



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein
Chancellor

THE BLUEPRINT FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL SUCCESS

Key Elements and Promising School-Based Practices

*A Component of the
Campaign for Middle
School Success*

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Acknowledgments

The Campaign for Middle School Success is a collaboration of dozens of people across the Department of Education and New York City who passionately believe that our school leaders must and can create a system of great middle schools that prepare our children for success in high school and beyond.

After receiving our charge from the Chancellor, generous funding from the General Electric Foundation, and encouragement and support from the City Council and the Mayor's Office, DOE leadership and staff, university and community partners, representatives of the UFT, CSA and elected officials, and principals and teachers embarked upon a journey of research, visits, focus groups and just plain conversations.

We wish to acknowledge and express our appreciation for the contributions of all those who completed the first leg of the journey with us. As we said, there were many, including our Senior Policy Committee, The Fund for Public Schools, and our Campaign for Middle School Success Exploratory and Action Planning Team Leaders and members. We are also grateful for the groundbreaking work of the City Council Middle School Task Force, and the guidance from the Middle School Initiative Advisory and the Citywide Advisory Committees.

Most importantly we appreciate the contributions of our principals and their staff who opened their doors, shared their practices, participated in focus groups, spoke thoughtfully and honestly about their successes and their challenges and maintained high expectations for their students, their school communities and themselves. Their experiences and successes have informed the findings in this Blueprint and will continue to shape the next leg of the journey. This is the first installment of the Blueprint; it will continue to evolve as we learn from the research and innovation taking place in our schools. We look forward to learning from and with them.

For every child,

Marcia V. Lyles, Ed.D.
Deputy Chancellor
Teaching and Learning

Sabrina Hope King, Ed.D.
Chief Academic Officer and Project Lead
Teaching and Learning

Joanna Lack
Project Lead
Teaching and Learning

Introduction

In 2003, New York City embarked on Children First, an ambitious program to reform its public schools. The overarching goal of Children First is to develop, support, and sustain a system of great schools. To deliver excellent and equitable educational services to approximately 1.1 million students in almost 1,500 schools, the City is focusing on the only outcome that really matters: student success. Since Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein launched Children First, more students are meeting and exceeding standards in math and reading and the graduation rate is the highest it has been in decades. The City has received outside recognition for this progress; in 2007, it won the Broad Prize for Urban Education. This \$1 million annual award honors the urban school district that has made the greatest progress in raising student achievement and reducing the achievement gap.

New York City's reforms are based on three core principles:

- Those closest to the students should get to make the key decisions about what will best help their students succeed.
- Empowered schools must be accountable for results.
- Schools should be able to count on funding that is fair and transparent.

System-wide standards for excellence and accountability focus support on every school and its leader. To attract and retain the best and brightest school leaders, New York City gives principals the ability to organize for student success while holding them accountable for student outcomes. In exchange for increased autonomy, flexibility, and resources, schools must raise student achievement using a broad range of tools to accurately measure and analyze those outcomes. NYCDOE accountability tools, including Progress Reports, Quality Reviews, Learning Environment Surveys, and Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) give principals, teachers, parents, and community members access to innovative ways of examining school data in order to make smart decisions that improve the academic progress of New York City students and schools.

As a result of the Children First reforms, the four-year high school graduation rate has reached 62%, the highest level since the city began calculating the rate in 1986,¹ and the percentage of students in grades 3 through 8 meeting or exceeding state math standards rose by 9.1 points between 2007 and 2008 – the largest increase since 1999.

While we have made a great deal of progress, we are far from attaining our goals and far from finished with our reform efforts. Today, nearly two out of five high school students do not graduate within four years, and 57% of our eighth graders and 39% of our fourth graders cannot read at grade level; these under-performing students are overwhelmingly African-American and Hispanic.² In addition, the City serves more than 140,000 English Language Learners (ELLs), with as many as one-fourth of those in the upper grades with some type of interrupted formal education that demands specialized instruction.

We know that it is critical that our students arrive at high school fully prepared to succeed there. Today, however, that is not the case. Less than half of our students are reaching proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) by the end of the eighth grade (60% in math). Data show that students who do not reach proficiency in the eighth grade severely reduce their chances of graduating from high school in four years. Only 6% of students who enter high school at a Level 1 are predicted to graduate with a Regents diploma (compared to 82% of those at Level 3 or above).³ This is particularly relevant to our students' futures given that diploma requirements are changing and all students will need Regents Diplomas in order to graduate. In addition, a new promotion policy for eighth grade students requires them to score at Level 2 or above and pass core subjects in order to move on to high school more prepared for the academic challenges they will face there.

¹ Since 2003-04, when the State began reporting comprehensive 4-year graduation rates, the DOE's rate has gone up 6 percentage points, and the rate elsewhere in the State has declined by 2 percentage points, for an 8-point reduction in the gap.

² Under-performing students are those performing at Level 1 or Level 2 on the ELA and/or Math State Assessments

³ NYCDOE data, 2007

Overview of the Campaign for Middle School Success

Through the Campaign for Middle School Success, we plan to set high expectations for middle schools and for our middle grade students' performance. We also plan to achieve dramatic growth in student achievement across our nearly 500 middle schools.

The development of the Campaign for Middle School Success was a highly collaborative effort involving educational leaders from across the Department of Education's central offices, as well as principals, teachers, parents, students, and community partners. During the first phase of our work, we conducted an extensive analysis to understand better the nature of the middle school challenge and to discover what is working, from across the department and elsewhere, in order to build on our strengths and successful middle school⁴ practices. Specifically, we:

- Performed a rigorous diagnosis of current performance in our middle schools using State performance data and City accountability tools and investigated past DOE reform efforts;
- Conducted external research in best practices in the areas that our research identified as key elements of middle school success, including academic rigor, adolescent development, teacher and school leader quality, family and community engagement, and school structure and organization in the middle grades;
- Visited many of our highest-performing middle schools to understand the situation from the ground, identified successful practices on which to build, and investigated best practices from outside New York City, both national and international;
- Interviewed principals, teachers, internal and external experts in policy and practice, community partners, and other key stakeholders across New York City to learn from their observations and experiences; and
- Reviewed the recommendations outlined in national and State middle school reform reports, including SUNY Albany's *What Makes Middle Grades Work*, as well as the recommendations of the New York City Council Middle School Task Force Report and the Coalition for Educational Justice Middle Grades Action Plan.

1. Vision and Goals

New York City is not alone in addressing the challenges of middle schools. Across the country, urban districts have struggled to improve the performance of students in the middle grades, including the burgeoning number of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

But while this isn't our problem alone, it's our responsibility to take it on and attempt to solve it. Adolescence is a time of growth and risk, and we must ensure that our schools are equipped to embrace both the opportunities and challenges that adolescent learners face. Our expectations for the achievement of all of our middle grade students must be dramatically elevated and informed by a deeper understanding of their development, experiences, and interests in and out of school, and the skills our students will need to demonstrate in order to succeed in post-secondary education, work, and life. Middle school student success is possible in New York City. We must develop a culture of student success that ensures that parents, students, teachers, school staff, school leaders, and community members have high expectations for the immediate and long-term success of our students and assume collective responsibility for the outcomes. Importantly, we must enlist the wisdom of our students in the work to brand student achievement—and to make school engaging, motivating, and

⁴ Throughout this document, "middle school" refers to grades 6-8 and includes any school with these grade levels, except for schools that end in the sixth grade.

relevant to their life experiences. We also must make sure that those who serve students are aware of what students feel they need in order to be successful.

We have learned that there is no single “silver bullet” solution to our middle school challenge. The path to success may differ for different schools. Therefore, each school should develop its own theory of change based on a comprehensive and coherent approach that includes key elements of middle school success. Those elements are: high expectations and rigorous opportunities for all students, effective management of human capital, personalized student supports, integrated family and community engagement, and strong school and organizational structures. We hope that schools will contribute to these elements based on their own research.

While the challenges of school improvement are significant, we will work with our schools to surmount them with the collective and aligned mobilization of our internal and external expertise, resources and partners. Schools are increasingly equipped to determine how to improve their students’ achievement. Principals have been given greater discretion over their resource allocation, staff selection, and student programming. Student-level performance data are more readily available than in the past. School Support Organizations (SSOs) give schools more support than ever before, tailored to meet their students’ specific needs. School-based structures, such as inquiry teams, in which professional learning communities use data to identify how best to change instructional practices to accelerate student learning, are well-suited to inform this theory of change and support its implementation.

We therefore have adopted the following goals for our middle schools:

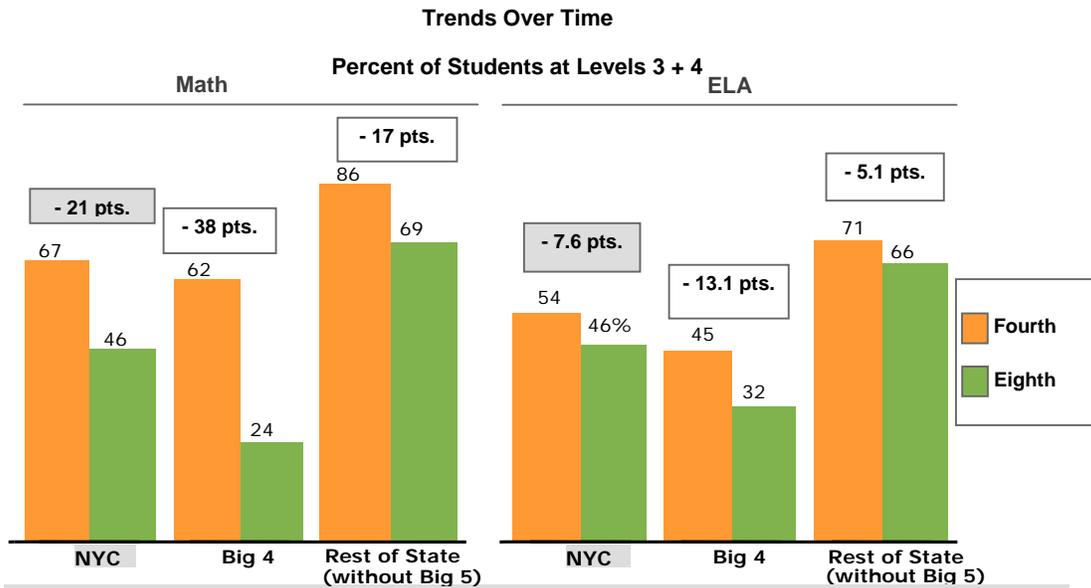
- Improve overall student achievement levels in all New York City middle schools;
- Close the achievement gap among Black and Hispanic and White and Asian students;
- Improve student engagement and socio-emotional development for all students; and
- Decrease the dropout rate and raise the graduation rate.

2. New York City’s Middle School Data

Academic Performance and Student Engagement. The nature of the middle school challenge in New York City is widespread. Nearly 45% of our middle schools are helping fewer than a quarter of their eighth graders reach proficiency in both English and Math.⁵ The data point to significant performance declines between the fourth grade and the eighth grade. This problem is pervasive not only in the City, but also across the State, as shown by the graphic below.

⁵ NYCDOE data, 2007

Graph 1. City and State Comparison of ELA and Math Performance



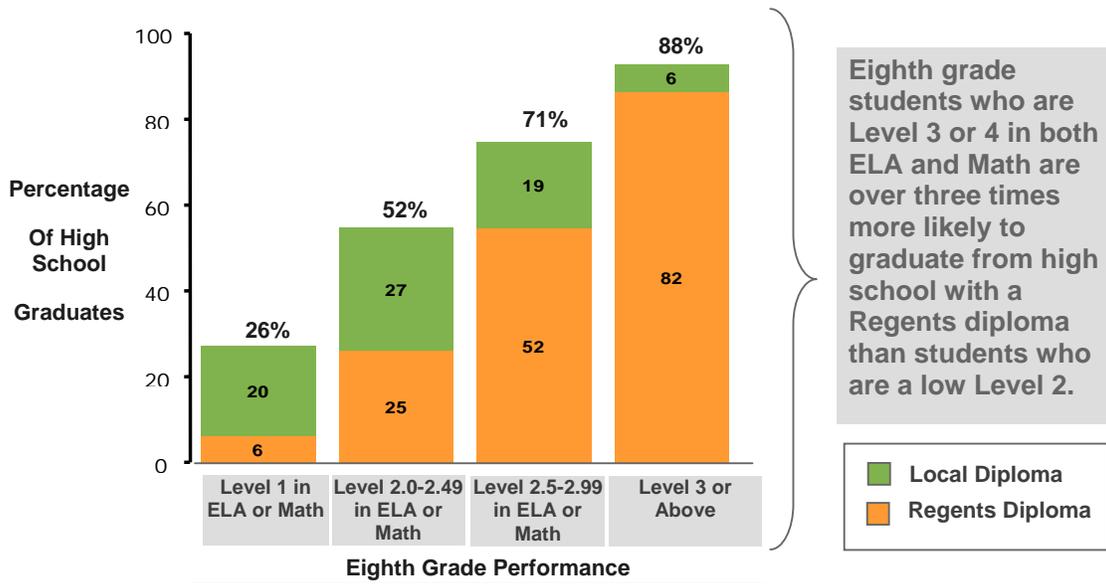
In NYC and the rest of New York State, math and ELA performance declines between fourth and eighth grade. In both subjects, this decline is greater in the Big 4 than in NYC.

Note: Excludes ELL students for ELA scores; 2006-07 eighth graders; 2002-03 fourth graders. The Big 5 are New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers.

Students who enter middle school at or below low Level 2 have a very low probability of becoming proficient by the eighth grade. Even students who enter middle school at Level 3 have just over a 50% chance of being proficient in eighth grade ELA and just over a 60% chance of being proficient in eighth grade Math.⁶ The repercussions of low middle school performance do not stop when students leave the City’s middle schools. In fact, this domino effect continues in high school. As demonstrated in the graphic below, eighth grade performance has a strong impact on high school graduation.

