The Impacts of a University Partnership on the Use of Research in School Improvement Efforts

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Supporters and Key Players

Original partners:
- School of Education
- Business Council of NYS
- NYS Education Department

Key Board Members and Collaborators:

- Teacher and administrator associations
- Other colleges and universities and the State University of NY
- School boards, business associations, policymakers
- NYS Parent-Teacher Association
- School associations (Big 5, small cities, charters)

Funded by the State of NY (Legislators and the Governor)

The Project Mission

- Inform
  - web displays of achievement data
- Inspire
  - reports, cases of higher performers, best practice framework
- Improve
  - self-assessments

"If you do what you always did, you'll get what you always got."
– **HS Administrator (NYKids HS Study)**

The Project Mission

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Best Practices Case Study
Susan Sherwood, *June 2009*

Best Practices from **High-Performing Middle Schools**

How Successful Schools Remove Obstacles and Create Pathways to Learning

Kristen C. Wilcox and Janet I. Angelis
Foreword by Gerald N. Tirozzi

Oliver W. Winch Middle School
South Glens Falls Central School District

School Context

The village of South Glens Falls, in Saratoga County, is 18 miles north of Saratoga Springs, known for its spas and horse racing. Nearby are Revolutionary War sites such as the Saratoga Battlefield and Fort Ticonderoga. And in South Glens Falls itself, one can find Cooper's Cave, popularized in James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*.

Economically, South Glens Falls residents have lower household median incomes than their neighbors. In 2007, for example, the estimated South Glens Falls median household income was $40,120, while in Saratoga Springs it was $57,256; the New York State median was $53,514[1]. This disparity between the two cities is reflected in the free or reduced-price lunch rates in each: In 2007-08, fifteen percent of the students from the South Glens Falls Central School District were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, while only 9% of the students in the Saratoga Springs district were eligible[ii].

What makes middle schools work
A report on best practices in New York State Middle Schools. Part of *Just for the Kids–New York*.

What makes high schools work
A report on best practices in New York State high schools.

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York

What works in middle school science
Preparing adolescents to become the next generation of scientists

The Project Mission

- Improve
  - self-assessments

Our Focus

- Inform
  - web displays of achievement data
- Inspire: Research, Dissemination
  - reports, cases of higher performers, best practice framework
- Improve: Development, Dissemination
  - on-line tools and institutes
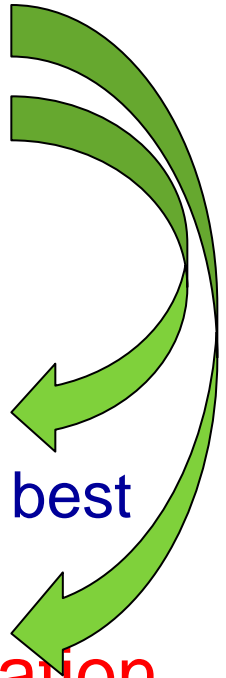
"If you do what you always did, you'll get what you always got."
– **HS Administrator (NYKids HS Study)**

COMPASS

- **COMP**are practices (to higher performers)

- **A**ssess priorities

- **S**elect levers to improve

- **S**et SMART goals

Continuous improvement process + best practice research findings

Step 1: Compare your practices

Theme: Relationships... What does your school look like?

Circle the number in either the A column (1 or 2) or the B column (3 or 4) that most closely resembles your school, and think of a specific example to demonstrate the reason for your selection.

