Achieving Graduation

New York Benchmark High Schools

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New York Benchmark High Schools

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▶ **Introduction**

Purpose of Study

With support from the Magellan Foundation, in 2007-08 RMC Research conducted a pilot study to take a close look at five New York high schools with relatively low student dropout rates. The schools were identified through a benchmarking process that compared the success rates of schools with similar demographic and community characteristics.

The purposes of the study were to:

1. Identify the ways in which the selected schools had achieved high graduation rates;

2. Compare the findings from these schools with the most current research about practices that are known to reduce dropout rates;

3. Describe how the schools in the pilot study have adapted practices to the context of New York and the student populations they serve; and

4. Develop methods for communicating information about effective practices to educators from schools with higher dropout rates and the service providers charged with assisting schools to improve performance.

Benchmarking and School Selection

The five high schools were identified through a benchmarking process. Benchmarking is the process of comparing the quality of what one organization does against another in order to make improvements. Using the Frontier Analyst™ model developed by Prism Decision Systems and Idea Sciences, multiple school and community inputs and outcomes were converted into a single measure of efficiency. In this case, the inputs included demographics of the high school's student population (e.g., number of English language learners and percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch) and the wealth of the school district. Outcomes consisted of four and five-year graduation rates and school dropout rates. Through this benchmarking system 41 of the 674 high schools in New York outside New York City were identified as "best in class" benchmark schools. These 41 schools performed better than their peer high schools, that is, those with similar school populations and resources, and therefore serve as a potential resource for the other 633 schools in the state. The Magellan Foundation also supported a website that presented benchmarking data for all New York high schools.

Ten of the 41 benchmark schools were selected for initial consideration for the pilot study based on the following criteria:

1. The benchmark school's dropout rate was lower than others in its category on the State Needs Index, a classification of types of schools used by the state;

2. The school was a leader within its state Needs Index category in both four- and five-year graduation rates;

3. Many other schools were referenced to the benchmark school, that is, they would potentially be able to benefit from the information collected in the pilot study; and

4. The school has an open enrollment policy, and thus has not limited the student body to the strongest students.

Finally, the goal was to represent in the group of schools selected the diversity of the school population and types and sizes of secondary schools in New York State.

We selected five schools for site visits based on telephone interviews with principals and staff. Final selection took into account the willingness to participate fully in the study and the ability of interviewees to articulate a set of practices that account for their success.

The five selected schools represent high needs urban/suburban, high needs rural, and moderate needs schools based on the district wealth and needs categories in the State Needs Index. Each school is a potential "match" for numerous other New York schools that need to improve graduation rates. Two of the schools are small and serve a rural population, one is suburban and located in Westchester County, and two are large high schools. All have significant numbers of students from families of low socio-economic status, and several have large populations of English language learners. The schools vary in grade configuration, i.e. grades 9–12, or 10–12, or 7–12. The schools profiled in the study are:

- Albion (Charles D'Amico) High School, Albion, NY
- Brentwood High School, Brentwood, NY
- Elmont Memorial High School, Elmont, NY
- Mount Morris High School, Mount Morris, NY
- Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, NY

Overview of Project Activities

Through this project RMC Research:

1. Developed and refined a framework synthesizing the most current research on effective high school practices, including those that reduce dropout rates and increase the percentage of graduates going on to higher education (see framework and annotated bibliography in Section 2 of this guide);

2. In partnership with the Magellan Foundation and its project partner, Prism Decision Systems, identified five benchmark high schools that met study criteria;

3. Conducted multi-day site visits to the five schools to learn about and document the practices that administrators and staff have put in place to improve performance over time;

4. Analyzed the practices found in the five schools and prepared case studies on each that describe their practices from the perspective of current research on effective high schools to inform other high schools (see Section 4 of this guide);

5. Developed a self-assessment tool based on the research framework that high schools can use to determine where to focus their searches for information about best practices (see Section 5 of this guide);

6. Created XHTML versions of the research framework, case studies, and other related materials for inclusion on the Magellan Foundation website to facilitate searching for information about best practices as well as conducting self-assessments; and

7. Conducted several dissemination activities with representatives from the five schools. RMC Research will pilot several webinars with benchmark schools presenting the practices they have employed to address elements in the research framework.

Observations about Study Findings

The following are general observations based on data collection from the benchmark schools that may be useful as the reader explores the guide and considers new practices. The observations also bear further exploration with a larger sample of benchmark schools.

1. There was congruence between the recommendations about effective strategies identified in the research literature and the specific practices that were identified by the benchmark schools as central to their success in reducing the number of dropouts. In a few cases, the benchmark schools also identified practices deemed to be of great importance to their success that are not contained in the literature on effective high schools. An example that we found in several schools is the use of extracurricular participation as a way to strengthen relationships with the school's faculty.

2. For the purpose of description and analysis, we have organized practices into categories; in some cases, of course, a specific practice supports multiple categories. In actuality within the schools, individual practices are integrated and are typically an aspect of a carefully crafted and evolving response to the perceived needs of an often-changing student population. The principal of Sleepy Hollow High School, for example, commented that Sleepy Hollow was not a "Christmas Tree school," simply adding programs that appeared attractive based on external advice. In most schools, staff had sought external knowledge and expertise, bringing in resources to expand offerings and increase the expertise of the faculty. As the school staff members face new needs, they are continuously improving existing programs or developing others. Although they used different strategies, all schools used data to inform and focus continuous improvement efforts.

3. The schools were positive places to visit—all characterized by high levels of emotional and academic support for students (and also faculty) accompanied by high expectations for performance and high levels of commitment. Within the context of a clear focus on academic success, students were the center of attention. School policies and programs have been developed and continually modified with the full needs of students in mind. While the ways in which the schools have responded to students' needs can be linked to research findings, the specific practices implemented in the five schools are far from identical. The practices have been developed based on student needs, the skills of leadership and staff, and available resources.

4. In the five schools the "high expectations-high support" culture was developed over a period of several years. In some settings leaders had been in place for a decade or more, but even where formal leadership had changed relatively recently, the culture, goals, and the programmatic strategies in the schools were maintained. Even "turn-around" examples take time to achieve and depend on continuity of leadership purpose and values. The five schools have supportive district offices; in several cases the high schools are components of well-integrated K–12 systems.

5. The benchmarking process yielded a different list of schools than a process based on academic performance alone (such approaches typically highlight schools that serve large numbers of students from high SES families). The study findings show that there is a great deal of innovation in the benchmark schools that could benefit educators from many types of schools. We anticipate that the benchmark schools will have much in common with many schools that have high needs students and limited financial resources.

Next Steps

From the limited dissemination activities that we have conducted to date, we found that staff members from other New York high schools were eager to learn about specific practices in the benchmark schools even though few had previously taken advantage of the information in the existing benchmarking website. We observed that educators are interested in learning more about the practices used by all the benchmark schools if the information is provided within a research-based framework. They did not necessarily limit their interests to the schools that were close matches in terms of demographic and community characteristics. Our experience suggests the importance of proactive dissemination of school practices that emerge from benchmark schools, and not relying on schools to investigate information on their own. This study documented information from only five schools; 36 other New York benchmark schools are implementing practices that are also likely to be of interest to New York educators.

We are well aware that a benchmarking process requires continual updating. Student populations in New York are continually changing, and student outcome data is updated annually. If web-based benchmarking information is to become part of a system for improving the quality of high school education in New York State, data will need to be updated regularly and the practices of benchmark schools similarly updated.

The benchmarking process has the potential to be very helpful to the state education agency if used on an ongoing basis to identify and learn from a wide range of schools that perform at high levels regardless of resource constraints or population needs. The practices used by benchmark schools have policy implications for state actions, including the provision of improvement assistance to schools statewide. There are many possibilities for further development of web-based awareness and improvement activities.
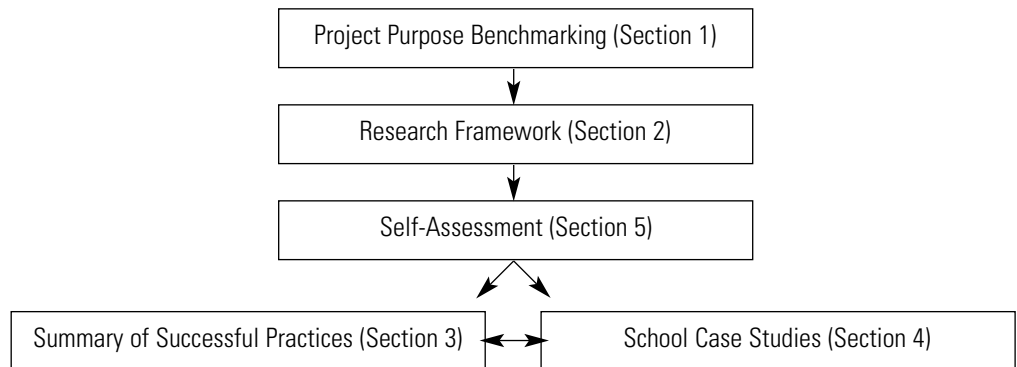
Using this Guide

This guide is organized in five sections:

1. Introduction - describes the purpose behind the project

2. Research Framework—synthesizes the most current research about effective practices in secondary school reform that was used to guide the review of practices in the benchmark schools

3. Summary of Successful Practices—provides short descriptions of specific practices drawn from the five pilot high schools

4. Case Studies—presents an overview and highlights from each of the five pilot high schools

5. Self-assessment—presents the research framework as a series of questions that a school team might use to inventory and reflect on their current practices.

This guide is not structured with the expectation that practitioners read it cover to cover. Depending on the reader's interests, one or two sections might be of primary interest. Because the entire study was based on the research framework, we suggest the reader begin by at least perusing Section 2. If readers desire to reflect on current practices in their own schools, we recommend completing the self-assessment (Section 5) to help focus on relevant portions of Section 3 (Summary of Successful Practices) or Section 4 (the five case studies). The diagram below shows that pathway of working through the guide:

> **This guide is not structured with the expectation that practitioners read it cover to cover. Depending on the reader's interests, one or two sections might be of primary interest.**

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│   Project Purpose Benchmarking (Section 1)   │
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│         Self-Assessment (Section 5)          │
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│ Summary of Successful        │←→│  School Case Studies         │
│ Practices (Section 3)        │  │  (Section 4)                 │
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Alternatively, after reviewing the research framework, the reader might move directly to Section 3 to read a summary of practices related to each element of the framework or browse the five case studies in Section 4. The reader might then move to the Self-Assessment (Section 5) and use it to determine where to focus on improving graduation and reducing dropout rates.

SECTION **2**

Research Framework—
What We Know About
Successful High Schools

- Introduction

- Research Framework: Categories, Features, Research Rationale

- Relationship of Research-Based Features

- Annotated Bibliography of References

▶ Research Framework

What We Know About Successful High Schools

RMC Research synthesized the most current research about effective practices in secondary school reform, including specifically those practices that contribute to reducing dropout rates, retaining high school students through graduation, and increasing the percentage of high school graduates going on to higher education. We were looking for evidence of improvement themes and related practices, seeking convergence of the research evidence with well-regarded theories about successful high schools.

We organized the themes from a review of the research into six major categories:

1. Rigorous academics and curriculum
2. Personalization and student support
3. Motivation and engagement
4. Staff expectations and support
5. Leadership and structure/organization
6. Parent, family, and community engagement

The intention of the framework was to guide the review of practices in the pilot high schools and surface other practices that have not been documented in the research literature but which the schools identify as important.

Within each category, we noted the major features of research findings and developed a brief summary of the underlying research and theory for each item to provide a rationale for why the practice is important. Each feature is keyed to one or major references.

The intention of the framework was to guide our review of practices in the pilot high schools and also be alert to any practices in place at the schools that have not been documented in the research literature but which the schools identify as important to their successes. The detailed research framework, which follows in table format, provides the context for specific practices that are described in the case studies. It is also designed to enable other high schools and those working with high schools to assess the alignment of their own practices with current research, and identify areas for improvement (see Section 5).

Of course, high schools, and the districts within which they reside, are whole systems with complex interrelated elements and practices. Research categories that isolate elements for the purpose of description do an injustice to interrelated systems. Practices described for one element of the framework always also impact some other element. Schools seeking to learn and borrow from the sampled schools need to assess how practices will either reinforce or conflict with existing culture and practices, and plan accordingly.

