Promising Practices: Preparing Critical Needs Students for College or Career

Kathryn Schiller, Francesca Durand, Catherine Kramer, and Eva Jones October 2017

Case Study: Crown Point Central School

Success is gained through cooperation. Without us having that basis of everyone having the same vision, it would not be attainable. . . . We have group meetings on certain kids that we may see falling off the radar that we know we can help. We have constant communication with parents. . . . We can only do this because we have a great working relationship. Our focus, our vision, is that we want students to be successful. We understand that all students are not traditional students. That is hard in this area because they don't have opportunities like they do in bigger areas. – principal

When asked, "What words come to mind when you describe CPCS?" Crown Point students said.....

School Context

Crown Point Central School is located in rural upstate New York. The district is home to a PK-12 building in the center of town that functions as the hub for community events and activities. Crown Point Central School is a stately, older two-level building with high ceilings, clean wide hallways, and administrative and town offices at the front of the building. Two newer additions to this original structure house the gym, cafeteria, music room, technology room, wood shop, art room, and AIS/resource room. The PK-6 wing is also part of these newer additions. Athletic fields line the back of the school, although the school shares some facilities with a nearby town for certain sports.

The high school day runs from 8:25 am to 2:25 pm, with 35-minute class periods. The school day also extends to include an "activity and remediation period" from 2:25-3:05 pm on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday each week. On Mondays during this period, teachers meet to coordinate lesson plans or discuss student issues. Once a month, this last period is reserved for each staff member to mentor a group of students. Districtwide, there are generally 15-20 students per grade level.

In the late 1990s, Crown Point Central School was designated by New York State as a school in need of improvement due to low performance on state assessments. In response, several long-time employees explained, the leadership at the time worked to stop administrator turnover and implemented a more rigorous curriculum and other support programs to improve school culture and expand student opportunities. This work was supported by a state school improvement grant. The current superintendent and many teachers have worked in the school since that time.

Currently, student scores on the Regents examinations[i] at Crown Point Central School are at or above the state average.

School Selection Criteria

Crown Point High School met the criteria of "odds beating" 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-score. With an overall z-score of 1.53, Crown Point High School is distinctive for exceeding expected performance on multiple measure of graduation across three cohorts of students for those who are economically disadvantaged.

Student Demographics 2016-17: Crown Point Central School, Crown Point Central School District

	Crown Point Central School	New York State
Grades Served	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	260	2,629,970
Economically Disadvantaged	62%	55%
English Language Learners	0%	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution		
African-American/Black	0%	17%
Hispanic/Latino	0%	26%
White	99%	44%
Multiracial	0%	2%
Other	1%	10%

Demographic data are from the state report cards for 2016-17 (https://data.nysed.gov/).

This case study[ii] reports how district and school leaders, teachers, and support staff have approached preparing their students for college or career. The next section highlights those processes and practices that were identified as being most salient to serving these students. An Appendix 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

Access Creates Opportunity

> *As far as diversity and culture [here in Crown Point], it's minimal, but it's maximized by us going places and bringing things to us. We spend a lot of disposable funding on bringing in cultural things that you can't find in Crown Point. . . . The opposite side is that we [also] bring our kids lots of places.* – superintendent.

Like the superintendent, educators interviewed in this district described focusing on providing students as much access as possible to diverse experiences. While Crown Point's geographic location and size create challenges, the educators described seeking opportunities for diverse

cultural experiences that include visits to college campuses, museums, and theaters as well as musical, athletic, and technology events. Participants in this study highlighted that these experiences give their students broader world views and provide them with ideas about future college or career goals.

Vertically Aligned and Horizontally Integrated Curriculum

> *Best practices and practices that we learned through [a national comprehensive design] program are still practices that we use to this day.* – teacher

Beginning with preschool and ending with senior year, students in the Crown Point Central School have access to a vertically aligned curriculum that considers students' needs and progress towards state-level expectations, which are monitored using a schoolwide data system. This curriculum is also integrated horizontally using a common set of best practices that establish clear expectations throughout students' school careers. In addition, teachers integrate their lessons by collaboratively developing cross-subject activities each year.

