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Backbone Organizations for Improvement Research and Continuous Improvement Utilization: Opportunities and Challenges from New York State

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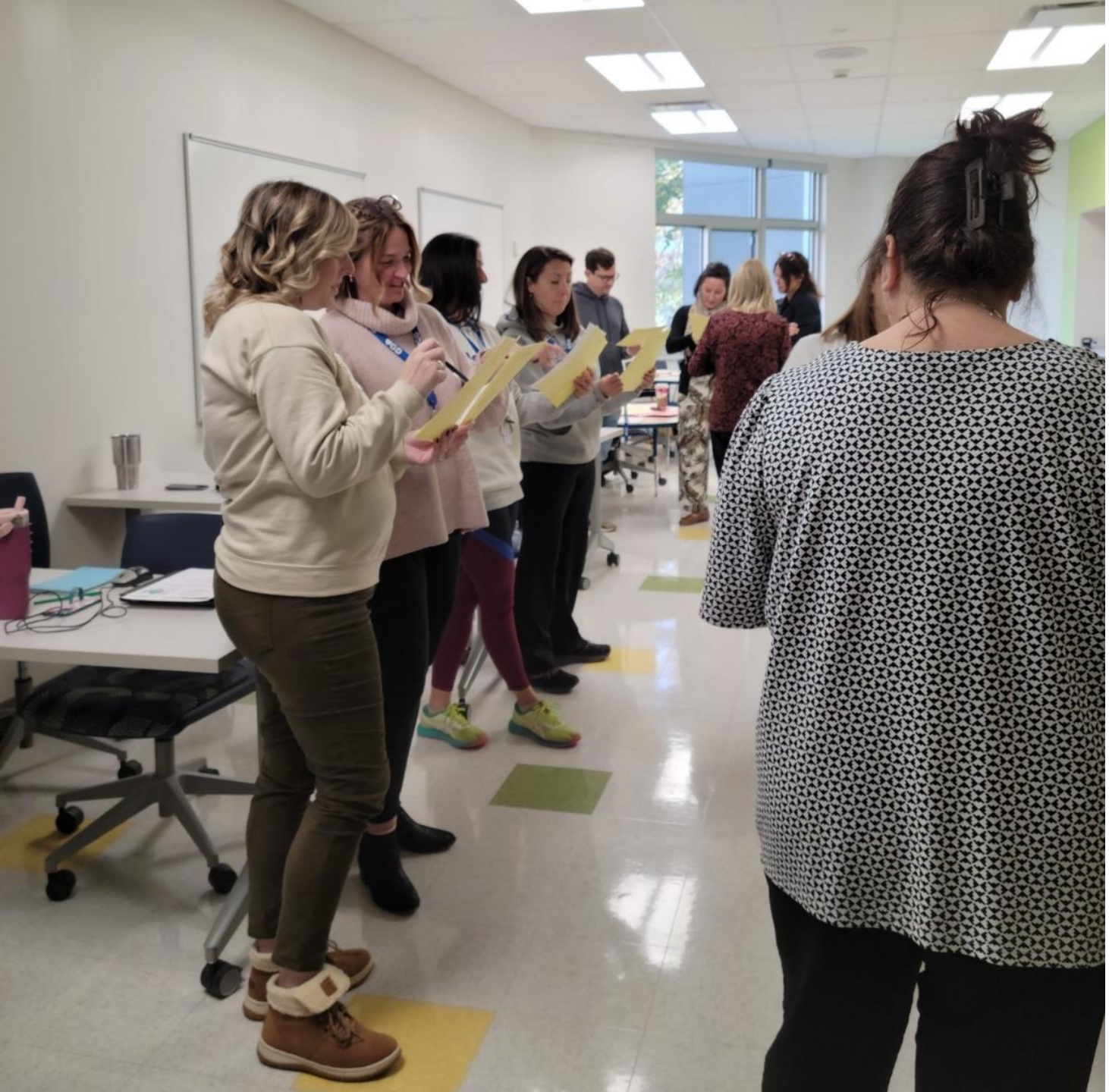
Some Gratitude for our Irish hosts… and Setting the Scene

“to learn one must be humble….”