⁶ NYCDOE data, 2007

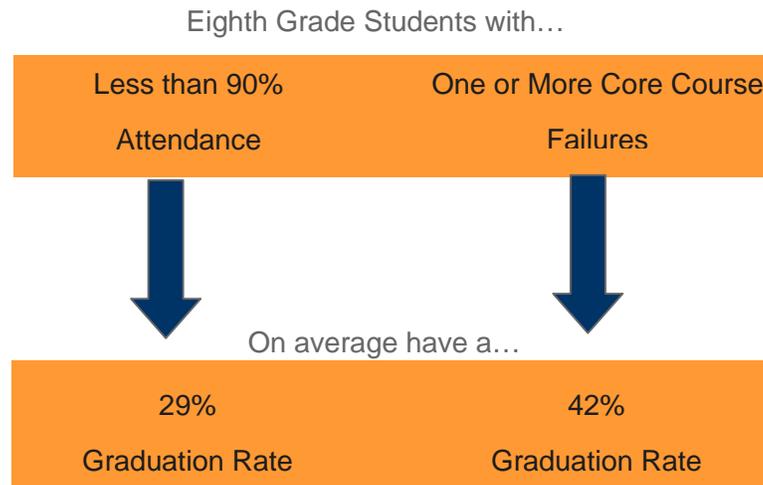
Graph 2. Eighth Grade Performance and High School Graduation



Note: Class of 2007. Excludes District 75 and District 79. Includes only students taking both tests on grade level in given year, students in schools that received 2006-07 Progress Report grades, and students in schools with at least 20 students in their graduation cohort.

The nature of the middle school challenge is not only one of academic performance, but also of student engagement, which we know affects performance. More than half (56%) of Level 1 eighth grade students have low attendance, fail a course, or both. Even Level 4 middle school students show signs of disengagement, with 18% having low attendance, failing a course, or both.⁷ As the graphic below indicates, middle school engagement is a leading indicator of high school graduation.

Graph 3. Middle School Engagement Indicators



Students who show signs of disengagement in middle school – i.e., they have low attendance or fail core courses – are less likely to graduate from high school.

Note: Class of 2007. Graduation rates assume 4 years in high school.

⁷ NYCDOE data, 2007

We conducted a rigorous examination of middle schools both in New York City and elsewhere. The results of our analysis suggest that concentration of low-performing students and school configuration had a meaningful impact on student performance, while school and class size had less of an impact. Importantly, our analysis identified a set of middle schools that improved their students' achievement relative to other schools in the City. Although these schools faced challenges similar to other middle schools in the City; they were able to increase significantly the number of students scoring at Levels 3 and 4.

Expectations for Student Success. We looked not only at successful schools' academic performance and student engagement, but also at their school cultures and expectations. Using the results of the City's Learning Environment Survey, we learned that there are low expectations for success in our middle schools. In low-performing middle schools, only about half (56%) of teachers believed high expectations were in place in their schools. Peer respect for student achievement was also weak, with only 43% of students in low-performing schools agreeing that students who perform well in school are respected.⁸ Finally, parents do not hold middle schools accountable for performance. Almost four in five parents (79%) in our lowest-performing middle schools (in which only 11% of students are proficient in ELA and Math) report they are satisfied with the quality of education in their children's schools.⁹ This underscores the need for strong accountability as the counterweight to school empowerment.

Lessons from Successful Middle Schools. These findings, coupled with the depth and breadth of the challenge facing our middle schools, led us to explore further the school-based practices of our more successful middle schools in order to understand to what they attribute their schools' success. We conducted additional research, including visits to many of our successful middle schools (as well as some of our struggling middle schools), interviews and focus groups with principals, and a review of external best practices.

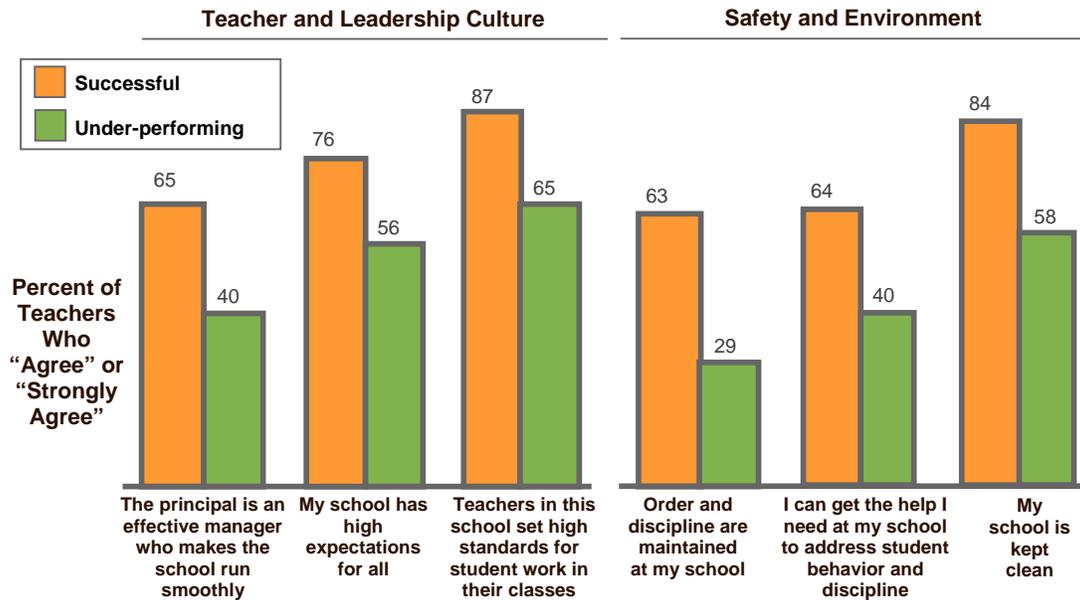
This process led to four primary insights:

- **Strong Leadership and Management Matter.** Successful middle schools have strong principals who effectively manage their schools and create high expectations that align students, teachers, parents, and all adults around a common vision and goals for student achievement.
- **We Need a Culture of Student Success.** Successful schools exhibit a set of common characteristics, which we refer to throughout the Blueprint as key elements of middle school success. While these elements were consistent across successful middle schools, the individual school-based practices that these schools employed to achieve a healthy, dynamic, and academically-oriented culture varied considerably. The graphic below shows wide variation in the school cultures of successful middle schools and under-performing middle schools.

⁸ Successful and low-performing middle schools in New York City were identified through a statistical analysis which predicted school outcomes based on student and school level factors. Successful schools are those that exceeded their prediction by 5% or above, while low-performing middle schools are those that did not meet their predicted performance level by 5% or more.

⁹ NYCDOE Learning Environment Survey, 2007

Graph 4. Indicators of Middle School Culture



All things being equal, school culture is a strong differentiator between successful and under-performing middle schools.

NYCDOE Learning Environment Survey 2007.

- **We Need a Comprehensive Approach.** Each successful school had a comprehensive plan to drive school improvement, which purposely encompassed each of the key elements. That is, these schools had principals and school leadership teams with a vision for how to fit together complementary activities—many of which are individually well-known—to drive student achievement.
- **We Need to Focus on Implementation.** The principals and leadership teams of successful schools followed through and made sure that their visions were implemented effectively—and that practices were adjusted to meet the specific needs of students.

The findings from our analysis informed the strategic actions of the Campaign for Middle School Success, and the lessons from successful middle schools in particular informed the Blueprint.

3. Strategic Actions: A Comprehensive Approach

The Campaign for Middle School Success is a comprehensive, strategic approach to improve student achievement in our middle schools. Our approach is aligned with and leverages the Children First principles of leadership, empowerment, and accountability, encouraging principals to make decisions related to core programs and operations in their schools.

This effort includes the following key strategic actions:

- **SYSTEM. We will create the conditions for middle schools to succeed.** We will improve our system by creating new, high quality middle school options aligned to student needs, ensuring that all middle schools have teachers and leaders committed to and knowledgeable about the middle school experience, and offering rigorous curriculum and instructional frameworks that engage adolescent learners.

- **SCHOOLS. We will encourage schools to take a comprehensive approach to school improvement.** Based on our research, the Blueprint for Middle School Success outlines key elements of successful middle schools and some of the school-based practices that achieve those elements. Schools can continue to contribute to this Blueprint by sharing their own research. We will support schools through grant opportunities, structured partnerships, and learning programs that support them in developing and effectively implementing their own comprehensive approach.
- **STUDENTS. We will create a culture of middle school success.** We will promote a culture of middle school success both Citywide and within each individual middle school that holds all members of the school community to high expectations, engages students, and supports their learning and development.

Objectives of the Blueprint for Middle School Success

The Blueprint for Middle School Success captures and shares some of the key insights from our analytic review of all of our middle schools and the research on effective middle school practices from New York and elsewhere. The identification of the key elements and successful practices included here follows the principles of knowledge management—namely, using the data to identify areas of focus, conducting internal and external research, identifying promising practices, and sharing this knowledge through the Blueprint. The Blueprint identifies the key elements and describes a select number of school-based practices that successful middle schools have utilized to implement these elements and to drive their own performance.

The Blueprint includes descriptions of the key elements and some of the selected school-based practices successful middle schools use to achieve those elements. In addition, it outlines the key components of each of the selected practices, as well as guiding questions for school leadership teams to consider in thinking through how these practices might take shape in their schools in order to meet the needs of their students. The Blueprint includes references to additional resources to help you better understand and develop these practices at your school. Finally, it includes spotlights on how individual middle schools in NYC have successfully adopted some of these practices to improve student achievement, as well as examples of how successful middle schools have comprehensively aligned their approach across each of these key elements.

We believe that dramatic school improvement requires a strategic focus across each of the key elements of middle school success. This focus must be aligned with schools' missions and visions and support the needs of their students. The Blueprint is a first step in an ongoing knowledge management effort, through which schools will share what they have learned with their colleagues at other schools across the City. Thus, the Blueprint is a living document that will align with ARIS and the Knowledge Management Platform and that will include best practices generated by your own research, successful practices, and future success. In other words, the “key elements” will evolve based on schools' experiences using the Blueprint to improve outcomes. We hope schools will use the Blueprint as a tool to guide their school improvement efforts and the collaborative work both within their school and with other middle schools across the City.

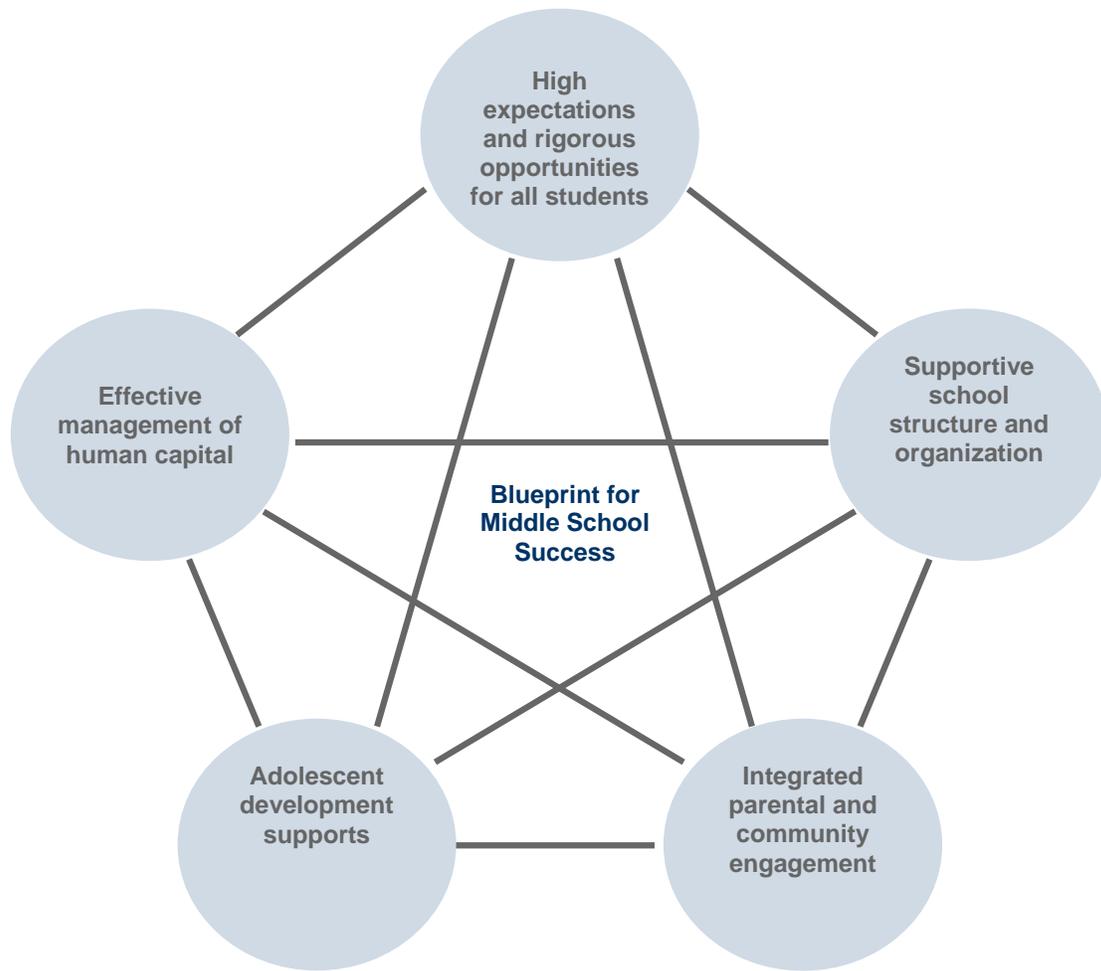
Key Elements of Middle School Practice

Through school visits, interviews, and focus groups, we took an in-depth look at our middle schools that have demonstrated significant progress. We looked at all schools—whether they were traditional public schools or charter schools—to gain a deeper understanding of their success. We complemented this analysis with an external review of best practices of successful middle schools, including charter schools in New York City and across the country and traditional middle schools, domestic and international. Taken together, we identified key elements of effective middle school practice, which are listed here:

- ***High expectations and rigorous opportunities for all students.*** A culture of high expectations and academic rigor ensures that every student experiences a smooth transition to middle school and receives the academic resources and support to succeed there.
- ***Effective management of human capital.*** Leadership is distributed among administrators and teachers and the principal aligns all actions around a common mission, vision, and goals.
- ***Adolescent development supports.*** These supports include both individual and school-wide supports that respond to student needs, set high expectations for student success, facilitate adolescent social-emotional health and development, and promote student engagement.
- ***Integrated parental and community engagement.*** Integrated parental and community engagement enables parents and community partners to participate in and augment students' middle school experience in culturally relevant and affirming ways.
- ***Supportive school structure and organization.*** Supportive school structure and organization optimize teacher collaboration, ensure adult responsibility for student relationships, and promote personalization and ongoing learning for students and staff.

A Comprehensive Approach. While successful middle schools shared these key elements of success, each school took its own unique approach to achieving its goals. What the successful middle schools had in common was not simply the presence of the key elements, but the strategic alignment across these elements around a common mission and vision that the entire school community supports and around which they align their individual actions. These schools took a comprehensive approach to addressing each of the key elements and remained relentlessly committed to its implementation.