School Is Family

> *The first word that comes to my mind is family because, really, that is what I think we are: one big family. Everyone is really close and supportive. I have never felt like I was alone at any time on any issue, whether it is an educational issue or a personal issue. The support here is phenomenal.* – teacher

The district was described by most educators as having "a family atmosphere," with their responsibility being to take care of "our kids." Many educators mentioned efforts to provide students with what they need socially and academically regardless of family circumstances. Some students are provided with backpacks of food and winter clothing. The district owns and provides musical instruments so that any student can learn to play one. Similarly, no student is prevented from going on a field trip due to inability to pay. Further, students can receive help with homework or other enrichment activities in the activity and remediation period at the end of the school day.

High Expectations for All

> *We as a staff analyze data and say, "OK, this may be the number that we need to get to but let's set a realistic goal. Where do we think we can get these students or the next class coming in?" I always set [my goals] a little higher, realistically, but a little higher just to know that is where I need to go.* – teacher

Educators expressed that expectations are high for all students in the district. Leaders are credited with creating a culture of high expectations, beginning with adopting a College for Every Student (CFES) program and working with faculty to ensure their instructional practices are aligned across the district. Leaders and other educators reported taking on multiple responsibilities to ensure that everything possible is being done to improve the lives of students and the community. As mentioned above, the school day is organized to provide students with opportunities for remediation or extra help. Each staff member is a "Panther Mentor" to a group of students with which they meet monthly and discuss expectations for social relationships and

behavior, adding to the culture of expecting students to be the best they can be. Educators described setting high expectations for students beginning in preschool and guiding them to graduation from Crown Point Central School.

A Closer Look

The four areas highlighted above – aligned curriculum and instruction, access to experiences and opportunities, a sense of family, and high expectations for all – 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

> *We've made a commitment to make sure that our staff is ready to teach the kids that they are going to get, not just what the teacher is supposed to teach and/or follow the modules and/or whatever. So it is more individualized, and student data drive that.*
>
> – superintendent

Staff members consistently described the goal for all graduates to be successful as lifelong learners and good citizens in their chosen path following high school, whether going to college or entering the workforce.

Alignment of Curriculum across Grade Levels

> *All the teachers and administrators met in the summer to make sure that we were meeting students' needs. They looked at the data, looked at the standards, and looked at the classroom population; . . . together they developed a core set of vocabulary that they will see not only on [grades] 3-8 testing but in high school. So that's how things are implemented here.* – teacher

Leaders and teachers described a system of aligning curriculum vertically to create a consistent schoolwide learning environment that continually builds on students' prior learning. For example, several teachers explained how they discuss grade-level appropriate yet consistent terminology and symbols so that students can more easily see connections between what they have learned and are learning. One English language arts teacher reported taking into consideration what a colleague would be teaching in a later grade when choosing which of the New York State curriculum modules to use: "She does a beautiful job with [Hamlet]," the teacher explained; "I have seen some of her lessons and the products that the kids come up with, and I love Shakespeare, but she's doing a great job." This teacher added that this year she was switching which modules she would be using to better align her lessons with her students' interests. The instructional support staff reported providing connections between grade levels as they move between classrooms to address students' needs.

Integration of Curriculum across Subjects

> *And we incorporated math, design, and art, all kinds of different areas.* – teacher

Teachers reported being expected to collaborate with colleagues on two to three cross-curricular activities for their students each year. One integrative approach observed during the site visit was coordination of activities around Hispanic Heritage Month, which was a schoolwide theme. Announcements at the beginning of the day were made in Spanish. In one hallway, students had created a display in Spanish of famous people. One student wrote on the poster, "¡Crown Point tiene los mejores estudiantes!" Teachers described other project-based collaborations such as exposing students to scientific notation and graphing simultaneously in mathematics and science classes or incorporating measurement, geometry, and art in an Adirondack Furniture course. The superintendent noted that teachers are regularly given time to collaboratively plan these lessons, projects, and activities. Several teachers, however, noted that collaboration on units is more difficult in the high school due to the need to prepare students for the Regents examinations, as well as difficulty in finding time to meet.

Student-Centered Instruction

> *I think that's another highlight of our teaching, that students are the biggest part of their learning, and they have ownership of that and they take pride in that and they enjoy it. As opposed to being taught to, they're more taught with and/or we're taught from them because that's another way to learn where they're at. . . . If you don't actually allow them to be the highlight, then you really are just doing what is in the book or doing a module or functioning.*   – superintendent

Throughout the school, educators consistently expressed that their main priority is ensuring that all students are learning. The leaders stated that they expect all teachers to structure their lessons with: 1) objectives clearly stated and displayed at the beginning of the lesson; 2) a period of direct or whole group instruction; 3) time for guided practice in small groups or individually; 4) debrief; and 5) a summary assessment. Teachers described embedding these engagement strategies and instructional techniques in their lessons. They also reported using a wide variety of daily or weekly assessments of learning and engagement, with the methods for monitoring students' progress varying by subject and grade level. Several teachers reported that they expect students to at least attempt homework assignments, and that they provide feedback using rubrics during the next class. Most of the teachers reported using "little quizzes" to establish students' baseline knowledge and gauge learning during a lesson or over a unit. One teacher described some class sessions where students take turns answering 30 multiple-choice items like "academic kickball" in which everyone has an opportunity to answer at least a few questions. As one teacher explained, students are required to be constantly engaged during a class:

> *I keep them on their toes every single class I have. And based on their abilities to respond to what I am asking, to what they are putting forth for product, it is very easy to identify if a student is having issues.*

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

> *Like [a neighboring larger district] for instance, I was there and [sighs]. . . I felt like there was a lot of ego going on rather than people willing to work together. That was the big difference. I think everyone parks their egos at the door here and there's one main concern and that's the student.*   – pupil support professional

District and school leaders were reported to continually align staffing resources and capacity building efforts to better meet the changing challenges that students encounter. Both teachers and pupil support personnel frequently mentioned that the entire staff – both instructional and support – work as a team and are aware of what each other is doing throughout the building.

Strategic Recruiting and Allocating of Staff Members

> *Multiple hats in a small place is probably more like the whole hat shop. . . . Every day is different but with the system and a goal and drive to have things be good for kids every day. . . . We are very fortunate that we have everybody here wear lots of hats. . . . Here you teach 6 different subjects, so the preparation is crazy big, so [teachers] all do a lot of things too.* – superintendent

Due to the small size of the district, leaders said, priority in recruitment is to hire individuals who are able and willing to fill multiple roles (e.g., more than one type of certification) and whose values align with those of the school. The superintendent, for example, said her title is really "gopher and facilitator" to make sure that students and teachers have what they need to be successful every day. The principal stated that she was excited about a new teacher joining the faculty who will not only be teaching mathematics and business education but also may offer an exercise dance class and is an ethnic minority. "I'm really excited about having some different perspective," she said, "and having our kids experience something that's different than we've ever had."

Staffing priorities are aligned with student needs, according to the leadership. While multi-generations teach and attend the school, some teachers commute several hours a day, and retaining those in hard-to-staff subjects (e.g., math and science) can be a challenge. Leaders described leveraging resources available regionally (e.g., a satellite mental health clinic once a week) whenever possible. However, several staff members interviewed described benefits of "stealing" people from BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) and other agencies to better meet the needs of students. For example, having a full-time school psychologist in the building allows early intervention in classrooms with what one staff member described as "the outside the box kind of stuff." Teachers' aides and other support personnel are assigned where students have either academic and/or behavioral issues, including the high school grades.

Leadership Sets the Course

> *We really have a great administration who really put kids first and always have the kids' best interests at heart, and they really do. . . . Everything is about, How can we help the kids? How can we make them better? How can we make them succeed? How can we help them have fun? It's about the kids.* – teacher

The administration consists of the superintendent and one PK-12 principal. Both leaders have offices at the front of the high school section of the K-12 building. Both leaders stated that their open-door policies ensure that they are available to problem solve, collaborate on issues, and address discipline concerns as needed. Staff members frequently credited the superintendent and

principal with creating a positive school environment focused on student success and continuous improvement. One teacher described the collaborative problem-solving process as follows:

> *If I have an issue, I talk to the regular teachers, my special education peers, my guidance counselors, my principal, the superintendent, the CSE [Committee on Special Education] chair person. I am not afraid to go to any of those people and say I have an issue, I have a problem, you know, what can we do about this? We tend to work together to come up with the best solution we can as a group.*

All faculty and staff interviewed concurred that when they needed something to help with the students, all they needed to do was ask the superintendent and principal and, if it was within reason, the administrators figured out how to make it happen. As one teacher noted, "They simply said, 'Yes. We understand that you need [that].'" The leaders reported regularly realigning resources to meet emerging needs. For example, they assigned an additional adult in a high school math course to quickly deal with emerging behavioral issues.

