

Case Study: Sherburne-Earlville Senior High School

We're a family. - support staff

*It's that team approach. If you work in isolation,
you're only serving yourself. It's all in that
connection.*
- principal

School Context

The Sherburne-Earlville School District's expansive brick buildings house the Senior High, the Middle, and the Elementary School. This multi-school complex sits neatly arranged on a hill from which one can take in miles of the rolling hills of New York State's Southern Tier. This impressive building complex suggests local residents' belief that education is important; it also conveys a two-part message to students: Adults care about them, and their education matters.



Approximately 4,000 people live in the villages of Sherburne and Earlville. Although some students live in the Village of Sherburne, just down the hill from the district's nearly 400-acre perch, many students live too far to walk or bike to school; they must endure hour-long or longer bus rides to arrive at the schools' doors. State data systems tell the story: Sherburne-Earlville is the sixth most sprawling rural district in the state.

The property that now serves as home for the complex of school buildings once was a family farm, and dairy farming has provided traditional employment options in the area. However, this agricultural sector has shrunk over the past several decades. In response, residents actively have pursued new options. In recent years, for example, businesses such as a nationally-distributed yogurt manufacturer (located only a dozen miles away), as well as small niche companies like organic beef and alpaca farms, have presented viable new employment options for Sherburne-Earlville's graduates.

Like other rural communities in New York State, Sherburne-Earlville's community is characterized by growing transience, poverty, mental health needs, and substance abuse issues. As the superintendent explained,

Mental health and poverty are big issues for the district. Attendance is one of the important indicators. So we're working on attendance, including retention, and doing

home visits, working with parents, connecting with community agencies to get help with chronically absent kids.

Visible needs in students often signal family stress, including recurrent transitions, in particular changing residences in concert with parents’ employment searches. School leaders described what they called “The Route 12 shuffle,” named for the main thoroughfare between Binghamton and Utica, along which students are “moving constantly,” said the principal. The changes caused by transience, poverty, and the like have required district and school leaders to adjust resources to ensure that students are receiving the social, emotional, and academic supports necessary to succeed.

Educators there characterized Sherburne-Earlville Senior High as the center of the community. They expressed a deep and sincere caring for students and their families and noted how students and their families take care of each other. They also pointed to a school culture that prizes collaboration and matching practical solutions to families’ and students’ needs and priorities—whether for college preparation, career and technical training, and/or students’ health and fitness. Sport and recreation facilities include an indoor swimming pool, running track, and exercise-fitness room.

School Selection Criteria

Sherburne-Earlville Senior High School met the criteria of “odds beating” in this studyⁱ because the difference between expected graduation rates for students entering ninth grade in 2010, 2011 and 2012 who are disadvantaged economically exceeded the average performance for similar students across the state. The difference between the actual and expected graduation rates were standardized to calculate the extent to which Sherburne-Earlville’s rate deviated from the mean. With an overall z-scoreⁱ of 0.85, Sherburne-Earlville High School is distinctive for exceeding expected performance on multiple measure of graduation across three cohorts of students who are economically disadvantaged.

Student Demographics 2016-17: Sherburne-Earlville Sr HS, Sherburne-Earlville Central School District

	Sherburne-Earlville Senior High School	Sherburne-Earlville Central School District	New York State
Grades Served	9-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	374	1,321	2,629,970
Economically Disadvantaged	51%	57%	55%
English Language Learners	-	-	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
African-American	0%	1%	17%
Hispanic/Latino	1%	1%	26%
White	98%	97%	44%
Multiracial	0%	1%	2%
Other	1%	1%	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. An Appendix to this report shares the results of a survey of school staff that explored their perceptions of the overall quality of school life and relationships within the school and with the community. Those with instructional responsibilities also reported on their instructional practices.

Highlights

Sherburne-Earlville educators identified connections to students and among adults, commitments to community, and relevance and independence as factors that help to account for this school's distinctive performance vis-à-vis typical schools.

Connections to Students and among Adults

A top priority expressed by educators at Sherburne-Earlville Senior High is developing and strengthening connections between kids and adults and between adults. Many of those interviewed reported acting intentionally to encourage engaging behaviors from all participants—students, educators, school staff members, parents, and community members.

