

Citywide Instructional Expectations Case Study Guiding Questions

Overview

The 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations help schools reflect upon and refine their practice in order to prepare all students to graduate college and career ready. One strategy for reflecting on practice is to examine how other schools have approached their work. These case studies offer insights on how teachers, school leaders and field support staff make decisions and engage stakeholders to develop school-wide practices to strengthen student achievement.

Case study schools have strong practices in building coherence among their culture, structures, and instructional core. The school communities voluntarily and generously shared their work in order to develop case studies that:

- Reflect authentic practice in a New York City school
- Include resources or artifacts from the school
- Connect to one or more of the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations components: Knowledge of Students, Instructional Focus, Collaborative Professional Learning

Guiding Questions: Instructional Focus

From the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations: An instructional focus is a school-determined priority that integrates multiple initiatives into a cohesive vision for strengthening student achievement. It is rooted in the school's needs and has a direct and evident impact on classroom practice. An instructional focus is developed after examining multiple sources of information, including the strengths and needs of students. It brings cohesion to a school's goal-setting process, comprehensive education plan, teacher and administrator development goals, and decisions about resource allocation. It is emphasized throughout the work of the school, including in school-wide professional development plans, the observation and feedback cycle, and communication with families.

1. What information in this case study suggests how the instructional focus is embedded in:
 - Structures
 - Professional Learning
 - Resources
 - School Culture
 - Classroom Practices
2. How has this school's instructional focus impacted students?
3. What decisions did the school leader make to support implementation of an instructional focus?
4. What questions does this study raise? What data or evidence would you like to add?
5. What practices does your school have in place that support the implementation of the instructional focus?
6. What systems and structures do you need to refine to better implement the instructional focus?

Potential Next Steps: Team activities and tools on the [Common Core Library](#)

- [School Reflection Protocol](#)
- [Instructional Focus Development Tool](#)



The Laboratory School of Finance & Technology



8th Grade Student

“A lot of our work is put up in the classrooms so we can expand and think about how we can learn from others work. It also helps us think about how we are doing individually, and what we need to keep doing, and what we need to do differently.”

Building a Responsive Learning Environment

MISSION Our mission is to provide an engaging rigorous academic program within a supportive and nurturing environment. We seek to expose our students to information technology and global commerce through a simulated economy and intensive technology training to prepare them to be successful in a rapidly changing world. We believe that learning becomes more meaningful when it is purposeful. Through active engagement, project-based learning and encouragement we will cultivate self-discipline and self-esteem amongst the members of our community and at the same time foster respect and consideration for others.



AT A GLANCE

Founded
2003

Grades Served
6-9

Borough, District
Bronx, 07

Neighborhood
South Bronx

Total Students
451

Admissions Policy
Application

Co-located
Yes

Demographics
Asian .4%
Black 23.3%
Hispanic 75.8%
White .4%

Free or Reduced Price Lunch
97.6%

English Language Learners
7.8%

Special Education
19.7%

Attendance
93.9%

● Instructional Focus

All staff and students at the Laboratory School of Finance & Technology engage in a *coordinated whole-school effort to create a responsive learning environment in order to continuously grow students, teachers and the larger school community*. They do this through analyzing evidence at all levels of the school.

The school's learning environment is informed by analysis of data around students' social-emotional growth and academic performance.

- Students take ownership over their goals and benchmarks in the classroom and in facilitated counseling sessions.
- Teachers take ownership of learnings around their practice from student performance data and observation feedback to inform instructional interventions and professional development.
- School leaders take ownership of the larger school learning environment by reviewing student and teacher data throughout the year to drive support for the larger school community.



Teacher

“The instructional focus should be something that impacts student learning, is ongoing and repeatable and is something all members of the school community can work on.”