- James Joyce (Ulysses)

The best way to understand an organization is by trying to change it – Kurt Lewin ->

The best way to understand an organization is by trying to **help those who work within it to** change it



Some guiding questions…

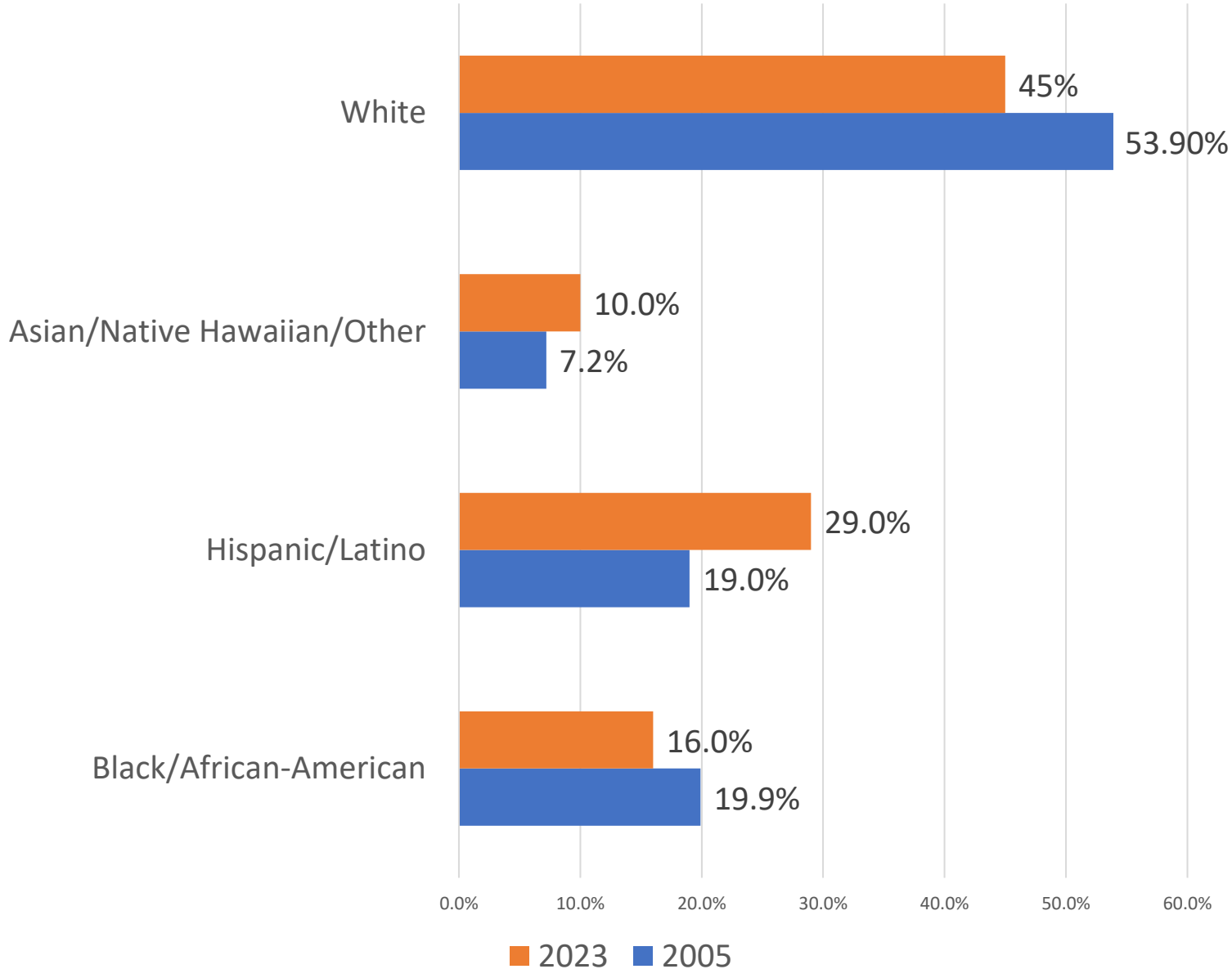
(1) What are the optimal strategies for **communicating and disseminating equity-oriented research findings and recommendations** with and for diverse stakeholders?

(2) What structures and strategies can policymakers, higher education leaders, school system leaders, and improvement researchers employ to **facilitate equity-oriented improvement research and continuous improvement utilization**?

