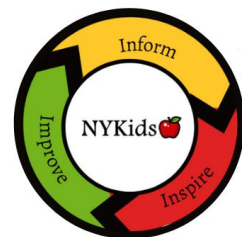# FOSTERING POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

- Research demonstrates the importance of peer relationships

- We don't know enough about how classrooms, schools, and communities interact to impact peer relationships

- This presentation draws on qualitative case studies of two secondary schools

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Bronfenbrenner's (2009) theory of ecological development posits a nested set of systems which impact individual and group outcomes.

- Individuals are influenced within their most immediate, local contexts and distal elements such as state and federal policy and the wider cultural and economic milieu

- An ecological framework can elucidate the various, interacting factors which influence peer relations
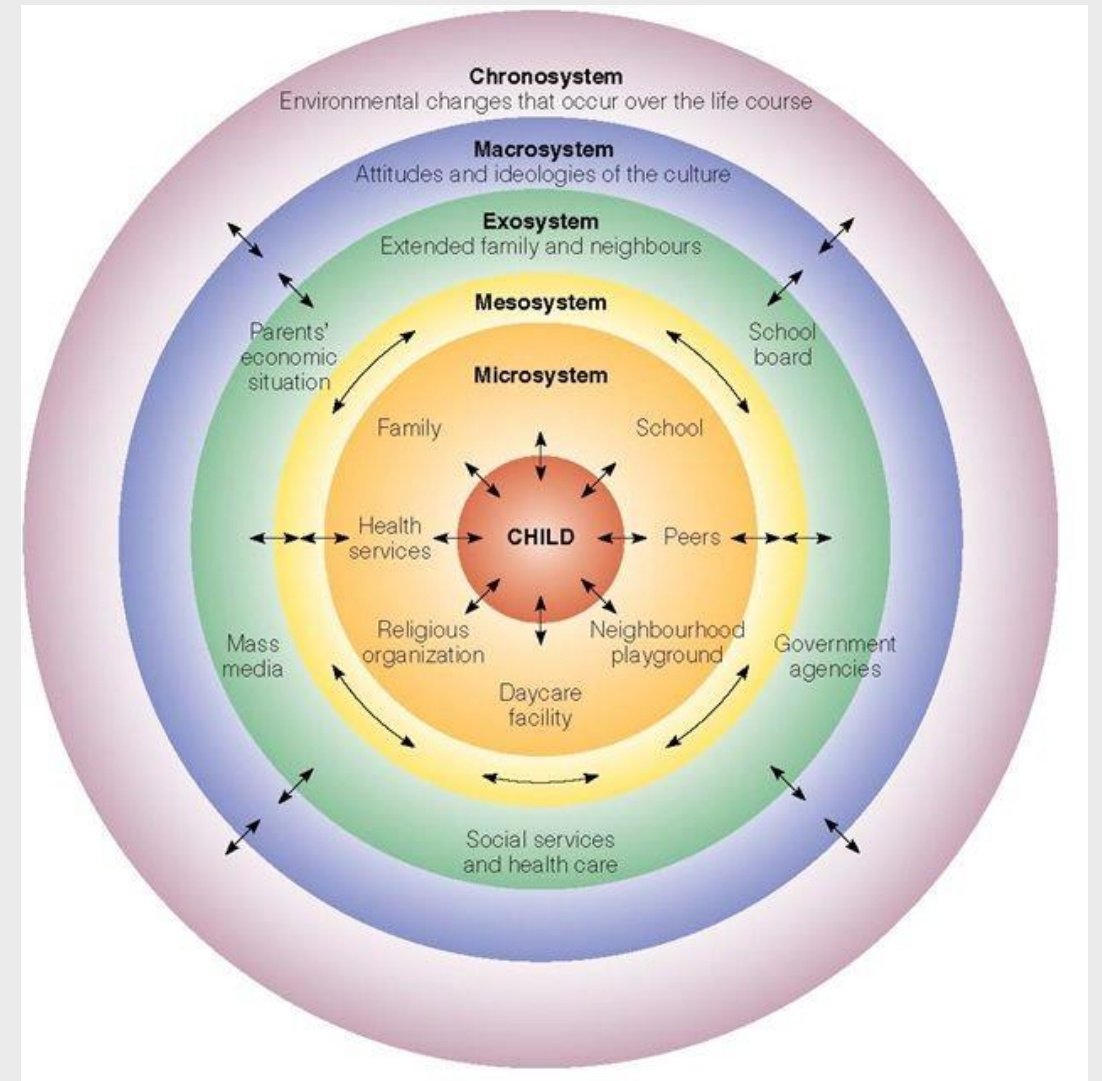
PEER RELATIONSHIPS

- Peers are important influences on students' academic performance and social-emotional wellbeing

- Shape attitudes and attachment towards schooling

- Negative peer interactions can harm school engagement and are linked with poorer outcomes

- Impact youths' identities

- Significant during adolescence as motivation and engagement can decline

PEERS IN SCHOOL

- Educators and school characteristics have strong impacts on relationships among peers

- Positive classroom "peer ecology" built through cooperative, learner-centered practices

- Teacher beliefs about students can influence peer relationships

- Pro-social practices, programs and extracurriculars at school-level can strengthen peer relationships

- Little scholarship has addressed connection between these contexts through qualitative inquiry

PHASE 1 STUDY

Selection Criteria:

- Graduation Rates

- Advanced Graduation Rates

Populations:

