Promising Practices: Preparing Critical Needs Students for College or Career

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Case Study: Freeport High School

This [school] is the best kept secret on Long Island. And the reason why I say that is because ... the support, the programs, the team, everything that's here, any student who wants it, can get whatever it is that they need right here in Freeport High School. We have everything to offer a student. – school leader

School Context

The accomplishments of students are celebrated throughout the Freeport High School building. Displays of student artwork and projects line the hallway at the entrance of the school, shown in the photo above. Other display cases contain pictures of students in the National Honor Society and the names of colleges they will attend, as well as activities of student clubs. Near the gymnasium, pictures of outstanding student athletes dating back to the 1970s line the walls, ceiling to floor. A school leader said,

> *We just keep adding [to the student athlete pictures]. One year we were running out of space, and there was a discussion about taking them down. Some of the community members found out and [said], "No, you cannot take down those pictures." Actually, my cousin is on this wall. And some faculty are on this wall.*

District and school leaders, faculty, and staff all described Freeport as a family where everyone cares about and supports each other, as well as students, and works cooperatively for student betterment. Recognition and celebration of student accomplishments provide one example of this family-oriented culture. Offices for school leaders are located throughout the school building to be closer to faculty, staff members, and students. These leaders include four assistant principals (one for each grade) in addition to two deans and the principal.

While multiple generations of families have lived in the community and attended Freeport, the school and community increasingly are welcoming youth and families arriving in the United States from countries predominately in the Caribbean and Central America. In 2016-17, 16% of students were English Language Learners and 64% were Hispanic. The superintendent reports that 20-25% of incoming ninth graders are immigrants.

Some of the students arriving in Freeport are not only immigrants in a new country, but they are reuniting with family members they have not seen for many years or may be meeting for the first time. Other immigrant students may live in Freeport with extended family or friends rather than

their immediate families. Some of these students and their families also regularly travel between the U.S. and their home countries. These circumstances and others contribute to increased mobility and transience among Freeport students, some of whom may experience extended interruptions in their formal education. Providing an environment that allows these students to flourish is a focus at Freeport.

Many employees from the district and school also described Freeport as a "gem." Situated among many affluent communities in western Long Island's Nassau County, Freeport Union Free School District (UFSD) has a median household income of $60,043 compared to $102,044 across the County. Similarly, the poverty rate in the district is 13.5% compared to 6.1% across the County. In 2016-17, 66% of students at Freeport were considered economically disadvantaged.

Despite the additional needs of the young people that pass through its doors, Freeport maintains an academically competitive and rigorous program to ensure students are prepared for career, college, or other post-secondary education. This includes providing pathways for earning college credit while in high school; a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and opportunities for trade and technical training and experience.

School Selection Criteria

Freeport High School met the criteria of "odds beating" in this study[i] because the difference between expected graduation rates for students entering 9th grade in 2010, 2011 and 2012, who are African-American/Black, Hispanic, or 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[i]. With an overall z-score of 0.82, Freeport High School is distinctive for exceeding expected performance on multiple measures of graduation across three cohorts of students who are African-American/Black, Hispanic, and/or economically disadvantaged.

Student Demographics 2016-17: Freeport High School, Freeport Union Free School District

	Freeport HS	**Freeport UFSD**	**New York State**
Grades Served	9-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	2,229	6,820	2,629,970
Economically Disadvantaged	66%	71%	55%
English Language Learners	16%	20%	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution African-American Hispanic/Latino White Multiracial Other	 29% 64% 5% 1% 1%	 23% 65% 8% 1% 1%	 17% 26% 44% 2% 10%

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

This case study reports how district and school leaders, teachers, and student support staff members approach 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 graduation rates. 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

Building an Inclusive Family and Supportive Environment

> *You know [our first priority is] student success. Also, creating an environment where faculty, staff, and students feel comfortable and safe to express their ideas and where they can be in an environment where they are supported.* – principal

A consistent theme expressed in interviews was that Freeport High School is a large extended family in which each member is valued and supported. In this family, educators said, adults model for students how to treat each other with respect and listen to differing perspectives. All members of the family have opportunities to voice their desires, whether faculty and staff members choosing professional development opportunities or students seeking to publicly express their concerns about school violence. In response to a growing Spanish-speaking population, the district has prioritized hiring bilingual faculty and staff members while also supporting current faculty to obtain bilingual certification. Other examples of supports include "safe zones" for LGBTQ youth and evening programs for students who must work to support their families.

