Best Practices for “Critical Needs” Students: 
News from a Study of New York State Elementary Schools

University at Albany Studies New York Elementary Schools 
To Find out Why Some Schools Produce Better Performance among 
Typically Lower-Achieving Populations of Students.

(ALBANY, NY) – The University at Albany’s School of Education has released preliminary findings to show what improves the academic performance of “critical needs” students (ethnically and linguistically diverse and special education students) in elementary schools.

Ten New York elementary schools were identified as higher-performing based on consistently strong results by critical needs students on two key state assessments -- English Language Arts and Mathematics. These schools were compared with schools serving similar populations that consistently get average results on the same assessments. Practices in all schools were analyzed to determine what marks the differences between higher and average performers. It was found that the higher-performing schools provide:

- Close engagement with and understanding of their students and families,
- Use of literacy and technology-enriched instruction that begins early and continues intensively and coherently from grade to grade,
- Consistent revision of a curriculum suited to the school’s student population and aligned to a system of student progress assessment,
- Fluid adaptation and deployment of resources to attend to students’ needs in a timely and efficient manner.

According to Dr. Kristen Wilcox, who led the study, “These schools share a special determination to engage, challenge, and keep students learning and achieving. Our study specifically sought to identify successes that are based on more than geography and demographics but on practices within the schools and districts.”

Dean of the School of Education Dr. Robert Bangert-Drowns added, “We applaud educators who regularly and systematically enact these practices in spite of challenges they face in students’ native language, poverty level, or prior knowledge. The elementary
school years are crucial to the future success of children. These findings should prove invaluable to educators and policy makers across New York State and beyond.”

The ten higher-performing elementary schools studied were:

- Malverne UFSD, Davison Avenue
- Mount Vernon City SD, Lincoln
- New Rochelle City SD, Columbus
- Pine Bush Central SD, Pakanasink
- Port Chester-Rye UFSD, John F. Kennedy
- Rochester City SD, School 19 - Dr. Charles T. Lunsford
- Roosevelt UFSD, Centennial Avenue
- Utica City SD, Martin Luther King Jr.
- Valley Central SD, Maybrook
- Valley Stream 30 UFSD, Forest Road

In consultation with an advisory board of representatives of major statewide organizations concerned with education, the project selected eligible schools based on performance on key state assessments across critical needs groups, student poverty levels, school size, student stability, and average per pupil expenditures.

Case studies of each of the higher-performing schools as well as a framework of best practices are currently available at www.albany.edu/nykids. A full report will be published in late October.

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