

Promising Practices: Preparing Critical Needs Students for College or Career

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Case Study: Alfred-Almond Junior-Senior High School

The more barriers you put between yourself in a leadership position and the students, the farther you are removed from what is truly important. - principal

School Context

For anyone driving down County Route 21 in New York’s southern tier, it would be hard to miss the expansive Tudor brick structure that is home to the Alfred-Almond Central School District. The main building, which houses the Junior-Senior High School, was built following a consolidation effort in the late 1930s. During those Great Depression years, the project was a tough sell to taxpayers and required agreement across six townships. According to historical records, “[K]ey people in the communities rallied to convince taxpayers . . . to maintain somewhere within itself, a suitable school for its children . . . with the same educational advantages as those from regions of greater wealth.”¹ With details such as wide hallways adorned by Italian terrazzo floors and chandeliers in the cathedral-ceilinged library, the building evokes pride and respect. As one teacher put it, “I have people tell me when they walk in this building they feel smart.”



The district is situated between the towns of Alfred and Almond, with the former home to Alfred University and Alfred State College. Being in the backyard of these institutions of higher education lends Alfred-Almond a reputation that it serves all the “smart kids,” but according to a number of teachers “that’s a misconception.” Educators generally concede that being in close proximity to those colleges “does pull us towards a higher level of education,” said a teacher. Nevertheless, as the superintendent explained, the community has changed over the years, with rising numbers of students growing up in poverty, and more transience:

So when I was a secondary principal here twenty years ago, our free and reduced lunch count was between 12 and 15 percent. We had a huge amount of students who came to us from Alfred University and Alfred State College—offspring of professors. . . . Now 20 years later we are 42 percent free and reduced lunch. We have a very changed student body. We have a very changed community.

In this “changed community,” district and school leaders and staff strive to maintain high expectations for themselves and their students, paying explicit attention to sustaining that “small community mindset” that entails “caring for each other,” said teachers.

¹ Almond Historical Society Newsletter, Oct/Nov/Dec 2003.

School Selection Criteria

Alfred-Almond Junior-Senior High School met the criteria of “odds beating” in this studyⁱ because the difference between expected graduation rates for students entering 9th grade in 2010, 2011, and 2012 who are disadvantaged economically exceeded the average performance for similar students across the state. The difference between the actual and expected graduation rates were standardized to calculate the z-scoreⁱ. With an overall z-score of 1.28, Alfred-Almond Junior-Senior High School is distinctive for exceeding expected performance on multiple measures of graduation across three cohorts of students who are economically disadvantaged.

Student Demographics 2016-17: Alfred-Almond Jr-Sr High School, Alfred-Almond CSD

	Alfred-Almond Jr.-Sr. High School	Alfred-Almond Central School District	New York State
Grades Served	7-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	298	612	2,629,970
Economically Disadvantaged	42%	43%	55%
English Language Learners	-	-	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
African-American	0%	0%	17%
Hispanic/Latino	1%	1%	26%
White	95%	93%	44%
Multiracial	1%	2%	2%
Other	4%	4%	10%

Demographic data are from the New York State report cards for 2016-17 (<https://data.nysed.gov/>).

This case study reports how district and school leaders, teachers, and support staff have approached preparing their students for college or career, with the next section highlighting those aspects of the district and school that were identified as being most salient to their odds-beating student graduation rates. An Appendix to this report shares the results of a survey of school staff that explored their perceptions of the overall quality of school life and relationships within the school and with the community. Those with instructional responsibilities also reported on their instructional practices.

Highlights

Balancing Tradition and Innovation as the Pride of the Community

From the hiring of former students into the faculty to a “very strong alumni association,” the district’s success depends and builds on its reputation for being a place that “brings out good kids,” said the principal. It is a place where educators hold a shared responsibility for upholding their reputation as the pride of the community. A teacher explained,

I do feel like there is a sort of sense of pride in this school. I’ve lived here my whole life, and a lot of the people that I talk to are proud to be associated with this school. So, there is this sense of maintaining that.

