THE LEARNING
Principal

EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

School culture makes the difference on the road to college

By Tracy Crow

"To see my students getting graduate degrees, pursuing PhDs ... that's a principal's dream," said Yetunde Reeves, former principal at EXCEL High School in Oakland, Calif. During her five-year tenure as principal, Reeves was tightly focused on the school's mission, which was to get all students ready for college.

The school's mission mirrors that of College Summit, a nonprofit organization that partners with schools across the country to increase college enrollment rates for low-income students. "We're encouraging schools to build strong college-going cultures," said Judy Madden, College Summit's vice president of education.

The challenge that College Summit is addressing is the urgent need to help more students participate and succeed in postsecondary education. According to the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Preparing Students for College and Careers*, most middle and high school students (83%) and executives in Fortune 1000 companies (77%) agree that there will be few or no career opportunities for today's students who do not complete some education beyond high school (2010).

Recent research projects that by 2018, 63% of all jobs will require some postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). While the college-going rate for all students has increased — in 1987, 29.6% of all 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college, and in 2007, that rate rose to 40.8% — the rate is still far below the projected need. And, the gap among white, African American, and Hispanic adults persists, with 45.2% of white, 33.1% of African American, and 26.9% of Hispanic young adults enrolled in college in 2007 (Ryu, 2009). "It is essential for students to plan for education beyond the high school diploma, so we work in partnership with schools to drive the belief that *every* student needs a postsecondary plan," said Madden.

A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

According to researchers, the solution lies in the culture that high schools create. For example, a recent report about

Assess your culture: Use the tools on pp. 6-7 to examine the college-readiness culture in your school and discuss next steps.

MetLife Foundation

Use professional learning to protect children from bullying

Several years ago I met Tristan, a 14-year-old gay student from Chicago's west side. This bright young man attended a center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth with dozens of other teenagers who had been ostracized and bullied by their classmates. One of Tristan's statements still haunts me. "I finally figured out how to deal with the harassment from other kids," Tristan said, "but I never knew what to do when the teachers joined in."

As leaders, it's imperative we remind each adult in our schools and districts of their responsibility to protect all children, even those whose beliefs, sexual orientations, religions, family traditions, racial identities, and backgrounds are different from their own. It's our responsibility to create and sustain an environment where all children and adults experience safety and security. Leaders have a responsibility to create a successful learning environment, and that means we can't ignore the need to protect children who experience hatred because they are different.

So how safe are our schools, and how prepared are we to protect our children? According to the *2009 National School Climate Survey* from the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 84.6% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically harassed, and 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation. Also, a nationwide National Education Association (NEA) study on bullying reported that 62% of surveyed NEA members had witnessed bullying two or more times in the last month, and 41% indicated they had witnessed bullying once a week or more. Although 93% of those surveyed stated their district had implemented a bullying prevention policy, only 54% had received training related to the policy.

As leaders, I urge you to engage in your own professional learning journey around these issues. Learn what protections students have in your district and state. Work with the staff and student leaders in your district to develop an anti-bullying policy, and provide the professional learning necessary to support and enforce it. Ensure every student has at least one caring adult by engaging in efforts like NEA's "Bully Free — It Starts With Me" campaign that asks each adult to sign the following pledge:

I agree to be identified as a caring adult who pledges to help bullied students. I will listen carefully to all students who seek my help and act on their behalf to put an immediate stop to the bullying. I will work with other caring adults to create a safe learning environment for all the students in my school.

Finally, seek out resources and external expertise such as these offered by GLSEN, NEA, Teaching Tolerance, and the Department of Education:

- www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html
- www.nea.org/home/bullyfreeschools.html
- www.tolerance.org
- www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html

"Why are the boys in glee club surprised they are being hassled by their classmates? Why do these girls insist on wearing their burqas knowing the other kids will tease them?" May we all work together to increase our own knowledge and the skills of all the adults in our schools so questions like these are never asked again!

REFERENCES

Bradshaw, C.P., Gulemetova, M., O'Brennan, L.M., & Wassdorp, T.E. (2011). *Findings from the National Education Association's nationwide study of bullying: Teachers' and education support professionals' perspectives.* Atlanta, GA: National Education Association.

Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network. (2009). *The 2009 national school climate survey executive summary: Key findings on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools.* New York: Author.

•

Frederick Brown (frederick.brown@learningforward.org) is director of strategy and development at Learning Forward. Ⓛ

It's our responsibility to create and sustain an environment where all children and adults experience safety and security.

External pressures help create school-level transparency

Organizational Routines as Coupling Mechanisms: Policy, School Administration, and the Technical Core

Spillane, J.P., Parise, L.M., & Sherer, J.S. (2011, June). *American Educational Research Journal, 48* (3), pp. 586-619.

OVERVIEW

This study explores how school leaders responded to government policies or other external pressures, coupling regulation with classroom instruction. As part of this process, school leaders created new organizational routines that aligned instruction with common standards, monitored teacher and student performance, and made some aspects of instruction transparent.

STUDY APPROACH

The researchers used data from a study that included four K-8 schools in Chicago. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, document review, and surveys. Researchers observed a range of organizational routines in practice, including all kinds of meetings and informal conversations.

SELECTED FINDINGS

Principals responded to a changing policy environment by transforming elements of their schools' routines. Researchers found that school leaders and other school-level administrators did not work to buffer teachers and classroom instruction from government regulation; rather, they transformed organizational routines to make sure that teachers could attend to these external pressures. Organizational routines covered a wide range of practices including new assessment routines, grade-level meetings, literacy or math committees, classroom walk-throughs, and student skill reviews.

State and district standards for students were essential in setting and maintaining direction in the schools, and student achievement data from state tests had an even bigger impact.

Principals' tendencies to couple policy with the technical core of instruction were far from symbolic. For example, one school designed a new assessment routine to align curricula with standards and tests and give teachers an ongoing source of data about how well students were learning. Other organizational routines included teacher leader networks and literacy or mathematics committees that worked to align curriculum horizontally and vertically. Organizational routines were seen as opportunities to examine instructional problems and develop improvement strategies that were linked to government policy.

The principals' roles in monitoring progress through organizational routines were significant.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

The organizational routines that school leaders designed to respond to external pressures made teacher practice more transparent. Teachers reported that these changes in practice helped them understand the value of sharing ideas with one another.

Norms may follow practice. When staff participated in organizational routines designed to couple instruction with response to government policy, they began to monitor their own compliance and internalize the norms set by the routines.

Principals reported that initially they encountered resistance as they changed organizational structures since many signaled dramatic shifts from long-held norms. School leaders who institute such shifts should recognize the difficulty of any change effort.

While it is common for educators and parents to complain about policy-driven pressure to "teach to the test," this study suggests that organizational structures that align regulation with instructional practice increase substantive examination of practices and results.

When teaching practice becomes more transparent and teams of teachers and faculty chairs diagnose problems, generate solutions, and share assessments, principals have increased opportunities for monitoring progress and demonstrating their commitment to leading instruction.

•

Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@ learningforward.org) is associate director of publications at Learning Forward. 🅛🅟

Continued from p. 1

a longitudinal study of what works to successfully transition Chicago students from high school to college found that, "(T)he single most consistent predictor of whether students took steps toward college enrollment was whether their teachers reported that their high school had a strong college climate; that is, the teachers and their colleagues pushed students to go to college, worked to ensure that students would be prepared, and were involved in supporting students in completing their college applications," (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2008, p.4).

In her school, Reeves used a variety of strategies to move her students to college. "Our primary focus was helping students understand the process of going to college and what it takes to be ready," said Reeves. Given their shared goals, it made sense for EXCEL to partner with College Summit for additional support.

The school strengthened students' skills through college visits and the close involvement of alumni who had attended college. "When we would visit colleges and meet an alumnus from our high school, that made a real impact on our students," she said.

While teachers and business leaders agree that "graduating each and every student from a high school ready for college and a career" should be a priority in education, no one feels more strongly about it than parents. Seventy-three percent rate it as among the highest priorities for education, according to the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Preparing Students for College and Careers* (MetLife, 2010). At the same time, many parents said their school does a fair or poor job of providing information to parents (46%) and to students (40%) about what the requirements are to get into college (MetLife, 2010).

BUILDING EDUCATOR CAPACITY

College Summit offers professional development to support educators in their partner schools, including academies for those who will be teaching a College Summit course in their high schools and for the school-based staff who coordinate the program. The academies include teachers, counselors, and principals. See box at upper right to learn about College Summit's courses.

Recognizing the importance of the principal in creating a college-going culture in a high school community, College Summit, with support from MetLife Foundation, has designed professional learning modules specifically for school leaders. "We have successfully piloted these materials in Miami. Our next step is to finetune them for roll out as part of our Educators' Academies in summer 2012," said Madden.

> **Learning Forward**
> **BELIEF**
>
> Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

> **ABOUT COLLEGE SUMMIT**
> Established in 1993, College Summit builds schools' capacity to support students through:
> - Tools and training include a detailed curriculum about the college application and transition process, support for educators, and online tools to help educators and students manage the application process.
> - Peer leadership development, where selected seniors attend a four-day workshop to learn first-hand about all aspects of the college application process.
> - Data analysis to track progress and help educators change and adapt to maximize college-going in their schools.
>
> Learn more about College Summit at:
> **www.collegesummit.org.**

As College Summit works to facilitate leadership skill development, Madden said that the first step is to acknowledge the critical role principals play. "We have to encourage principals to own that leadership role," said Madden. The principals are critical to building the college-going culture, making sure educators have the support they need, and lifting student expectations across the school.

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

At first, Reeves spent more time in developing teacher classroom practices than in developing the culture. Teachers had to understand what it means to teach in an urban context, what it means to teach high school students reading at a 5th-grade level.

The high school was small, with about 80% African American students. "The staff talked about how to talk to parents, what it takes to learn about the community," said Reeves. A majority (59%) of teachers surveyed in the most recent MetLife survey agreed that "strengthening programs and resources to help diverse learners with the highest needs meet college- and career-ready standards" should be done as one of the highest priorities in education (MetLife, 2010).

Initially, Reeves did most of the coaching herself, concentrating on the academic skills students need to be ready for college. Eventually, the school had coaching support from the district. And, "once teacher leadership took off, I was able to have teachers coaching each other," she said. "We were a very close community. We had a lot of conversations" about the work, said Reeves.

The teachers also participated in professional development outside the school. Reeves chose to expend considerable resources in capacity building during her first years as a principal to bring staff up to speed quickly. More of the

learning moved in-house in later years as resources dwindled and the staff's capacity expanded.

To build her own knowledge and skills, Reeves participated in professional development with College Summit. "The network of College Summit principals in Oakland was very strong; principals were always sharing information, and the collaboration really helped me," said Reeves.

RESULTS FOR STUDENTS

"Our college enrollment rate exceeded the other schools in the district," said Reeves. In 2006, 65% of the graduating class enrolled in college. In 2007, 70% attended college, and the number of students enrolling in four-year colleges rather than two-year colleges doubled over the previous year.

College enrollment rates for students in College Summit partner schools on average have increased 18% over the baseline. "We're constantly involved in examining our programs and digging deep into how our tools are implemented to understand where we have impact," said Madden. And, she continued, they look weekly at student milestone data.

STUDENTS AS STAKEHOLDERS

College Summit's peer leadership strategy – where influential students help their peers develop "college knowledge" — requires educators to be prepared to support a school's student leaders as essential stakeholders in changing the culture and making college enrollment a primary mission.

College Summit brings selected student leaders to a summer workshop to equip them with information about not only what it takes to go to college but also how to push through obstacles as they influence their peers and transform a school's culture.

Reeves also understands the importance of identifying appropriate student leaders who can spread a message among a challenging crowd. Educators should take note of those kids who are standing out, maybe not through positive leadership, but as leaders nonetheless. Those are the potential influencers. As Reeves said, "Once you've got those kids working with you, you've got it made."

REFERENCES

Achieve. (n.d.) *From high school graduation to post-secondary success: The completion innovation challenge.* Available at www.achieve.org/high-school-graduation-postsecondary-success-completion-innovation-challenge.

ACT. (2010). *The condition of college & career readiness, 2010.* Iowa City, IA: Author.

Carnevale, A.P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2010, June). *Help wanted: Projections of jobs and education requirements through 2011.* Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago. (2008, March). *From high school to the future: Potholes on the road to college.* Chicago, IL: Author.

MetLife. (2010). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Preparing students for college and careers.* New York: Author.

Ryu, M. (2009). *Minorities in higher education, 2009 supplement.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

•

Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) is associate director of publications at Learning Forward. **LP**

MetLife Survey series
Explore the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Preparing Students for College and Careers* and access more than 25 years worth of archived surveys at **www.metlife.com/teachersurvey**.

Disconnect between expectations and results

Both teachers and students express high expectations about students' readiness for college, but there may be a perception gap about what it takes to make the transition successfully. Nine in 10 students (88%) agree that they understand what they need to do to succeed in college, including 44% who strongly agree. Nine in 10 teachers (89%) report that their schools have "clearly defined and set specific standards for what constitutes college and career readiness for students, and 83% agree that they assess every student's readiness for college" (MetLife 2010).

However, according to ACT, 34% of the high school graduates taking the ACT do not meet the benchmarks for college readiness in English, and 57% do not meet the benchmarks for math (ACT, 2010). According to Achieve, "approximately 30% of first-year college students must take remedial courses in English and/or math in order to learn, or relearn, high school level content and skills before they can even begin taking credit-bearing college courses" (n.d.).

Evaluate high expectations

As part of the *College Readiness for All Toolbox* from the Pathways to College Network, these two pages offer opportunities for principals and school staffs to assess the college-going culture of their school and discuss next steps in building such a culture.

Directions: Check the appropriate box to indicate the degree to which the element (row header) is being addressed.

High Expectations	**Non-Use** No present actions are taking place.	**Preparation** There are definite plans to begin using this strategy.	**Management** Changes are being made to better organize this innovative strategy.	**Embedded** There is an established pattern of use and changes are being made to increase the impact on student/college readiness.	**Renewal** More effective alternatives are being sought to establish use of this strategy.
The leader clearly articulates the expectation that all students will be college-ready.					
Staff has a common goal that college is for all students.					
There is a coherent professional development plan in place to help staff members address their cultural belief systems about student achievement.					
There is support in place so that all students develop aspirations for postsecondary education.					
Support is in place so parents/guardians develop aspirations for their children to attend postsecondary education.					
The school is actively working to develop the capacity to change.					

Develop a culture of high expectations

Directions: Follow the guidelines provided and use the reflective questions to gauge current status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Six schools were chosen to participate in a national study of schools that had high levels of poverty, diversity, *and* students attending college. The schools' advice is offered here as a tool for leaders to use in analyzing their school or program's readiness in developing high expectations for college preparation, access, and success for all students.

1. **Pay attention to the everyday language of the school. The expectation that all students are going to college is pervasive.**
    *   Use words like "changing," "dedicated," "positive," "diverse," "personal," and "caring" to describe the staff.
    *   "Talk college" in every setting and interaction with students. College planning is not limited to the junior or senior year.
    *   Encourage former students to stay connected to the school and act as role models for other students who want to go to college and may face many challenges.
    *   Shift the focus of the school from "hanging on to" students until they are seniors to providing an exciting, challenging, and fun environment that actively supports the transition from childhood to adulthood - a P-16 transition. Provide counselors who support all students in the college search and application process.

2. **Pay attention to both internal and external catalysts for change.** These catalysts include increasing internal expectations for student achievement, external expectations and goals (high-stakes testing, district plans), and a clear picture of the future for students.

3. **Know that turning points are a combination of factors.** The turning point for a school is the point at which it becomes dissatisfied with the status quo. New leadership, new visions for the school, and the ability to envision new dreams for students act as catalysts to draw together a critical mass of adults in the school community to begin the conversation about what needs to change. A combination of these variables creates a synergy that produces new fuel for change with the school.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the everyday language of your school as it relates to expectations that all students can go to college.
    *   What words do staff members use as they talk with students about student aspirations, expectations, and achievement?
    *   How do staff and students "talk college"?
2. How do former students connect to the school and serve as role models?
3. Does the school reach out to past graduates and ask them to serve as college mentors for the student body?
4. How does the school learn from past graduates and develop better ways to prepare students for post secondary success?
5. What is the focus of the school regarding school transitions P-16?
6. What are the internal and external catalysts for change?
7. What opportunities for synergy exist at your school?

Professional learning in tough economic times

How can school districts provide effective professional learning when professional development budgets are being cut across the country? How can we help school boards understand the value and results of professional development so they continue to support it during tough economic times? Find answers to these and other frequently asked questions on Learning Forward's website. From journal articles to webinars to blog posts, explore a wide range of resources to become a stronger advocate for professional learning in your school, district, and community at a time when it is needed most.

More than 30 resources for conducting professional learning in tough economic times are available at: **www.learningforward.org/advancing/pdtoughtimes.cfm.**