

### Malverne Senior High School Student Study

*Everybody here cares about me. Even the security guards, they know my name. They're always nice. They always make conversation. Everyone's so understanding of everything. [Our Principal] knows. . . . I'm surprised because he has so much to do, and he still knows so much about me, all my interests and stuff. He knows everybody in the school. . . . All the staff here really just care about the individual and I mean it really just makes a difference. As a high school student, it's hard to find your place realizing how big the world is. Like what am I going to do? How small I am, the impact I'm going to have. It's just they helped us so much – everyone in the school helps us so much. (Sean<sup>1</sup>)*



### The School Context

Malverne Senior High is situated about thirty miles from New York City in a working-class community dotted with small businesses, private homes, and housing complexes. As described by Robyn, one Malverne high school student, the high school is an important hub for the community, with a “very close connection” between the school and parents.

In this Phase II of our College and Career Readiness Study, we investigated Malverne 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students’ perspectives on their preparation for life beyond high school.

Referring to the surrounding community as “small,” “diverse,” and “close-knit,” students described spending time with friends and family at local restaurants, shops, and cafes. “Everything is just so close,” said Sean. Other communal locations of interest to students were the town library, parks, and basketball courts. The close proximity to New York City was also mentioned by numerous participants as a source of cultural enrichment, diversity, and entertainment opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the identities of participants all student names are pseudonyms

Sean elaborated on what it was like to spend time in the town of Malverne:

*When you go to Malverne, there's like different stores and things, so it's just like a comfortable place to just be with my friends. Like we know where everything is, . . . and we know the people there because it's pretty small. . . . In a small town like this, it's good to be friendly with people and know people, because it's good to build connections.*

### School Selection Criteria

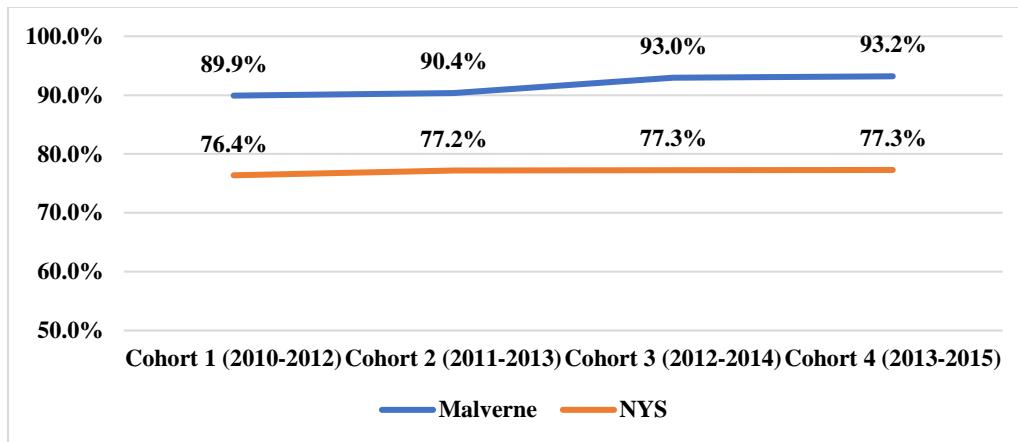
Malverne Senior High School met the criteria of a positive outlier in Phase I of the College and Career Readiness Study because the difference between expected graduation rates for students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2010, 2011 and 2012, who were disadvantaged economically, African-American, and/or Hispanic/Latino, exceeded the average performance for similar students across the state. For this student study (Phase II), we chose to revisit Malverne because it continues its positive outlier trend. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of Malverne in the academic year 2018-19<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1. Malverne Demographics**

	Malverne Senior High School	Malverne Union Free School District	New York State
Grades Served	9-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	548	1,728	2,598,921
Economically Disadvantaged	51%	51%	57%
English Language Learners	2%	2%	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
African-American	54%	48%	17%
Hispanic/Latino	24%	26%	27%
White	15%	18%	43%
Multiracial	1%	3%	3%
Other	6%	5%	10%

Since the completion of Phase I of our study, we noted that Malverne Senior High School has maintained a higher graduation rate when compared to the New York State average. Figure 1 shows a comparison of Malverne graduation rates over four cohorts of 9<sup>th</sup> graders who started high school from the years of 2010 to 2015 in comparison to the New York state average.

<sup>2</sup> 2018-19 School Enrollment data are the most recent available from the New State Enrollment Database.