Valuing the Whole Child

> *And then [newly arrived immigrant youth] are thrust into a new high school with a new language and are expected to perform academically. And unless we, as an institution, understand that we have to service the whole child and not just make sure they pass a test and graduate, we're not going to find continued success.* – school leader

> *Usually the brightest kid in every class is on the special ed side. . . . It doesn't matter the disability, it doesn't mean that they're any less intelligent than any other student. They just need to be taught a different way, and I have no problem doing that. . . . Certain teachers cannot be inclusion [teachers] because they will not change their ways.* – teacher

Educators at the high school consistently expressed admiration for all students' efforts and achievements, along with the goal of helping them to be successful after they graduate. Teachers reported that they cannot tell the difference between students who are and are not receiving academic support services in their classrooms. Student support staff members stress that they work to ensure that every students' course schedule includes electives to promote a love of learning. The automotive and technology programs provide students with technical skills valued by industry and the workforce.

A Closer Look

The practices highlighted above 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

Aligning Curriculum to College Standards

> *If you're teaching to a college level, you should be aligned to what's on the state exam because the expectations at a college level are going to be above that level of what's in the high school classroom.* — school leader

Educators at Freeport High School consistently described striving to have their curriculum goals exceed New York State Standards to prepare students for college or the workforce. Each year, they explained, leaders and teachers collectively review their local goals, state standards, and college requirements to ensure that material covered aligns with that on the NYS Regents' Examinations while also maintaining the academic rigor demanded by colleges. This process, school leaders added, is facilitated using on-line collaboration tools in which curriculum modules provided by the state or other publishers can be tweaked. The goal, one school leader explained, is to "have all of our students, especially in the upper-level classes, achieve their goal as far as getting into their desired school."

This careful curriculum refinement process is necessary, school leaders noted, because of the extensive dual-enrollment programs with area colleges. Over the past decade, the school has been continually expanding opportunities for students to gain early access to postsecondary curriculum through not only Advanced Placement (AP) courses, but also dual enrollment programs with area colleges. The dual enrollment program started with three courses in 2008 and now includes more than a dozen courses that students can incorporate into their academic programs. The school has obtained grants that will help pay the tuition for students with limited financial resources, especially if neither of their parents attended college. A fourth cohort of approximately 80 students is participating in a program through which they will earn a mechanical engineering associates degree while in high school.

Freeport educators have high standards for their students, and they also provide resources to support student learning and progress. For example, time is built into the day for academic assistance for students who need to work after school to help support their families. A robust evening high school program (called the "Twilight Program") for students who are unable to attend the regular day-time program is also available. And one of the school leaders has developed a program to help students understand how to prepare for the "next step" after graduation:

> *[Students] also know how to target a college that fits for them in terms of what's a stretch school, what's a reach school, what's a target school. They understand the meaning of those terms and how it applies to them as an individual. So, we not only are working with trying to get them prepared here for the success that they're going to have in their four*

years in Freeport High School, we also try to make sure that we're preparing them for their next step, in their next journey on from here.

Providing Students with Clear Goals to Motivate Them

I think it's important to let the students know what your expectations are and what your final outcome is so that they understand what they're working towards, because without that everyone's pretty lost.   – school leader

While acknowledging that improving graduation rates is a top priority, educators stressed that their strategy is to find ways of motivating students to be successful within a supportive school environment. School leaders and student support staff members described working together to develop academic programs customized to students' varying situations and needs. These efforts include considering which teachers are best suited for each student and ensuring that all students' schedules include electives to provide academic enrichment. These electives range from traditional music and art classes to an in-house automotive program along with other regional vocational and technical training programs. The school has a full-time transitional support professional who connects students with employment opportunities in the community, arranges for industry and other professionals to speak at assemblies, and serves as a schoolwide resource for trade education.

