

Promising Practices from Persistent and Emergent Positive Outliers

NYKids 20th Anniversary Study



CASE STUDY: MALVERNE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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We have something that drives us every year. Last year, we were “unstoppable.” This year, we are “excellence on purpose.” And it is the theme that drives what we do. And it comes from understanding where we are on our pathway to success. – district leader

*We share the same tenacity of providing our students the best education.
– district leader*

Study Background

For two decades NYKids has been studying typically performing and positive outlier schools to identify some of the differences that account for better student performance in the outliers. With increased interest in what supports adaptation and innovation in the context of external shocks and community demographic changes, our current study sought to discover new insights into what sustains schools’ significantly better student outcomes over time. This case study describes policies, processes, and practices in Malverne Senior High School (HS) — a persistent positive outlier school.

School Selection Criteria

NYKids studied Malverne Senior HS in the 2017-18 College and Career Readiness study because their graduation rate data revealed significantly better outcomes for Black, African-American, Latino, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students. In a second phase of that study conducted in 2019-20, 11 Malverne students participated in interviews and focus groups. Both prior case studies can be found at <https://ny-kids.org/research-results/>.

In this study we used graduation rate data from 2021 and 2022 (the most recent at the time of study sampling), which included cohorts of student who started 9th grade in 2017, 2018, and 2019. This analysis yielded several persistent positive outliers, including Malverne Senior HS.

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School Context

Malverne Senior HS is in Nassau County on Long Island, New York. The many surrounding towns enveloping the school, with their unique demographic profiles, contribute to this richly diverse school community. While most students are born and raised in the Malverne Union-Free School District, the percentage of English language learners (ELLs) in relation to the entire student population has increased somewhat in recent years. Most of the ELLs are Spanish speaking, and this has been a long-term trend. However, Malverne has increasingly served students from other regions around the world, including South Asia and the Caribbean, most notably, Haiti.

As members of the first district to integrate schools in this region of New York State (NYS), Malverne staff and community members are keenly aware of the racial and economic divides that have persisted throughout the district and region. Keeping in mind this historical context, educators, school leaders, and community members have openly discussed and advocated for efforts to incorporate culturally relevant and sustaining principles and address longstanding issues of inequity in and outside of the classroom. Notably, the district celebrates Juneteenth each year and pays tribute to Malverne's close ties to the early Civil Rights movement throughout the year. At Malverne, students are encouraged to speak up about issues of injustice and to be civically engaged in and outside the school community. One example of this civic engagement came in the form of a student-led effort to change the elementary school's street name. Now Malverne children approach their elementary school on "Acorn Way" replacing the previous street name coined after the local head of the Ku Klux Klan.

Like other schools across NYS, the Malverne community has experienced a variety of challenges in recent years – most notably due to COVID-19 pandemic-related school disruptions. Malverne educators noted the need to find new ways to foster student engagement, with a special focus on addressing youth use of social media and cell phones in school. Malverne educators also identified the increased need to address young people's overall well-being by focusing more attention on supporting them to take care of themselves mentally and physically. To address these and other challenges, Malverne educators have innovated in a variety of ways, including in what academic coursework and extracurriculars they offer as well as how they engage in student and family communications. Next, we highlight these and other promising practices.

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Student Demographics 2022-23: Malverne Senior High School, Malverne Union Free School District			
	Malverne Senior HS	Malverne UFSD	New York State
Grades Served	9-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	628	1797	2,422,494
Economically Disadvantaged	46%	42%	58%
Students with Disabilities	14%	15%	19%
English Language Learners	1%	2%	10%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
American Indian/Alaska Native	0%	1%	1%
Black or African American	49%	43%	16%
Hispanic/Latino	28%	28%	29%
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	7%	9%	10%
White	15%	18%	40%
Multiracial	1%	1%	3%
Other	0%	0%	0%

HIGHLIGHTS

Investment In and Ownership for Nurturing Close Human Connections

I never want to hear “these kids.” . . . I want to hear “our kids.” Our kids deserve everything every other child deserves, and Malverne figures out a way to make that happen. – district leader

The atmosphere of Malverne Senior HS evokes the feeling of family: the way adults and young people relate to each other is less about adhering to traditional roles of educator (or school staff member) and student, but more about human connection. This extends to how Malverne educators and staff talk about young people as “our kids” or “my kids” versus “students.” How individual adult-youth connections are fostered is not only intentional, but expected and therefore normative. This investment in and ownership for nurturing close human connections extends to celebrating and honoring each individual’s value and contribution to the Malverne community.