Administrators and teachers do not rest on their reputation to pave their way forward, however. Educator after educator echoed concerns about rising poverty and mental health issues in their community and spoke of balancing pride with the humility to address challenges head on. Therefore, they attempt to balance upholding traditions that have made them the pride of the community with the expectations, as one district leader put it, to “change” their “game up” and innovate.

Reciprocating Respect of and for Everyone

Respect is seen as an important part of the Alfred-Almond tradition. As the principal, a former special education teacher, remarked, “When I came here back 27 years ago, you felt that everyone—all of the teachers, the faculty, and staff—had a high regard for respect.” Importantly, maintaining high expectations for respect is not seen as a one-way street. Instead, an explicit focus on developing adolescents’ abilities to self-regulate is seen as feeding how students perceive expectations of their peers and adults with whom they interact in and outside of school:

They [teachers] give respect, and they expect respect. We tend to work with a culture of “We’re going to give you respect and we’re going to expect it back, and we are going to have conversations with you [students] when we see that that’s not happening.” But we are looking for that level of independence and being able to kind of govern ourselves and work together, and that goes hand in hand with high expectations. - principal

A teacher reported, “I think our kids have high expectations of themselves. We set high expectations and they want them.” These expectations extend beyond administrators and teachers to family members, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers, who are also expected to be respected and respectful. A parent affirmed that educators walk their own talk with regard to mutual respect and that in her experience, if a parent reached out with an issue, “You will always be rewarded with being listened to or heard.”

Preparing Every Child for Life

As mentioned earlier, while Alfred-Almond serves a relatively homogeneous population of students, many of them from middle- and upper-class homes, they also serve a growing number of students growing up in poverty. These students and their families bring a wide variety of ideas and ideals about what is valuable in a high school education. One parent explained that since classes are “becoming a little bit smaller,” the schedule of courses available for college-bound students isn’t optimal. However, despite the limitations of serving in a small rural school, Alfred-Almond educators impart the belief that success is different for each and every child and strive to offer a number of different pathways for “preparing them [all students] for life,” noted a school leader. As part of their effort to provide every child with opportunities to meet her or his potential and contribute to society in some way, they encourage all students to take at least one college preparatory class and offer financial assistance for students interested in the vocational options at Alfred State College (part of the State University of New York) in specializations such as welding. They also have partnered with other colleges in their region to offer a number of courses online.

A Closer Look

These highlights are evident throughout the five dimensions that frame the study of which this case is one part. The sections below expand on each of these findings within the context of the study's framework.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Keeping Expectations High with a Compassionate Twist

With a commitment to achieving “what the community demands of our kids,” said the superintendent, Alfred-Almond educators have paid explicit attention to not lowering expectations. Rather, he explained,

We have not changed what our expectations and what our standards are. Just like the rest of New York State, we've been hit with a larger degree of poverty and homelessness and mental health issues; but we've maintained those standards, and we have really attempted in doing so to understand each and every one of our students. We have done great work here in terms of educating the whole faculty . . . from our bus drivers and custodians right through our board members and our teachers in terms of poverty.

The rising numbers of students living in poverty, as well as the increase in the number of reported mental health issues among Alfred-Almond students, has prompted educators to take action in terms of better understanding and adapting to their students' needs. Poverty simulation workshops, for example, have served as a powerful source of professional development influencing how administrators, teachers, and support staff are approaching academic goal setting, the curriculum, and a number of school policies and practices. A notable adjustment relates to policies and practices related to tardiness and absenteeism. The principal explained that part of keeping expectations high for kids also involves keeping expectations high for adults (including clerical staff) to be compassionate with them and focus on helping them succeed.

When a student . . . shows up in the morning late . . . rather than [saying], “You're late again,” . . . it can be, “I'm so glad to see you,” because we have no idea what is going on in their world that maybe causes them to be late; and rather than judging when they don't have all of their belongings, we need to just have prepared classrooms where kids can simply get up and go get something, and we don't have dialogue about why you're missing your paper or your book again.

Tailoring Curriculum, Policies, and Practices to Students' Needs

The professional development, the principal says, has “prompted a lot of the dialogue and then ensuing activities for us to put ourselves in the shoes of those families [challenged by poverty] and of those students.” It is these kinds of professional development opportunities, she adds, that help district and school leaders and teachers tailor the curriculum as well as policies and practices to what is in the best interests of their students. She explained,

And then that [tailoring curriculum] goes even further to changing some of our practices; and that really goes hand in hand with teachers looking at things like our grading practices and our homework policies. And, again, these are things that we hear everywhere, but we're really seeing how it's hit home, because we can now look at it and think, "You know, you have a certain homework policy and [if] it's going to only benefit a certain portion of your students, then that's really not in the best interest of all students."

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

Distributing Leadership and Preserving Relationships

Teachers and support staff described an "open door policy," with any combination of the superintendent, principal, other teachers, teaching assistants, and counselors providing feedback and instructional support as needed. Ultimately, whatever adjustments are made through these communications and collaborations are expected to be driven by students' needs. To make this approach work, the leadership structure is not hierarchical but instead distributed, with the superintendent and principal setting an expectation that anyone and everyone can and needs to be a leader. A special education teacher explained how this leadership culture has impacted her:

So I just always felt like I had a big group of cheerleaders, that even if I was a little hesitant to move out of my comfort zone . . . their [the superintendent's and principal's] door is always open.

To foster an environment where staff want to knock on that door, the superintendent spoke to the importance of having "open" relationships and also to having sometimes difficult discussions that don't erode relationships. He explained,

You have to be able to have the strength to have an open relationship and to sit down and say, "No, you're wrong on this. You know this is why we have to do these things," and understand that if we have that discussion, great. That's a professional discussion.

In such an environment, where everyone is expected to be contributing to meeting students' needs, teachers are given and take opportunities to work together to problem solve. For instance, a number of teachers have contributed to piloting and sharing lessons learned about the use of new technologies in their classrooms through organized efforts such as their "Breakfast Club" or through informal mentoring of other teachers and staff.

Fostering a Learning Organization

While Alfred-Almond is certainly not without challenges to maintaining their reputation as the pride of the community, the school exhibits a number of qualities of a learning organization ready to tackle those challenges in the here and now and in the future. These include a shared desire to think expansively about what is best for their students and to embrace learning together. As a district leader who is both a teacher as well as a data coordinator reported,

I've shared this role in other districts, and what they really do well here is work together. Here, teachers are not prideful. Their doors are open and they want to reach out.

To foster professional learning, administrators, teachers and support staff report, they have never been denied support through formal or informal mentoring or a professional development opportunity. A school counselor shared,

I think as a whole this district is committed to professional development and growing—just growing in areas that people feel they need more support in.

Like expectations for reciprocal respect discussed earlier, Alfred-Almond educators also exhibited the expectation for reciprocal learning: students as well as adults being encouraged to think expansively and work together to support each individual's growth. As the superintendent put it, "The best educators I have ever known change and evolve and are always doing different things."

Building Their Future from Within

Despite teacher shortages in certain content areas and specializations in rural schools across New York State, expectations are high at Alfred-Almond for the hiring and retention of teachers who hold promise for life-long learning and long-term contributions to the school and district. As the superintendent explained when describing the qualities he looks for in a teacher,

We want that open mind. We want those individuals to always be wanting to learn themselves and evolve as teachers.

To encourage them to stay and grow, Alfred-Almond educators are offered varied leadership opportunities and opportunities to work with different age groups and in different capacities. For example, a number of teachers reported having started teaching at one grade level and then filling a need identified in another grade but feeling supported to fluidly fill that role. Others talked about their role as teachers shifting into a leadership role, be it from teacher to CSE (Committee on Special Education) chair, or from teacher to principal or superintendent or chief information officer.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Technology to Support -- Not Replace -- High-Quality Instruction

When asked about what instruction is expected to look like at Alfred-Almond, leaders used words like "passion," "interest," "engagement," and "interaction." Having the right technologies and, most importantly, teachers who want to and can use the technologies well are priorities that align to their mission to stay innovative in their teaching. To this end the school has become a G-SUITE (Google) school, and all students, K-12, have a Chromebook assigned to them. To support technology integration, a full-time technology coordinator was hired from within the teaching ranks, and her roles and responsibilities include "know[ing] the curriculum and what the

teacher needs are.” As one leader explained, “We want to enhance the learning process, and that’s what technology does.” In addition to this support, teachers are engaged in the decision-making process about what technologies to utilize and have opportunities to pilot new technologies as part of the “Breakfast Club” mentioned above. These teachers work with the technology coordinator to try new technologies, then present the results to the school board and faculty. The piloting of new technologies allows for careful monitoring of what was described as “ease of use” by the technology coordinator. In this way, reluctant students *and* teachers are more apt to find success and comfort in their growing knowledge of technological tools.

While some teachers discussed their reluctance to use certain technologies in lieu of more traditional tools, the district allows for flexibility in this regard. One teacher shared that as long as he continues to grow in his instruction, the extent of technology he uses is not dictated:

I can really say I feel like I do what works for me, to the extent that I need to do it. I’m always encouraged to try new things and do more. . . . If I can latch onto a small piece of Google Classroom, then at least I’m giving them [students] digital announcements or I’m doing some piece of that initiative, I think that administratively we’re happy with that as a way of, “I’m a teacher. I’m making progress. I’m trying something new. I’m learning.”

In addition to the technologies used for instruction, technologies are used for assessment and feedback purposes as well. Providing meaningful feedback is a schoolwide initiative, and technology facilitates that feedback being, in the words of teachers, “real time” and “immediate.” This immediate feedback is seen as helping keep students engaged and as a “game changer” for all students, affording each student regardless of ability an opportunity to participate in the classroom. Special education and AIS (Academic Intervention Services) teachers discussed technology as a way to improve the independence levels of their students and ensure that those students have opportunities to participate when they might not otherwise have done so.

Finally, with a concern for helping their students navigate technology use responsibly, the district has taken up a cyber citizenship focus. A leader explained what cyber citizenship is and why it’s important:

It’s being a good citizen online: How do you speak online? How do you connect online? Who do you connect with online? Who don’t you connect with online? And what sorts of things are appropriate for a student to do online? And then, of course, you teach them what different sites do and how they’re meaningful.

Seeing a growing need for these kinds of meaningful discussions and activities about cyber citizenship in the classroom, Alfred-Almond educators are working to develop a formal curriculum in this area -- further evidence of their willingness to stay current and innovate.

Teachers Changing Their Game Up and Staying Connected

A number of teachers mentioned changing their instructional approaches to be more intentionally focused on developing students’ abilities to construct knowledge rather than act as passive learners. As one explained,

I'm finding myself making my class more student centered, more constructivist, shifting the learning onto them and less of me just giving it to them. It's a scary thing to do, but there's so much research out there that says they'll learn more by doing and working with others and talking to each other.

Adapting instructional practices in order to keep students engaged and active is seen as requiring a “dynamic classroom . . . where you’re moving and transitioning,” explained a teacher, and several teachers mentioned using inquiry-based lessons and a lot of encouragement to do this. One teacher provided an example of her work coteaching in a math classroom:

Math can be hard because not all students love math. And they feel like they can't be math kiddos and so we worked really hard on making them highly engaged -- making sure that they were up and moving around the room, making sure that they were really involved so that there wasn't that opportunity to be passive and sit back and not really pay attention. And we needed them to see they were making progress and that they were understanding concepts and there weren't math people and not-math people. There were learners, and we're all learners, and we're all moving from whatever step to the next step.

Notably, fostering connections with students is seen as imperative for this approach to work and should not be happening just in the classroom, but outside of it as well. According to a teacher, “When I see certain kids that want to be invisible in class, I call them by name in the hallway or, you know, I directly interact with them.”

Inclusion Programs and Differentiated Practices

The Special Education program at Alfred-Almond is clear in its standards and expectations to level the playing field for all students. Classroom instruction is expected to be differentiated, and a coteaching model is used across grade levels and subject areas. According to teachers’ reports, students feel comfortable with coming to their special education teachers for extra help, often filling their rooms until five o’clock; and they seek out help from anyone, whether or not they are on a teacher’s case load list. An AIS teacher said, “Even though they are not our kids . . . they still feel comfortable enough to come in and ask for that extra assistance because we are teachers in their classrooms.” Special education and AIS teachers described their teaching as “different on a different day” and involving constant “reevaluating,” and because they use an inclusion model, they said, these approaches benefit all students. According to one special education teacher, “You tend to take what you know and what you’re using for your own students and make it for everybody.” In this way, no student is singled out or denied differentiated instruction. As one AIS teacher explained, “Eighty percent of our interventions are provided in the classroom through coteaching.” In addition, for high-needs students, a self-contained classroom on site has been created that means they no longer have to travel on long bus rides to receive services outside of the district. These Alfred-Almond services are also offered to students from neighboring districts.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

A School Climate Facilitating Data Use to Improve Instruction

As discussed earlier a number of technological tools are in use at Alfred-Almond that assist with monitoring student achievement. What makes Alfred-Almond different is not so much what technologies they have for data capture and use but the environment within which it is used. The climate is one in which data review is seen as part of everyday work. “It’s an embedded kind of thing,” explained a district leader, and expected to be used to guide instruction on an ongoing basis. In this context, even the much-maligned APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review) process (mandated by the state) was looked at in a positive light. In an environment where relationships are paramount and teachers can rely on reciprocal trust with school and district leaders, evaluations can be looked at as a learning opportunity. As the principal expressed it, “What it [the APPR system] did for many of us was it made us all examine what is good teaching.”

Drilling deeply into data to identify where individual students might not be hitting their targets, then, is about the students, not about what is potentially a failure among educators. The superintendent explained his perspective on the learning opportunities that data review offers in the service of students:

You know, we learn from what we didn’t do correctly, which is why data is so important. What about this group right here, can we shift them?

Assessment Is Formal and Informal, Rigorous and Personal

Just as instructional practices have been switched up, so too have classroom assessment practices. Alfred-Almond educators reported relying upon multiple formative and summative assessments and ongoing item analysis that at any given time can help them identify weaknesses and make changes for different students. A teacher explained that they engage in “finding the lessons that are appropriate that go along with that actual standard that we feel they’re not doing well on” based on item analysis, and then they use this information to modify or eliminate ineffective lessons altogether.

Additionally, in an effort to up the ante in terms of rigor but still maintain a personalized approach, teachers have collectively adjusted how they weight different assignments and assessments. For instance, while many students are, in the words of one teacher, “very compliant,” and “they’ll do their homework, for the most part, and have it ready,” the relatively heavy weighting of homework was identified as disadvantaging some students (see discussion earlier on poverty simulation professional development) and not a particularly rigorous measure of knowledge or skill. A teacher explained how they adjusted their assessment system accordingly:

So not grading them as heavily on that piece [homework], but really weighting their assessments, their formal assessments, much higher so we know what they actually know, rather than how compliant and how willing they are just to do their homework.

In addition to such collective decisions to adjust their assessment practices, teachers also relayed the import of personalized and frequent feedback, even though it is time consuming. As one teacher explained,

I've been doing a lot more formative checks, and I have been trying to adopt this idea that you give them [students] multiple practices before you grade them. So, in my past I would give them a homework assignment after instructing on the concept, then I'd grade that homework, but that's really not fair. You really should give them a couple of chances to learn it and make mistakes and then you grade it after the third time, which is very hard because of the time it takes.

Recognitions, Interventions and Adjustments

Nurturing Respect and Independence

While Alfred-Almond has been recognized for success in terms of “graduation, Regents (New York State Assessment) scores, where kids are going to college, and where they’re going to work,” the superintendent explained, equally, and perhaps most important, are “the things we hear, you know, whether it be from parents or business owners: ‘You know, your kids are great! They’re on time. They’re respectful.’” District and school leaders and teachers expressed recognizing the importance of nurturing among their students’ respectfulness and growing independence. As mentioned earlier, nurturing respect and independence is understood as reciprocal: Adults are expected to be respectful to students, and that requires engaging with them and being attentive to their unique circumstances and needs, explained the principal:

When the bell rings all teachers are expected to be at their doors, just greeting kids, talking to them. It's going to let you know which kiddos maybe look sad, maybe who's cursing in the hallways that needs to be attended to and is somebody missing that we are looking for? So, it's a small piece, but it's the pieces like that that kind of promote the overall culture and bring out good kids. And if we're doing it, the kids answer back, you know, with a “Good morning.” We expect your head up and you're answering back.

These expectations for respectfulness balanced with independence require measured flexibility on the part of school staff. Whether allowing a student to study in the hallway because it was just quieter for her (as the research team observed) or greeting students with a welcome instead of a reprimand if late for school, Alfred-Almond is a place, in the words of one parent, where “appreciation for people’s differences” and “morals” are “very valued.”

Supporting Swift and Evidence-Based Interventions

As one school staff member remarked, “I feel like there are more kiddos in crisis than I remember there being in the past.” A school leader explained that educators at Alfred-Almond reap the benefits of a data system that they relatively frequently update, saying, “We don’t expect that they [teachers] would wait to the end of a 10-week marking period and put data in,” adding that being a relatively small school they are able to swiftly pull together teams of people to intervene if a student is struggling emotionally, socially, or academically. In addition, newer

teachers are given professional development on progress monitoring, are given extra planning time as they do their progress monitoring reports, and are given support from more veteran teachers:

For all of our new teachers, they are going to put all their progress notes in [the data system]. I'm going to review all of them and then we're going to talk about what needs to change before they print and send them home to parents so that whatever they put is really measurable. Are they using the right resources? - district leader

Therefore, whether a child is in foster care, growing up in a household where there is substance abuse, or is challenged by a disability like autism, Alfred-Almond offers the benefits of a relatively small community of educators who act swiftly and with a variety of sources of information to intervene and adjust to meet their needs.

In a Nutshell

Alfred- Almond Junior-Senior High School evokes community pride based on a long tradition of producing good outcomes for “good kids.” With a mission to keep expectations high, educators nurture students’ independence. Alfred-Almond’s students benefit from a staff who overall express being well supported by exceptional leaders and ample mentoring and professional development opportunities that develop their competencies in leading and teaching. This occurs within a culture where respect is highly valued and seen as reciprocal among adults who work in the district, community members, families, and children.