Creating safety nets for newly arrived immigrants and those with other academic challenges is a top priority for the school, leaders reported. The goal, one school leader said, is to work with families to establish a "balanced social and emotional life so that [students] can focus on their education." Rather than simply pushing these students to pass a state examination or complete a course, staff members at Freeport High School stress the importance of what they are learning for the future. One school leader noted that this focus on the future is particularly important for immigrant students facing linguistic in addition to normal academic challenges:

[We do] not just push them along but motivate them by showing them success from staying in school and learning the English. Although it's difficult and hard, they need it for their further education, for work, just for survival at times in the States.
                                                    – school leader

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

Hiring Skilled Staff Members to Meet the Needs of a Diverse Population

[Support staff members] are bilingual, too, because in previous years . . . the students would come to us and say, "Well my guidance counselor doesn't speak Spanish, so I don't know what they're talking about." Now we don't get that anymore – now they know who to go to. The [counselors] are bilingual, they speak Spanish, and they understand [the student's] path, and that's huge.   – teacher

District leaders at Freeport reported actively seeking to hire staff members who are best suited to support their large Spanish-speaking student population. To this end, new teachers are expected to possess either the state's English as a New Language (ENL) extension to their teaching

credential or a bilingual certification. As a school leader explained, "[District leaders] want to know that you can handle this population, that you have experience with this population and have knowledge about it." In addition, the district leaders said that they support current teachers in acquiring the ENL certification to best serve English Language Learners (ELLs) and former ELLs in their classrooms; and Spanish-speaking teachers without bilingual certification are encouraged to acquire the valuable bilingual credential.

Similarly, as described in the quote at the beginning of this section, the school has hired bilingual student support staff members to better serve Spanish-speaking students and their families. These bilingual staff members include two counselors, a social worker, and a psychologist. The availability of Spanish-speaking staff at Freeport was reported to help facilitate communication with families and establish a sense of ease among Spanish-speaking parents. A student support staff member described how families reacted positively to the additional bilingual staff:

> *And when [parents] learn that they're able to call someone in the building who speaks their language, you can see, you can feel, the relief in them.*

Several staff members are not only bilingual but also community members and former alumni of the high school and thus said that they felt a real sense of commonality with their students. "I wanted to give back to my community," reported one such teacher who has been working at the school for over a dozen years.

Putting Professional Development Opportunities into Practice

> *You don't just throw things at them because you want to start something. . . . If that's not the need, it will not work. They have to have a buy-in to what they are learning before they will even aspire to go there; otherwise it goes in one ear and out the other.*
> – district leader

Wide-ranging professional development opportunities were reportedly made available to staff members at Freeport High School. As a student support staff member said, "There's always a [professional development offering] to refresh what we thought we already knew. And it's updating." A teacher concurred, "There's a lot; they offer a lot." A district leader described an "open policy" where staff members can feel comfortable requesting funds to attend a professional development opportunity. The principal explained, "If the staff brings something to us, whether it's to myself or the [assistant principals] to me, and they want to do something of value, it's always welcome."

Furthermore, school leaders said that they base many professional development offerings off teacher feedback gathered from surveys. A district leader commented on the importance of taking teacher feedback seriously: "We can never survey teachers, ask them what their needs are, and then not respond to it." School leaders also reported affording great flexibility to staff wishing to pursue professional development opportunities that pique their interest, rather than imposing requirements.

While staff members have copious opportunities for professional development, school leaders stated that they expect the knowledge and experiences gained from these opportunities to be implemented in the classroom. As a district leader explained:

You have to make sure that they are putting it into practice and that you follow it and see whether it's working. If it's not working, you tweak it, and if that's not the one that is good, you look for something else.

A school leader echoed these sentiments, commenting that a "main theme" of professional development is "to give teachers tools that they can use in the classroom and use immediately." In addition, teachers who attended courses were then expected to share their expertise with their colleagues. "Everyone in the department can learn it," explained a school leader.

Promoting a Collaborative Leadership Style

We don't hold anything back. We have our differences with one another, we say what we need to say, we get it out, and I think those are healthy relationships that actually allow us to be successful. Because I can say anything I want to anybody in this room, and I think that's important. – principal

As exemplified in the principal's description of his collegial and open relationship with the four assistant principals, collaboration and communication were identified in interviews as important qualities for school and district leaders to possess. The superintendent, for example, said, "I want to be collaborative, work with my team. I'm here to support them in every manner, to make sure the kids are successful." At the building level, school leadership is distributed between the principal, the four assistant principals who each cover a grade level, and a dean of students who handles discipline issues.

One component identified by district leaders as contributing to a shared sense of leadership was the willingness to meet with each other frequently. In addition to weekly meetings between district and school leaders, a two-hour meeting is held monthly to discuss departmental updates. A district leader commented on the importance of these meetings:

Meetings such as that build the leadership because nobody is going to come to the table unprepared. I'm going to speak the truth because everybody is going to know, and they want their department to shine.

The collaborative style of leadership exemplified by district and school administrators is promoted among students as well, and school organizations and extracurricular activities feature leadership roles for students. As the principal explained, the collaborative tone set by building leaders sets a positive example for students:

We have a unique situation here: we're all friends, we all taught here. We have camaraderie with one another; every decision is made by consensus. So I think that translates with the kids because they see how we interact.

Staff described several examples involving student leaders such as an LGBTQ advocacy group, the student government, and an orientation for incoming students with disabilities run by upper-class students with disabilities. In addition, student support staff members described a vibrant mentoring program with 172 students and over 60 faculty members participating. As one student support staff member mentioned, "They take over, and that's okay because teenagers will listen better to other teenagers."

<u>**Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements**</u>

Using Technology Strategically to Constantly Engage Students

> *My advice is to invest in technology, because that's these kids' world. That's what they're going to be doing. That's what they're going to be living, and if we can implement it as much as possible, I think it goes a long way for the 21st Century skills.* — teacher

Educators at Freeport High School highlighted the school's efforts to incorporate technology throughout the school, in classroom activities and interactions with students. Two years ago, the school board adopted a districtwide technology innovation initiative that one district leader described as "riding the wave of the future." Teachers reported that taking time to provide a year of training and support was critical for successful implementation of innovations like using laptop computers, placing assignments on line, and preparing resources for students such as links to videos and readings. Other supports include email addresses for all students, technology laboratory facilitators, and "technology" teachers in each building to provide colleagues with examples of how to use the computers and programs. While technological concerns – particularly internet connection limitations and keeping track of devices – continue, one district leader described the result as overall a "huge success."

In the 2017-18 school year, which is the second year of the initiative, each student in the high school received a laptop like those given to teachers the prior year. One challenge, several teachers reported, was showing students how to organize files and programs on their laptops. Now, though, they said, students' work is more organized than when they were using paper notebooks. One teacher noted being surprised that many students needed to rapidly develop typing skills. An advantage of the connected classroom is that, for at least some classes, students can access assignments and instructional materials from anywhere in the building or beyond without needing to carry around large textbooks or notebooks. However, teachers also reported, they had to help students develop strategies for accessing on-line materials outside the school building, such as in the public library, or to work off line if necessary. Instructional time is no longer lost for events such as a severe snow storm, one district leader noted.

Now staff and students are "spinning on all cylinders," said a teacher. "It's really been a god-send." In a focus group interview, teachers took turns describing ways in which technology has enhanced their instruction to provide what one described as "a big gain in time." The system, they explained, allows students to receive immediate results on quizzes that not only indicate what they got wrong but explains the error. Later, the teacher can review the records to monitor students' progress to differentiate instruction. Similarly, another participant continued, teachers and peers can give students feedback in virtually real time on writing assignments:

> *I can give [girl's name] feedback on her intro, and [boy's name] feedback on his conclusion, and I can link [another girl's name] to the video that I already went over about where to put your commas. So, I'm able to like navigate – they get more feedback from me in real time than they would if we were writing essays all together.* – teacher

One technological advantage that appeared to excite several of the teachers was a change in students' individual or group projects. One explained that instead of being limited to a 3-foot

square board, students are now preparing presentations with elaborate video editing, sound effects, and computer graphics. Another described how she helps students learn to use video calls to connect with each other when working on projects. She recalled telling students, "It doesn't matter that your mom doesn't let people come over and your mom doesn't let you leave." School leaders and teachers both reported that students appear to be becoming more responsible (e.g., reminding teachers to post assignments or resources) and more accountable, because they know that teachers can check on activities like participating in collaborations with others on projects. These skills, educators stated, are important for students' success after graduation:

> *A lot of jobs now, just looking at my siblings and those around me and my friends, . . . they have to do group work. I don't think you can get through college without doing at least one presentation with a group. And that's what we're going to do – get our kids ready for college and careers.* – teacher

Creating Strength-Based Programs for Special Needs Students

> *You can't tell who needs what in our class. You would never know who is who, which kids are which.*

> *Sometimes, I feel like your kids can be my kids.* – two coteachers

The above exchange between a special education teacher and the content teacher who coteach an integrated class is an example of the collegial rapport displayed during focus groups conducted at Freeport High School. This exchange also exemplifies educators' expressions of their view of special education students as differently abled rather than academically lacking. Special education services offered by the school range from additional counselling to integrated cotaught courses to classes specifically for only these students. In the interviews, educators highlighted the different styles of coteaching used in the combined or inclusion classes. The approach differs by the particular teachers involved and the subject matter, one teacher explained, such as providing support when students are working in small groups to a full coteaching model in which lessons are co-constructed by both teachers. One pair of teachers took turns noting the other's contributions, such as subject matter content, technological expertise, and knowledge of how to address students' learning needs.

> *We are a full coteaching model. Either I'm at the board or she's at the board, and we switch spots seamlessly. She will interject; I will interject. There is no "Oh, she's the teacher. She's support." No, no, no. There's none of that in our classroom.* – teacher

Regardless of the instructional approach, the focus is on how best to highlight students' strengths and tailor activities to help them be successful, both leaders and teachers said. Several educators attributed success in transitioning special education students to the workforce or college to a program developed by student support staff members. The program not only provides special education students with practical skills such as how to conduct themselves at job interviews, but also exposes students to post-graduation opportunities through assembly speakers and visits to work sites and different types of educational programs. As a school leader put it,

> *If you know how to do something, you could do whatever you want. You could go to college and work. That's what we all did. So, you know, if you know how to do something*

and can support yourself and be a contributing member of society, you could do whatever you want and sometimes wherever you want -- plumber, electrician.

Providing Diverse Supports for English Language Learners

> *[Newly arrived immigrants] are improving. It's amazing. Success for me is now they're not asking me what this means, now they use context to derive a meaning of a word or to understand the situation that I am asking them about.* — teacher

The admiration for the achievements of English language learners (ELLs) expressed by the teacher above was echoed throughout interviews with educators in Freeport High School. One teacher noted that courses for ELLs start the year with 100% of the instruction in Spanish; three months later 75% of instruction is in Spanish; and by March less than 50% is in Spanish. Teachers described their ELLs as "always really engaged," "really hardworking," and "really excited." One teacher mentioned a student with virtually no English knowledge completing a month's worth of practice in less than a week and coming back for more words. Other teachers also reported that students often ask for additional English words to learn or develop their own lists of words to translate.

District leaders described a comprehensive and differentiated program for ELLs: In the elementary grades, the district has a bilingual program serving a mixture of native and non-native English speakers. For grades 7-12, the bilingual program is for only students classified by the state as ELLs, most of whom are recently arrived foreign-born youth. ELL students who do not speak Spanish progress through a three-year program that is followed by additional academic supports for two years after formally exiting the program. For its Spanish speakers, the high school offers an assortment of courses in Spanish taught by bilingual certified teachers, which are a hiring priority and one of whom is an alumnus of the school. Some of these courses prepare students to take Regents examinations available in Spanish (e.g., Earth Science, Algebra, and Global History[ii]), which one district leader explained allows most of these students to graduate with a Regents diploma in five years. A district leader also noted that the school's "Spanish for native speakers" course has a curriculum with advanced reading and writing requirements that support development of language arts skills needed to do well on the English Regents Examination. Other teachers described emphasizing similar cross-subject skills.

Helping students make connections not only across subjects but also between English and their native language was a common theme expressed by educators in interviews. A district leader described working with teachers to help students use their native language "strategically" by learning how the two languages "play off each other," such as words that sound like each other. This district leader explained that teachers also use language strategically to avoid "dizzying" constant translation in their instruction by deciding when to use each language in a lesson.

> *Using two languages for instruction is not a no-brainer; it takes a lot of thought. . . . These teachers make hundreds of decisions a day about using those two languages in a way that makes sense.* — district leader

Creatively using technology to engage students learning English was highlighted by several teachers. Several teachers described how they have effectively "flipped" their classrooms by

providing students with videos to watch at home in preparation for activities during class. The goal, one teacher explained, is for the teacher to become "a facilitator rather than just out their lecturing." Another teacher, noting that students must be self-disciplined and have access to the internet for this approach to work, has an "in-class flipped classroom" in which students use technology to obtain translations or research something that they don't understand rather than having to ask for help all the time. Other examples of technology use include providing lessons for students when teachers are absent and as resources students can use for translating assignments or other instructional materials. A teacher gave specifics:

> *There are a lot of things you can do with a flipped classroom. The main focus is you're not wasting time on what they can do by themselves versus what they can do with you. Because, like [another teacher] said, you want to be the facilitator, not the lecturer.*

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Technology to Monitor Student Progress

> *It's good for you as a teacher to be able to look at data and see who's struggling, and who's not, without actually having to walk around your room. You know some kids feel embarrassed by certain things. You can look at the data later, and then determine how you're going to differentiate your instruction for those students as well.*   – teacher

Educators described the analysis of data as an important method of improving instructional practices and student outcomes. "Everything is pretty much data driven," said one district leader.

In addition to bimonthly data meetings and weekly team meetings, a student intervention team meets every month to discuss individual students at risk of failing. These meetings include school leaders, teachers, and student support staff members. Teachers and school leaders often meet informally to discuss data. "I would say on a weekly basis, different levels of the data committee meeting are going on," said a member of the student support staff.

Technology was consistently mentioned as an important tool in acquiring and monitoring data. A collaborative on-line document editing system was described as a valuable tool in fostering real-time communication between teachers and district leaders to monitor the usage and progress of curricular programs. A schoolwide on-line data system is used to create schedules and maintain information on attendance and discipline as well as a way for parents to track their children's achievement. Instructional technologies such as electronic classrooms and collaboration tools for students also aid teachers in managing data on student performance. These applications allow teachers to tailor their instructional needs to individual student needs based on data.

Putting Data Analysis into Practice

> *We look at data. But now I want to make certain that that data is truly being used, so that you begin to see where it's more student directed and not teacher directed kind of learning. That's where we're going now.*   – district leader

District leaders reported monitoring the progress of school initiatives with the intention of using data to improve their implementation. For example, regarding the recent rollout of one-to-one laptops at the high school, a district leader described plans to analyze data on student usage to inform the upcoming rollout to the middle school.

School and district leaders take an active role in monitoring the progress of both students and teachers to ensure that data analysis is being utilized effectively to inform instruction. As one district leader reported, "The administrators are in and out of their classroom frequently to see what they have learned, the opportunity to practice, and if it is working. It's a constant evaluation."