- African-American/Black

- Hispanic/Latino

- English language learners

- Economically disadvantaged

PHASE 1: EDUCATOR STUDY

Data Sources

- Interviews: **22**
- Focus Groups: **12**
- School tours: **2**
- Documents: **19**

Participants:

- 14 school/district leaders
- 43 educators

PHASE 2: STUDENT STUDY

Data Sources

- Interviews: **11**
- Focus Groups: **4**
- Questionnaires: **11**
- Student –crafted Artifacts: **41**
- Documents: **6**

Participants: 11/school (Total 22)

- Junior and Senior High School Students

PHASE 2 STUDY: SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

| School	Enrollment	Grade Span	Urbanicity	%Economically Disadvantaged	%English Language Learner	%Hispanic/ Latino	%Black/ African American
Crown Point Central School	75	K-12	Rural	61	0	0	0
Malverne High School	548	9-12	Suburban	51	2	24	54
New York State	N/A	N/A	N/A	57	9	27	17

# PEER RELATIONSHIPS: TWO PRIMARY QUESTIONS

1. How do teachers and young adults in these schools characterize relationships among their peers?

2. What programs, practices, and opportunities influence the peer relationships in these schools?

PEER RELATIONSHIPS AT CROWN POINT

They [adults] use the [student] leaders to help show the younger students or students who haven't experienced certain things how to act in a way. But they know that they can trust us to be that role model.

   - Alex
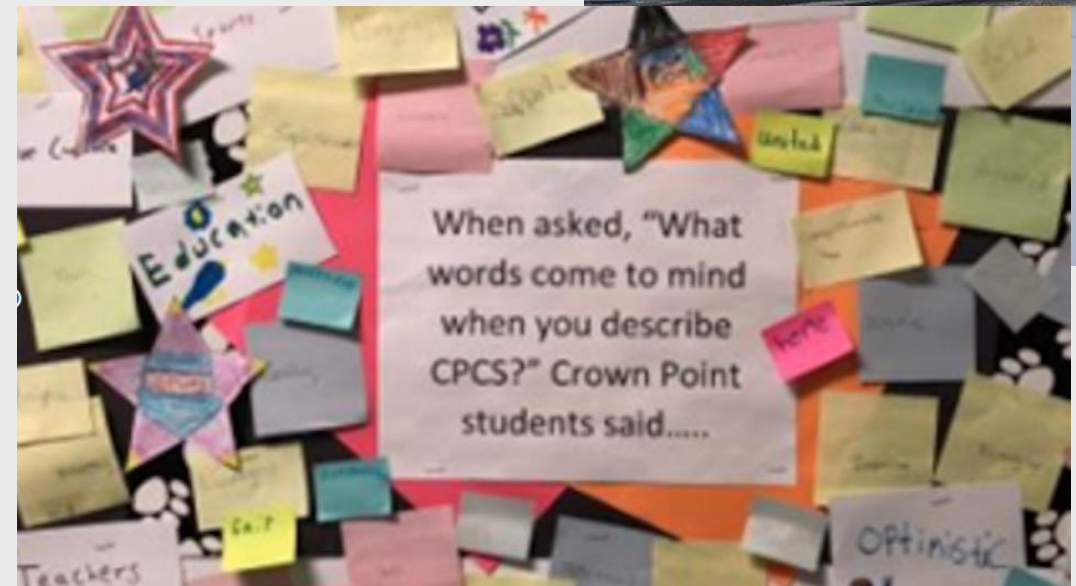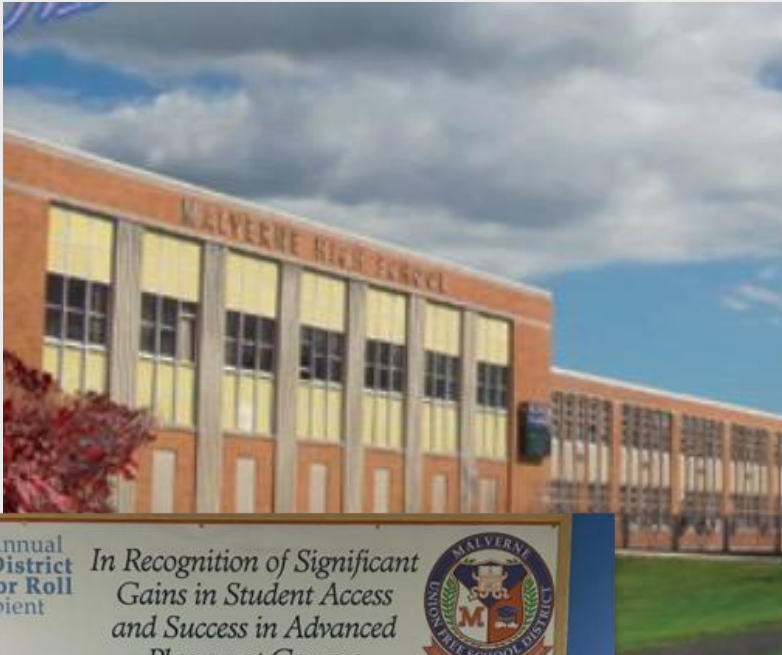
PEER RELATIONSHIPS AT MALVERNE

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 like 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.

- Elizabeth

DISCUSSION

Contribution

- Interaction of school, classroom, community systems

- Qualitative research featuring voices of educators and students

Implications

- Ecological influences on peer relationships

- Modeling

- Heterogeneous school groupings

- Extra-curriculars

Further research

- Improve understanding of fostering peer relationships in various contexts

- Pandemic has raised awareness on youth engagement in learning, social-emotional well-being, and relationships with each other in school

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THANK YOU!

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