1=very similar; 2=somewhat similar; 3=somewhat similar; 4=very similar

A		B	
1	2	3	4
We have not made fostering trusting and respectful relationships between educators and between the school and community an explicit priority and so we do not consistently support this.		We clearly define expectations regarding respect for others as well as consequences for behavior that is disrespectful; these expectations are consistently supported by all personnel across the school.	
1	2	3	4
Respect and responsibility are part of our character education programs, but I'm not sure that we have connected them with day-to-day practice in classrooms, hallways, and faculty rooms.		A top priority for all personnel is modeling respect and responsibility our interactions with our students, each other, families, and other community members.	
1	2	3	4
The processes and practices we have put in place to purposefully foster collaboration and community are "spotty" and tend to be peripheral in the activities at the school rather than spotlighted and ongoing.		We have multiple processes and practices that purposefully foster collaboration and community, and we draw students into our community as active participants in tackling what is important. We tap into a variety of resources from outside the school.	
Average your total circled numbers and place that number in the next column. ➡		Total: Average (Total divided by 3):	

Know Your Schools~
for NY Kids

Overview of COMPASS Steps

Step 1: Compare your practices to higher-performing schools

Step 2: Assess priorities

Step 3: Select levers to improvement

Step 4: Set SMART Goals

What makes middle schools work

Stage 1: Understanding
Framing/Analyzing

Stage 2: Formulating
Identifying Possible Solutions/Selecting Solutions

Stage 3: Applying
Applying Solutions

Stage 4: Reflecting
Assessing Outcomes/Evaluating Outcomes

Stage 5: Improving
Refining Solutions/Repeating the Cycle

Kowalski, T. J., Lasley, T. J., & Mahoney, J. (2008). *Data-driven decisions and school leadership: Best practices for school improvement.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

10

COMPASS Institute Agenda

Day 1

- Team building

- Self-assessment and priority setting

- Learning from the best practices research
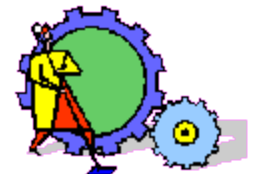
Day 2

- Setting a SMART goal

- Developing an action plan

- Determining what evidence to collect

This Mixed-Method Study

Research question:

How does a research-based tool and process impact continuous school improvement practice?

Data Sources:

- Two surveys: One focused on the COMPASS Tool and institutes, the other on a variety of project resources (e.g., case studies, cross-case reports)

- Documentary evidence in the form of working drafts of goals and timelines

- Interviews

Theoretical Orientation and Related Research

- Socio-ecological theory (Brofenbrenner, 1993) envisions student performance as related to multiple <u>contextual influences or processes</u> situated both <u>inside and outside the classroom</u>.

- <u>Shared understandings</u> of what is known about a school <u>context</u> and the community that school serves are central to informing what practices and processes are most likely to <u>transform</u> what work is done and how that work is done (Bruner, 1996; Fullan, 2010; Kowalski et al., 2008).

Brofenbrenner, U. (1993). The ecology of cognitive development: Research models and fugitive findings. In R. H. Wozniak & K. W. Fischer (Eds.), *Development in context: Acting and thinking in specific environments* (pp. 3-44). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole system reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Kowalski, T. J., Lasley, T. J., & Mahoney, J. (2008). *Data-driven decisions and school leadership: Best practices for school improvement*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Participants

Cohort I
7 middle and high schools
- 5 urban, 2 suburban, 2 on the state "list"
- 2 days, summer 2010; ½ days, Dec. 2010, 2011; full day, Mar. 2011

Cohort II
9 middle and high schools
- all urban, most on the state "list"
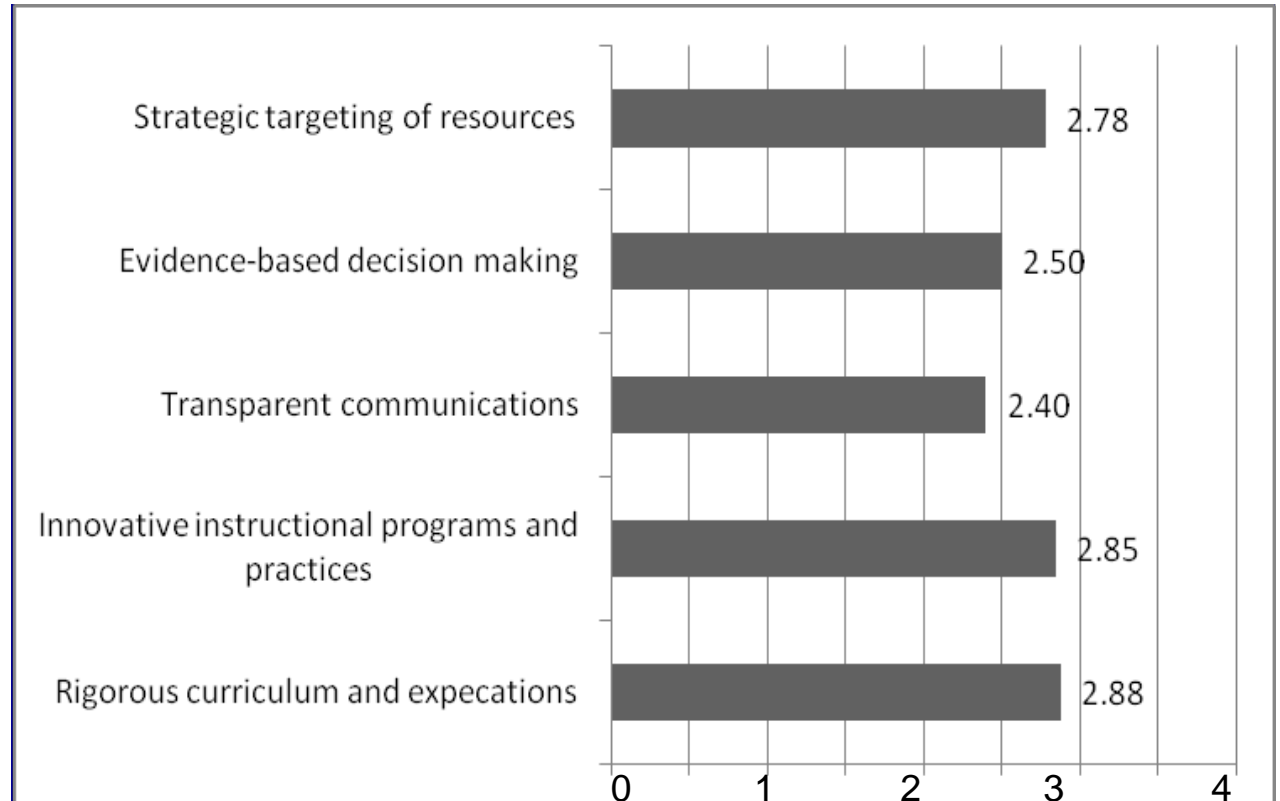- 2 days, summer 2011 (with partner organization)