A parent, teacher, and long-time resident of the community described one way that the school promotes healthy development toward adulthood:

We value the importance of looking somebody in the eye and saying hello, taking the time to have a conversation. I think what it's done is help the development of [students'] people skills, and I think it makes them an all-around better person and more personable. This district allows for that to happen.

In this environment, teachers and student support staff reported being connected to each other and offering up care to each other and also to their students. A student support staff member spoke of the importance of “just being able to have that connection, to be able to bounce ideas off of and figure out what we’re doing and where we’re headed.” And a teacher described how she and other teachers strive to connect with students:

We're there every day; we still have a smile. Even when they have bad days, we're still consistent with them the next day. Even if they're acting out in class, they come in the next day and it's right back to, “Hey how are you? Are you okay?” And they know we're not holding anything against them. We're just moving on.

Commitments to Community

Complementing their efforts to forge connections within the school, educators described how their commitments to engage extend beyond the school walls, as well. While these commitments are predictably and appropriately academic in some respects, they also take shape in emotional

supports, as indicated by the teacher’s expression of care for students in the quote above. Others expressed how this support extends to the surrounding community:

There are going to be issues because of the economic depression, but I think what we’re seeing is that there are people trying to fight that as well in different ways. I think what gives us an advantage in a rural area is the community sense of looking out for each other.
– parent/teacher

I hear some others from other districts talking, and I just shake my head thinking, “Why would you take that hard line with that kid or with this parent?” . . . I think our teachers are really accommodating. I just think that we all have the same goal in mind, and this place seems really committed, whatever that is going to look like, for each kid – but really committed to trying to get kids to where they need to be and get families what they need. If we have word that we have a family that lost power or they don’t have any food in their cupboard, the response from this district is just immediate, and it’s substantial. An email goes out to the district [staff]: “This is what we need” – and boom, that cupboard is filled up. Whatever that need is, it’s taken care of.
– student support staff

Relevance and Independence

In this rural community, educators emphasized making a high school education relevant to students’ lives and developing their independence. A teacher explained that instructional practices are focused on “giving [students] choices” and fostering independence “by letting them learn at their own pace and the way they want to learn.” Several curricular features also encourage independence. For example, offering a variety of unique elective courses is purposeful and meant to increase student buy-in and engagement in planning their own futures. “It’s as much choice as you can give so they [students] can take ownership of their learning,” explained a teacher.

To this end, teachers described striving to help students “learn how to learn” with and from each other, as explained by one:

Instead of giving them the answer, I’ll ask them questions about what they’re doing, and they’ll come up with the answer on their own. I hate giving them answers, and it really frustrates me when kids around them will just jump in with the right answer. I’m like, “Let them do this so they can learn what they’re doing instead of just giving them the answer.”

A Closer Look

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

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Creating Individualized Academic Goals for Each Student

Teachers and school leaders at Sherburne-Earlville acknowledged the wide range of academic abilities and skills of their student population and stressed the importance of developing individualized goals to best suit each student's aptitudes and aspirations. As the principal stated, "Success is different for every person. . . . [It] is a case-by-case basis."

In keeping with this philosophy, school leaders have created opportunities for students who struggle as well as those who excel academically. As the superintendent explained,

The main real value is really just making sure that we try to provide what we can for each student based on their individual needs. Whether they're students with disabilities or whether they're students who require enrichment, those are the things we focus on.

For college-bound students, Sherburne-Earlville offers a range of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and also facilitates other course options through local community colleges. "We have students walking out of here with twenty-plus college credits," a teacher explained. The opportunities to take college-level courses in high school is, according to a teacher, "outstanding" and instills in students the "idea that they can be successful in college."

For students intending to enter the workforce after high school instead of college, a robust Career and Technical Education (CTE) program through the local BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) helps provide career-readiness skills so they can compete in the job market. In addition, these programs provide academically struggling students with supports to build their self-esteem and motivation. As one teacher put it,

When I first started . . . it was hard to convince them [lower-performing students] that they were worth just as much as the kid who's on the honor roll. With these other programs, we can put them into something they're interested in and they're good at. It gives them a lot of self-worth. They can go to English class and maybe they're not strong writers, but it gives them a little bit more confidence to try and work harder.