Future-oriented and Ambitious

We don’t feel like we’re there — like our work is ever done. We’re looking at areas where we need to improve. And I think the second we sit back and say we’re good, we’re going to have a lot of problems. – district leader

In Malverne Senior HS, leaders and educators showed evidence of positioning themselves in a way that is future oriented and ambitious. This was evident in the ways many of the leaders and educators participating in this study described embracing innovation and a “never done” stance to address current and future needs. As discussed above, the school and district are part of a

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culturally rich community history which Malverne educators mine to craft rich learning opportunities. Whether through developing a highly adaptive and accessible schedule every year, crafting engaging new courses, or offering new entry points into arts, sports, clubs, and a slew of other activities, Malverne educators lean into the motto “small yet do it all” to meet students’ various needs.

Leveraging Legacy and Leading in the Education Field

What I've seen over the past 20 years is a complete transformation. . . . This is a place where students can take pride and come in and feel like . . . “We’re Malverne.” And we’re saying it loud and proud — “We are Malverne, and this is what we’re doing.”

– district leader

As a complement to their future-orientation and innovative stance, Malverne educators described efforts to carry forward a legacy of excellence in service to their community. They also strive to provide leadership in the field of education, particularly regarding addressing inequities and opening up rich learning opportunities in culturally diverse communities like their own. Educators take pride in the strides their school and community have made to close opportunity gaps, and they trumpet their many successful alums’ stories to present an image of the school as an institution to celebrate and support.

A CLOSER LOOK

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

Culture, Climate and Community

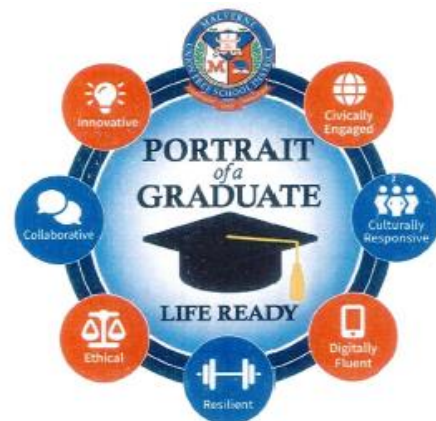
Integrity in Message and Method: A Portrait of a Malverne Graduate

We just completed the portrait of a graduate. . . . Everybody in the community was involved in identifying what does it look like to be a Malverne graduate? And it is key to everything. – Superintendent

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The Portrait of a Malverne Graduate articulates what is valued in a Malverne education and provides a clear framework for communicating shared understandings of aspirations and expectations. In their 2024 “portrait,” emphasis was placed on graduates being civically engaged, culturally responsive, digitally fluent, resilient, ethical, collaborative, and innovative. The Portrait was based on survey responses from over a thousand school and community members and is just one source of evidence of Malverne’s inclusive approach to stakeholder input. Threading through the Portrait and the method of developing it is something akin to the idea of integrity (wholeness or completeness). Integrity in this sense is enacted as Malverne educators emphasize surfacing and respecting the diversity of ideas and values represented in the community and actively working to ensure that the school represents these ideas and values as fully as possible.



