

New Report Shows What Makes Higher-Performing Middle Schools Work

Just for the Kids-New York Studied New York Middle Schools, Identifies Best Practices

A new report on the attributes and practices that lead to higher-performing middle schools in New York State has been released by Just for the Kids–New York, an affiliate of the Just for the Kids national project and a cooperative venture with the University at Albany’s School of Education, The Business Council of New York State, and the New York State Education Department.

1. A key finding of the report is the importance of **building trusting and respectful relationships** among administrators, teachers, students, and parents, which make possible four additional essentials:

2. Attending to the social and emotional well-being of students

Creating a supportive environment for middle school students gives them a sense of social and emotional well-being. Higher-performing schools recognize that providing a sense of security to students provides them with a support network and connections to their school, removing significant barriers to learning.

3. Creating an environment in which teamwork is integral

Higher-performing schools have created a collaborative environment and organizational structure that support teamwork between and among teachers, school leaders, community members, and administrators – all focused on improving student performance.

4. Sharing a common vision of mission and goals

Teachers and administrators sharing a vision about goals as well as a definition of success leads to better communication, mutually agreed-upon expectations, and more long-term success.

5. Instituting a system of evidence-based decision making

Sharing and using data to make decisions is critical to helping schools achieve success. Data from a variety of sources are frequently gathered, analyzed and used in making decisions about programs, instructional practices, and interventions.

While these findings may seem self-evident, the real key lies in enacting enough of them to a great enough degree to make a difference. For the study,

researchers compared schools whose students consistently perform well on New York State Grade 8 Assessments with schools serving similar students but consistently achieving average results on the same assessments. They then identified similarities and differences between the two groups of schools. In general, the differences were those of degree: the average performers were working on some but not all of the five features identified, or were not as far along in achieving them.

The study specifically sought to identify schools that are “beating the odds” based on student poverty levels, percent of English language learners, and other demographic factors. The schools studied are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the state and are located in districts that report per pupil expenditures similar to the state average.

Copies of the report summary and full report, as well as case reports of the higher-performing schools studied, are available online at www.albany.edu/aire/kids. The higher-performing schools in the study are:

- **Taylor Finley** Middle School, **Huntington** Union Free School District
- **Holland** Middle School, **Holland** Central School District
- **John F. Kennedy** Middle School, **Utica** City School District
- **Albert Leonard** Middle School, The City School District of **New Rochelle**
- **Niagara** Middle School, **Niagara Falls** City School District
- **Port Chester** Middle School, **Port Chester-Rye** Union Free School District
- **Queensbury** Middle School, **Queensbury** Union Free School District
- **Vernon-Verona-Sherrill** Middle School, **Sherrill** City School District
- **West** Middle School, **Binghamton** City School District
- **Westbury** Middle School, **Westbury** Union Free School District

Just for the Kids-New York is part of the national Just for the Kids project. Results from across the nation can be found at www.just4kids.org, which also offers an interactive section where visitors can look up any school in New York and compare its performance to similar schools in the state.

Just for the Kids-New York is sponsored by the University at Albany in partnership with the NYS Education Department and The Business Council of New York State. The national project is sponsored by The National Center for Educational Accountability at The University of Texas at Austin, in partnership with the Education Commission of the States. The New York project has been supported, in part, by member companies of the Business Council such as IBM, State Farm Insurance, and AT&T. Funding for the middle school study came primarily from the State of New York.

For more information about the study or the project, visit www.albany.edu/aire/kids or call 518-442-5023.