● Decision-Making Process

The instructional focus for the 2013-14 school year built on the last few years of using school data to help inform teaching and learning at all levels of the school. The instructional focus was a collaborative process with the administration, the school's cabinet, and teacher teams. As a part of the decision-making process the school considered:

1. What is the intent of the 2013-14 Citywide Instructional Expectations? Do we have to choose one of the suggested instructional foci?

- The school's cabinet, comprised of the principal, assistant principals, coaches, parent coordinator, dean, grade team leaders, and demonstration teachers began this conversation about the 2013-14 Citywide Instructional Expectations to build an understanding of the city's priorities for the year. Initially the school's cabinet grappled with whether or not the CIE was asking schools to choose one of the suggested instructional foci listed, or if schools had the authority to choose their own.
- The final decision by the school's cabinet was that the intention of the instructional focus as outlined in the CIE is that it would move students towards meeting higher standards in the school.

2. Is our instructional focus from last year still relevant?

- The school's cabinet discussed whether the current focus was still relevant: using purposeful data analysis to create an evidence-driven, responsive learning environment where everyone has the opportunity to grow. By looking at student and teacher growth in the previous year, the school's cabinet decided the focus should stay the same for the 2013-14 school year.

3. How can the school do better?

- Dr. Gonzalez shared the instructional focus with the teams at the school, and through discussions allowed all staff members to voice their thoughts.
- Teams then provided feedback around how the focus for 2013-14 school year could be improved from last year.

4. What changes need to be made to continue our work around the instructional focus?

- The feedback from the staff was incorporated into revisions of the systems and structures to support the instructional focus for the 2013-14 school year.

● Implementation and Monitoring

At the Laboratory School of Finance & Technology, team members believe that the instructional focus needs to be embedded throughout the school. In practice, this takes the form of using the focus to drive data analysis to inform the implementation of systems and structures and their professional development plan to support the work. The sources of information analyzed are:

Student Data Sources	Frequency of Analysis
State Accountability Measures	Once a year
Student Work – Individual Classrooms	Multiple Times Per Unit
Benchmark Assessments – Content Areas	Three times a year
Student Conferences	Two – three times a year (varies by content area)

Teacher Data Sources	Frequency of Analysis
Staff Development Surveys	Three times a year
Framework for Teaching-aligned Teacher Data	Six times a year
Teacher Goal Setting Check-Ins	Three times a year

Principal/School Data Sources	Frequency of Analysis
Principal 360 Performance Review	Once a year
Quality Review Data	Formal review every few years Reflections on most recent QR every year
Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP)	Once a year

School Systems and Structures

Student Ownership of their Development

In order to support student use of data to promote their ownership of learning, in many classrooms individual students lead goal setting and monitoring. Within a unit, students are asked to track the results of their formative assessments, set goals, and reflect on their final performance in the unit. Students also engage in peer feedback. The way the student and peer discussion and reflection looks in classrooms varies across the school. For example, in ELA often the grading rubrics are used to guide the feedback session with a peer. In a math class, the peer feedback is a collaboration on reworking incorrect solutions to math problems. See sample for details of a student setting goals and self-reflecting in an ELA class.



[Student Goal Setting Sample](#)



[Student Goal Setting Template](#)

Teaching Laboratory

In order to further support teachers in their practice, four demonstration teachers (ELA, math, social studies and special education) have been identified. These teachers were chosen for their consistently strong practice in the classroom. Demonstration teachers create lessons that respond to the identified needs of colleagues. For example, if teacher observation reports show that more could be done around higher level questioning in the classroom, the demonstration teacher will create an exemplary lesson to model this practice. Teachers then have the option of attending on their prep period. During the observation, teachers use an intervisitation observation tool to record their evidence around the focus of the lesson. After the completion of the lesson, the demonstration teacher and teacher who observed discuss the lesson and the alignment to the Framework for Teaching.



[Intervisitation Observation Tool](#)



9th Grade Student

“We know what we have to do for our grade, we don’t have to depend on the teacher, we are held accountable for our work.”