Research Framework

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM	
FEATURE	**RESEARCH RATIONALE** (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Academic expectations	High impact schools consistently have higher expectations for all students, regardless of students' prior academic performance. Students are encouraged to take on academic challenges. (5)
Access to advanced courses	All students, including those less likely to pursue college immediately, should have options for becoming academically prepared for college. (11)
Access to college courses	High impact high schools focus on preparing students for life beyond high school—specifically, college, and careers. The opportunity to obtain college credit can be motivating for students. (5, 12)

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT	
FEATURE	**RESEARCH RATIONALE** (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Transition to high school	The transition to high school is especially difficult for low achievers; low-achieving students are more prone to course failure and retention in ninth grade. Students experience disrupted friendships and challenges at a time when parents are less involved. (4, 6, 22, 24)
Progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students	An early warning system that uses accurate data to target an appropriate mix of interventions for groups and individual students is a proactive step in stemming dropouts. High impact schools have early warning systems to identify students who need help. They use assessment data to improve curriculum, instructional practice, and make teacher assignments. (3, 5, 13)
Comprehensive guidance and advisory support	Students need personalized guidance from adults who know and care about them in order to make optimal academic and social decisions. Students need ownership over learning, opportunities to recognize and make choices, and a sense of belonging. Attention to all aspects of students' needs, including health, is an important element in personalizing services and making personal connections. (22)
Academic support	Getting students to enroll in more demanding courses is not enough for success. Increased rigor is complemented by extra support. High impact schools are aggressive, systematic, and deliberate in getting help to students who are struggling—which allows students to stay on pace rather than slow down when they need help. Because experienced/well-qualified teachers are critical, high impact schools use criteria such as past student performance in making assignments. Class sizes are adjusted in high impact schools to provide more attention to struggling students. (1, 5, 7, 11, 25)

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT (continued)

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Content support for English learners	Developing word-level skills alone does not support the development of higher-level thinking needed to develop text-level skills. Without specific support, ELL students are often tracked into low-level courses that limit their ability to progress beyond high school. (10, 17)

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Postsecondary exploration	Success is heightened when secondary/postsecondary linkages are strengthened, and transition eased for students. Students need current information about job markets to make informed post-graduation choices. High impact high schools focus on preparing kids for life beyond high school, not just graduation. (5, 26)
College-going culture	High schools with high college enrollment rates for all students systematically cultivate aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying, and enrolling in college. (2, 11)
Extracurricular connections	Participation in extracurricular activities has been associated with reduced rates of early dropout and criminal arrest among high-risk students. Extracurricular activities provide another venue for success, and for interaction with adults. The quantity and quality of interactions with students are improved when school personnel have time to know individuals and develop long-term relationships with them. (7, 18, 19, 22)
Recognition for attainment	Specific, substantial recognition of behaviors centered on academics is evident in consistently higher performing high schools. (3)

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Collaborative learning opportunities	Teachers need time to work together on examining standards and aligning with their own work, analyzing test results, revising instructional strategies, and bringing common expectations and strategies to coursework. Higher-performing schools incorporate time within the school day for teachers to collaborate on addressing needs indicated by data and classroom observations. (3, 7, 11)
New teacher induction and support	High impact schools support new teachers with a focus on instruction and curriculum in addition to personal/social support. (5)

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE / ORGANIZATION

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Employment criteria	Principals in high impact schools aggressively recruit qualified staff. (5)
Collaborative leadership	Leadership is seen as a collaborative endeavor in which staff, students, and the community are engaged. Teachers in high impact schools are more likely to have a say in decision-making and professional development. The principal and teachers collectively maintain a focus on academic learning, and allocate resources to this purpose. (3, 5, 22)
Coherence of values and continuity of purpose	In high impact schools, teachers and administrators express consistent views about achievement-related schools goals: they have high expectations for all students and a collective commitment to student success. When members of a school community consistently express common beliefs and values, staff are able to work together toward a common goal. It is easier to accommodate a variety of student needs and interests, and instructional practices, including changing practices, when there are commonly held beliefs and values focused on student needs and learning. New practices or programs are instituted only if there is a strong sense that they will contribute to the common purpose. (3, 5, 16, 22)
Continuous improvement and allocation of resources	In high impact schools, staff members make greater efforts to learn information and use it to improve curriculum and instruction and allocate resources. For example, higher-impact schools are more deliberate about the use of instructional time, arranging available time to help "catch up" students as needed. (5)

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE (Code In Parenthesis Keyed to Annotated Bibliography)
Parent and family involvement	Family involvement in academics and learning remains important in the adolescent years. Family involvement also relates to higher rates of college enrollment. (4, 27)
Community engagement	Community organizing, and tapping into the resources of the community, can positively affect the school learning environment and contribute to higher student educational outcomes. (3, 20)

Relationship of Research-Based Features

The research-based features do not function independently but rather in concert as depicted below.

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    Rigor/High          Leadership
    Expectations  <····>  Structure/
                         Organization


Staff Expectations     Successful          Motivation &
& Opportunities  ····> NY High Schools <····  Engagement


    School-wide          Personalization &
    Instructional  <····>  Student Support
    Commitment
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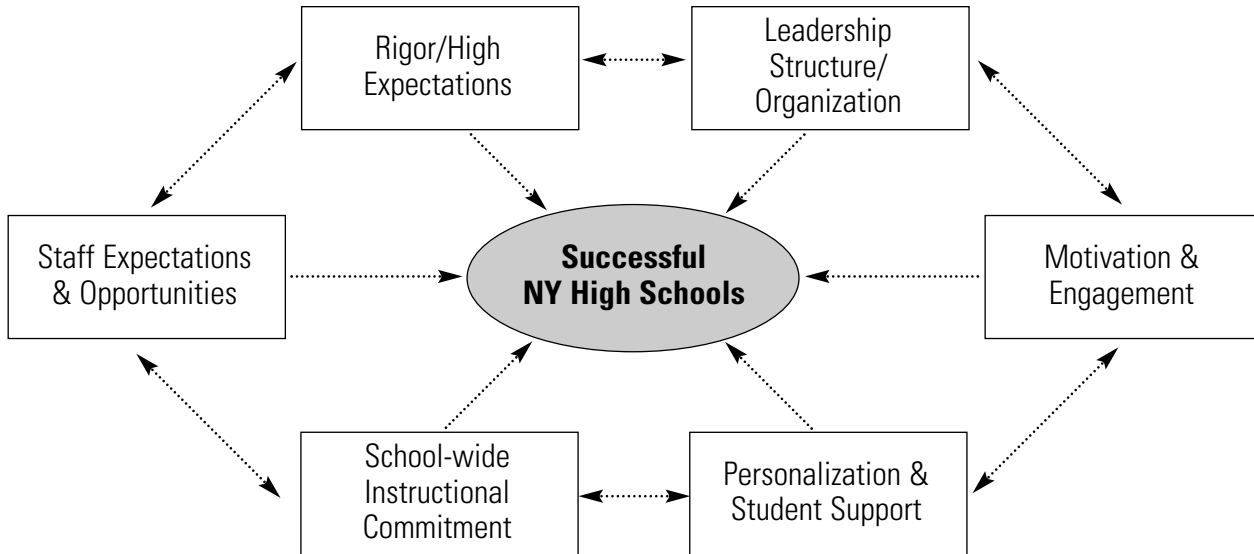
Annotated Bibliography of References

1. ACT & The Education Trust. (2005). *On course for success: A close look at high school courses that prepare all students for college and work.* Iowa City, IA: ACT, Inc.

    In high schools with significant minority and low-income student populations, students can be prepared to succeed in credit-bearing first-year college courses. Whether students plan further education or work after high school graduation, they need to graduate college-ready. The common components found at the high schools in this study that put students on course for success were: high-level college-oriented content, well-qualified teachers, flexible pedagogical styles, and tutorial support.

2. Corwin, Z., & Tierney, W. (2007). *Getting there—and beyond: Building a culture of college-going in high schools.* Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.

    How can schools increase access to college and enable students to graduate from a postsecondary institution? One overarching conclusion is that students are best served by schools that exhibit a strong "college-going culture." Culture is the intersection of beliefs and practices. The authors respond here to five key questions aimed at strategizing and promoting a college culture on high school campuses: (1) What is a college culture? (2) What are common challenges to building and sustaining a college culture? (3) Who participates in a college culture? (4) How can a school strengthen its college culture? and (5) What resources are available to improve college culture?

3. Dolejs, C. (2006). *Report on key practices and policies of consistently higher performing high schools.* Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Accountability.

    Much has been written recently about the ways many high schools are failing students, but much less has been written about the ways successful high schools manage to maintain standards of excellence for all students, pursuing high academic standards while still closing the achievement gap. This report focuses on successful high schools, highlighting the ways in which many superintendents, principals, and teachers are setting and meeting high expectations for all students.

4. Eccles, J.S., & Harold, R.D. (1993). Parent-school involvement during the early adolescent years. *Teachers College Record, 94*(3), 568–587.

    This article discusses ways teachers could work more effectively with parents to facilitate healthy early adolescent development. After examining the importance of greater parental involvement in children's education, the article describes barriers to parent involvement and summarizes specific ways teachers could try to involve parents of adolescent children.

5. The Education Trust. (2005). *Gaining traction, gaining ground: How some high schools accelerate learning for struggling students.* Washington, DC: Author.

    These researchers looked closely over the course of nearly a full academic year at the practices in four public high schools that do an unusually good job of "growing" the performance of students who enter behind their peers, and

compared them to three demographically similar schools that get more average results. They describe how the "high impact" schools differ in terms of culture, academic core, support, teachers, time, and other resources.

6. Falbo, T., Lein, L., & Amador, N. (2001). Parental involvement during the transition to high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 16*(5), 511–529.

   The authors identified the types of parental involvement that are effective as students make the transition to high school. They also elaborated on the role parents play in connecting their children to desirable peer networks during this transition. They identified five forms of parental involvement that help students succeed.

7. Friedlaender, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). *High schools for equity: Policy supports for student learning in communities of color.* Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network.

   The authors share findings from five California high schools that are located in California's largest cities, are nonselective in their admissions, and have beaten the odds in supporting the success of low-income students of color. All five schools provide personalized settings, offer rigorous and relevant instruction, and promote professional learning and collaboration. The study also identified four policy areas that influence the ability of high schools to enable students of color to succeed: organization and governance; human capital; curriculum and assessment; and funding.

8. Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2006). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high school.* Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

   This report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research, but that even when used together, they may not constitute a full writing curriculum.

9. Harvard Family Research Project. (2007). *Family involvement in middle and high school students' education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

   This paper synthesizes research studies that link family involvement in middle and high school to youth's academic and social outcomes. It also profiles programs that have been evaluated to show what works to promote family involvement and student achievement during this critical developmental period. The paper concludes with implications for policy, practice, and research.

10. Heller, R., & Greenleaf, C. (2007). *Literacy instruction in the content areas: Getting to the core of middle and high school improvement.* Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

    This report addresses one important way in which schools can and must improve the literacy instruction they provide to students in grades 4–12. More specifically, it focuses on reading and writing instruction in the academic content areas—particularly the areas of math, science, English and history—that comprise the heart of the secondary school curriculum.

11. Horowitz, J. (2005). *Inside high school reform: Making the changes that matter.* San Francisco: WestEd.

    This book goes inside the reform efforts of 28 high schools where educators collaborated to fundamentally change expectations for students — in effect, to prepare all students for postsecondary education. By challenging the status quo, teachers and administrators set out to strengthen their delivery of services so that all students, especially those traditionally denied access to college, would leave their care with more options for college and for life.

12. Karp, M.M., Calcagno, J.C., Hughes, K.L., Jeong. D.W., & Bailey, T. (2007). *The postsecondary achievement of participants in dual enrollment: An analysis of student outcomes in two states.* New York: Teachers College, Columbia.

    Dual enrollment programs enable high school students to enroll in college courses and earn college credit. Once limited to high-achieving students, such programs are increasingly seen as a means to support the postsecondary preparation of average-achieving students. This report examines the impact of dual enrollment participation for students in the state of Florida and in New York City. The authors provide evidence that dual enrollment is a useful strategy for encouraging postsecondary success for all students, including those in career and technical education programs.

13. Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions.* Washington, DC: National High School Center.

    This paper summarizes research-based steps school systems can readily take to identify likely high school dropouts. The first involves tracking and analyzing basic data on which students are showing early warning signs of dropping out. The paper points out that less is known about effective remedies designed to address high school dropouts. Some of the common elements shared across higher performing high schools with relatively low dropout rates include attention to school climate in order to facilitate student engagement, rigorous coursework for all students, and the effective use of extended learning time during the school day such as the block schedule. It lists specific dropout prevention programs that have strong research showing positive or potentially positive effects.

14. Koelsch, N. (2006). *Improving literacy outcomes for English language learners in high school: Considerations for states and districts in developing a coherent policy framework.* Washington, DC: National High School Center.

    The paper recommends that states and districts need to redesign literacy work for English language learners in high school by moving from remediation to academic acceleration and enrichment. It summarizes research findings that: 1) English language learners who are able to negotiate entry into high-level courses develop higher levels of literacy than do ELLs of similar proficiency who are tracked in low-level courses; 2) ELL students have a better chance to achieve at high levels when academic barriers to college preparation and accelerated courses are removed; and 3) college preparatory courses can be accompanied by enrollment in academic support classes when necessary.

15. Lachat, M.A. (2001). *Data-driven high school reform: The Breaking Ranks Model.* Providence, RI: Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory.

    This paper presents a synthesis of the research literature on data-driven school improvement and describes findings from work in helping low-performing high schools become more student-centered, personalized, and intellectually rigorous through the implementation of the Breaking Ranks Model of high school reform. The model offers a capacity-building approach to school improvement based on the recommendations of *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, which was produced by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in partnership with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

16. Lee, V.E., Smith, J.B., & Croninger, R.G. (1995, Fall). Another look at high school restructuring. In *Issues in restructuring schools. 9.* Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

    Findings from this report indicate that the presence of organizational factors, such as a common academic curriculum, academic press, authentic instruction, and a collective sense of responsibility explain much improvement in student

learning. Furthermore, in schools with these factors, school restructuring efforts had positive effects on learning during the early years as well as the later years of high school. The report contends that schools, especially high schools, organized communally are better places for students to learn than schools that are traditionally organized.

17. Lesaux, N., & Geva, E. (2006). Synthesis: Development of literacy in language-minority students. In D. August and T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners. Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

    This research meta-analysis reviewed the differences and similarities between language-minority and native speakers in the development of various literacy skills, the characteristics of those language-minority students identified as having literacy difficulties, and the factors that have an impact on the literacy development of language-minority students. The authors find that well-developed oral language proficiency in English is associated with well-developed reading comprehension skills in English. Oral vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, syntactic skills, and ability to address metalinguistic aspects of language are linked to English reading proficiency. Second language reading is a function of both second language proficiency and first-language reading ability.

18. Mahoney, J.L. (2000, March/April). School extracurricular activity participation as a moderator in the development of antisocial patterns. *Child Development, 71*(2), 502–516.

