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NEW REPORT SHOWS WHAT MAKES HIGHER PERFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS WORK

Just for the Kids-New York Studied New York Middle Schools to Determine What Makes Some Succeed

(ALBANY, NY) – Just for the Kids–New York, a component 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, has published a study of the attributes and practices that lead to higher-performing middle schools in New York State.

As part of the study, researchers compared New York middle schools that had been identified as consistently higher-performing over time and compared them with average-performing schools serving similar populations. Similarities and differences between the schools were identified.

“What we found is that these schools shared a special set of attitudes and values that were instilled in the students, faculty, administrators and parents,” said Kristen Wilcox, lead field researcher on the project. “This study specifically sought to identify successes that were based on more than geography and demographics.”

The key finding that the report identified is the importance of building positive relationships among administrators, teachers and students as identified by:

1. 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 removes significant barriers to learning.
2. Sharing a 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.

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3. Instituting a system of evidence-based decision making
Sharing and using data to make decisions is critical to helping these schools achieve success. Data from a variety of sources are frequently gathered, analyzed and used in making decisions about programs, instructional practices, and interventions.
4. 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 that focuses on improving student performance.

“While some of this seems self-evident, we are impressed with schools that regularly and systematically enact these practices. The middle school years are so crucial to determining the future success of a student that this report should prove to be invaluable to the 5000 New York schools that serve the middle grades,” said Dean of the University at Albany School of Education and Interim Provost of the University Susan Phillips.

Copies of the report summary and full report are available online at www.albany.edu/aire/kids.

Just for the Kids-New York is part of the national Just for the Kids project. National results 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 study 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.