Grade Level, Subject, and School Cabinet Meetings

In these meetings, teams of teachers analyze student performance through collaborative inquiry and case studies. The analysis is then used by coaches, teams and individual teachers to create student interventions and professional development to meet the current needs of students and the staff.

Grade level meetings take place once per week and teachers analyze student performance data through inquiry and case studies. The case study is a deeper dive into the performance of one student per grade, who has been identified by teachers and administration as struggling in one or more components of their academic performance and/or social-emotional growth. Teachers walk through a protocol (see example below) to discuss students' strengths and challenges, identify the prevailing issue, and determine intervention and follow-up strategies.

Case Study Process

- The identification of the student for the case study comes from the conversation at the grade level meetings.
- Teachers bring names of students they would like to discuss and the group determines if the student is struggling across multiple classes.
- Once the student is identified, the protocol is followed.

Example: Recently the 7th grade team identified a student who had been increasingly disengaged in the classroom. Teachers were concerned about the reason for the behavior. As a result they identified this student for their case study for the month. Over the course of the month, the parents were notified of the concern and interventions that have been planned. At the following month's grade level meeting, the student progress was discussed.

In these meetings teams of teachers also work on standardized grade level rubrics for subjects. For example, a grade 8 persuasive essay writing rubric was created, which has allowed for all grade 8 literacy teachers to bring coherence to their analysis of students' persuasive writing across the whole grade. See example below.



[Grade Team Case Study Protocol](#)



[Persuasive Writing Rubric](#)

Subject meetings take place once per week. After analysis of student work with the inquiry group, protocol modifications are made to year-long curriculum maps, unit level plans and daily lesson plans to accommodate students' strengths and areas for growth. In addition to looking at student data, teachers also reflect on their units to help further diagnose the causes of student performance. The protocols used in these reflections are below.



[Inquiry Group Protocol](#)



[Unit Plan Template](#)



[Lesson Review Tool](#)

School Cabinet meetings take place once per week. In these meetings the principal, assistant principals, coaches, parent coordinator, dean, grade team leaders, and demonstration teachers discuss any pressing issues that have surfaced over the previous week, often including student behavior and staff concerns. Once a month they analyze student removal data (when a student has been removed from a classroom) and student attendance data. These pieces of data are analyzed by student, teacher, and time of day. The goal is to identify any patterns in the data. For example, recently it was found in the attendance data that there were many absences in 9th grade, but most of them were coming from two boys in the periods before lunch and right before the end of the day. Looking at this data allows the cabinet to target their efforts towards addressing the specific needs of the school and further explore the root cause of absences from class to determine if students, or possibly teachers, are less focused at certain times. As a result, interventions are discussed for the appropriate individuals.

Professional Development Plan

The school-wide professional development plan is a responsive year-long plan that is developed as a result of purposeful data analysis. Evidence is analyzed to inform the priority areas for professional development that will help meet the needs of students and teachers. From this, the professional development team plans for upcoming sessions. The professional development team is led by the staff and comprised of 8 members:

- 6 content area teachers
- Math coach
- ELA coach

The team ensures the sessions are aligned to the Framework for Teaching and their Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) goals. The examination of the information sources helped the professional development (PD) team determine specific strategies to incorporate into the PD plan that would have the most impact for classrooms. Some of the strategies include strategies for ELLs, Universal Design for Learning, Depth of Knowledge, Understanding by Design, questioning techniques and essential questions. See sample professional development plan for the details.



[Professional Development Plan Sample](#)



[Professional Development Plan Template](#)



[Danielson Aligned Professional Development Survey 2013-14](#)

Additional Resources

In order to support data analysis teachers have been provided with a tracking system, Jupiter Grades, and receive assistance with data analysis with this program. The program helps make the data transparent to both students and their families.



8th Grade
Student

“A lot of our work is put up in the classrooms so we can expand on other people’s work. We see what has worked for other students and think about how we can learn from others work. It also helps us think about how we are doing individually and what we need to keep doing and what we need to do differently.”

