

2011 NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS
U.S. Department of Education



Beacon School of Excellence PS 172
Brooklyn, New York
New York City District 15

Beyond Textbooks: Customizing Curricula in Real Time

Erika Gundersen, Assistant Principal: We really understand that no kid comes in here with the same skills and the same abilities.

Angela Ventura, 3rd Grade Math Coach and Interventionist: We plan our own curriculum here at PS 172. We use guides, like we use Math in the City, we use TERC, we use Addison-Wesley, we use a little of each. In May and June, as a staff, we sit and we plan what went well this year, what did not, and how we could change it.

Erika Gundersen: Really, one of our greatest successes is that there isn't a program, there isn't a curriculum that we have taken and made our own. Everything is done by us, revised by us, constantly. We also build into our curriculum mid-unit assessments and end of units assessments that are more formalized. So our teachers have become really quite good at assessing kids.

Jack Spatola, Principal: Yeah, and every time we finish a unit, we basically make notations about successes and failures of those units, and then how it influences the next, the upcoming unit of study.

Rachel Dougherty, 3rd Grade Special Education Teacher: I think there's also a mentality in this school that it's okay to change things. Everyone is very flexible, like we don't--we're not so stuck on a curriculum that we can't mold it and change it.

BEACON TEACHERS KEEP A NOTEBOOK FOR EVERY STUDENT.

Erika Gundersen: We've sort of developed a system for reading and writing and sharing with colleagues about the kids so that we're all working on same thing at same time and not taking our neediest kids and doing three or four things at once.

Antoinette Coppa, 3rd Grade Reading Interventionist: With the notebook, I feel like it also keeps the kids accountable, so they know, “Well I’ve done this with my classroom teachers, but maybe I don’t have to do this with Mrs. Clipper so maybe I can do something else.” But I can look back in the notebook and say “hey listen, I noticed you went through this with your classroom teacher last week and I want to see how that’s going.”

3rd Grade Student: Me and the teachers use notebooks by like we write information in it. And the teachers they actually like take notes during the lessons. They take notes about like what we’re doing so they can keep track, they help us, they talk to us.

Rachel Dougherty: We really work very very hard to make sure we are all on the same page.

INTEGRATED CO-TEACHING FACILITATES DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION.

Maria Di Rosa, 3rd Grade Teacher: It’s Integrated Co-Teaching. So you have two teachers, one who is certified in general education and another teacher who has a base certification in general ed and special ed. And we are working as a team.

We actually look at our classroom as, we share the kids. We all—they’re all of our kids. It really benefits the children because you do see different ways of things being presented and you do hear different techniques and strategies. By keeping the kids all together—they’re in the classroom, they’re always there, they’re not missing anything. So—it all connects together.

Angela Ventura: So we are big here on differentiation. So even it might be the same topic, but the word problems, something would be enriched for the kids to be a little more challenging, whereas some of the others might need just basic.

Jacqueline Di Pierro, 3rd Grade Teacher: Ms. Ventura’s group did a lot more hands-on stuff. And that’s simply because there are actually two kids in her group that have auditory processing issues. So it’s also about knowing your students and knowing where they would work better. I knew those two kids would get a topic like combinations not by listening to me say “I’m in the supermarket,” but by actually seeing articles of clothing and piecing it together themselves.

3rd Grade Student: She started the math lesson with a story about her nephew and then she kind of like said “Okay, we are going to make combination of how I can dress my nephew”. And so it was pretty hard ‘cause we had to like think of we had to like do six shorts with a different colored tee shirt, and six long jeans, and also overalls, with different kinds of tee shirts too.

Antoinette Coppa: Our primary goal is just make sure that these kids get everything they need. Kids, developmentally, are at different stages at different times during the year and you have some kids aren’t ready to go there and who need a little bit more time, and so by having this flexible grouping system, and you know, our libraries, makes it a little bit easier for our kids. You have a kid who’s really ready to move on to something more challenging, when you’re in a workbook or in a basal, you can’t do that because we are all doing the same thing. The beauty of our situation is that we can give that to kids.

Because we can do that, we're not frustrating them. And we're not forcing them to be at a certain point that they may or not be ready to do.

Erika Gundersen: By the end of the year we'll have transitioned them to being—stellar. So you have to move and change as the child is changing.