

Promising Practices Series: Special Education Inclusion

Center for School Success



Center for School Success Promising Practices Series

College Preparation

Curriculum Integration

Dual Language

Professional Development

Special Education Inclusion

Other Resources in the Promising Practices Series

Block Scheduling

Guide to School Visits

Student Advisories

Each publication in this series includes a brief overview of research relating to the practice featured, descriptions of one or more schools using the practice, and resources for finding more information. For access to a library of materials that schools have created in relation to the practices, visit our Center for School Success Web site at www.newvisions.org/schoolsuccess.

To get the most information about these practices, we encourage you to visit the schools. You will find school contact information listed within each publication. We have also developed a Guide to School Visits (see Appendix) to assist you in arranging and planning a school visit.

For more information about New Visions for Public Schools and our programs, please visit our main Web site at www.newvisions.org.

SPECIAL EDUCATION INCLUSION

Center for School Success Promising Practices Series

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CRITERIA FOR PROMISING PRACTICES	2
EXEMPLARY SPECIAL EDUCATION INCLUSION AT THE CHILDREN’S SCHOOL	3
APPENDIX	
REFERENCES	10
RESOURCES	10
GUIDE TO SCHOOL VISITS	13

Center for School Success Promising Practices Series: Special Education Inclusion
By Dr. Josephine Imbimbo and Naomi Knopf

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to all the people who contributed to the development of this series: Maud Abeel, Tracey Marie Allen, Velma Bowen, Vivian Brady, Lili Brown, Drew Dunphy, Maggie Eng, Molly Hershey, Jossie O’Neill, Eileen Plaza, Sarah Ruegger, Leanne Shimabukuro, Michael Webb, and Alisha Yadali.

New Visions would like to especially thank the principals and teachers who contributed their valuable time to help us capture the stories of their schools. Their dedication and hard work are the reasons we have many exemplary schools from which others can learn.

These publications have been produced with the generous support of The Atlantic Philanthropies and The Clark Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Promising Practices Series! This series will introduce you to some innovative New York City public schools and the instructional practices they use to help students learn and achieve. The series is intended for anyone who is or wants to be involved in improving schools, from administrators and teachers to parents and community partners. Our goal is to support people doing the challenging work of school development, and our message to you is: “You are not alone!”

There are many New York City public school teachers and administrators who have worked hard to develop instructional practices that help their students succeed. We want to provide opportunities for you to learn from them. Our goal is not to offer “models” to replicate. Rather, we want to provide information on the experiences of a wide range of schools in order to stimulate thinking and innovation. Some of the schools featured in this series have existed for less than five years, while others first opened more than 15 years ago. Regardless of their age, they are all works-in-progress, a distinguishing characteristic of effective learning communities. They have all had to face the many demands of an urban educational system—from changes in policy and funding to staff shortages—and these are reflected in the how they have modified their practices throughout the years.

This publication focuses on special education inclusion. Inclusion is a term that expresses commitment to providing specially designed instruction and support for students with special needs in the context of a general education classroom. All students in the school are full members of the community, participating equitably in the opportunities available in a general education environment. Support services are brought to the child, rather than moving the child to the support services, and the only requirement is that the child benefit from being in a general education class rather than having to keep up with other students. Inclusion is a revolutionary concept that addresses concerns of self worth and strives to meet the needs of all students.

New Visions for Public Schools is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City’s public schools. Working with the public and private sectors, New Visions develops programs and policies to energize teaching and learning and raise the level of student achievement. New Visions started the Center for School Success (CSS) in 1999 to document and disseminate innovative educational practices demonstrated by New Visions’ schools that hold promise for increasing student achievement throughout New York City. The success of these schools should serve as examples that New York City public schools, serving the full range of students in New York City, can work.

CRITERIA FOR PROMISING PRACTICES

A school's instructional model should aspire to meet the following criteria in order to be considered a "Promising Practice."