    In this study participation in school extracurricular activities was associated with reduced rates of early dropout and criminal arrest among high-risk boys and girls. The decline in antisocial patterns was dependent on whether the individuals' social network also participated in school extracurricular activities.

19. McNeal, R.B. Jr. (1995, January). Extracurricular activities and high school dropouts. *Sociology of Education, 68,* 62–81.

    This article reports on a study of over 14,000 students to determine whether participation in specific extracurricular activities (athletics and fine arts) significantly reduces a student's likelihood of dropping out. The author found that, when all activities are examined, only athletic participation shows a statistically significant decrease in students dropping out of high school.

20. Mediratta, K., Shah, S., & McAlister, S. (2008). *Organized communities, stronger schools: A preview of research findings.* Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

    Across multiple data sources, authors of this six-year study found strong and consistent relationships between activities that mobilize youth, public school parents and community residents and/or institutions in the service of school reform and policy and resource decisions, school-level improvements, and student outcomes. Data analyses suggest that organizing community engagement in this fashion helps expand the capacity of urban public schools to support student success by building support for reform alternatives, increasing equity in the distribution of resources, and generating meaningful parent, youth, and community engagement focused on improved student learning. Successful organizing strategies contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized test score performance, and higher graduation rates and college-going aspirations in several sites.

21. Mizelle, N. (1999). *Helping middle school students make the transition to high school.* Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

    This digest discusses how educators can ease students' transition into high school by providing challenging and supportive middle school environments and by providing well-designed transition programs. These programs should

include activities that provide information to students and parents, activities that provide social support, and activities that bring middle and high school educators together. Finally, the author concludes that the importance of parents being involved in their young adolescent students' transition from middle to high school can hardly be overestimated.

22. National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2005). *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for leading high school reform.* Reston, VA: Author.

The book addresses what we must do to graduate young people with the skills, habits, and convictions that are required for success in the rapidly changing American culture and global workplace. Three touchstones it proposes are: collaborative leadership; personalization of the high school experience; and aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment to standards. It recommends the following strategies to improve student performance: 1) establish the essential learnings a student is required to master in order to graduate; 2) increase quantity and improve quality of teacher/student interactions; 3) implement a comprehensive advisory program; 4) ensure that teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and assessments; 5) implement schedule flexibility to accommodate interdisciplinary planning; 6) ensure meaningful involvement in decision making by all; and 7) align professional development and personal learning plans to prepare students for graduation.

23. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2007). *Standards for grades K–12.* Reston, VA: Author.

In this document the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics describes the mathematical understanding, knowledge, and skills that students should acquire from Pre-K through grade 12.

24. Neild, R.C., Stoner-Eby, S., & Furstenberg, F.F. (2001). *Connecting entrance and departure: The transition to ninth grade and high school dropout.* Paper presented at Harvard Civil Rights Project Conference on Dropouts in America.

The authors argue that the inner-city dropout epidemic cannot be ameliorated unless high schools organize themselves to help students through the transition to high school. The treacherous waters of the transition to 9th grade substantially increase the probability of students leaving high school without ever finishing. This includes many who looked similar to their successful peers in other respects at the time of entrance to high school. The authors describe strategies being used to address this issue.

25. Torgesen, J.K., Houston, D.D., Rissman, L.M., Decker, S.M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S.M., Wexler, J., Francis, D.J., Rivera, M.O., & Lesaux, N. (2007). *Academic literacy instruction for adolescents: A guidance document from the Center on Instruction.* Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction.

Based on current research in adolescent literacy, the first part of this document discusses recommendations to improve literacy instruction in the content areas, instructional recommendations for English language learners, and critical elements of instruction for special reading classes with struggling readers. It addresses three critical goals for academic literacy instruction with adolescents: 1) to improve overall levels of reading proficiency; 2) to (at least) maintain grade level reading skills from the end of third grade through high school; and, 3) to accelerate the reading development of students reading below grade level. In a second section, eight experts with extensive experience conducting research on adolescent literacy address both literacy instruction in the content areas and recommendations for struggling readers. They also recommend additional readings related to these questions. An annotated bibliography of their responses is included.

26. Venezia, A., Kirst, M.W., & Antonio, A.L. (2007). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K–12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University.

The authors report that states have created unnecessary barriers between high school and college that are undermining student aspirations. The current fractured systems send students, their parents, and K–12 educators conflicting and vague messages about what students need to know and be able to do to enter and succeed in college, resulting in misunderstandings that can contribute to poor preparation for college. The report also highlights issues such as inequalities throughout education systems in college counseling, college preparation course offerings, and connections with local postsecondary institutions; the importance of teachers in advising students about college preparation issues; student overestimation of tuition; and an inequitable distribution of college information to parents. The authors offer recommendations to improve the current situation.

27. Zill, N., & Nord, C.W. (1994). *Running in place: How American families are faring in a changing economy and an individualistic society.* Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc.

This report describes the situation of families in the United States in the 1990s, using statistical data, and explores three challenges that families with children currently face as they attempt to fulfill some of the functions that society expects of them. The three challenges are: (1) making ends meet in a changing economy; (2) combating negative peer influences; and (3) maintaining parental control as children grow older. The report examines each challenge in depth, and explores what can be done to help families, including the role of government programs and partnerships between schools and families.

SECTION **3**

Summary of Successful Practices from Five New York Benchmark High Schools

- Introduction

- Practices that Promote Rigorous Academics and Curriculum

- Practices that Provide Personalization and Student Support

- Practices that Build Student Motivation and Engagement

- Practices that Define Staff Expectations and Support

- Practices that Illustrate Leadership and Structure/Organization

- Practices that Build Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

▶ Summary of Successful Practices from Five New York Benchmark High Schools

The practices are illustrative of the policies, programs, and operating philosophies that the five schools believe are key to their successes in reducing the number of dropouts, and increasing graduation rates and rates of students entering postsecondary education.

On the following pages, we have broken down the research framework into the six major themes and provided short descriptions of specific practices drawn from the five pilot high schools. The relevant section of the research framework begins each set of descriptions. The practices are illustrative of the policies, programs, and operating philosophies that the five schools believe are key to their successes in reducing the number of dropouts and increasing graduation rates and rates of students entering postsecondary education. We have selected practices from the longer descriptions that are contained in the school case studies (see Section 4), chosen to show a range of ideas without attempting to be inclusive.

Certainly, in all cases the schools are doing much more than the highlighted practices in order to achieve their successes. As we indicated previously, high schools are complex systems in which policies and practices related to one factor always affect other elements. Further, the quality of implementation is important to success. Quality of implementation associated with practices depends on the cohesiveness of underlying beliefs and assumptions and how well they are communicated, the extent of staff buy-in to practices, and linkages and reinforcement across practices.

We suggest beginning by reviewing the research framework in Section 2 to understand the classification of school practices, and then reading through this section. If one of the practices from a school seems of particular interest, we suggest reading the full case study for a school to understand the practice in context (see Section 4). An alternative approach is to use the self-assessment (see Section 5) prior to reading this chapter to identify the themes and features that respond to areas of your school's greatest need. Then turn to this chapter to see the types of practices that schools believe have helped them attain success in those areas.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM	
FEATURE	**RESEARCH RATIONALE**
Academic expectations	High impact schools consistently have higher expectations for all students, regardless of students' prior academic performance. Students are encouraged to take on academic challenges.
Access to advanced courses	All students, including those less likely to pursue college immediately, should have options for becoming academically prepared for college.
Access to college courses	High impact high schools focus on preparing students for life beyond high school—specifically, college, and careers. The opportunity to obtain college credit can be motivating for students.

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

Mount Morris: Block scheduling permits a seventh period late in the day when teachers can bring in students who did not complete homework or did not understand class instruction for remediation advisement. A web-based program enables teachers to schedule students for advisement from their classrooms or homes. The advisement assignment system is applied with uniform rules. Even the highest-performing students are assigned remediation advisement if they have not completed homework.

Elmont Memorial: The message that is clearly and continually articulated is that students are expected to graduate and go on to college. There are daily expectations that set the stage. An evaluative "Aim" question and "Do Now " activity are clearly displayed on the board as students enter each classroom. Students are expected to immediately engage in the "Do Now" activity before the lesson begins. The "Aim" forces students to evaluate at a higher thinking level what the goal of the lesson is.

ACCESS TO ADVANCED COURSES

Elmont Memorial: All high school students are encouraged to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses. To enroll in an AP course, students must meet two of the following criteria: classroom achievement of at least 85% in the subject area, teacher recommendation, and/or demonstration of a superior degree of motivation for the curriculum area. Extensive support is given to all students taking AP classes. Fifteen AP courses are offered along with honors and advanced classes.

Sleepy Hollow: Sleepy Hollow has a policy of open access to all courses; students receive support to make informed decisions about course selection, beginning with teacher recommendations. There is a "student-friendly" process for those not recommended and who express interest in honors or AP courses. The school has identified skills and learning behaviors that fit the profile of successful students, and counselors help students reflect on their readiness and willingness to undertake the challenge with the ultimate choice belonging to the student and family. Staff members have created a series of supports for students who choose AP and honors courses, including a summer academy, access to extra help throughout the year, and access to student role models.

ACCESS TO COLLEGE COURSES

Albion: Albion High School has arrangements with the local community college (Genesee Community College) whereby students can earn up to 30 credits towards a bachelor's degree. Students pay a reduced rate for the community college courses that are taught by Albion High School teachers. Many students graduate with 24 or more college credits, and some graduate from high school with an associates degree.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE
Transition to high school	The transition to high school is especially difficult for low achievers; low-achieving students are more prone to course failure and retention in ninth grade. Students experience disrupted friendships and challenges at a time when parents are less involved.
Progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students	An early warning system that uses accurate data to target an appropriate mix of interventions for groups and individual students is a proactive step in stemming dropouts. High impact schools have early warning systems to identify students who need help. They use assessment data to improve curriculum, instructional practice, and make teacher assignments.
Comprehensive guidance and advisory support	Students need personalized guidance from adults who know and care about them in order to make optimal academic and social decisions. Students need ownership over learning, opportunities to recognize and make choices, and a sense of belonging. Attention to all aspects of students' needs, including health, is an important element in personalizing services and making personal connections.
Academic support	Getting students to enroll in more demanding courses is not enough for success. Increased rigor is complemented by extra support. High impact schools are aggressive, systematic, and deliberate in getting help to students who are struggling—which allows students to stay on pace rather than slow down when they need help. Because experienced/well-qualified teachers are critical, high impact schools use criteria such as past student performance in making assignments. Class sizes are adjusted in high impact schools to provide more attention to struggling students.
Content support for English learners	Developing word-level skills alone does not support the development of higher-level thinking needed to develop text-level skills. Without specific support, ELL students are often tracked into low-level courses that limit their ability to progress beyond high school.

TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL
Brentwood: All entering tenth graders participate in the Small Learning Communities program. The small learning communities bring students together in manageable groups and help transition students to the high school. They help students set goals, see possibilities for their future, and feel empowered. Small group assemblies address aspects of school learning or culture, such as discussing a common reading assignment, learning to read student transcripts or understanding graduation requirements such as number of credits.

PROGRESS MONITORING WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS
Albion: A select group of eighth graders is identified to participate in the Take Flight program to increase students' academic engagement and ease the transition to ninth grade. A ninth grade literacy program aims to improve reading comprehension and inferential skills for selected students; students are chosen for the program based on their inconsistent performance on the NYS English language arts assessments, attendance problems, and poor work habits.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT (continued)

PROGRESS MONITORING WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS

Sleepy Hollow: Sleepy Hollow provides ninth and tenth graders who are at-risk for failure with a two year intense humanities program that focuses on global studies and English language arts. In addition, a teaching assistant follows students through mathematics and science classes, helps them with homework, and makes home calls as necessary.

COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE AND ADVISORY SUPPORT

Elmont Memorial: Each year students and parents attend an annual review conference with their guidance counselor. The freshman year conference focuses on course selection and reinforces that tenth grade involves career exploration. During junior year counselors advise on college preparation with students and parents. Senior year is for college selection and the application process.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Albion: The academic day is structured as a 4 x 4 block schedule. A fifth block runs from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m., during which credit recovery courses are offered. Teachers who provide Academic Intervention Services (AIS) meet with juniors and seniors who need to pass a state assessment to graduate, access student data and data from counselors and teachers, and then design a program of study. The guidance department creates a spreadsheet that shows each senior's progress towards graduation along with "estimates" of the likelihood of graduation. Each month the administration and department representatives meet to assess progress and prescribe interventions for students in the "doubtful" and "maybe" categories.

Elmont Memorial: Ninth grade students identified as at-risk are paired with teacher volunteers who oversee their academic progress. Summer curriculum workshops are offered to upgrade and strengthen education content for struggling students. During the school year extra help sessions are offered before and after school and Saturday mornings. Supportive services are in place to ensure academic success for those taking Regents, Honors, and Advanced Placement classes.

Mount Morris: Junior high teachers follow the same group of students for two years to enhance continuity of academic instruction and limit the loss of learning time. "Semester-ing" and block scheduling for core academic courses allow students to concentrate on two, rather than four, core academic subjects at a time. For students who need additional support, the Building Educator Support Team (BEST) develops an action plan, oversees implementation, and later reconvenes to review outcomes and consider further action.

CONTENT SUPPORT FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Brentwood: The Immersion Program serves students with interrupted formal education. The Bilingual Program supports different levels of ESL within each department, (which works because the school is so large). As students' language skills improve they are able to move to more advanced classes offered during the same period.

Mount Morris: The high school offers tutoring to boost English skills, and tailors support based on individual student skills and interests. All teachers received professional development on differentiated instructional strategies for English language learners.

Sleepy Hollow: Sleepy Hollow High School offers a Spanish language GED program, three levels of ESL classes, specialized content area classes in mathematics, science, social studies, music and technology, and an ESL summer school. An ESL after-school center affords students academic help and an opportunity to complete homework.

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT	
FEATURE	**RESEARCH RATIONALE**
Postsecondary exploration	Success is heightened when secondary-/postsecondary linkages are strengthened, and transition eased for students. Students need current information about job markets to make informed post-graduation choices. High impact high schools focus on preparing kids for life beyond high school, not just graduation.
College-going culture	High schools with high college enrollment rates for all students systematically cultivate aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying, and enrolling in college.
Extracurricular connections	Participation in extracurricular activities has been associated with reduced rates of early dropout and criminal arrest among high-risk students. Extracurricular activities provide another venue for success, and for interaction with adults. The quantity and quality of interactions with students are improved when school personnel have time to know individuals and develop long-term relationships with them.
Recognition for attainment	Specific, substantial recognition of behaviors centered on academics is evident in consistently higher performing high schools.

POSTSECONDARY EXPLORATION

Albion: Students may participate in semester-long career internships within the local area, and summer opportunities in a wider geographical area. The one year Community as School (CAS) program provides an avenue for at-risk students to explore human service careers. An agreement with the county Job Corps allows high school students to pursue vocational interests and receive Job Corps benefits while continuing their high school studies. Students are transported to the Job Corps site for the second half of the school day, where they can choose from one of seven vocational programs.

COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

Albion: Students can complete courses for college credit while in high school which helps students make the transition to college. To increase the likelihood that they will continue to higher education, all high school students are required to complete an application to Genesee Community College if they are not submitting an application to another college.

Elmont Memorial: One tool that guidance counselors use with parents and students is a folder known as The Elmont Memorial High School Profile. The Profile lists the district and school standards and requirements needed to graduate. It also includes the previous year's graduating class statistics; percent of students earning Advanced Regents Diplomas, Regents Diplomas, SAT I and II scores; and the percent of graduates attending four-year colleges, two-year colleges, and entering technical programs, employment, or military.

EXTRACURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Elmont Memorial: Staff believe that when students participate in extracurricular activities a deeper connection is made with the school. All athletic coaches and club advisors are members of the faculty and staff of Elmont Memorial. The school offers more than 100 sports or activities. Descriptions of each activity or sport include the purpose and how it relates to the skills that students need.

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT (continued)

Mount Morris: Administrators believe that sports and other extracurricular activities help keep many students in school. One way the school builds relationships is through 28 sports teams, usually coached by teachers. The school's goal is to have every student participate in at least one sport. In addition, the school offers popular music and drama programs, and provides opportunities for its rural students to travel for cultural and academic learning.

RECOGNITION FOR ATTAINMENT

Albion: Each month two students are recognized by the School Board for character and leadership, and each month two students are introduced to the Rotary club. A senior breakfast and ceremony recognize students for character and participation in music, art, and sports.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT	
FEATURE	**RESEARCH RATIONALE**
Collaborative learning opportunities	Teachers need time to work together on examining standards and aligning with their own work, analyzing test results, revising instructional strategies, and bringing common expectations and strategies to coursework. Higher-performing schools incorporate time within the school day for teachers to collaborate on addressing needs indicated by data and classroom observations.
New teacher induction and support	High impact schools support new teachers with a focus on instruction and curriculum in addition to personal/social support.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Elmont Memorial: An extensive staff observation process provides supervision and supports individual professional development. Non-tenured teachers are observed by administrators and department chairs six to seven times during the school year. Included are unannounced observations on three successive days. Post-observation conferences cover commendations, agreed upon recommendations, and a formal summary report. Recommendations may suggest support from other staff or encourage the teacher to share their knowledge or strategies with others.

Sleepy Hollow: High school teachers are increasingly working in pairs. Teachers have two hours of collaborative planning time in order to develop expert teams in content areas and address interdisciplinary affective goals. Staff are collaboratively designing community meeting lessons, activities, and celebrations on topics such as leadership and conflict resolution.

NEW TEACHER INDUCTION AND SUPPORT

Albion: The high school has a three-year induction program for new teachers. A seven-day pre-service summer institute provides information and skills training covering community and parent involvement, planning and preparation, classroom management, character education, lesson design, student engagement, rigor and relevance, and technology use. New teachers are assigned a buddy-teacher and provided quarterly release time during their first year. In addition, a district teacher mentor works with new teachers and their buddy-teachers in planning and reflecting. During the second and third year of the program bi-monthly instructional strategy sessions are scheduled. Individual teacher growth plans are developed for teachers who need additional support.

Brentwood: New teachers at Brentwood attend a one-week orientation. During their first year, new teachers visit and observe 20 teachers' classrooms. First year teachers are observed and evaluated five to six times during the first six months. In addition, new teachers attend ten after school professional development sessions per semester conducted by retired teachers. During the second year, new teachers continue to observe ten additional teachers' classrooms.

Elmont Memorial: Department chairs meet weekly with new teachers. During their first three years, new teachers are observed unannounced six to seven times a year by the principal, assistant principal, and department chairs. A continuous feedback loop is established with the principal and new teacher addressing steps in a documented improvement action plan.

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE / ORGANIZATION

FEATURE	RESEARCH RATIONALE
Employment criteria	Principals in high impact schools aggressively recruit qualified staff.
Collaborative leadership	Leadership is seen as a collaborative endeavor in which staff, students, and the community are engaged. Teachers in high impact schools are more likely to have a say in decision-making and professional development. The principal and teachers collectively maintain a focus on academic learning, and allocate resources to this purpose.
Coherence of values and continuity of purpose	In high impact schools, teachers and administrators express consistent views about achievement-related schools goals: they have high expectations for all students and a collective commitment to student success. When members of a school community consistently express common beliefs and values, staff are able to work together toward a common goal. It is easier to accommodate a variety of student needs and interests, and instructional practices, including changing practices, when there are commonly held beliefs and values focused on student needs and learning. New practices or programs are instituted only if there is a strong sense that they will contribute to the common purpose.
Continuous improvement and allocation of resources	In high impact schools, staff members make greater efforts to learn from information and use it to improve curriculum and instruction and allocate resources. For example, higher-impact schools are more deliberate about the use of instructional time, arranging available time to help "catch up" students as needed.

EMPLOYMENT CRITERIA

Brentwood: Recruitment at Brentwood High School occurs all year. Department leaders screen 15–20 candidates through demonstration lessons and submit six names to an interviewing group that includes parents. The top three candidates return to interview with the principal. The principal intentionally allows time for the candidate to view the highly diverse student population in order to obtain the candidate's perspective on student capabilities and instructional strategies.

Mount Morris: Addressing the student-centered values of the school is critical to the hiring process at Mount Morris High School. Candidates are specifically asked about how they would handle student issues, strategies they use for developing rapport with students, and what their role in the discipline process would be.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Elmont Memorial: The principal at Elmont Memorial High School is constantly informing the superintendent of current events and receives advice and support when needed. The principal conducts weekly cabinet meetings with the assistant principals and department chairs to review assessments, progress reports, and provide professional development.

COHERENCE OF VALUES AND CONTINUITY OF PURPOSE

Mount Morris: Proposals for new initiatives can come from administrators or teachers. Mount Morris' professional development community continually addresses the core questions: "What kind of school do we want to become?" "What are the impediments to realizing this?" and "What are we willing to do about it?"

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE / ORGANIZATION (continued)

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

Albion: At Albion High School if programs are not effective after three years, they are eliminated. This strategy requires clear goals and use of data to evaluate a program's worth. Extracurricular program participation is tracked by subgroups to help in program recruitment.

Sleepy Hollow: Sleepy Hollow High School staff regularly collect and examine data on student outcomes, discipline issues, and program effects for proactive planning and program modification. The Breaking Ranks framework is currently being implemented.

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
FEATURE	**RESEARCH RATIONALE**
Parent and family involvement	Family involvement in academics and learning remains important in the adolescent years. Family involvement also relates to higher rates of college enrollment.
Community engagement	Community organizing, and tapping into the resources of the community, can positively affect the school learning environment and contribute to higher student educational outcomes.

PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Mount Morris: Teachers are expected to communicate with parents through methods that work best for parents (email, phone, home-to-school liaison) to inform them of academic performance, whether of challenges or successes. Extended family members are welcomed into school conferences and meetings. Parents of students involved in sports must attend a meeting to talk about the importance of academics. The district seeks monthly family meetings with parents of ELL students to understand parents' perspectives.

Sleepy Hollow: Sleepy Hollow's family center offers parent workshops, support groups, referral services, a lending library, and translation services. There are two teacher conference nights each year, during which the school provides Spanish language translators, and encourages students to bring any significant adult to the conference.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Albion: Each student is required to complete thirty hours of community service to graduate. Many classes have service learning components and all Advanced Placement (AP) courses have a service learning requirement.

Sleepy Hollow: Formal relationships exist with local colleges and a local hospital. A district-created foundation raises money to supplement educational programs at the high school which includes supporting a professional grant writer. Action-oriented student projects are conducted by different classes or extracurricular groups.

School Case Studies

▶ School Case Studies

The five benchmark schools were selected from a possible list of 41 New York state secondary schools on the basis of their potential to provide learning opportunities as models for a maximum number of other New York schools. We also attempted to represent a range of school grade configurations (e.g., 7–12, 9–12, 10–12), demographics, school sizes, and community types in the selections. The table below summarizes basic facts about the five schools.

	Albion High School, Albion, NY	Brentwood High School, Brentwood, Long Island, NY	Elmont Memorial J/S HS, Elmont, NY	Mount Morris J/S HS, Mount Morris, NY	Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, NY
Community population	6,700	54,000	34,000	3,000	11,500
Median household income	$39,700	$69,000	$87,000	$43,400	$68,700
High school student population	830	3,443	653 (7–8) 1272 (9–12)	299	800
Student demographics	74% White, 16% African American, 8% Hispanic	61% Hispanic/ Latino; 23% African American, 14% White; 2% Asian	77% African American; 13% Hispanic/ Latino; 8% Asian; 2% White	90% White; 6% Hispanic	48% Hispanic/ Latino; 45% White; 5% African American
Grade configuration	9–12	10–12	7–12	7–12	9–12
2002 cohort dropout rate	7%	18%	1%	5%	3.7%
2003 cohort dropout	3%	16%	2%	6%	12%
Graduates who pursue higher education	84%	75%	97%	85%	92%

Each short case includes an overview of the school and brief points about its recent school improvement efforts along with the overarching philosophies that animate and integrate practices. We have highlighted selected practices for each school, choosing those practices that were most important from the school staff members' perspectives. Because all the schools had implemented practices in each of the theme areas, we have also provided general statements to characterize how each school addresses each of the six themes in the research framework. The chart below shows which practices are featured for each school.

Featured Highlights

	Albion	Brentwood	Elmont Memorial	Mount Morris	Sleepy Hollow
Academic expectations			X	X	
Access to advanced courses			X		X
Access to college courses	X				
Transition to high school		X			
Progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students	X	X			X
Comprehensive guidance and advisory support			X		X
Academic support	X		X	X	
Content support for English learners		X		X	X
Postsecondary exploration	X	X			
College-going culture	X		X		
Extracurricular connections			X	X	X
Recognition for attainment	X				
Collaborative learning opportunities			X		X
New teacher induction and support	X	X	X		
Employment criteria		X		X	
Collaborative leadership			X		
Coherence of values and continuity of purpose				X	
Continuous improvement and allocation of resources	X				
Parent and family involvement				X	X
Community engagement	X				X

Albion (Charles D'Amico) High School (Albion, NY)

The Basics

Community population:	6,700
Median household income:	$39,700
High school student population:	830
Student demographics:	74% White, 16% African American, 8% Hispanic
Grade configuration:	9–12
2002 cohort dropout rate	7%
2003 cohort dropout rate	3%
Graduates who pursue higher education:	84%

MISSION: Achievement, Character and Success for life…ACS

VISION: A Community School of Excellence, A Model for All

VALUE STATEMENTS:

- Share the Work, Celebrate the Success
- Learn Today, Lead Tomorrow
- Value Everyone, Everyday, Everywhere
- ACS—Community Built on Character
- Committed to Continuous Improvement

Walk into any school in the Albion district and you will see the district mission, vision and values, and the school's goals for the year prominently displayed. In Albion High School the primary conversations are about students, how to help them succeed, and how to solve their problems. Data are continually collected on students' performance, analyzed in many ways, and staff come together to develop programs or approaches that better meet student needs. The school seeks to prepare all students for college. At the core is continual improvement of services and programs for all students.

As a student-centered school, Albion hires teachers who are willing to commit to the values of the district. "What does 'Value Everyone, Everyday, Everywhere' mean to you?" is an example of a question asked of candidates for teaching positions. The school and district invest in staff through professional development and access to experts so that they can build the skills needed to educate all students.

Specific highlights of Albion's practice:

- Rigorous Academics and Curriculum: access to college courses
- Personalization and Student Support: progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students, academic support
- Motivation and Engagement: postsecondary exploration, college-going culture, recognition for attainment
- Staff Expectations and Support: new teacher induction and support
- Leadership and Structure/Organization: continuous improvement and allocation of resources
- Parent, Family, and Community Involvement: community engagement

History. The current superintendent came to the district as an assistant superintendent in 1991; at that point the district leaders began to focus on instruction, and determine when and why students were not learning. The major impetus for the current vision, values, and direction of the high school and district arose from a series of 70 "Focus on the Future" community forums that the district held in 1995. Staff were trained as facilitators and asked community members what preparation they wanted for their children, academically, socially and in terms of character. The effort increased organizational cohesion and began a journey of change which has continued ever since.

The high school moved to block scheduling and instituted many new programs, including service learning and a community service graduation requirement. Department chairs were abolished because their role had become primarily clerical, but more recently they have been reinstated with new job descriptions. Department chairs now are responsible for curriculum and instruction and collecting data on student performance. As academic demands have become more rigorous at the high school level, the district is now considering how to better prepare students for high school because remediation begun at the 9th grade or later is sometimes too late.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM

Teachers have developed common assessments for all core academic subjects so that students taking similar courses are all measured against the same standards. Teachers frequently review results and student work to determine if instructional practices need alteration to improve student outcomes. Advanced Placement (AP) courses are open to all students and students are encouraged to stretch themselves to participate.

Access to college courses. Albion has arrangements with the local community college, Genesee Community College, whereby students can earn up to 30 credits towards a bachelor's degree. Students pay a reduced rate for the community college courses which are taught by the high school's teachers. Many students graduate with 24 or more college credits, and some graduate from high school with an associates degree.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Guidance counselors make a concerted effort to make all students feel connected to the school, and they make home visits (accompanied by teachers and administrators) if helpful for keeping a student in school. A full-time Department of Social Services worker is the link to community agencies for students who need additional services.

Progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students. Based on their academic performance, attendance, and level of engagement, each year 30 to 40 eighth graders are identified to participate in the ninth grade Take Flight program. The program's goal is to increase students' academic engagement and ease the transition to ninth grade. Through a focus on literacy, instructional approaches based on learning style, and reduced class size, the program prepares students for success in 10th grade academic classes. A team composed of a facilitator, social worker, guidance counselors, and teachers (dedicated to this program) work with the students. The school day is modified in structure and time to meet the instructional needs of the students.

Recently the school created a ninth grade literacy program to improve reading comprehension and inferential skills. Forty students were chosen based on their inconsistent performance on the NYS English language arts assessments, attendance problems, and poor work habits. Schedules are modified to allow maximum contact with the literacy teacher during a daily 85 minute literacy period.

Academic support. The academic day is structured as a 4 x 4 block schedule. A fifth block runs from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m., during which credit recovery courses are offered. Students who have previously failed a course take one or more fifth block classes to make up lost credits. The school is seeking to move from reactive to proactive Academic Intervention Services (AIS), and four teachers have been hired to provide AIS. They meet with juniors and seniors who need to pass a state assessment to graduate, access student data and data from counselors and teachers, and then design a program of study. Students are pulled from non-core courses or meet with AIS teachers after school for approximately 25-minute sessions for a semester.

Prior to the beginning of the school year the guidance department creates a spreadsheet that shows each senior's progress towards graduation along with estimates of the likelihood of graduation, described as definite, probable, maybe, doubtful, or impossible. This information enables the guidance department to prioritize resources; each month the administration and departments meet to assess progress and prescribe interventions for students in the "doubtful" and "maybe" categories, including AIS services, placement in a 5th block class, parent-teacher-student meetings, learning lab placement, or a schedule change.

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Teachers and administrators read and reflected on Ruby Payne's *Framework for Understanding Poverty* which reinforces the importance of helping students from poverty backgrounds establish relationships with significant adult role models. Staff have tried a number of strategies to strengthen relationships between teachers and students, including expanding participation in extracurricular activities.

Postsecondary exploration. The school's School to Career Coordinator manages the Albion internship program. Students may participate in semester-long career internships within the Albion area and summer opportunities in a wider geographical area. Through partnerships with the county and local community college, students may participate in a Human Services Academy for careers in general and special education, speech pathology, nutrition, and gerontology. For the past ten years the high school has offered a one-year program for twelve at-risk students who take their classes at the Orleans County Nursing Home where their learning is integrated into the life of the nursing home. The Community as School (CAS) program provides an avenue for students to explore human service careers.

In addition to traditional BOCES programs, an agreement with the Iroquois Job Corps allows high school students to pursue vocational interests and receive Job Corps benefits while continuing their high school studies. Students are bused to the Job Corps site for the second half of the school day where they can choose from one of seven vocational programs. They receive many of the benefits accorded full-time Job Corps students, including health care, career counseling, a clothing allotment, living allowances, and a completion bonus.

College-going culture. Completion of courses for college credit while in high school helps students to make the transition to college. The guidance department uses "career cruising" software with all juniors who are also encouraged to visit colleges. As a way to increase the likelihood that they will continue to higher education, all high school students are required to complete an application to Genesee Community College if they are not submitting an application to another college. Fifty-six percent of graduates attend four year colleges, another twenty-eight percent go on to two-year institutions.

Recognition for attainment. Albion staff believe in celebration of student achievements. Each month two students are recognized by the School Board for character and leadership, and each month two students are introduced to the Rotary club. This past year the school initiated a senior breakfast and a ceremony to recognize students for character and participation in music, art, and sports.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

Staff are expected to continually improve their practices in service of their students. Department chairs, for example, ensure that two or three teachers are qualified to teach every course so that teachers can be assigned to courses in ways that best meet the needs of students each semester. In turn, teachers receive continual access to professional development to make this kind of flexibility possible. The Albion School District has implemented Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* model for teacher evaluation to provide constructive feedback based on objective evidence. The model supports a cycle of continuous improvement, in turn creating master teachers and teacher leaders. In addition to embedded staff development, all staff are required to commit three days in the summer to in-service programs conducted by the district.

New teacher induction and support. In response to the challenge of increased teacher requirements, new positions created to reduce class size, and a shortage of applicants, in 1998 the district assigned a veteran teacher as a district teacher mentor, and initiated "Professionals Helping Professionals," a three-year induction program. New teachers now attend a seven day pre-service summer institute that provides information and skills training covering community and parent involvement, planning and preparation, classroom management, character education, lesson design and student engagement, the principles of rigor and relevance, and technology use. As a result new teachers begin with a solid understanding of district initiatives, expectations, and standards.

During their first year, new teachers are assigned a buddy-teacher and provided with quarterly release time for planning, classroom visits, and reflections; monthly mini-workshops on topics pertinent to novice professionals; team teaching opportunities; and social support. The district teacher mentor works with new teachers in their classes, plans and reflects with them, and with their buddy-teachers. In the second and third years of the program, time is scheduled for bi-monthly instructional strategy sessions to expand teaching skills. Individual teacher growth plans are prepared for teachers who need additional support. Student achievement is higher in the classrooms of teachers in the program and its graduates than in those of more experienced teachers. Teacher turnover has dwindled to below 4%, and the new teachers have become a significant element in increased academic success.

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

Departmental chairs are instructional rather than administrative leaders, and develop annual goals that move the school towards its overall goals. Teacher leaders support structures such as the new teacher induction program. Locally developed data on academic outcomes and participation rates are regularly used to identify programmatic needs, adjust teaching practices, and assess existing programs. Manifesting school values through behaviors is key to Albion's success. Program decisions are made on whether they are best for students, not whether they are easiest for the school's adults.

Continuous improvement and allocation of resources. The superintendent of schools takes the position that she is the steward of the taxpayer's money. She is committed to high levels of learning and high graduation rates; if programs do not show their worth, they are eliminated. New programs are usually given three years to demonstrate results. This strategy, in turn, requires clear goals and the use of data to assess programmatic effectiveness. For example, the school can say that the Community as Schools program is working because 75% of students referred to the program now graduate in contrast to an earlier rate of 40%. Similarly because Albion depends on sports and its other extra-curricular clubs to provide social support for all its students, it tracks participation by student sub-group (race, ethnicity, etc.) and recruits individuals and sub-groups who are missing out on extracurricular participation.

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff routinely make home visits, students participate in service learning projects, and the district has developed a Parent Academy with workshops covering topics such as college funding and financial aid.

Community engagement. Albion High School and the district as a whole have reached out to the community in many ways to support students. The school has entered into multiple formal relationships with organizations, and expects students to engage with the community as an integral part of their learning. Each high school student must complete thirty hours of community service to graduate. Examples of service projects include the creation of a Vietnam Veterans memorial and a monument with names of the first African Americans to settle in the community. Many courses have service learning components and all AP courses have a service learning component so that student time after the AP exams is well spent. A statistics and biology AP service learning day in 2007, for example, consisted of a free diabetes screening day during which 78 community members were tested. Students used data from those tests and participant surveys to complete a number of statistical analyses.

Brentwood High School (Brentwood, Long Island, NY)

The Basics

Community population:	54,000
Median household income:	$69,000
High School student population:	3,443
Student demographics:	61% Hispanic/Latino; 23% African American, 14% White; 2% Asian
Grade configuration:	10–12
2002 cohort dropout rate:	18%
2003 cohort dropout rate:	16%
Graduates who pursue higher education:	75%

MISSION: The mission of the Brentwood Public Schools is to provide an educational environment characterized by high expectations and staffed by individuals who are compassionate, supportive, creative, and effective. We will actively involve our students, parents, staff, and community in striving for educational excellence. Recognizing the uniqueness of all students, we will assist each to achieve his/her potential. Our actions will reflect our commitment to the belief that it is essential that all students achieve a positive self-image and acquire the basic and higher order thinking skills that they will need in order to adapt to a multicultural, continually changing world.

Brentwood High School, located in the Town of Islip in Suffolk County on Long Island, is one of the New York's largest schools. The high school comprises two wings, Sonderling and Ross Center, which share the approximately 3,500 students in grades 10–12. It also comprises two alternative programs, the PM school to which students may be assigned for disciplinary reasons, and the Delayed After School Program for tenth grade credit recovery. The principal oversees both schools, aided by three assistant principals in Sonderling and two assistant principals in the Ross Center. About 40% of the students become the first high school graduates in their families. Ninth graders attend school in another building led by a different principal and administrative staff. The school day has nine periods, two of which are available to students to seek extra help. Evening school and summer school enable students to earn additional credits.

The principal has held his position since 1995, and has been in the school since 1974. He relies heavily on a teaching staff of over 250 to share responsibility for maintaining the school's culture of achievement and high expectations. Reflecting the high number of Hispanic and Latino students, about 30% of faculty members are Latino and 5% African American. Despite its size and potential for student anonymity, Brentwood's school culture nurtures strong relationships, among students and between students and teachers, to help students realize high academic goals. Expectations for excellence apply universally to students and faculty. Both students and faculty receive considerable support and are expected to meet very high standards.

Specific highlights of Brentwood's practice:

• Rigorous Academics and Curriculum
• Personalization and Student Support: progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students, transition to high school, content support for English language learners
• Motivation and Engagement: postsecondary exploration
• Staff Expectations and Support: new teacher induction and support
• Leadership and Structure/Organization: employment criteria
• Parent, Family, and Community Involvement

History. Until the 1950's Brentwood bused all students who had completed elementary school to nearby Bay Shore High School. With a tremendous growth in population during the 1950's, Brentwood decided to build its own high school. The Ross High School, as it was originally called, opened in 1955. A few years later a second building was added. Ross High School became the Ross Center. The other building was named the Sonderling Center. To address the concerns of the community about the increased size of the high school, a separate freshman center was formed to give personalized attention to the incoming students. The new high school principal, formally a science teacher at the school, developed strategies to make the large buildings more personal as well as connect more concretely with the Freshman Center to make the academic and social transition to the high school seamless.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM

Brentwood High School staff communicate high academic expectations for their students. All students have access to the same courses provided that prerequisites are met. Eighteen Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered. The school maintains partnerships with several community colleges and universities. Students can obtain up to 12 college credits.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Teachers are generous and flexible with their time during extra periods and after school. One of Brentwood's challenges is size, making it more challenging to have personal relations and demonstrate a caring environment. To meet the range of students' needs, Brentwood has developed a cadre of social and mental health supports, as well as academic supports to help students transition and stay in high school.

Attendance officers and teachers contact students who are absent by making telephone calls and knocking on doors. School buses are often sent home to bring students to school. Ninety-two percent of students attend regularly. The district implements an attendance program that begins in sixth grade for students with low attendance rates. Students get intensive support to stay in school and develop the belief that they can succeed.

Three features described in more detail are early identification of at-risk students, small learning communities for 10th graders, and supports for English language learners.

Progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students. The Delayed After School Program is for tenth graders who have exhibited academic problems. The program operates Monday through Thursday between 3:00–6:00 pm with twenty to thirty students in attendance. Staff identify students for the program after the first semester. The decision for a student to attend is voluntary and made in consultation with staff and the student's parents. Once in the program, class attendance is mandatory. The program provides an intense academic setting with one subject addressed per day and a low ratio of students to teachers. Program staffing includes teachers, guidance counselor, attendance officer, and security officer. Regular classroom teachers choose to teach in the program. Students who agree to attend automatically pass to the next grade; approximately 85% also earn four to six credits in the program.

Transition to high school. All tenth graders entering the high school (1100-1300 students) participate in the Small Learning Communities program. Students are placed into small groups of 100-110, including English language learners and students with special needs. Grouping is based on students' English period. The small groups meet together in assemblies. Each assembly is devoted to some aspect of school learning or culture, such as discussing a common reading assignment, learning to read student transcripts, or understanding graduation requirements such as number of credits. The small groups also attend the school's extracurricular fair where the tenth graders learn about the different school activities. Students are challenged to partner with another student and sign up to try three activities. The intent of the small learning communities is to bring students together in small manageable settings; transition students to the high school; and help students set goals, see possibilities for their future, and feel empowered.