Act 1:
The Context

- The New York Context and The Eqiity Imperative In New York State Schools

New York State Context: A Snapshot



Unpacking Equity

(an overused and annoyance-provoking term for many educators in NYS)

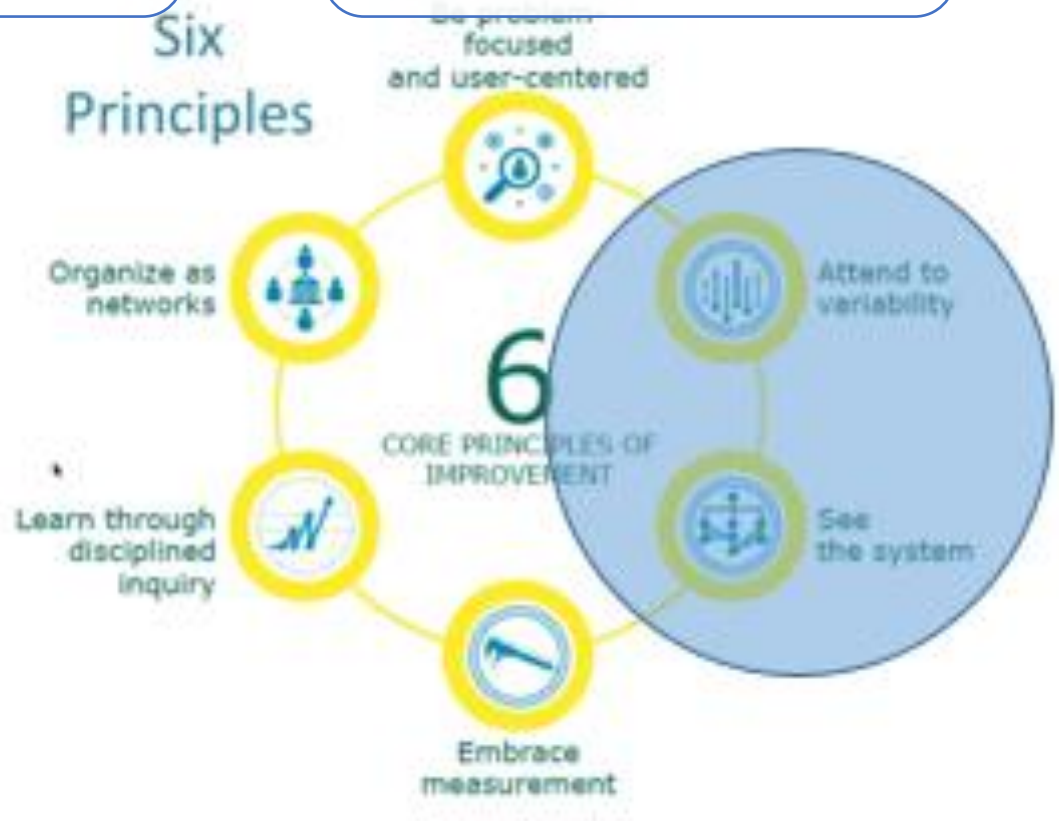
"Equity continues to be defined in a variety of ways and the goals and character of equity-oriented improvement efforts are impacted by how equity is defined."

Wilcox, K. C., & Lawson, H. A. (2022). Advancing Educational Equity Research, Policy, and Practice. *Education Sciences*, p. 13

Equity vs. Equality: 2 Frames & Improvement Science as one approach to addressing issues of equity

Equity emphasizes **special policies, customized practices and non-discriminatory, personalized** treatment

Equality emphasizes **"sameness" achieved by standardization**



What we already have …

Research on …

- ✓ contexts where outcome disparities are being addressed successfully.
- ✓ interventions that work well in different contexts.

National and state policies directing educators to …

- ✓ use research and data to improve student outcomes.
- ✓ use continuous improvement approaches within and across schools.

What we don't have enough of…

- ✓ Research designed to provide clear implications for practice and have "baked in" strategies for use of research findings for a variety of stakeholders that might benefit from them.
- ✓ District and school leaders and frontline educators who have time and/or know how to take advantage of research and data collected in their own settings to engage in continuously improving their systems.
- ✓ A continuous improvement "infrastructure" (structures and routines) that encourage the use of research and local data to make systemic and strategic changes in and across schools.

