# Best Practices Case Study

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Just for the Kids-
New York

## Batavia High School
### Batavia City School District, Batavia

**School Context**

Batavia City School District, located in Genesee County between the larger cities of Buffalo and Rochester, serves approximately 2500 students divided among three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The city, described by a staff member as having "city characteristics with a small town feel," has lost much of its industrial base. The district faces the challenges of declining enrollment and the economic decline of some of the population it serves. Despite these challenges, the Batavia City School District provides exceptional facilities and technology in support of student learning.

Batavia High School, originally built in 1962, has gone through several renovations. Its latest renovation and addition in 2004 produced a bright, clean, modern building with an inviting atmosphere. The extremely well equipped Wellness Center, the Career Center, a state of the art computer lab, and a green house are among the many extras the high school offers its approximately 800 students. The principal reports, "the community has been very supportive of the schools in general as reflected in the budget votes. We have wonderful facilities."

**Student Demographics 2005-2006:** *Batavia High School, Batavia City School District*[i]

|  | Batavia High School | Batavia City SD | New York State |
|---|---|---|---|
| % Eligible for Free Lunch | 22% | 30% | 37% |
| % Eligible for Reduced Lunch | 8% | 9% | 8% |
| % Limited English Proficient | 0% | 0% | N/A |
| Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution<br>  % African-American<br>  % Hispanic/Latino<br>  % White<br>  % Other | <br>9%<br>2%<br>87%<br>2% | <br>13%<br>3%<br>82%<br>1% | <br>20%<br>20%<br>53%<br>7% |
| % Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level English Assessments | 83% | 80% | 69% |
| % Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level Mathematics | 85% | 82% | 71% |
| % Students Graduating | 80% | 77% | 67% |
| Total Enrollment | 819 | 2,463 | 2,772,669 |

Besides the core academic courses, students can choose from a wide array of electives including many offerings in art, music, computer technology, and unique online courses such as forensic science and sociology.  It is obvious that the faculty and administration focus on helping students

explore their interests with challenging programs that will prepare them for life-long learning and success in the 21$^{st}$ century.


## Best Practices Highlights

Batavia High School is characterized by

- Extensive professional development to support instruction;
- State-of-the-art technology that supports and enhances instruction; and
- Data analysis that informs district decisions and instruction.

These characteristics are evident across five broad themes that frame the best practices study of which this case is one part[ii]. The sections that follow discuss specific practices at Batavia High School within each theme.


## A Closer Look

### Curriculum and Academic Goals

Batavia City School District goals start with the Comprehensive District Educational Plan (CDEP).  Administrators, parents, community members and teachers collaboratively look at data to determine goals for the district. Then the Leadership Team composed of administrators and department chairs decides on goals for each department and how they will be accomplished. The goals then go to the teachers who decide on overarching goals for their department and how these goals will be met. As part of the annual performance review, teachers set individual goals that are specific and measurable based on student achievement.

"Our goal setting," says an administrator, "is as a group. It is data driven and everyone is part of a team." At the end of the year the analysis of how goals were achieved and managed becomes another collaborative process.

According to another district administrator, curriculum goals and projects "begin by looking at New York State Standards, and we underline the big ideas and the pressing knowledge we want kids to take away.*"* The district is now examining the "power standards"—those concepts that are most important for success in life after school or are the foundation for the next grade level. The teachers interviewed express agreement that their courses and curriculum maps are aligned with the standards.

*We've built our course around the state standards.*

*New York State clearly spells out what needs to be done. [The standards] guided our curriculum maps.*

*[The standards] are part of the game, a piece of the puzzle, along with the planning, activities, lessons and discipline. Standards are a nice little road map.*

*I look at the state standards as a guideline to make sure wherever they [students] go to school they have all covered the same curriculum. It's the backbone, the structure to be sure everything is covered.*

Teachers report they use curriculum maps for all courses. They are in the process of putting the maps on a commercial software program through the school website, where they will be available to everyone. Course formats are already online, and several teachers say they look forward to being able to access any curriculum map at any time.

## Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

### Teacher Recruitment
New teachers are recruited in traditional ways through advertising and job fairs; but the consensus among those interviewed is that the district has such a positive reputation that strong and well qualified candidates find the district. An interview committee composed of parents, teachers, department chairs, and administrators participate in the first round of interviews. Students are also involved in the second round, when candidates teach a demonstration lesson. Hiring teachers appears to be a very thorough and collaborative effort.

### New Teachers
A three-day orientation and a mentoring program help new teachers adjust to the district and profession. During the summer orientation, new teachers learn about such things as the many electronic resources available, attendance policies, and the teachers' association. Mentors are compensated and trained in the summer. In the first year the mentor and mentee meet on a regular basis and observe each other. The relationship may be extended for a second year on either a formal or informal basis, depending on the principal's recommendation. The goal is for new teachers to be gradually weaned from the mentor. Teachers describe the mentor program as "structured and highly successful."

### Teacher Evaluation
Administrators cite using a national model for supervision based on four domains: 1) planning and preparation, 2) classroom environment, 3) instruction, and 4) professional responsibilities. All administrators have been trained in the model, which stresses the learner-centered classroom.