Each school chose a comprehensive but tailored set of practices to meet the needs of its students and improve student achievement. While these key elements are critical for middle school success, a diverse set of school-based practices is important. No two schools need to adopt the same set of school-based practices. Moreover, schools must tailor their chosen practices and approaches to meet the specific needs of their students. Most importantly, each successful middle school had a comprehensive plan to drive school improvement, which purposely encompassed the achievement of each of these key elements for middle school success.



Described in detail below are examples of practices that successful middle schools and those that have demonstrated significant progress have used to achieve each of the key elements. Our intention is to provide principals and school leadership teams with examples of successful practices, not to prescribe practices that will work in all schools or in all situations. School leadership teams are encouraged to use this Blueprint document as part of their own research and action planning effort to determine what will work best in their schools; schools may generate additional knowledge through their own process. Only by understanding successful practices and choosing and tailoring them to meet the needs of the actual students in a school, particularly the students in the achievement gap, can schools improve student achievement.

Key Element #1: High Expectations and Rigorous Opportunities for All Students

Description: Successful middle schools develop a culture of student success and have an observable commitment to high expectations for all students, including students at all achievement levels, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. They are led by a strong, distributed leadership and management team that communicates these high expectations and develops programs and policies that demonstrate those expectations. Specifically, they share a focus on increasing achievement for all students, regardless of where their students start. These schools rigorously use data to understand student performance, classification, and designation, especially through the ongoing work of their inquiry teams. They develop and align curriculum and often produce individual student plans to accelerate achievement. Many of these schools focus on fully understanding the skills and interests of their incoming students and utilize a variety of ways to accelerate student achievement.

Rationale: Middle schools have the distinction of serving students who are in the midst of transitioning from childhood to adolescence. With that comes the added challenge of first, supporting students in the early phase of creating their personal identities so that they identify with success and second, providing the academic supports to ensure they are able to achieve it.

- In New York City, only 34% of our sixth graders entered middle school proficient in math and ELA in 2006. It is typical for student academic performance to drop over the course of middle school. Thus, focusing on sixth-grade transitions can be important to improving student achievement.¹⁰
- Research shows that transition programs, particularly those including extended day programs, can be effective in accelerating the achievement of under-performing students. Many high-performing schools, such as KIPP charter schools, leverage techniques that specifically target the transition to middle school and advance student achievement.¹¹
- By extending the hours of the school day for sixth-grade students, schools can raise incoming middle school students' academic achievement and provide enrichment opportunities that can complement academic learning and motivate students to be engaged in school.¹² Extended day learning can be particularly helpful for adolescent English Language Learners, since many of them must do double the work of English Proficient students (developing basic and academic language while learning new content).

Promising Practices: There are a variety of ways middle schools can promote high expectations and rigorous opportunities for all students, including providing:

- Coherent curricular and instructional approach
- Portfolio of supports to facilitate transitions and accelerate achievement
 - Sixth grade portfolio of supports and academies
 - Eighth grade portfolio of supports targeted to students at risk of being retained
 - Algebra Regents mathematics program
- Collaborative Team Teaching

¹⁰ NYCDOE data, 2007

¹¹ KIPP, www.kipp.org

¹² Citizen Schools, www.citizenschools.org

Coherent Curricular and Instructional Approach

The curriculum program must be relevant to students’ lives. It must also be motivating, challenging, and rigorous in order to prepare students for success in high school and beyond. Creating a coherent curricular approach is crucial in ensuring that students receive instruction in content that is relevant across content areas and developmentally appropriate across grades. A coherent curricular approach organizes and integrates what students should know and be able to do in all grades and across all content areas. Content and concept acquisition are actively integrated with the teaching of processes, skills and strategies necessary for acceleration of achievement and closing of learning gaps for all students.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>College Preparatory and Enrichment Curriculum</p> <p>Develop a curriculum with rigorous content that includes the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescent literacy and academic vocabulary across the content areas • Visual and performing arts and physical education for every child • Small group and individual tutoring for struggling students • Advanced courses across the curriculum available to every student • Differentiated instructional techniques to reach each student within each class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will all stakeholders, including students, be represented in development, selection or improvement of curriculum resources? • What cyclical methods of school-level delivery will be recommended to ensure that subsequent waves of teachers and administrators receive this information after initial rollout? • How will the particular needs of students in the achievement gap be incorporated into planning? • How will we consider gender, ethnicity, and culture and the needs of English Language Learners and students with special needs? • What protocols, programs, and/or school reform models would fit the needs of our school (e.g., International Baccalaureate, Project Grad, America’s Choice)?
<p>Continual Curriculum Mapping and Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use transparent scope and sequence that ensures horizontal (across subject) and vertical (across grade) connections in a comprehensive curriculum that is culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate • Set clear expectations, provide rubrics, exemplars, and clear directions for assignments and projects, including staggered deadlines and check-ins for extended projects • Consider the varied ways that students can display mastery, including project-based learning, and meaningful homework • Support the use of comprehensive student data, particularly for students on inquiry team study rosters, to identify targeted needs and determine best practices in differentiating and scaffolding instruction for struggling students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key learnings of each unit? In what ways can units be integrated with other content areas and across grade levels? • How will content of the unit be made relevant for adolescent learners? What motivational strategies will be used (e.g., student choice in text selection, principles of active engagement)? • How will students be both supported and challenged? • What are the learning targets or skill gaps for our struggling students, including those who are overage? • What is the appropriate instructional change strategy based on analysis of the data? • Are instructional options in place that address specific targeted needs addressed by the data?

<p>Instructional Strategies and Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ instructional strategies to engage and reach our diverse middle school population and develop the self esteem and confidence of our students who are within the achievement gap • Utilize technology to allow for independent self-paced instruction • Use a multi-sensory approach to reading such as Wilson Reading Program • Identify differentiated texts that students can access for free, e.g., Thinkfinity.org • Build native language and literacy as part of content instruction and English development for English Language Learners, incorporating robust vocabulary development and the integration of technology resources, e.g., Achieve 3000 • Choose reading assignments that reflect students’ own situation and provide them hope to rise above their circumstances • Identify a core of “must-read” texts for all sub-groups of students, particularly African-American and Latino adolescent males, which can serve as soft role models in the absence of physically present male role models by providing motivation, direction, and hope for the future and suggesting what is worthwhile in life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunities can be created at the school level to support the development and sharing of a repertoire of teaching strategies? • What professional research and school-based data are needed to address student learning needs?
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Portfolio of Supports to Facilitate Transitions and Accelerate Achievement

We have a significant number of underperforming middle school students. It is important that schools determine the best strategies to support students through the transitions to middle school and to provide multiple opportunities to accelerate student achievement. We describe a suite of possibilities which can be used by schools to:

- Support incoming sixth graders in making the transition to middle school;
- Support eighth graders in meeting the requirements of the new promotion policy; and
- Expand Regents-level coursework through the Regents Algebra Program.

Sixth-Grade Portfolio of Supports and Sixth-Grade Academies

A sixth-grade portfolio of supports can facilitate the transition from fifth to sixth grades and/or from elementary to middle school and boost student achievement, particularly in literacy, so that students can engage fully in the middle school curriculum. These supports can also help to acculturate students to their new middle schools. A sixth-grade academy can be developed within a school incorporating these supports and an accelerated curricular approach to boost student achievement.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Pre-transition Outreach to Feeder Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain student data from feeder schools and familiarize students and families with the new school • Establish and maintain relationships with feeder school(s) (where applicable) and engage students and families prior to the beginning of the school year • Utilize parent coordinator to facilitate pre-transition outreach for families and students who will be attending a non-neighborhood school • Ensure program continuity and appropriate placement for ELLs and students with disabilities • Establish a transition team to facilitate teaching and learning conversations between fifth and sixth grade teachers to discuss incoming students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which members of our school community could be on our school’s transition team? Who could lead this team? • Which ARIS data systems can be leveraged to share student and knowledge management information? How will grade-level teams and professional learning communities use data on incoming students to inform orientation and classroom practice? • Since maintaining program continuity and providing native language support is a strong contributor to ELL achievement, how will we reach out to and obtain accurate program information for incoming ELLs? • How will information about the transition to middle school or middle grades and the upcoming academic program be shared so that the maximum number of parents can be reached?
<p>Pre-Sixth Grade Expeditionary Learning Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote academic success and positive school culture through expeditionary learning • Implement an academic program, including targeted approaches to accelerate the literacy and math achievement of under-performing sixth graders, prior to the start of the school year • Provide an introduction to the Middle School experience that includes school expectations and norms, routines, rewards, consequences, opportunities for student empowerment, leadership and accountability, and development of a student roadmap for success • Offer Saturday off-site retreats and programs to promote team-building and sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we introduce students and families to our school’s cultural and behavioral norms? How can we include current students in this process? • What academic supports do we need to provide to students prior to the start of the school year in order to accelerate their achievement? How will we introduce students to personal student success plans? • Which staff members are best suited to support our priorities? What additional resources do we need? • What is the best time to convene students, staff, and families prior to the start of the school year? At the beginning of the school year?

SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: SIXTH-GRADE TRANSITION

School has an intensive, four-week summer academy for incoming sixth-grade students, which students attend and then sign pledges for commitment to their education during academic year.

- Students participate in two weeks of academic instruction and two weeks of arts instruction under the guidance of full-time middle school teachers.
- Sixth grade students have special programming during first weeks of school to introduce them to school norms and routines and provide them with an overview of the year-long project that culminates with transition to seventh grade.

<p>Extended Learning Time (ELT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional opportunities to accelerate academic achievement and participate in an enriched curriculum by extending the learning time available to students • Implement a significant increase in the length of school day or year (30% or more) to help students meet higher performance standards, often targeted to focus on the academic needs of a specific student population • Include opportunities for enrichment, such as arts, sports, and talent development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the critical goals for our incoming students that will be addressed through ELT? ELA or math improvement? Adopting school culture? Targeting specific population (e.g., ELLs)? • Which teachers want to be a part of extended learning time? What additional organizations should we partner with to teach students and support our key priorities? Who will manage ELT program and partnership with external groups? • What budgetary resources can sustain this program?
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SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: POSSIBILITIES WITH EXTENDED LEARNING TIME

- This charter school is a free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory public school where students develop the knowledge, skills, and character needed to succeed in top-quality high schools and colleges and in the competitive world beyond. This school incorporates extended day in order to accelerate student achievement.
- An average of 67% more time spent in school: Students attend school from 7:25 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, from 7:25 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Friday, for four hours every other Saturday, and for three weeks during the summer. The average daily attendance is 97%.
- Two hours of homework each night. Teachers are available for assistance by cell phone.
- Academically-oriented field lessons that bring to life the locations and events these charter school students have studied in the classroom and introduce them to places they have never been. Students visit national parks, historically significant regions throughout the country, and college campuses, as well as destinations throughout New York City. Out-of-state destinations include Utah, Boston, and Washington, D.C.
- Weekly tests and quizzes designed to monitor students' progress and help teachers identify and address students' areas of weakness.
- A comprehensive, ongoing staff development program that assists teachers in implementing effective lessons that use a variety of activities to accomplish clearly defined aims and that take different learning styles into account.
- Frequent communication between school staff and students' parents or guardians about how to support the school's efforts at home.
- 90-minute blocks for reading and math classes.
- A staff social worker and guidance counselor who meet with students to help them address personal issues.

Eighth Grade Portfolio of Supports

The NYCDOE has a new eighth-grade promotion policy. The Eighth Grade Portfolio of Supports is designed to accelerate the achievement of under-performing middle school students to ensure that they succeed under the new eighth-grade promotion policy and are prepared to meet the increased academic demands of high school. The Portfolio of Supports which schools can consider employing includes curricular supports, after-school and Saturday opportunities, and tools to motivate and empower students.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Curricular Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate teaching and learning. Include the use of manipulatives, visuals, narratives, and technology; multi-leveled/multi-theme, multi-cultural resources • Focus on student motivation. Provide opportunities for students to share ideas and integrate real-world experiences into their class and homework • Promote deep questioning and thinking. Ask students to analyze, investigate, and evaluate their understanding of the material in order to exhibit understanding • Encourage student talk and conversations. Allow time for students to engage in dialogue and debate to further solidify the content and ensure student ownership of the material • Teach organizational skills. Set and reinforce routines such as the organization and use of notebooks and protocols for use of technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which curricular supports and strategies would be most beneficial to teachers in their work to move Level 1 and Level 2 students? • What supports can be put in place to assist students with completing their homework? • What supports can be put in place to teach students organizational, study and time management skills? • Which staff members are best suited to create project-based learning opportunities within the curriculum geared toward accelerating student achievement across all disciplines?
<p>Tools to Motivate and Empower Students</p> <p>Student Planners and Roadmaps set students on the path to high school and help students develop success skills necessary for high school and beyond.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize the Student Planner, designed to put the student at the center of his/her learning and keep schools and families on the “same page” by providing clarity about assignments, responsibilities, deadlines, and school meetings • Provide Roadmaps which will guide students through the challenges and opportunities of the high school application and transition process • Engage students through the Renzulli Learning Personal Success Plan which provides individualized resources specifically chosen to match students’ interests, learning style, and preferred modes of expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will academic advisors be introduced to the Student Planner and Roadmap? How will advisors provide academic support, Roadmap updates, and management? What form/model will be used? • How will students and parents be introduced to the Student Planner and Roadmap? • How can the Student Planner and Roadmap be used to empower students to take charge of their own learning? • If our school has limited access to technology, how might we create and administer a similar paper system? • How will we introduce the Personal Success Plan and the Renzulli Learning System to teachers? To parents?

<p>Professional Development Support for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the latest research on accelerated achievement of under-performing students and engage in hands-on content area strategies • Share and showcase best practices that enhance academic achievement for students performing at Level 1 and Level 2 • Share and showcase best practices relevant to culture, gender and adolescent development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which professional development sessions would best meet the goal of "Supporting Accelerated Achievement of our Level 1 and Level 2 Students"? • What professional development would support the progress and/or achievement of our Inquiry Team learning target(s)? • Which staff members have demonstrated success with improving the achievement of Level 1 and Level 2 students?
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Algebra Regents Program

The Middle School Algebra Regents Program provides middle school students in grades six through eight with advanced Regents-level high school math instruction. This program enhances students' learning, development, and achievement in mathematics by supplementing the middle school math curriculum and offering after-school and Saturday Regents math preparation. Students receive Regents-level instruction to develop and improve their critical thinking, problem solving, logical reasoning skills and overall math ability and engage in project-based, hands-on learning. They use technology to explore various math applications and gain the knowledge and skills needed to pass middle and high school state exams. Participating students are encouraged to take both the specialized high school examinations and the high school Algebra Regents Exam before leaving middle school.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>School-based Regents Initiative Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a leader of the Regents initiative to oversee student selection, scheduling, the high school partnership, ongoing professional learning, peer tutoring, and progress monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we select students to participate in the program? • Do we have the systems and supports in place to support students of all ability levels in an academically rigorous program?
<p>Middle and High School Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give students the opportunity to attend classes on Saturdays at a partner high school (see below) • Encourage middle and high school teachers to plan math instruction together • Facilitate peer tutoring between high school students and middle school students in the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we budgeted per session for middle and high school teachers and coaches? • How can we best organize a schedule for in-class visitation during the school day? • What kinds of resources and support will peer tutors need?
<p>Extended Day/Saturday Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer after-school math preparation twice a week for 2 hours per day • Offer three-hour Regents Prep sessions each Saturday at designated neighborhood high schools • Enable students to attend selected trips in and outside of the city to broaden their knowledge and exposure • Provide opportunities for students to participate in apprenticeships or internships in various careers in mathematics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we developed a curriculum for these extended-day opportunities? Planned for teacher professional development? Facilitated collaboration opportunities for high school teachers? • Have we contacted CBOs, business community, universities, and school partnerships to leverage apprenticeship opportunities for students?

SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: ALGEBRA REGENTS PROGRAM

A group of middle schools partnered with a nearby high school to offer a Saturday program, which enabled middle and high school math teachers to plan together and learn from one another, and enabled students to receive additional Algebra instruction to supplement their math learning during the week.

- Participating middle school students were excited to attend class at the high school and benefited not only from the additional instructional time with their teachers, but also from the peer tutoring component, which helped them to ease the transition to high school.

Ongoing Professional Learning and Collaboration

- Develop a pacing calendar or leverage the pacing calendar provided by the Regents Initiative
- Train coaches to manage the learning of teachers in the Regents Initiative

- How can we adapt the pacing calendar to our schedule and student needs?

Collaborative Team Teaching

Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) is a service delivery system designed for special education students to be in a least restrictive environment. In CTT classrooms, two (or more) educators or other certified staff share instructional responsibility for a group of students, primarily in a single classroom or workspace, and with mutual ownership, pooled resources, and joint accountability.¹³ CTT provides opportunities for two-teacher instruction based on strong models of classroom collaboration, creates an optimal environment for differentiation of instruction, and creates layers of opportunity for scaffolded learning for both individuals and small groups. CTT provides complete equity and access to the standard curriculum for all students in the classroom, along with supports for those students who require them at any point. Collaborative team teaching is a model that can be used for all student populations.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage collaborative and team planning to meet all student needs for each co-taught lesson • Ensure that both teachers have knowledge of students' IEP goals and plan accordingly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are successful methods of recruitment of both special education and general education students into the CTT classroom? • What are the considerations in pairing teachers to work successfully in the CTT classroom? • How are the benefits to both the students with disabilities and general education students in the CTT classroom clearly communicated to the school community?
<p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable all students to have access to, and participate in, the general education curriculum • Ensure that all students are using appropriate materials with adaptations and modifications as needed • Teach educational concepts according to the New York State Learning Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we ensure that all students have access to the general education curriculum?

¹³ Friend, M. *Administrative Considerations for Successful Co-Teaching*, Presentation to the New York City Department of Education, 2004.

<p>Differentiated Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make teachers co-responsible for implementation of differentiated instruction • Use the skills of the special education teacher to help develop differentiated instructional strategies for all students • Encourage both teachers to differentiate instruction based on content, process, and product, as appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resources are available to support teachers in differentiating instruction to meet student needs?
<p>Team Teaching Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a variety of team teaching approaches appropriate to the students' needs and the instructional task, including: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; parallel teaching; station teaching; or alternating teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will initial and ongoing professional development be provided to initiate teachers into the effective use of a variety of team teaching approaches? • How can the strengths of each teacher be mobilized most effectively to support student learning and growth?
<p>Cooperative Learning Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign students to groups on the basis of their interest and complexity of task • Design cooperative learning groups to strengthen students' academic and social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which groupings will best accommodate our students' needs and improve their achievement?
<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage both teachers to share and discuss summative, formal and informal assessments to plan instruction • Use disaggregated test results to target instructional topics on an ongoing basis • Use comprehensive student data, particularly for students on inquiry team study rosters, to identify targeted needs and determine best practices in accelerating the achievement of struggling students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we use periodic assessment results to inform instruction in the CTT classroom? What other assessments can we use to inform instruction? • How will we regularly track individual student progress? • What do the data reveal (trends, strands, subsets of skills, subgroups affected)? How are the data translated and used so that they affect teaching and learning in the classroom?
<p>Classroom Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group students flexibly • Establish classroom areas for station teaching and/or small groups • Ensure that classroom materials reflect supports for students with varying patterns of strengths and interests • Ensure that both teachers determine and implement behavior management systems • Celebrate students' work, process, and product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we ensure that the CTT classroom's management system is consistent with our school-wide mission and vision? • How can we support teachers in maintaining positive and productive learning environments for all students?

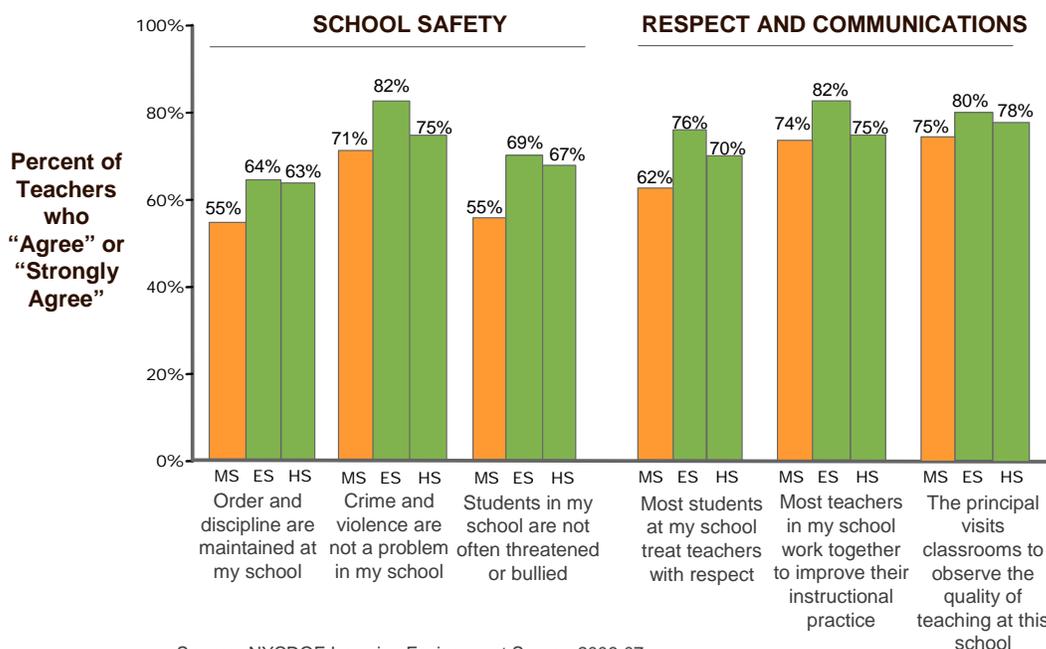
Additional Resources: For additional information and support in helping your school to address high expectations and rigorous opportunities for all students, please see http://www.nycboe.net/AdminOrg/Offices/TeachingLearning/CMSS/Key_Element1_Additional_Resources.pdf

Key Element #2: Effective Management of Human Capital

Description: Successful middle schools have a deep-rooted commitment to attracting, developing, and retaining highly effective staff members who are aligned around a common vision to teach adolescent learners and are eager to collaborate with one another. These schools have a culture of excellence and are rigorous about both supporting their teachers and creating high expectations for performance. They also effectively mobilize all the adults within a school, including teachers, leaders, volunteers, parents, the parent coordinator, and community partners.

Rationale: The graphic below shows that middle schools scored lower than both elementary schools and high schools on every school safety and respect/communications category on the Learning Environment Survey.

Graph 5. Middle School Teacher Perceptions of School Safety and Respect



Source: NYCDOE Learning Environment Survey, 2006-07

Research consistently shows that teacher effectiveness is the most critical variable in student success.¹⁴ Replacing an average teacher with an excellent one can nearly erase the achievement gap between low- and high-income students. Many successful global education systems (e.g., Singapore, Finland) are particularly effective in managing their human capital, and as examples, have utilized Lead Teacher programs as an attractive potential part of an overall career path to help retain their most effective teachers and facilitate the sharing of best practices.¹⁵

Promising Practices: There are a variety of ways middle schools can ensure effective management of human capital. Many schools focus on teacher recruitment throughout the school year; involve high performing staff members and the whole school community in the selection of new teachers; develop rigorous support programs for new teachers; leverage lead teachers and instructional coaches; ensure all teachers have access to high quality professional development (both within and outside of school);

¹⁴ Gordon, R., Kane, T.J., and Staiger, D.O. (2006). *Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

¹⁵ McKinsey & Company. (2008). *How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out On Top*.

and take seriously their responsibilities to evaluate the performance of both new and veteran staff. Many schools find opportunities to affirm successful teacher practice.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Teacher Recruitment and Selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in year-round activities to market schools to prospective candidates, leverage DOE systems to identify candidates, and consider candidates from all pathways (traditional, alternative certification, transfers) when vacancies arise • Define the values and professional qualities that the school expects of its teachers and that best respond to the needs of the student population and the school community • Involve staff in the interview and selection process • Utilize all sources of data and insight about a candidate from written applications, screening tools provided from central offices, interviews, demonstrated lessons, etc. • Cultivate high-potential candidates throughout the school year through events, follow-up meetings and phone calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the activities we can engage in to market staff positions? • How can we make working at our school appealing such that we can recruit mission-driven, empowered staff committed to dramatically improving student achievement? • Which university partnerships can be developed to provide collaboratively-developed internships for prospective teachers and a pipeline for positions? • How are school staff members and parents selected to participate in the teacher selection process? • What is our selection model—what traits and skills do we look for in new teachers? What mix of teacher backgrounds do we strive for? How have past decisions worked for our school? • How diverse is our staff? Do our staff members share any of the life experiences or perspectives of our student or school community? What are strategies to recruit a staff reflective of diversity?
<p>New Teacher Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure every new teacher has a trained mentor who has time to provide effective mentoring • Ensure that mentoring is purposeful and leads to the development of teacher competencies that result in favorable student achievement outcomes • Engage in frequent and regular communication with new teachers and mentors to understand what additional supports they need • Take advantage of network and district resources for mentor and new teacher training and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies can we put in place to support beginning teachers' development of instructional planning and classroom management skills? • What strategies can we put in place to cultivate an open-door policy where new teachers feel free to ask questions, visit colleagues' classrooms and ask for help? • What support structures can be put in place to help new teachers learn to work with students in need of improvement? • How frequently does the principal meet with new teachers and mentors to ensure quality mentoring is happening? • How well do we use available tracking systems, PD resources for mentors and new teachers, staff at network level dedicated to supporting new teacher development, etc.?

<p>Lead Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Lead Teacher programs which enable (and reward) high-performing teachers with demonstrated performance and competencies to split their time between teaching their own class and serving as coach to develop less experienced teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would our school benefit from a lead teacher (or a pair sharing of a classroom)? • Would lead teacher positions be effective in recruiting high-quality teachers with expertise for which our school has a critical need, e.g., in math or science? • Would lead teacher positions allow us to retain our best teachers, especially in shortage areas? • How well does our lead teacher serve as an example of the type of instructional leadership and outstanding track record with student achievement we seek?
<p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that high-performing school leaders reach out to teachers (especially those high performers they are most eager to keep) to understand best what the school can do to facilitate their retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have teachers whose departure would disrupt our ability to meet our school's goals? Have we spoken to them about their intentions? • What other roles might help to retain high quality staff (e.g., inquiry teams, mentors, per session positions, comp time positions, department chair)? • How have we identified any of these high performers who have the potential to become school leaders, and can we retain them by encouraging them to participate in leadership development programs on the job? • What community-building activities are in place in which these conversations can naturally take place (e.g., informal staff breakfasts or other gatherings)?
<p>Performance Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear performance expectations for all staff members, aligned to overall school goals • Visit classrooms frequently and have informal meetings to provide constructive, informal feedback to teachers against those expectations • Conduct meaningful formal evaluations of teachers and identify those teachers whose performance is unsatisfactory • Ensure that tenure is granted to only those teachers who demonstrate a meaningful, positive impact on student learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the principal do to communicate clear performance expectations for staff members? • How well is the principal's professional development plan linked coherently to those performance expectations and school goals? • What consistent feedback mechanisms are in place? • How well does the principal or assistant principal provide feedback to teachers after the daily walkthrough and consistent classroom visits? • How frequently do informal classroom visits take place? • How well does the principal provide pre- and post-formal observation opportunities to preview expectations and review teacher performance? • How frequently does the principal use the Tenure Notification System as a tool to help make timely and thoughtful decisions about teachers who are completing their probation? How well is the suggested process followed to document poor performance for teachers who are not on track for successful completion of probation?

Additional Resources: For additional information and support in helping your school to address the management of human capital, please see http://www.nycboe.net/AdminOrg/Offices/TeachingLearning/CMSS/Key_Element2_Additional_Resources.pdf

Key Element #3: Adolescent Development Supports

Description: Developing personalization in middle schools includes both individual student and school-wide components that are informed by student needs, set high expectations for student success, facilitate adolescent social and emotional health and development, promote student engagement, and provide opportunities for students to grow both personally and academically.

Rationale: Adolescents need to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness through personal support and adult relationships, as well as social and emotional support, including programs that teach how to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, foster positive relationships, and other critical social skills.¹⁶ Adolescents in NYC need supportive and culturally relevant mentoring and advocacy so they can successfully navigate the opportunities and challenges affecting NYC youth.

- Research shows that middle school guidance programs influence development and performance. Middle school counselors can have both immediate and intermediate effects on students' academic, social, emotional, and career development.¹⁷
- “Social support” is strongly linked to academic gains for sixth and eighth grade students, and targeted mentorship programs have proven benefits for urban students in particular.¹⁸
- Adolescents face multiple options and serious decisions about which courses they will take, what activities they will engage in, and how seriously they will take their schoolwork. The presence of an adult mentor can be key in helping students develop a roadmap for success, reinforcing the importance of school, fostering good work habits, helping adolescents overcome feelings of anonymity, and helping youth make smart choices.
- High achieving students spend 8 to 10 times more in conversation with adults than underperforming students and also have regular routines that promote positive behaviors.¹⁹ The social and emotional learning that advisories facilitate, including decision-making and interpersonal skills, has significant impact on adolescent achievement and development.