**Figure 1. Overall Graduation Rates in Malverne Senior High School and New York State.**

This case study<sup>i</sup> reports on students’ perspectives on their high school experiences and their preparation for life beyond high school. The next section highlights major findings and is followed by details regarding the five lines of inquiry that framed this study.

## Highlights

Students in this study shared perspectives that the following were important aspects of their preparation for life after high school:

- ✓ Close Relationships with Teachers and among Peers

Students characterized their relationships with teachers and their peers at Malverne as “close-knit,” “supportive,” and “like family.” “Everyone knows each other,” said Steven, continuing, “We’re so interconnected.” Comfortable and casual relationships with teachers were commonplace as students described feeling free to talk to their teachers about both academics and personal challenges. “Even though they’re your teacher sometimes, most of the time, they speak to you as a friend and as a mentor,” commented Nick.

Peer relationships were also described as supportive and egalitarian, as students reported a lack of bullying and hierarchy among students in their school. Elizabeth, for instance, explained that Malverne High School was “distinct” because of “how well everyone interacts with each other.” Another student responded similarly: “I feel like our school is just so supportive of everything – we all get love. And I feel like that separates us from other schools.”

- ✓ Focus on extracurriculars

Extracurricular activities were frequently mentioned by students as a strength of their school and a powerful source of experiential knowledge. As Tina put it, “There are so many things to do here.” Many felt that extracurriculars offered them a chance to be recognized and appreciated for their different abilities and offered many outlets for

students to develop their talents. In addition, extracurriculars were described by students as a way to develop relationships with peers with whom they may not have otherwise had a chance to interact in classes. These new relationships helped to break down barriers across student groups and forge a more harmonious school culture. As Olivia explained, “It doesn’t matter if you’re in band or on the football team. Nobody cares – we’re all the same . . . because the music kids are the athletes, because there are football people and volleyball people in band.”

✓ **High Expectations and Preparation for Future**

Students felt that educators at Malverne High School held them to high expectations and prepared them well for their lives after high school. Teachers’ strong emphasis on college readiness was complemented by efforts to have students apply their learning to “the real world,” as Robyn put it. Steven explained, “No matter what teacher we’ve had, no matter what subject [teachers] taught, they always taught more than they needed to. They always taught more than just the curriculum. . . . They always say how that’s really important for us to keep going past school and always try to be learning and taking in more information.”

Although some students commented that the rigor and expectations of teachers were, at times, challenging to fulfill, they also knew they had the support of teachers. For example, students described the extra lengths teachers would go to to make sure students understood class material, whether it was through before-school study sessions, providing help in the Homework Center after school, or extra credit opportunities. Students felt that the passion and support of their teachers kept them engaged and determined to learn. As Olivia put it, teachers “always provide everything they can possibly provide – extra credit, work. Teachers tend to stay basically every day after school. Homework Center, everything, they literally won’t stop until you learn, until you get it. And I feel like that’s what we have that most schools don’t, which is the passion and the dedication.”

## **A Closer Look**

The three highlights above are evident throughout the four lines of inquiry that frame the study of which this case is one part. The sections below expand on the highlights.

### **Voice, Choice, and Leadership**

#### **Encouraging Student Voice**

In general, students felt encouraged by educators to raise their voices about issues both inside and outside of school. Though acknowledging that “not every problem can get fixed,” students felt that they were heard by educators and staff. “We’ve talked to [the school principal] about how we felt. . . . He’s always trying to fix all the problems in our school,” explained Olivia.

Students were also urged to speak up about difficult and complicated issues in classes such as sexual assault and mental health. Being treated like “adults” – as Robyn put it – made students not only feel more comfortable and open with teachers, but also well prepared to engage in

dialogue with those who may not share the same views as them. As Elena put it, “I voice my opinions a lot.” Sean described the value of having “heated” political discussions between peers in a Government class:

*But it always ends the same way in that at the end of class, everyone is still. . . . Somehow it all dials back down and everyone just goes back to being normal, because having this opportunity to voice our opinions and not be afraid of that is – we learn to respect each other's way, and I wish more people did that.*

Several participants also brought up examples of student-led initiatives in school such as a walkout planned in response to the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. School and district leaders, wanting to ensure the walkout could be done safely, met with students to create a plan on which they could all agree. “We sat in the conference room [and] talked about what we wanted to do, how we wanted to do it,” explained Erin. The event eventually developed into a memorial in which the entire student body walked to the field behind the school and installed a peace sign in honor of the victims of the shooting. “That was really nice that they were able to listen to us,” she said.

### **Offering Choice to Students**

The wide variety of classes, extracurriculars, and activities offered at Malverne provided students with a range of pathways designed to develop them into well-rounded learners. Students could choose from a range of rigorous AP courses as well as career-oriented tracks offered through the regional BOCES, with programs as diverse as Engineering, Bio-Medical, and Music. As Steven commented, “Everybody kind of finds their own niche in a way, and the school really does offer something for everyone.” Elizabeth explained that the diverse activities and class offerings meant that students could cultivate an array of skills and aptitudes that would be beneficial to them as they moved on from high school:

*So for every class, the school meets your needs. If you want to be a doctor, if you want to be a lawyer or a professional swimmer – it doesn't matter. The school right now has so many activities and stuff that, even if you don't have a specific class that suits your needs, you have clubs and activities and events that just spark your interest. And then it gets you prepared for other things that you might do outside of high school.*

The range of choices and opportunities available to them is what, according to several students, distinguished Malverne from other schools. As Mary explained:

*Sometimes I have to go to a different school, and I talk to the kids that are in the school, and whenever I tell them that I'm part of the marching band or we have a musical every year and I'm part of that, they're like, “Oh we don't have that.”*

## Motivating Students to Learn

Many students explained how they were motivated by teachers to work hard and meet the high expectations set out for them. Through this process students learned about their own strengths and aptitudes and became more confident in their abilities. Nick, for instance, explained how teachers' high expectations encourage students to work hard and achieve in school:

*That's what also can push students to do better because you don't want to disappoint. . . . You like this teacher, they're really cool, you don't want to disappoint this teacher. You want to do better.*

When asked what teachers do to encourage student success, Olivia described how Malverne teachers keep students engaged and motivated to work hard:

*The teachers here are dedicated; they want you to pass. They want you to keep going. And I love that about teachers here because I feel like kids need that extra push. . . . They show so much love; they want you to do good. And I feel like that's just better because if you have a teacher that's like, "Do whatever you want, I don't really care if you pass or fail," then students are going to be like, "Okay I guess I'm going to go on my phone." But if teachers are going to be like "We have a test next week, and you're going to study," [students] will be like, "Oh I have a test. . . ." They will want to do well; they want to do better more often.*

Robyn recounted how a teacher used her paper as an example for other students to emulate, a moment that instilled in her more confidence about her own abilities:

*The fact that these teachers that I think are so intelligent, that I have so much respect for, think that what I've done is good enough to show to their students in order to help them succeed. That . . . just like confirmed in me that I can succeed on my own because they believe in me basically.*

The support and encouragement of teachers was also mentioned by students as a strong motivation to overcome both academic and personal challenges. For instance, Henry explained how a teacher had used a personal story to motivate him to work harder in school. "He told me that he came from nothing and he had to work his way up to become a teacher," explained Henry, continuing, "Mr. [name] was someone I talked to – I still talk to him every day. And he was talking about me being very bright, taking my future seriously, and I just remembered that to this day because he told me if I waste it, there's no coming back."

## Cultural Responsiveness

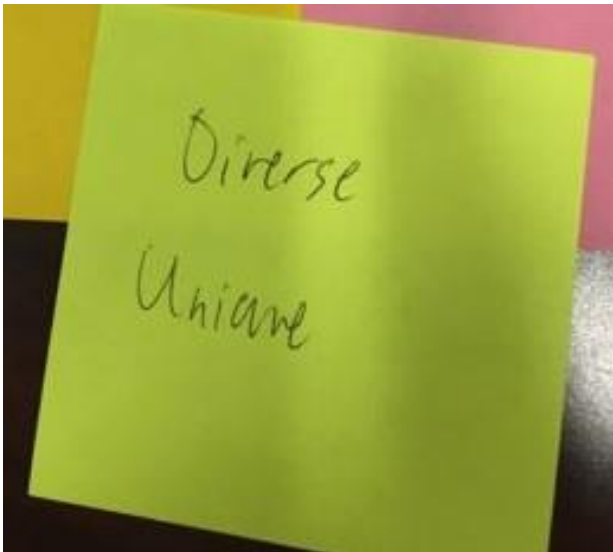
### Learning through Diversity

The diverse student population of Malverne High School was reflected in the curriculum and pedagogy implemented by educators. Several participants, for instance, explained how their teachers encouraged them to connect curricular elements to their cultural identities. For example, Elizabeth described how her teacher welcomed her input on subjects with which she had direct

cultural experience and knowledge. “I would put in my input into it. . . . It was just nice. It’s good that they’re open about that.”