Fostering an Inclusive and Engaging Environment

I would describe Malverne as an inclusive environment. I think it's an environment where ... everyone knows the students by name and [knows] their needs and their strengths and how to help them academically, and athletically, and socially. I think it's . . . ideal almost.” – parent

While what educators seek to cultivate in Malverne youth is made clear in such documents as the Portrait discussed above, the climate young people and their families encounter is also purposefully designed to support youth development and family and community engagement. Specifically, the climate Malverne educators cultivate can be characterized as both inclusive and engaging, and these are complementary. What this looks like in the words of one parent, “is an emphasis on culture, sports, music, theater, clubs, engaging children, teaching them how to work and be with one another.” One example of how inclusivity and engagement are encouraged is through such programs as “Peacemaker,” as described by a parent:

From when they are very little, there's something called Peacemaker. And it's just [teaching] those values of helping others, of being a good citizen. And those values, really, in my opinion, travel with the kids as they go up. That's something that's coveted, to be inclusive, to help others, to make sure you're doing your best. And I think that it's evident in just the way the school functions.

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Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Keeping the Curriculum Coherent, Culturally Responsive, and Innovative

I want my kids to enter college . . . because a college diploma is what a high school diploma used to be. . . . We don't want them there unprepared . . . we want them to have the literacy and the mathematical skills that will keep them there. – Superintendent

Malverne educators show evidence of efforts to approach curriculum through the lens of what their community represents in the now and what it can be in the future. Breaking down barriers to post-secondary learning and work opportunities in such a culturally and socioeconomically diverse community is a driving force in curriculum revision efforts from K to 12. The Superintendent, who joined Malverne in 2020, prioritized literacy, setting the expectation for Malverne youth to be on grade level in literacy skills by third grade and with a priority for adopting research-based programs and developing more coherence in the curriculum around literacy skills from elementary to secondary. She asserted, “We can’t just say, ‘Okay, I like this program.’ It has to be backed up by research.”

Keeping the curriculum culturally responsive, “alive” to change, and innovative are all hallmarks of the Malverne approach to curriculum. How Malverne educators have engaged culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE) principles, for instance, predate New York State’s own CRSE framework. One district leader described how the superintendent’s suggestion of using the picture book *Martin and Anne*, which is a fictional account of what would have happened if Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Anne Frank had conversed, is just one example of Malverne’s approach. This leader described how Malverne educators used the book’s subject matter, with different emphases at each level of schooling. At the senior high school, for example, they read

“Letter from Birmingham Jail” and . . . The Diary of Anne Frank. . . . We discussed that and brought in . . . a stage production, . . . which is literally excerpts from The Diary of Anne Frank and excerpts from “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” And it’s interwoven so that it almost appears as if they’re talking to one another. . . . It’s a wonderful production. And we decided to make that sort of the centerpiece and have it be a civic engagement and cultural learning event for all Malverne students. . . . We streamed it, and we were able to have a districtwide presentation that parents could attend while the students were working with it in every grade level.

Abundant other examples of innovative curriculum include the “Virtual Enterprise” course that offers “virtual simulation of . . . real business operations,” as described by one teacher. Another example of innovative curriculum can be found in the Black Studies course, about which one

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parent expressed appreciation her daughter had “had an opportunity to take a Black Studies class, which I was happy with.”

Building Motivation for Academic Learning through Connection: Malverne’s “Secret Sauce”

I don't jump right into my lesson right away. I'll take like five minutes just to kind of talk to the kids. Be like, hey, what's going on? How was your basketball game? How'd you do? You know, and take a little pause, not jump right into the lesson right away. And I think it helps build those relationships with the kids that gets them to want to be in the seat. – teacher

Several teachers described their instruction as fairly traditional, but with clear priorities for personal connection first. Teacher after teacher reported checking in on how their students’ lives were going – whether related to school activities or other things before digging into the content of their lessons. While this approach is intuitive and common place in many schools, Malverne teachers described prioritizing personal connections as an imperative and how they see those connections as related to feeding, what one teacher termed, students’ “intrinsic motivation” to learn. Feeding motivation for learning through those casual conversations about life outside of the classroom makes possible purposeful attention to how the content connects to students’ interests and lives. This linking of personal connection to academic learning is what one teacher characterized as Malverne’s “secret sauce.”