Alfred-Almond Junior-Senior High School
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¹This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Know Your Schools~for NY Kids since 2005. In 2017-18, research teams investigated 10 high schools. Three of these schools were typically-performing (with graduation rates as predicted for the student population served) and the remainder were odds-beating schools (with graduation rates above-predicted for the student population served). For the purposes of this study, expected graduation rates were estimated using regression analysis for two types of outcomes – proportions of cohorts earning any Regents diploma and proportions of cohorts receiving an Advanced Regents diploma – using three demographic characteristics – proportions of students who are classified as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, and either African-American or Latino/Hispanic. These estimates were calculated for three successive cohorts of 9th graders – 2010, 2011 and 2012 – with separate analyses for all students and four subgroups – economically disadvantaged, English language learners, African-American, and Latino/Hispanics. For each of the 30 analyses, gaps between actual and expected rates were standardized to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1 (i.e., z-score) before calculating an overall actual-expected gap by averaging these z-scores. Next, purposive sampling was used to reflect geographic and community variation around the state, with equal representation of rural, suburban and urban locales. Researchers used site-based interviews of teachers, support staff, and administrators, as well as analyses of supportive documentation in all schools. Results of the cross-site analysis and details regarding the project’s other studies, staff, and publications can be found at www.albany.edu/nykids.

Appendix. Survey Results

Summary of Findings

The school culture survey was designed to explore how staff members perceive the quality of school life, their attitudes about cultural diversity, and relationships between members of the school community. Those with instructional responsibilities also reported on their instructional practices. The survey was distributed electronically to all staff members prior to the visit and remained open for three weeks. A total of 20 responses were received for a total response rate of 45%. Fifteen respondents indicated they have instructional responsibilities in their current position.

To keep responses anonymous, identifying information was not collected. School personnel were asked to respond to a series of statements about their perceptions about the school environment, their beliefs and values regarding cultural diversity and engagement, and their instructional practices and responsiveness of these practices to diverse students.

Questions about culture asked participants to respond on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Instructional practices questions asked participants to respond on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from every day or almost every day to rarely or never. Responses are reported in the aggregate, as a percentage of total responses for each question, in Tables 1, 2, and 3, each following a brief summary.

Table 1. School Culture Inventory

Overall, respondents were overwhelmingly positive in their responses about the school culture.

Staff-School Leadership Interactions: All respondents (100%) reported that the principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff members. All staff members (100%) also indicated they can talk with their principal when they are concerned about a student and that the principal and leaders back up staff members when addressing student behavior.

Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions: All respondents (100%) reported that staff members have strong ties to the local community. Most (95%) stated that they receive a great deal of support from families for their work and that parents/legal guardians who differ in ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds are involved in some school activities/programs. A small percentage (5%) reported difficulties communicating with students' families. Regarding parents' educational aspirations, all staff members (100%) believed that parents/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.

Staff-Staff Interactions: All staff members (100%) reported working together to ensure that the needs of students are met as well as feeling accepted and respected by most staff members.

Staff-Student Interactions: All staff members (100%) indicated that they feel responsible for helping all students learn and succeed and for teaching students to treat each other respectfully.

Additionally, every respondent reported that they believe students can learn, that they are responsible for engaging students in school and learning, and that they try to find help for students encountering difficulties at home or in school. Most respondents (95%) reported regularly discussing with students their plans after high school.

Student-Student Interactions: All staff members (100%) reported that students respect classmates who excel academically. No respondents (0%) reported that fights between groups of students of different backgrounds are a serious problem at the school. However, half of respondents (50%) reported that students generally hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices: All staff members (100%) reported looking forward to learning about the traditions, customs, and holidays of others, as well as looking for opportunities to learn how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language and socioeconomic backgrounds. Also, all staff members (100%) reported that students and staff of different backgrounds treat each other with respect. No staff members (0%) reported that academic expectations are low for students of varying backgrounds. Most staff members (90%) reported feeling prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Table 1: School Culture Inventory