Promising Practices: Schools can support the social and emotional development of their students in a variety of ways, including:

- Comprehensive guidance program
- Student mentorship and advocacy
- Advisories

These approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be combined in various manners to support one another. Careful consideration of the unique aspects of your school and student population should guide the way you think about how best to provide such supports to your students.

¹⁶ Juvonen, J. (2007). “Reforming Middle Schools: Focus on Continuity, Social Connectedness, and Engagement.” *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 197–208.

¹⁷ Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., and Schellinger, K. (2008). “The Effects of Social and Emotional Learning on the Behavior and Academic Performance of School Children.” Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, www.casel.org.

¹⁸ Lee, V. et al. (1999). “Social Support, Academic Press, and Student Achievement: A View from the Middle Grades in Chicago.” *Improving Chicago's Schools: A Report of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project*.

¹⁹ Clark, R (1983). *Family Life and School Achievement: Why Poor Black Children Succeed or Fail*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.

Guidance Program

A comprehensive guidance program provides adolescent students a range of academic and non-academic (physical, social, and emotional) supports and encourages broader college and career readiness to motivate and empower adolescents and ensure that they have multiple opportunities to lead and succeed. These programs include a foundation of high expectations of what students will know and be able to do, delivery of school-wide and individual supports that meet identified school and student needs, management of the cross-functional team to promote students' social-emotional health, and accountability for results, including tracking progress and trends to meet student needs.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Middle School Guidance Counselor Role</p> <p>The middle school guidance counselor has the following responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support and guidance to students and their families (often in partnership with the Parent Coordinator) and assist in providing school-wide support needed for this age group • Provide day-to-day, culturally sensitive guidance and counseling for individual students as well as managing crises that may occur and facilitate the assignment of community partners to assist in this work • Manage cross-functional team. Guide the focus and direction of the cross-functional team: the counselor is the “broker of services” for the school-wide guidance program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What behavioral trends are emerging or evident in our school? • What is the best method for the guidance counselor to deliver school-wide supports? What is the capacity of teachers and other staff for delivering these supports? What additional resources (e.g., social worker) are available to support school-wide needs? • Should the guidance counselor push into classrooms, or should support be included in advisory, small-groups, after-school, or built into the curriculum? • What additional training does staff need to understand and support adolescent development? • What are the needs of our special student populations, e.g., ELLs and students with disabilities? How can the guidance counselor reach out to Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), who often experience challenges acclimating to their new school environment?

SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: GUIDANCE PROGRAM

A 6-8 school has one guidance counselor who coordinates a team of interns who address students' social-emotional issues

- Guidance counselor works with individual students and also leads bereavement groups, groups on social skills, sexual development groups, and other groups depending on school-wide needs.
- Guidance counselor collaborates with advisors as well as the cross-functional team, which consists of special education teachers, the principal, assistant principals, and grade-level facilitators. Teams meet weekly to discuss student issues and plan interventions.

<p>Cross-Functional Team</p> <p>A cross-functional team to support both school-wide and individual student needs includes the following design elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that there is a structured design and a defined set of members that also leverages additional staff as appropriate. This team should meet on a regular basis (weekly - monthly) to assess emerging individual student and school-wide needs and issues that occur throughout the year • Implement a codified process and goals. The team should use both quantitative and qualitative data to determine the needs of the school and individual students, to develop a strategic plan for delivery of appropriate services, and to monitor and evaluate success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which members of our staff have capacity to be on the cross-functional team? Which additional members of our school staff may need to be included to discuss specific issues / individual needs? • What data will the cross-functional team use consistently and what are other mechanisms to identify student needs (e.g., inquiry team data, test scores, grades, and admission/discharge information to address the needs of ELLs, homework records, suspension data)? • What external programs could best support our students' adolescent and academic development? Do we have the internal capacity to develop our own supports/interventions? • What affinity groups can we create to support student needs (e.g., Rites of Passage, Time and Stress Management, Exploring My Development, Becoming a Successful Male of Color)?
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Mentorship and Advocacy

Mentoring programs help establish and support relationships that provide students with critical experiences, resources, and skills to motivate them, hold them to high expectations, and advance their social, emotional, educational, and intellectual development. Mentors serve as advocates. They also support individual students or groups of students, helping to address students' academic and social-emotional needs. Creating a strong relationship requires a school to engage meaningfully in planning and consider carefully the unique needs of adolescent students.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Program Goals and Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify which students are most in need and would benefit most from mentorship, informed by an analysis of students in the school and research on Black and Latino students who make up the achievement gap • Determine the appropriate balance between mentorship programs for groups of students and the need for individual mentor relationships with individual students • Identify a leader to manage the mentorship program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will lead the program? Who has the skills and capacity? • Who are the students most in need of mentorship? How many will be included in program? Will relationships be group- or individually-based? • How long and often should mentors and mentees meet? Where will they meet? <div data-bbox="797 1440 1385 1650" style="background-color: yellow; border: 2px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p>SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: MENTORSHIP</p> <p>Leveraging their status as a 6-12 school, students are involved in gender-specific peer-to-peer mentorship programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty facilitates programs, but students are trained as peer mentors as early as seventh grade. </div>

<p>High-Quality Pool of Mentors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a high-quality pool of mentors that leverages internal and/or external capacity. They may be teachers at the school, but may also likely be from an external, partner organization or other community group • Consider the goals of the program when determining pool of mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does our school staff have the capacity/skills to serve as mentors? What additional support could we provide in training mentors? • With which organizations do we have existing relationships or could we build relationships to provide mentors to our students (e.g., community-based organizations, local businesses or universities)? Which organizations are aligned with the needs of our identified students? • What criteria will mentors need to meet the needs of special student populations (e.g., bilingual mentors for ELLs)?
<p>Matching of Students and Mentors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer a match carefully for every child and support it with trained personnel (e.g., school lead, external partner lead). Effective matches are safe, well-suited to each student's needs, harmonious and sustainable • Interview potential mentors in person and perform a thorough background check • Base matching on similar interests and background, but it may vary depending on program and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What criteria are most important when matching students and mentors (e.g., background, interest, gender, need)? • Who will be responsible for screening mentors? • How will students and mentors be matched? How can students be involved in this process?
<p>Sustainable Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that relationships are sustainable over time • Provide mentors with guidelines for how frequently they meet with their mentees - standards and procedures help ensure meaningful, high-impact relationships • Ensure a minimum of four hours per week for individual relationships. Weekly meetings for groups is critical to help ensure a strong relationship • Provide mentors with on-going training and guidance about their role as a mentor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities or projects should be included in our program (e.g., visits to cultural institutions, colleges)? • How will training/support be provided? • How will we measure student impact/results?

Advisories

Advisories are regularly scheduled opportunities for groups of students to meet and work with teachers or other adult school employees, whose role is to build a sense of community, to assist students in achieving their academic and personal goals, and to serve as a point of communication for advisees' teachers and families. Advisories are designed to provide students with a sense of belonging and connectedness through personal support and adult relationships and help students reduce and overcome feelings of anonymity that frequently arise during the middle school years.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Staff and Capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify teachers or other school staff to be a part of advisory program; all staff must have capacity to be involved and receive ongoing appropriate training to support adolescents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What teachers and other school staff are committed to and will be able to interact with adolescents on a social and emotional level? What are the needs of our students and which staff members can meet these needs? How will we address the needs of our special student populations (e.g., ELLs and students with disabilities)?
<p>Talent, Interest, Theme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Center advisories around a theme, student talents or interests, or specific focus that supports the needs and/or talent development of the students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will we identify and categorize the needs and interests of our students to determine the theme or focus of the advisory? What model will best facilitate meaningful adult-student relationships? Potential themes include interest- or talent-centered, college awareness and readiness, community service-based, school and workplace study skills
<p>Scheduling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a regular advisory schedule and ensure that it fits the schedules of students, teachers and other school staff. Advisories can take place in homeroom or in other areas of the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often will advisories meet? Will all students in school have advisory at same time (e.g., once or twice per week, first class period of the day, by grade level or across grade levels)? Where will advisory meet? What are the space constraints? How can we make space? Will advisory be cross-grade or single grade? Co-ed or separated by gender?
<p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop, either internally or externally, a structured advisory curriculum. Curriculum guides advisor lessons and self-directed student learning experiences and can also include training and additional advisory support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of curriculum will be used? Will it be developed internally or externally? How can we involve students in the design of advisories? How can we use enrichment clusters?
<p>SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: ADVISORIES</p> <p>School has a comprehensive, cross-grade advisory program which is linked to its year-round calendar of school traditions and “fits the rhythm of the school” according to its staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School chooses to have cross-grade advisory in order to create mentorship and leadership opportunities for older students and integrate incoming sixth graders more effectively. Guidance counselor plans curriculum but whole school is involved in feedback and support. While a set curriculum is provided by counselor, more experienced advisors are welcome to tailor to their personal style. Guidance counselor recognizes that not all of the staff are comfortable in the advisor role and thus provides professional development for advisory at the beginning of the year and in ongoing workshops. 	
<p>Continuous Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve students in the ongoing assessment of the Advisory and empower them to make suggestions and action plans to improve continuously 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and when will we provide time for advisors and students to review and reflect on program? How will we ensure that changes and adjustments can be made to advisory program, if necessary? How will we provide training and guidance to advisors about issues our students may face? What is the referral process if issues surface during advisory that require additional, personalized student support?

<p>Responsibility and Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an accountable leader for the program, who organizes the curriculum, provides advisor support, and evaluates progress. Students can also be involved in leadership roles in advisory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will be responsible for overall advisory program and coordinate curriculum and activity on an on-going basis? • What are metrics for success and how will we track results?
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Additional Resources: For additional information and support in helping your school to address adolescent development supports, please see http://www.nycboe.net/AdminOrg/Offices/TeachingLearning/CMSS/Key_Element3_Additional_Resources.pdf

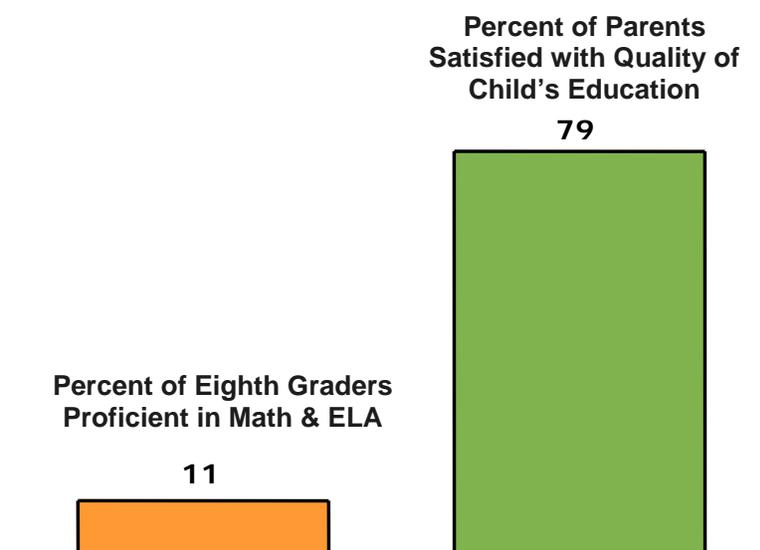
Key Element #4: Integrated Family and Community Engagement

Description: Successful middle schools effectively welcome and mobilize the unique strengths and resources that families and community partners can bring schools, while ensuring that such efforts are aligned with schools' mission and messaging to students. New students and families are welcomed broadly and the parent coordinator role is leveraged strategically to engage parents and provide them with multiple opportunities to get involved. All school staff take ownership for communicating effectively with parents and developing a sense of belonging. Many successful middle schools also have benefited from partnerships with community-based organizations, which can provide distinctive supplemental programs or opportunities for students and families.

Rationale: Parental involvement, in combination with teacher support and sense of belonging, improves middle school student achievement; however, parental involvement declines significantly in the middle grades.

- Nationally, in fourth grade, 89% of students are in schools where more than half of parents participate in parent-student conferences, but this declines to 61% in eighth grade. Specific barriers to parental involvement exist in New York City, including language differences, parents not feeling welcome, lack of time and resources, and lack of child care.²⁰

Graph 6. Parent Satisfaction Among 100 Lowest-Performing Middle Schools



Even in schools where few students are proficient, most parents are satisfied with the quality of their child's education.

Source: 2006-07 NYCDOE Learning Environment Survey

- Students at greatest risk for underachievement often grow up in families that did not experience acculturation and upward mobility; parents have not had the experience they need to help their

²⁰ Education Week, 2003, national survey; "Family involvement in middle and high school students' education"; *Family Involvement Makes a Difference: Evidence that Family Involvement Promotes School Success for Every Child of Every Age*, Harvard Family Research Project; Catsambis, S. (1998). *Expanding Knowledge of Parental Involvement in Secondary Education*. Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk.

children succeed. Schools must empower parents to embrace the success of their children so their children have permission to surpass their parents' accomplishments.²¹

- Middle schools with strong parental involvement have leaders who are committed to making parents feel welcome. The parent coordinator is highly valued and used strategically to engage parents and provide them with appropriate opportunities to get involved.
- A study of low-income African-American students showed that students had significantly higher GPAs after one year of middle school when parents were involved in their work and they were provided with other social supports.²²

Promising Practices: Schools can promote an integrated approach to family and community engagement by leveraging the following practices:

- Strategic use of middle school parent coordinators
- Strengthened family-school communication through multiple opportunities for involvement in culturally affirming ways
- Facilitated family and community leadership

Strategic Use of Middle School Parent Coordinators

In successful middle schools, the middle school parent coordinator is highly valued and used strategically to engage parents. Middle school parent coordinators are actively involved in the regular events of the school and reach out to parents through multiple channels to keep them informed about their children and their middle school experience. Middle school parent coordinators and school staff also strategically build relationships with relevant community organizations to support students and families and can serve as the liaison with parents and community-based agencies on issues relating to adolescent development; middle school parents need support during this transition just as middle school students do.

²¹ Comer, J. and Poussaint, A. (1992). *Raising Black Children: Two Leading Psychiatrists Confront the Educational, Social and Emotional Problems Facing Black Children*. Plume: New York.

²² Gutman, L.M., and Midgley, C. (2000). "The Role of Protective Factors in Supporting the Academic Achievement of Poor African American Students During the Middle School Transition." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29(2), Plenum Publishing Corporation, 223–248.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Participation in School-based Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the parent coordinator is well-trained and aware of available resources to make informed decisions • Encourage parent coordinator to network with other parent coordinators to be aware of best practices and new approaches to family engagement • Encourage the parent coordinator to serve as liaison with parent coordinators of feeder schools to facilitate transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school • Guide parent coordinator in advocacy for the needs of students in the achievement gap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can our parent coordinator be most effective? What role can the parent coordinator play as a part of school-based teams / committees? With which staff should our parent coordinator be building relationships and communicating regularly? • What mechanisms of communication would be most helpful for parents at our school? How can our parent coordinator help facilitate multiple forms of communication to parents?
<p>SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: STRATEGIC ROLE OF PARENT COORDINATOR</p> <p>Parent coordinator reaches out to parents of new students prior to the beginning of the year. Since it is a choice district and students come from different areas, she hosts a welcome picnic and introduces parents to those in similar areas so that they can help support one another.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School involves family in sixth-grade transition programs by offering a workshop for incoming parents on behaviors and expectations. 	
<p>Leveraging of Community Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the parent coordinator to help build strategic relationships to support school mission and vision and meet identified needs of school's families, e.g., local hospital to offer nutrition workshops • Facilitate workshops or book clubs, e.g., Adolescent Development, Living with a Teenager • Develop a relationship with an organization to support specific students' development, e.g., partner with 100 Black Men to create a Black Men Who Read Program to support the academic and identity development of black boys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which teachers or other faculty would be well-suited to support our parent coordinator in engaging our family and community? • What community organizations in our school's community could help meet the needs of our families?
<p>Ongoing Family-School Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parent coordinator to facilitate and/or advocate for multiple strategies to communicate with parents to remove common barriers to communication and partnership, helping to welcome parents to the middle school experience and offering multiple opportunities for parent participation (see below for detail) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What mechanisms of communication would be most helpful for the parents at our school? How can our parent coordinator help facilitate multiple forms of communication to parents?

Strengthened Family-School Communication

There should be regular, ongoing, supportive, two-way communication between families and schools. Communication should not be only in response to behavior problems. Educators should also offer praise, support, and information. Middle schools can help parents to choose how they would like to be involved and support families' choices in a variety of ways. In successful middle schools, the parent coordinator often plays a key role in helping to facilitate and advocate for effective and ongoing family-school communication, but all school staff take ownership over ensuring frequent communication and developing a sense of belonging among parents.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Communication Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate high expectations and opportunities on a regular basis, including academic performance, eighth-grade promotion policy, assessments, discipline, and extracurricular activities • Offer Web- and/or telephone-based daily information/updates about school assignments, activities, and requirements and offer school staff access to computers and phones at school to facilitate communication with parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will coordinate the communication strategy? • How should we communicate with our parents to ensure that they know the requirements for every class? Do our teachers make this information available at the beginning of the year? • How are we set up for two-way communication, so that parents can easily initiate conversations, conferences, and meetings with school staff?
<p>SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: STRENGTHENED FAMILY-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION</p> <p>A charter school sets up bins organized by homeroom for students to drop off their homework each morning before school starts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff or volunteers are assigned to call the parents of the students who did not submit their homework each day and commit to following through with these calls throughout the school year 	
<p>Teachers' communication with Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide, when needed, specific guidance and support to teachers on effective communication strategies (e.g., using "parent friendly" language, being culturally sensitive, defusing conflicts with parents) • Engage parents in the development of personal student success plans, outlining strategies for success as well as identifying supports available for their child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can facilitate sessions for teachers, or should we secure outside support (parents, community-based organizations, school support organizations)? • How can we offer culturally-relevant capacity-building workshops for parents and build teacher capacity to communicate with parents with unfamiliar life experiences and perspectives? • How do we ensure that we are able to communicate with families, orally and in writing, in their first language if necessary? Are we leveraging translation services?

<p>Welcoming Environment for Parents</p> <p>School ensures that the first impression when a parent enters a middle school is positive and inviting (e.g., interactions with safety agents, administration, and main office staff; family rooms in the school with resources for parents; teacher liaisons for parent community). For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an open door policy and provide a parent resource room where parents can network and learn in their native language • Hold orientation barbecues for new and returning parents • Hold Town Meetings where parents are encouraged to ask questions and make suggestions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we make our school a more welcoming place for families to visit? How can we develop and promote a sense of belonging for families in our school? How can we incorporate culturally relevant practices into our school routines? • What are the barriers that exist between our school and its families, and how can we address these strategically (e.g., cultural/language barriers, parents not knowing what child is learning, lack of time / resources to get to the school)? • How do our school safety agents interact with families? • How can we best provide a place/person parents can go to in the school where they know they will be welcomed at any time?
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Facilitated Family and Community Leadership

Parents, families and community members can play vital leadership roles in supporting the school in realizing its mission and vision. Successful middle schools identify the strengths and interests of parents and community members and mobilize those strengths strategically to support student engagement and achievement.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Opportunities for Increased Parental Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide parents with meaningful and engaging ways to become part of the school community and develop a sense of belonging at the school • Provide opportunities for all interested parents to be integral members of the Parents Association and the School Leadership Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we engage parents in determining how they want to be involved? • What leadership opportunities can we offer our parents? How can we make parents aware of these opportunities and increase participation? • How do we regularly update parents on their children’s progress?
<p>Partnerships with Community Organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build awareness of local community organizations that provide services that meet the needs of students and their families and use these partnerships strategically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we develop a broad understanding of the resources within the community that can be leveraged? • What explicit agreements between partner organization and school are needed about the scope of relationship? • Who should we designate as a lead for community partnerships (e.g., a teacher or a parent coordinator)?

<p>Parent and Community Professional Development Opportunities, Workshops and Classes</p> <p>Hold monthly events for parents. Potential topics might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What my middle schooler is learning this month • Student work exhibitions and walk-throughs • Supporting my child's path to college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of curriculum sharing workshops, family math nights, or organizational skills workshops are necessary? • How can we facilitate mechanisms for parents to learn how to support their child with his/her homework and high school, college, and career planning?
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Additional Resources: For additional information and support in helping your school to integrate family and community engagement, please see http://www.nycboe.net/AdminOrg/Offices/TeachingLearning/CMSS/Key_Element4_Additional_Resources.pdf

Key Element #5: Supportive School Structure and Organization

Description: While they vary in size and grade configuration, successful middle schools have adopted various internal structures to optimize teacher collaboration and ensure adult responsibility for student relationships, which are particularly important in middle school when adolescents benefit from increased adult guidance and support. The inquiry team process adopted across New York City schools further leverages these structures to facilitate rigorous, data-driven teacher collaboration and capacity-building to improve student outcomes.

Rationale: The way that middle schools organize themselves for success is critical to improving student achievement. School structure and organization can facilitate personalization of the learning environment and ongoing collaboration among both students and adults.

- Research suggests that effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), implemented with fidelity, can lead to higher student achievement.²³ Using student performance data regularly to inform and differentiate instruction can have powerful results²⁴ and is at the core of successful PLCs.
- Research shows that Small Learning Communities (SLCs) have proven to have positive impact for all stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, administrators, and parents,²⁵ but consistent definition and implementation of SLCs is critical to success.²⁶ Recent efforts by the Department's Office of Portfolio Development (OPD) to standardize SLCs at the high school level have shown promising results. Specifically, schools that designated and supported the creation of high school SLCs improved their ninth-grade credit accumulation by 5.7% in their first year of implementation.²⁷ NYC SLC schools gained approximately 3% for their ninth-grade attendance last year, while comparison schools showed no significant gains.²⁸

Promising Practices: Successful middle schools can organize for success using:

- Professional Learning Communities
- Small Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities

PLCs facilitate the interaction of faculty within a school to engage them in an in-depth study of curriculum, student work, and each student's unique learning characteristics. PLCs should be informed by the school's inquiry team focus. Specifically, faculty study the student data including individual student strengths and knowledge gaps, as well as best practices for teaching and ongoing analysis of what students have learned. The purpose is to improve student achievement by developing a deeper understanding of all students through targeted work and to improve teaching practices to provide better learning experiences.

²³ Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002). *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*. National Educational Service, Bloomington, IN.

²⁴ Stiggins, R. (2006). "Assessment for learning: A key to motivation and achievement." *Edge* 2(2), 3 - 19.

²⁵ Cotton, K. (2001). "New Small Learning Communities: Findings from Recent Literature." Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

²⁶ NYCDOE Periodic Attendance Reporting (PAR) Data; Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). "Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works." Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network at Stanford University.

²⁷ NYCDOE analysis, 2007

²⁸ 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 PAR data

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Regularly Scheduled Meeting of School Staff with Trained Facilitator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that membership of the PLC is consistent, members of the PLC agree to meet regularly, and a schedule is agreed-upon in order to ensure regular contact • Ensure that each PLC has a trained facilitator who works with members to develop agendas and a set of agreed-to norms and who adheres to structures to support analysis and reflection • Provide a range of tools (protocols, structures, activities) to examine student and teacher work and student data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are PLC members selected for optimal synergy? • How is common planning time built into the schedule? • What accountability structures or mechanisms exist to ensure that the PLC is meeting its deliverables in a timely fashion? • What is the best system of gradual release for use of a paid outside facilitator? Is there a focus on building internal capacity in this regard?
<p>Clear Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the members of PLC reach agreement on the student achievement goals, as well as teacher and team development focus, understanding that part of this work will focus on their own learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should we establish a calendar of expectations for the work of the PLC to ensure that interim steps are being met and that purpose is clear?
<p>Focus on Teaching and Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the examination of teaching practices and their impact on student learning. There is a direct connection between the work of the PLC and the classroom • Focus on teaching practices and their impact on student learning, student work, and teacher work and develop the practice of action and reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will content area teachers, ESL teachers, and special education teachers collaborate? • How effectively is the existing Inquiry team functioning as a Professional Learning Community which is focused on instructional improvement through innovation? If not, why? How could this be improved or how should a new PLC differ in approach or action?
<p>Collaborative Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice in order to achieve common goals, setting common planning times for this work • Embed professional learning in the culture of a PLC as staff members learn from one another as well as from outside expertise and build knowledge through inquiry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can formal models of collaboration be employed (e.g., active listening)? • How will school leadership participate in this process? • How will the quality and level of collaboration be measured?
<p>Results Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage PLC members to work together to improve student achievement; this becomes the routine work of everyone in the school • Encourage every teacher team to participate in an on-going process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress • Analyze data and use it for reflection, planning and improvement; focus not on what one intends to do but rather on the results of actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the work of the PLC be made transparent to our school community – particularly with regard to achievement of PLC group goals and objectives and with regard to lessons learned from inquiry team data? • What is the formal process for building capacity of PLC members in meeting their stated objectives?

Small Learning Communities

The goal of SLCs is to improve teaching, learning, and student outcomes. SLCs can enable teachers and school leaders to create more personalized approaches to engage students and meet the needs of adolescent learners. They are semi-autonomous communities within a larger school, each consisting of a leader (likely an assistant principal), a staff of teachers, and a support staff focused on creating a personalized learning environment for a dedicated group of students that meets their academic, social and emotional needs. We have developed a comprehensive framework for SLCs in New York City comprised of the following key components.

KEY COMPONENTS	QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Facilitative and Distributive Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the school’s collective vision is kept at the forefront of the work and establishes a common framework of high expectations and accountability. All staff are empowered to work toward common goals, within and across SLCs • Involve SLC Leadership Teams in decisions about use of SLC budget and resources, assessing the effectiveness of the framework, scheduling, and hiring of staff • Have assistant principals and teacher leaders work together within each SLC, to provide ongoing and consistent feedback to teachers – all focused on improving instruction and measurable outcomes for students, as reported in the Quality Review and Progress Report • Encourage assistant principals and teacher leaders to promote collaboration and the opportunity for teachers to meet, plan, and learn together within each SLC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the hopes and aspirations held by the students, families and community and how are these embedded into the collective vision of our school? What are the interests, talents and goals of our school staff? • What structures do we employ to ensure that the collective vision for the school is translated into daily practice? • What follow-up mechanisms for the feedback provided to teachers by SLC/assistant principal/teacher leader to ensure ongoing accountability and progress in improving instruction? • What are the strengths of the SLC leadership team and what training is necessary to build their capacity (e.g., budget, scheduling, developmentally appropriate practice, academic support strategies)? • How can the talents and strengths of each member of the SLC leadership team be utilized most effectively to enhance team capacity?

<p>Dedicated Teaching, Learning, and Support Teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign groups of 250 – 450 students per SLC, and include ELLs and students with disabilities • Encourage teachers to work collaboratively across and within subject areas and SLCs, with a primary focus on working with colleagues who share the same students • Encourage staff to participate in professional development on effective use of common planning time. Teams should engage in common planning time and collaboration at least two hours per week • Ensure principal collaboration with SLC leaders and the UFT to develop a process that leads to effective use of staff capacity to ensure student achievement • Ensure that SLC Teams monitor academic progress, assist with career and college planning, and provide assistance and support for social and behavioral progress. Every student has a significant and ongoing adult connection • Engage teachers, students, and parents, within each SLC, in ongoing communication about student achievement and progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What organizing strategies are employed to promote a sense of community in students and staff within the SLC? • How do teachers accommodate English Language Learners and students with disabilities within the SLC? • How is the success of efforts at collaboration and common planning monitored and supported? • How are matches between each student and his/her mentor made to ensure optimal benefit to the student? • What specific mechanisms for parent engagement will be put in place (e.g., a Web site or online bulletin board, an e-mail letter distribution list, communication between teacher(s) and parents at specific telephone hours, teacher accessibility via e-mail, formal and informal reporting during meetings to parents on their child’s achievement)? • How will parents’ understanding of student data relevant to their children be explained? What parent training will be put into place to build their conceptual base so they can fully understand the data that are presented?
<p>Data-Driven Accountability System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage SLC teams in ongoing professional development to hone their skills on using data to improve instruction and analyzing student work for evidence of progress, mastery of standards, and effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies • Use diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to drive reflection and the process for improvement of instructional planning and academic interventions • Ensure that every SLC has its own inquiry team, supported by the school’s data specialist - providing baseline and historical student data, disaggregated data on student achievement, cohort information, etc. • Disaggregate and review SLC data, from the ARIS system, to ascertain strengths and weaknesses and make appropriate adjustments in programming and staffing to improve student progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What needs assessment measures will be used to determine SLC team professional development needs? • How will diagnostic and formative assessment data be used to differentiate instruction? • What ongoing supports will be put in place to ensure effective practices in culling useful information through analysis of student work?

Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction for All Students, Centered on a Unifying Focus

- Provide coherence by theme or other unifying principles that serve as a vehicle for teachers to plan together and to encourage connections within and across content areas
- Plan for post-secondary education for all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs; this is the responsibility of each SLC team. Tracking is eliminated
- Ensure that all students have access to college preparatory courses and the appropriate supports for them to be successful. In some cases, these courses are offered across SLCs, but are rooted in course work offered in every SLC
- Align the support of intermediaries and other school support organizations to the goal of rigorous and relevant theme-based curriculum for all students
- Ensure that every SLC has a clear strategy and assessment process for moving Level I and II students to grade-level performance

- How does the SLC utilize the theme-based coherence strategy across subjects (horizontally) and across grades (vertically)?
- What resources are utilized to assist with the content for college preparation activities (e.g., AVID, CTE supports)?
- How can we ensure that all students have access to Pre-AP or Advanced Placement courses? What specific supports will be utilized to ensure increased success in these courses?
- How is available professional development differentiated by teacher need and capacity?

SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL: SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

A 6-8 school opted to divide into three small learning academies organized around themes. Each academy offers electives that correspond to its theme.

- Teachers and students have developed a culture for each academy and students have pride in their academy community - each academy has its own distinct colors and uniforms
- Each academy is shaped by a cabinet of teachers and students
- The school divides its ELL students among the academies to encourage integration
- Each academy engages in extracurricular activities that incorporate discussions of diversity and service learning projects

Additional Resources: For additional information and support in helping your school to integrate supportive school structures and organizations, please see http://www.nycboe.net/AdminOrg/Offices/TeachingLearning/CMSS/Key_Element5_Additional_Resources.pdf

Profiles of Successful Middle Schools in NYC

A number of middle schools in New York City have been able to improve significantly their students' achievement levels compared to other middle schools in the City that face similar challenges. In sharing the practices of these successful schools, we hope that other schools can learn from the success these schools achieved. We know there is no single formula or set of practices to ensure school success; the practices at these schools vary widely, although they all adhere to a comprehensive, integrated plan to improve the achievement in their school and focus relentlessly on its implementation.

Below are profiles of three successful middle schools, in which you will see the diverse practices that contribute to their success. While these profiles can only give a limited view of everything that goes into becoming a school that surpasses expectations, it is an excellent starting point for deepening the conversation about how to improve student achievement. These practices are replicable and should be considered in the mix of good models successful schools employ.

SCHOOL PROFILE #1: MS 319 MARIA TERESA MIRABEL SCHOOL OF MATH, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Principal: Ysidro Abreu

MS 319 is a moderately sized school in District 6, with 486 students in grades six through eight. It has four monolingual classes, one bilingual class, and one special education class at each grade level. Sixty-six percent of its students are English Language Learners (ELLs) or former ELLs, and the school has a small number of Students with Formal Interrupted Education (SIFE). More than 90% of the student population is eligible for Title I. The school practices rigorous monitoring of student progress for all levels of students – those struggling to achieve proficiency, as well as those who are performing at high levels.

High Expectations and Rigorous Opportunities for All Students

- **High expectations:** New teachers are trained to use a common language to express high academic expectations for all students. Staff members train students in the Seven Habits of Mind. These are constantly communicated to children in every classroom.
- **Approach to intervention:** All students at all achievement levels, including those above proficiency, receive academic intervention. This is made possible through a scheduling structure in which all mathematics and literacy teachers conduct Tier II pullout for provision of academic intervention services.
- **Scheduling:** Mathematics is provided for 10 periods each week. This is two more periods than are required, with an intensive focus on thinking, working in groups, and discussion using accountable talk.
- **Approach to differentiation:** Each class has an independent learning center, is heavily technology-based, and geared to the needs of individual students. Formative data is used to differentiate so that students can go beyond the mini-lesson being taught. Students use Web-based or software-based programs for this differentiated work, with continuous teacher supervision provided. Language levels, an important consideration in this school, are taken into account as well in planning for differentiation and intervention.
- **Tracking student progress:** Student academic profiles are made transparent through a color-coded system of data rings which list both strengths and weakness for each child. At math and literacy conferences, the teacher color codes learning objectives to indicate range of mastery for specific area(s). This is done for students at all levels and provides a built-in alert system to ensure attention is paid to any special needs that are blocking movement. Strengths are noted in this way as well.

- Areas of need are connected across students and clinics are created to address these needs. Mini-clinics are provided within the classroom so that multiple levels of need can be accommodated within classrooms. Station rotation is practiced, in which students cycle through various differentiation centers in the classroom, addressing specific learning objectives.
- The color-coded system is used to track student progress in an ongoing way. It alerts staff to areas that require focus in differentiation of instruction. This system is also used for flexible grouping and enables students to take ownership of their learning.
- **Data-driven instruction:** Based on formative assessment results, the school conducts special mathematics clinics every Wednesday that focus on highlighted needs areas, including language practice (work with idioms and drawing inferences, etc.), with a focus on provision of mini-lesson activities. Students are divided based upon need, including information from measures such as the NYSESLAT. A similar structure is employed for science clinics as well; within the clinics, all teachers teach the clinic subject (mathematics, science, and literacy). Teachers train each other in the skills needed to conduct these clinics.
- **Integrated use of technology:** Staff uses technology across the curriculum, including use of Smart Boards, Airliners, Neos and laptop carts in every classroom, with an average of 6-9 computers in each class. Each subject has an embedded technology component and interventions are heavily technology based (including the use of Read 180, Focus on Fluency, Destination Math, etc.).
- **Emphasis on reading:** There is a strong stress on the 25-book standard enhanced through the use of Accelerated Reader in which some students reach the two-million words level.

Effective Management of Human Capital

- **Structured professional collaboration:** Scheduling is structured so that all teachers teach 20 periods each week, as well as engage in one study group each week (in which they read research, look at and analyze student work, in cycles) and participate one period per week in a team meeting facilitated by a team advocate for each grade. The team advocate for the grade meets with teachers in the grade to review student information, including attendance and behavior, and plan for next steps. Every teacher has one period built in per week for collaborative work in form of study group noted above. Study group is both vertical and horizontal; team meetings are horizontally grouped by grade.
- **Peer observation:** Professional development is provided by a program called Excel that allows teachers to observe each other utilizing a computerized pen which quantifies information for this purpose; this is supervised intensively by a consultant.
- **Lead teacher:** A lead teacher in each department offers support—including coaching and feedback—to the teachers. The lead teachers use a coding system to determine teacher needs and next steps – similar in structure to the one used for students.
- **Goal-setting:** Teachers set their own goals and objectives at the start of the year, discussed in a one- to-one conversation with the principal. Ongoing follow-up meetings are conducted over the course of the school year to determine any need for supports and to frame ongoing next steps. This is an informal process separate from the formal evaluation system.

Adolescent Development Supports

- **Advisory:** While the school formerly used a 15:1 advisory system for all students, the school now conducts advisory efforts in a more targeted and focused way two times per week for selected students based on evidenced needs.
 - All students participate in clubs that function like an advisory and are selected by each student based on individual interest. These include clubs such as a French club,

basketball, women in sports, TICA (all girls Teenagers in Community Awareness), baseball, Japanese, sign language, and others. These clubs are held two mornings per week in the zero period for all students.

- All advisory teachers meet on Fridays with the guidance counselor and pupil personnel secretary to add value to the content of the advisory work. This year Children's Aid Society staffers will join this meeting.
- **Uniforms:** A progressive system of uniform use is in place for 100% of the student population. This progressive uniform-use model has sixth graders with fewer requirements, seventh grade requirements becoming more complex (e.g., jackets and ties added), and eighth grade being most complex and 'professional' looking (e.g., ties vary from other grades – they pass these ties to the seventh graders in a symbolic and emotional ceremony when they graduate).
- **Student leadership:** A student government system provides students with opportunities to express their wants and needs and help turn them into actions within the school.
- **Mentorship and extra-curricular activities:** An extracurricular baseball team addresses student need for male mentorship and is led by a male parent coordinator. There is a girls' volleyball team conducted before and after school. Extracurricular academic programs are offered as well, including those for mathematics, science, social studies, literacy, special science inquiry (a 3:1 program), and track and field.
- **Student incentives:** Within the clinic model and in use in the school as a whole, an incentive program for students consisting of tickets is used to reinforce use of accountable talk, habits of mind, and improvement in performance. Tickets are in turn exchanged for prizes.
- **School meetings and traditions:** All students meet as a grade with the grade team advocate and have focus themes such as social justice, transition to high school, next steps in learning, and core value principles such as perseverance, achievement and excellence. At this meeting, students are selected for student of the month prize.
 - A Town Hall meeting is conducted once a week supervised by the mini-school (grade) team advocate and assistant principal, a variety of teachers and guests.
 - Career day, Valentines Day, math marathon, Poem in Your Pocket day and other events are celebrated to encourage engagement in the school community.

Aligned Parental and Community Engagement

- **Frequent communication:** The school communicates with parents in multiple ways.
 - A special automated system makes telephone calls to parents in two languages with congratulatory messages, events notification, etc.
 - The school sends out a Thursday letter. Every Thursday an interoffice envelope is sent to parents about news from the school. Parents can respond in a section where they can write back 'Dear Maria Teresa' letters to express any concerns or questions.
- **Parent leadership opportunities:** Parents have multiple opportunities to become involved in the life of the school.
 - Every class will have a class parent in the upcoming school year who liaisons with other parents in the class to ensure that communication with parents is strong.
 - A parent member sits on school's SLT.
- **Welcoming parents to the school:** Parents on grade are invited on walkthroughs with principal once per month focusing on academic rigor, classrooms, learning, bulletin boards, etc. Parents have the opportunity to express feedback and requests.

- **Strategic community partnership:** A community-based organization, Children’s Aid Society, works with the school in providing health services, social services and an after-school program that provides meals and activities until 6:30 p.m. along with homework help and activities. Children’s Aid Society social workers and psychologist work closely within the grades in the school program.

Supportive School Structure and Organization

- **Small Learning Communities:** There is an emphasis on small learning communities within this relatively small school in which there is a distinct sixth-grade mini-school called Trees, seventh-grade mini-school called Bugs, and an eighth-grade mini-school called Stars. Each of these schools maintains its own uniform and culture, but is intensively connected to the greater organization as well. Each of these mini-schools has a team advocate who facilitates discussion of student needs and progress at meetings.
- **Reduced teacher load:** A 20:1 student teacher ratio in literacy is enjoyed across the entire school. In mathematics this 20:1 ratio is provided in grades seven and eight, because it is felt that the intensive focus on indoctrination into mathematical thinking in sixth grade is better served in a larger group that allows for great group process work;
- **Scheduling and use of space:** Sixth-grade teachers are clustered in nearby rooms so there is less student movement in the hallways in that grade. Programming is considered crucial because it provides the flexibility needed to allow for teacher collaboration, study groups and special student programming such as the block scheduling for mathematics, literacy and science labs provided by the school.

SCHOOL PROFILE #2: PS/IS 189 Lincoln Terrace School

Principal: Berthe G. Faustin

PS/IS 189, a K-8 school in District 17, has over 1100 students, many of them English Language Learners and Students with Interrupted Formal Education. This school provides a comprehensive program of both enrichment and academic and behavioral supports, with a strong emphasis on parental engagement. Expectations for achievement and behavior are verbalized and transparent, and the school is perceived as a ‘safe haven’ in the community.

High Expectations and Rigorous Opportunities for All Students

- **Determining student interest and need:** Use of an interest questionnaire is in place to determine student interest for reading and this information is used to guide configuration of classroom library and other textual material that is made available to students for independent reading. Teachers use a literacy program that encompasses a range of methods and strategies to increase independent reading as well as a grammar and spelling continuum, which is used from kindergarten through grade eight, and is particularly successful with ELLs.
- **Rigorous academic opportunities:** This school offers students multiple ways to engage in rigorous curricula.
 - Students are accelerated for Regents exams in science and mathematics. In science, seventh graders take the ILS assessment; this same group also takes the Living Environment Regents. In grade eight students can prepare for and take the Earth Science Regents Exam. Of the students who took the science Regents in grades seven and eight, 40 students passed with relatively high grades (the lowest score last year was 72%).
 - After the March exams, students switch textbooks to those used in the subsequent grade. Thus, in a seventh grade classroom, students are using algebra texts and

learning basic concepts in this content area in the school year *prior* to typical instruction of this subject. This serves both to develop skills and content for the upcoming year and also to motivate students. It also meaningfully focuses the work in the late spring months so that there is no ‘down time’ in the instructional cycle.

- School has ARISTA Junior Honors society for seventh and eighth graders, with good student participation of about 20 students. The school uses a 90% average as the cutoff (which is more rigorous than ARISTA’s requested 85% average).
- **Extended Learning Time:** To prepare students for the specialized high school program, school targets the students from fifth grade going into sixth grade. These students receive additional preparation and instruction both after school and during the summer. Some of this preparation is provided by Kaplan services in the fall; the school then picks up this support and provides it internally.

Effective Management of Human Capital

- **Teacher Recruitment:** There is a prevalence of teachers who were formerly students in the school themselves, which enables the school to carry on its traditions, provides students with role models for success, and enables increased interaction with the community.
- **Instructional Expertise and Support:** A Lead Teacher program provides support to teachers. Coaches are on site daily for literacy and mathematics support. An ELL staff developer provides support to ESL and bilingual teachers, and also collaborates with coaches.
- **Performance Management:** Principal is actively engaged in rigorous professional development activities and there is ongoing principal-teacher collaboration focused upon monitoring of individual student movement. Principal has one-on-one meetings with teachers to focus instructional planning based on deeply analyzed student data with the goal of developing strategic instructional plans.
- **Structured Professional Collaboration:** Collaborative teacher teams are in place forming vertical (across grade) groups within all subjects.

Adolescent Development Supports

- **Mentorship:** There is a strong emphasis on teacher-student relationship building, including having teachers join students during lunch. One-on-one conversations with students take place at start of the school year so students can set and record their goals for the year; at end of year these goals are revisited. An incentive program is in place – ‘catching children at their best’ – in which students receive ‘slips’ and exchange these for various incentives provided by the school.
- **Advisory:** The school has an advisory program which is implemented with support provided by a community-based organization (CBO).
- **Arts Program:** The school feels the arts are an important component of the program and has a dance ensemble which performs extensively at conferences and universities across the City and State, a school band – with a band teacher who is a ‘genius’ at bringing students who have never played an instrument to a level where they are adept by eighth grade, and a school choir, as well as a partnership with Brooklyn Conservatory of Music.

Aligned Parental and Community Engagement

- **Strengthened family-school communication:** The school uses multiple strategies to facilitate frequent family-school communication and parent participation.

- Open door policy for parents in which respectful relationships have developed. Communication with parents is acknowledged and encouraged.
- The school conducts ‘public relations calls’ in which administrators call parents for the purpose of reaching out to see how they are doing; at the end of school year, they have spoken at least once with each parent for a positive outreach purpose.
- A community-based organization provides parent workshops in topics such as raising adolescents, helping children handle peer pressure, choosing high schools, and other topics.
- **Celebrating student success:** The school holds a series of events for students and parents at the end of each marking period. For the first marking period, an honors breakfast is held during the school day, which includes a specially prepared slide show and awards ceremony. In the second marking period, a Saturday luncheon is held for those students for whom this is a second award and students receive additional incentives including a gift certificate to a book store. At the third marking period, the honors event is combined with Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day celebrations and is heavily attended. In the fourth marking period, a final special evening celebration is held.

Supportive School Structure and Organization

- **Looping:** School utilizes ‘looping’ through the middle school grades, in which students stay with the same teacher over two or more years in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and foreign language to ensure continuity of instruction and relationships.
- **Flexible scheduling:** Block scheduling is utilized in general, including use for science lab programming. For instruction of ELL students, the licensed English teacher is paired with the ESL teacher in a parallel program so that ESL is blocked into the English program.

SCHOOL PROFILE #3: IS 709 Harlem Village Academy

Founding Principal: Dr. Deborah Kenny

This charter middle school of 220 students in grades five through eight stresses a rigorous curriculum grounded in the highest expectations for all students, and a caring and nurturing environment with an emphasis on universal human values. Integral to the school’s mission is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s notion of “strong mind and tender heart,” that a complete education includes the development of intellectual competence as well as the nurturing of fine character. The school’s emphasis on universal human values and timeless wisdom prepares students to become informed, concerned citizens who are successful in work and in life. An emphasis on kindness, integrity and scholarship is integrated into the academic courses and throughout the school culture. The educational program incorporates proven best practices and research-based curricula, along with innovative, teacher-designed lessons. This school believes it is essential that students attain proficiency in basic knowledge and skills *and* learn to think deeply, independently and critically.

High Expectations and Rigorous Opportunities for All Students

- **Creating a culture of success:** The school emphasizes teamwork and fosters a culture of ‘belonging’ through a warm, loving environment and traditions such as family meetings at the school. Every student is held to high expectations all of the time.
 - Teachers are provided with intensive professional training and supported by a school-wide system of routines and rules. Every expectation set is an expectation enforced. The school follows the “broken windows” theory of discipline – no late homework, disrespectful gesture, or other minor infraction is tolerated.

- Students wear school uniforms, must arrive to school on time and prepared, and are expected to follow a strict, clear and consistent code of conduct.
- **Supporting student transitions:** To assist students in making a successful transition to middle school, incoming students are brought in a week prior to school opening to meet teachers and learn about the academic and behavioral expectations of the school. The school uses a system of preventive discipline that emphasizes “not what we do in reaction to misbehavior, but what we do to train students to behave properly in the first place.” At the start of the school year, new students are trained through an in-depth, week-long orientation that teaches them precisely what is expected and provides opportunities to practice routines until they become habit.
- **Ongoing assessment of student needs:** Frequent, diagnostic assessment of student progress is employed and drives continual instructional improvement. Students in all grades are given monthly assessments, which are analyzed by the teachers. Those students identified as needing specialized assistance in a particular subject receive small group instruction; this ensures that no student is falling behind.
- **Coherent curricular approach:** A rich liberal arts curriculum is based on rigorous standards of excellence. The school stresses a college-bound school culture; learning standards provide everyone in the school community with a clear understanding of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and at graduation from the school. The standards are aligned to New York State and are designed to prepare every student for admission to the nation’s finest colleges; extracurricular programming includes karate, chess, yoga and dance.
- **Extended learning time:** A longer day (7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.) provides students with additional learning time. Each month, Saturday School is assigned to students whose grade point average is C or below. Teachers tutor their own students during the day, as well as once a week after school. The tutoring and Saturday school programs prevent the development of chronic problems and provide immediate and individual attention to students who need extra help.

Effective Management of Human Capital

- **Peer observation and lesson study:** Teachers engage in peer observations as well as in lesson study in which teachers collaborate in developing a lesson plan which is then presented to peers for review and continual improvement.
- **Collaborative planning:** A five-week summer planning institute is provided in which teachers engage in collaborative planning for the upcoming school year. Master teachers lead each department in developing and continually refining its customized scope and sequence and units of study.
- **Accountability for results:** Teachers feel personally responsible for the success of their students; there is a clear culture of accountability for academic achievement.

Adolescent Development Supports

- **Advisory:** An advisory program is in place consisting of a 10-minute meeting every morning with a group of 8-12 students per teacher or team member. Students address relevant issues in the school or cover topics outlined in the advisory curriculum. Every student is carefully guided by an adult advisor – a mentor who develops a close personal relationship with the student and his or her family. The advisor provides stability and consistent attention and helps students transition successfully into the challenging Village Academy’s college preparatory environment.
- **Community Circle:** The school has implemented a ‘Community Circle’ – a weekly, whole-school meeting which is built into the school schedule. Each advisory group takes turns in leading this meeting, which involves reciting the school pledge and introducing student, teacher, and external speakers or performers. During these ‘Community Circle’ meetings,

teachers distribute ‘Leadership Bracelets’ and provide ‘shout outs’ to publicly acknowledge student achievement and positive behaviors. Those students who have been recognized are allowed to participate in special field trips, class competitions and college visits. School leaders rely on this and all school gatherings to foster a positive and welcoming school culture.

Aligned Parental and Community Engagement

- ***Making families feel welcome:*** The school hosts a series of family events, such as grade-level potluck dinners, art or science fairs, and whole school picnics.
- ***Frequent family-school communication:*** Advisors call home every month to report student progress; teachers call parents to check-in frequently, soliciting feedback and addressing questions and concerns.

Supportive School Structure and Organization

- ***Flexible scheduling:*** Small group instruction is embedded into each student’s schedule.

Implementation Supports

The Department of Education provides a variety of opportunities and tools to support you and your school in determining a comprehensive approach across the Key Elements of Middle School Success, including:

- The NYCDOE **Middle School Learning Program**, which includes the following components:
 - **Planning and Implementation Workshop Series** that leverages internal and external expertise to support schools through a guided planning process and learning cycle that addresses the following components: development of a school-based theory of change; strategic inquiry and assessment of school needs against the key characteristics of successful middle schools; opportunities to build school capacity around specific middle school best practices, including scheduling, management, and a curriculum and instructional approach; planning for implementation of a school’s comprehensive improvement plan; and tracking and measuring implementation progress.
 - **Design Workshops** to provide schools with greater detail on the key design elements in each of the Blueprint for Middle School Success practices (for example, “Planning extended learning time to accelerate student achievement” or “Integrating parent and community engagement for meaningful change”).
 - **Structured Partnerships** of schools interested in pursuing related innovations, including one or more elements in the Blueprint for Middle School Success as well as other practices identified through school research.
 - **Planning and Implementation Cohorts** to reflect on the learning from the workshop series, provide peer feedback on middle school improvement plans, and participate in school visits to strengthen understanding of developing best practices and additional practices to be shared in future versions of the Blueprint.
- **Inquiry Team Handbook.** The Inquiry Team handbook is a comprehensive guide that explains the importance of inquiry teams as a tool for school improvement and provides a step-by-step explanation of the three phases of the inquiry team process—from identifying the students to increasing student achievement and finally to improving the school systemically. This handbook will be particularly valuable for newly created inquiry teams but can also be used as a resource to determine how existing inquiry teams can evaluate the impact of the changes made to date, and use what was learned to improve their approach and ultimately bring more students into the sphere of success. Inquiry teams can use the Blueprint throughout the inquiry team process as a discussion tool and resource for planning to meet the needs of their identified students.
- **Knowledge Management Platform.** The Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) not only is a Web-based data management system that will allow educators to access and analyze student academic performance, but also provides a knowledge management platform which enables educators to share and learn best practices from one another, access instructional resources such as pacing guides and units of study, and search for research on a topic of interest. The tool will empower educators to improve student achievement by providing access to a wealth of resources that have, in the past, been available only through limited sources or in piecemeal form.

Conclusion

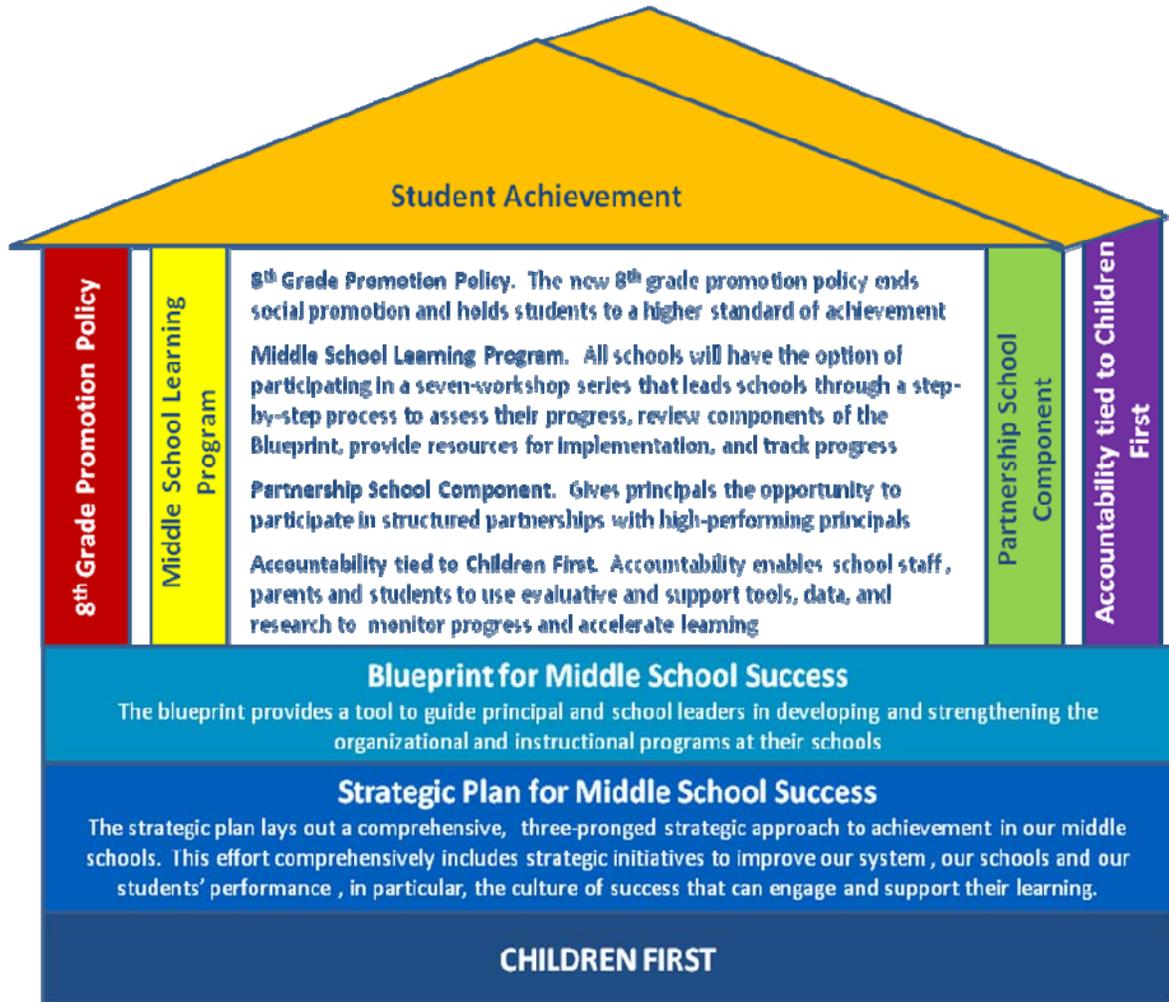
We can develop a Culture of Middle School Success. Across our middle schools, our students, teachers, school leaders, parents, and community members possess the collective will and wisdom to improve middle-school student achievement. We can develop a culture of student success in each of our middle schools and across our system so that all students are exposed to a rigorous and enriching middle grades experience and prepared with the knowledge, confidence and tools to succeed in middle school, high school and beyond. We can mobilize all of our internal and external resources toward the goal of supporting our students as they transition into and through adolescence, as they develop their own personal and cultural identity and as they develop the knowledge and skills to be successful in school and outside of school.

Leadership, Empowerment, and Accountability. The Children’s First principles of Leadership, Empowerment, and Accountability can be used to frame our expectations and our work with middle school students. In order to succeed in middle school and beyond, students need to be engaged in their own learning, clear about the steps necessary for short-term and long-term success, and empowered to contribute to the planning of their educational and life plans. Middle school students need leadership opportunities so that they can envision what is possible in their futures. Importantly, our middle school students need to be able to participate in creating disciplined and structured school environments in which everyone is held accountable for participation and performance.

Knowledge Management at Work. As we use all of the student data now available to us, develop a theory of change, use the inquiry team model to dramatically improve student achievement for our lowest-performing students, and use these data to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all students in our schools, we have the opportunity to share our work with our colleagues. We encourage you to use the Blueprint for Middle School Success to jumpstart your middle school improvement planning efforts. As you develop successful practices, we encourage you to submit them for consideration for the next version of the Blueprint so that your colleagues will have the benefit of your efforts and practice. We encourage schools to develop partnerships with each other so that schools can form inquiry clusters focused on particular theories of change, school turnaround practice, or key elements of middle school success.

If we embrace the Campaign for Middle School Success by developing a culture of middle school success, we will be able to realize dramatic improvement in our middle schools.

The Campaign for Middle School Success



Partners in the Development of the Campaign for Middle School Success

Chancellor Joel Klein

DOE Senior Policy Committee

Photeine M. Anagnostopoulos

Marcia V. Lyles

Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger

Elizabeth Sciabarra

JoEllen Lynch

Garth Harries

Shael Suransky

Campaign for Middle School Success

Project Leadership Team

Sabrina Hope King

Joanna Lack

Joanna Cannon

Exploratory and Action

Planning Team

Joshua Thomases

Joel Rose

Martine Guerrier

Melissa Harris

Jackie Lee

Anna Commitante

Cheryl Hall

Lori Bennett

Fund for Public Schools

Stephanie Dua

Cate Swinburn

Citywide Advisory Committee

Anita Gomez-Palacio

Brook Jackson

David Pristin

Erica Veras

James Comer

Jason Welch

Jon Synder

Lawrence Ambrosino

Lenore Brown

Barbara Gross

Lori Bennett

Margaret Kelly

Patrick Montesano

Richard Farkas

Roseanne Darche

Shelia Evans-Tranumn

Sonia Gulardo

Wendy Gigeous

Yolanda McBride

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