Offering a Responsive and Relevant Curriculum

School leaders and teachers spoke of making strides in an effort to develop a curricular program based on the needs and interests of the community. The centerpiece of their version of cultural responsiveness is evident in such curricular adaptations as the rebuilding of the Agricultural Science program, which had been eliminated in the 1990s. Reinstating this program had long

been a priority for many parents, students, and teachers, since Sherburne-Earlville has historically been an agricultural community. As the superintendent recounted, “We have [community] members saying, ‘Here we are, an Ag-related school. Where’s the Ag?’” Responding to such questions, school and district leaders have been adding Agricultural courses and are planning to hire a full-time instructor to teach them. To augment these courses with hands-on experiences students and staff have been constructing a greenhouse (see photo on p.1) on school property using funds from a grant provided by the nearby yogurt maker. The importance of agriculture to the community and its relevance to students’ lives was made explicit by the superintendent:

I think some of our students have been missing out because you do have a lot of students who are going into the [agricultural] business. I had a conversation just the other day with one of my former biology students who has a small, organic farm. . . . He could have really benefitted from some of those Ag Science courses, and [we’re] looking to bring those pieces back.

In addition to the Agricultural Science program, other course offerings have been added to the curriculum to ensure its relevance to students’ interests and needs. “We’re constantly adjusting our course offerings to meet those needs to what they’re interested in,” said the principal. A Hunting and Wilderness course, for example, was added to respond to student interest in the outdoors.

New courses based on graphic novels and mythological heroes also are being proposed in the English Department. Based on current student interest and recent graduates’ feedback, a college-level Physics course was recently added to the curriculum as well as other STEM (Science-Math-Engineering-Technology)-related offerings such as Computer Science, Engineering, and Robotics.

One teacher thoughtfully summed up the need to provide courses students need and/or feel are relevant to their lives in the following way:

I think it has to be relevant to their life because when you throw material at a student . . . what does it really mean to them? How do you relate it to their life here?

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

Planning and Goal-Setting at the District Level

The move to “a K-12 perspective,” as the superintendent put it, has been facilitated by the district strategic planning team called “Links.” This team meets about four times each school year. It consists of teachers, school leaders, and support staff from the district’s three constituent schools.

Links meetings were credited with cultivating collegiality and helping to align goals across all three schools, as members were tasked with disseminating districtwide goals through grade-level teams organized in their respective schools. In general, structural alignment among schools and their district offices paves the way for coherence – e.g., shared language, meanings, and

priorities. In Sherburne-Earlville, the superintendent said, “We know [that] what’s going on in the elementary school is supporting the middle school, and what’s going on in the middle school is supporting the high school.”

Although one teacher admitted that Links team meetings are sometimes “a little bit abstracted from what actually goes on from day-to-day here in school,” interviews with other participants indicated that several important initiatives can be traced to Links meetings. Examples include student-centered teaching observations, home visits to improve attendance, and the push for additional staff to address students’ mental health needs.

Distributing Leadership among a Competent Staff

District and school leaders described distributing leadership responsibilities as well as encouraging teachers and support staff to voice their opinions and provide feedback about which things are working and which are not. The principal emphasized this point saying, “If you work together, everybody wins.”

School leaders spoke of taking staff feedback seriously and surveying staff members in order to incorporate their opinions into future initiatives. One reported, “At the end of the year, I ask [staff] ‘Do you have any suggestions as far as things we should change, trainings I should bring in or we should have?’”

While acknowledging that at times difficult decisions have to be made that don’t meet everyone’s expectations, the principal explained,

I’m okay making those decisions. At least if people feel valued, that they’re heard – it helps out in that when you are making a decision they know where you stand and that you do value their opinion.

District and school leaders added that this collaborative approach to leadership is only possible when staff are authentically heard and valued:

A lot of it comes down to the fact that I don’t have to micromanage because these people are sharp. . . . They’re doing the right thing, and they’re smart people. - superintendent

Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Staff

Rural school districts across America typically encounter challenges in attracting and retaining teachers and student support professionals. Sherburne-Earlville, however, continues to attract and retain highly qualified candidates to fill open positions, a circumstance that those interviewed attributed to a clear district vision, student-centered values, adequate resources, and a supportive and collegial atmosphere.

Although there had been some administrative turnover over the years, many teachers reported having been employed by the district for over twenty years, and many of the newly employed staff had been hired to replace retirees who had been in the district for decades.

Teachers and support staff newly hired explained that the community spirit and student-centered values were immediately apparent at Sherburne-Earlville. As a support staff member explained, “In my interview I could tell like everyone was a team player. . . . It was students first—whatever you had to do for the students.” And another explained,

I was extremely impressed with the vision of the district, the technology that the district had, and what they were looking to try to do within the district. So, because of that, I knew that this is the kind of school that I want to be in.

Other members of the support staff who have worked in the district for a while said, “I never feel like I’m alone,” and “We work well together. We text each other on weekends; I just couldn’t ask for better colleagues.”

Many teachers and school leaders explained that they live within the community, where they regularly interact with colleagues, students, and parents at school events. “The staff and the students have certainly been what have kept me here for sure,” said a teacher. In describing the school climate, numerous district and school leaders, teachers, and staff used the word “family.” “I don’t know how you label it any other way,” said one school leader.

Among the other indicators of the district’s attractiveness and staff-holding power, the principal proudly reported that “several staff members” commute an hour just to work at Sherburne-Earlville. “They found themselves loving it here and not wanting to leave.”

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Becoming More Student Centered

Sherburne-Earlville teachers are being encouraged to move away from a one-size-fits-all model of direct instruction, primarily lecturing. They reported that they are progressing toward a more student-centered and engaging approach. As one school leader said, “There are kids that won’t learn from lecture and there are some that will.” Instead, teachers are asked, “What are you doing to engage students in your classroom?” -- meaning all kids, not just the kids that are easy to engage.

The principal explained that a student-centered approach obliges teachers to “cater instruction” to the specific needs of each student:

We want learning to be active, not passive. Gone are the days of sitting in a classroom and the teacher lectures like Charlie Brown and everyone is sitting in their little single rows and you just listen. We want to engage them [students]. We want rigor.

Teachers described emphasizing critical thinking and deep thought as alternatives to “cookie-cutter” approaches, as one teacher put it, that rely on lecturing and rote memorization. That teacher continued, “They [students] have to take initiative in their learning. . . . I try to put the emphasis on them as the generators of knowledge.”

For many teachers interviewed, an additional goal for students is that they be able to apply school learning to their lives outside of school. “It’s easy to get the information,” said one teacher, “but we have to teach them what to do with it.” Another said that her class was designed to “extract life lessons” from course readings and help make students “better versions of themselves.”

Such shifts in teaching have been facilitated by a collaborative initiative organized by teams of teachers teaching in the same content area who have started to observe each other’s lessons when using student-centered activities. After observations, teachers meet to discuss their findings. For courses taught by only one teacher, arrangements are made for teachers to visit other districts to observe teachers who teach the same courses.

Engaging Students with Hands-on Instruction

Teachers described using hands-on activities widely as a way to engage students and provide them with a way to put their knowledge into practice. “They’re going to get more from it [the lesson] in the long run,” said one teacher, who emphasized inquiry-based and hands-on approaches.

This pedagogical emphasis is enhanced by facilities such as a fully functioning greenhouse (owing to the initiative of an enterprising teacher) as well as maple syrup harvesting on school premises. To complement these experiences, courses in CAD (Computer-Aided Design) have been offered so that students can learn how to design sugar shacks among other things. Chickens donated to the school have also been kept on school grounds so that students can learn how to raise them and then eventually sell them.

Although school leaders provide teachers with some pedagogical flexibility, hands-on instruction was mentioned as an instructional practice that is strongly encouraged:

You’re not going to expect hands-on every minute, but the more we’re seeing that, the more successful I think kids tend to be internalizing information. - school leader

The emphasis on hands-on instruction has been supported through the allocation of resources to acquire cutting-edge technology and equipment. For example, science classrooms are well stocked with laboratory equipment, and technology classrooms are replete with computers, a 3D printer, and a CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machine that enables precise cutting of materials such as wood.

Voice and Choice and Opportunities for Sharing to Improve Instruction

While hands-on approaches are strongly encouraged, teachers are reportedly afforded flexibility and freedom in how they teach, within the imperative to engage all students: “We try to give them autonomy,” said the principal.

Reciprocally, teachers expressed appreciation for the pedagogical flexibility provided by school leaders. There's a "certain amount of flexibility to allow people to be themselves," said one teacher. Another teacher commented, "There's academic freedom." With this freedom come requests for resources, flexibility in programming, and opportunities for sharing. School leaders described having an "open door policy" in hearing these requests, and teachers confirmed it:

Anytime you want to improve instruction or anytime you want to improve course offerings for students, it's always been well accepted. - teacher

The pedagogical flexibility afforded to teachers extends to opportunities for sharing teaching practices. As mentioned earlier, teachers have begun to engage in peer observations focused on student-centered teaching. In addition to faculty and team meetings, teachers enjoy opportunities to share their practices informally for two unstructured planning periods each day.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Using Data to Improve Student Attendance

While the principal admitted that he loves "spreadsheets," he also acknowledged that the ultimate goal is to "come back to what student needs are," and staff need to be "comfortable collecting data, know what data to collect, and how to use it in a meaningful way." The district's Links strategic planning process, referenced earlier, facilitates such data collection and use. One area of focus identified through the process is attendance. The superintendent explained,

This [focus on increasing attendance] is something that came out of the strategic planning. A lot of it is the relationships. A lot of it comes down to that. Right now . . . one of our teacher aides is spearheading a lot of that – collecting attendance data, developing relationships with the families, actually doing home visits with the families if the student is out a number of days.

Once this problem was identified, counseling staff connected attendance data to students' progress toward graduation, and grade-level teams began discussing and developing student-specific strategies to improve attendance. The effort to get every student to school every day is a shared goal, and leaders send this message across the school community.

Attendance starts the whole process. We need to get you [students] here because once you're here we can do our good work. - principal

Rallying students, staff, and community members to improve attendance has had a huge pay off, with last year's graduation rate having increased "almost 25%," according to the superintendent. As a school leader explained,

Last year we had all of the students who started senior year graduate for the first time. That hasn't happened [before]. So we lost kids of the class of 2017 before they made it to

senior year, but every kid that was here in September walked across the stage in June. That was huge, that was success.

Using Risk Factor Data to Design and Deliver Supports

With the district focus on student-centered learning, teachers and leaders reported taking steps toward using more formative assessments, with interdisciplinary communications to help refine and define priorities for academic supports students need. In one such example mathematics and writing skills have been integrated and are offered via drop-in clinics during and after school as well as during summer. The district provides transportation to facilitate student participation in these clinics.

At-risk reports based on attendance, grades, and referrals are shared through Google docs, spreadsheets, and rubrics. Summer programs demonstrate a year-long commitment to students, and some target students most at risk as revealed by data. According to the principal,

Last year, we did a summer program with a social worker, the counselors, myself, the psychologist, the assistant principal. We looked at risk factors: whether they failed the class or not, whether they've been retained or not, their attendance, the number of referrals they got. We made a chart of our at-risk students. They were all given the opportunity to attend a summer program -- just coming in half-days, talking in groups. We started off with about twelve and it dwindled down to eight, and regularly we saw like five or six kids. But comparing those risk factors from the end of last year to this year, they've decreased.

Building Teams to Generate and Use Evidence to Improve

The Links framework developed at Sherburne-Earlville identifies a goal of using assessment data to inform instruction. However, school leaders recognize the balancing act of reinforcing teachers helping teachers with their instruction while also being data driven.

We want them to look at data, and they were like, "No we don't want to do this. We don't want to look at our tests and we don't want to make our tests – like analyze the data based on the standards, based on how we taught it. We don't want to do that. Can we just watch each other teach and talk about it?" . . . So kind of keep it organic, keep it with them as they're asking for it, as they're ready for it. – school leader

In this context, district and school leaders have focused on building a foundation for instructional improvement, one that meets teachers where they are at, encouraging inquiry, observations, and some measured autonomy. Teachers expressed appreciation for leaders' support of teaming and reported being treated like professionals and being consulted about and engaged in their own learning process. The superintendent explained how this teaming has worked:

Those teams are focusing on student-centered learning. We've instituted this year peer observations. We're having each teacher go in to watch other teachers, focusing on student-centered instruction – not in terms of evaluation, but in terms of what's working

well for students. It's generating more discussion about making instruction more engaging and more rigorous and more student centered. There was a lot of apprehension at first. Some people feel like, "Oh, we're going in to evaluate." The administration isn't part of it at all. We set up the groups, and now members from the Links team who are in that subcommittee or sub-category, they set the agendas for each meeting. Within each little team, they're coming up with their own schedules to meet and observe.

Recognitions, Interventions, and Adjustments

Matching Resources to Needs

School and district leaders have established new programs and hired additional staff that can be used flexibly to respond to the pressing social and emotional needs of their student population. As one teacher explained, "We really have a lot of people in this building who can provide one service or another."

Recognizing the growing mental health needs of students, additional school counselors and social workers were hired in the district to make sure no student "fall[s] through the cracks," as a teacher put it. A clinic staffed with a doctor and dentist is housed on school grounds so that students can receive medical care without missing school time. Since these resources provide crucial medical and mental health supports, school leaders and teachers are freed up to focus their attention on academics. As the superintendent explained,

As opposed to the administration basically taking on any and all crises situations, we have things in place, primarily the people that we've hired to be able to assist us with that. So our administrators can be instructional leaders.

Ensuring Smooth Transitions to High School

In the superintendent's words, measures have been taken in the past few years to prevent schools from "functioning in independent silos." Student support staff in the middle school, for example, make counselors at the high school aware of students to "look out for" to make sure that they receive support when needed. High school student support staff meet before the school year to discuss potential needs to address among incoming freshmen, with an all-hands on deck approach.

When a kid comes up through the ranks from pre-kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade, we all have a hand in educating this child. – principal

Participants interviewed for this study reported that junior and senior students volunteer to act as mentors for incoming freshmen. Incoming students' lockers are located near those of juniors and seniors, enabling mentees to connect with their mentors extemporaneously. As the principal noted, "Their mentors are on them all the time."

Building Community through Extracurricular Activities

Sherburne-Earlville offers students “so much . . . not just the academics,” a teacher explained. Indeed, a rich array of extracurricular activities, including sports, theater, music, and numerous interest clubs are available. Two additional late buses are provided to make sure all students have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Teachers and school leaders reported that extracurricular opportunities help students make friends and build community with peers. In the words of a teacher, “It [extracurricular involvement] makes them [students] part of a community; it makes them connect; it gives them people skills.”

At the same time, extracurricular activities provide community-school ties for parents and other community members and were mentioned as a focal point for parent and family involvement. Sports are a special attractor. According to the principal, “Everyone comes out to the games”; and a teacher noted, “There are times where we have more of our fans at away games than there are fans of those local schools!” In addition, parents volunteer as athletic coaches, and families organize team dinners and parties. Community members were also reported to frequent art shows, band recitals, and theater performances.

In a Nutshell

Connections, community, commitments, relevance, and independence are some of the highlights that weave through the processes and practices that explain Sherburne-Earlville Senior High’s odds-beating performance in terms of graduating on time students who are economically disadvantaged. Serving a rural community facing increasing poverty and rising mental health needs among its students and families, educators attempt to provide school-based response and support systems to meet local economic needs, contribute to the preparation of the future local workforce, and match what they do with community values. They provide this locally-oriented, education while continuing to provide a rigorous college preparatory curriculum for those students and families who want it.

Their goals extend beyond conventional academic orientations and outcomes to a holistic approach to students’ life course development. Beyond academics, these educators seek to teach students how to advocate and think for themselves and use local as well as technological resources to enhance their learning experiences. The school’s reported collaborative atmosphere lends itself to a constant pursuit to improve how they serve their students and their community, one increasingly informed by data and involving comprehensive learning support systems.

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Appendix. Survey Results

As part of the study, school personnel were invited to respond to a school culture survey 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 36 responses were received for a total response rate of 49%. Twenty-five 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, 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 (100%) reported that the principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, all staff members reported that they can talk with the principal when concerned about a student.

Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions: Most respondents (86%) reported that staff members have strong ties to the local community. Many (67%) also reported that most school activities and programs involve students' families, including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Staff-Staff Interactions: Almost all staff members (92%) reported feeling accepted and respected by most staff members, and most (89%) reported working together to ensure the needs of students are met.