Nick described how, through a writing assignment, his teacher helped him reflect on his Haitian heritage. “[My teacher and I] talked about each thing I do with my culture and which thing that I like to do the most. So ultimately, we came up with my Haitian heritage because Fourth of July . . . in Haiti we have Independence Day, too.” Similarly, Mary described how the themes of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* resonated with her on a deep personal level. “[The book] talks about all aspects of life that I’ve experienced. . . . It has a lot to do with racism, and that’s a part of my history, especially being African American. . . . That’s a big theme in the book that resonated with my family, my household.” She continued, “I found a lot of the concepts in the book to be relatable to my lifestyle in a way.”

As referenced above, Malverne High School serves a highly diverse student population. Many students commented on the diversity of their school and were grateful that they were offered an opportunity to meet students from different cultural backgrounds, a situation that they felt was unique compared to many schools in the surrounding area. As Elizabeth put it, “I feel like where people come from – especially New York – there’s a lot of schools where it’s all just white kids or all black kids. But in this school district, it’s just a mix. And I feel like that’s a good variety for everyone.” Robyn explained, “You go to a classroom and you’ll see people of so many different cultures and different backgrounds.”



Students also felt that being part of a diverse school culture provided them with important knowledge and experiences that would prepare them well for their futures. For instance, Steven commented that the school gave students a chance to communicate and get to know students across any “cultural barriers.” In describing the diversity of Malverne High School, Robyn explained how Malverne offered her the opportunity to learn about different cultures firsthand. She explained, for example, how she was not only learning Spanish by taking classes but utilizing these lessons by seeking out opportunities to talk to her native Spanish-speaking peers in school. She continued:

*Going to this school, I know so much about people of different races, religions, backgrounds than someone else would. So I think that it causes me to be maybe a more empathetic person, or maybe a more culturally understanding person, than another person would be.*

## School Culture, Climate, and Management

### **A Close-Knit and Caring School Culture**

In reflecting on the school culture and climate, many students described Malverne High School as “close-knit.” “I think it’s like a great thing because everyone does know everybody,” said Robyn. Elizabeth elaborated on the supportive and nurturing school culture that developed between peers and with teachers over the course of their high school careers:

*Malverne is a small school, so I mean – especially if you’re here for four years – you basically know a lot of people here and you have connections. . . . Everyone is like supportive of each other. I mean, once you know everyone here it’s like they’re kind of just your family.*

The high expectations and rigorous academic climate of Malverne described above is also complemented by educators’ genuine concern about students’ well-being. This caring and supportive climate at Malverne provided an important source of support for students who recognized – as Erin put it – that their teachers were “tuned into” how they were feeling. Robyn, for instance, explained,

*One particular thing that stood out to me about the teachers where I was like, “Wow:” In sophomore year, I was going through a little bit of a tough time, and I was at extra help for my AP Chem. I had a really bad test and . . . I was kind of getting upset about it. But my teacher came and said, “Listen I don’t care about your grades, I care about your well-being.” It’s not like a teacher or any of them are going to judge you on whether you’re doing really well in the class.*

The prioritization of mental health was mentioned by students as an important sign that educators cared about their emotional well-being. Several students appreciated that their teachers checked in on them if they were having a difficult day or appeared to be upset. “Everyone, all the teachers here really are open to the students. They want to make sure everyone is comfortable and everyone is doing their best, like even outside of school how they’re feeling,” said Sean. Moreover, programs such as Meditation and Mindful Mondays provided students with important outlets for the stress and pressure of academics. As Olivia explained:

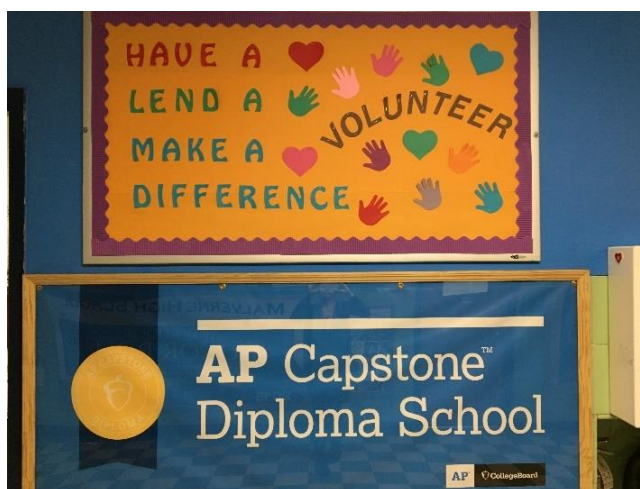
*[My teacher] would do Meditation Mondays or Mindful Mondays, and he would go around and just have a moment of silence. He would just talk, and it just clears your head . . . especially if you’re really having a bad day. I remember this one time he did it, it was 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I just started crying because it was a really bad day for me. I was stressed, I was upset. . . . And it just really helped me out. I feel like he does that with all of his students. And everybody who I’ve talked to about it, they liked it. They felt like it was a good way to escape for a little bit, to express how they feel. Because, to me, expressing how I feel makes me feel better. Talking to someone about it – because if I hold it up all together, I’m just going to break down. That’s what he does, and I feel like it’s really helpful.*



## Setting High Expectations

Students at Malverne believed that their teachers and school leaders set high expectations for all students and encouraged them to succeed in academics and beyond. As Steven put it, “There’s a lot of them expecting us to give all of our effort to their class and everything else we do.” Many students described “time management” as an important skill they developed as they sought to manage their numerous academic and extracurricular commitments. Others expressed the rigorous tone set by their teachers. “They don’t like excuses,” said Robyn, who explained how teachers held them to high standards such as not missing any assignments and being punctual. In describing a teacher who would mark students late if they came in only one minute after the bell, Steven explained how he’s applied the same discipline to his part-time job: “I’ve kind of applied that to my job because this is the real world and this is a business. . . . It kind of like makes you apply it to your real life.”

The high expectations of teachers, at times, posed challenges for students who struggled with the stress of academics and extracurriculars. Despite these difficulties, students overall felt such rigor would prepare them well for their lives after high school, and they also felt supported by teachers who were readily available for extra academic and emotional assistance. As Steven explained, “I think we have such a solid extra help system with the teachers, and we’re very comfortable in going to them. The work is challenging, but we’re able to handle it because of that.” Several



students reported that mental health and general well-being has become a bigger focus at Malverne High School, referencing the implementation of meditation and mindfulness programs described above. In addition to these programs, others mentioned the role played by guidance counselors and social workers at their school in supporting their social and emotional health.

## Creating Safe and Open Spaces throughout the School

The comfortable and casual relationships that Malverne students had with educators was reflected in the way they described the space inside the school. Several students, for example, mentioned places within the school where they could just “hang out” or “talk” with peers or their teachers. The guidance office, library, and band room all were mentioned as communal places where students can congregate and temporarily “escape” from academics, as Olivia put it. Sean explained how teachers always had “their doors open” for students to reach out to them whenever they needed:

*We could really go anywhere because teachers are always like, “If you need, if you want to come in, doors are open. If you wanna study, if you want to just talk, if you want to hang out, it’s fine.” So, I mean I could really go to the Bio room. I could go to the Engineering room. You know, everyone has their place.*

Recently, a new wing was opened at the school, further expanding the spaces in which students can spend time. This new space includes a lounge area, practice area for band members, and a small auditorium. As Sean summed it up, “Everyone has a sort of safe part of the school that they can go to.”

## Relationships among Peers, Educators, Families, and Community Members

### **Supportive and Encouraging Teachers**

Students reported close relationships and a high level of comfort with their teachers, frequently referring to them as “friends” and like another set of “parents.” One important characteristic mentioned by students was teachers’ availability and willingness to talk to them about both classwork as well as a range of everyday topics in students’ lives. Several participants, for instance, felt that their teachers were always there to speak with them about any issues they may be having in class. As Robyn put it, “I know I can go to them if I have a problem or I need to talk because we’ve forged these special relationships.” Steven added, “I think it’s really important that . . . we do have that level of comfort where we can go to a teacher if we have a problem, and we can actually talk to them.”

Other students described how their close relationships with teachers provided them with sources of casual and comfortable interactions. “They’re always willing to joke with us and have fun in class. They’re not rigid,” said Robyn.” Erin described how she liked to catch up with her favorite teacher every day: “I’m here in the morning because I come a little early and [my teacher and I] just talk about everything like TV shows, sports, college.” As Robyn put it, “I just like to talk to [my teacher] about my life and my academic endeavors, literally anything.”