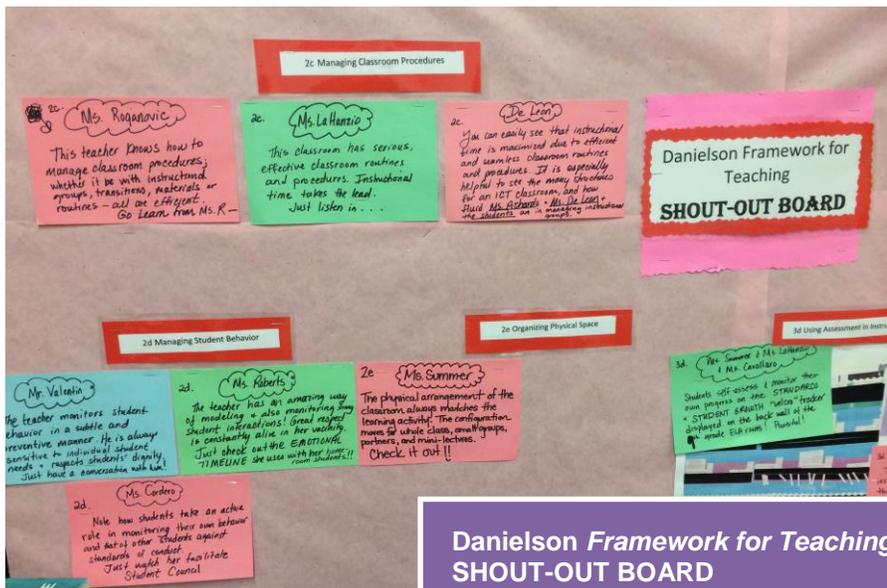
● Impact

Student Growth

Students have benefited from the personalized learning experiences created by teachers and administrators both inside and outside of the classroom. The purposeful analysis of instructional data ensures that students who require small group or individual instruction, either for remediation or acceleration, can receive the instruction they need. Students have taken more ownership in their learning environment that is evidenced by increased engagement and motivation in the classroom, as well as increased responsibility for their performance. The number of students who have scored at the proficient level on the math and ELA state exams has been steadily increasing for the last five years.

Teacher Practice

As a result of the time teachers and teacher teams have put into evidence analysis, the Laboratory School for Finance & Technology is able to create personalized learning environments for students. This allows students to feel they are getting what they need and appreciated by their teachers. The Framework for Teaching has also allowed teachers to see concrete data on their practice and personalize their own development that help them grow in their practice. Teachers also identify other teachers who have shown elements of effective practice in the Framework for Teaching.



The SHOUT-OUT BOARD provides an opportunity to:

- Share strong practice with the larger community
- Identify and celebrate teachers with strong practice
- Foster a culture of peer intervisitation

● Successes and Challenges

Successes

In addition to the previously mentioned successes, the instructional focus has provided a common language and direction for individual teachers, teacher teams and the school community at large. The culture of the school has embraced the instructional focus and has seen the impact on growth in both student performance and teacher practice as evidence that drives the creation of a responsive learning environment.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges has been consistency across classrooms, grades and departments. Teachers have shown improvements in collecting student information, but are still struggling to create time for analysis and use of data. Additionally, some teachers are learning how to use the Jupiter Grades system more effectively.

As a first step to address this, school leaders have leveraged teacher observations to encourage collection and analysis of student information. The school's commitment to focus on component 1b: Knowledge of Students, 3c: Engaging Students in Learning and 4b: Maintaining Accurate Records in the Framework for Teaching has been closely tied to teacher analysis of data. Concentrating on these components further strengthens the coherence amongst the instructional focus and teacher practice.

● Thinking Forward

While progress is being made, change is incremental and there is still room for growth. Practices in creating a responsive learning environment driven by evidence, which continuously grows students, teachers and the larger school community, will likely be refined and revised again for the 2014-15 school year.