Cohort III
- Summer 2012: elementary schools (invited)
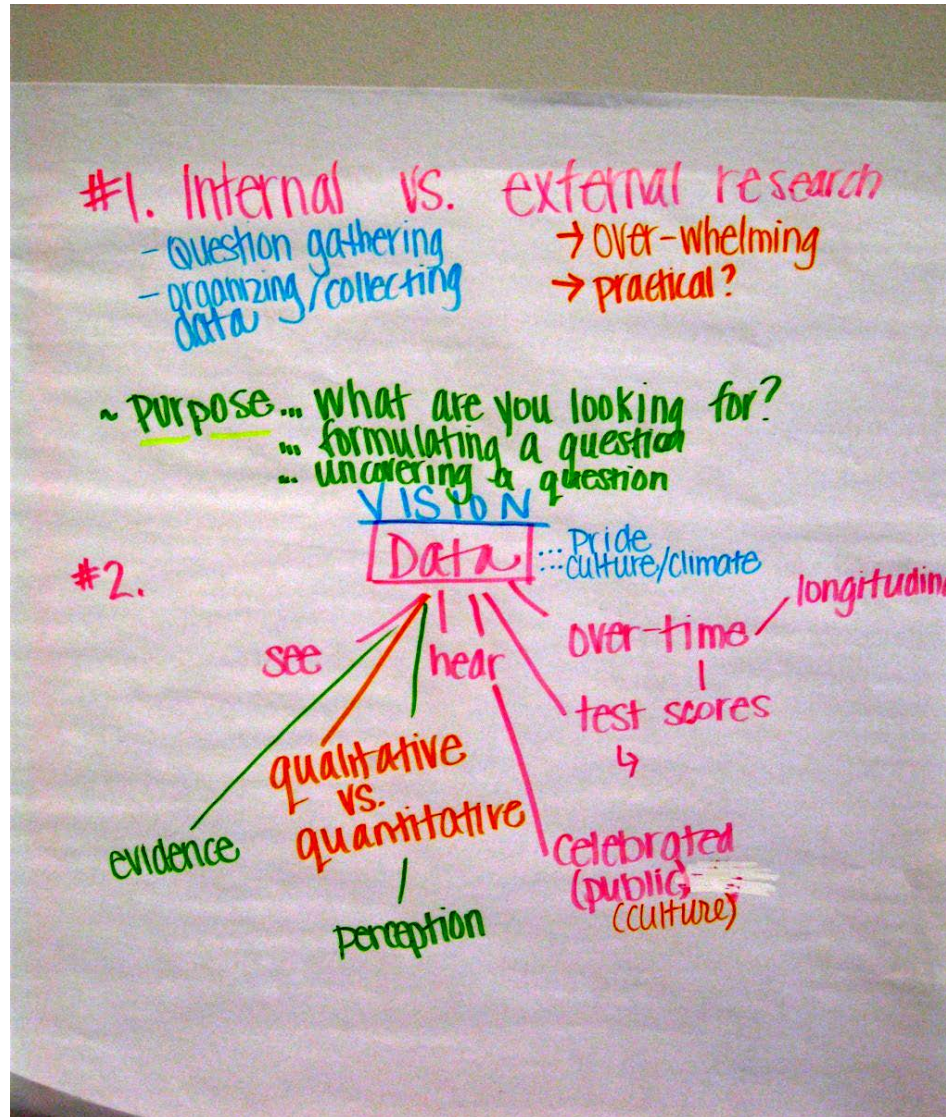
An exemplary case:

Echo High School's Journey

Strategic targeting of resources — 2.78
Evidence-based decision making — 2.50
Transparent communications — 2.40
Innovative instructional programs and practices — 2.85
Rigorous curriculum and expecations — 2.88

"We didn't know what we didn't know."
- EHS Principal (2011)

Echo High School's Journey

"There are so many data, getting your arms around them is like wrestling with a mattress."
- EHS Principal (2011)

Echo High School's Journey

after 1 year of participation

Progress toward goal of reducing achievement gaps while meeting overall performance targets

Group	ELA	Math
All students	✓ AYP	x 4 points shy
Hispanic	✓ Safe Harbor	✓ Safe Harbor
Econ. Disadv.	✓ AYP	x Not met
Sped.	x Not met	x Not met

"We had to take a look in the mirror, dig in, and decide who we really are."

- EHS Principal (2010)

Preliminary Findings All Schools

How would you characterize the usefulness
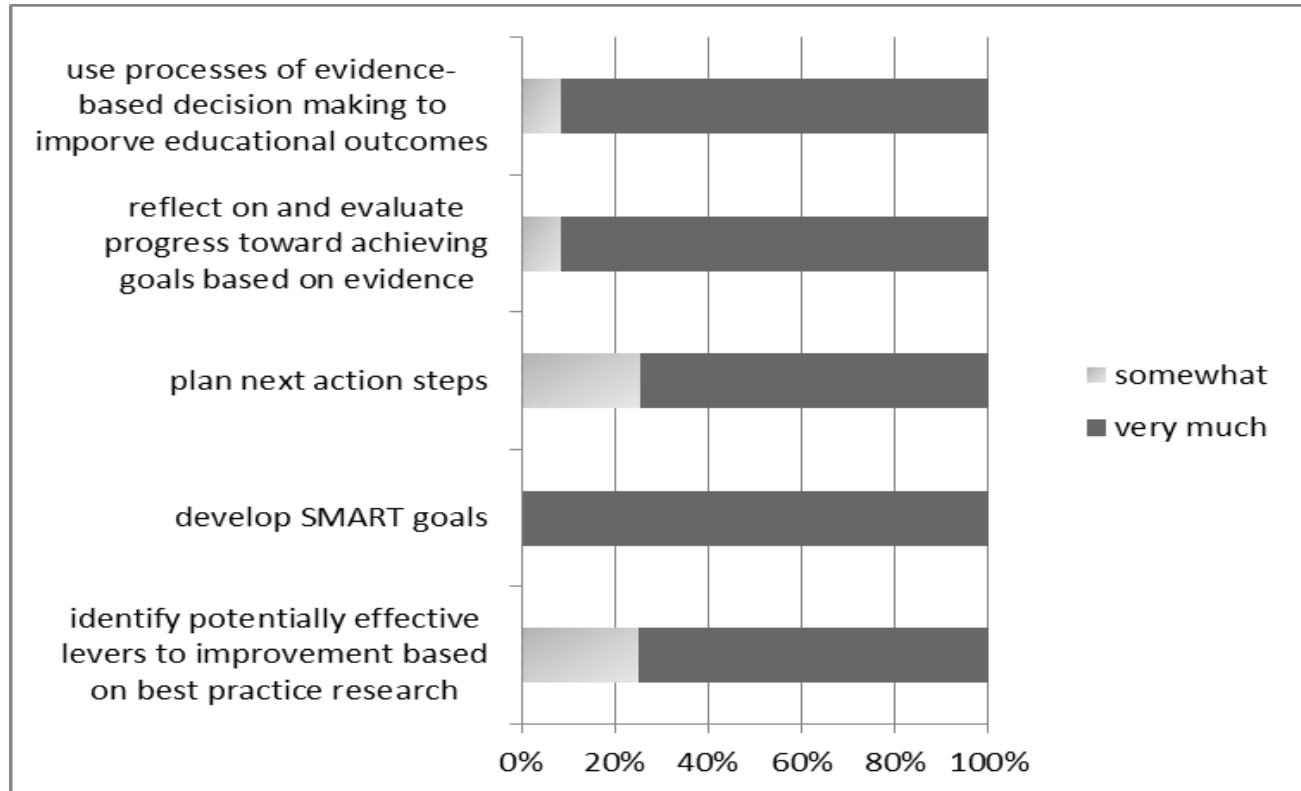of the Compass tools and institutes?
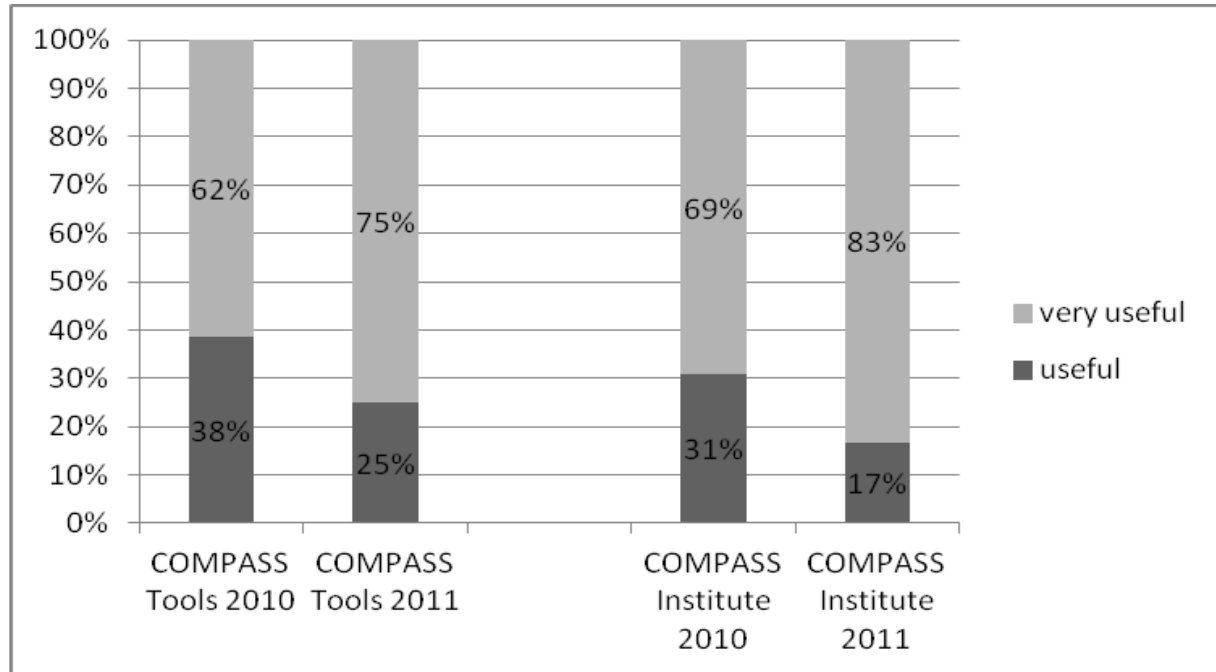
"This has been a great resource to further our thinking
and planning within our district. It's so wonderful to
connect with other districts as well."

- COMPASS Institute Participant 12/9/2010

Preliminary Findings All Schools
Participants' Abilities to Sustain a Continuous Improvement Process

"Implementation (and development) of SMART goals have focused our initiatives. The entire building now strives to reach a common goal. [Process] assists with streamlining initiatives."

Cohort I participant (Dec. 2012)

To know is <u>not</u> enough…

- As schools face shrinking resources yet increasing demands to close achievement gaps and improve graduation rates, developing the collective capacity to assess needs and select appropriate programs or practices to address them at the local level is needed (Wilcox & Angelis, 2009, 2011).

To know is <u>not</u> enough…

– Doing rigorous research and effective school improvement based on that research is not enough.

– Strategic communications of research impacts are neither a luxury nor peripheral to ongoing support.
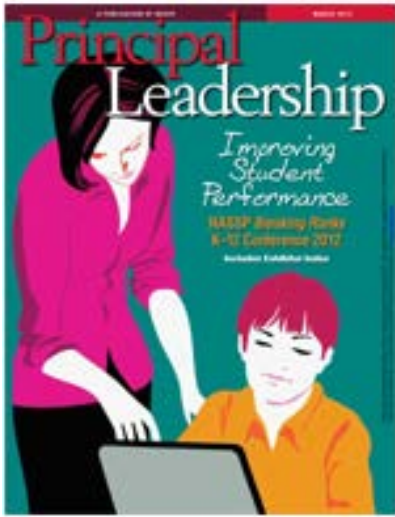
Thank you!

This presentation will be available at

http://www.albany.edu/nykids/

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"Collect, Analyze, Act"

(March, 2012) Principal Leadership

➢ *Diversity as Strength: How Higher Performing Schools Embrace Diversity and Thrive* (in press). In Breaking the Mold of Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students, edited by Andrea Honigsfeld and Audrey Cohan. R & L Education

➢ *Poverty, Performance and Frog Ponds.* (2011) Kappan

➢ *From "Muddle School" to Middle School: Building Capacity to Collaborate.* (2011) The Middle School Journal

➢ *High School Best Practices: Results from Cross-case Comparisons.* (2011) The High School Journal