

Promising Practices: Preparing Critical Needs Students for College or Career

Kristen Campbell Wilcox, Brian Rhode, Lisa Cala-Ruud, and Catherine Kramer, May 2018

Case Study: Port Chester Senior High School



When we get kids here to end up (succeeding), it is like magic. There's magic happening in this building.
- principal

Our kids learn for us. If they don't buy into you, no learning is going to take place.
- teacher

School Context

Adorning the center of the circular foyer of Port Chester Senior High School, a lighted globe illuminates flags from around the world, signaling that this is a school that embraces its diversity.

Serving an over 84% nonwhite student population and, at 18%, double the state average in percentages of English language learners (ELLs), educators at the school share a mission -- to offer a welcoming school climate and multiple pathways for each and every student to participate fully in school and reach their highest potential.

Even though the Port Chester-Rye Unified School District serves one of the poorer communities in Westchester County, the High School offers a wide range of course options including honors, advanced placement (AP), and an International Baccalaureate (IB). The High School also boasts an array of programs in fine arts, bilingual education, and, through the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), vocational education, to name a few.

Beyond academics, student participation in extracurricular opportunities is highly valued, and an estimated third of the student body participates in one of more than a dozen sports teams (School Profile 2017-18). For students who share other interests, an award-winning marching band, theater, journalism, and a number of other clubs are available.

At the core of what makes the High School tick is educators' purposeful efforts to live the mantra "Trust and understanding are the fruits of learning," a phrase engraved on the entrance to the school and one representing the import Port Chester educators and staff place on building positive relationships with each other and the youth they serve.

In this "service community," as a school leader called it, surrounded by more affluent municipalities such as Rye Neck and Blind Brook, living "trust and understanding" day in and

day out requires that educators recognize the assets students bring with them as well as the challenges they face. It calls upon educators to express true appreciation for students’ full participation in the school community. It also calls upon them to approach their work with professionalism and dedication and a sprinkle of that “magic” of any learning organization: the will and capacity to keep growing.

School Selection Criteria

Port Chester Senior High School met the criteria of “odds beating” in this study¹ because the difference between expected graduation rates for students entering 9th grade in 2010, 2011 and 2012 who are African-American, Hispanic/Latino, English language learners, or economically disadvantaged exceeded the average performance for similar students across the state. The difference between the actual and expected graduation rates was standardized to calculate a z-score¹. With an overall z-score of 0.83, Port Chester High School is distinctive for exceeding expected performance on multiple measures of graduation across three cohorts of students for all subgroups.

Student Demographics 2016-17: Port Chester HS, Port Chester-Rye Union Free School District*

	Port Chester HS	Port Chester-Rye UFSD	New York State
Grades Served	9-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	1,436	4,658	2,629,970
Economically Disadvantaged	69%	74%	55%
English Language Learners	18%	29%	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
African-American	6%	5%	17%
Hispanic/Latino	77%	78%	26%
White	16%	15%	44%
Multiracial	0%	0%	2%
Other	2%	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 support staff have approached preparing their students for college or career, with the next section highlighting those aspects of the district and school that were identified as being most salient to their odds-beating student graduation rates.

* The official name of the district is Port Chester-Rye UFSD; the district serves students from two of the villages in the Town of Rye: Port Chester and Rye Brook. Port Chester is the larger of the two, and the district is generally referred to simply as Port Chester.

Highlights

Hard Wiring for Diversity

One of the greatest challenges facing educators in New York State as well as around the country is adapting their processes and practices to successfully engage each, and every, high school student and prepare them to reach their full potentials. A defining characteristic of the approach at Port Chester relates to leaders' and staff members' efforts to offer youth opportunities to do what they might not think they can. One of the ways they do this is by acknowledging and integrating what students already know and are able to do and adjusting their plans as circumstances arise. A veteran teacher, building off the stories of her colleagues, explained what this looks like in her classroom.

That [adjusting to student needs and circumstances] is what we're hardwired for. I used to call it "doing the moonwalk" sometimes. I would try to teach something, realize they [students] didn't know this, back up a little bit, then realize they don't know that. You can't take anything for granted.

The "anything" not taken for granted goes beyond students' current knowledge or skills and extends to making adjustments for a wide range of circumstances—both predictable, e.g., some students going to their native countries for several weeks at a time during holidays, to unpredictable, e.g., a student needing to miss school to take care of a sick family member. It means seeing everything from staffing to programming to assessment practices and interventions through the lens of students' diverse experiences and prior knowledge. And it also means removing barriers in school policies (e.g., honors and AP exclusion criteria) that could hold students back from meeting their full potentials.

"Lighting" Kids (and Adults) Up through Recognition and Validation

One can argue that "trust and understanding" (referencing the engraving on the Port Chester entry), are the glue upon which all important connections between people depend. This idea relates to a second distinguishing characteristic of Port Chester High School, and that is how teachers and staff connect with kids and each other. A parent, who is also a teacher at the school, felt firsthand the impact on her own daughter when a fellow teacher reached out and gave her daughter a compliment. She said,

I felt like that broke the ice for her [my daughter] here . . . it just lit her up. She was good after that; the hallway was much less scary for her from that day on.

Importantly, this tendency toward recognition extends to adults. As one long-time school leader recounted, recognizing and validating everyone's efforts goes hand in hand with a culture of professionalism and dedication:

What I try to do is, I try to validate people. A lot of times, a lot of the good things people do go unrecognized, and sometimes that can lead to people feeling disheartened—not being appreciated. So I try to make sure to validate people as much as possible, when it is in my interactions with them or when it is the observations we do of them.

A Collaborative Culture Powered by “Really Good People” Working in Teams and Using Evidence

With almost every nook of the school building used for one purpose or another, teachers and staff are packed into tight quarters one teacher called a “communist” model of workspaces. Nonetheless, those interviewed express feeling sufficiently resourced and connected to their colleagues in meaningful teamwork. This collaborative culture is fueled purposefully through hiring practices that prioritize that staff be a good fit for their diverse student body. The use of teams and evidence feedback mechanisms such as instructional rounds also fuel the collaborative school culture. The deputy superintendent explained what he sees as the key ingredients of this culture:

The greatness of an organization is determined by its people. Anybody who comes to work in this district, I'm going to vet them personally. And I think that when you have really good people you have the potential for really good outcomes. Within those good people you need to have a very healthy functioning collaborative dynamic. And then of course you have to ensure that you have structures and best practices and programs in place that are evidence based and you're just not trying to make it up as you go along. But it starts with the good people, because the good people are going to find the good programs, and they're going to collaborate with each other.

A Closer Look

These aspects of Port Chester High School 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

Planning for a Wide Array of Productive Futures with a Large Dose of Encouragement

In a school with large percentages of family members who may not have had opportunities to complete a secondary degree or attend college, guidance counselors play a key role in helping students not only see their options but make plans for their futures. A counselor explained the import of actively working with students to create plans and ensure follow through on those plans:

Our [guidance counselors’] goal is to make sure that every student can be a productive citizen, and they have to tell us their plan. They just can’t get a diploma and walk out the door. We have to know. If you're going to work, where's the job application? If you're going to do vocational training, okay we make sure that we set that up with you. So, I would say that we try to arm them all with a plan, whatever that plan may look like. You have to have a plan.

As mentioned earlier, in an effort to offer the widest array of options to students, leaders have worked to open up the gateways to honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes and ensure that the students in those classrooms represent the diversity of the school population. As the principal

explained, this purposeful change required effort on the part of teachers to adjust their academic expectations and revisit their instructional strategies:

When you try to get more students involved in more demanding and challenging work, you're challenging those students to do better than they even thought they could, but you're challenging teachers to work with students that they didn't think they could work with, which forces them to change . . . to be successful, forces them to change the way they are teaching. So putting more students in the honors and AP classes made teachers by default have to adapt their instruction to fit a wider audience, which was beneficial to that wide audience and yielded results.

Teachers reported that to make this work, a large dose of encouragement is needed on the part of teachers: One explained,

When we set up realistic goals, things that they [students] can accomplish, then when they do one thing towards that goal it becomes a big deal—a big celebration. Like, you need to commute to school [and] you just got your driver's license, that's a big deal, that's a step forward in your life. Like that driver's license does not just symbolize that you can drive, it also means you overcame the fact that no one else in your family drives. And we celebrate it as a class, creating that sense of community.

A Literacy-Rich, Relatable, and Aligned Curriculum

In this diverse environment, language and literacy development has been a central focus, and teachers described a continuous effort to ensure that their curriculum is, as one explained it, “relatable.” In the English Language Arts (ELA), making the curriculum relatable for their students involves examining closely the extent to which teachers assign “dead white man” literature, said one teacher, versus more culturally diverse options from which students can choose. A teacher explained their curriculum review process in this effort:

Every summer we do curriculum mapping. We have a two-week session where we go in and we revamp the map in terms of our anchor texts. We ask, “How can we make our anchor texts more relatable?” So, one way we're doing it is a big push into Young Adult literature because certain authors are going to connect with different types of students.

Initiatives to assist with curriculum alignment across grades and within content areas include the use of professional learning communities called CPAs. One teacher explained that these CPAs provide opportunities to “constantly look at our curriculum and think about alignment.” To address particular areas they identify as needing attention—whether to align to new standards or adjust to changes they identify in-house—the district has partnered with local colleges and outside experts. For example, in ELA one teacher explained how partnerships and outside expertise has helped with aligning the writing curriculum across grades:

There was a huge divide between the middle school and the high school for a lot of the time that I've been here. But in the last few years, especially this year, the English department is working with the teacher's college, and we're aligning 6th grade and 9th

grade teachers. Next year it's going to be 7th and 10th, and the year after that it's going to be 8th and 11th. So eventually everyone will be on the same page from 6th grade up.

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

Hiring Competent Staff with High Expectations and Willingness to Collaborate

When asked about the right fit of staff for Port Chester, district and school leaders' responses converged on a few essential qualities that include applicants' beliefs about adolescents' potentials; their diverse backgrounds or deep understanding of diversity; and their ability and willingness to collaborate. The principal spoke of the importance of "open-mindedness" about student potential:

We like people who are open minded, who are not the kind who would say . . . that no student can be successful in an honors class if they don't meet certain criteria. I'm not looking to hire people who are close minded in thinking about the potential of children when given opportunities.

He explained that through hiring practices, district and school leaders have worked to employ competent staff who can connect with students and with each other and described how leaders make purposeful staffing choices:

I knew I wanted teachers who looked more like my students. I knew that I wanted to hire qualified applicants who were filling niches . . . African-American teachers, Hispanic teachers, Spanish-speaking teachers. Those were what we certainly looked for very hard when we were filling positions, with always, though, the idea that merit is what mattered most.

Once hired, Port Chester employees benefit from the kind of recognition discussed earlier and become part of the collaborative fold. A teacher noted, "I think we all ended up staying because we have such a team approach here and we're all so supportive of each other."

Encouraging Professional Discretion and Ownership

The district leadership team works to guide staff toward common goals while prioritizing professional discretion, as articulated by the deputy superintendent when describing his leadership philosophy:

It's like the case study that was done in the 2000s in the Baltimore City Schools where they called it "Bounded Autonomy:" I'm going to bind you to some guidelines and I'm giving you the autonomy to do it the way that you need to do it in whatever role you're in so that you can be successful.

Indeed, the high school teachers expressed viewing themselves as partners in helping shape the school culture. One school leader described the messages he and other leaders strive to send to staff about each and every individual's role in making the school a great one:

We see the hard work they [teachers and staff] are doing, and we thank them not only for their professionalism but what they are doing for our students as well. It's not my students—it is our students. Giving them some ownership in this no matter what [their] role is here in the school. This is our building; it is not my building. It's not [the principal's] building; it is our building. And as a result of that everyone must work to their best potential whatever role with students they have. So if anyone has any ideas in which we can go ahead and improve the environment . . . make any type of improvements in the school, feel comfortable going ahead and feel empowered to bring those suggestions and ideas about because they are important here.

These sentiments of professional discretion and valuing of staff as decision-making partners were echoed in teachers' and support staff's characterizations of their experiences. As one teacher explained,

I'm going to have to say honestly that our administration pretty much gives us autonomy and relies on our experiences to be masterful teachers.

Nurturing Instructional Capacity

Over the last few decades the district has seen significant shifts in student demographics, most notably with a large increase in ELL students and income disparities among its constituent families. These changes require vigilance on the part of leaders to be strategic in many ways, including how they build and nurture instructional expertise to meet demands. To address this issue, district leaders have engaged in careful planning and experimented with different ways to provide instructional guidance. One leader explained their evolving process:

We did instructional rounds and every building where we did walk-throughs we paid attention to what we saw and took notes and had conversations. We did it as groups and we've also done it singularly or in pairs, so now we're going to open up to a larger conversation with teachers, having them join us on the instructional rounds and also join us in creating a districtwide definition of student engagement so that next year going into the fall we can roll it out as this is the Port Chester way.

Along this journey, according to the deputy superintendent, district leaders added “another level of administration in content area specialty in order to help the building principals . . . [who have] so much going on with all of the [state] mandates and requirements.” In the words of one of these new leaders (called directors), their responsibilities are wide ranging:

Our major function is not only systems, but we provide professional development [in grades] six through twelve for the teachers as well as assist with helping teachers on a daily basis. At the high school level and the middle school level there are no instructional coaches, so we are both the coaches and the professional developers, as well as everything in between for teachers.

As to the impact of these efforts: Overall, the staff interviewed expressed feeling that their professional development needs are being well met and that they feel equipped with the support they need to be successful in their work in the classroom.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

An Array of Programs and Class Options

In regard to instruction, a key component of Port Chester’s hard wiring for diversity, as mentioned in the Highlights above, is marked by their robust ENL (English as a New Language), bilingual, and special education programs that provide an accessible rigorous curriculum to students with diverse needs and circumstances. Despite some naysayers, district and school leaders attributed part of the school’s odds-beating performance to changing “the dial” with regard to offering students rigorous options, as explained by the deputy superintendent:

I think that a couple of things have taken place here at the high school which have really changed the dial. First, the . . . the recalibration of the expectations of what our students are capable of as indicated by the implementation of programs like the IB [International Baccalaureate] program. You know, “Oh, you’re a 74% percent Hispanic high school, how are you going to have a successful IB program?”

An impressive array of options are available to provide multiple pathways to IB, Regents, and Advanced Regents diplomas. These options include slower pacing (i.e., completing courses in two years rather than one) or receiving instruction through one’s native language or accompanied by a lab or second period or even a half-year course for mid-year arrivals. With the shift in state policies toward more fully integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms (CR Part 154 revised), the district has also increased “inclusive” offerings through coteaching arrangements, although teachers expressed mixed feelings about whether these policy shifts in the end will help or hurt Port Chester’s already extensive array of options for ELLs.

Sharing Language and Technology-Enriched Instructional Expertise

Teacher after teacher noted that instructional mandates are few. In fact, the only mandate some mentioned was the use of language objectives, a relatively new (within the past two years) initiative to better serve their culturally and linguistically diverse students. To meet this mandate, teachers were provided professional development in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), which has provided a framework for infusing language objectives in content instruction. This was done districtwide, reinforcing alignment across classrooms in the use of language-sensitive and language-rich instructional strategies designed for ELLs but that also benefit all students. While teachers expressed appreciation for this professional development, they also said that time to just share ideas “is very important and very effective.” To facilitate time for teachers to work with other staff, leaders instituted common planning time in lieu of what used to be hall duty. As described by a teacher, this time, is

not structured. . . We’re all working on our computers and saying, “Hey, what do you do here? What language works best?” . . . You’d be surprised that even though [my

colleague] teaches chemistry and I'm social studies, there are things we can help each other with.

Teachers described helping each other by offering a broad range of expertise. One explained: “We have foreign born, we have mainstream, and we have special education students, and so depending on where that child is, you depend on different teachers or staff members to go to regarding that child.” Teachers look to each other for specific instructional support, too, for example, with more tech-savvy faculty helping others integrate technology. One summed up how instruction is enhanced across the school when teachers work together in these ways:

I feel like we're in the trenches together and we're what we have to rely on. We talk to other teachers from other schools and it's like, "Wow it's very different here."

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Starting with the Goal, Not the Data

Part of Port Chester's “magic” (as noted by the principal in the opening quote) can be found in shared goals, priorities, data literate teachers and leaders, access to multiple forms of data, and designed systems of inquiry that enable interventions to match students where they are at. The deputy superintendent described the ways he and others in the district model answering the important “why” questions and relating those to data and goals:

What are you really looking at? Why are you looking at this?

It's to improve literacy.

Why?

Because, through literacy we'll be able to improve learning for kids.

Literacy, engagement, opportunities for advanced coursework, and high expectations for participation were priorities educators expressed in solidarity and understood as drivers to meet their student outcome goals. According to a school leader, they define a problem of practice, know what data to cull to measure success, and adjust interventions: “How much student engagement? What kind of lessons are we seeing? What are teachers doing to increase student engagement?”

The deputy superintendent explained how leadership teams create feedback loops through instructional rounds, observation, and coaching and link this feedback directly to district goals.

I want to sit with you [a teacher] before we go on our walk-through and my observation and know this year exactly how all of these things are related to our district goal on literacy. This year was about students' engagement because we wrote this student engagement language into it based on the instructional rounds that gave rise to us saying, "The focus of practice has got to be on student engagement."

Access to an Abundance of Data with Capacity to Use Them

As mentioned above, an important component of Port Chester’s system of monitoring includes the use of rubric-guided instructional rounds that could be perceived as threatening to teachers. However, school leaders said that they draw from their stores of “trust and understanding,” along with professional development, to make feedback work for improvement. As one explained, the overall approach is to “help support where teachers feel that they are strong and really want to grow.”

Teachers and leaders alike attested to using multiple measures to monitor performance and the capacity to use tools (e.g., matrices/rubrics) to improve. They pay close attention to both “whole” groups of students as well as to variations in performance between individual students using a variety of tools (e.g., matrices). A school leader explained,

We looked at the whole population and needed a matrix. Students at different levels need to be placed in an algebra course or an algebra plus, which is created for those that are struggling. There needs to be more than one data point, so that's why we created these matrices.

Processes for Collaborative Sense Making within and across Schools and Disciplines

Data use is part of an evidence-based decision making process that is cyclic, iterative, and reflective. A school leader explained that this process brings coherence not only at the High School, but also across all schools in the district.

How can we expect our ELLs to thrive? . . . That's why we went into using Balanced Literacy, and similar things happened at the elementary level where they had conversations with teachers and just said, “You know let's talk about this.” And it really came from feedback from teachers looking at the end results backwards and thinking about, what do our students need?

Access to school data, data literacy expertise, and time all factor into enabling teachers and leaders to make sense of data to improve practice and adjust their systems. Teachers and leaders think about their contexts and questions and seek and connect data with their experiences and understandings of what students need, as described by a school leader:

Last year we started an inquiry team that was cross discipline throughout the high school, where it was teachers through different grades, different contents—including phys ed, art, every major core—and they would come with student work. We're basically using student work to analyze data, but at the same time really reflect on our own practices by looking at other people's work and just sharing out.

Making a Match Using Data

Teachers and leaders at Port Chester play matchmaker with data and staff to provide the right experiences for students. A school leader reported that “the true key to our success is correct

placement of a child into their course each year and being able to give the correct support that that kid needs.” Sounds simple, yet in practice elaborate and thoughtful class schedules, teacher placements, and instructional supports are all involved. These adjustments are informed by a range of data sources, as described by a range of educators, for example,

It [meeting students’ needs] is in the structure of the way that students are scheduled, so there are courses that are designed to be able to push kids into where they’re going to get what they need. - school leader

The placement of the teacher for the next year, perhaps, with the type of students that could be matched best to their potential. - superintendent

We look at the data to try to see . . . where are they struggling? What specific areas do we need to focus more on? Then [we] design lessons that would incorporate strategies to target those deficiencies and then continue to test them, so we’re basically progress monitoring using data-driven instruction. - teacher

Recognitions, Interventions and Adjustments

Bringing Families into the Fold

As discussed earlier, Port Chester educators serve a diverse population, including a number of children who arrive from Latin American countries. According to teachers, these students bring from their cultural heritage a belief that teachers should be respected, and their family members also carry the belief that school staff are there, in the words of one teacher, “to take care of their children while they are at work.” Most teachers interviewed understand the importance of making emotional connections with students to draw them to come to school and succeed in their coursework. One support staff member described it this way:

We’re very lucky: There’s an appreciation level here from families. I think that you don’t always get that [in other places] as opposed to here, where students and families are appreciative of you doing it. And so, I think it makes you want to do your job and do it well because you see the impact. I think that’s a pretty powerful thing.

Even though some family members may not see a role for themselves in their child’s education, guidance counselors described active outreach to families and said they include bilingual staff who can conduct home visits when necessary. These counselors also use technology to communicate with family members in Spanish. They offer a number of events to inform family members of financial aid and college options and reported that these events are “packed.”

Providing Health and Community Service Ties

Beyond academic supports, Port Chester provides an “open door” community school model with health services available on site, and students have access to two social workers and a school psychologist shared with the other schools in the district. In addition, teachers and support staff referenced several community organizations that offer enrichment and out-of-school learning and

health opportunities for their students, including a “teen center” that provides tutoring among other options, some of which are staffed by Port Chester teachers. Educators shared a number of other ways they reach out to their community to enrich youth experiences. For example, a support staff member reported bringing in “speakers from the community to speak to Spanish-speaking students and their families about . . . things that they know, either immigration or about laws in general.”

In a Nutshell

Port Chester High School is hard wired to serve its diverse community’s adolescents in ways that range from programming to staffing to an approach toward building on adolescent, family, and community strengths. At the foundation of what makes the school distinctive are leaders and staff who value the import of positive, connected relationships between adults and between adults and kids as well as high expectations for performance and collaboration. These relationships are built on “trust and understanding” and reinforced through recognition and validation of staff’s professionalism and dedication and reciprocated with validation of students’ contributions to a culturally and linguistically rich school. With many barriers to honors and AP courses having been removed over the years, teachers are tasked with making difficult content accessible. They are aided in this effort by a wide array of ENL, bilingual, and special education course options; considerable shared staff instructional expertise; instructional guidance offered by district and school leaders as well as directors; adequate embedded and outside professional development opportunities; and systems for evidence-guided decision making.

**Port Chester Senior High School
Dr. Mitchell Combs, Principal
One Tamarack Road
Port Chester, New York 10573
mcombs@portchesterschools.org**

Appendix. Survey Results

Summary of Findings

The school culture survey was designed to explore how staff members perceive the quality of school life, their attitudes about cultural diversity, and relationships between members of the school community. Those with instructional responsibilities also reported on their instructional practices. The survey was distributed electronically to all staff members prior to the visit and remained open for three weeks. A total of 74 responses were received for a total response rate of 49%; 47 respondents indicated they have instructional responsibilities in their current positions.

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: Most staff members reported that they can talk with their principal when they have concerns about a student (90%) and that their 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 (89%).

Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions: Most staff members reported that the majority of parents and legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children (78%) and that staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community (76%). In addition, many staff members reported that most school activities and programs involve students' families including those from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds (70%).

Staff-Staff Interactions: Almost all staff members reported feeling accepted and respected by most staff members (94%), and most reported working together to ensure all students are in school every day ready to learn (85%).

Staff-Student Interactions: All staff members (100%) reported feeling responsible for engaging all students in school and learning. Additionally, almost all (99%) reported feeling responsible for helping all students learn and succeed and to learn to treat each other respectfully; believing all students can learn; trying to find help for any student encountering difficulties at home or school; and finally, feeling certain they are making a difference in the lives of students.

Student-Student Interactions: Most staff members reported that outside of classrooms, students hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds (90%) and that most students respect classmates who excel academically (88%). Additionally, most agreed that fights are not a serious problem among students of different backgrounds (88%).

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices: Almost all staff members (99%) reported looking forward to learning about others’ traditions, customs, and holidays and looking for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds. The same percentage reported that students of different backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services they need.

Table 1: School Culture Inventory

Staff members were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:	Strongly Agree, Agree, or Somewhat Agree	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, or Somewhat Disagree
<i>Staff-School Leadership Interactions</i>		
The principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff members of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	89%	11%
The principal and other leaders back up staff members when addressing student behavior problems.	79%	21%
I can talk with my principal(s) when I am concerned about a student.	90%	10%
<i>Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions</i>		
Staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community.	76%	24%
Most parents/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.	78%	22%
Most school activities and programs involve students’ families, including those from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	70%	30%
I have difficulties communicating with students' families.	32%	68%
I receive a great deal of support from students' families for the work I do.	67%	33%
<i>Staff-Staff Interactions</i>		
Staff members work together to ensure that all students are in school every day ready to learn.	85%	15%
I feel accepted and respected by most staff members.	94%	6%
<i>Staff-Student Interactions</i>		
I feel responsible for helping all students learn and succeed in school.	99%	1%
I feel responsible for helping all students learn to treat each other respectfully.	99%	1%
I feel responsible for engaging all students in school and learning.	100%	0%
I believe that all students can learn.	99%	1%
Most students are actively engaged in learning while at school.	88%	12%
I try to find help for any student encountering difficulties at home or in school.	99%	1%
I regularly discuss with students their plans after high school.	91%	9%
I am certain that I am making a difference in the lives of students at this school.	99%	1%
<i>Student-Student Interactions</i>		
Outside of classrooms, students generally hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	90%	10%

Fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are a serious problem in this school.	12%	88%
Most students respect classmates who excel academically.	88%	12%
Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices		
I look forward to learning about others' traditions, customs, and holidays.	99%	1%
I enjoy sharing my cultural and ethnic heritage with others at my school.	91%	9%
Students and staff frequently share aspects of their backgrounds such as their traditional food, clothing, art, and/or music.	85%	15%
Students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds treat each other with respect.	93%	7%
Students and staff at this school value each other's distinctive ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic differences.	92%	8%
I feel prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	96%	4%
I look for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	99%	1%
Students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need.	99%	1%
Academic expectations are low for some students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	27%	73%

Table 2. Teacher Interactions about Instruction

The most common instructional practices that staff members reported occurring at least once per week include: 1) discussing how to teach a particular topic (85%); 2) collaborating in planning and preparing instructional materials (78%); and 3) sharing what was learned about their teaching experiences (76%). Among the least common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported almost never or never using include: 1) hosting fellow teachers in their classroom for learning new strategies or providing feedback (70%) and 2) visiting the classroom of a fellow teacher for learning new strategies or providing feedback (50%).

Table 2: Teacher Interactions

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.	85%	13%	2%
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials.	78%	15%	7%
Share what I have learned about my teaching experiences.	76%	17%	7%
Visit another classroom to learn more about or provide feedback on teaching.	11%	39%	50%
Another teacher visits my classroom to learn new strategies or to provide feedback on my teaching.	6%	24%	70%
Analyze or review student data.	37%	41%	22%
Work together to try out new ideas for	61%	28%	11%

engaging students.			
Participate in professional development.	5%	93%	2%
Practice new skills.	52%	41%	7%
Discuss students with academic difficulties.	74%	24%	2%
Share strategies for communicating with students' families.	35%	41%	24%

Table 3. Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Most instructional staff members (53%) 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, and only 17% reported rarely or never altering lessons. Additionally, 46% of instructional staff members 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 24% 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 lessons' content, tasks, or assessments to take into account students' different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	53%	30%	17%
Purposely have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	46%	30%	24%

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