explored the problem of standards implementation in classrooms (Continued)
that include English language learners by drawing upon knowledge and experience of
standards and education reform, second language development, and effective
educational practices for English language learners. An essential aspect of the
professional development involves four sustainable strategies: standards analysis,
student work, peer visitation, and discussion of professional literature. These
strategies hold promise for ongoing reform at the school level, because with practice
they can be used independently. The goal is for teachers to adapt these strategies for
use in school-based study groups.

**CONCLUSION**

Demographic trends suggest that the profile of U.S. public school students will
continue to be diverse. Education reform requires that educators provide quality
schooling for all of their students. Clearly, professional development must equip
teachers for this challenge. There is growing evidence that professional development
approaches that are guided by teacher input and that view teacher learning as
continual and transformative makes schools a better place for students and staff.

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**Author:** Clair, Nancy - Adger, Carolyn Temple

**Source:** ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics Washington DC.
Engaging Families to Improve Achievement: Advice from the Research

Taken together, decades of research strongly suggest that families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life. When schools support families to be involved at home and at school, students of all backgrounds achieve at higher levels. In short, when parents are involved in education, children do better in school, and schools get better.

According to a new review of recent research published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2002), students with involved parents are more likely to:

♦ Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
♦ Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits
♦ Attend school regularly
♦ Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school
♦ Graduate and go on to post-secondary education

Key Findings

Families of all backgrounds are involved at home. Several studies show that families of all income and education levels, and from all ethnic and cultural groups, are engaged in supporting their children’s learning at home. White, middle-class families, however, tend to be more involved at school. Supporting more involvement at school from all families may be an important strategy for addressing achievement gaps.

Programs and special efforts to engage families make a difference. For example, teacher outreach to parents results in strong, consistent gains in student performance in both reading and math. Effective outreach practices include meeting face to face, sending learning materials home, and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home are linked to higher reading and math scores. Schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs. Practices like these should be included in a school’s parent involvement policy and school-parent compact.

Higher-performing schools effectively involve families and community. Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share three key practices:

♦ Focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members.
♦ Recognize, respect and address families’ needs, as well as class and cultural differences.
♦ Embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.

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Effective Practices

Directly link the school’s parent involvement efforts to student learning.

- Include information on standards and exhibits of student work at open houses and back-to-school nights.
- Engage parents and students in math and reading games at Family Nights. Explain where students’ skills need to be stronger. Use scoring guides while making craft projects, to let parents know how to use them.
- Use the school newsletter to discuss test results and what students are doing to meet higher standards.
- Use the annual school and district Report Cards as a chance to have focused conversations with parents and community members about each school’s strengths and weaknesses — and how teachers, parents and community members can work together to make improvements.

Match practices to grade levels. Features from programs that are linked to gains in children’s learning take children’s age and developmental needs into account.

1. Families with young children:
   - Home visits from trained parent educators with cultural backgrounds similar to their own, or with knowledge of their culture.
   - Lending libraries that offer games and learning materials to build skills at home.
   - Discussion groups with other families about children’s learning.
   - Classes on how to stimulate their children’s mental, physical and emotional development.

2. Families of elementary and middle school students:
   - Interactive homework that involves parents with their children’s learning.
   - Workshops on topics that parents suggest, like building their children’s vocabulary, positive discipline strategies, and supporting children through crises.
   - Regular calls from teachers, not just when there are problems, about how their children are doing in class.
   - Learning packets in reading, science and math, with training in how to use them.
   - Meetings with teachers to talk about their children’s progress and what they’re learning.

3. Families of high school students:
   - Regular meetings with teachers and counselors to plan their children’s academic program.
   - Information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and post-secondary education options and how to plan for them.
   - Information about where to find academic support, such as help with homework, tutoring, afterschool programs, and special classes. Include subject areas covered and associated costs.

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♦ Explanations of courses students should take to be prepared for college or other post-secondary education.
♦ Information about financing post-secondary education and applying for financial aid.

Facilitate transitions. Children of all ages do better when they make a solid adjustment to school. By adjustment, we mean that students feel comfortable and respected, feel they belong at school, and feel supported by teachers. Here are some practices that research suggests help students adjust as they enter a new school:

♦ Offer families and students tours of the school and opportunities to visit and observe in the classrooms.
♦ Meet with students and families at the feeder schools or programs to introduce staff, explain the school’s programs, and answer questions.
♦ Make home visits the summer before school starts to begin building a relationship with each family.
♦ Work with families to prepare children for the next level and help them plan for postsecondary education and a career.

Develop families’ sense of confidence and power. Researchers call this “efficacy.” Studies find that when parents have a sense of confidence and power, their children do better in school. For example, we want parents to feel they can help their children do well in school, and be happy and safe. We also want parents to feel that they can overcome negative influences on their children (such as violence and drugs), and have a positive impact on the school and neighborhood. Many practices that help empower families, such as these listed here, are required by the No Child Left Behind law.

♦ Engage families in planning how they would like to be involved at school.
♦ Consult a representative sample of parents and families, not just the PTO leadership, about school policies and proposed actions.
♦ Involve families in action research. Ask them to develop and conduct surveys of other families. Invite them to observe in the classroom, review books and materials, and visit other schools to gather ideas.
♦ Make it easy for parents to meet and discuss concerns with the principal, talk to teachers and guidance counselors, and examine their children’s school records.
♦ Invite families to attend staff development sessions and faculty meetings.
♦ Facilitate families’ connections with youth groups and programs for young people.
♦ Work with families to help them monitor their children’s activities. Create a school directory, so they can contact other parents.
♦ Offer workshops on communicating with their children, about topics they suggest, such as talking with children about drugs, dating, problems with friends or family, and values.

Support families’ efforts to improve the school and community. When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, their children tend to do better in school. Their parents are also better equipped to help them. When
schools work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the school and advocates for public education.

- Give families information about how the education system (and local government) works. Make field trips to district offices and school board meetings.
- Keep voter registration forms and information about local government agencies in the school office or family center. Develop a student-run voter registration drive.
- Invite candidates for school board and other local offices to speak to families at the school.
- Open the school to community meetings.
- Go with families to press local officials about needed funding, programs or law enforcement.
- Work with families to develop action research skills to document problems in the neighborhood.
- Invite local banks and businesses to talk with families about their services, loan programs, and employment opportunities.

**Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members.** All school staff, from the principal to the custodian, need opportunities to learn more about working more effectively with parents and community members. Design educational opportunities for all school staff that:

- Help staff recognize the advantages of school, family and community connections.
- Explore how trusting and respectful relationships with families and community members are achieved.
- Enhance school staff’s ability to work with diverse families.
- Enable staff to make connections with community resources.
- Explore the benefits of sharing power with families and community members.

**Work with local after-school programs and supplemental service providers to link their content to what students are learning in class.**

- Form a partnership between after-school program staff and teachers. Encourage them to share ideas and knowledge about the students, observe each other at work, and attend staff development sessions to update and build their teaching skills.
- Inform supplemental service providers about the school’s curriculum and learning programs (especially math and reading).
- Share textbooks and other learning materials with program staff.
- Give program staff information about students’ progress and academic needs.

According to a new review of recent research published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education

Furthermore, studies show that families of all income and education levels, and from all ethnic and cultural groups, are engaged in supporting their children’s learning at home. White, middle-class families, however, tend to be more involved at school. Supporting more involvement at school from all families may be an important strategy for addressing the achievement gap.

Programs and special efforts to engage families make a difference For example, teacher outreach to parents results in strong, consistent gains in student performance in both reading and math. Effective outreach practices include meeting face to face, sending learning materials home, and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home are linked to higher reading and math scores. Schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs.

Higher performing schools effectively involve families and community Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share three key practices:

- Focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members
- Recognize, respect and address families’ needs, as well as class and cultural differences
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared

Parent and community organizing efforts are improving schools This type of engagement, which is based outside schools and led by parents and community members, is growing nationwide. Aimed mainly at low-performing schools, strategies of community organizing are openly focused on building low-income families’ power and political skills. Unlike traditional parent involvement, parent and community organizing intends to hold schools accountable for results.

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Recent studies have found that community organizing contributed to these changes in schools:

- upgraded school facilities
- improved school leadership and staffing
- higher quality learning programs for students
- new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum
- new funding for after-school programs and family supports

**In Short**  When parents talk to their children about school, expect them to do well, help them plan for college, and make sure that out-of-school activities are constructive, their children do better in school. When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, and support parent involvement at home and school, students make greater gains. When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns, honor their contributions, and share power, they succeed in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement. And when families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, school districts make positive changes in policy, practice, and resources.

**How Can Schools, Families and Community Groups Put these Findings into Action?**

- Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education or cultural background, are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well.
- Design programs that will support families to guide their children’s learning, from preschool through high school.
- Develop the capacity of school staff and families to work together.
- Link efforts to engage families, whether based at school or in the community, to student learning.
- Build families’ social and political connections.
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power. Focus on developing trusting and respectful relationships. Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise.
- Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.
- Include families in all strategies to reduce the achievement gap between white, middle-class students and low-income students and students of color.

From *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*, by Anne T. Henderson and Nancy Berla (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education, 1994) and *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002).

**Ordering Information:**  /www.sedl.org/connections/resources/