Staff members were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:	Strongly Agree, Agree, or Somewhat Agree	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, or Somewhat Disagree
<i>Staff-School Leadership Interactions</i>		
The principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff members of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	100%	0%
The principal and other leaders back up staff members when addressing student behavior problems.	100%	0%
I can talk with my principal(s) when I am concerned about a student.	100%	0%
<i>Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions</i>		
Staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community.	100%	0%
Most parents/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.	100%	0%
Most parents/legal guardians of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are involved in some school activities and programs.	95%	5%
I have difficulties communicating with students' families.	5%	95%
I receive a great deal of support from students' families for the work I do.	95%	5%
<i>Staff-Staff Interactions</i>		
Staff members work together to ensure that all students are in school every day ready to learn.	100%	0%
I feel accepted and respected by most staff members.	100%	0%
<i>Staff-Student Interactions</i>		
I feel responsible for helping all students learn and succeed in school.	100%	0%
I feel responsible for helping all students learn to treat each other respectfully.	100%	0%

I feel responsible for engaging all students in school and learning.	100%	0%
I believe that all students can learn.	100%	0%
Most students are actively engaged in learning while at school.	95%	5%
I try to find help for any student encountering difficulties at home or in school.	100%	0%
I regularly discuss with students their plans after high school.	95%	5%
I am certain that I am making a difference in the lives of students at this school.	100%	0%
<i>Student-Student Interactions</i>		
Outside of classrooms, students generally hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	50%	50%
Fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are a serious problem in this school.	0%	100%
Most students respect classmates who excel academically.	100%	0%
<i>Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices</i>		
I look forward to learning about others' traditions, customs, and holidays.	100%	0%
I enjoy sharing my cultural and ethnic heritage with others at my school.	90%	10%
Students and staff frequently share aspects of their backgrounds such as their traditional food, clothing, art and/or music.	95%	5%
Students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds treat each other with respect.	100%	0%
Students and staff at this school value each other's distinctive ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic differences.	95%	5%
I feel prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	90%	10%
I look for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	100%	0%
Students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need.	90%	10%
Academic expectations are low for some students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	0%	100%

Table 2. Teacher Interactions about Instruction

The most common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported occurring at least once per week include: 1) (67%): discussing students with academic difficulties; 2) (60%): sharing take-aways from teaching experiences; and 3) (53%): discussing how to teach a particular topic, collaborating in planning and preparing instructional materials, and working together to try out new ideas for engaging students.

Among the least common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported almost never or never using include: 1) (40%): hosting fellow teachers in their classroom for learning new strategies or providing feedback; 2) (33%): visiting the classroom of a fellow teacher for learning new strategies or providing feedback; and 3) (13%): collaborating in planning and preparing instructional practices and analyzing or reviewing student data.

Table 2: Teacher Interactions

Teachers were asked how frequently they had the following interactions with other teachers, including instructional coaches, in this school:	Every day to 1-2 days per week	1-2 days a month to every 1-2 months	Almost never or never
Discuss how to teach a particular topic.	53%	40%	7%
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials.	53%	34%	13%
Share what I have learned about my teaching experiences.	60%	33%	7%
Visit another classroom to learn more about or provide feedback on teaching.	14%	53%	33%
Another teacher visits my classroom to learn new strategies or to provide feedback on my teaching.	13%	47%	40%
Analyze or review student data.	20%	67%	13%
Work together to try out new ideas for engaging students.	53%	40%	7%
Participate in professional development.	7%	93%	0%
Practice new skills.	33%	67%	0%
Discuss student with academic difficulties.	67%	33%	0%
Share strategies for communicating with students' families.	33%	60%	7%

Table 3. Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Some instructional staff members (29%) reported altering the content of lessons, tasks, or assessments to reflect diversity in students' ethnic, cultural, language, or socioeconomic backgrounds 3-5 days per week, while 21% reported they rarely or never alter their practices. Just over a third of respondents (36%) reported purposely placing students in work groups with peers who are different ethnically, culturally, or socioeconomically, or who speak other languages 3-5 days per week; the same percentage (36%) reported rarely or never engaging in this practice.

Table 3: Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Frequency with which staff:	3-5 days per week	1-2 days per week or every few weeks	Rarely or Never
Alter lesson's content, tasks, or assessments to take into account students' different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	29%	50%	21%
Purposely have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	36%	28%	36%