Content support for English language learners. Brentwood High School has two programs for English language learners. One is the Immersion Program for students with interrupted formal education which served about 60 students in the past year. Students take an ESL class for two school periods and a mathematics course. They are evaluated at the end of the school year to determine if they are ready to exit the program and enter the Bilingual Program. The Bilingual Program serves over 500 students. Different levels of ESL are offered within each department (which is possible because the school is so large). For example, within a department there may be three classes of beginners that are divided into low, medium, and high. As students' language skills improve they are able to move to other levels during the same time period. After students leave the Bilingual Program, they may still go to their bilingual teachers to receive extra help. Most bilingual teachers establish good relationships with students which makes it easier for students to seek help.

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Brentwood High School provides many opportunities to keep students engaged in learning within school and successful after graduation. The school district sponsors college and career fairs for parents and students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The fairs are designed to get younger students interested in post-graduation options and introduce financial information to parents. Brentwood High School has over 100 clubs with most led by high school teachers. Students are recognized through several award ceremonies, including scholarship award ceremonies, leadership awards, and departmental Gold Medal awards that appear on a student's transcript.

Postsecondary exploration. In the tenth grade students take an interest inventory and then are divided into groups with common interests. Guidance counselors arrange meetings with outside professionals so students with shared interests can learn about career opportunities. The high school guidance department ensures opportunities by arranging trips to colleges and visitations from colleges. In addition, students have access to summer programs at different colleges, and can gain work experience with workforce programs where students can earn up to two credits.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

Staff expectations are embedded in the culture expressed as: "we want the kids to succeed" and "we will find a way into each kid." Staff aim to find as many opportunities as possible to connect with students. The administration knows that for students to succeed, teachers must be supported, rewarded, and listened to. Department leaders conduct many informal and formal classroom observations. At departmental meetings the chair intentionally addresses instructional themes based on observations and results of assessments. Brentwood High School has had a stable teaching staff. One important way the school supports its teachers is through its program for new teachers.

New teacher induction and support. Teachers starting at Brentwood attend a one-week orientation. During the first year, new teachers visit 20 teachers and observe their classrooms. In the second year, new teachers make ten observation visits to other teachers. Department leaders are responsible for crafting good experiences for new teachers. First year teachers are

observed five to six times within the first six months; evaluations are written in narrative form. In addition, new teachers meet ten times per semester after the school day to listen to speakers, talk about issues such as teaching approaches, and get practical information, including classroom management. The after-school sessions are led by retired teachers recruited by the principal.

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

Given the population size of Brentwood, the principal depends on a core administration to focus on academic learning and make sure every student is cared for and engaged. The principal surrounds himself with highly qualified assistant principals, deans, and department chairs. He meets weekly with department leaders and relies on them to select and monitor instruction. Expectations of teachers and students are made clear. The principal uses the interview process to convey expectations and make sure potential candidates share the same high expectations for all students in the building.

Employment criteria. Recruitment for new staff happens all year long. The school depends on bilingual staff so language proficiency is a big factor in selection. Department leaders do the first sorting of candidates by asking 15–20 candidates to give demonstration lessons, and then submit six names to the principal. These candidates return for interviews with a group that includes parents. Candidates are ranked numerically on several characteristics, e.g., content knowledge, experience with students, craft of teaching, attendance at previous job, and so forth. Each member of the interview group selects their top three candidates. The three candidates are invited for an interview with the principal. During the interview, the principal intentionally leaves the room for a few minutes but keeps the door open to the hallway so the candidate can observe the school's diverse and numerous students as they pass between classes. When the principal returns, he asks the interviewee several targeted questions, for example: What do you think these students are capable of doing? If you gave a test and 75% failed, what went wrong and what would you do? The answers help the principal make a final decision.

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Brentwood High School staff view the school as an important contributor to the community and source of local pride. The school has an active PTSA; a successful community event recently raised over $5,000 in scholarship money for Brentwood seniors.

Elmont Memorial High School (Elmont, NY)

The Basics

Community population:	34,000
Median household income:	$87,000
Jr. High School (7-8) population	653
High school (9-12) population:	1,272
Student demographics:	77% African American; 13% Hispanic; 8% Asian; 2%White
Grade configuration:	7–12
2002 cohort dropout rate:	1%
2003 cohort dropout rate:	2%
Graduates who pursue higher education:	97%

MISSION:

The purpose of Elmont Memorial High School is to effect an environment where learning takes place. This learning process results from a covenant between the students and those involved in their education: teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, and the community. We are dedicated to academic achievement, the development of academic and personal values, and the cultivation of individual strengths and talents in a supportive environment for our diverse, multinational student body.

Elmont Memorial High School located just outside New York City in a blue collar working class community serves a large and diverse student population. While fighting stereotypical labels, the school staff embrace the cultural differences and numerous languages which they believe benefit their educational community. When asked about the key factors that contribute to Elmont Memorial's high graduation rates, the principal reports high expectations, focus on research based instruction, commitment from teachers, and the introspective observation process. The principal oversees the extensive teacher observation process, promotes professional development on differentiated instruction, and continues to celebrate students' different cultures. The school is considered the "center of the community"—a place where students choose to be on weekdays, nights, and Saturday mornings for academic attainment and extracurricular enrichment.

Elmont's Goals:

• To improve academic achievement
• To promote the positive image of our school
• To cultivate an environment of mutual respect and civility

The school believes there are six steps for ensuring student success (ACTION): Analysis, Collaboration, Teaching techniques, Instructional support, Opportunities for success, and Needs of students.

Specific highlights of Elmont Memorial's practice:

• Rigorous Academics and Curriculum: academic expectations, access to advanced courses

• Personalization and Student Support: comprehensive guidance and advisory support, academic support

• Motivation and Engagement: college-going culture, extracurricular connections

• Staff Expectations and Support: collaborative learning opportunities, new teacher induction and support

• Leadership and Structure/Organization: collaborative leadership

• Parent, Family, and Community Involvement

History. The school is one of five junior/senior high schools that make up the Sewanhaka Central High School District on Long Island. Before the early 1990s, Elmont Memorial High School was considered a very challenging school. Major change started in the early 1990s when Dr. Diane Scricca became principal. The community and school were experiencing "white flight" while the pressures for academic success were increasing. Instead of trying to overcome cultural differences, she celebrated the school's diversity in all aspects of school operations. She introduced an observation process as professional development for teachers to improve instructional practices, placing emphasis on reaching different types of learners and sharing teaching strategies to achieve the goal. Over the course of thirteen years, the principal turned the school into a student-centered building with a focus on learning.

Elmont Memorial High School has continued to flourish. By 2004 Elmont had achieved a 100% graduation rate. In 2005, Elmont Memorial was recognized as having the largest number of African-American high school students scoring a 3 or higher on Advanced Placement examinations in the world. Also, in 2005 they were awarded The Education Trust's Dispelling The Myth Award for closing the achievement gap. In 2006, Elmont Memorial was one of three schools in the nation that was awarded The Schott Foundation Award for Excellence in Education of African-American Male Students.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM

Administrators and faculty members believe strongly that setting high expectations and not accepting failure are key to serving minority students. Students are given opportunities to take college level courses at Adelphi University in accounting, marketing, foreign language, and English. In addition, students take advantage of summer programs offered at Hofstra, Columbia University, and other colleges.

Academic expectations. High expectations are reported to be the primary factor responsible for high graduation rates at Elmont Memorial High School. The message that is clearly and continually articulated is that students are expected to graduate and go on to college. There are daily expectations that set the stage for the larger graduation expectation. Upon entering each class, an evaluative "Aim" question and "Do Now " activity are clearly displayed on the board as students enter the classroom. Students are expected to immediately engage in the "Do Now" activity before the lesson begins. The "Aim" of the lesson helps students think about the lesson's goal at a higher level.

Access to advanced courses. All high school students are encouraged to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses. To enroll in an AP course, students must meet two of the following criteria: classroom achievement of at least 85% in the subject area, teacher recommendation, and/or demonstration of a superior degree of motivation for the curriculum area. Extensive support is given to all students taking AP classes. The AP courses offered are English Composition, English Literature, U.S. History, World History, U.S. Government/Politics, Calculus, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Studio Art, Italian, Spanish, Music, Psychology, and Statistics. Honors or advanced classes are offered in English, social studies, mathematics, science, and foreign language. In addition, Elmont Memorial operates a Talented and Gifted Program, which is independent of other academic offerings and provides unique opportunities for the most gifted learners.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Administrators believe students' needs drive academic and social offerings. For instance, Read 180 for remedial reading is currently used in the Junior High and the principal is reviewing the data to possibly bring the program in for ninth graders struggling with reading skills. Elmont Memorial students are surrounded with staff who target specific student needs. The Elmont administration and staff "circle the wagons" and students know that they will be "relentlessly chased" by caring personnel if they are not performing. Each assistant principal is responsible for the discipline at two grade levels. The assistant principals are each assisted by a dean of students who oversees student attendance. The assistant principals for grades 9 through 12 move up each year with their students so that positive relationships can be developed and maintained for the four years of high school. Individual academic intervention plans are constantly being developed and implemented by counselors, clinicians, administrators, and teachers. Parents are also included in the development of individualized intervention plans. Most students who speak English as a second language attend a different high school within the district.

Comprehensive guidance and advisory support. Elmont Memorial has ten guidance counselors plus a guidance department chairperson. Each year students and parents attend an annual review conference with their guidance counselor. Since the majority of students are first-generation college-bound students, the guidance department is key to informing students and parents about preparing for college. The freshman year conference focuses on course selection and tenth grade is for career exploration. During junior year counselors advise on college preparation with students and parents. This includes instructing parents on how to visit a college. Senior year is for college selection and the application process. Mini-college days are offered along with colleges coming to the school for college recruitment. An annual District College Fair is held with over one hundred colleges and universities attending. Seniors report frequenting the guidance office to seek advice and fill out college applications.

Academic support. If a ninth grader is identified as an at-risk student, he or she is paired with a volunteer teacher who oversees their academic progress. Summer curriculum workshops are offered to upgrade and strengthen education content for struggling students. During the school year extra help sessions (Operation Success) are offered before and after school and on Saturday mornings. Supportive services are in place to ensure academic success for those taking Regents, Honors, and Advanced Placement classes. There are AP seminars offered on Saturdays, Regents review sessions, study groups, teacher-created review materials, and practice exams. Students in the seventh and eighth grades can attend after school Interdisciplinary Team Centers for extra help from their teachers. Students reported teachers explicitly treating them like they were their own kids and wanting them to strive for the best. "The teachers here give us that extra push that we need, they will find a way to pick us up whether it be extra help or coming in early."

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

"Keep your eye on the prize" is frequently heard by students as encouragement from their teachers. The staff believe they are teaching students content and also "how" to get through their classes, take exams, and juggle their time. Students as well as teachers are instructed in how to analyze their own assessment results. The school recognizes student achievement by featuring a student of the month in each academic department for academic achievement and effort. Pictures are taken of these students and displayed throughout the school. As a means of celebrating the school's diversity, each year Elmont Memorial students take part in an Inter-cultural Night and a week of honoring different languages.

College-going culture. One of the tools that guidance counselors use with parents and students is a folder known as the Elmont Memorial High School Profile. The Profile lists district and school standards and requirements needed to graduate; the Profile includes the previous year's graduating class statistics. Information includes the percent of students earning Advanced Regents Diplomas (41% for 2007); Regents Diplomas (95%); SAT I and II scores; and the percent of graduates

attending four-year colleges (67%), two-year colleges (30%), and entering technical programs, employment, or military (3%). The back of the Profile boasts over 200 names of colleges and universities offering admission to the last two graduating classes. A yearly Alumni Day has graduates speaking to current seniors about their post-high school experiences. Career Day hosts different professionals talking to juniors and seniors about possible occupations.

Extracurricular connections. All athletic coaches and club advisors are members of the faculty and staff of Elmont Memorial. This policy provides students and staff with the opportunity to build positive relationships outside of the classroom. Students come to rely on staff for support with various types of issues that young people face. Teachers believe they are teaching on the strength of relationships. Students are encouraged to take part in an extracurricular activity at Elmont Memorial. The administration and faculty believe that when students participate in extracurricular activities a deeper connection is made with the school. As one student reported, "Participation teaches you more responsibility because you have to maintain your grades in order to participate so it's a balance and you get more opportunities to excel." The school offers more than one hundred sports or activities including Model United Nations, Future Business Leaders of America, Students Active in Legislation, Science Research Program, Key Club, S.A.D.D., and several Honor Societies. The list of groups articulates the purpose of each activity and how it relates to the skills that students need for success in today's world. Descriptions of skills include developing knowledge and skills, fostering interest and understanding of different disciplines, preparing for competitions, promoting school and community service, and learning to research.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

Elmont Memorial teachers operate under the "sweep policy;" that is, they are responsible for their own hallways and getting their students into class on time. The teachers are expected to be reflective about instructional methods and encouraged to take risks in order to reach all students. Data analysis at the item level is conducted on all exams in order to inform instruction. Professional development opportunities have focused on brain research and differentiated instruction. The principal has created the "DI Corner" in his weekly newsletter to provide strategies for teachers so that can differentiate their instructional delivery. Also, if the principal becomes aware of a successful differentiated instruction technique that was used by a member of the faculty, it is publicized in the "DI Corner."

Collaborative learning opportunities. A key factor in Elmont Memorial's high graduation rates is the extensive staff observation process. These observations are unannounced visits. A formal report contains the details of all classroom activities observed, post-observation conference notes, commendations, recommendations, and a summary. The process provides supervision and supports individual professional development. For example, teachers are given feedback on the strategies they use for motivating and engaging students, use of classroom time, classroom management, how lessons are anchored by the daily evaluative question referred to as "Aim," use of exam-based activities, and assessment of all students' understanding of the lesson, evidence of prior learning, and the spiraling of material. Recommendations are agreed upon by the observer and the observed teacher to ensure that the teacher is at the center of the process and has an opportunity for reflection. Recommendations may suggest support from other staff members or encourage a teacher to share his or her knowledge or successful strategies with others.

New teacher induction and support. New teachers are required to meet weekly with department chairs. Teachers with initial certification are assigned a New York State mandated mentor and an informal within-department buddy. New teachers are observed unannounced six to seven times a year by the principal, assistant principal, and department chairperson during their first three years. Specific recommendations and a plan of action for improvement are documented, followed by a continuous feedback loop that includes the new teacher and principal as action steps are taken.

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

Elmont Memorial High School has a dedicated core faculty, and like-minded staff and administrators who are highly visible to their students. The sustaining philosophy is about meeting student needs through collaboration.

Collaborative leadership. Elmont Memorial operates with an administrative support system. The principal is in constant contact with the superintendent. The principal conducts weekly cabinet meetings with the assistant principals and department chairpersons to review assessments, progress reports, and provide professional development. The administration is proactive. A current goal is to reduce suspension rates which will be tackled by administration, dean of students, and department chairs.

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The school encourages parent involvement. The PTSA, parent athletic club, and the music/parent club are all growing in numbers. There is open communication between Elmont Memorial High School and community law enforcement, local stores, and restaurants, all of which may have interactions with Elmont students.

Mount Morris High School (Mount Morris, NY)

The Basics

Community population:	3,000
Median household income:	$43,400
High school student population:	299
Student demographics:	90% White; 6% Hispanic
Grade configuration:	7–12
2002 cohort dropout rate:	5%
2003 cohort dropout rate:	6%
Graduates who pursue higher education:	85%

MISSION:

At Mount Morris we prepare all our students for participating in a diverse democratic society, setting realistic goals and achieving their individual potential. Responsibility for achieving this purpose involves the family, the student, the community and the school in a team effort with the mutual support of each other.

This tiny high school offers a wide range of electives and Advanced Placement (AP) courses in European History, U.S. History, English Literature & Composition, Biology, and Calculus. The school provides daily academic support for students who struggle with the content of a lesson or homework. All teachers have been trained in how to support English learners. Sports, music and drama programs are considered integral to the lives of students; most students participate in at least one sport.

Administrators report a strong belief that all students can learn and succeed regardless of background. The leadership and staff continually accentuate the positive, address problem behaviors directly, and avoid labeling students. Leaders in the school have shown the capacity to learn from many outside sources to improve their offerings, whether by visiting out-of-state high schools to learn about new programs, or through relationships with three New York universities.

Ninety percent of the town's population is white; six percent Hispanic, the majority from a single location in Puerto Rico. The community also includes families who relocate to be close to fathers in a nearby state prison. The school's relatively small size, with fifty or fewer students in a cohort, means that it can be difficult to interpret meaningfully percentages such as graduation and dropout rates.

Specific highlights of Mount Morris' practice:

• Rigorous Academics and Curriculum: academic expectations

• Personalization and Student Support: academic support, content support for English learners

- Motivation and Engagement: extracurricular connections
- Staff Expectations and Support
- Leadership and Structure/Organization: employment criteria, coherence of values and continuity of purpose
- Parent, Family, and Community Involvement: parent and family involvement

History. The Mount Morris Community School District is the largest institution in a town with a lot of pride in its investments in schools. Mount Morris Junior-Senior High School is part of a K–12 building. The principal of the high school, elementary school principal, and K–12 principal for student affairs have been with the district for an average of sixteen years. A new school superintendent supports the values of prior district leadership. Staff turnover is relatively low. The K–12 principal for student affairs oversees guidance, health and support services for all students, and serves as the district's primary liaison with town organizations.

The school system has evolved over time under consistent leadership, but is also able to make rapid and significant changes at times to meet student needs, taking advantage of external resources, shared knowledge of educational research, and a common set of values. For example, six years ago the high school faced an incoming class with a reputation for unruliness. Within a few weeks of visiting Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois, Mount Morris High School had implemented a system for rewarding positive academic behavior, providing for immediate follow-up of students who had not completed their academic work, and attending to misbehavior—an approach that required changes in teacher behavior and that transformed the culture of the school.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM

Mount Morris offers five AP courses, which are open to all students with teacher approval. Students may take some courses for community college credit. The school has found that using a block schedule for core academic courses is the most effective structure for addressing demanding academic content. A 90% attendance rate is required to pass courses.

Academic expectations. Establishing a high performance culture has been facilitated by a daily advisement period. Block scheduling permits a 7th period, late in the day, when teachers can bring in students who did not complete homework or did not understand class instruction for remediation advisement. Students are also placed in alternative advisement if they have disrupted the educational process. Those who fall into neither of these categories qualify for privilege advisement, when they use time as they wish with certain restrictions. A web-based program enables teachers to schedule students for advisement from their classrooms or homes.

Mount Morris High School Daily Schedule

Period	Content
1 & 2	Block for core subject
3	42 minute academic period
4 & 5	Block for core subject
6	42 minute period
7	25 minute academic advisement period
8	Lunch (all high school students eat at same time)
9 & 10	Block for core subject

The advisement assignment system is applied with uniform rules. Even the highest-performing students are assigned remediation advisement if they have not completed homework. Clear and consistent application of the program has changed the school's culture. Over time all students have come to appreciate the fairness of the system.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

K–12 students learn together in the same building. High school students regularly provide individual assistance to elementary students, and routinely stop administrators in the hallway to ask for advice or support. The position of principal for K–12 student affairs institutionalizes continuous support in a school small enough to ensure that all are well known and that nobody "slips through the cracks."

Academic support. Mount Morris administrators and staff believe that high academic expectations can only be achieved with high levels of support so they have introduced multiple formal structures as well as developing many opportunities for informal connections among staff and students. At the junior high level they have introduced looping (i.e. teachers follow the same group of students for two years) to enhance continuity of academic instruction and limit the loss of learning time at the beginning of the year. At the high school they have introduced "semester-ing" and block scheduling for core academic courses, permitting concentration on two, rather than four, core academic subjects at a time. The school plays particular attention to seniors. If seniors appear to be slipping academically or are in danger of losing credit due to the 90% attendance policy, the school contacts and engages the student's parents.

   If teachers have a significant concern about a student, whether about academics, behavior, or out-of-school matters, they refer the student to the Building Educator Support Team (BEST). The BEST comprises the student's teachers, the principal, counselor, the school nurse, and the parents. The team develops an action plan, oversees implementation, and later reconvenes to review outcomes and consider further action.

   Through a system-wide action research grant from Syracuse University, teachers observed behavioral patterns of emotionally charged students, watching for behavior "triggers," and then discussed their observations. In addition to improving teachers' skills in supporting learners who had tended to act out, the project resulted in more "push-in" programs at the high school and increased collaboration among teachers to support students who might otherwise have been branded as behavioral problems.

Content and instructional support for English learners. The district employs a staff member to lead the K–12 program for English language learners (ELL). Using assessments, a peer mentoring program and welcoming philosophy, entering ELL students (and their families) are rapidly acclimatized to the school. The high school offers tutoring to boost English skills, and tailors support based on individual student skills and interests. This past year all high school teachers received professional development on differentiated instructional strategies for English language learners such as adjusting the vocabulary in assessments to ensure that students understand the questions.

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Administrators and teachers continually ask the question, "What's best for students?" They treat students with respect, are available to work with students as needed, and in turn students report that they enjoy school and are engaged. The school has built programs to motivate and engage students. For example, the Junior High Strongest Steel Band emerged from an artist-in-residence program and now students learn to play in the band or serve in roles of finance, promotion, and so forth, as the band has continued over the years.

Extracurricular connections. Mount Morris understands the importance of providing opportunities for students to develop personal relationships with school staff. One way the school builds relationships is through 28 sports teams, usually coached by teachers. The school's goal is to have every student participate in at least one sport. Administrators believe that sports and other extracurricular activities help keep many students in school. Mount Morris has popular music and drama programs, offers occasional dramatic shows of the caliber that students would only be able to see if they traveled to the nearby City of Rochester ("our students deserve to see that quality"), and provides opportunities for its rural students to travel for cultural and academic learning.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

At Mount Morris new staff members are assigned a mentor, and participate in monthly group meetings. Teachers are a close-knit group who are comfortable addressing issues with each other; for example, when they notice that a student is having difficulties, they will bring the matter up with others. As one observed: "They [teachers] will sincerely do anything and everything to make kids successful." Competition among staff members is low and decision-making shared.

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

Mount Morris has organized the school day to optimize student learning. Changes may be initiated by teachers or administrators, and decisions are reached through collaborative decision-making. Students are also involved through decision-making structures such as a student court and the student council (which recently led a successful initiative to change school policy on cell phone use).

Employment criteria. Mount Morris High School hires teachers who match the student-centered values of the school. Newly hired teachers reported that the questions asked in their pre-hiring interviews differed from those asked by other schools. The Mount Morris process includes many more questions about handling issues related to students, approaches for developing rapport with students, and the teacher's role in the discipline process.

Coherence of values and continuity of purpose. Continuity of purpose and leadership has been achieved through multiple strategies. The discipline of a professional learning community that addresses core questions ("What kind of school do we want to become?" "What are the impediments to realizing this?" and "What are we willing to do about it?") keeps the focus on central purposes. Administrators and the teachers' union have excellent relationships; proposals for new initiatives may come from either administrators or teachers. The teacher union president, rather than a school administrator, often announces new educational initiatives to the school community. No one can even remember a grievance going through a full cycle.

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Mount Morris High School is a significant contributor to the community and source of community pride. The principal for K–12 student affairs maintains close connections with community and business groups such as the Rotary. The school and its active PTA bring in performances that are open to the whole community.

Parent and family involvement. Mount Morris High School stresses parental involvement. There are three mandatory parent meetings a year for parents of students involved in sports to talk about the importance of academics. The school informs parents about their child's performance, including positive behaviors, through email or other methods that work for particular parents. Teachers have ready access to telephones at school, and are expected to communicate with parents.

The school has had to adjust its assumptions about parental involvement to meet the cultural practice of the Puerto Rican community and welcome extended family members into school conferences and meetings. The district seeks monthly family meetings with parents of ELL students to understand parents' perceptions of the school and their children's learning, and learn about any barriers they or their children are experiencing. A home school liaison employed through a local non-profit supports connections with parents from the Puerto Rican community.

Parents express appreciation for the personal relationships that staff members have created with all students. In response they provide teachers with mini-grants, sponsor teacher appreciation events, and even maintain a coffee cart for staff in the school hallways. Parents create a welcoming environment for families who have relocated to be close to fathers in a nearby state prison.

Sleepy Hollow High School (Sleepy Hollow, NY)

The Basics

Community population:	11,500
Median household income:	$68,700
High school student population:	800
Student demographics:	48% Hispanic/Latino; 45%White; 5% African American
Grade configuration:	9–12
2002 cohort dropout rate:	3.7%
2003 cohort dropout rate:	12%
Graduates who pursue higher education:	92%

VALUES

THE KEYS TO BEING SUCCESSFUL

For students:

Be Here…	Every Class, Every Day
Be Prepared…	To Do Your Best Work
Be Respectful…	Of Self and Others
Be Positive…	Think You Can, and You Will

For parents:

Be Involved…	Call and Visit Often

Sleepy Hollow continually adapts to meet the needs of its diverse student population as described by the principal:

> *People use the buzzword 'diversity' to mean minority and poor. When we talk about that, yes, we have lots of free and reduced lunch kids. Yes, we have a significant portion of minorities. We also have some extremely wealthy families. We have everything in between. To be diverse is really to be the combination of all these things and our challenge as a public school is how to serve all of them. How do you make one asset work for another? And I think that's probably the thing that we've been the most successful at.*

Sleepy Hollow's success has involved creating an inclusive culture in which relationships and high expectations are both valued. School objectives are:

• 90% or higher graduation rate
• 92% of all graduates accepted to two- or four-year colleges
• 95% daily attendance rate, and
• Personal Plans for Progress implemented for all students.

Creating academic and social supports that result in high graduation rates and enable virtually all graduates to pursue higher education requires programs that meet diverse needs. Excellence is achieved by identifying pockets of need, developing focused interventions, and then continually improving them. The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, for example, is used in only one program for selected students. Similarly, team teaching is used only in selected programs. The "glue" that holds the school together is the individual attention everyone gets, teachers included.

Specific highlights of Sleepy Hollow's practice:

• Rigorous Academics and Curriculum: access to advanced courses
• Personalization and Student Support: progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students, comprehensive guidance and advisory support, content support for English learners
• Motivation and Engagement: extracurricular connections
• Staff Expectations and Support: collaborative learning opportunities
• Leadership and Structure/Organization: continuous improvement and allocation of resources
• Parent, Family, and Community Involvement: parent and family involvement; community engagement

History. The shift to the current Sleepy Hollow philosophy began in 1994 with the hiring of a new school principal who was charged with meeting the needs of students from high income families and also recent immigrants, many of whom arrive in high school with little or no English. The philosophical shift has been from a traditional high school to a dynamic institution where staff seek to meet the needs of all who cross the threshold.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM

At Sleepy Hollow High School all students are expected to pursue education beyond high school. The school utilizes block scheduling, flexible scheduling, and many niche programs to strengthen instruction. Following a trend in private schools, it has recently introduced physics in the ninth grade, taught by math and science teachers in tandem. As a result, freshmen have scored higher on the physics Regents than upperclassmen.

Some students arrive at the high school with no English skills and not enough time to master the English language to the point where they can pass the English Regents exam before they age out of school. The solution was to enroll them in an in-school Spanish GED prep program for three hours a day, while they simultaneously take English as a second language (ESL) and other classes. This program is considered a privilege, and all but one of the participating students have now gone on to further education.