Students also felt that their teachers cared about each student regardless of their academic ability or position in the class. For instance, several students explained that teachers at Malverne did not develop close relationships only with certain members of the class but sought to cultivate them with all students. As Robyn said, “Usually when that happens [close relationships develop], a person is like a genius in the class, teacher’s pet, but you don’t have to be the best to be good friends with your teacher or feel comfortable with your teacher.” Nick explained how Malverne teachers appreciated students’ particular needs and identities:

*I feel that the teachers, they do a really good job of understanding each student. I think that's what really comes down to the success is that each teacher can successfully resonate with a student. For me, every teacher, they know your individual needs, they know what you struggle with, they know your personality and how to interact with you.*

### **Egalitarian Peer Relationships**

Students commented on the relative lack of rigid peer groups in their school and the cooperative and congenial relationships between classmates. Sean, for instance, maintained that “this school really doesn’t have bullying,” and even with “outside pressures” there were “many different

opportunities for students who are dealing with stuff,” including support staff, counseling programs, and clubs. Robyn explained how peer hierarchies were generally absent:

*We don't have this popular hierarchy, like social hierarchy here. There aren't cliques; you just hang out with this group of people, and sometimes you hang out with this person, and maybe you're friends and maybe you're not.*

Extracurriculars and sports were considered by many students as an important factor in promoting healthy relationships across peer groups. During a focus group, students explained how extracurricular activities and sports helped create unity among students and allowed students to meet peers with whom they might not have otherwise had a chance to develop relationships:

*Robyn: There aren't this one group of people who are like – oh these nerds are in band. No, it's literally everybody. Nobody is going to get bullied for . . . doing any club or anything because we're all in there. We're all in the same ugly uniforms, whether you're the prettiest girl in the school or you're somebody who's kind of really shy and introverted. Everybody just like does band. We're all the same in that aspect, which kind of unites us.*

*Steven: I think that's true across all of our clubs and stuff that we offer. I'm a part of the Robotics Club at our school, and we have students at the top of their class and we have students at the bottom of their class. It almost evens it out in a way. When students join Robotics, most of them don't know anything about it. And they come there and they learn. And everybody learns the same thing and everybody ends up learning at the same rate. So in a way, it kind of humanizes everybody. You don't see the kid at the top of the class as that really smart kid that's better than everyone else. You see him as the kid that doesn't know how to tighten a screw [Tina and Erin laugh]. It almost gives us all a new perspective on each other. It goes back to the whole interconnected part of us where we can all come together.*

Many students also mentioned relying on each other to overcome challenges they experienced – with Robyn referring to their friends as a “support system.” For instance, several students described studying with other peers in the school library, at each other’s homes, or in nearby cafes and restaurants. Elizabeth explained how the support of her peers has helped her get through difficult academic challenges, “Since we’re such a close-knit school, everybody pretty much understands the stress and it's like if they got through it, I'm gonna get through.”

## **Academic and Non-Academic Skills, Competencies, and Knowledge**

### **A Focus on College and Career**

Students explained in detail about how well prepared they felt for college and career. For one, students felt that the rigor of their classes and high expectations of their teachers gave them a strong academic foundation. Several students mentioned specifically the skills of time management and communication as two strengths that they developed as students. Teachers “set

a good standard so that you know how to be ready for college,” said Nick. Another explained that classes were often run like college courses with no late assignments accepted. “You’re treated like an adult,” commented Tina.

Several students described how their teachers helped them decide on college majors and career pathways. Robyn, for instance, told how her teachers helped her “realize what I want to do” for a career by stimulating her interest in politics and history. Elena explained how she felt “lost about who she was” until she began taking more challenging English and History classes. Through these classes and her engaging teacher, she discovered a “passion” for literature. “If I were just being thrown facts at, I wouldn’t have this ideal that I do now,” she explained. Olivia explained how her teacher helped guide her in deciding on what to do after high school:

*My Spanish teacher, too, she’s also like a mom to me. I talk to her about everything, and she always tells me to follow my heart and do what’s right. Following your intuition sometimes . . . as long as you’re stable and you’re happy . . . that’s the most important thing. No one would want to do something they don’t like for the rest of their life and they’re hating themselves and regretting it.*