Staff-Student Interactions: All staff members (100%) reported feeling responsible for helping all students learn and succeed, for teaching students to treat each other respectfully, and for engaging students in school and learning. All respondents also indicated that they try to find help for students encountering difficulties at home or in school and that they regularly discuss with students their plans after high school.

Student-Student Interactions: Almost all staff members (94%) reported that most students respect classmates who excel academically. Additionally, only 3% agree that fights between

groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds are a serious problem.

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices: All staff members (100%) reported feeling prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, or socioeconomic backgrounds and that students of different backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need. Also, almost all staff members (94%) reported looking for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different backgrounds.

Table 1: School Culture Inventory

Staff members were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:	Strongly Agree, Agree, or Somewhat Agree	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, or Somewhat Disagree
<i>Staff-School Leadership Interactions</i>		
The principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff members of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	100%	0%
The principal and other leaders back up staff members when addressing student behavior problems.	86%	14%
I can talk with my principal(s) when I am concerned about a student.	100%	0%
<i>Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions</i>		
Staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community.	86%	14%
Most parents/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.	58%	42%
Most school activities and programs involve students' families including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	67%	33%
I have difficulties communicating with students' families.	22%	78%
I receive a great deal of support from students' families for the work I do.	53%	47%
<i>Staff-Staff Interactions</i>		
Staff members work together to ensure that all students are in school every day ready to learn.	92%	8%
I feel accepted and respected by most staff members.	89%	11%
<i>Staff-Student Interactions</i>		
I feel responsible for helping all students learn and succeed in school.	100%	0%
I feel responsible for helping all students learn to treat each other respectfully.	100%	0%
I feel responsible for engaging all students in school and learning.	100%	0%
I believe that all students can learn.	94%	6%
Most students are actively engaged in learning while at school.	77%	33%
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.	100%	0%
I am certain that I am making a difference in the lives of students at this school.	97%	3%
<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.	92%	8%
Fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are a serious problem in this school.	3%	97%

Most students respect classmates who excel academically.	94%	6%
<i>Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices</i>		
I look forward to learning about others' traditions, customs, and holidays.	86%	14%
I enjoy sharing my cultural and ethnic heritage with others at my school.	86%	14%
Students and staff frequently share aspects of their backgrounds such as their traditional food, clothing, art and/or music.	69%	31%
Students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds treat each other with respect.	86%	14%
Students and staff at this school value each other's distinctive ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic differences.	81%	19%
I feel prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	100%	0%
I look for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	94%	6%
Students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need.	100%	0%
Academic expectations are low for some students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	30%	70%

Table 2. Teacher Interactions

The most common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported occurring at least once per week include: 1) discussing students with academic difficulties (68%); 2) sharing learning about teaching experiences (56%); and 3) discussing how to teach particular topics (44%). 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 (36%); 2) visiting the classroom of a fellow teacher for learning new strategies or providing feedback (28%); and 3) collaborating in planning and preparing instructional materials/analyzing student data and practicing new skills (16% each).

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.	44%	44%	12%
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials.	32%	52%	16%
Share what I have learned about my teaching experiences.	56%	32%	12%
Visit another classroom to learn more about or provide feedback on teaching.	4%	68%	28%
Another teacher visits my classroom to learn new strategies or to provide feedback on my teaching.	0%	64%	36%
Analyze or review student data.	16%	68%	16%
Work together to try out new ideas for engaging students.	28%	60%	12%

Participate in professional development.	0%	88%	12%
Practice new skills.	24%	60%	16%
Discuss student with academic difficulties.	68%	28%	4%
Share strategies for communicating with students' families.	8%	80%	12%

Table 3. Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Almost none of instructional staff members (16%) reported altering the content of lessons, tasks, or assessments to reflect diversity in students' ethnic, cultural, language, or socioeconomic backgrounds 3-5 days per week, while only 32% reported they rarely or never altered their practices. Almost none (17%) reported purposely placing students in work groups with peers who are different ethnically, culturally, socioeconomically or who speak another language 3-5 days per week, while 50% reported rarely or never engaging in this practice.

Table 3: Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Frequency with which staff:	3-5 days per week	1-2 days per week or every few weeks	Rarely or Never
Alter lesson's content, tasks, or assessments to take into account students' different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	16%	52%	32%
Purposely have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	17%	33%	50%

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.