Non-tenured teachers are observed three times a year with pre and post conferences. At the end of the year they are rated with a cumulative review based on the four domains. The rating system consists of: needs improvement, basic, proficient and distinguished. If a teacher is rated 'basic' or 'needs improvement' in any of the domains, a Professional Staff Improvement Plan must be in place for the following year. Only teachers who score 'proficient' or 'distinguished' in all areas get tenure.

Tenured teachers go through a cumulative review every three years. Administrators report that the cumulative review system allows the administration to step in and offer help if they see a problem. One administrator describes the evaluation process as "designed to reward and give a pat on the back to those who perform at high levels. The current system also holds people accountable."

**Professional Development**
Teachers characterize professional development in the 2007-8 school year as "extensive," providing "lots of opportunities," "very rich," with "numerous technology workshops," having "endless opportunities to work on course materials: It's phenomenal," and "teacher driven."

Professional development has been decentralized. The district uses an online program that offers a wide array of courses: "We have three catalogues of course offerings on the website."

In addition, departments can decide what is needed and what to do. For example, the English department is working on differentiated instruction. Through self-reflection, teachers place themselves on a continuum as to where they are in understanding and implementing differentiated instruction. They choose activities and courses accordingly. The social studies department participated in a summer curriculum project analyzing Regents exam questions that resulted in uniform mid-term and final exams.

Teachers are encouraged to attend professional conferences, AP training, curriculum camps, and BOCES workshops. An administrator says, "Pretty much anything anybody asks for, they are allowed to do." A teacher concurs: "When we request time to go to conferences, most of the time it is granted." When special education teachers go to conferences, "bring a general ed friend" is encouraged. It is clear that the district empowers its teachers to pursue meaningful professional development in a wide variety of ways.

## Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

**Learner-Centered Classroom**
The learner-centered classroom is strongly encouraged throughout the Batavia City School District. This philosophy includes "hands on and minds on" projects and lessons, with more student activity and less teacher talk and lecturing. Other instructional practices strongly encouraged include differentiated instruction and using technology to enhance student learning.

High school teachers cite the 85-minute block schedule as a beneficial instructional practice. They say they get to know their students well and do more activity-based teaching; a full lab is easily accommodated, as is viewing a video: "It requires a change of teaching style. We get through the same content, but we have more activities." Some students with very full schedules are allowed to take an "independent study," which may meet for a half block either during the school day or after school.

**Collaboration**
Collaboration is strongly encouraged and supported by administrators. High school schedules and lack of common planning time affects collaboration, but the teachers explain ways they are able to work together. They collaborate at monthly department meetings, creating common assessments and curriculum projects. English and social studies teachers collaborate on an exit project for seniors. Summer curriculum work is collaborative, with teachers creating common assessments, lessons and materials. An administrator states, "Collaboration is supported. If teachers want a half day or full day release to work together, we'll provide the time. Summer work is very popular here to work together on projects."

**Technology to Enhance Learning and Instruction**
Teachers marvel that the superintendent has been so successful in acquiring state-of-the-art technology, given district resources. He credits the acquisition of the technology to "sound

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financial business practice" and says the use of technology in staff development "hooked the teachers on the value of technology." Now, he reports, the teachers integrate technology in the classroom to support instruction. It's especially useful because "It's the way kids learn today." Everyone interviewed agrees that the technology available is a wonderful asset in the school. The Batavia City School District is one of three model districts in the nation recognized by the National School Boards Association as a "Technology Enhanced Learning Centered Community."

According to the district web site,

> *Our students are digital natives; their future success is dependent upon using all digital media and hardware successfully. Therefore, our focus is on employing various technology tools to complement and deliver curriculum and fully supporting teachers, the "digital immigrants."*

Teachers and administrators attest to the commitment to this goal. All students and teachers have computer and internet access. Many teachers report the use of smart boards to enhance instruction. A teacher asserts "anyone who asked for one [a smart board] got one." A science teacher also uses a classroom response system that gives immediate feedback on student understanding and helps the teacher make adjustments daily. Another teacher describes an online course delivery system that allows student access to the course at any time: "It's like an electronic filing cabinet; it brings complete accountability."

The district website describes classroom documents with notes added by the teacher as "providing 'virtual notes for absent students or kids who just need to revisit the day's content to increase understanding.'" The Integrated Technology Specialist and technology aide assist in training teachers in all areas of technology. The online delivery system provides numerous professional development courses as well as online courses for students. The school web site provides additional support for publishing web pages, instructions for solving routine technology problems, software application resources, and forms and manuals.

## Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

**Data**

Another aspect of using 21$^{st}$ century technology is the use of the data it provides. It is clear the district is committed to analyzing data, as evidenced by the position of District Administrator of Student Assessment and Data Analysis. According to this administrator, "We keep a lot of data…but we're not just a repository." Students' state assessments are scanned, and an item analysis is done so teachers can use the data for instructional decisions: "We make good use of time, by the time the results come from the state; we've already had a head start on the data." The break down and analyses of the data are by building, by class, and by student. From this information, teachers are able to pinpoint particular areas that need adjustment.