Broadening and Increasing Access to Extracurriculars

We know that the studies show that the more actively involved in outside school events, the better they [students] are going to perform academically. So whether that's a sport or a club, we didn't really have the ability to do that [track extracurricular participation], technology wise, but recently, we . . . created an 11th period. And all the clubs would go in that 11th period. – district leader

Malverne students are provided with abundant opportunities to choose classes and construct their schedules around their interests. As one parent put it, “The students have ownership over their schedules.” Students who are involved in multiple extracurricular activities are given the choice and flexibility to figure out how to make their busy schedules work. In addition to creating the extra period, the district has employed new processes and technologies to make this scheduling more seamless and to track the rosters of all clubs. Thinking about her son’s involvement in academics and extracurriculars, one parent reflected; “My son . . . in his sophomore year . . . wanted to play basketball and winter track, and the coaches were just like, ‘The practice times would be an issue.’ But he was willing to put in the work, and they worked with him. And he was able to do both. And he did an amazing job.”

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District and School Leadership

Purposeful, Patient, and Proactive Leadership

Any initiative that we have started . . . the girls' empowerment, the youth for connection with police, it's on purpose. It's we're doing it purposefully in that sense, and we're going to do it with fidelity. So every piece marries with the theme. – principal

Informed by many stakeholders, Malverne leaders are careful to take on new initiatives or major changes only after they have had the opportunity to invite people into making sense of them. In addition, new initiatives must be connected to their theme for the year (e.g., excellence on purpose). They couple this purposeful approach with patience. Leaders described taking pains to get clarity about what changes they might make, as well as why and how, before developing a plan. Although the COVID-19 pandemic posed a number of issues that required urgent attention, some important matters were given space and time so that leaders could get more clarity on options and nurture shared understandings of why a change was needed. For instance, like other schools around the country, youth cell phone use in school has been on Malverne's radar. How to address this problem, however, is an example of the principal's patient approach. She explained,

So I know that over the summer, part of my goal is to have a shared decision committee . . . parents, school teachers, some students, some staff -- and try and come up with an idea of how to handle cell phones better.

While sometimes waiting to get input, generate ideas, and pull a plan together is the preferred path, other times Malverne leaders take a proactive stance to prompt what they see as an urgent need. For instance, one district leader described the need to lean into DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work, including active engagement with families. He explained,

We all learned that . . . you can't be passive in that [creating a welcoming and affirming environment]; you have to be active. And part of that means we don't wait for the Hispanic families to come to us to say, "We want to participate more." How do we do it? We need to go to them and say, "We need you. We need your voice. We need to know your needs."

Balancing "Flattened" Leadership with Role Clarity

I feel that we have a leadership team that is flat -- so flat that we had a meeting where five of them [leaders] got COVID. You know, I'm the superintendent. But I want you to take me on, and they [leaders] do. – Superintendent

While Malverne district leaders, as exemplified in the quote above, talk about the "flattening" (i.e., nonhierarchical) leadership, they also show evidence of walking that talk by inviting critical perspectives. While this nonhierarchical approach to leadership invites engagement of all staff in problem-solving and solution-generation, it is not a free-for-all. Instead, the various people who

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take leadership roles are clear about what those roles are and who the point people are to take the reins when an action needs to be taken. The principal explained,

So if I really know I need something for assessments, I'm gonna go see [dean of students] about it. If [dean of students] is unavailable, though, I know I can always go to [assistant principal] about it. If [assistant principal]'s not available, they [teachers] can always come to me.... but they know who the point person is. And that's what it really comes down to.

Opening Lines of Communication and Sharing Responsibility

We have an open door [policy], they [union representatives] walk into our office whenever they need to. . . . You know, let's figure it out. And that's a lot of the conversation that comes up in the Faculty Advisory Committee; it's meaningful. We always recommend . . . if you have a problem, come talk to us. – school leader

Openly communicating ideas and concerns around staff, youth, family, or community member needs is part of what makes Malverne tick. Much of this communication is done through informal processes that offer open lines of communication between leaders and staff and students. The Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC), for example, offers a space where staff can submit their questions or concerns, which are directly reviewed by the superintendent and other district and school leaders. Malverne educators and school leaders are also proactive in communicating with youth, caregivers, and community members to both relay important information as well as gauge stakeholders' perspectives. Much of this communication is done through a software program called "Thought Exchange."

In addition to maintaining open lines of communication, the Malverne leadership team operates through a shared responsibility and describe themselves as a multifaceted team that is in frequent communication about a situation. A school leader described this process:

I think all three of us come together, we're almost like a Swiss army knife, like we are able to do different stuff when needed. You know, like, as everyone said, I have an umbrella of my responsibilities. [Assistant Principal] has an umbrella of his responsibilities, but it's interwoven; we're in and out of each other's offices. So we collaborate every single day.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Youth Mental Health

Promoting Student Leadership and Self Advocacy

They're engaged in making decisions. Students have an active role and voice in what they want in here. . . . We have 25 clubs. All of those clubs are student initiated. – principal

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At Malverne, youth are encouraged to lead and self-advocate, which ties with several of their “Portrait” tenets (e.g., civic engagement and resilience). Students play active roles in making decisions for themselves, their school, and their community by initiating and coming up with proposals backed up with evidence of need for new clubs, activities, or other changes. Knowing how to lead an initiative and advocate for it is not expected to come from nowhere or be within reach of only a subset of students who are heavily involved in school activities. Rather, all Malverne youth are urged to express their ideas and advocate for change. As the principal explained, “They [students] typically will come in and do a PowerPoint presentation and we teach them how to initiate and get what they want.” As one teacher noted, “It’s so important for kids to learn how to advocate for themselves and how to feel more confident as leaders [as they] come into ninth grade. And then we work so closely with them over four years.” A twist on the theme of leadership and self-advocacy comes in the form of how Malverne educators pivoted from punitive to more restorative practices when encountering youth behavior issues. As one district leader explained, “The restorative perspective” at Malverne is just “lightyears ahead.” According to a school leader, the leadership team pioneered the use of restorative practices “around 2018-19, right before the pandemic” and has continued to embrace and evolve their approach.

Redoubling Efforts to Connect and Meet Youth Where They Are

Just so you know, the foundation that makes us successful, we can have all of the great programs, the tactics and leaders, but it's the genuine love and care for the kids. – district leader

For students to see themselves as active agents in their own and others’ lives (an important component of SEL), Malverne staff maintain a collective commitment to prioritize student well-being. This emphasis on well-being has become an even stronger priority following the COVID-19 pandemic, as one teacher commented:

It’s unbelievable. The amount of effort that goes into the kids. It’s never about what is the student not doing. It’s always about, “How can I help this student?” where I feel like in other communities it’s, “It’s this way or the highway, you pass, you fail, you figure it out.” That’s not how it is here. It’s we [educators and students] figure it out. No student will be left to figure it out by themselves.

To complement what is offered for mental health support in the school, a support staff member reported that the district has partnered with a nearby healthcare provider to “add behavioral health and emergency room physicians and coordinated care as follow up,” instead of a typical emergency room experience that could be traumatic. Other programs such as “Reconnecting Youth” and the Youth and Police Initiative support Malverne students in connecting to each other, the school, and their community.

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Providing On-demand Comprehensive Supports in and Out of the Classroom

Staff reported that it is commonplace for adults to provide a sort of “open-door policy” that encourages students to be comfortable talking about any challenges or concerns they have; and staff described often choosing to stay at school outside of classrooms and extracurricular activity hours to offer that support. This approach is not only “on-demand” but also comprehensive in that it extends beyond typical mental health support such as school counselors or school psychologists to anyone and everyone who interacts with students. As one teacher explained,

I always say, “Treat the kids like you would want your own kids being treated, or you want to be treated.” It can get intense at times . . . [but] I think we do a great job with that. And they [staff] have open door policies. And I think sometimes the coaches and teachers have great relationships that the kids don't even want to go home, like, parents will come to a coach, and they'll be like, “Wow, I didn't even know that about my kid.” But they [students] have that relationship with them [staff]. And . . . they [students] want to open up and they'll talk about private stuff. And then coaches reach out to parents, and you build a relationship with the whole family. It's not just on the field, or in the classroom, it's outside of it.

Educators reported that students are more eager to show up and be engaged in class knowing that the adults in school care about them and want them to succeed. As one teacher commented, “It's a home to them here, you know, a lot of them want to be here.”

Parent/Caregiver and Community Partner Engagement

Inviting Diverse Parent Voices in Idea Generation and Decision Making

Malverne parents and educators reported efforts to actively engage a diverse array of parents and caregivers in decision making while affirming and encouraging parent and caregiver advocacy for their children. Through the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, for example, parents are offered opportunities to voice their opinions about school activities and programs. Recapping her experience as a DEI committee member, one parent echoed the common sentiment of appreciation for having parent voices heard and valued:

They [Malverne educators] were so intentional about getting information from the general population as to what the needs are, what's important to the community, what are some of the positives as well as the negatives so that they can improve on them. There were a lot of surveys that were sent out, some included just the students, some were for students and staff, some were for students, staff, and parents. We [parents] definitely did see them

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[Malverne educators] use that information to add certain programs and just make minor changes around the school that had a big impact on the student population.

Leveraging Old and New Strategies to Engage Parents

While Malverne educators still use phone calls, texts, and home visits to engage parents, they have also initiated a digital newsletter and begun using “Thought Exchange” (a digital engagement platform) to ramp up their parent engagement strategies in recent years. As one silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual parent-teacher conferences have been and continue to be offered for those who cannot attend in person. Malverne educators also utilize the “Remind” app, which enables texting communication with students and families. According to a district leader, a “big thing” that was part of the parent engagement push has been to increase PTA involvement. As she explained, the PTA has evolved to be more inclusive of a diverse array of parents and caregivers and has been organized as a “Central Council PTA” to encourage collaboration across buildings.

It [the Central Council PTA] is something that's really valued. And she [superintendent] has done a really great job at helping us develop more of a celebration and a collaboration with our PTAs— both building-wide K12 and Central (throughout the district). . . . They [building and central PTAs] really complement the work we do, and they're able to support in ways that I don't think a lot of us even realized they could.

Staffing, Retention, and Staff Development

Hiring Skilled Staff with an Emphasis on Diversity

One characteristic that has attracted educators to their roles at Malverne is the diversity of the student body, as well as the diversity of the school staff. A Malverne school leader explained that she chose to apply to the district because she wanted to work in a place where her diversity was reflected among the students, while another school leader commented on the significance of the diverse staff involved in interviewing her for her role:

And I did do some research in looking at Malverne before choosing the school to apply for it. So I knew that I definitely wanted to be at a place where there was diversity, and children that look like me as well.

In turn, school leaders at Malverne are intentional in hiring staff who reflect the diversity of their students. Notwithstanding the emphasis on diversity at Malverne, school leaders are intentional about hiring individuals who are skilled and knowledgeable in their content areas and can relate to Malverne youths’ life experiences. One school leader explained, “I try to pick teachers who

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have the same background as the ELs [English learners] here.” And another reported, “But as far as reading goes . . . we always hire the right people for the right job and hire the experts.

Applying a Humanistic Approach to Staff Recruitment

When it comes to hiring and recruiting new staff, Malverne school and district leaders are intent on doing so through a humanist lens. A priority for leaders is to ensure that staff will approach their jobs with a high level of care for students. For Malverne administrators, the human side and passion for teaching is critical, while they are willing to work with educators to develop their skills.

In those hiring meetings, I always want to pick those questions where I want to see the human being inside of this person. You can dazzle me with your portfolio, and you did this and you did that. But like, what do you do with a kid who has his head down, you know? – school leader

Breaking down hierarchies through the hiring and interviewing process is another approach by Malverne school leaders to find staff who will fit in with the Malverne community. As one school leader noted,

Here I was interviewed by four people, but one of them happened to be a teacher I was going to supervise. And I asked her questions about students here and how they view their philosophy and that's what really attracted me to this district.

Flexibility and Collaboration amid Challenges

While Malverne is a small school district, administrators go out of their way to ensure students are able to take the classes they want. This poses challenges in terms of coordinating scheduled time for teachers to meet and plan. Nevertheless, Malverne leaders acknowledge this obstacle and are working on finding strategies for structured staff collaboration in years to come.

We're going to try to put in, like we said, common planning time for the teachers, grade level or subject area, . . . hopefully something along those lines, which again, can be challenging, and working in isolation is not the best way to do it. – school leader

Despite scheduling conflicts, Malverne educators are flexible and often find time to collaborate through casual opportunities such as lunch time or passing in the hallway. Additionally, the built-in friendships and positive rapport among staff enable additional collaboration outside of school hours as well as opportunities to bring concerns to school administrators. As one teacher described,

I think everybody is so open to that chat and that communication, and if I'm having this issue with the students, I feel confident to bring it up to my boss or to bring it up to the principal or to bring it up to another coworker. And so what are you thinking? How can we

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deal with this? And so the camaraderie and the ability to share as a group is tremendous. We have a very cohesive and caring group of staff here [determined] that we won't let the student fail.

Prioritizing Long-Term Growth and Development among Staff

Malverne educators can often be seen advancing to leadership positions within the district – speaking to a common theme of growing from within. Administrators recalled the processes of stepping into their new leadership roles after being guided and mentored by their supervisors. As one building leader explained,

So I decided, when my supervisor retired, again, she tapped me on this shoulder [and] she said, “You know, you've been doing this for a long time, you've been mentoring.” And I also was a curriculum specialist. So I knew about the curriculum, I knew about what was happening. And I was mentoring teachers, great students. So she tapped me on the shoulder [and] says, “I think it's time for you to get out of the classroom and help more teachers.” So that's the reason why I became an administrator.

Additionally, Malverne school leaders encourage educators to continually step into new positions and obtain necessary licenses. As one school leader mentioned, “While I've had teachers during their tenure here, they've gained additional licenses. . . . If I see potential in a teacher, I say, ‘Why don't you get the ENL [English as a New Language] license?’”

While educators are encouraged to grow and maintain longstanding positions at Malverne, district leaders are also intent on implementing training to ensure staff both buy into and are new programs, curricula, and technologies.

We always talk about anything that we find that . . . will be great for our kids; we go for the training. So we do the training for this, we do the training for that. That's how I was over there in the city, getting the training to share with my teachers. – school leader

Interventions, Adjustments, and Special Arrangements

Enhancing Systems of Support

As in many schools across the state and nation, educators in Malverne now need to address a wide and complex range of youth academic, SEL, behavioral, physical, and mental health needs. According to staff, Malverne has experienced an increase in the number of students identified with autism spectrum disorder, which has necessitated more youth on waitlists for services, stretching local resources thin. Meanwhile, in the school, efforts to fully implement Multi-Tiered

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Systems of Support (MTSS) well, especially Tier 1 supports, has been a focus of professional learning in recent years. As the principal explained,

We're not just looking at the bottom third, we're looking at every kid in the classroom, and how they're getting academic intervention within the classroom. And I think that's a huge component this year that we're doing differently compared to in the past.

In efforts to work proactively on systems of support, Malverne educators initiated a Freshman Academy class to give incoming Senior HS students opportunities to develop the skills to succeed. A school leader described it this way:

And it's just a class to bridge the gap between middle school and high school; you know, kids come in and they're like, "Oh, my God, I'm so overwhelmed." This class, you know, teaches them about study habits, . . . about good habits in general, teaching them organizational skills, and stuff like that. And our teacher, who is like a mom to them, is such a pivotal person in their life.

Mastering the Master Schedule: "Kids Want to Do Everything"

An emphasis on high student involvement in extracurricular activities alongside academic rigor is part of the school's culture. Through the years, the level of student eagerness to be involved in activities has increased as facilities have improved and relationships throughout the community have solidified. Meanwhile, school staff and leaders have sought to continuously improve students' course options and have opened Advanced Placement (AP) course to almost all students; this has necessitated adding labs for students who might need them to succeed. Making such moves requires significant mastery at master scheduling. One teacher explained,

I think what someone from the outside would be surprised by is how small we are and how all of our kids do everything. They want to do everything, and we do everything we can to make sure they can do everything, really. You know, a student yesterday had regular school 'til three o'clock, and then musical rehearsal till six, and then they came to a winter percussion rehearsal until nine. And we said, "It's too much; you don't have to come." [The student] said, "No, I'm not going to miss it, I'm gonna be there."