As referenced above, many students had close relationships with their guidance counselors and visited them frequently. Counselors were also mentioned by students as crucial figures in assisting them prepare for college. Henry, for instance, explained how he had not been planning for college until 10<sup>th</sup> grade when his cousin suggested he talk to his guidance counselor:

*It was like midway 10<sup>th</sup> grade year to 11<sup>th</sup> grade that I started going to guidance. I didn’t know where the guidance office was when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade even though my cousin was here – but he graduated last year. He knew where it was, but I just never went there. But when he was talking to me about my future, I started going to guidance frequently.*

Other students described going to guidance frequently for both college and career advising. Erin said that her guidance counselor helped her pick out programs and scholarships as well as assisting with the application process. “She’s amazing; she’s constantly looking for things for me and just helping me make sure that I’m looking at the programs that I want to look into,” she explained. Elizabeth explained how her guidance counselors were instrumental in steering her towards the right college.

*[F]or the people that are just inspiring me, I would say it’s my guidance counselors because I see them all the time, and they’re always the ones that give me the guidance as to what college I should do, which ones suit me, which ones I think I would fit in more. I feel like they’re the ones that would make me more comfortable when I get out of high school and engage in the real world.*

### **Providing Deep Learning Experiences**

Both academic classes and extracurricular activities at Malverne were seen by students as providing an array of skills and experiences that they felt would prepare them well for their lives after high school. Specifically, many felt that the rigor of classwork and high expectations of

their teachers instilled in them a strong work ethic. Elizabeth summed up how going to Malverne High School prepared her for “the real world:”

*I feel like I'm pretty prepared because with the opportunities that I had at school, I'm more open to just embracing other people and just talking to them. And I feel like just being . . . within this school and knowing everybody here, I feel like that is a beneficial thing. Because then when I go into the real world, I have an idea of how I should communicate, and who I should reach out to if I need help or ideas to succeed.*

Describing the difficulty and commitment of participating in the marching band, Erin explained, “It’s definitely taught me how to keep working towards something even though it’s really hard. Like I don’t just give up.” Henry recounted how, with the support of his teacher, he raised his grade in Chemistry after failing the midterm:

*I learned [that] if I work hard at anything, I'm going to get it. If I work hard at anything, it doesn't matter what it is, if I put my mind to it, I'm going to do it. That's what Chemistry taught me. And it wasn't just a class, that was a life lesson.*

Other students felt that teachers encouraged them to dig deeply into content and apply that knowledge to “real life situations,” as Steven put it. Robyn explained how her interest in history was kindled by her teacher, who sought to apply these lessons to current events. As she explained:

*I know sometimes people are like, “Why do we learn about history? It's already happened before.” It's something very real and affects your real life and is going to affect the future. . . . [My teacher] didn't just teach it in the context of the test, he taught it in real life.*

Several students commented that their experiences interacting with peers from different backgrounds and participating in the various clubs and extracurricular offerings at Malverne would help them communicate with others as they moved forward in life. Nick, for example, felt that his experiences at Malverne helped “broaden” his “horizons.” Elizabeth explained how students at Malverne were well prepared for life after high school:

*I feel like I'm pretty prepared because with the opportunities that I had at school, I'm more open to just embracing other people and just talking to them. . . . Malverne is that step when you're going into college and you have to interact with other people, you're not this awkward person that doesn't want to talk to anyone. You're more comfortable now because you had experience from high school.*

## In a Nutshell:

Overall, students described their experiences at Malverne as ones that would prepare them well for their futures by developing close relationships with teachers and peers and endeavoring to fulfill the high expectations set out for them by educators. The diverse cultural climate of Malverne High School, students believed, offered them valuable opportunities to build relationships and learn from students from different backgrounds, a feature they felt was unique as compared with other more culturally homogenous schools in the surrounding area. The wide range of extracurricular programs and activities was also frequently mentioned by students as an important source of learning, as well as a way for students to work with peers they might not interact with otherwise. The focus on college and career at Malverne High School was also considered by students as a factor that made them well prepared for college and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Know Your Schools~for NY Kids since 2005. In 2019-20, research teams investigated two high schools that we identified as positive outlier 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 9<sup>th</sup> 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. In the phase 2 study, we also compared the trajectory of graduation outcomes in Malverne to the New York State average of four cohorts of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, who started high school from the years of 2010 to 2015. Researchers collected interview and focus group data as well as timelines and ecological maps for this study. Results of the cross-site analysis and details regarding the project's other studies, staff, and publications can be found at <https://ny-kids.org/>