Workshop for SCDN P-20 Effective Leadership for Continuous Improvement: Strategies from New York State Positive Outlier Schools

November 5, 2026

K.C. Wilcox, NYKids Director and Professor Educational Policy and Leadership



Agenda

- Welcome and Introduction
- NYKids and Key findings from the latest research
- Voices from Positive Outlier Schools
- Interactive Reflection and Discussion
  - Small-group discussions connecting findings to local contexts
  - Large-group sharing and reflection
- Closing Discussion and Q&A
  - Questions, reflections, and commitments to action

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What facilitates effective leadership for continuous improvement ?

We'll come in and we'll help you, and you'll learn this. – school leader (ASH)

You have to create a space where people want to be. - principal (ASH)

There has been this sense of not trying to carry all the water . . . we are developing the capacity of those around us. The definition of 'leader' in our district is shifting. – district leader (ASH)

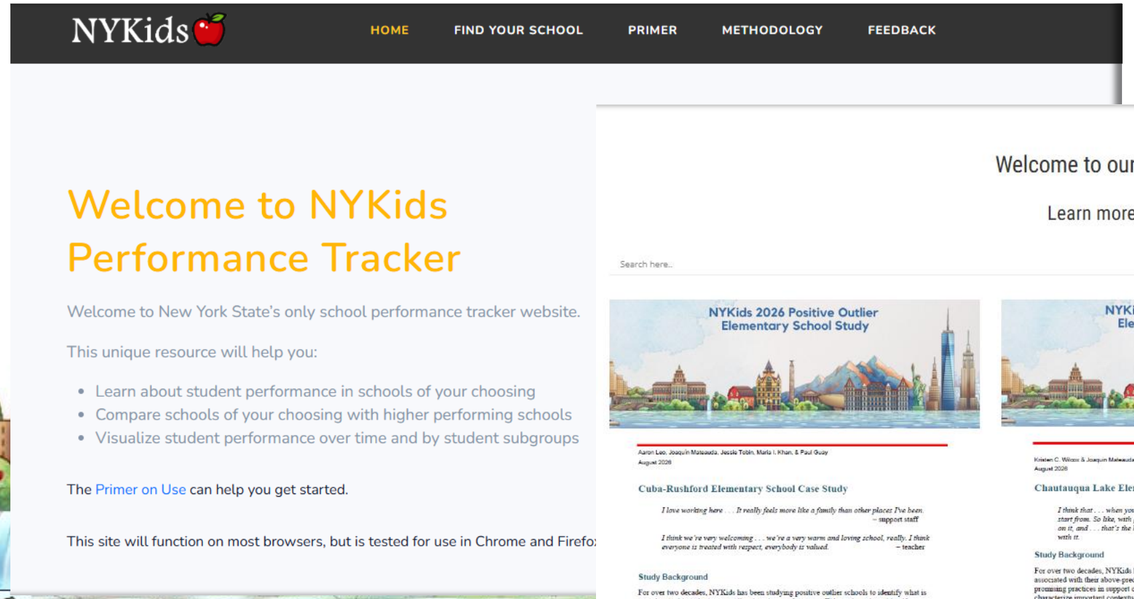
I can't think of a time that . . . I've had any of my teachers who said, 'I really don't want to do that' or shut the door and be like, 'Yeah, I'll tell her I'm doing it, but I'm really not.' - principal (Van Schaick)

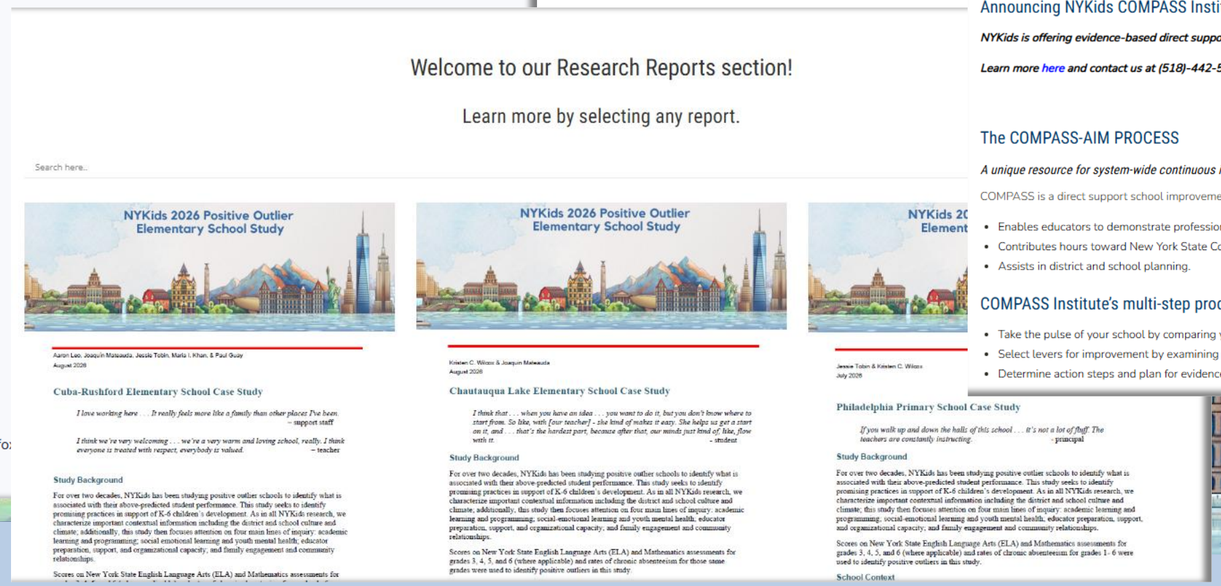
Our principal lets us, if we're thinking out of the box, . . . she's like, "Do it." Like she just trusts you. . . . And I feel comfortable going to her. – teacher (Van Schaick)

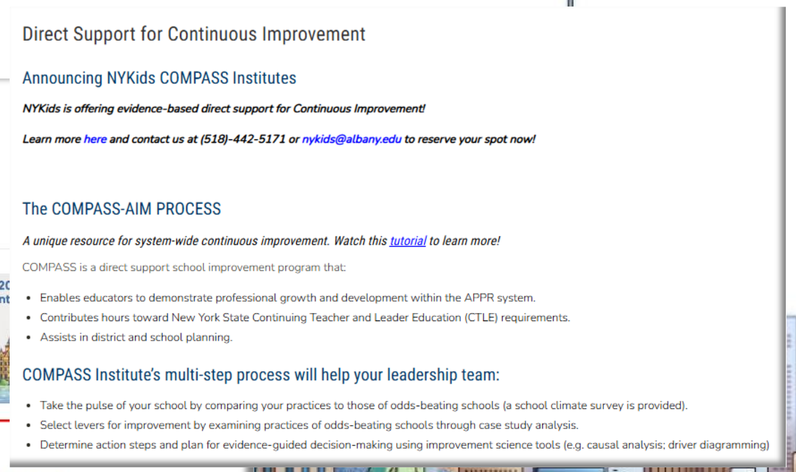
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Warming up…

1. **What kinds of formal and informal opportunities for educators to grow professionally and to take on leadership roles already exist in a chosen school or district? *Are they adequate?***
2. **What decisions are still bottlenecked at the top? *Why do you think that is?***
3. **What are the barriers for educators to take on leadership roles? *Which are changeable and how?***





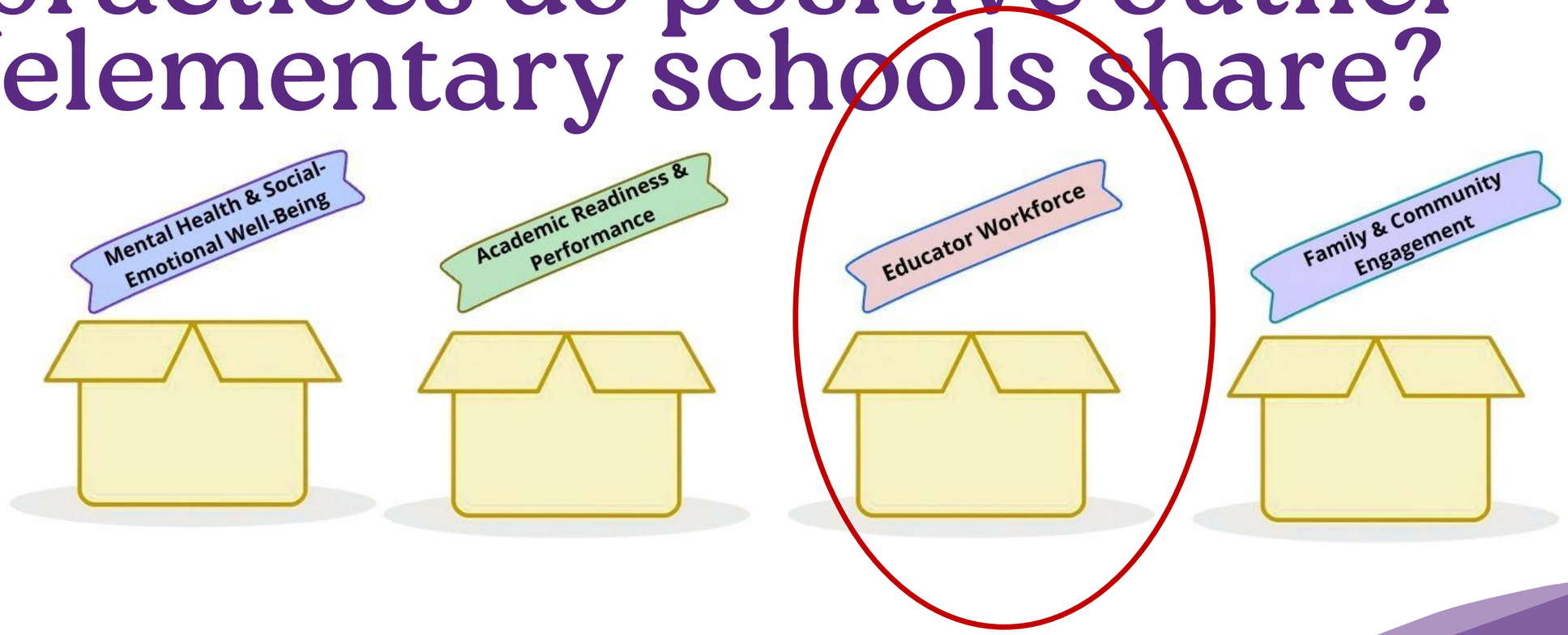


The *Mission* of NYKids

- ***INFORM*** P-12 school stakeholders about their own school's and other schools' performance
- ***INSPIRE*** educators by reporting promising practices from field studies of positive outlier schools
- ***IMPROVE*** schools through university/P-12 continuous improvement support

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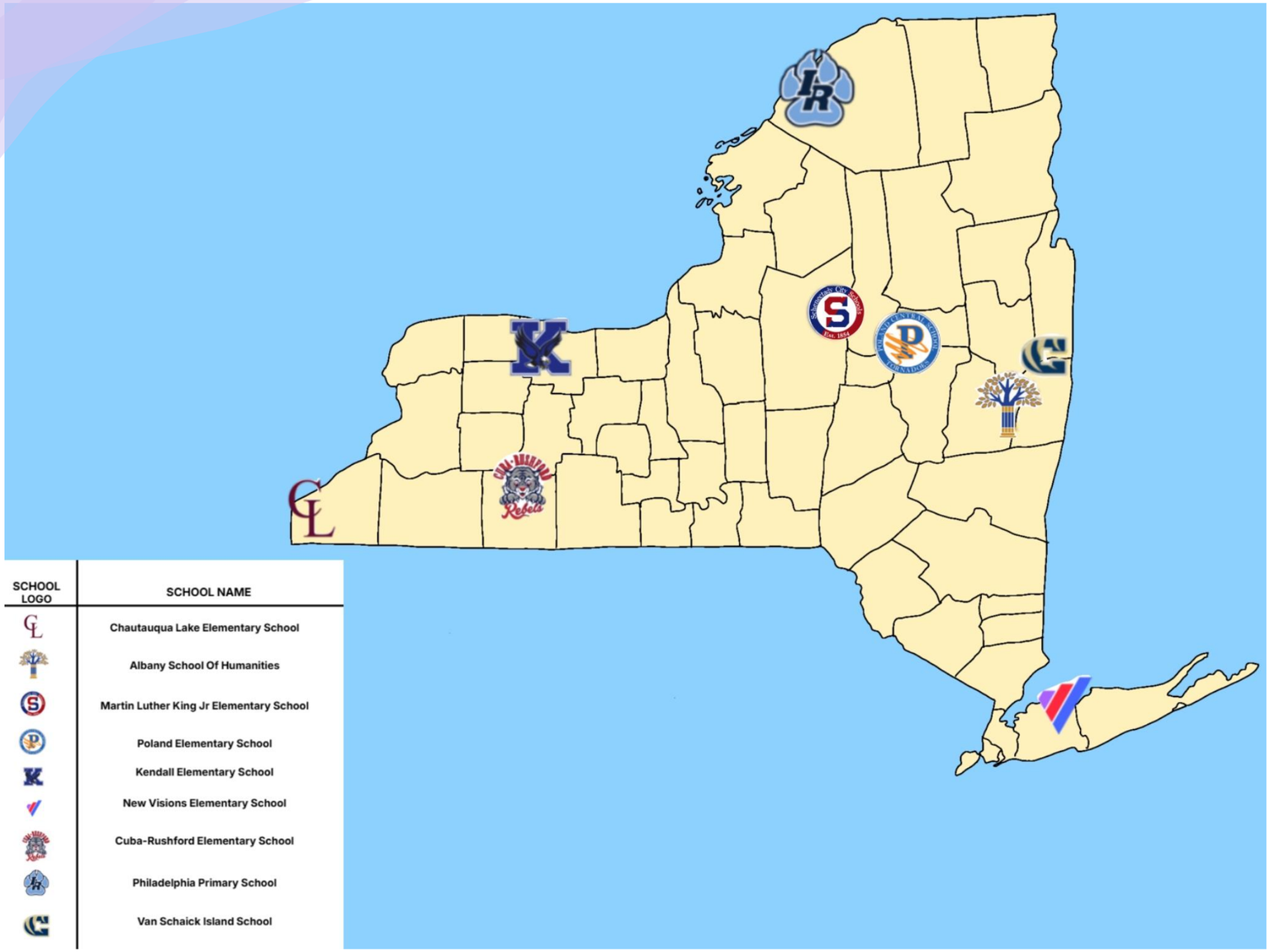
What policies, processes, and practices do positive outlier elementary schools share?



Schools	Enrollment	Grade Span	% Economically Disadvantaged	% Students with Disabilities	% White	% English Learners	Needs Index	Z-Score
Albany School of Humanities	377	K-5	58%	11%	20%	5	High Need: Urban-Suburban	1.88
Van Schaick Grade School	124	K-5	78%	35%	62%	1	High Need: Urban-Suburban	1.70
Chautauqua Lake Elementary School	285	K-5	46%	16%	93%	0	Average	1.62
Kendall Elementary School	346	K-6	52%	17%	88%	0	Average	1.75
New Visions Elementary School	433	K-4	70%	15%	3%	29	High Need: Urban-Suburban	2.20
Cuba-Rushford Elementary School	327	K-5	61%	23%	94%	0	High Need: Rural	2.18
Philadelphia Primary School	122	K-3	64%	20%	78%	0	High Need: Rural	1.17
Poland Elementary School	216	K-6	43%	12%	95%	0	High Need: Rural	1.20
Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School	302	K-6	97%	18%	10%	24	High Need: Urban-Suburban	1.12

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Positive Outlier School Map



SCHOOL LOGO	SCHOOL NAME
	Chautauqua Lake Elementary School
	Albany School Of Humanities
	Martin Luther King Jr Elementary School
	Poland Elementary School
	Kendall Elementary School
	New Visions Elementary School
	Cuba-Rushford Elementary School
	Philadelphia Primary School
	Van Schaick Island School

Data Collected Jan – June 2026

School Name	Interviews	Focus Groups	Documents & Photos	School Tour	Interpretive Memos	Participants
Albany School of Humanities	5	10	37	1	1	53
Van Schaick Grade School	5	6	24	1	1	21
Chautauqua Lake Elementary School	4	7	56	1	1	46
Kendall Elementary School	5	8	142	1	1	37
New Visions Elementary School	4	9	39	1	1	33
Cuba-Rushford Elementary School	6	6	30	1	1	25
Philadelphia Primary School	7	4	10	1	1	23
Poland Elementary School	5	23	3	1	1	25
MLK Jr. Elementary School	8	5	34	1	1	19
Total	**49**	**78**	**375**	**9**	**9**	**282**