Act 2: A Backbone Organization

An Example of a Backbone* Organization for school improvement: NYKids

**Backbone organizations serve as coordinating bodies that bring together a diversity of stakeholders and lead synchronized efforts to achieve common goals.*

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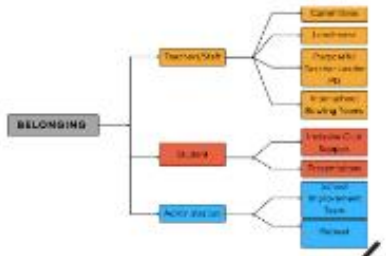
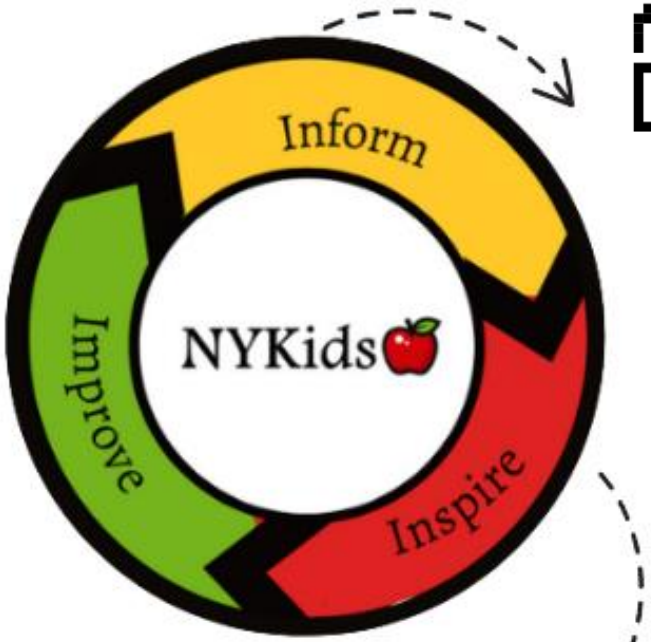
Scan the QR code for NYKids website

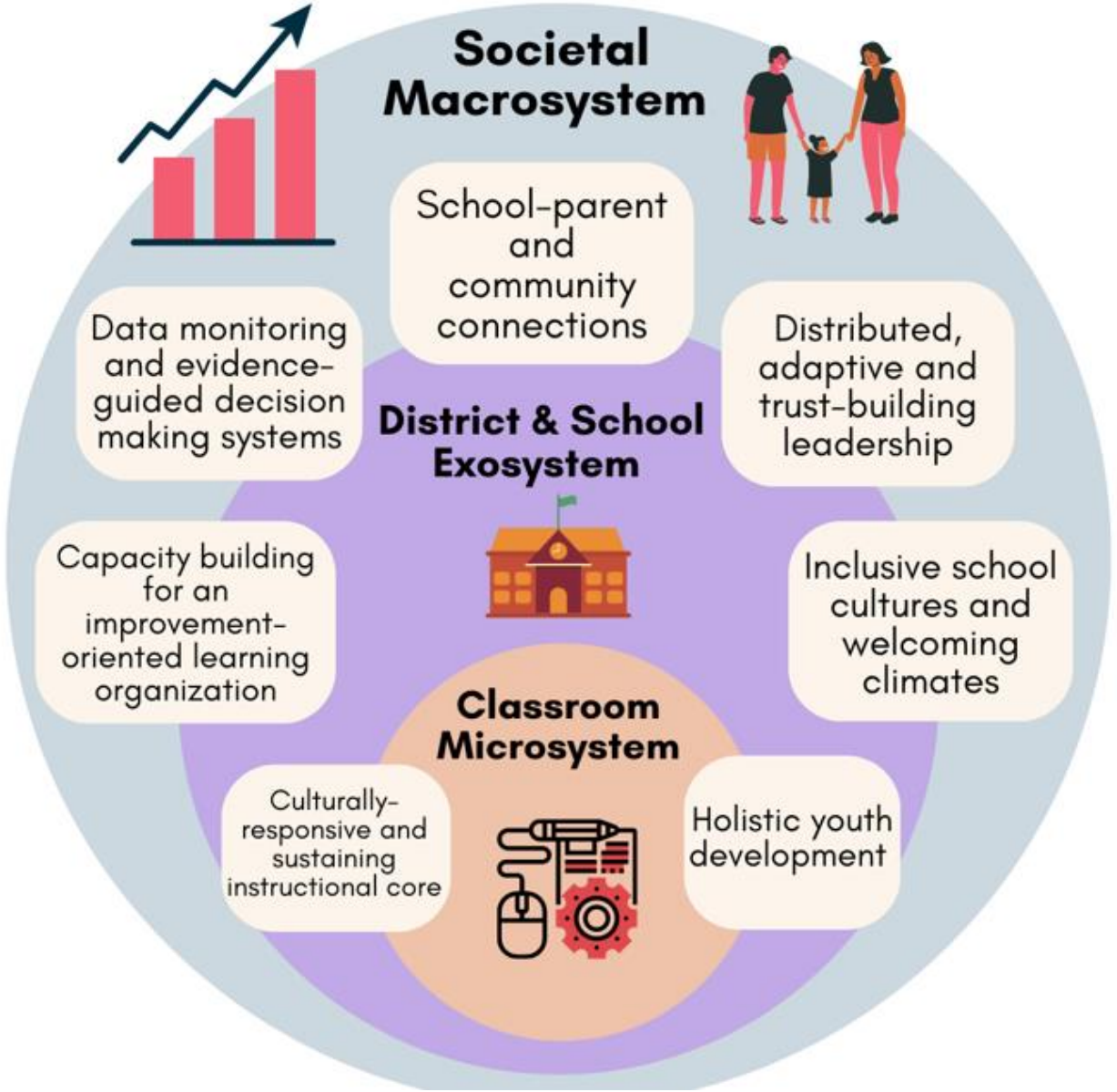


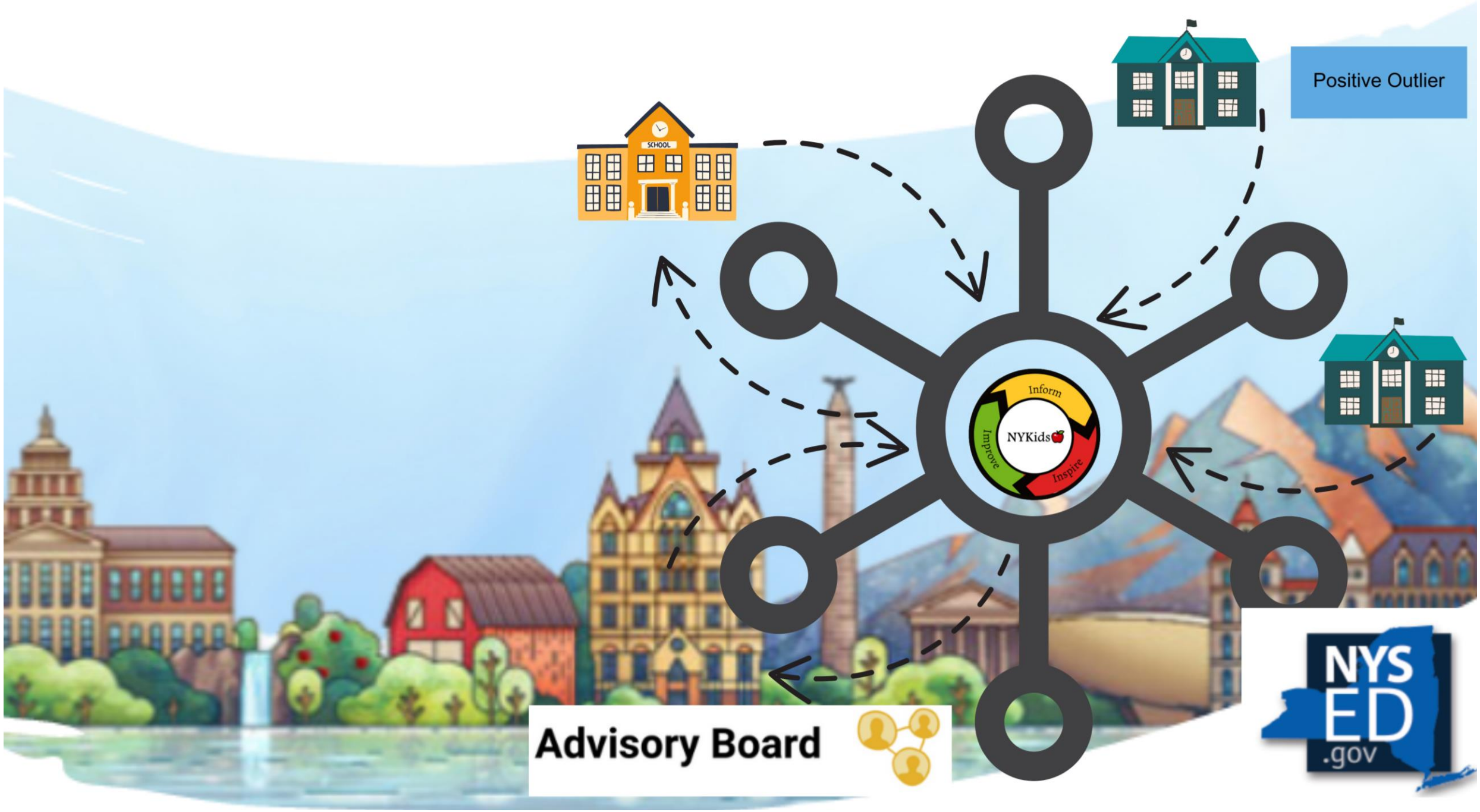


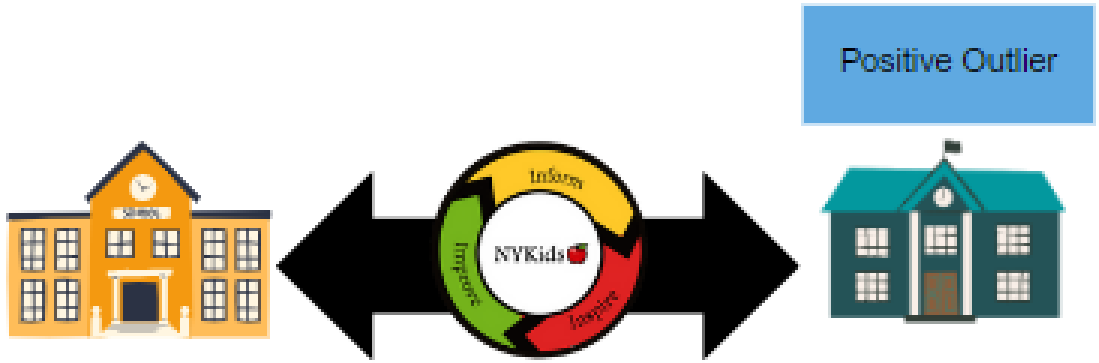
Scan the QR code for our latest case study

Scan the QR code for our Performance Tracker

What has NYKids learned regarding schools that prize, make progress toward, and achieve equity?




Positive Outlier
SCHOOL
Inform
Improve
Inspire
NYKids
Advisory Board
NYS ED .gov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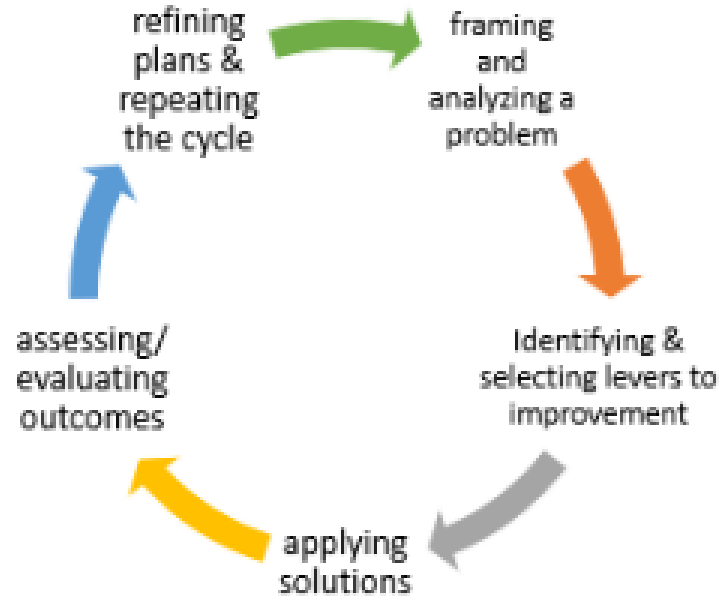
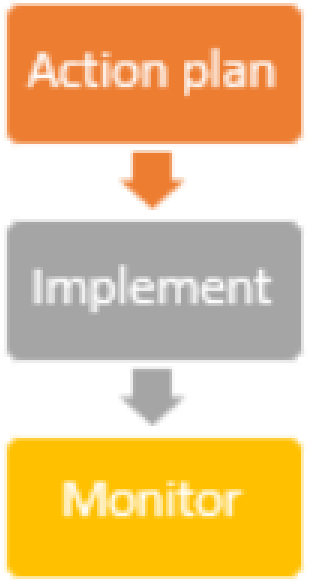
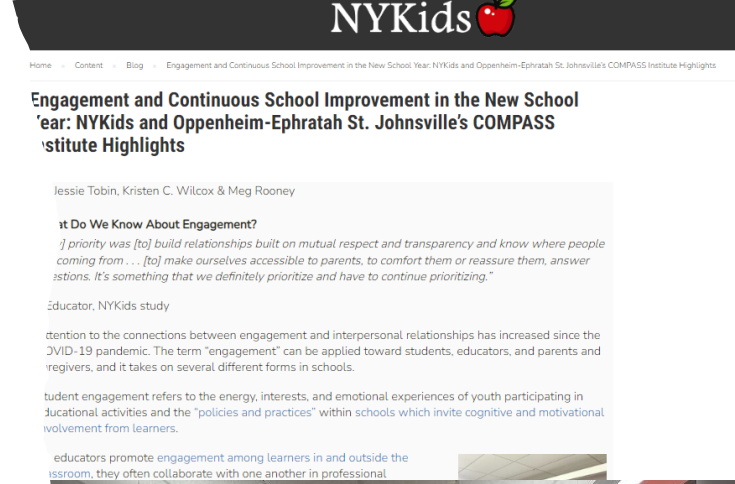