1. The school has a clearly articulated and agreed upon mission focusing on inclusion. This mission is stated in the school's official plan. The school's programmatic focus, implementation, recruitment of students, hiring of staff, budgeting and curricular offerings are all consistent with this mission, and supported by the school administration, staff, and parents.
2. The program has clearly defined, well-articulated, and rigorous standards and assessments for all students.
3. The instructional program consists of general education classes that are designed to meet the needs of a diverse student population of special and general education students with a range of abilities. The program provides all students with intensive, reasonably individualized instruction, and incorporates a range of curricula offerings and a variety of instructional strategies.
4. A broad range of services is available to address the varying needs of special education students, and there is access to transitional services to support them as they move to new settings within the school.
5. Special education and general education teachers work closely and collaboratively to plan and implement instruction, review student progress, and assess student outcomes. There are several types of teaming models which may accomplish this; the most integrated is a collaborative co-teaching approach where a special education and general education teacher share teaching responsibilities within the same classroom.
6. The program should include careful and frequent monitoring of student progress through a regular system of assessment that defines success by the learning of each and every student in the building. Students with disabilities are included in state- and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations as necessary. At the same time, assessments which reflect individualized performance expectations are also used to measure student progress.
7. The program is staffed with high quality instructional personnel. In addition, there is a comprehensive, ongoing program of professional development available to all staff.
8. Teachers must be able to teach the content and skills of the general education curriculum to all students. This requires knowing how to assess students' strengths and needs, how to modify instruction to meet children's diverse needs and interests, how to effectively use a variety of instructional strategies, and how to work as a team with other teachers, support staff, and parents.
9. Teachers, support staff, and parents are fully involved in the decision-making, planning and evaluation processes for individual students and the building-wide programs.
10. The structure of the school is flexible enough to adapt to a variety of student needs and teaching approaches. There are reduced class sizes and/or increased numbers of teachers within the classroom to meet children's individual needs.
11. The program assures parents full access to a system of procedural and substantive rights and ensures that they are informed participants in educational decision-making for their children (concerning both the services provided and the setting in which they are provided).

.EXEMPLARY SPECIAL EDUCATION INCLUSION AT . .

The Children's School

Lorraine Boyhan, Principal
Arthur Mattia, Assistant Principal
P.S. 372 K
512 Carroll Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215
718.624.5271

Year Started: Fall 1992
Enrollment: 345 students
Grades: Pre-Kindergarten-5th

OVERVIEW

Founded by teachers, parents, and administrators, The Children's School is a collaboration between Districts 15 and 75 to serve children with a broad range of abilities and disabilities in general education classes on a full-time basis. It is the mission of the school to provide all students with a rigorous standards-based curriculum that will challenge them to perform their best. The Children's School employs a child-centered approach (teachers learn about the strengths, needs, and interests of each child and incorporate them into the curriculum and their instructional practice). Respect for all is the underlying principle of The Children's School. The inclusion classroom provides the context for children to develop a sensitivity for one another as well as an acceptance of and appreciation for individual differences.

STRUCTURE OF INCLUSION MODEL

The Children's School uses a team-teaching model. In every class there is a special education teacher and a general education teacher who are jointly responsible for the class. Each of the classrooms also has at least one teaching assistant. There are approximately 19 general education and six special education children within a classroom. In each of the classes there is at minimum two students who would have otherwise been placed in self-contained Specialized Instructional Environment (SIE) classes. Each class is structured so that it is as heterogeneous and balanced as possible in terms of children's academic strengths, behavior, and gender. Within one classroom it is not unlikely to find students who would have otherwise been in gifted classes with students who would have otherwise been in special education classes.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS

The Children's School is a District 15 school of choice, as opposed to a neighborhood zoned school. The school tries to recruit a range of children who reflect the racial, ethnic, and economic make-up of the district. Any family within the school district can apply to the general education program by submitting an application. Children are admitted by lottery. Special education students are referred to The Children's School by the District's Committee on Special Education and are selected by lottery. Interested families attend open houses and some visit classrooms. It is a popular school in the district. Last year the school received a total of 167 general education applications for the 19 pre-K seats they had available and 143 applicants for the 10 kindergarten seats.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The foundation of the school rests upon providing good instructional practice across the board. This includes the following:

- Ongoing assessment of individual children's strengths, needs, and interests is integrated into the curriculum. Teachers rely upon diagnostic assessments, such as Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (ECLAS), formal educational assessments that are the basis of the Instructional Education Plans (IEPs) for children with special needs, teacher evaluations, and parent interviews.
- The curriculum is structured to support individualized learning. The Children's School has a Balanced Literacy Program and uses the Reader's/Writer's Workshop Model. This approach allows teachers to work with individual children. Tasks are broken down to help children to move to each level. Through individual conferencing and mini-lessons, instruction can be targeted to children with specific needs. Having a selection of "just right" books enables children to access information at their own level.
- Instructional modifications and adaptations are ongoing and based upon trial, reflection and experiences shared among staff. In order for teachers to discover which modalities help their children learn best they try new approaches, assess whether they were effective for which children, and communicate the information to other teachers.
- There are classroom and school resources to support individualized learning. To research a social studies topic children use all different levels of books ("just right" books) and other resources—maps, photographs, computers, etc. To demonstrate what they have learned from this information, children can write a report, draw pictures, do an oral presentation, produce a video or a tape-recording—whatever medium allows the child to best convey the message.
- Modification of the curriculum or technology-based adaptations are integrated as needed. Computers and other assistive technology are used (e.g., keyboards facilitate writing when children may not be able to physically write well).
- There is a great deal of structure and consistency across the grades and throughout the school, which helps to facilitate children's learning by reinforcing academic and behavioral expectations.
- Children's social/emotional development is integrated into the curriculum through instruction in conflict resolution focusing on sensitivity and respect. There are behavioral contracts developed for those children who continue to demonstrate social or behavioral issues.

SERVICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Children with special needs (including both special education students and general education students who receive mandated related services) have access to all services that are part of their IEPs. These services may include occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, hearing services, speech therapy, crisis management, para-professionals, mobility services, or vision services. There is also the School-Based Support Team, which provides additional support to students where necessary.

ALIGNMENT WITH STANDARDS

The core curriculum—language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science—have been aligned with the City and/or State standards. All children receive the same standards-based curriculum. In the past, the staff underwent a process of learning about the City and State Standards and aligned their curriculum accordingly. Now, this process has become part of the school's regular planning process. To measure children's grade-level progress in reaching the standards, the school uses the district performance standards and promotional policies. The Everyday Mathematics curriculum also includes pacing calendars for grades one to five. Each program has grade expectations laid out for teachers.

Special education students are held to the same standards as general education students. The curriculum is structured to allow children to meet the standards in different ways. For example, the fourth-graders research and report on Native Americans as part of the social studies curriculum. One student may go into more detail and focus his research on the historical facts. Another child may focus more on the cultural aspects of the topic, which does not require the same level of detail (e.g., comparing of Native American children's games with current American children's games). Both children fulfilled the requirements for the assignment, but did so according to his or her ability. It is important that all children feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

All students are required to take the mandated City and State assessments, unless otherwise indicated on their IEP. In addition, the school has also used the Primary Language Record (PLR) to examine children's literacy development. Since it requires considerable data collection, only elements of the PLR are currently used (e.g., the Parent Interview). There is an interest in the use of portfolio assessment, but the school has yet to proceed very far in its implementation.

TEACHER HIRING

Teacher turnover at The Children's School is low, so little recruitment is necessary. Through School Based Options, The Children's School has a hiring committee that selects teachers. The team has a set of interview questions and requests a writing sample which is graded on a scale of 0 to 2. Teachers must have at least three years of teaching experience. More teachers are applying with dual certification in special education and general education than in the past. Presently, at least 85% of the teaching staff have dual certification. Many teachers may not have started with both certifications, but over their course of teaching in The Children's School they acquire an M.A. in the second area.