Another administrator explains how teachers are required to look at student work together. They discuss the strengths and weaknesses displayed and what strategies and best practices will help students. Using data effectively "by making sense of it" to make good instructional decisions appears to be a district priority. As one teacher explains, "It may have been painful at first, but we're realizing that looking at the data is a good thing. [It helps] to understand where our weaknesses are and how to change and correct what we are doing."

**Monitoring**
Teachers cite using both formal and informal means of monitoring student progress. Several departments administer common mid-term assessments, and the English department has developed common benchmarks that parallel the tasks on the English Language Arts Regents Exam. One teacher sees the state assessment as a "great measuring stick." Another compares the state assessments to a check list to see if the students learned the basic content information. It appears the teachers view the state assessments as a reality in evaluating student achievement, but several do not see it as the most important measure. Rather, they find both their own and the AP exams more rigorous and more valuable.

**Analysis of the Dropout Problem**
Faculty and administrators report that improving the graduation rate is a major focus for the district. The principal explains that the district is working with a consultant to research the factors that influence the school's dropout rate. The project includes analyzing the records of students who have not completed high school. An administrator states that data indicate that "we start to lose students in the ninth grade. So we have to look at the kinds of things and programming we can do in ninth grade." From the data, they have also identified the factors that influence their dropout rate. Identifying at-risk students early (even in middle and elementary school) and implementing what they need then is seen as crucial to their success. The entire school district, K-12, must accept ownership, claims one administrator. A guidance counselor explains that after meetings with parents and administrators, individual plans are developed to try to keep students in school.

**Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments**

**Recognition**
In addition to the traditional recognitions of Honor Roll, Merit Roll, end-of-the-year awards for academic achievement, and attendance awards, the school bestows a monthly Giraffe Award for "sticking your neck out." Students are also encouraged to participate in many competitions and their efforts are publicized on the school website, in the school newsletter (*A+ Communicator*) and on the morning announcements. Student artwork is displayed in the local library, and music groups perform for the community. The School Improvement Team, composed of administrators, teachers, parents and students, recognizes the completion of the Senior Exit Project with a breakfast complete with decorations and awards. All facets of student achievement are celebrated at Batavia High School.

**Intervention**
The director of special education describes a very inclusive approach toward special education students. Almost all special education students are in the district, with only a few students with very specialized needs placed in programs outside the district through BOCES. She states that the district prides itself in keeping students in Batavia schools. The administration is also very proud of the acceptance of all students by the entire staff. An administrator cites the importance of differentiated instruction and the co-teaching model for inclusion to work well. She believes both instructional practices are beneficial for all students, not just special education students.

Students who fail state assessments or benchmark assessments are scheduled into the AIS (Academic Intervention Services) program during the school day. Other interventions for struggling students include the Activity Period from 2:45-3:15, when teachers are available and can require student attendance; in addition, any students who need extra help can seek it. The after school Learning Center runs from 3:20-4:20 with a teacher from each core area and a

special education teacher available to assist any student any way they can. Every block during the school day has a 'clinic' in the core content areas. Students may go to the clinic during their advisement period (study hall).

The district is looking into developing a non-traditional summer school program for high school students, modeled on its summer intervention Literacy Academy for at-risk sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders. This intervention does not offer a 'repeat' curriculum; rather, teachers work on the literacy tools students need to succeed in high school. A guidance counselor believes the summer Literacy Academy has helped the current ninth graders who participated, and an administrator voices the hope that a similar model will soon be in place for high school students.

It is evident that the district wants all its students to succeed. According to the teachers interviewed, with changing economies and demographics, the school must combat problems such as attendance problems and more families in turmoil. But administrators and teachers appear to embrace the idea of helping all students reach their potential. As one teacher put it, "We provide every possible means to success."

## In a Nutshell

Batavia City School District is clearly committed to providing 21$^{st}$ century technology and tools to assist teachers so all students reach their full potential. Extensive professional development opportunities to support instruction and data analysis to inform instruction are a powerful combination in the pursuit of student achievement.

**Batavia High School**
**260 State Street**
**Batavia, New York 14020**
**http://www.bataviacsd.org/highschool.cfm**

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[i] Demographic data are of students in the 2002 entering cohort and are from the 2005-06 New York State Report Card (https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/AllDistrict.do).  This case study was conducted in spring, 2008.

[ii] This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Just for the Kids-New York, beginning in 2005.  For the study of high schools, conducted during the 2007-08 school year, research teams investigated ten consistently higher-performing and five average-performing high schools based on student performance on New York State Assessments of English, mathematics, science, and history.  Researchers used site-based interviews of teachers and administrators, as well as analyses of supportive documentation, to determine differences in practices between higher- and average-performing schools in the sample. In half the higher-performing schools, from one-third to three-quarters of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Average-performing schools were matched as closely as possible to the higher performers in terms of student poverty levels, geographic location, size, and student ethnicity. Results were organized along five broad themes that form the framework of the national Just for the Kids study of which the New York study is part.  The national study has been sponsored by the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA).