

White Plains High School *White Plains City School District, White Plains*

School Context

Historically, I can say the district has changed dramatically from the time 10-15 years ago. There's a real shift in the demographics -- largely non-English speaking and an increasing Hispanic population.

– curriculum coordinator

Diversity is nothing new to White Plains High School: Just outside New York City, the school spreads over a 75-acre hilltop campus but has the feel of both the city and the suburbs in its landscape and people. In addition to receiving accolades like the “Blue Ribbon School of Excellence” (from the U.S. Department of Education), White Plains High School has distinguished itself as a leader in adapting to diversity through reforms like its innovative Choice Program.

Back in 1988 when the school was looking at where they were and the whole issue of diversity, the community started the Choice Program. In kindergarten, every parent has an opportunity to view and choose a school. Then youngsters are assigned based on overall demographic distribution to our school. . . . Even back then they were beginning to change.

– administrator

The Choice Program is only one of the myriad ways the district and school embrace diversity and make it work for consistently higher performance than other schools. In this context, as one teacher describes it, “It’s about leveling the playing field, making sure when kids walk through the door, whether they live in a mansion or a project, that they have equity.”

The mission of the White Plains City School District is to educate and inspire all students, while nurturing their dreams, so they learn continually, think critically, pursue their aspirations and contribute to a diverse and dynamic world.

– White Plains School District Mission Statement

Teachers and administrators enact the district mission by providing opportunities for all students to succeed in school and modeling a proactive, problem-solving stance toward inevitable change.

There are universal challenges in every high school. Obviously diversity is something to be celebrated; it also brings along all kinds of complexities. We're not afraid of problems [or] to look at data even if it doesn't put us in the best light. We've always done that historically. What makes the school unique is we don't shy away from those problems.

We don't spend all of our time talking about it.

– teacher

Challenges notwithstanding, in White Plains, embracing diversity and integrating it into the fabric of the school; infusing continuity and consistency in curriculum and instruction; and adhering to a hopeful stance backed by strategic action are some of the ways they make consistent gains in their already higher than average performance.

Student Demographics 2005-2006: *White Plains High School, White Plains City School District¹*

	White Plains HS	White Plains CSD	New York State
% Eligible for Free Lunch	19%	26%	37%
% Eligible for Reduced Lunch	6%	8%	8%
% Limited English Proficient	11%	14%	N/A
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% African-American	22%	20%	20%
% Hispanic/Latino	40%	42%	20%
% White	35%	34%	53%
% Other	3%	3%	7%
% Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level English Assessments	81%	78%	69%
% Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level Mathematics Assessments	88%	85%	71%
% Students Graduating	80%	78%	67%
Total Enrollment	2,164	6,761	2,772,669

Best Practices Highlights

Embracing diversity and integrating it into the fabric of the school. To bridge ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic boundaries, the school and district actively recruit teachers who represent this diversity; offer a large variety of clubs and after-school activities; reach out to community based organizations; and have adopted and continually revise a mission of maintaining high standards for all. Part of the focus on diversity relates to reducing layers of tracks and providing a greater variety of students opportunities to take AP and honors classes.

Infusing continuity and consistency in curriculum and instruction. Continuity of the curriculum is achieved through ongoing curriculum mapping under the direction of coordinators who are responsible for at least 6-12 if not K-12 curriculum decisions. Differentiated instruction (DI) -- the district-wide focus of professional development -- is expected, reinforced, and monitored in classrooms. Instruction is guided by the “three-legged stool” as a model for integrating DI with assessment and the use of clear objectives.

Adhering to a hopeful stance backed by strategic action. Three-year plans to integrate the “three legged stool” and improve assessments (e.g., in reading) are made, implemented, and evaluated for effectiveness. Demographic patterns and sub-group performance targets are closely analyzed and used to make strategic decisions about the allocation of resources. Data are used to

target interventions (e.g., labs, tutoring from community members or students from Honor Society) to those students who would benefit the most from them. Frequent formative assessments are used so that if students aren't performing well it is noticed early, then plans are made to prepare students for the next challenge whether through after-school programs or summer intensive institutes.

A Closer Look

These characteristics of embracing diversity, providing continuity and consistency, and maintaining a hopeful stance are evident across five broad themes that frame the best practices study of which this case is one partⁱⁱ. The sections that follow discuss specific practices at White Plains High School within each theme.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

All students succeed – diversity is the norm. - teacher

Strategic Planning

Constantly planning on how to achieve higher academic goals for all students is part of the culture in White Plains. In the most recent round of strategic planning, for example, a wide net was cast to gain insights regarding core values and the future direction of the district from as many constituencies in the district as possible.