Student teachers come from Bank Street, Teachers College, Long Island University and Brooklyn College. Once they graduate, the teachers may gain additional experience as substitutes in another school (in order to gain the necessary three years of teaching experience) and then come back to The Children's School to apply for a position.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing professional development is a central component of The Children's School. The school serves as a Professional Development Laboratory (PDL) for teachers and hosts visits for teachers who are interested in inclusion. Teachers attend the Summer Reading and Writing Institute at Teacher's College as well as sessions throughout the school year. In addition, once a week, a staff developer from Teachers College works with individual teachers in their classrooms, modeling inclusion lessons. Additional staff development is provided through the school district or through special programs (e.g., Learning by Design Architectural Program, Metropolitan Opera, Brooklyn Museum).

Teachers meet weekly by grade or grades. These meetings are facilitated by a staff developer or the school administrators, or are teacher-led. Teachers choose an area of instruction which they would like to improve (e.g., how to help students develop "voice" in their writing), and this serves as the focus for the meetings in conjunction with the professional development support they are receiving. Activities for meetings may include a discussion of a professional book that is related to their focus of study (e.g., Lucy Calkin's *The Art of Teaching Writing*).

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

The School Leadership Team (SLT), composed of parents, teachers, and administrators, develops The Children's School's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). At the beginning of the school year, the principal selects goals from the CEP and reviews them with staff during the first staff development day. At the end of the school year, the staff and the SLT review student outcomes to determine if the goals have been reached. This review includes looking at the results of the ECLAS, State, and City-wide tests, as well as reviewing student work. An internal Performance-Assessment-in-Schools-Systemwide (PASS) review is also conducted in the Spring to look at school culture and climate in addition to instructional issues.

Throughout the school year teachers invest a great deal of time in planning. The principal feels that she has scheduled as much planning time as possible, including common prep periods, common lunch periods, and professional development days. Teachers informally meet with one another over the weekends and during other spare time. A variety of resources are readily available to help teachers to plan effectively. These resources include various publications developed by the Department of Education (e.g., the ECLAS book), which are particularly useful for new teachers, as well as many other resources focused on reading, writing, and mathematics. When there is a specific learning issue teachers will seek "expert" information.

Since the school has a team-teaching approach, there is a seamless planning process for the special education and general education students within the classroom. Teachers also integrate information from staff who provide support and special services to the special needs students. Teachers look at student's education evaluations and discuss them with the School-Based Support Team. Staff providing special services (e.g., Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists) are consulted to help teachers address the children's problems within the classroom. Specialists also share the techniques they use with the children themselves, so that teachers can use them as well. Due to their heavy caseload, special service providers are not able to formally meet with teachers at a regularly scheduled time.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement, which is considered to be critical to the school's success, is high, even though many of the children do not live in the immediate neighborhood and are bussed to The Children's School. The studio program in the arts is run by parents, and parents are also active in technology support (e.g., one parent is designing the school's Web site). The School Leadership Team includes seven parents. There is a minimum of approximately 50 parents attending PTA meetings. The PTA has 13 different sub-committees all with a specific purpose. One sub-committee focused on students with auditory problems and helped to make acoustical changes in classrooms to improve the ability of children with hearing impairments to hear.

The expectations for children's learning is communicated to all parents in a variety of ways. Teachers give presentations to parents at the PTA meetings to demonstrate the instructional activities. There are also support groups for parents of children with special needs.

FUNDING

In addition to its school budget, The Children's School relies upon numerous outside grants to support its program (e.g., Annenberg, technology grants, exemplary practice grants). The team-teaching model is expensive and special resources are necessary. However, the principal feels that it is worth the extra cost because it is effective and successful for all children.

School Statistics: The Children's School

SCHOOL MISSION/VISION*

- To provide the optimum learning environment for general education students and students with special needs to meet their diverse abilities and to maximize their growth and potential.
- To provide a standards-based curriculum to all students that challenges them to perform at their highest level of capability and prepares them to function in a rapidly changing technologically advanced world.
- To provide rigorous professional training for staff so that their knowledge and skills allow them to meet the needs of our students who have a full range of abilities and levels of functioning.
- To provide every student with a literacy based education with an emphasis on integrating the arts and technology into the learning process across the curriculum.
- To support students in developing a positive self-image and well rounded interests and abilities, to be socially and physically competent and embracing of individuality and differences in their peers.
- To realize that success for all students involves a strong partnership between home and school where open communication and involvement is essential.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

- Teacher Characteristics: 32 Teachers
31 Education Para Professionals
- Student Characteristics: 55.7% White
10.7% Black
23.5% Hispanic
10.1% Asian and others
65.3% Eligible for Free Lunch
93.7% Attendance Rate

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

General Education

State English Language Arts and City CTB-Reading Tests Grade 3, 4 and 5

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	78	2.6%	19.2%	51.3%	26.9%	78.2%
2001	93	0.0%	21.5%	43.0%	35.5%	78.5%

State Mathematics and City CTB-Mathematics Tests Grades 3, 4 and 5

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	80	2.5%	23.8%	42.5%	31.3%	73.8%
2001	93	5.4%	24.7%	39.8%	30.1%	69.9%

State ELA Test Grade 4

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	27	3.7%	18.5%	63.0%	14.8%	77.8%
2001	32	0.0%	25.0%	34.4%	40.6%	75.0%

State Mathematics Test Grade 4

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	28	0.0%	17.9%	57.1%	25.0%	82.1%
2001	32	0.0%	6.3%	34.4%	59.4%	93.8%

Special Education

State English Language Arts and City CTB-Reading Tests Grade 3, 4 and 5

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	79	41.8%	45.6%	12.7%	0.0%	12.7%
2001	83	45.8%	33.7%	18.1%	2.4%	20.5%

State Mathematics and City CTB-Mathematics Tests Grades 3, 4 and 5

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	88	48.9%	31.8%	15.9%	3.4%	19.3%
2001	92	57.6%	31.5%	8.7%	2.2%	10.9%

State ELA Test Grade 4

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	18	44.4%	44.4%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%
2001	22	31.8%	40.9%	27.3%	0.0%	27.3%

State Mathematics Test Grade 4

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	16	25.0%	56.3%	18.8%	0.0%	18.8%
2001	20	30.0%	45.0%	20.0%	5.0%	25.0%

* Obtained from the 2000-2001 CEP.

** Obtained from the 2000-2001 School Report.

REFERENCES

- Gartner, A., & Lipsky, D. (1997). *Inclusion and school reform: Transforming America's Classrooms*. Baltimore, MD: P. H. Brookes Publishing.
- Moore, C. (1998). *Educating Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms: A summary of the research*. Eugene, OR: Western Regional Resource Center, University of Oregon.
- NCREL Evaluation Studies. (1997). *Evaluation of the New York City Early Childhood Initiative: Learning Together: Profiles of Student's Journey Through Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Year III Report*. Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- NYC Department of Education. (2000). *Special Education Services As Part of A Unified Service Delivery System (The Continuum of Services for Students with Disabilities)*. New York, NY: Author.
- Stout, K. (1996). *Special Education Inclusion*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Education Association Council.

RESOURCES

Internet Resources

The Center for Applied Special Technology
<http://www.cast.org>

Consortium on Inclusive Schooling
<http://www.asri.edu/CFSP/brochure/abtcons.htm>

Council for Exceptional Children
<http://www.cec.sped.org/>

Institute on Community Integration
<http://ici.umn.edu/welcome/default.html>

Journal of Special Education Technology
<http://jset.unlv.edu/>

Kids Free Ware
<http://www.kidsfreeware.com>

Learning Disabilities Online
<http://www.ldonline.org/>

National Institute for Urban School Improvement:

<http://www.edc.org/urban/index.htm>

Resources for People with Learning Disabilities:

<http://www.ldresources.com/>

SEN Teacher Resources:

<http://www.senteacher.org/>

Print Resources

Fisher, D., McGregor, G., & Roach, V. (1996). *A Framework for Evaluating State and Local Policies for Inclusion*. Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices, CISP Publications and Resources, Issue Brief.

Lewis, R.B. (2000). *Musing on Technology and Learning Disabilities on the Occasion of the New Millennium*. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 15(2).

Lombardi, T.P. ed. (1999). *Inclusion Policy and Practice*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

McGregor, G., & Vogelsberg, R.T. (1999). *Inclusive Schooling Practices: Pedagogical and Research Foundations. A Synthesis of the Literature that Informs Best Practices about Inclusive Schooling*. Baltimore, MD: P.H. Brookes Publishing.

Rainforth, B. (1996). *Related Services Supporting Inclusion: Congruence of Best Practices in Special Education and School Reform*. Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices, CISP Publication and Resources, Issue Brief.

Sands, D.J., & Wehmeyer, M.L. (1996). *Self-Determination Across the Life Span: Independence and Choice for People with Disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: P.H. Brookes Publishing.

Sax, C., Pumpian, I., & Fisher, D. (1997). *Assistive Technology and Inclusion*. Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices, CISP Publications and Resources, Issue Brief 2 (1)

Guide to School Visits

New Visions has developed this brief guide to help you as you prepare to go on school visits. We hope that it proves helpful to you.

1. SELECTING A SCHOOL TO VISIT:

You should select a school that matches your identified needs.

New Visions' Center for School Success has information on many successful and promising public schools in New York City that welcome visitors. You can find the Center for School Success at: www.newvisions.org, or contact Jody Imbimbo, the Center's director, at (212) 645-5110 for information and assistance in facilitating a visit to these schools.

In addition, you should talk to colleagues and professional experts who may know of good schools to visit.

2. PREPARING FOR A VISIT:

Be clear about the purpose of the visit. This may be your only opportunity to see the school, so plan carefully. You will get the most from your visit if you are focused on what you would like to observe and learn during your visit.

Select a team for the visit.

Think about who should go on the school visit and why they should be included. Depending on the team's goals, the team might include an assistant principal, teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and students. Assign a team leader who will be the contact person for the team and will make the arrangements for the actual school visit. Another team member should be designated the recorder for the visit. Remember to check with the hosting principal to determine how many team members may participate in the visit.

Prepare an outline of key topics and questions.

We suggest that you and your team prepare an outline of key topics and questions to help you during your visit. If possible, share your questions with the school principal before your visit. For help in thinking about key topics, please refer to Section A, Issues to Explore During a School Visit.

Review the school's Annual School Report before your visit.

The New York City Department of Education publishes Annual School Reports for each public school in the city. These reports provide important background information on the school, including student and teacher demographics and student performance data. Annual School Reports may be found on the NYC Department of Education's website: www.nycenet.edu/daa/reportcards

Determine whether you need a half-day or full-day visit.

Please see the descriptions below. Please discuss the purpose of your visit with the school principal beforehand to ensure that the agenda for your visit best reflects your team's needs and interests.

HALF-DAY VISIT

A half-day visit usually lasts between two and three hours. A half-day visitation typically begins with a meeting with the principal during which time s/he will provide a brief overview of the school and inform you about the school's mission, curriculum, and instructional program(s). You will then be given a tour of the school, which should include classrooms, administrative offices, lunch room, auditorium, gym, library/learning center, computer labs, and guidance and college advisement offices. During the tour, some schools encourage visitors to talk with students; please check with the principal to determine the school's policy. After the tour, you should have the opportunity to meet with teachers, parents, administrators and staff to ask questions and debrief.

NOTE: You may want to structure your half-day visit around the activities that you want to observe and learn about. For instance, if you want to see a professional development workshop, you may want to visit in the afternoon so that you see the after-school professional development program.

FULL-DAY VISIT

A full-day visit is generally more intensive than a half-day visit. A full-day visit should include a meeting with the principal and a brief tour. This visit, however, should allow for more in-depth observations of a particular aspect of the school. Examples of in-depth observations include opportunities to shadow a teacher or administrator, and to conduct classroom observations for a full period. During the tour, some schools encourage visitors to talk with students; please check with the principal to determine the school's policy. At the end of the school day, you should have the opportunity to meet with teachers, parents, administrators and staff to ask questions and debrief.

3. CONDUCTING A VISIT:

While you are walking around a school, try to observe tangible evidence of the school's climate and culture. Look for evidence of a welcoming environment, engaged students, and active learning. Please see Section B, What to Look For on a School Visit.

SCHOOL VISIT GUIDELINES:

Be on time. If you are going to be late, or if you will not be able to attend the school visit, call the school principal or contact person as soon as possible.

Be prepared. All team members should have copies of the agenda, the team's outline and/or questions, as well as pens and paper.

Designate a team recorder. The team should select a team recorder who will be responsible for reporting back to the entire team about the site visit.

Be respectful. You should be aware of the time and effort that your hosts put into the visit.

Be professional. Maintain professional conversation in all areas, including classrooms, hallways, and restrooms.

Do not interrupt a lesson. You are visiting a school and observing actual lessons. Do not interrupt during a class unless the teacher or principal signals that you may ask questions. If you talk to students, keep the discussion brief to avoid interrupting the planned lesson.

Debrief as a team. At the end of the visit, your team should meet to talk about what you have seen and what it means to each of you in relation to your school's plan. Debriefing can take place in a room at the school or at an off-site location.

4. FOLLOWING THE VISIT:

Report back to the team. The designated team recorder should report back on the site visit to the entire planning team. The entire team should discuss the visit in relation to the outline and questions that the team prepared prior to the visit. You should consider whether the team members observed practices that might be incorporated into your school's plan. It is also valuable to identify problems and challenges that surfaced during the visit that might be avoided or addressed by further planning.

SECTION A

ISSUES TO EXPLORE DURING A SCHOOL VISIT

RIGOROUS INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM:

Does the school provide all students with a standards-based academic curriculum (i.e., a curriculum which includes requirements for English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and laboratory sciences)?

What types of instructional approaches do teachers use to engage students?

What opportunities are available for students to think critically and become actively involved in problem-solving activities?

What strategies does the school use to encourage students to meet and exceed the standards?

PERSONALIZED RELATIONSHIPS:

How does the school structure time to support personalization (e.g., block scheduling, extended day, after school)?

How does the school structure its instructional program(s) to support personalization (e.g. houses, institutes, student advisory program)?

How does the school identify students' academic and non-academic needs? How are those needs addressed? Are additional supports and resources provided?

How does the school help students who do not meet the standards?

CLEAR FOCUS AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS:

What is the school's mission?

Does the school's mission include high expectations for all students?

Has the school organized all of its functions (including instructional program, student activities, student recruitment and admissions, staff hiring, and budget) around its mission?

How does the school evaluate its progress towards achieving the mission?

Does the school ensure that all students receive the preparation and personalized support needed to set and pursue post-high school goals?

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP:

How does the principal ensure that the school's mission shapes all of the educational programs in the school?

How does the principal exercise leadership in the areas of curriculum and student instruction?

What roles do students, parents, and staff have in school decision-making and governance?

What opportunities do teachers and other school staff have to hold leadership positions in the school?

SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION:

How does the school structure time for professional development (e.g., block scheduling, common preparatory periods, voluntary agreement to meet outside of school hours, and early release of students)?

How does the school use professional development time to focus on teaching and learning (e.g., reviewing student work, developing rubrics, reflecting, and sharing practice)?

How does the school ensure that teachers and staff receive adequate follow-up and support following professional development activities?

What structures have the school put in place to provide teachers with opportunities for peer support (e.g., teachers regularly spending time in each other's classrooms, peer coaching, mentoring, team teaching, and study groups)?

Does the school utilize any outside resources to support the professional development program (e.g., university partnerships, institutes, consultants)? If so, what types of professional development do these outside resources provide?

How do professional developers and the principal provide feedback to teachers?

MEANINGFUL CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

How does the school assess student needs and progress over time?

In addition to standardized tests, what measures are used to assess student progress (e.g., portfolios, performance-based tasks, and teacher tests)?

How are student achievement data reviewed and analyzed?

How do teachers and staff use student achievement data to plan curriculum and instruction?

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY AND PARENT/CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT:

What roles do parents/caregivers and community members have in the school?

What partnerships and alliances have been created with community-based and other organizations?

What types of resources and activities are offered by the school to parents/caregivers and community members (e.g., GED programs, technology training, workshops)?

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:

How do students participate in school decision-making and governance?

How are students' interests and needs reflected and integrated into the instructional program?

Is there a variety of extracurricular activities that address students' interests and needs, including after school and extended day programs (e.g., clubs, athletics, arts, academic enrichment)?

EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY:

Do curricula, lessons, and other activities use technologies that accommodate diverse learning styles, academic skills, and technology skills?

What types of opportunities do members of the school community have to expand their learning and use of technology?

Does professional development promote the effective use of technology, and is professional development delivered using technology?

Do all students have equal access to school-based technology?

SECTION B

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON A SCHOOL VISIT

1. GENERAL SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS

School Climate

What is the climate of the school (this might include the way that students and visitors are greeted upon entry, the cleanliness/orderliness in the hallways and classrooms, and displays in the hallways)?

How do students interact with adults in the building?

How are desks arranged in classrooms (e.g., in rows, or in clusters)?

Expectations

Are there clear expectations and standards posted in classroom? Have teachers posted rubrics in their classrooms?

Are there displays of student work in the classrooms? Are they examples of good student work? How do the displays show students' individuality?

Is there visual evidence of a college preparatory culture, including a college/guidance office, college displays, and bulletin boards?

Are students comfortable asking questions of teachers?

Facilities

How are students using libraries, resource centers, and computer centers during the day and after school?

Did you notice anything in particular about "common rooms" such as the school library, gym, auditorium, and lunch room?

Are computers kept in self-contained computer labs, or are they kept in classrooms?

In schools that share a building, how do schools divide space between them? How do they share "common rooms" and hallways?

2. TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS (IF IT IS APPROPRIATE TO DO SO)

Knowledge and Awareness

What are you learning?

Why do you need to learn this?

What did you need to know in order to learn this?

How will this help you learn in the future?

Clear Expectations

How do you know when your work is good enough?

Do you know how to make your work better?

When you get a grade on your work, do you know why you received that grade and what it means?

What happens when you make a mistake or answer a question incorrectly?

Student Engagement

Do you get to work with classmates on tasks? If so, when and how?

Are you asked to compare concepts, strategies and skills with other students?

Do you learn from other students?

How much time do you spend at your desk?

Do you have opportunities to learn about subjects and topics that interest you?

Supports

When you are having trouble understanding something, how do you get help?

Do your teachers ask how your work is going, and if you need help?

Does your teacher offer you encouragement?

Do you have the things that you need in order to do your work?

Are you asked to compare your work with another students to learn different ways of doing the assignment?

Is there more than one right answer?



96 Morton Street
New York, NY 10014

Phone: 212-645-5110 • Fax: 212-645-7409
www.newvisions.org

Center for School Success Promising Practices Series



96 Morton Street

New York, NY 10014

Phone: 212-645-5110 Fax: 212-645-7409

www.newvisions.org