Access to advanced courses. Like many schools, Sleepy Hollow has a policy of open access to all courses; students receive support to make informed decision about course selection, beginning with teacher recommendations. There is a "student-friendly" process for those not recommended and who express interest in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The school has identified skills and learning behaviors that fit the profile of successful students. Counselors help students reflect on their readiness and willingness to undertake the challenge with the ultimate choice belonging to the student and family. Staff members have created a series of supports for students who choose AP and Honors courses, including a summer academy in English, science, mathematics and social studies, access to extra help throughout the year, and access to successful student role models. The philosophy is one of "no surprises" high expectations.

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Sleepy Hollow High School has developed practices such as Spirit Week that mold a supportive culture and create a sense of ownership on the part of new students. To ensure that a high percentage of students can attend selective colleges, Sleepy Hollow has developed numerous support programs. An example is the in-school Upward Bound program offered in

collaboration with Mercy College, a nearby private institution. The program, now in its sixth year, annually offers both academic and social support to fifty students from families who have no previous college experience.

Progress monitoring for intervening with at-risk students. Sleepy Hollow provides ninth and tenth graders who are at risk for failure with a two-year intense humanities program that focuses on global studies and English language arts while building literacy and students' self-images as successful learners. A teaching assistant follows students through mathematics and science classes, helps them with homework, and makes home calls as necessary. The program utilizes PBIS to address any emerging behavior issues. An additional daily mathematics period is provided several times a week for students who need extra support. Students selected for the program are two or more years below grade level, have poor attendance and grades that are significantly below mastery, and need a strong relationship with a significant adult. The program is much less expensive than having students repeat ninth grade or placing them in special education. Early findings suggest the program is successful.

Comprehensive guidance and advisory support. Guidance staff assume the role of student and family advocate, both socially and academically. Guidance staff identify and target specific programmatic needs, teen parents for example, and seek funding for specialized programs. The staff includes a social worker who makes referrals to service agencies in the community or to the school district health clinic.

The guidance department works with students to develop a pre-college "mindset." Staff target higher education opportunities that are achievable in terms of cost and location. In addition to an individualized computer-based college planning and advising system, guidance staff members take groups of students on college trips and work with them closely on college applications and financial aid.

Content support for English learners. In addition to the Spanish language GED program, Sleepy Hollow High School offers three levels of ESL classes, specialized content area classes in mathematics, science, social studies, music, and technology, and an ESL summer school. It also has an ESL after-school center which replicates the "kitchen table" experience, complete with snacks, as a place where students can seek academic help and complete their homework.

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Sleepy Hollow High School collaborates with a local hospital, a local community college, and a private college to provide introductions to careers in teaching and nursing. The aim of Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers is to encourage members of under-represented groups to enter the teaching profession, providing access to tuition scholarships. Tomorrow's Nurses offers a six-month hospital internship and has similar aims. The school also offers a pre-engineering program, and has affiliations with multiple colleges and universities. Through Upward Bound, students from families with no prior experience of college education are able to tour colleges and participate in an SAT preparation course.

The school annually offers many academic awards and scholarships; in 2008 awards totaled in excess of $250,000. Monetary awards and prizes recognize excellent achievement in content areas, athletics, community service, and leadership. Each year the "shoe-leather award" is won by the student for whom the assistant principal has put in the most mileage and who has shown significant academic improvement. Another favorite is the "Spirit of Sleepy Hollow" scholarship honoring a student who has taken full advantage of Sleepy Hollow High School and who exemplifies the school mission.

Extracurricular connections. Sleepy Hollow High School has an extensive physical education program that includes dance, mountain biking, weight training, violence prevention for women, and lifeguarding. The sports programs seek to be inclusive—winning is not the first goal. The following is a student-written tribute to the school's physical education program:

Since the seventh grade I have had the privilege of being taught by four amazing teachers. It may surprise many readers, but these four are physical education teachers, and have provided me with some of the greatest memories of my middle and high school years… I have enjoyed phys ed so much that I chose to turn down an hour and a half of extra sleep so that I could take it twice during my junior and senior year. Outside the gymnasium they provide we with both laughs and meaningful advice. They are the first ones I go to when I need to talk to someone.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

Teacher recruitment emphasizes the need to be student-centered and to teach to a wide range of interest and ability. The school seeks bright, passionate, caring people who are excited about their subject matter and have the ability to make a difference in the lives of young people. New teachers are assigned a mentor and attend twice-monthly new teacher meetings. Teachers believe that they are tasked with teaching well enough so that all students learn. Teachers put a great deal of time into their lessons. Introduction of Smart Boards into every classroom has increased the expectation that teachers will develop well-crafted, interactive, and illustrated lessons. The move to block scheduling several years ago provides 90-minute blocks for interactive, engaging, and collaborative learning opportunities with an emphasis on application and synthesis.

Collaborative learning opportunities. Sleepy Hollow High School teachers regularly share expertise informally, and will ask colleagues questions such as, "How do you suggest I teach this student?" Teachers increasingly work in pairs in the classroom, both for special education inclusion and in general education classes. The school is exploring ways to do this well, ensuring that teachers truly collaborate and not just work in parallel in a single classroom. The school goal of providing all teachers with two hours of weekly collaborative planning time was achieved in 2008. Teachers have used the time to further develop expert teams in content areas and to address interdisciplinary affective goals. Personalization is currently a focus; faculty are collaboratively designing lessons, activities and celebrations for use in grade level homerooms (called community meetings) on topics such as leadership, conflict resolution, service, and transitions. Teacher teams remain with the same students through their high school years.

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

Teachers and the principal maintain a focus on academic learning, and take opportunities to put priority on academics, such as trading the opportunity to have an in-school suspension manager for an instructional technical assistant. The staff has elected to trade faculty meetings for professional development time. The principal says that she seeks staff who have strong ideas and opinions, and who are passionate about their work. Sleepy Hollow High School promotes risk-taking—it is okay to try something and fail. PBIS, which was initially adopted as a school-wide program, is an example of a "famous flop" that has since found its place as a niche program.

Continuous improvement and allocation of resources. The Sleepy Hollow High School principal emphasizes the importance of proactive planning. The school is continually looking at the patterns associated with students who are not succeeding. The staff regularly collect and examine data on student outcomes, discipline issues, and program effects, and use data to modify existing practice or develop new programs. As part of continuous improvement, Sleepy Hollow is currently implementing the Breaking Ranks framework.

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Parent and family involvement. Sleepy Hollow's family center offers parent workshops and support groups, referral services, a lending library, and translation services. It provides newcomers with welcome gifts. The school addresses parent expectations and needs, communicating that teenagers need rules, and that it is the job of parental figures in the school and community to establish and maintain appropriate behavioral boundaries.

As part of its outreach to the community, the school provides Spanish language translators at evening events. Staff look for reasons for students to bring their families into the school, honor community newcomers through newsletters, and acknowledge and celebrate diversity. Over time there has been increasing involvement of Hispanic families in the life of the school. Similarly, the school makes efforts to sustain the involvement of middle and upper-middle class families through active booster, PTSA, and informational parent programs. There are two teacher conference nights annually, to which students may bring any significant adult in their lives.

Community engagement. Sleepy Hollow High School has established formal relationships with local colleges and a local hospital. It has also obtained significant support from the community as a whole. The district has created the Foundation for the Public Schools of the Tarrytowns, which raises thousands of dollars annually to supplement the high school educational program. The school has hired a professional grant writer to prepare significant grants for the Foundation. Community support is the source of funds for cash prizes for academic achievement. Students, in turn, support the work of the wider community. As an example of the many action-oriented student projects in the school, this past year the Senior Government and Contemporary Issues honors class raised $2,100 for DarfurFest to provide aid to refugee camps in the western Sudan and neighboring Chad.

SECTION **5**

**Self-Assessment:
What Practices are in Place?**

• Introduction

• Self-Assessment

▶ Self-Assessment: What Practices are in Place?

The overall intent of the Magellan-sponsored benchmarking project is to inspire and facilitate high school improvement in New York state by providing models and practices from which to learn. Schools that are motivated to begin or continue an improvement process usually do well to conduct a systematic reflection about their current successes and needs.

We have organized the research framework into a series of questions that a school team might use to inventory and reflect on their current practices. Three columns have been added to allow a rating of current practices. For each question or set of questions, consider whether a practice is In Place, Needs Refinement, or an Area to Explore. Use the Notes section to make comments about a rating and identify how to build or develop new or additional practices. The completed self-assessment can then be used as a guide to seeking information about specific practices in this report, i.e. checking out the practices for each theme in Section 3 or reviewing case studies that feature practices of interest in Section 4.

1. RIGOROUS ACADEMICS AND CURRICULUM

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Academic expectations	1. To what extent do staff demonstrate high expectations for all students?			
	2. To what extent do programs ensure that all students have adequate pathways to graduation?			
	3. How does the school communicate the expectation that all students continue education or training beyond graduation?			
	4. Do school practices ensure that all students are spending a high percentage of their time in challenging courses?			
Access to advanced courses	5. Is there broad student access to advanced student courses?			
	6. Do policies facilitate student access to challenging courses, i.e. no pre-requisites that act as barriers?			
Access to college courses	7. Do all students have the opportunity to obtain college credit for course work taken in high school?			

Notes:

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Transition to high school	8. Which programs or strategies bridge middle and high school?			
	9. How do freshmen receive support for the high school experience, including ways that parents are involved?			
Progress monitoring for identification and intervening with at-risk students	10. How are classroom performance-based assessments used to inform instructional decision-making and tailor instruction, including providing extra interventions as needed?			
	11. Are data from classroom assessments used in a routine and timely fashion?			
	12. Are there systems for early identification of students who are potentially at risk of dropping out, including systems that begin prior to secondary school?			
Comprehensive guidance and advisory support	13. Do all students receive personalized guidance?			
	14. Are there additional advisory or mentoring programs for at-risk students?			
	15. Do at-risk students regularly meet with faculty members to assess their progress?			
	16. In what ways does the school provide physical, mental, and social supports for students?			
Academic support	17. What types of support do students receive to enable them to meet high expectations in course work, e.g., tutoring, alternate ways to demonstrate mastery, homework support?			

2. PERSONALIZATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT (continued)

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Academic support	18. What additional interventions exist for at-risk students, and how effective have they been?			
	19 Are there specialized interventions for students who have difficulty reading that are designed to improve reading skills?			
Content support for English learners	20. Are English learners taught both general academic language and content-specific academic language?			
	21. Are there specialized programs for English learners who are relatively new to the US, including supports beyond academic in-class support?			

Notes:

3. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Postsecondary exploration	22. To what extent do all students have opportunities to explore post-secondary training, college and career options?			
	23. Do students have opportunities for work, internships, service learning?			
College-going culture	24. Do school programs and practices enable all students to explore education beyond high school?			
	25. Are practices in place to support the transition to education beyond high school?			
	26. What opportunities does the school provide to ensure students can navigate access to college, e.g., exams, applications, tours, financial aid?			
Extracurricular connections	27. Does the range of extracurricular activities respond to the interests of all students?			
	28. Are extracurricular activities used to expand and increase personal relationships with faculty?			
	29. Do extracurricular policies and activities support academics and the culture of the school?			
Recognition for attainment	30. Are there different types of recognition for student attainment, especially for academic achievement?			

Notes:

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Collaborative learning opportunities	31. To what extent is a climate of collaboration fostered among administrators and staff?			
	32. Are there systematic professional development, mentoring, coaching, co-teaching, and/or other collaborative learning opportunities that help teachers implement research-based strategies?			
New teacher induction and support	33. Does the district/school have a comprehensive, instructionally-focused new teacher induction program?			
	34. Are new teachers assisted in learning about the cultural expectations of the school and the needs of students?			

Notes:

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ ORGANIZATION

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Employment criteria	35. Do hiring criteria ensure that highly qualified and highly effective teachers are selected, and how are those criteria built into the hiring process?			
	36. Are strategies in place for recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas or specialties?			
Collaborative leadership	37. What is the system of instructional leadership, i.e. which different individuals set and monitor instructional expectations?			
	38. What is the role of the principal in providing instructional leadership?			
	39. To what extent is leadership seen as a collaborative endeavor in which staff, students, and the community are engaged?			
Coherence of values and continuity of purpose	40. Are there clearly understood and articulated values that guide decision making?			
	41. What evidence is there that the official mission, values, and beliefs are acted on by all staff?			
	42. Is there a clearly articulated long term goal which the school staff work towards?			
	43. Are programs and practices aligned with this long term purpose?			
	44. To what extent does the structure/organization of the school align with the school's philosophy and commitment to students?			

5. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE/ ORGANIZATION (continued)

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Continuous improvement and allocation of resources	45. Are assessment results systematically used for improvement in student supports, curriculum and instruction, school organization?			
	46. To what extent does the school protect and effectively use academic time?			
	47. To what extent does the school leverage external resources to support students?			
	48. Does the school regularly assess programs and allocation of resources to ensure they are effective and efficiently utilized?			

Notes:

6. PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

FEATURE	SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	RATING SCALE		
		Practice in Place	**Needs Refinement**	**Area to Explore**
Parent and family involvement	49. How are parents involved in assisting their children to make the transition to high school?			
	50. Does the school provide opportunities to help parents navigate access to college?			
	51. Are parents and the community involved in meaningful ways in important school decisions?			
	52. Does the school engage families from the non-dominant culture in culturally-responsive ways?			
Community engagement	53. How does the school systematically engage the wider community in supporting the school and its students?			
	54. To what extent does the school routinely access community resources to support academic learning of all students?			

Notes: