Bay City[1] Elementary School

An Urban Case Study

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[1] Bay City is a pseudonym

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This case study is one part of a multiple case study designed to investigate implementation of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) as they relate to student performance outcomes in New York State.

The study sample included both odds-beating and typically performing schools. Bay City was selected for study as an odds-beating school because it met the criteria for exceeding expected performance on the 2013 state assessments, scoring almost 1.8 standard deviations higher than other schools around the state.[2] This school is distinctive as an odds-beating urban elementary school in that performance significantly and greatly exceeded expectations in multiple subjects and grade levels. This relative academic success has been achieved despite most students coming from economically disadvantaged homes.

In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the school context and then describe key features of this school and district that might provide guidance and generate ideas as to how particular processes and practices can be developed and supported to achieve higher-than-expected student performance in other urban elementary schools. In Appendix A we also provide an overview of the types of data collected.

School Context

Bay City Elementary School is located in a large urban community in New York State. This elementary school is one of five other schools in the district and has consistently achieved higher student performance outcomes than the other elementary schools in the district. In fact, Bay City was the only elementary school in this district that met the study criteria of "odds beating."

As observed during the visit to Bay City and as reported by participants in the study, educators at the school make it a point to greet students at the door every morning to welcome them and see if any students are having a rough start to their day. This reflects the caring school culture and the priority that school leaders and teachers have placed on developing relationships with students beyond academics and creating a safe and compassionate environment.

Highlights of Process and Practices

The following features characterize the Bay City school and district:

- Instructional coaches and the principal act as instructional leaders (not solely as building managers) who support professional development to enhance the quality of instruction.
- Data are consistently and frequently used to inform instruction and to make decisions about interventions. Progress monitoring is conducted in the building by a data team in collaboration with teachers and is reported to school leaders.

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[2] Bay City does not represent the highest-achieving schools in the state. Rather, it is an urban school with above-average student poverty and ethnic diversity whose outcomes correlate with higher achievement outcomes than demographically similar schools.

- There is a strong emphasis on individual growth and catering to the individual needs of learners. Meeting the social and emotional needs of all learners is seen as a centerpiece of educational success.
- Collegial professional support, reflective and dialogic mentorship, and shared vision and mission all contribute to a sense of a supportive and non-threatening environment, conducive for change and continuous improvement.

A Closer Look

Following a vignette the rest of this report summarizes the findings from a two-day site visit to the school as well as the results of a school climate survey that was distributed to all staff members (see appendi8x B). Findings are reported for each line of inquiry that framed the study: District office-school relations, alignment, and coherence; school building leadership; Common Core curriculum and instruction; teachers' instruction and practice; student social/emotional developmental health; and family engagement strategies and community partnerships. A discussion of the literature informing this study is available in a separate report (Lawson et al., 2014).

A Close Read

As a fifth-grade ELA class prepared to engage in a "close read" of a documentary video, the teacher asked them why researchers use a camera to study wildlife. Students offered responses such as, "You can see what a dangerous animal might be doing," "It won't scare animals away," and "You can see what it does, how it lives when no one is watching." While watching the informational video, broken into seven one-minute segments, students were busy writing and sharing gist statements. One student explained that the segments were "like paragraphs in an article."

"I'm really impressed. You are doing an awesome job. You're focused and able to identify key ideas from a video," their teacher said as she concluded the lesson. The teacher later reflected, "I really did think the lesson went well." She noted that students responded well to the minor adaptations she had made to the scripted lesson plan and the preparation she had put into the technical aspects of the presentation. "Using informational texts is a big shift. She commented, "This module brings in all the standards of the Common Core, including context clues and higher vocabulary."

Overview

The vignette above provides an example of how teachers at Bay City are approaching instruction. Based on surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations and documents collected during a two-day site visit at this school, we found evidence that educators were working to align curricula and instructional practices with the Common Core Learning Standards. The district's educator evaluation processes and tools included formal observations,

walk-throughs and focus walks, reflection feedback, measures of student learning, instructional coaches, Danielson Rubric, and fidelity checks for Common Core. School and district leaders were aligning resources to support the implementation of the Common Core curriculum and APPR evaluation system. An experienced staff, tailored workforce configurations, organizational designs, and improvement models contributed to a climate focused on student learning. A sense of collaborative effort and readiness to improve were part of a collective efficacy that pervaded discussions with Bay City educators.

Bay City administrators and teachers expressed a consistent understanding that the CCLS are suggestive, not prescriptive. That is, the implementation of the Standards within Bay City followed an adaptive, progressive approach, where school leaders and teachers were given autonomy to decide how to best implement the Standards for the needs of their students. District leaders, school leaders, and teachers described the process of implementing the CCLS as one of adaptation, adjustment, and alignment. Educators were consistent in saying they know what to cover based on the CCLS; however, they also expressed an understanding that they were lent leeway in how to cover it.

School and district leaders and teachers alike spoke of the APPR as a tool to improve instruction and raise student achievement, not as a threatening evaluation or a source of fear. The practice of the school principal and assistant principal visiting classrooms frequently was a part of the culture prior to APPR; this practice was accepted by teachers as part of encouraging learning, rather than being seen as invasive or linked only to APPR.

Summary of Site-Visit Findings

District Office-School Relations, Alignment, and Coherence

District priorities were said to be focused on instruction and learning and driven by a learner-centered vision and mission. Based on documentary evidence and educator interviews and focus groups, district office-school relations seemed aligned and coherent. Distributed leadership, investment in continuous professional development, community partnerships, technology use, a collaborative work environment, and supportive management all were cited as contributing to the district taking shape as a learning organization. The value of accountability as a responsibility drives both practices and processes in the district. The district also has a strong emphasis on data use; instruction, goal setting, continuous improvement, and strategic plans are data driven.

Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals. District leaders have invested financial, material, and professional resources into improving instruction and achievement of students in service of their shared vision of "learning for all, whatever it takes." For example, district wide investment in instructional coaches, principals as instructional leaders, building-based substitute teachers, multiple commercially available instructional approaches, and continuous professional development advance the district agenda of good instruction and high achievement. However, teachers expressed that the pacing of the state CCLS-aligned modules do not align well with the district's vision, and at the time of this study teachers were discussing and providing feedback to school and district administrators about what they perceived as needed adjustments to keep children on pace.

An inclusive culture filled with supportive mentorship, collaborative spirit, shared leadership, and the overall creation of a safe environment frame the organizational structure in the district. This especially holds true in regard to implementing the Common Core and APPR. The superintendent spoke of creating a safe environment "to be secure in this new realm." She explained that fostering readiness for change was accomplished through investment in, and provision of, professional development and supportive mentorship.

In addition to the district shared vision and mission, district leaders hold a shared perspective that each school building is a unique entity with its own needs. They foster a balanced and distributed leadership model in which all school personnel are following the district-developed guidelines consistently, while allowing for individual school and teacher agency. For example, one administrator stated that teachers are required to use the lesson content provided but that they may adjust the instructional approaches.

Furthermore, while similar models are used across the district (e.g. Danielson Rubric, leadership teams, principals as instructional coaches), district leaders recognize and emphasized that a one-size-fits-all policy does not always work, and they regard each school building individually. School personnel take charge of their own improvement plans, their own data analysis, and teacher evaluations. Also, there is an individualized and customized approach to professional development that caters to the particular needs and grade levels identified by school administrators and coaches. Professional development is provided by the district, consultants, or BOCES, or is turn-keyed by the faculty. As one district administrator explained:

> I think at this point, it's time to individualize. I really don't want to see one size fits all professional development across the board, which we've done for a number of years for good reason. But it needs to be more individualized and differentiated now. No student is the same, no building is the same.

To this end, there is a strong and shared emphasis on accommodating different learning styles and abilities and measuring individual student growth. The district's policy is to meet each child's unique needs by differentiating instructional approaches, extensively incorporating technology, and providing a variety of services and intervention programs such as Response to Intervention (RTI).

Leadership Structures, Strategies, and Philosophies. A combination of managerial style, pedagogic philosophy, and leadership characteristics of the superintendent set the stage for the distributive organizational hierarchy in the school district. While the hierarchies and supervisory roles are clearly defined, we observed shared decision making, designation of responsibilities, promotion of ownership, and empowerment of the faculty to take on leadership roles. The latter speaks to a well-established horizontal leadership structure. A sense of a cordial, non-threatening, collegial and inclusive environment was observed at school and district levels. The Bay City principal and teachers expressed a feeling of being listened to, heard, and supported by district leaders. Both the superintendent and principal emphasized empowerment through delegation of responsibilities and building ownership of the accountability, success and continuous improvement process. The superintendent highlighted this point:

So these data teams became very important for staff to analyze their own data;
not to have it from the central office down. I use that purposely, … down to
the schools; the schools needed to control their own data and their own
methodology for reaching what kids need to have within their school levels.

There was a sense of commitment and a purposeful attempt to develop leaders within the district who are experienced and knowledgeable about a variety of things related to instruction and partnerships with families.

The priority on teaching and learning is communicated from both district and school leaders. District leadership prioritizes a hands-on school leadership policy and leaders at Bay City were directly involved in many ways, including in providing instructional leadership via frequent walk-throughs and focus walks. The management of the school building was distributed to other roles rather than the principal. School leaders are also part of data-driven decision making such as teacher professional development based on SLOs and individual goals. Additionally, leaders expressed viewing not only teachers, but also support staff, including drivers, cooks, and custodians, as contributing to student learning.

District leaders. District leaders are also connected to classroom learning and building processes. District leaders spoke repeatedly about being committed to, and aware of, what is happening in the school buildings. With Common Core implementation, district-level administrators were directed by the superintendent "to be committed . . . to go out and be in the buildings." For example, one district administrator expressed that being in the buildings felt like "a breath of fresh air." He was welcomed in the classrooms, was able to reconnect with people and hear about their challenges and frustrations and see what they need first hand. Another spoke of getting into the buildings as a part of the APPR process; to talk to the principals about putting away managerial tasks and focusing on instructional practices. He emphasized that instructional conversations are "about what they are doing, what they need to do, how they're providing feedback, how they are providing staff development, how they are monitoring."

The district had a strategy for communicating and structuring upcoming district-wide changes. First, the complexity of the upcoming reform was broken down into chunks. Second, a consistent message was communicated that can be summarized by a building administrator:

Administration isn't coming in to catch you doing something wrong, to a different
twist that "this isn't there to hurt you it's there to help you. . . ." We're coming in to
help analyze your teaching practices and how you deliver instruction to not as, "Aha!
I caught you and you weren't doing this or you were doing that" to more of a
communication between the teacher and the administrator to reflect on their teaching,
improve their skills and bring a whole new understanding and awareness to things
they maybe they never thought about.

District leaders were also strategic in how they handled the challenge of a high level of poverty among students and families. "We have used our poverty wisely," stated the superintendent. The district and the community collaborate to improve school and student success. Local businesses contribute by sending employees to read or be mentors to kids or by donating bags of clothing. Turning the socio-economic disadvantage into an opportunity, the district also was able to apply

for extra grants for staff development. The overall district message is that regardless of poverty, a good learning environment can be created.

Resource Allocation and Monitoring. First and foremost, district officials prioritize a funding allocation line for continuous professional development purposes. The superintendent saw the state CCLS mandate as "a ready, fire, aim approach," in other words, an immediate action or reaction before thorough planning. She stated that that was the rationale behind the district "spend[ing] money on staff development like never before." She also noted that professional development for incoming staff is emphasized within the district; however professional development has "retrained or trained (all teachers) in the new kinds of students sitting before them in new numbers."

The district also invests heavily in technology, including tech labs, smart boards and online programs to cater to different learning styles and needs. Several teachers noted that they felt "blessed with a district that has supported us with staff, resources, training."

District leaders prioritized keeping budget cuts away from the classroom. Instead, they eliminated the programs that did not directly relate to instruction and achievement. District leaders also utilized grants to help develop additional programs and services for students. Extra resources from the community, including partnerships with a local community organization and local university, also contribute to school and district success. Retired teachers are contracted for reading support in classrooms, providing students with access to experience and knowledge.

School Building Leadership

School leadership was aligned with the priorities, goals, vision, and mission of the district. Teachers expressed a shared sense of a nurturing and caring, supportive, and collegial environment. A sense of agency, collective efficacy, and unity of purpose were seen at Bay City. A holistic approach to each learner's success and emphasis on individual growth permeated the narratives of values, goals, mission, and vision. The processes and practices that we observed point to the existence of distributed, empowering, and inclusionary leadership. While teachers and leaders felt that they had an abundance of material resources, they expressed a need for more personnel to support instruction and achievement.

Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, and Culture. One of the stand-out characteristics of the Bay City ES was a well-pronounced sense of camaraderie and collaborative work. A nurturing collegial spirit and a shared feeling of trust were echoed among staff members. Teachers spoke of team work, a sense of a family, close collaboration with each other, feeling supported by their colleagues, and shared responsibility for students' success; all testified to the group effort towards a shared goal. Many saw these characteristics of the school as a key to success. Some teachers attributed their close-knit relationships and working well together to serving a lower socio-economic population with the associated challenges and hardships.

Both principal and school staff expressed that looking at the whole child's physical, social and emotional well-being in conjunction with improving their academic performance was a school-wide goal. The principal stated and teachers and support staff often repeated, "You have to sit back and think, 'Where does this child come from?'" School educators were aware of challenging family situations, community demographics, and students with difficulties.

Several mechanisms are in place to support overall well-being. On the academic side is a school leadership team that reviews curriculum, student achievement, and student individual needs. On the physical-social-emotional side, a student-teacher response team tracks student behavior and attendance in relation to academic progress. We found a shared belief that everyone learns differently and that continuous individual growth is what defines success.

Leadership Structures, Strategies, and Philosophies. The principal echoed the district narratives of building a safe, nurturing environment for students. The principal deemed as exceptional leaders those who strive to build trust and create an inclusionary, empowering atmosphere conducive for success and continuous improvement. As a leader, the principal sought to reduce anxiety around the CCLS and APPR through emotional and professional supports, such as central communication and mentorship.

The principal also was surrounded by a core leadership team, including an assistant principal, two school leader assistants, and an instructional coach. This team used collaborative leadership to create a collegial learning environment. This also extended to other faculty members, particularly those involved in the PEP and data teams. The school has a system of distributing roles and responsibilities through multiple committees, including a data team, a student-teacher response team, a leadership team, and resource allocation innovations such as building-based instructional coaches and deans of discipline. Members of these teams demonstrated a sense of leadership and agency as they described encouraging colleagues to use data and assisting them in understanding and interpreting information. Decision-making processes are decentralized, team based, and data driven. Staff members are appointed to attend trainings or meetings outside the building and are expected to turnkey information to others. A strong sense of collaboration was a consistent theme in the narratives of the school climate. Results from the climate survey (see Appendix B for full details) echo what was found in observations and focus groups, namely that school staff expressed that the principal was supportive and respectful to all and that they in turn respect and support the principal.

Resource Allocation and Monitoring. The school leaders described the school as having ample resources for technology, curriculum, and instruction. However, school leaders and teachers expressed frustration in not having enough people to meet goals. The shortage of personnel and lack of extra assistance in the classrooms was expressed as a concern and an impediment to quality instruction. The school had secured a grant from a local community organization to fund an extra counselor position, which helped strengthen the school's foundation. Bay City allocates funding for parent engagement purposes such as musical performances, gift baskets, a turkey raffle, or free giveaways. There is no library at Bay City, and teachers expressed a wish for one.

School Climate. A school survey was administered electronically to all adults who work in Bay City Elementary School in any capacity. Approximately 25 anonymous results were collected (50% response rate) and results were tabulated and are presented in full in Appendix B. Overall, according the survey results, Bay City employees provide a picture of a positive work environment where staff reported positive relationships with school leaders, student behavior problems were dealt with consistently, and students respect and respond to adults. Additionally, all staff reported that students are actively engaged in learning at Bay City and that they

personally believed that all students can learn. Finally, all Bay City staff reported that they felt accepted by and respected by each other and that staff interact in positive ways.