How do they make so much available for kids who want to "do everything?" First, it can't all happen within a regular school day. As one school leader put it, "The school never closes," and this requires extra effort and time on the part of educators and leaders. Second, on the academic side, the scheduling process starts in November and "everyone is involved," said one school leader. Much discussion among guidance personnel and supervisors goes into a process that includes painstaking "hand scheduling," taking into account individual student requests. As a school leader put it,

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The intimacy of us being a small school limits us, but it also enhances us because we could hand schedule 230 kids, just moving sections around to accommodate everyone.

Data Use and Progress Monitoring

Continuous Review of Academic and Nonacademic Data

Examining academic data at Malverne is done consistently, as staff and leaders proactively collect and assess data around student academic standing, as well as their overall well-being, throughout the year. One school leader commented,

I think we always look at the data, I mean, data, data, the data sings, you know. So we try, and we try and have our classes serve the demographics that we have here, you know. Listen, again, our AP program, you guys [the researchers] are here because we defy the odds . . . we're it's almost open enrollment. And a lot of districts, when you have a lot of kids coming in [to the AP courses], maybe it dips a little bit, but for us, with the support that we give all our students, it allows them to be successful here.

Data around challenges such as student suspension rates and mental well-being are also closely monitored by educators and school leaders. For instance, staff use a mental health screening tool. A school leader explained how this process looks: “We do it through an online form and a paper form so that everybody has the opportunity to have their kids evaluated. And we do it through the health classes.”

Additionally, Malverne school leaders continuously review data from the staff and broader community in order to make improvements around areas such as school climate; a district leader reported using the digital platform “Thought Exchange” to find out what teachers or parents are thinking.

Using Technologies to Generate and Assess Data

Malverne educators utilize a variety of technologies and software to generate data to make adjustments and address needs. One example is the software program mentioned earlier that monitors student involvement and engagement in extracurricular activities, not only to track active student involvement but to identify those who might be disengaged. A school leader explained:

Throughout the course the year we're going to look at which students were involved and which students were not involved and see what we could do to next year when we have our club fair, and we get everything going at the beginning next year, how can we get those students involved in some kind of afterschool activity.

Another technological innovation staff use to manage and assess data makes it possible to show trends and address goals. A teacher described how it “gives you a graph and shows you whether

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the trend is increasing or decreasing. And then you can basically alter your program to meet the needs of that student.”

Analyzing Data Collectively

Staff and school leaders reported consistently communicating about data in order to make changes. Monitoring student data is a shared effort and responsibility. As one school leader put it,

We are all responsible for looking at our data and pushing the envelope and looking to see how we can better ourselves. So if there's a weakness, we have to work on that.

Another leader commented on the process of collaborating about student data:

And sharing that [assessment data] with the teachers is important, because not every student can work on the same . . . page. So I think, yeah, we're definitely into sharing assessment, I think it's pivotal in making sure that the students are all getting the right instruction.

In a Nutshell

Balancing the many different interests and priorities of youth and families in a culturally diverse school and community like Malverne is a complex task and one that requires constant efforts to be both responsive and innovative. To this end, fostering pathways for communication and connection between youth, families, staff, and leaders is a key part of getting clarity on priorities and options to pursue them. This, coupled with efforts to draw on Malverne's legacy of success to the benefit of current and future students, further builds Malverne's reputation as a place offering excellent learning opportunities in a richly diverse environment. Hiring wisely by recruiting talent from outside the district when needed, as well as supporting current staff in taking on new responsibilities and moving into leadership roles, is an important part of Malverne's adaptation and innovation story.

Malverne Senior High School

Principal Kesha Bascombe

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