We just finished our strategic plan. It's what's important – our values. What is our mission? It's not what I think is important; it's what the school district -- the teachers, the students, the parents, core team thinks about what our values are. - administrator

This process included gathering survey information and hosting discussion forums about the priorities in the district and ways of strategically implementing and monitoring reforms.

We started off with letting people know about the strategic plan -- what we were doing. [We used] surveys, world cafes. We ended up with hundreds of people in the cafeteria talking about the schools, listening to people about our schools -- what they liked -- didn't like. We kept a log about what those things were. After the survey, we invited people to be on a core planning team, followed up with action teams, and measurement teams. There were about one hundred people on all of those different committees. Looking at – again -- where are we going? [It] started last fall and the board adopted it in January. - administrator

Ultimately the strategic plan – seen as a “blueprint” for the future of the district -- included core values, the mission statement, strategic objectives, strategies to reach those objectives with a “list of results” by which they could be measured, and “strategic delimiters.”

***Strategic Objectives:** By 2012: All students will achieve challenging district standards of literacy across all disciplines. All students will continually choose to explore and enrich*

communities. All students will choose to apply their knowledge and skills to solve problems meaningful to them.

Strategic Delimiters: *We will not: Adopt any new program or service unless it is: consistent with and contributes to our mission; accompanied by an analysis of the resources and the staff development needed for its effectiveness; accompanied by a plan to assess its ongoing effectiveness. - District Strategic Plan Adopted Dec. 3, 2007*

Part of the strategic plan is to close the achievement gap, and efforts to do this include setting high academic goals for all students supported by continuity and consistency in the curriculum.

Continuity and Connections in Curriculum

Like most districts in New York State, White Plains pays close attention to State Standards and assessments when developing and revising curriculum, but they enhance the curriculum to adapt specifically to the diverse needs of their students.

We are a standards based district: All of our curriculum is aligned with the state curriculum. In all of our ESL content area classes we have the same curriculum, with modifications of SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] training for content instruction. There's ongoing professional development. Instruction and assessment are aligned. We've done a lot of work on that. We expect that students in ESL will meet those standards. - teacher

Under the guidance of a curriculum coordinator hired specifically to help with the process, the curriculum has been mapped (in some content areas more than others) and closely aligned with the state Standards.

There wasn't an across the board curriculum, but before it was the popular thing to do we knew we needed to map our curriculum and put it on the walls. In high school, it's pretty well cut with mandates, driven by state Standards. - administrator

Although significantly shaped by state Standards, all content areas attempt to draw on students' previous knowledge (i.e., from middle school) in a systematic way to enhance the continuity of the curriculum.

Starting last year, we're transitioning into more of a curriculum map that'll be a little more concrete. A version of it is [online]. Another teacher and I are just finishing up on a research strand that really builds upon the work of previous years. On our last conference day, middle school and high school teachers worked all together on a strand for middle school.

New York State changed the curriculum K-8. We've been in the midst of a total re-vamping. We started to see it in middle school in terms of algebra skills. This year's 9th graders' algebra skills are much stronger. Incoming 6th grade has seen real improvement in fraction, decimal, percentage sense. So while it's been a tremendous challenge, we are seeing improvements. Curriculum maps . . . [are] comprehensive and coherent. The teachers put them together and craft them. - teachers

White Plains teachers also draw on their knowledge of students' background knowledge and what is relevant to their lives outside of school to enhance the curriculum.

We do a lot of prior knowledge-tapping, brainstorming, memoir writing, making their own connections to movies and TV. . . . I stress connections with them; we don't live in a bubble in their English class.
- teacher

With a powerful combination of curriculum mapping, student performance analysis, and setting high expectations of all students, the school is able to identify and target areas of weakness and expand on their strengths.

[The curriculum coordinator] drives [curriculum mapping] for us along with our coordinators and directors. They work closely with her, looking at our curriculum and assessments, . . . focusing on what we aren't doing right. We remind people that no matter how good we are . . . we're nowhere near where we would like to be in order to have our students achieve at a high level. To get to that higher place, we can't rely on what they're doing. White Plains takes pride in what we're doing and we think we do a very good job. But we can do better. In order to do better, we have to look at what we're doing. . . those things that aren't leading to high student achievement, we have to [leave] and move on. We push that a lot.
- administrator

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Staff Reflects Community

Part of closing the achievement gap -- one of the district's top priorities -- includes providing leadership and guidance for current teachers, but also selecting new teacher candidates who are knowledgeable about the cultures and experiences of the diversity represented in White Plains.

I think the board of education saw several years ago a need to address performance and shifting demographics. They made a conscious effort to look for people who could address those issues in a positive way. . . . [In a teacher candidate] I look for someone who is knowledgeable about the culture, whose standards and expectations are high for all students. There's a major theme that we have in the district in terms of addressing the achievement gap and closing the achievement gaps while maintaining high standards for all students. I think that's a sensitivity that I look for when I'm hiring and a sensitivity the hiring committees have as well.

We're always looking for not only the best teachers but racial balance in the schools. It should be an ongoing thing. . . . If you're going to interview you've got to have diversity not only in the pool, but also those doing the hiring should reflect racial balance. So our adults reflect our student population.

- administrators

Teachers express a sense of "fit" with the diversity in the school, which for some was part of what inspired them to come to the school and stay.

That's why I came to White Plains: because the person who hired me and the building principal represented for me the spirit of what White Plains means. That spirit has been a commitment to equitable access to all. That's what makes for a different school. We work to help ALL students to succeed. We're not always successful, but we try. - teacher

The word diversity is one of the first words in our mission statement. Candidates don't always know they should interview the school. You want to feel at home here. - teacher

When I came for my initial interview, I felt very welcomed as an interviewee. I was interviewed by students -- that sent a very strong message about the integrity and care. - administrator

The “spirit” of White Plains is rooted in building the capacity of all teachers and students to participate in their own and the school’s and community’s success. It is this sense of inclusion and ownership for outcomes that provides a foundation for many professional development initiatives to succeed.

Targeted Professional Development

Professional development initiatives in White Plains High School are guided by performance data analysis and strategic planning. This is accomplished in part through district-level leadership in setting a professional development agenda and providing ongoing assistance for teachers to implement district initiatives.

[Our approach toward staff development] has changed over the years. Our staff development and the effort towards providing meaningful staff development has increased. Through the superintendent conference days, we try to support teachers in the district's initiatives: differentiated instruction, reducing the achievement gap, and our third effort to increase minority participation in Honors and AP classes. Those have been the three initiatives over the past few years. The district hired . . . a consultant. She is very knowledgeable about practices of DI and meeting the needs of students. She's been hired to come periodically. Teachers sign up for her to come into their classroom to observe and see what they're doing, with no evaluative work. - administrator

Elements of these three district initiatives – DI, reducing the gap, and increasing minority participation in Honors and AP courses – have been broken down over time and are continually reinforced through workshops, mentoring, and programmatic changes. For example,

We embarked on a journey three years ago to look at differentiated instruction. The district invested a lot of time and effort [and] decided to divide DI into different levels: instructional strategies, assessments, and learning objectives. Each year one of those major sub-themes became a theme for the year. We developed professional development that supported it. The first year we did learning objectives: Every department had the same language. . . . All administrators were obligated to look for objectives and comment based on the objectives that they saw. There was follow-up in spring to what was done in the fall.

Every one of the teachers knew that that was a major initiative -- that there's a learning objective posted in and utilized in every classroom in the building. The degree to

which they're used varies with the teacher. But by and large, they've become a standard expectation in all classrooms. More importantly, when an objective is clearly stated, shared with students, and assessed at the end of the period, we have higher outcomes. That's something we made very clear.

- administrator

Support to Innovate and Initiate

Although district initiatives like differentiated instruction became an expected instructional approach among all high school teachers, teachers express a feeling of freedom to experiment with different approaches in their classrooms and cite supportive stances toward teaching, learning, and participating in leading the school to do so.

My failure is not negative. It can be my greatest teacher. By encouraging teachers to experiment, and not to be afraid to fail, we become much better teachers.

I've always felt supported as long as there's academic integrity and a community commitment to providing academics to all kids. The district's never penalized me for trying. Ultimately, every class has its own dynamic. The district encourages that kind of experimentation.

- teachers

Professional Growth Plans

One of the structures to draw on teachers' knowledge and build that knowledge in-house is the "Professional Growth Plan," a three-year project available to tenured teachers that includes both individual and collaborative components.

One of the greatest things our district does is the professional growth plan. If you're a tenured teacher, you can do [one] year in an individual project, then collaborate with a colleague, then have an observation year. It encourages teachers to do projects then share these projects. . . . I worked with a global history teacher who's also a special ed teacher one year. We took every thematic essay that had been given over the past 12 years from the State. We made outlines of what would be converted into essays and that we also put online.

The most recent [Professional Growth Plan] I did around writing instruction. My individual year I worked on planning and setting up a writing center for students, which we did. The collaboration year was when I ran professional development on the writing workshop model. The final year was the observation.

- teachers

White Plains High School builds capacity through a balance of targeted professional development, a climate where problem-solving and innovative thinking is encouraged, and structures for teachers' to improve their practice with the support of administration.

Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

The Three-Legged Stool

The “Three-legged Stool” is a framework the district adopted to encourage the integration of learning objectives and formative assessment into instructional decisions. This framework weaves the district-level vision for differentiating instruction and closing achievement gaps into a coherent instructional model. Supported through professional development workshops, consultants, and administration feedback, the “Three-Legged Stool” provides a clear instructional approach and, perhaps most importantly, systematically integrates critical thinking about the achievement of learning objectives into instructional planning.

What’s really important when we speak to teachers is: There are four questions at the end of every lesson: Was there an objective? Was the objective achieved? What percentage got it? And how do you know that? That’s really it. It’s critical. What we can measure learning by – we take objectives and measure their achievement.

- administrator

For some teachers the model is not much different from what they already knew and used; others say the model provides them with a sense of coherence about meeting district and school expectations and improving their practice.

Every teacher is required to have a learning objective. I’m totally sold on the idea of having that. The kids and I joke, if you didn’t really understand or meet that objective, I didn’t really do my job. It’s very small but it’s significant to getting the kids to know -- to get the big picture.

- teacher

Our variation [in mathematics] is on the workshop model. It’s basically . . . : Review of homework, mini-lesson, guided practice, independent practice, ideally in a group or [with a] partner where they have to talk, closure. All levels at high school write and communicate a learning objective with the students. In the workshop model, there’s formative assessment. This is your default lesson; [teachers] have the freedom to change it, but they have to have a reason for it [to change].

- curriculum coordinator

One administrator describes what instruction looks like now that the district has “finished all three legs of the stool:”

I did an observation. There was an objective clearly stated during the time of the lesson. The teacher developed strategies related to the objective. When it’s really well done, there’s some type of assessment, it can be subjective -- as simple as how many [understand it]. By the end of the period, there’s a more formal assessment, whether it’s an exit ticket, pop quiz, quick around the room to [confirm that] what was intended to be covered was covered. When it’s done effectively, it’s powerful. By the end of the period, when you hear them telling you back [what they learned], it’s great. I’m seeing it more and more frequently. Conversations and reviews of classroom observations are centered around these kind of issues: Did you achieve our objectives? How do you know, and what proof do you have that [is the case]? These are the kinds of questions you need to have.

Literacy and ESL Support

Ultimately, literacy is at the foundation of learning in all content areas. In White Plains, the need to improve literacy among all students, particularly among those whose native language is other than English, is a central concern. In the high school, teachers express an understanding that no matter what content they teach, they are all responsible for improving their students' literacy skills:

Many students who are not performing well -- it's primarily a literacy deficit. We address content literacy skills no matter what the content area is. Good readers are created through practice. I modify a lot of my materials -- insert questions in long passages to make it less overwhelming. If we can all learn to teach literacy, then we'll all become better teachers. That way, you present information to students with multiple modalities -- writing, hearing, visually.

Because diversity -- linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic -- is woven into the fabric of the district, a combination of instructional practices and programs are used to meet students' literacy needs including: mainstream teachers' integration of literacy-building instructional approaches, bilingual and native-language classes (for the more than 250 high school students served by ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages], and a budding SIFE (Students with Interrupted Formal Education) program.

We have shifted the culture in the school so that we have a number of teachers, who say, "I'll see their strengths even if they're in the ESOL program." We have shifted the culture so people no longer see lack of English as a deficiency, but maybe a temporary condition. We have tremendous success in terms of moving our students from where they are when they come in here to where they are when they graduate.

- curriculum coordinator

Technology-Enhanced Instruction

Although technology is not part of the "Three-Legged Stool," White Plains High School strongly encourages the integration of technology in classroom instruction. And in this objectives-driven school, teachers are required to get training in how to use particular technologies before they are provided to them.

In order to get an interactive white board you're required to take a course. A standard of performance is expected for anyone who uses white boards in order to ensure that it's used properly.

- administrator

From interactive white boards to extensive web pages for parents and students to dynamic mathematics software, teachers in White Plains revel in the opportunities technologies bring to expand on their instructional repertoire and excite their students.

[Our] dynamic interactive geometrics software package is used in innovative ways, mostly in 10th grade. Interactive white boards are in seven out of ten math classrooms. We'd like more of those, too. Teachers using technology more makes math more fun. Students are responding more. Kids are the technology generation, even more than some of the teachers are.

- teacher

We're seeing an increased use of technology to reinforce learning. We see the use of various mediums to bring forth opportunities for student modalities – visual, auditory, kinesthetic. To see the kids do an interactive white board chart on the causes of World War II is something. It's very powerful, to see it work. - administrator

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

Analyzing Trends and Gaps

White Plains takes advantage of BOCES item analysis to identify performance trends, gaps, strengths, and weaknesses. This analysis is brought into discussions among administrators, curriculum coordinators, and teachers, who develop strategies for attending to areas in need of improvement.

We're taking advantage of BOCES item analysis of Math Regents, looking at trends -- function of whether the curriculum is taught enough or not enough; or we moved things around, where we made sure we went back and reviewed it. That's only been available in the last couple of year. It's used to look at curriculum, examine gaps and strengths to build on as well. - curriculum coordinator

The district has taken monitoring and analyzing student performance data several steps further than the standard BOCES report. With the help of a consultant, administrators create spreadsheets on which important details regarding performance can be teased apart; they analyze Regents and benchmark scores for the most current year, trends, and gaps; and they make a periodic “Report to the Faculty” on the results.

We've sophisticated it down to the point where I know what our AYP is, with some limits. The consultant built into the spreadsheet the formulas required [for AYP], so that once I've identified a group of students, whether it's special ed, ESL, African-American males, females in general, I can see them, then look at a summary page that's converted that to AYP. That's very powerful -- as long as [a district is] committed to using it. It's one thing to say you have it; you have to know what to do with it. I get excited about data; it makes a difference. Some people in the building still hate it. Culturally, they've accepted the fact that it makes a difference. - administrator

What is done with all these data is a continual process of revising goals and making changes to meet those goals. Maintaining and expanding on success becomes increasingly challenging the higher the performance – presenting a welcome challenge.

The annual report provides the data on benchmarks. The first thing I did when I got here was to set goals. Each year we hope to improve our students' achievement on the state assessments by 10% a year. What's happening as far as good news/bad news goes is that our performance is so high it's hard to get 10 percent. Our white kids were 190 out of 200. You can't grow and you can't maintain it. . . . Our Latino and African-American students are well over the 180s. A few years ago, they were 150. We've had such a huge growth over the past five years that's astounding. We now have to come up with better ways. - administrator

Consistently Using Formative and Benchmark Assessments

In addition to standardized tests like the Regents exams, all content classes continually use formative assessments and benchmarks. In English language arts, for example, a district benchmark assessment is given twice a year in grades 9, 10, and 11. Elements of the Regents are integrated into benchmark assessments in different content areas over their high school careers, so that students have been exposed to and taught how to respond to the kinds of tasks they will be asked to perform on the high-stakes tests well before they take them.

What we try to do [on] at least part of each midterm and final . . . [is] based on part of that Regents exam. The first part of the 9th-grade exam has listening and at the end of 9th grade, a critical lens essay. We try to make sure that before the Regents exam they've had experience with each of the four parts, and had to work on a full section. One of the things we realized about a year and a half ago was that kids were having a tougher time on some of the multiple choice questions, so we re-focused our efforts. We spent a little more time to break down the phrases typically used in multiple choice questions. Which words are asking you for what -- facts, interpretation. [We worked on] more general test taking strategies. And they did much better on the multiple choice type things. - teacher

Curriculum coordinators are trained in data analysis, look closely at the data coming from these benchmark assessments, and along with teachers participate in developing strategies for enhancing instruction and clarifying reporting of student cohort data where indicated.

I don't collect data for just the quarterly: I collect midterms, finals, and Regents. I look at each course, by teacher, and how many are passing at over 85%. I look for trends by grade level because our 9th graders have higher failing rates than others. I look for something that's out of trend. I look at data on a kid-by-kid basis. Now we're looking at component re-testing; we put packets together with all kinds of review materials. If they have failed the Math A test more than once, then we have those [materials].

We've become much better at some things. We've all gotten much better at understanding data and data analysis, item analysis, and comparisons. The district's really focusing on how to use data to inform instruction. The first year we did the English Regents, we slightly missed our target. We looked at everything. The other thing is we've gotten much better at understanding how the state reports cohorts and what they're reporting for what. We have a much better sense of that. We spend a lot of time looking at our lists with our principal to determine who is in what cohort.

- curriculum coordinators

Recognitions, Interventions, and Adjustments

Identifying Needs

As part of the larger effort to close achievement gaps the district has made several adjustments, including more frequent assessments, with accompanying interventions.

In several ways we are much more active in terms of assessing needs . . . beginning with the conversation about identifying handicaps, learning disabilities, or other deficiencies in children who are non-English speaking. We began to realize that the dynamics of the

population [are] different, and that you could be foreign-born and still have some handicapping conditions. We need to help address those as well. - administrator

We're much clearer about assessment of student performance in smaller increments, not waiting so long to assess. Now in the 11th-grade ESL we give practice tests in the January prior to the June Regents in order to determine where students are. It's a formal mid-term exam under formal testing conditions. The kids are very keyed into it; they get very excited about it. We treat it as a Regents [exam]. - curriculum coordinator

The Study Center, Peer Tutors, Labs, Emerging Scholars

Students who are in need of extra support are provided a slew of different options, many of which were crafted in “think tanks” or committees driven by curriculum coordinators, teachers, and administrators. One example is the “Study Center” where any student (ESOL and others) can go for support from a variety of teachers during particular periods in the school day.

ESOL students come here [Study Center] instead of study hall. Study hall is not personal or with supports for learning. - teacher

Another approach to help students not only with their current studies, but in planning for their next school year, is the use of peer tutors who are oftentimes and ideally from the same ethnic and linguistic background.

In the program I coordinate, the diversity issue is really used in the sense we get the students who are new to the school and most of the time new to the country. We have peer tutors, other students who have been in the same spot two or three years before them, to help them decide what courses to take and use their acquired knowledge to help these new kids. The tutors also come from different countries. Hispanic students are not the same; the schools, system and cultures are different. Within the Hispanic community, there's lots of diversity. The kids are referred [to the program] by counselors, teachers, and parents. - outreach coordinator

As part of the effort to reduce achievement gaps, the district also reduced tracks and put “labs” and other interventions in place to assist students who need these supports.

The district wanted to move away from Regents Prep [RP] in core subjects. . . . In the old days, we used to have layers of prep. This district is looking to compact and minimize the layers. There were still deficiencies, learning gaps, students who needed supports, but we no longer call it RP. So we had to request a lab attachment for students, even though we eliminated the Regents Prep level. - administrator

The “Emerging Scholars Program” is designed to encourage enrichment for students going into 9th grade over the summer months. 20-22 students are recommended to the four-week program; if they complete the four weeks, they are enrolled in one Honors class in 9th grade and supported throughout the year.

The Emerging Scholars Program helps address the achievement gap in a little different way because it increases the involvement of students of color in Honors and AP courses.

We don't specifically target those students. But when we speak to the guidance counselors at the middle school, lots of those students who've got lots of potential that hasn't been tapped already happen to be Latino-American or African-American students. There are funds to take students on field trips and other resources. There are three of us to about 20 students; we get to see them every day. We stay with them all through 9th grade, but by 10th grade, we want them to take it on their own. - teacher

Accolades All Around

White Plains High School students do not lack for recognition for outstanding performance. The end-of-the-school-year award ceremony, teachers report, is quite extensive and only the grand finale to a host of other forms of recognition given throughout high school.

There are extensive awards at the end of the year. Most, at least half, of the senior class gets some kind of recognition. It's a long night, but it's really nice. A lot of student art work is up, and trophies are everywhere. . . . There are personal letters to the kids from the principal. Things are recognized in board meetings. There's a special breakfast every year for student volunteering and community service. - teacher

In a Nutshell

Diversity and success are nothing new to White Plains High School, which defies the common correlation of a large minority school population with lower academic performance. By embracing diversity and integrating it into the fabric of the school; infusing continuity and consistency in curriculum and instruction; and adhering to a hopeful stance backed by strategic action, White Plains High School continues to offer a model of best practice for other diverse schools.

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<http://www.whiteplainspublicschools.org/wphs>

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 10 produced as part of a larger study of high schools conducted during the 2007-08 school year. Research teams investigated 10 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).