Recognitions, Interventions and Adjustments

Customizing Academic and Socioemotional Development Support Systems for All Students

> *We definitely use a strengths-based approach. We work on this individual student's strengths and we really try and ride with that, as far as we can; that builds up confidence, skills, and their willingness to be here. It really helps bring them in.*
> – student support staff member

At Freeport High School, an array of specialized programs and services have been designed to ensure that students reach graduation prepared to pursue the goals of their choosing. These programs and services address academic and socioemotional development and needs while being sensitive to the unique circumstances of each student. As a student support staff member said, "Everything we do is custom; customization is one of our strengths." Administrators, faculty, and student support staff members take a strengths-based approach to identifying student needs, and, based on student-driven goals, select from a menu of supportive programs and services. If a service does not exist to meet an identified need, it is created. For example, a school leader, inspired by working with students in the junior class, described creating a program to support students preparing for college.

In addition to a diverse academic program, the school offers students a wide variety of socioemotional and social services that can be tailored to varying needs. The school has three social workers and three psychologists. This large student support team enables staff members to best meet the needs of a diverse body of students and families by allowing students and families to indicate whom from the team they want to work with.

The team described a variety of programs and interventions such as meditation and mindfulness seminars in the "Zen Zone," a support group for teen parents (all of whom graduated in 2017), and schoolwide assemblies on healthy decision making. Additionally, there is a building committee on social-emotional learning, according to the principal, and the student support team is a resource to faculty as well as serving as advocates for students.

The student support team also identified specific relationship-building interventions. For example, they cited "Challenge Day," which facilitates faculty and students getting to know more about each other's life experiences, a mentoring program that in 2017-18 had 172 participating students and 60 faculty, and a peer mentoring program for immigrant students.

Building relationships with each student is essential to bringing students into these services, according to school leaders, faculty, and student support staff members. Key to this is meeting students where they are, identifying their goals and figuring out ways to work toward them, and always being honest and straightforward. Strengths-based relationship building was identified by many and viewed as the responsibility of all.

Using a Shared-Decision Making Approach to Discipline

To deal with discipline, you have to look at the environment and the culture of the building. That's how it starts. When teachers don't feel comfortable . . . or they're not being supported, your infractions and your write-ups are going to increase. Also, the same thing with the students: if they don't feel supported, their level of acting out is going to increase. I started certain practices where I empowered either the student or the teacher in the decision-making process, within reason, of the consequence [of an infraction]. – school principal

At Freeport High School, thinking about discipline begins before problems arise and is about more than administering consequences. According to the principal, an approach to discipline should start with examining the culture that leaders, faculty, and other staff members set for the school. It involves building relationships with students as soon as they walk in the door to be sure that each student is connected to a caring adult; this practice mirrors the approach to customization described above.

The principal described a disciplinary process that involves shared decision making with staff members and students. This reportedly involves providing a space for staff members and students to share their perspectives and understanding of the incident, as well as what the consequence should be. Leaders reported working with both teachers and students to process their thoughts and behavior and stressed the importance of not responding to the situation with emotion, which the administrators model. Since implementing this approach, the principal said, suspensions and write-ups in the school have dropped dramatically.

In a Nutshell

We work very well together. I respect all my colleagues; I think they all respect me, and we have no problem debating, discussing, and having differences of opinion. But in each and every individual's eyesight are the students, which are the prize. So, when we fight, and we have our debates, even though we're coming from our hearts and a compassionate place, it's for the students. – school leader

Educators at Freeport High School reported a consistent focus on ensuring that all students have the supports they need to be successful both inside and outside the classroom. Every student is valued for their unique histories and abilities, which are described as strengths upon which to build success and prepare for life after graduation. Technology is used creatively to continuously engage all students in learning, whether providing resources such as immediate translations of instructional materials for English language learners during lessons or maintaining connections such as sending daily assignments home during a snow day. Integrating newly arrived immigrant youth is facilitated by a district priority to develop a staff with bilingual capabilities through both hiring and professional development. The school has a diverse set of programs that provide students with access to both college-level courses and training in technical trades. Appearing to place their egos aside to work as a team, educators expressed a sense of urgency and a desire to not waste time in realizing the goal of accomplished and well-adjusted young adults.

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Appendix. Survey Results

As part of the study, school personnel were asked to respond to a school culture survey designed to explore 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. The survey was distributed electronically to all staff members prior to the site visit. A total of 45 responses were received for a total response rate of 9%[1]. Additionally, 35 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 staff members responding (100%) reported that they can talk with their principal when they have concerns about a student.

***Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions*:** Most staff members reported that staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community (84%) and that most school activities and programs involve students' families, including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds (73%). In addition, about half of staff members (51%) reported receiving a great deal of support from students' families for the work they do.

Staff-Staff Interactions: Almost all staff members (93%) reported feeling accepted and respected by most staff members, and most (86%) reported working together to ensure all students are in school every day ready to learn.

Staff-Student Interactions: All staff members (100%) reported feeling responsible for helping all students learn to treat each other respectfully and certain that they are making a difference in the lives of students at this school. In addition, all staff members reported believing that all students can learn and trying to find help for any student encountering difficulties at home or in school (100%).

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[1] Because the response rates were so low for this school, the results of this survey should be interpreted extremely cautiously and not be considered representative of the school as a whole. However, they are provided here for consistency with the case studies for other participating schools.

Student-Student Interactions: Almost all staff members reported that outside of classrooms, students hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds (95%), and that most students respect classmates who excel academically (80%).

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices: All staff members reported (100%) that students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds treat each other with respect and look for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, almost all (98%) reported looking forward to learning about others' traditions, customs, and holidays.

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.	84%	16%
The principal and other leaders back up staff members when addressing student behavior problems.	84%	16%
I can talk with my principal(s) when I am concerned about a student.	100%	0%
Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions		
Staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community.	84%	16%
Most parents/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.	64%	36%
Most school activities and programs involve students' families including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	73%	27%
I have difficulties communicating with students' families.	40%	60%
I receive a great deal of support from students' families for the work I do.	51%	49%
Staff-Staff Interactions		
Staff members work together to ensure that all students are in school every day ready to learn.	86%	14%
I feel accepted and respected by most staff members.	93%	7%
Staff-Student Interactions		
I feel responsible for helping all students learn and succeed in school.	98%	2%
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.	98%	2%
I believe that all students can learn.	100%	0%
Most students are actively engaged in learning while at school.	75%	25%
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.	95%	5%
Fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are a serious problem in this school.	28%	72%
Most students respect classmates who excel academically.	80%	20%
Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices		
I look forward to learning about others' traditions, customs, and holidays.	98%	2%
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.	93%	7%
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.	91%	9%
I feel prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	93%	7%
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.	93%	7%
Academic expectations are low for some students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	45%	55%

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 how to teach a particular topic (51%); 2) sharing what they have learned about their teaching experiences (49%); and 3) collaborating in planning and preparing instructional materials (43%). Among the least common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported almost never or never using include: 1) visiting the classroom of a fellow teacher for learning new strategies or providing feedback (63%); 2) hosting fellow teachers in their classroom for learning new strategies or providing feedback (51%); and 3) analyzing or reviewing student data (29%).

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.	51%	40%	9%
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials.	43%	43%	14%
Share what I have learned about my teaching	49%	37%	14%

experiences.			
Visit another classroom to learn more about or provide feedback on teaching.	9%	29%	63%
Another teacher visits my classroom to learn new strategies or to provide feedback on my teaching.	6%	43%	51%
Analyze or review student data.	20%	51%	29%
Work together to try out new ideas for engaging students.	29%	60%	11%
Participate in professional development.	17%	83%	0%
Practice new skills.	32%	56%	12%
Discuss students with academic difficulties.	31%	60%	9%
Share strategies for communicating with students' families.	11%	66%	23%

Table 3. Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Some staff members (40%) reported altering the content of lessons, tasks, or assessments to take into account students' different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds 3-5 days per week; 46% indicated doing so 1-2 days per week or every few weeks; and 14% responded that they rarely or never do so. Additionally, few staff members (23%) reported that they purposefully have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds, while many (63%) reported doing this 1-2 day per week or every few weeks, and 14% reported rarely or never doing so.

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.	40%	46%	14%
Purposely have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	23%	63%	14%

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[i] 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. Four 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.

[ii] For information on New York State Regents examinations available in languages other than English, see http://www.nysedregents.org/translatedexams.html.