In addition to building leadership and CSE teams, the district has a College for Every Student (CFES) Leadership Team, and a Student CFES Leadership Team. The leadership teams, educators said, provide opportunities to collaboratively participate in setting goals and helping guide the school. However, educators described how leadership is a fluid concept in this district, with teachers claiming leadership over their own classrooms and everyone feeling comfortable to communicate with and collaborate with those with leadership titles to "make sure kids have what they need" academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

Professional Learning and Improvement Is a Priority

> *And just a reminder, don't forget these kids [those living in poverty] come to school first thing in the morning with a lot on their plate. So, what can you do to help if they are coming in and having a bad day? How can you help them turn it around and be able to participate in and focus on what is happening here? It has been a very interesting presentation that they've been giving us.* – teacher

During the 2017-18 academic year, whole-school professional development is focusing on improving cultural proficiency, particularly understanding more about students challenged by poverty. The quote at the beginning of this section describes one of the early sessions in which consultants provided this training. The consultants will continue visiting the school about once a month to work with the faculty and staff. One staff member described the initial seminar as focused on connecting with students: "One individual person reaching out to a kid, and really that can make a difference," she said. "That can make a world of a difference for a student."

Time is set aside each week for professional learning, with teachers sometimes meeting in grade-level or subject-matter groups, but sometimes all staff members in the school meet together. Teachers described professional learning time as valuable opportunities to exchange strategies for engaging students. In addition, the district established two full days and five half days for in-district professional development, which includes faculty and all support staff members.

The superintendent described how every person is included in making decisions about what types of professional development they want and need. Teachers of every subject spoke of opportunities to attend professional development both in their school building and in external locations. Some teachers highlighted opportunities through their local BOCES (e.g., autism and poverty seminars), nearby institutions of higher education, and national conferences or workshops. Taking graduate courses is one of only two reasons given in the faculty handbook for teachers leaving the building before the "after-school" period ends. One teacher noted that these out-of-district activities provide valuable opportunities to "throw off or steal ideas" from teachers of the same subject at other schools. A pupil support professional described selecting sessions at a professional conference because of the needs of particular students. "That part is pretty cool," she noted, "and knowing what needs might come up in the future and maybe where I have weaknesses." The principal stressed that teachers are expected to bring their knowledge back to share with their colleagues. "If teachers go somewhere and get really great knowledge," she said, "they do share it with their peers."

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

> *The highlight of good teaching is the active learning that you see and the noise that you hear, the accountable talk, the way that kids respond to questioning, and they're the ones doing the questioning, they're doing the exploring.* – superintendent

Crown Point staff members have worked continuously and rigorously to improve their school, stated all those interviewed. They reported both staying true to the principles of best instructional practices and continuously seeking out new ideas and programs to incorporate into their practices and activities to help them better meet students' needs.

America's Choice Guides Instruction

> *The process of being an America's Choice school . . . led to . . . getting one reading and one math curriculum all the way through the elementary. . . . It got kind of the whole staff pulling in the same direction, and I think that's been the biggest difference in our school-- we all have one direction now that we're going in and we tend to be doing better at that.* – teacher

Approximately two decades ago, Crown Point Central School was labeled by the New York State Education Department as a "school in need of improvement" for low student assessment results. School leaders applied for and won a state school improvement grant to work with partners to improve performance on state assessments. Several educators who were involved in the school at the time recalled the faculty and administration working together to choose and adopt the America's Choice Program[1]. This program was designed to help lower-performing schools raise their student performance scores through aligned curriculum materials, professional development for educators, embedded instructional techniques, and the use of data to inform decision making at all levels.

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[1] http://ncee.org/what-we-do/history/americas-choice/

All educators reported that they remain faithful to America's Choice tenets today, which provides stability of expectations and engagement for students. They credit the program for improving student assessment results and helping them to vertically align curriculum and horizontally integrate instructional techniques into the PK-12 classrooms. Teachers described this program as aligning curricula, providing common planning time, and creating consistency. Several educators explained that they have adapted the state's recommended Common Core curriculum modules by incorporating new language and vocabulary but maintaining the same classroom practices. The superintendent described America's Choice as part of the reason they are "consistent and progressing."

College for Every Student Provides Connections

This school goes out of their way to give kids opportunities that large schools don't have. I think maybe because it is a small school, we are able to do that. CFES [College for Every Student] is a super, super program. These kids get to do a lot.

– administrative support staff

The superintendent stated that, complementing America's Choice, a second "prong" guiding the school's instructional program is College for Every Student (CFES)[2], which has the stated goal of "helping K-12 students from low-income rural and urban communities become college and career ready." CFES emphasizes providing students with essential skills, mentoring, and a clear pathway to college and career. Crown Point has been recognized by CFES as "exemplary," and groups of students present at national CFES conferences.

Providing opportunities for students to develop skills essential for being successful after graduation were mentioned by many educators interviewed. One teacher described a senior project in which students compile a portfolio that may include a resume, a spread sheet with the cost of attending college, a presentation on a career that interests them, and a budget for living expenses. At the end of the year students make a 20-minute presentation, for which they dress professionally, to a panel of adults that includes a CFES representative. "That is one of my favorite things that I experience all year long," a teacher said, adding, "The kids really look forward to it." Other teachers described similar activities at all grade levels that promote skills in teamwork, leadership, goal setting, perseverance, agility, organization, and networking.

Early Access to College and Career

I think the importance is that every kid knows there's a possibility of something to continue their education after they graduate from here, and that philosophy starts as young as in Pre-K. . . . If you let us know what you are interested in, we will make sure you are exposed to that. There are kids that are not college material, but those kids can still continue their education, whether it's in a certificate program or whether it's in a mentorship. It's just a philosophy in our building that in order to be successful you need to continually learn, and how you learn is not set in stone. – teacher

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[2] http://www.collegefes.org/

Another CFES component described by educators as implemented widely in the school is providing students with a clear vision of the pathways to college and career. Staff members stated that they expect that all students will have set post-graduation goals, whether college, technical training, work, or the military. To help guide development of these goals, leaders said, the school provides high school students with access to both early college and career training programs.

All students from sixth grade up are afforded the opportunity to make college visits with either the guidance counselor or other staff members. The guidance counselor described playing a large role in setting expectations about the ability to go to college by, for example, displaying pennants from schools attended by Crown Point alumni and publicly celebrating college acceptances, as well as offering counselling and providing information about financial aid and other resources. Dual-credit "bridge" courses are offered with two nearby colleges, which several teachers noted helps reduce the cost of a college degree. One pupil support professional described how these programs change student perspectives, saying,

> *Even those who are not interested are encouraged to go on college visits and do different curriculum that they don't think they can do because it says "college credit" on it. They'll try it. These kids end up changing their minds and going [to college].*

Approximately half the juniors and seniors attend a BOCES career and technical program to begin learning trades, which include cosmetology, natural resource management, health care, and security and law enforcement. The principal explained that the staff realized that students wanted to have real hands-on experiences. Staff members described a variety of efforts to provide students with diverse learning opportunities such as independent studies and access to the art room and technology rooms during the day and after school. The art room and the principal's office were also described by several interviewed as safe spaces where students can go to process social or emotional issues.

Early and Frequent Remediation Keeps Students On-Track

> *We have a remediation period built into our high school schedule. That is a period between 2:25 and 3:05 that allows for students to meet with teachers if they need to make up a test, if they need to correct a test, if they are missing homework, if they didn't understand the lesson.* – principal

Many educators stressed that the school provides frequent and early remediation opportunities for students at risk of falling behind. The 35-minute extension of the school day three days a week allows students who need help to work with faculty on homework or topics that present challenges. Any student who stays can take the second bus to get home. In addition, the research team observed many teachers working with students during their prep periods. Teachers also described allowing students with study hall time to sit in on extra classes and going above and beyond their classroom time to work with students to help them be successful.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

> *A teacher was saying, "[A student] is not coming to class organized. He is not bringing his work. He is not staying after school. It is not a two-week check, so what are we going to do?" It is then identifying that this is not really this kid; what is going on? What are we going to do? We are pretty much on top of it. We communicate.* – principal

As Crown Point is a K-12 building, educators throughout the school system described both formally and informally continually sharing information with each other concerning students' academic progress and social adjustment. A K-12 data system is used to compile this information and make it available to school staff and parents. The purpose of these efforts, staff members reported, is to make sure that every student is receiving the supports needed to be successful.

Early Warning System to Identify Kids Encountering Difficulties

> *The principal came in [to a 7-12 grade meeting] and said, "Quite a few teachers are struggling with this grade level and so let's share out. What's going on? What are you seeing? What instructional strategies are you using that are working or are not with this group? What are you seeing that another teacher is not?" That is another way we come together to share progress, not even just on an individual student, but on a class as a whole.* – teacher

Educators attributed their ability to get to really know every kid in the school to its small size. Many teachers have had students in class for multiple years because they teach subjects at more than one grade level. Teachers reported being aware of their students' attitudes and engagement each day in addition to their long-term progress and goals. The principal credited this familiarity with kids' usual engagement and demeanor with allowing staff members to recognize small changes that may be early signs of difficulties. One teacher explained that the on-line system allows any staff member concerned about a student to see how the student is doing in other courses:

> *I know there may be some students who are struggling in other classes and we teachers try to figure out if this is consistent throughout the building or consistent with others. Hopefully, we have an intervention or a meeting to reach the need of the learner.*

Teachers keep records of students' attendance, assignments completed, and grades in an on-line data system. In addition to quarterly grades, students receive formal five-week reports, which are sent to parents, in addition to "check-ins" every two weeks. One student support professional credited being able to access the data as important for coordinating efforts to help children, saying, "We're all in it together. . . . We know what's going on." In addition to teachers and administrators, parents are also able to log into the system to see their child's attendance record and grades on homework and tests, along with their average course grade at that point.

Using Data for Continuous Improvement

> *We all sit down with interim results and pull like math with math, PK-8, just to see what everybody is teaching to try to find a commonality. When we do our interims, we have to*

do an item analysis, like the question and the standard that was being assessed with that question, so we that can see in third grade they are learning how to multiply and in sixth grade 10% of them are still struggling with that.   – teacher

As part of their commitment to the tenets of the America's Choice program, the superintendent described the district as "continually looking at what we're doing, where we are falling short, where we are doing well, and finding ways to fill those gaps." The principal said that she is responsible for entering state-mandated information into and extracting reports from the regional data warehouse. The reports are shared with the building data team, which includes the subject matter coordinators. The leadership team members described using the summer break for data analysis and curriculum work to set goals, along with determining what kids need help and how to best provide what they need. Teachers added that they also make tweaks as needed during the year. The capacity to write action plans based on student performance was a focus of the school's professional development several years ago, one teacher noted, explaining that she learned, "What does all the data mean and how do you follow up on it?"

Recognitions, Interventions and Adjustments

The School Is a Family

I have often heard it described as a family. Because we are so small, it is hard not to know anybody, so everybody knows everybody by name, usually. There are a lot of hellos in the hallways, even between elementary [and high school students] because our students have to come through this side of the building to get to gym, for example. You see the older students saying hi to the younger students by name even if they are not related.   – teacher

Walking through the halls of Crown Point Central School, the interactions among students and staff in the hallway reflect the constant theme in interviews that they are like a family whose members care for one another's needs, whether child or adult. Quick hugs between students and adults, even when not related, were not uncommon. Several staff members described being touched by the kindness of their colleagues and students when encountering personal difficulties. Further, teachers and administrators stated that they try to remain sensitive to the fact that some students have very difficult challenges outside of school, and they are persistent in their support. For example, they have an unofficial motto of "Every day is a fresh start," meaning that even if a student has a bad day one day, the next day is a new day for that child. The superintendent reported strong relationships with families, who work together with the staff members, who become "part of the family too," when students are encountering difficulties.

The school is the center or hub of the town, several staff members said, adding that they collectively consider one of their responsibilities to be a central force for good in the community. Multiple programs are offered by the school, including student awards, musicals or plays, concerts, and sporting events that are reported to be well attended. Educators described how they make sure all students have their physical, emotional, and social needs met by providing backpacks with food or school supplies, coats or other clothes and shoes, and access to social workers or healthcare. One staff member runs a family literacy program funded through grants that provides reading materials to around 100 adults in the students' families.

In addition, leaders and staff members described striving to build "a sense of pride in the community" by including field trips (often K-12) to local parks, businesses, and towns. This year, students and adults painted brightly colored "kindness rocks" and placed them around the community to be found by community members. They were excited to see pictures of rocks on social media and appearing in places they had not originally been placed.

Mentoring Is Present throughout the District

> *We have small groups; everyone in the building has a small group [of students for the mentoring program]. Sometimes, we work on the values in the PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] program and on leadership; and sometimes we [ask], "What do you do if you notice someone being bullied?" So, each time we meet in small group we all have a conversation about whatever that topic is, or sometimes we read books, sometimes watch a little snippet, or sometimes just have a little project that we do with them. Just promote those positive character values.* – principal

One of the CFES tenets is that every student has a mentor, and many different types of mentoring were mentioned regularly in interviews. Most frequently mentioned is the K-12 "Panther Mentor" program that matches every adult (teacher, administrator, business official, administrative assistant, and teaching assistant) with a group of 5-8 students from multiple grade levels. The mixed-grade groups span Grades K-3, 4-6, or 7-12, with students generally staying together while in each span (e.g., once placed in a group in seventh grade, students stay with that adult and those peers until they graduate). When transitioning between grade-level groupings, students are asked to name three adults with whom they would like to be placed, and they are put with one of them.

The names of the Mentors' students are displayed on their office or classroom doors. "We want [students] to know that this is where they belong," explained one teacher, adding, "It is not just certain groups, these kids need a mentor; these kids need an adult to be able to go to." The groups meet monthly during one of the extended-day periods to discuss positive character values and provide other social or academic supports. Within these groups students also mentor each other about appropriate ways of dealing with problems, behaving, and setting goals, other teachers said. "They're realizing they're not alone with their problem," one teacher explained, "and it seems so much smaller to them when they're done talking about it with … other kids their age."

Similarly, high school seniors are paired as "buddies" with Kindergarteners to provide academic and social supports. Several teachers described the seniors and Kindergarteners giving each other high-fives in the hallway.

In a Nutshell: It's All about Our Kids

> *You need to let your kids know that you care about them and that they come first. They come first before a test. They come first before a lesson. They come first before anything. They're important to us and we are invested in them. You let them know, "Hey, great goal in last night's game. It's good to see you. Did mom have her baby*

yet? What did you name him?" You have to let kids know that you know them, because they know if you know them or not. And if they know that you know them and know that you care about them, they are going to work hard for you, because you are important to them and they know that they are important to you. So, I think that you just need to know your kids. – teacher

Every aspect of Crown Point Central School is clearly centered on the "kids," from how the leadership allocates resources to how teachers deliver their lessons. Teachers confirmed the leaders' claims that they obtain materials or provide access to training needed for students and their teachers to be successful. Teachers described adjusting their curriculum and instruction to engage students in active learning and monitor their progress. All staff interviewed agreed that instructional and support staff are hired and reassigned based on student needs. Time is set aside each week for adults in the building to discuss students' progress to ensure that no child falls through the cracks. All adults in the building have a multi-grade group of students with whom they meet regularly in mentoring sessions. "What's best for kids" was a theme woven throughout the interviews with staff members.

Crown Point Central School
Tara Celotti, Principal
2758 Main Street
Crown Point, NY 12928
tspaulding@cpcsteam.org

Appendix. Survey Results

As part of the study, school personnel were asked to respond to a school culture survey designed to explore how they 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 33 responses from K-12 teachers were received for a total response rate of 66%. Additionally, 21 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

***Staff- School Leadership Interactions*:** All respondents reported that the principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds (100%). Almost all staff members (97%) reported that the principal and other leaders at the school back up staff members when addressing student behavior and that they can talk with the principal when concerned about a student.

Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions: All respondents (100%) reported that staff members have strong ties to the local community and that most school activities and programs involve families with diverse backgrounds. Additionally, most staff members who participated in the survey (82%) also indicated that that they receive a great deal of support for the work they do and that parent/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.

Staff-Staff Interactions: Almost all staff members reported feeling accepted and respected by most staff members (97%), and all staff members reported working together to ensure the needs of students are met (100%).

Staff-Student Interactions: All staff members (100%) reported feeling responsible for helping all students learn and succeed, for teaching students to treat each other respectfully, and for trying to find help for students encountering difficulties at home or in school. Additionally, all staff members (100%) indicated that they believe all students can learn, that they are making a different in the lives of students, and that they are responsible for engaging students in school and learning.

Student-Student Interactions: Almost all staff members (94%) reported that most students respect classmates who excel academically. Additionally, fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds are not a serious problem as reported by all staff members (100%).

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices: All staff members (100%) reported looking forward to learning about the traditions, customs, and holidays of others and that students and staff members frequently share aspects of their backgrounds. Also, almost all staff members (97%) reported that they look for opportunities to learn how to help students from diverse backgrounds and that academic expectations are not low for certain students based on ethnic, cultural, language, or socioeconomic backgrounds (91%).

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
Staff-School Leadership Interactions		
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.	97%	3%
I can talk with my principal(s) when I am concerned about a student.	97%	3%

Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions		
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.	82%	18%
Most school activities and programs involve students' families including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	100%	0%
I have difficulties communicating with students' families.	22%	78%
I receive a great deal of support from students' families for the work I do.	82%	18%
Staff-Staff Interactions		
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.	97%	3%
Staff-Student Interactions		
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.	97%	3%
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.	97%	3%
I am certain that I am making a difference in the lives of students at this school.	100%	0%
Student-Student Interactions		
Outside of classrooms, students generally hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	74%	26%
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.	94%	6%
Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices		
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.	94%	6%
Students and staff frequently share aspects of their backgrounds such as their traditional food, clothing, art and/or music.	100%	0%
Students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds treat each other with respect.	94%	6%
Students and staff at this school value each other's distinctive ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic differences.	91%	9%
I feel prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	94%	6%
I look for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	97%	3%
Students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need.	100%	0%
Academic expectations are low for some students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	9%	91%

Table 2. Teacher Interactions about Instruction

The most common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported occurring at least once per week include: 1) discussing students with academic difficulties (80%); 2) collaborating in planning and preparing instructional materials (70%); and 3) working together to try out new ideas for engaging students (65%) and sharing learning from teaching experiences (65%). Among the least common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported almost never or never using include: 1) hosting fellow teachers in their classrooms for learning new strategies or providing feedback (50%) and 2) visiting the classroom of a fellow teacher for learning new strategies or providing feedback (44%).

Table 2. Teacher Interactions about Instruction

Teachers were asked how often 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.	55%	30%	15%
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials.	70%	25%	5%
Share what I have learned about my teaching experiences.	65%	30%	5%
Visit another classroom to learn more about or provide feedback on teaching.	28%	28%	44%
Another teacher visits my classroom to learn new strategies or to provide feedback on my teaching.	28%	22%	50%
Analyze or review student data.	53%	36%	11%
Work together to try out new ideas for engaging students.	65%	30%	5%
Participate in professional development.	35%	65%	0%
Practice new skills.	60%	25%	15%
Discuss students with academic difficulties.	80%	20%	0%
Share strategies for communicating with students' families.	33%	50%	17%

Table 3. Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

About half (47%) of instructional staff members 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 only 16% reported they rarely or never alter their practices. Most respondents (68%) reported purposely placing students in work groups with peers who are different ethnically, culturally, or socioeconomically or who speak another language 3-5 days per week, while only 11% 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.	47%	37%	16%
Purposely have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	68%	21%	11%

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[i] New York State's standardized assessments.

[ii] This 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 New York State 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.