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Case Study Highlights



Kristen C. Wilcox, Oema Rambharose, & Maria I. Khan
May 2026

Albany School of the Humanities Case Study

ASH is a no excuse kind of building – district le

Study Background

For over two decades, NYKids has been studying positive outlier scho associated with their above-predicted student performance. This study promising practices in support of K-6 children's development. As in al characterize important contextual information, including the district an climate; additionally, this study focuses attention on four main lines of learning and programming; social-emotional learning and youth menta preparation, support, and organizational capacity; and family engagem relationships.

Scores on New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathem grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (where applicable) and rates of chronic absenteeis used to identify positive outliers in this study.

School Context

The Albany School of the Humanities (ASH) is one of 12 elementary s District of Albany (CSDA) located in the capital of New York state. Tl a dynamic and changing demographic landscape, marked by a significa learners (MLLs); a shift that has been mirrored across the district, where MLL numbers increased from "about 300 . . . to just short of 2000" (district leader) by 2026. This increase has brought entering and emerging bilingual students (those needing foundational English language skills) directly into ASH for the first time in years, requiring staff to "pivot and figure out how to make what we do at ASH work for that" (teacher).

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Aaron Leo, Brian DiPasquale, Paul Guay
March 2026

Van Schaick Grade School Case Study

You have these people who just have had their heart in Cohoes for so long, and I thi that's one of the things that just makes us great. [It] is the people who are here are h for the right reasons and are invested in the community. – district lead

Study Background

For over two decades, NYKids has been studying positive outlier schools to identify what is associated with their above-predicted student performance. This study seeks to identify promising practices in support of K-6 children's development. As in all NYKids research, w characterize important contextual information including the district and school culture and climate and then this study focuses attention on four main lines of inquiry: academic learnin and programming; social emotional learning and youth mental health; educator preparation, support, and organizational capacity; and family engagement and community relationships.

Scores on New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments for grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (where applicable) and rates of chronic absenteeism for grades 1- 6 wer used to identify positive outliers in this study.

School Context

Van Schaick Grade School is located in the city of Cohoes, New York, ten miles north of Albany and only four miles from the city of Troy. The school is the smallest of three elementary schools in the district and serves 124 students from kindergarten through fifth grade. A Pre-K program, administered by the Boys & Girls Club of America, is housed in the basement wing of the school building.

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Workshopping with the Tool…Part 1

1. With a partner(s), work your way through the tool, taking each rung at a time.
2. You may choose to stop and reflect after each rung or work through the entire tool in one go and then debrief with your partner(s).
3. We will allow 30 minutes for this activity.
4. After we debrief we will move on to Part 2



Workshopping with the Tool… Part 2

Place your school on each rung (averaging for that rung). Which rung(s) do you think needs the most work? What actions from the research might be helpful to move up a rung?

Discussion Protocol

1. ***Which rung is the strongest? Why do you think that is?***
2. ***Which rung limits progress or needs the most work? Why do you think that is?***
3. ***What is one action your chosen school or district can take in the next 30-60 days to move up a rung? (remember the foundations are exactly that – foundational)***
4. ***How will you know if a leader is moving up the ladder?***

Rung	Score (average)	Promising action(s) to address?
Shared Stewardship		
Professional Trust		
Mutual Support		
Belonging & Voice		
Communication		
Reliability & Safety		

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Summing up

- ✓ The "Ladder of opportunity" tool mirrors NY Inspires' emphasis on readiness pathways — just as NY Inspires reframes what "readiness" looks like for students, a sustainable -leadership pathway reframes what "readiness for leadership" looks like for staff.
- ✓ Positive outlier case studies (e.g. Albany School of the Humanities, Van Schaick) operationalize Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education, which NYSED names as a central framework within NY Inspires — grounding the trust-sustainable leadership discussion in CRSE-aligned practice rather than leadership theory in the abstract.

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Keep in touch and where to find us...

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