Curriculum and Instruction

While the majority of teachers spoke of adapting to the Common Core Learning Standards and not adopting state recommended modules completely, a high level of fidelity to the CCLS and their instructional shifts was observed in the classrooms as evidenced in the use of Common Core-aligned materials and instructional strategies as described in the vignette below from a fourth-grade math classroom.

> During a fourth-grade lesson on fractions, the teacher stands at the front of the room near a smart board. She explains to the class, "I need someone to come and write all the ways to make 1/2. She says, "2/4, 3/6, 4/8. 5/10. Does anyone see a pattern?" As students raise their hands, the teacher waits. "(Student name) what pattern do you see?" The student tells the class that the numerators are going up by ones. The teacher replies, "Yes, is there a pattern you see in the whole fraction?" Students discuss that the numerator is half of the denominator and that the denominators are all even numbers. The teacher writes examples on the board. The teacher then says, "What about one third?" Students work in small groups to get answers together. The teacher guides the discussion at the front of the room by asking groups what strategies they are using to get their answers. As they come back to the whole group to share answers, the teacher reiterates, "We're all here to help each other learn."

The interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and supporting documents we collected during the site visit produced evidence that Bay City educators were working to align curricula and instructional practices with the Common Core Learning Standards.

Overall, a combined use of the NYS Common Core-aligned modules and previously used materials (e.g., text series, online programs) is in place. There was general agreement among teachers and district and school leaders that the Common Core ELA Standards were "much smoother" to implement than math. Due to the gap in vocabulary from earlier grades and the rigor and newness of the concepts and language, math was said to be harder to implement. A shared concern for both ELA and math was that implementing the NYS Common Core-aligned modules takes more time than prescribed. Teachers expressed that the CCLS involve more thinking and reflecting and therefore foster deeper learning. District and school leaders found that while it is currently challenging, students are "not shocked by what's in front of them" and will "rise to the occasion" and improve in the long term.

A moderate to high staff buy-in and commitment to the Common Core Standards was expressed. Generally, district and school leaders embraced the CCLS. Teachers, on the other hand, like the Standards but felt they needed more time to phase them in. They believed that the timing, pacing, and resources need to be differentiated, as many students were not prepared for the more complex material and meeting the demands of the modules. Teachers felt there were not as many differentiation opportunities as in previous programs. They also expressed concern about lock-step progressions that do not align with their district's vision for learners. There was little complaint or expressed feelings of anxiety. Teachers thought that the modules can be

engaging and can build skills and knowledge. However, some teachers and support staff working with special education students found the CCLS and the modules especially challenging for their students and are struggling to implement them fully. It was consistently stated that the CCLS do not work the same way for special education students as they do for students in regular education.

Teachers' Instruction and Practice

Teachers are granted considerable autonomy at Bay City. They receive directives from school and district leaders but feel comfortable acting from a place of their own expertise and judgment. For example, they were given leeway to interpret for themselves what they want to use from the CCLS-aligned modules, and they made collective decisions across the grade levels. They also expressed that APPR does not worry them because they know that they do their job properly and what matters is student's individual growth and success on a daily basis. Teachers concurred that student participation is a key standard of high-quality instruction and shared some strategies for student engagement. The teachers in this school have a common planning time for grade levels, receive feedback on their instruction, and reflect on it with the instructional coaches.

Student Engagement. Student engagement was predominantly brought up in the context of special education and catering to the diverse learning styles and needs of students. Here again, the emphasis on individual growth was apparent. Seeking to reach every child and to foster student engagement and inclusion of diverse needs, the school uses a three-tier system for reading, provides an immersed classroom experience for special education students (it has only one self-contained classroom), and offers specific services (e.g., speech therapy, individual or group counselling) according to a student's educational disability. One teacher talked about how using a scripted program for reading had helped her students make progress in their reading ability and therefore built their self-esteem.

When asked about the characteristics of high-quality instruction, mainstream teachers shared that strategies of engaging different learners' skills and abilities are critical. The art of keeping students involved and interested was seen by teachers as a component of high-quality instruction. Classroom strategies used to engage students include teacher whole-group facilitation, small-group activities, pairing, co-teaching, student-led whole-group discussion, student use of white boards and smart boards, one-on-one conferencing, clickers, and hand signaling. Celebrating small achievements and providing behavior incentives was a commonly expressed tactic for building motivation and participation. For example, one teacher shared:

> It's really key to provide instruction that keeps the students … involved and interested in the day. It's to make sure that they are involved, not just somebody standing in the front of the classroom, presenting the slides, or putting notes on the board. They have to be actively involved and participate in discussions. That's difficult for some students, but I think it's the teacher's job to find ways to connect each kid and get them involved. Have a little conversation that is not related to school but outside, and draw them in and get them to actively participate. Or present them with a story or article that is interesting on their level. There are a lot of different

ways to do it. You have got to use a lot of different techniques with the population we serve.

Teachers are also observed and are asked to reflect on how they engage students and how they can improve their strategies for student engagement.

Assessment and Data-Driven Instruction (DDI). The use of data to inform instruction and interventions in this school had been firmly instilled by the previous principal and was also evident during the site visit. The data team consists of teachers and a teaching assistant and plays a central role in monitoring students' progress school-wide. They use what is commonly referred to as a data binder. Student test scores from AIMSweb (a screening, progress monitoring and data management system used to support Response to Intervention programs), grade-level exams, and NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) assessments are collected and compiled throughout the year in the data binder. Teachers and leaders can consult and identify students' needs using the binder. The data team also provides guidance and assistance to their colleagues in analyzing and using data.

The school improvement plan is created by looking at the previous year's state assessments for ELA, math, and science and identifying targets for the upcoming year. The team-based decisions about assigning students to different tiers are made based on these data and standardized protocols. There is a rigorous system of tracking growth or rate of improvement and placement into tiers that can be summarized in the words of one of the data team members:

> After the students are tested, we have a spreadsheet we use. We input, looking at the information that comes about showing above average, average, below and well below students. That's an indication, but it's not the sole purpose of placing a student into a tier. It would be looked at, there's a mathematical equation that's used to see where they are placed.

Some teachers stated that improving scores on state assessments is one of the school's goals and that target setting comes from the data binder. Data use was also evident at the classroom level. Data team members said that teachers are becoming more comfortable about using data to guide their instruction and to stimulate growth. For example, teachers shared strategies for using data for instructional purposes and to improve student achievement, including conducting in-class assessments to decide if they can move on with instruction, advising students to read more at home, and printing out progress reports for children to take home or to celebrate the achievement of the set target.

Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health

Student social and emotional developmental health is a central priority of the school alongside academic achievement and a reflection of the "looking at the whole child" philosophy. To satisfy this priority and educational value, a number of mechanisms are at play. Examples include the student-teacher response team; anti-bullying, character building and social skills programs; and lunch group meetings.

Positive Youth Development Priorities and Strategies. To cater to the physical-social-emotional pillar of learning, the school created the student-teacher response team to review student behavior and monitor attendance in relation to academic progress. The team includes school psychologist, counselors, and social worker as well as school leaders. The team monitors students' progress by digging deep into the history of the child and the family, tracking attendance and medication intake, and by simply getting to know the child on an individual basis. A school leader stated that students are greeted at the front door every morning, and staff "read their faces" to gauge if they are having a rough start to the day.

As a part of a district-wide initiative, the school has character building and anti-bullying programs. Within the framework of the program a new character trait is being taught and practiced every month. The school decorates the hallways with signs and pictures such as "Bullies Out and Buddies In." Grade-level character assemblies are held monthly. Teachers choose students who exemplify the character trait of the month and give them character choice awards; students' pictures are displayed on the school wall. Students also get awarded a certificate and a t-shirt for doing the right thing or receive a plaque and go to a special ceremony if caught performing a good deed. The school also has a bully box system where kids can fill out a form if they're not comfortable verbalizing who is bothering them, and then one of the counselors or administrators get involved and try to help.

Academic Support, Mental Health, Physical Health, and Social Services. The school has a well-established system for academic and emotional support. The aforementioned student-teacher response team focuses on behavioral issues, social skills, and mental health disturbances. Based on the team's reviews of student progress, a case manager is assigned to a child to monitor progress and decide on referrals to special education. The school was able to secure an extra social worker position through a grant from a local community organization that focuses on services for youth. School support staff, including the counselor and social worker, conduct individual or group counselling sessions covering anger management, coping skills, bullying, anxiety, and family issues.

The two school leader assistants, who are primarily responsible for addressing behavior referrals, interact with the two counselors, the school psychologist, and the social worker often. All these individuals are part of a well-established system that uses collaborative protocols as a backdrop for progress monitoring, personalized interventions, and communication with parents. The contracted social worker works with students and their families in the home and at school. Within the school, referrals are made by teachers. Support staff make a lot of referrals to counselling agencies, community health centers, or probation. The physical environment of the classrooms is also arranged with an in-built cool-down area, or a cool-down zone. Students learn calming techniques from school staff and how to use the cool-down area when needed.

Family Engagement Strategies and Community Partnerships

Family Engagement. Low parent involvement is seen as a challenge district-wide and school-wide. A district-parent committee works toward the district's goal of higher parent involvement in schools. This committee, funded through parent involvement funds, has two parent representatives from each school in the district, meets once a month, and is facilitated by one of the district administrators. The meetings include educational speakers, presentations about district happenings, and sharing of information from the schools.

School leaders and staff expressed awareness that parents' own educational histories affect their children. Yet many teachers expressed disappointment with parental lack of involvement and concern about the difficult home environments of some students. Some teachers explained that there is a directive from the district office about building parent engagement on a service model, i.e., through communication and relationship building. Recognizing, and being sensitive to, the particulars of the parent population (young parents, school drop-outs, high poverty rates) inform the multiple efforts made to engage parents. Typically, the social worker, school psychologist, counselor, or the school leader assistants perform the parent/family coordinator roles. To facilitate parent engagement the school runs a monthly parents' group, engages parents to serve on the school quality counsel, and organizes parent conferences, family fun nights, student performances, and turkey giveaways. Teachers continue this work by communicating frequently with parents through letters home, progress reports, and parent meetings. Support staff occasionally will meet in parents' homes.

Community Partnerships. School-community linkage was a cornerstone of the educational efforts in this school district, and the school in particular. Partnerships were highlighted by school and district leaders. Bay City leaders partner with the local university for continuous professional development for educators and with local colleges for students to come in, learn, and serve. It also partners with church members for extra-curricular reading tutoring; local community agencies for referrals and social services; local businesses for mentorship or extra reading provided by their employees. Retired teachers contribute by providing extra support with reading. Additionally, a local business association helps school families by providing dinners or organizing Christmas walks. Community agencies also provide information about resources for families or run lunch groups with students, as well as help organizing in-kind and monetary donations (e.g., canned food and clothes drive collections) to students and families in need.

In a Nutshell

To summarize, Bay City district and school leaders and educators have a well-coordinated and aligned effort to serve their student and family population. Student academic, social, and emotional well-being guides the practices around instruction, community partnerships, family engagement, and organizational structures. Bay City, in conjunction with district support, presented itself as a learning organization capable of withstanding change in order to provide a brighter future for the children and families that they serve. Collegial support, dialogic mentorship and clear unity of purpose all contribute to a safe environment, thus setting favorable conditions for change and continuous improvement.

Appendix A

Detailed descriptions of the methods used in this study are provided in the Methods and Procedures Report (Wilcox et al., 2014). Here we provide a brief overview of the types of data collected at Bay City, including interviews, focus groups, and observations with these educators. In addition, we collected supporting documentary evidence and conducted a climate survey (see Appendix B).

Table 1. Data Collected

Educators	No of Data collection points
District Administrators	
Superintendent	1
Assistant Superintendent	1
Directors of Assessment	1
Others	3
School Administrators	
Principals	1
Assistant Principals	1
Others	3
Support staff	
School psychologist	1
Others	3
Teachers	
Grade 3	2
Grade 4	2
Grade 5	3
Others	2
Teacher Aides	1
Specialists	
Special education	1
Others	1
TOTAL	**27**

Appendix B

The school climate survey was designed to explore how the school's personnel feel about several topics related to the quality of school life and character. The survey was distributed electronically to all staff members, including instructional staff, administrators, and support staff, prior to the visit. A total of 25 responses (approximately 50% response rate) were received. To keep responses anonymous, identifying information was not collected. School personnel were asked to respond to a series of statements about their perceptions of the school's principal, their

beliefs about student behavior at this school, their beliefs about student learning and engagement, and their beliefs about school climate and respect. They were asked to respond on a 4-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree). Responses are reported in aggregate form, as a percentage of total responses, in Table 2, and summarized below.

Attitudes and Beliefs about the Principal (Part A). Overall, respondents were overwhelmingly positive in their responses about the principal. All (100%) of respondents reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements about the principal. Highlights include: Staff reported that the "principal of Bay City supports and encourages staff members" (76% strongly agreeing) and that "they in turn support and respect her/him" (76% strongly agreeing). Additionally, the majority (68%) strongly agreed that "the principal sets priorities and makes sure plans are followed through."

Attitudes and Beliefs about Student Behavior (Part B). Most respondents saw their student behavior positively. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed that "the principal enforces student conduct rules," 76% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Additionally, 52% of respondents strongly agreed that "school staff consistently enforce student behavior rules," and 84% strongly agreed that "the principal supports behavior enforcement." Respondents also expressed positive beliefs that "students at the school respect and respond to adults"; 92% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

Attitudes and Beliefs about Engagement with Learning (Part C). Respondents were also very positive in their responses about the student learning. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed that "students are actively engaged in learning at school," all (100%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Additionally, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I believe all students can learn." All responders agreed or strongly agreed that it was "part of their responsibility to help all students learn and achieve at this school," with 88% strongly agreeing.

Respondents' Attitudes and Beliefs about School Climate and Respect (Part D). Almost all respondents were positive in their perceptions about cooperative work and mutually respectful relationships within the school. All respondents (100%) reported agreement (Strongly Agree or Agree) with statements about "feeling accepted and respected by other staff members" and that "staff members respect one another and interact in positive ways." Additionally, 100% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "staff members work cooperatively." Respondents generally disagreed with a statement (67% disagreed or strongly disagreed) about "receiving a great deal of support from parents."

Table 2: Staff Beliefs

Staff members were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A. Responses concerning the principal				
Overall, the principal consistently supports and encourages staff members.	76%	24%	---	---
The majority of staff members respects and supports the	76%	24%	---	---

principal.			---	---
The principal sets priorities, makes plans, and sees that plans are carried out.	68%	32%	---	---
The principal communicates to the staff what kind of school he or she wants.	64%	36%	---	---
B. Responses concerning student conduct				
My principal enforces school rules for student conduct.	76%	24%	---	---
My principal backs me up when I address student behavior.	84%	16%	---	---
Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by staff in this school.	52%	48%	---	---
Overall, the students at my school respect and respond to adults.	16%	76%	8%	---
C. Responses concerning student engagement & learning				
Overall, our students are actively engaged in learning while at school.	24%	76%	---	---
I believe all students can learn.	72%	28%	---	---
I am certain I am making a difference in the lives of the students attending this school.	52%	44%	---	---
I feel it is part of my responsibility to help all students learn and achieve at this school.	88%	12%	---	---
D. Responses concerning school climate & respect				
I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work that I do.	8%	25%	42%	25%
Staff members routinely cooperate and work together at this school.	76%	24%	---	---
I feel accepted and respected by most staff members.	64%	36%	---	---
I feel it is part of my responsibility to help students treat each other respectfully.	76%	24%	---	---
Overall, students respect each other and interact in positive ways.	---	76%	20%	---
Overall, school staff members respect each other and interact in positive ways.	76%	24%	---	---

References

Lawson, H.A, Wilcox, K.C., Schiller, K.S., Durand, F., Zuckerman, S.J., Gregory, K., & Angelis, J (2014). Conceptual Framing and Review of Literature Related to the Odds-Beating Elementary School Cross-Case Report. A report for the New York State Education Department as part of the School Improvement Study. University at Albany, State University of New York.

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