refining plans & repeating the cycle
framing and analyzing a problem
Identifying & selecting levers to improvement
applying solutions
assessing/ evaluating outcomes

COMPASS
Set SMART Goals
•COMPare practices
•Assess priorities
•Select levers to improve


Action plan
Implement
Monitor

School Improvement in P-12 Schools: Voices from the Front Lines

- *This is hard stuff, but attainable with a group I am excited to be involved from its infancy and looking forward”*
- *“Takes a “village” to get our goals to be successful”*
- *“In order to show that things are improving you must have an action plan that must be measurable”*
- *“We need to share/communicate our goal with all staff”*
- ***“I feel excited and empowered to make our building a better place for all”***
- *“This work will be impactful with lots of moving parts, but we are on the same page that change is needed and welcomed”*
- *“I am not alone in my thinking others have the same ideas and needs”*


NYKids

Home » Content » Blog » Engagement and Continuous School Improvement in the New School Year: NYKids and Oppenheim-Ephratah St. Johnsville's COMPASS Institute Highlights

Engagement and Continuous School Improvement in the New School ear: NYKids and Oppenheim-Ephratah St. Johnsville's COMPASS stitute Highlights

Jessie Tobin, Kristen C. Wilcox & Meg Rooney

t Do We Know About Engagement?

] priority was [to] build relationships built on mutual respect and transparency and know where people coming from . . . [to] make ourselves accessible to parents, to comfort them or reassure them, answer stions. It's something that we definitely prioritize and have to continue prioritizing."

Educator, NYKids study

ttention to the connections between engagement and interpersonal relationships has increased since the OVID-19 pandemic. The term "engagement" can be applied toward students, educators, and parents and regivers, and it takes on several different forms in schools.

tudent engagement refers to the energy, interests, and emotional experiences of youth participating in ducational activities and the "policies and practices" within schools which invite cognitive and motivational volvement from learners.

educators promote engagement among learners in and outside the ssroom, they often collaborate with one another in professional

Act 3:
Lessons Learned

What we need more of…

- ✓ Research designed with practical use value in at the center
- ✓ Guidance for those who facilitate and participate in continuous improvement initiatives to effectively develop school and district improvement infrastructures
- ✓ Alignment between accountability, improvement, and research infrastructures

What are the optimal strategies for **communicating and disseminating equity-oriented research findings and recommendations** with and for diverse stakeholders?

1) **direct engagement with a diverse array of stakeholder groups** representing large numbers of members through presentation and publications in member communications;

2) **direct engagement with state education department agents** in the role of “thought partner” as well as co-designer of continuous improvement professional development opportunities.

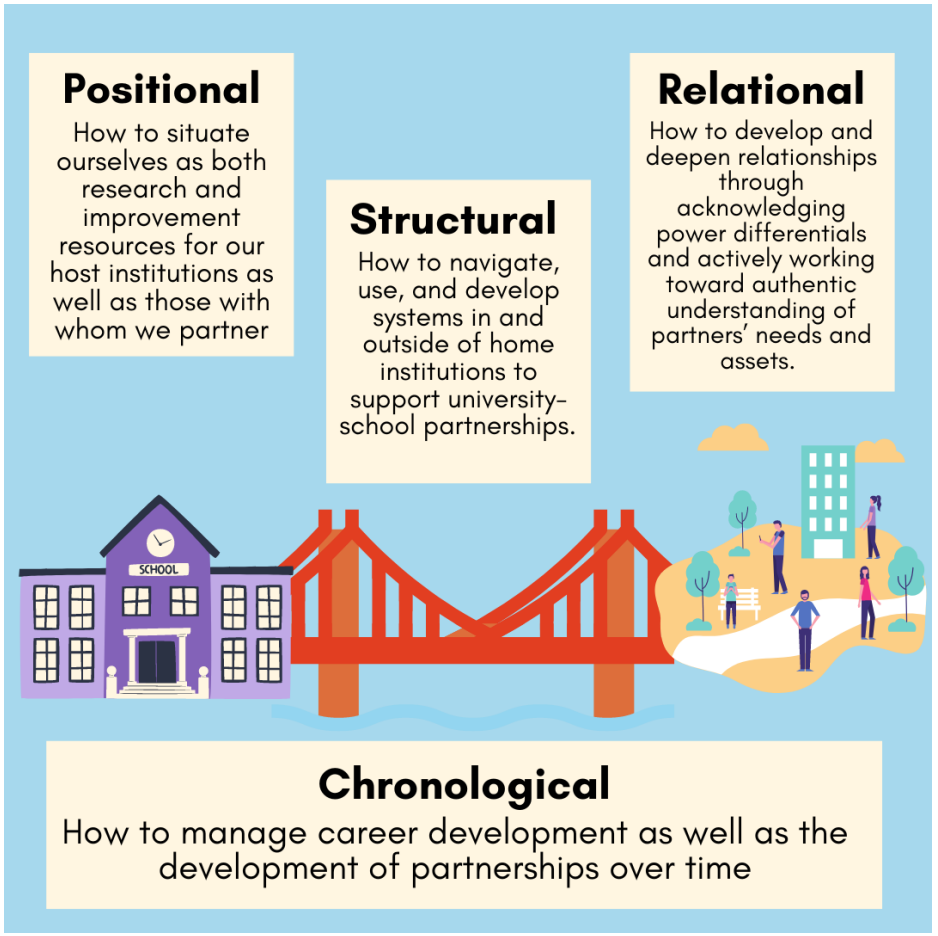
What **structures and strategies** can policymakers, higher education leaders, school system leaders, and improvement researchers employ to facilitate equity-oriented improvement research and continuous improvement utilization?

1) **surfacing a theory of improvement through dialogue** with multiple policy agents to encourage sense-making and build coherence across entities and organizations with regard to improvement initiatives,

2) thoughtful **integration of practice-oriented expertise with improvement research knowledge and school improvement expertise** in the development and delivery of continuous improvement-focused professional development, and

3) building improvement infrastructure from an **equity-center** (i.e. how will the research and practical change address systemic issues that limit access to quality education and marginalize youth and their families)

Challenges, Opportunities, and What's on The Horizon for Backbone Organizations in IHEs



CHAPTER 20

A TALE OF TWO UNIVERSITY–SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT HUBS

An Ecological View of Hub and Hub Leader Development

Sarah Zuckerman
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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University of Albany

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“to learn one must be humble….”

@forNYKids

Know Your Schools-For NY Kids

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https://ny-kids.org/

Related References

Wilcox, K.C. & Lawson, H.A. (2022). Advancing educational equity research, policy, and practice. *Education Sciences*. 12, 894. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12120894

Wilcox, K.C., Lawson, H.A., & Angelis, J. with Durand, F., Schiller, K, Gregory, K., & Zuckerman, S (2017). *Innovation in Odds-beating Schools: Exemplars of Getting Better at Getting Better*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.